

Harmonisation of success rate data (Update)

1. What are we asking the board to do?

The information authority board (“the board”) is asked to confirm it is content with the Data Harmonisation work undertaken so far and to endorse the proposals that will take this work forward.

2. Introduction

Brief overview:

Since the creation of the ‘Data Harmonisation Group’ in the summer of 2008, the group has made significant progress. The aim of the group is to simplify and harmonise a wide range of data issues including qualification success rates. Partners include DIUS, DCSF, LSC, Ofsted, IA and Data Service and there is full representation at each meeting. Lesley Davies (LSC) chairs the main group. A working group led by Mike Davis (Ofsted), is responsible for reviewing and developing the full range of success rate (SR) measures, currently used by or in the future will be used by the FE sector. The group consists of technical specialists, but its terms of reference enable its membership to fluctuate if the nature of the work or policy requirements dictates. The underlying mantra of the group is where possible to find ways of working that are as simple as possible, provide consistency and are robust.

A key ‘Principles/commitments’ document has been agreed by all partners on the understanding that each organisation will commit to the ‘Success Rate Harmonisation’ agenda. Only by working collaboratively can the FE sector achieve equitable outcomes. This journey will need commitment, compromise and the necessary resources to undertake investigative analysis and collectively build (if required) new systems.

Brief overview of progress to date:

- a) LSC, Data Service and Ofsted have agreed on when data cuts will be applied and their application in the calculation of published success rates
- b) Each apprenticeship framework mapped onto the QCA ‘Subject Sector Area’ classification system through a process endorsed by ‘Sector Skills Councils’. Note: As owners of the Frameworks, SSC’s alone have the authority to agree to this. The new mapping is therefore sector owned and not artificially imposed.
- c) Impact analysis comparing ‘Old’ and ‘New’ mapping methodologies for apprenticeship frameworks undertaken by LSC, Ofsted and DIUS

analysts. Some variation at the national level, but the impact on some providers is greater than others

- d) New style reports for 'Apprenticeship and Train to Gain (T2G)' designed by the Data Service. First release at the end of May 2009. Reports contain SR rate calculations at different levels of disaggregation. For example, overall, Sector Subject Areas Tier 1 and 2, age and apprenticeship type. Where available there are three years of historic data, national averages and 'in year' performance'. Apprenticeships - Ofsted will start using the new reports from September 09 and they will form the basis of future Minimum Level of Performance (MLP) calculations
- e) Communications strategy formulated and agreed to explain the SR methodologies and give information on work in progress to harmonise SRs. New 'Data Harmonisation' website up and running, various articles and example mappings either being developed or currently available. Future consultation with providers is planned although membership organisations such as the (AoC and ALP) have been kept informed of developments to date
- f) The paper on 'Developing a single SR methodology for the FE sector' received very positive support from all the partners, with the underlying thinking behind the document used as a key driver for the group's next significant piece of work (see section 3)
- g) Ongoing work includes:
 - The development of an unified approach to calculating school V11th form success rates
 - Guidance on Learner Responsiveness SR calculations for 2008/09
 - Developing a SR methodology for 'employment responsiveness' provision
 - Developing a SR methodology for 'QCF' provision
 - Redesigning FE – learner responsive reports (Gateway) to ensure consistency of style of read across to other new reports
 - Review the value and purpose of the current 'Widening Participation' factor when applied to SR
 - Other issues including the 'Governance' of data; pre and post the Machinery of Government changes
 - Development of a published calendar for updates to SR methodologies and syntax

3. Next significant piece of work:

Developing a single approach to calculating 'Employer Responsiveness' success rates

Proposition: The Data Harmonisation working group to develop and then undertake an impact analysis on a 'Single success rate methodology' that will be applicable to all 'Employer Responsiveness' provision. Earliest implementation – 2010/11 data sets.

Background: Funded employer responsiveness provision includes:

- T2G NVQ level 2
- T2G NVQ level 3
- T2G Skills for Life
- T2G Flexibilities
- Apprenticeship Pathways
- Apprenticeships
- Advanced Apprenticeships

Currently there are three different methods used to calculate 'Success Rates' for this type of provision culminating in a total of 4/5 different success rate outcomes. This is confusing for the sector and unhelpful for users, commissioners, overall performance assessment and quality improvement.

Proposal:

To investigate a single methodology based on 'Planned end dates'. Whilst the LSC (currently) does not specify the length of a given programme each qualification attracts a standard level of funding. Based on a provider's professional judgement and after conducting a detailed learner induction; initial assessment; and investigation of prior learning, the planned length of individual qualifications is set. This can vary significantly from learner to learner. However, when a provider has completed this analysis, if the 'length' for example is in excess of what they consider the norm, the provider may shorten it anyway as they know their funding will be profiled and this might impact on their cash flow. Currently, there is no 'penalty' for poor practice, as all successes are picked up sometime in the future. From inspection experience it has been noted that the poor setting of end dates considerably impacts on the learner experience/success and poor practice is most noticeable in satisfactory and inadequate providers.

What be the effect of focusing on 'planned end dates'?

- It will refocus the planning of learning on learner needs
- It will provide a clear 'cut off point' for the calculation of all 'Employer Responsive' success rates

- End of year data will be 'clean' and final
- It will allow direct comparability between different types of provision

How might it work in practice?

It is recognised that setting an accurate end dates, for example during an economic downturn when employers are facing exceptional pressures, is not a perfect science. So we would need to build into the system a degree of slack. Nominally we could allow an additional 3 months to gain a successful completion of an NVQ and a shorter time for say a 'Skills for Life' qualification. Different rules would need to be developed depending on the 'size' or 'length' of the programme'. However, as all of this provision type is 'roll-on and roll-off' the ILR will be able track when a completion time is spent. There will of course need to be exceptions to the rule, for example if someone is made redundant, but these will need to be thought through. Any successes that occur outside of the agreed period would be collected, but would not be included in the calculation of performance outputs used for example, by commissioners and the inspectorate.

Conclusion:

We would then have 'one rule' that is uniformly applied and is fair and consistent.

4. FE Sector Implications

We will not know the impact of such a methodology on the FE sector until, an approach is fully developed/ tested and a detailed impact analysis completed. DIUS are aware of this proposal and have given their broad support to the development work. In the short to medium term however, the impact is likely to fall disproportionately on some colleges/providers, particularly where poor practice is already endemic.

5. Next Steps

With the agreement of the board, a detailed proposal will be presented at the next meeting of the Data Harmonisation group. If the proposal gains support and the necessary resource committed a project plan will be scoped and the work started. Target date for summary report: **late autumn 2009**.

6. Contact Details

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