

# Benchmarking Data 1995-96 to 1997-98

*Retention and  
Achievement Rates in  
Further Education  
Colleges in England*

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THE  
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***THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL***

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# Benchmarking Data 1995-96 to 1997-98

## Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England

### Introduction

1 This publication sets out benchmarking data on levels of retention and achievement in the further education sector in England, for the period 1995-96 to 1997-98, and updates *Benchmarking Data 1995-96 and 1996-97* published in August 1998.

### Key findings

2 The results show an increase in retention and achievement from 1996-97 to 1997-98, particularly for achievement rates in general further education and tertiary colleges. This is consistent with the *Statistical First Release* of July 1999, and initial analysis of performance indicators for colleges for 1997-98, which will be published at the end of September 1999.

3 Analysis of the benchmarking data for 1997-98 shows that:

#### *Retention rates*

- retention rates increased slightly between 1996-97 and 1997-98, and now stand at around 80% for most qualifications
- the retention rates of adults in sixth form colleges have increased significantly by 5 percentage points on average, although there are relatively low numbers of these students.

#### *Achievement rates*

- there has been an increase in achievement rates between 1996-97 and 1997-98 for all age-groups and at all levels of qualification. This

builds on gains between 1995-96 and 1996-97

- for example, achievement rates for students aged between 16 and 18 studying for qualifications at notional level 3 increased from 75% to 77% between 1996-97 and 1997-98, building on an increase from 73% in 1995-96
- achievement rates for adults studying notional level 1 qualifications increased from 57% to 62% between 1996-97 and 1997-98, building on the increase from 54% in 1995-96
- the variability in achievement between colleges is becoming smaller as colleges with the lowest achievement rates show the highest levels of improvement. For example, the achievement rate for adults studying at notional level 1 increased by 12 percentage points between 1995-96 and 1997-98 for the bottom quarter of colleges
- colleges with the highest achievement rates continue to improve. For example, in 1995-96 a quarter of colleges had achievement rates at or above 83% for students aged between 16 and 18 years old studying qualifications at notional level 3. This had increased to 85% in 1997-98.

### Background

4 The publication of national benchmarking data is part of the Council's strategy to support colleges in raising the standards of their work. The government's white paper *Learning to Succeed: A new framework for post-16 learning* (June 1999) emphasises the importance of improving quality and the need for all education and training providers to 'demonstrate high and rising levels of retention, completion and achievement of learning objectives; it is unacceptable for performance to be as varied as it is'.

5 The publication of benchmarking data on student retention and achievement by the Council allows colleges to assess their performance and assists their planning of action programmes to improve the retention and achievement rates of their students.

6 At the Council's request, all colleges now set annual targets for improving student retention and achievement rates. Institutional target-setting using benchmarking data is now an integral part of colleges' strategies to secure continuous improvement. Colleges used a standard framework for setting targets for the first time during the 1998-99 college year. An analysis of college targets, and guidance for 1999-2000 will be published in autumn 1999.

### Approach

7 The Council's approach to publishing benchmarking data is to publish a manageable amount of information, drawing on existing statistical measures.

8 The benchmarking data have been derived from colleges' individualised student record (ISR) returns and provide a range of national statistics for retention and achievement.

9 The Council publishes national benchmarking data on levels of retention and achievement in three ways, which are updated annually as set out below. All the benchmarking data are available on the Council's website (<http://www.fefc.ac.uk>) under 'Data' then 'Analysis and Benchmarking'.

10 The term 'benchmarking data', rather than 'benchmarks', is used throughout this document. 'Benchmarking data' is used to imply a reference point for comparison, and not necessarily a standard of best practice.

**Table 1. Publication of benchmarking data**

<i>Source of information</i>	<i>Annual update in</i>	<i>Published in hard copy</i>	<i>Available on the Council's website</i>
<i>Benchmarking Data</i> publication showing results by college type and notional level	Early September	Yes	Yes
Supporting data showing results by college type, notional level and broad qualification type, programme area and subprogramme area	September	No	Yes
National benchmarking data for individual qualifications	October	No	Yes

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## Benchmarking Data

### Improvements in presentation

11 The 1995-96 to 1997-98 benchmarking data benefit from a number of improvements in the presentation of results in response to feedback from the sector and the government's white paper *Learning to Succeed: A new framework for post-16 learning* (June 1999):

