



The information authority

Paper 8: Harmonisation of Qualification
Success Rates

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1. Introduction

This paper is prepared for *the information authority* board (“the board”) meeting on 1 October 2008 to update it with work being undertaken to harmonise the calculation and aggregation of qualification success rates for FE, apprenticeship and Train to Gain provision within and across the LSC and Ofsted

The board is asked to confirm it is content with the proposals for taking this work forward.

2. Background

The LSC uses qualification success rates (QSRs) at various levels of aggregation for a variety of purposes including, but not restricted to:

- planning
- commissioning
- funding (determination of funding rates)
- performance assessment
 - Framework for Excellence
 - minimum levels of performance

Ofsted uses QSRs for individual qualifications and for aggregations as evidence for its inspection judgements and as part of its inspection planning process. Average success rates at various levels of aggregation across various cohorts of colleges and providers are used as benchmarks against which judgements are made.

For some time, it has been recognised that the QSRs used by the LSC and Ofsted differ, even when they are nominally reporting the same thing. The *information authority* commissioned a report to identify the specific issues behind this and make recommendations on how QSRs could be harmonised across and within the two organisations.

A joint harmonisation group including the *information authority*, the LSC, Ofsted and DIUS (chaired by the LSC) has been established to identify and implement changes to the calculation of individual and aggregate QSRs that will harmonise QSRs across the four organisations. DCSF have recently been invited to join this group.

Ofsted and the LSC have assigned individuals to work on this project.

3. Progress

Lesley Davies (LSC Director of Framework for Excellence and Quality) has been given responsibility for harmonising success rates within the LSC and with Ofsted. Lesley is the chair of the joint harmonisation group.

One issue that has been identified is the lack of a single, clear governance structure for agreeing the definitions and data sources for QSRs in the LSC. This is being pursued within the LSC.

At the last meeting of the group on 18 September 2008, it was confirmed that FE success rates for 2006/07 and 2007/08 will have been harmonised across the LSC and Ofsted and that these will be identical in future years. This is expected to remove a significant frustration within the sector.

A small working group has been established to consider and propose a common approach to deriving and reporting QSRs for apprenticeships and Train to Gain NVQs (Skills for Life and a few other qualifications are also included in some Train to Gain contracts) that would be acceptable to both the LSC and Ofsted. In reality, the LSC's methodologies for 2007/08 are all set and integrated into systems so that any work on this issue by the group will relate to the methodologies for 2008/09. The group could influence reporting of these QSRs for 2007/08. Both organisations are committed to having a common approach. The working group has been asked to respond in detail to this request within one month.

The calculation of comparable QSRs for school sixth-form provision is also being considered. This is made complex by the absence of ILR data and hence the need to collect or derive the necessary data from other the DCSF's Termly Census and from Awarding Bodies. The treatment of AS qualifications that are not cashed in also has to be resolved. Recently, the DCSF has asked the LSC to make a proposal for the piloting of the Framework for Excellence in school sixth-forms from the summer of 2009, which will be a strong driver for developing a comparable QSR measure for school sixth-forms.

There is also the issue to be considered of calculating comparable QSRs for FE provision in higher education institutions for which the return of ILRs is voluntary. A comparable QSR is being developed by the LSC but it is complicated by the matter that it relies on HESA data to support the measure.

A big issue for the near future is communication with the sector. There is a lot of confusion among apprenticeship and Train to Gain providers as to which QSRs are calculated by whom and for what purpose. It should be communicated widely that it is the intention of the *information authority*, LSC, Ofsted, DIUS and DCSF that QSRs will be harmonised. Until this happens, colleges and providers must be made aware that QSRs do differ between the LSC and Ofsted. They should be given a clear guide as to which QSRs are used by whom and for what purpose. They must also know where to find the appropriate QSRs and then use them appropriately. The problem for apprenticeship and Train to Gain providers is that their in-house software may

replicate LSC QSR definitions but if the data entered is not exactly the same as that returned to the LSC on the ILR, then the QSRs will differ. Also, while the LSC provides in-year updates on QSRs, Ofsted do not, so colleges providers are not able to monitor any gaps between the current LSC in-year QSR and that calculated from the Ofsted definition. This can lead to unpleasant surprises for some colleges and providers when they are inspected. A position needs to be agreed on all communications so that there is a clear and universal understanding of who is responsible for which parts. For example, the LSC's Strategic Analysis and Modelling Team produces the QSR methodology and syntax to help users understanding. There is also the associated matter of responding to queries and questions raised by colleges, providers, software suppliers and other external organisations. There are a significant number of enquiries, with the current plan that the Data Service's Service Desk will field these initially and establish appropriate 'resolution groups' to answer the questions.

The *information authority* has volunteered to lead on the resolution of communication issues.

4. Proposals

The board is asked to endorse the formation and membership of the QSR Harmonisation Group.

The board is also asked to give its support to the introduction of a formal governance procedure for setting and revising QSRs to maintain harmony once it has been established.

The board is asked to agree that the *information authority* takes the lead on communications.

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