- a. additional measures of the variability of colleges' levels of retention and achievement are provided in annex A. The purpose of this information is to increase colleges' understanding of their performance in order to reduce the range of performance and improve quality;
- b. 22 colleges where the Council has serious concerns about the quality of their data over all or some of the period 1995-96 to 1997-98 have been excluded from the results to improve the reliability of the national benchmarking data;
- c. additional information is provided on GCSE results in annex B;
- d. the benchmarking data for individual qualifications to be published on the Council's website in October will indicate the number of colleges each result is based upon;

- e. the supporting data and benchmarking data for individual qualifications are flagged where there may be data credibility issues. More information on these credibility queries can be found on page 17 of *Guidance Notes: Student retention and achievement 1995-96 to 1997-98*, available on the Council's website;
- f. additional summary tables of the benchmarking data will be available on the Council's website in October, showing results by subprogramme area and by broad qualification type.

### Improvements in definition

12 The underlying methodology used to update the benchmarking data to 1997-98 remains the same as was used for the previous publication *Benchmarking Data 1995-96 and 1996-97* except where improvements have been made to take advantage of changes to the 1997-98 ISR. The method now takes into account students transferring on to another qualification and includes more detail of the outcome of qualifications. These changes are set out in detail in annex B.

13 The benchmarking data are set out in annex A. An illustration of the layout of the benchmarking data is shown in the layout illustration on page 4.

## Layout Illustration

		16-18			19+		
		95-96	96-97	97-98	95-96	96-97	97-98
<b>Table 1. All colleges: enrolments on notional level 1 long qualifications</b>							
<b>Number of starters</b>	<b>A</b>	125,400	174,400	217,100	286,100	349,000	392,400
<b>Retention rate</b>	<b>B</b> mean	80%	80%	82%	81%	79%	80%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	<b>C</b> mean	57%	58%	61%	54%	57%	62%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i> <b>D</b>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		6%	5%	3%	2%	2%	2%
NVQs (%)		8%	8%	8%	5%	6%	6%
Other (%)		86%	87%	89%	93%	92%	92%
<i>Measures of college variability</i> <b>E</b>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	75%	75%	77%	74%	71%	73%
	<i>Median</i>	82%	81%	83%	81%	79%	80%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	88%	87%	87%	89%	86%	87%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	45%	47%	51%	43%	48%	53%
	<i>Median</i>	60%	62%	67%	58%	61%	66%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	75%	80%	82%	75%	78%	82%

- 1** at sector level (all colleges), by college type, and for GFEC/TC (general further education and tertiary colleges) with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas
- 2** by notional NVQ level
- 3** by student age-group at the start of the qualification
- A** 'number of starters': the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. See annex B for a full explanation
- B** 'retention rate': the percentage of qualifications which students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification. The figure shown is the mean for all students. This is the same as the 'average' shown in *Benchmarking Data 1995-96 and 1996-97*

- C** 'achievement rate': the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included. The figure shown is the mean for all students. This is the same as the 'average' shown in *Benchmarking Data 1995-96 and 1996-97*
- D** 'breakdown of number of starters': the breakdown of the number of enrolments started, shown between five broad types of qualification: GCSEs; GCE A/AS levels; GNVQs and their precursors; NVQs; and other qualifications such as Access and City and Guilds Wordpower qualifications
- E** measures of college variability
- '25th percentile': the retention/achievement rate which three-quarters of colleges meet or surpass
- 'median': the retention/achievement rate which half of colleges meet or surpass
- '75th percentile': the retention/achievement rate that the top quarter of colleges meet or surpass



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14 In addition, short qualifications, where the student expects to complete in fewer than 24 weeks, are distinguished from longer qualifications.

15 The final group of benchmarking data shows the results for general further education and tertiary colleges which recruit a high proportion of their students from deprived areas and which have a widening participation factor, as calculated for funding purposes, of 1.025 or higher. Typically these colleges would recruit at least half their students from disadvantaged areas. Retention and achievement rates for this group of colleges are significantly lower than for other colleges.

16 Results for 1995-96 and 1996-97 have been recalculated from *Benchmarking Data 1995-96 and 1996-97* published in August 1998 to include more colleges and to take account of revisions to colleges' data and the qualifications database. More details and definitions are available at annex B.

## Using the Benchmarking Data

### Comparing results

17 Colleges will be able to measure their performance by comparing their results with the published benchmarking data. This information will support the process of setting targets for 1999-2000 and beyond.

18 The Council provided a set of results to each college for the period 1994-95 to 1996-97 in the same format as the benchmarking data publication during the autumn 1998 term. This information will be updated to show 1995-96 to 1997-98 results and will be sent to colleges in autumn 1999.

19 Colleges may determine which benchmarking data are the most appropriate for their provision. For example, a general further education college with an overall widening participation factor of less than 1.025 may recruit students from very disadvantaged areas for particular elements of its level 1

provision. In this case, the college might choose to compare its results for level 1 provision with the level 1 benchmarking data shown in table 17 of annex A for general further education and tertiary colleges with high levels of deprivation, while using the benchmarking data in tables 7 to 9 for the remainder of their provision.

20 Where the college's performance is different from the benchmarking data, the college will wish to explore the reasons for this by calculating retention and achievement rates for particular parts of the college's provision and comparing these with statistics for similar provision at national level. To facilitate this comparison, a more detailed breakdown of the benchmarking data by broad type of qualification, and individual qualification aim will be available by October on the Council's website at <http://www.fefc.ac.uk> under 'Data' then 'Analysis and Benchmarking' then 'Benchmarking Data 1995-96 to 1997-98'.

21 In some cases there may be a difference between college statistics and the national benchmarking data because the mix of qualifications at the college is significantly different from the national mix, and this means the benchmarking data for comparison purposes should be adjusted. An example of how to adjust the benchmarking data is shown at annex C. It illustrates that in most cases the adjusted benchmarking data would be similar to the original benchmarking data, even with a different mix of qualifications in the college.

### Kitemarked software

22 As at August 1999, there were 10 software suppliers offering kitemarked software to colleges to produce retention and achievement results using the same calculation method as the Council. A list of these suppliers with contact details is available on the Council's website under 'Data' then 'Analysis and Benchmarking'.

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23 Kitemarked software enables colleges to analyse their results before receiving their results from the Council in the autumn. The Council is working closely with software suppliers to ensure that they are kept up to date with developments, and to define standard reports to be produced by kitemarked software.

### **Accreditation**

24 One of the requirements for colleges applying for accredited status is that the college should demonstrate high or improving levels of student retention and achievement. Annex C of Circular 98/41 *Applying for Accredited Status* sets out how to use the benchmarking data for the period 1995-96 to 1996-97 to meet this criterion. An update of annex C of Circular 98/41, taking account of benchmarking data for 1997-98, will be available on the Council's website in October 1999.

### **Review**

25 The Council is conducting a review of the methodology used to calculate benchmarking data to take account of feedback received from the sector, particularly from colleges inspected during the 1998-99 college year. Colleges which have indicated an interest will be invited to participate in the review and will be consulted about any new proposals before they are implemented.

### **Queries**

26 Queries about this publication should be directed to the funding and statistics support desk on 01203 863224 or by fax on 01203 863249.

# Annexes

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# Benchmarking Data 1995-96 to 1997-98

## Retention and Achievement Rates

### Sector statistics

Table 1. All colleges: enrolments on notional level 1 long qualifications

Table 2. All colleges: enrolments on notional level 2 long qualifications

Table 3. All colleges: enrolments on notional level 3 long qualifications

Table 4. All colleges: enrolments on notional level H long qualifications

Table 5. All colleges: enrolments on short qualifications

*See annex B for details of the definitions used.*

**Table 1. All colleges: enrolments on notional level 1 long qualifications**

		16-18			19+		
		95-96	96-97	97-98	95-96	96-97	97-98
<b>Number of starters</b>		125,400	174,400	217,100	286,100	349,000	392,400
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	80%	80%	82%	81%	79%	80%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	57%	58%	61%	54%	57%	62%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		6%	5%	3%	2%	2%	2%
NVQs (%)		8%	8%	8%	5%	6%	6%
Other (%)		86%	87%	89%	93%	92%	92%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	75%	75%	77%	74%	71%	73%
	<i>median</i>	82%	81%	83%	81%	79%	80%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	88%	87%	87%	89%	86%	87%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	45%	47%	51%	43%	48%	53%
	<i>median</i>	60%	62%	67%	58%	61%	66%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	75%	80%	82%	75%	78%	82%

**Table 2. All colleges: enrolments on notional level 2 long qualifications**

		16-18			19+		
		95-96	96-97	97-98	95-96	96-97	97-98
<b>Number of starters</b>		348,600	385,200	386,700	319,400	364,300	395,700
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	78%	77%	77%	78%	78%	79%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	61%	62%	68%	58%	59%	65%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCSEs (%)		51%	46%	40%	34%	27%	21%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		14%	13%	12%	3%	2%	2%
NVQs (%)		15%	16%	17%	25%	25%	27%
Other (%)		19%	25%	31%	39%	45%	51%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	73%	72%	73%	72%	70%	72%
	<i>median</i>	79%	77%	78%	79%	77%	79%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	83%	82%	82%	85%	83%	84%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	49%	51%	60%	51%	54%	61%
	<i>median</i>	63%	64%	71%	63%	66%	72%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	79%	81%	86%	78%	80%	82%

see paragraph 17 of annex B for notes on GCSEs

**Table 3. All colleges: enrolments on notional level 3 long qualifications**

		16-18			19+		
		95-96	96-97	97-98	95-96	96-97	97-98
<b>Number of starters</b>		457,200	499,200	512,100	300,000	328,700	312,000
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	81%	77%	77%	80%	78%	78%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	73%	75%	77%	56%	56%	64%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCE A/AS levels (%)		72%	71%	69%	29%	24%	22%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		20%	19%	18%	15%	13%	12%
NVQs (%)		3%	3%	3%	14%	17%	19%
Other (%)		6%	7%	10%	42%	46%	47%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	76%	72%	71%	72%	68%	69%
	<i>median</i>	82%	77%	77%	80%	76%	77%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	85%	83%	82%	84%	82%	83%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	60%	63%	66%	52%	55%	59%
	<i>median</i>	73%	74%	75%	62%	65%	69%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	83%	85%	85%	74%	76%	79%

**Table 4. All colleges: enrolments on notional level H long qualifications**

		16-18			19+		
		95-96	96-97	97-98	95-96	96-97	97-98
<b>Number of starters</b>		2,300	2,100	2,500	34,900	39,000	40,100
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	85%	83%	84%	85%	82%	81%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	67%	72%	73%	54%	57%	61%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
NVQs (%)		13%	9%	10%	34%	37%	34%
Other (%)		87%	91%	90%	66%	63%	66%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	70%	70%	75%	80%	77%	75%
	<i>median</i>	92%	88%	91%	88%	85%	84%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	100%	100%	100%	94%	92%	90%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	45%	50%	50%	35%	40%	43%
	<i>median</i>	75%	77%	80%	54%	59%	63%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	100%	100%	100%	77%	79%	82%

**Table 5. All colleges: enrolments on short qualifications**

		<b>all ages</b>		
		95-96	96-97	97-98
<b>Number of starters</b>		570,700	981,600	1,195,400
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	94%	95%	95%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	69%	76%	78%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>				
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	90%	90%	91%
	<i>median</i>	95%	95%	95%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	98%	98%	97%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	49%	59%	62%
	<i>median</i>	72%	77%	78%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	87%	88%	90%

## Retention and Achievement Rates

### By college type

Table 6. General FE and tertiary colleges: enrolments on notional level 1 long qualifications

Table 7. General FE and tertiary colleges: enrolments on notional level 2 long qualifications

Table 8. General FE and tertiary colleges: enrolments on notional level 3 long qualifications

Table 9. General FE and tertiary colleges: enrolments on notional level H long qualifications

Table 10. Sixth form colleges: enrolments on notional level 1 long qualifications

Table 11. Sixth form colleges: enrolments on notional level 2 long qualifications

Table 12. Sixth form colleges: enrolments on notional level 3 long qualifications

Table 13. Specialist colleges: enrolments on notional level 1 long qualifications

Table 14. Specialist colleges: enrolments on notional level 2 long qualifications

Table 15. Specialist colleges: enrolments on notional level 3 long qualifications

Table 16. Specialist colleges: enrolments on notional level H long qualifications

Table 17. General FE and tertiary colleges with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on notional level 1 long qualifications

Table 18. General FE and tertiary colleges with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on notional level 2 long qualifications

Table 19. General FE and tertiary colleges with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on notional level 3 long qualifications

Table 20. General FE and tertiary colleges with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on notional level H long qualifications

*See annex B for details of the definitions used.*



**Table 6. General FE and tertiary colleges: enrolments on notional level 1 long qualifications**

		16-18			19+		
		95-96	96-97	97-98	95-96	96-97	97-98
<b>Number of starters</b>		105,700	147,100	180,500	273,700	333,600	375,100
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	81%	81%	82%	81%	80%	80%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	54%	55%	59%	54%	56%	61%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		6%	5%	3%	2%	2%	2%
NVQs (%)		8%	9%	9%	5%	6%	6%
Other (%)		86%	86%	87%	93%	92%	92%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	76%	75%	77%	75%	74%	74%
	<i>median</i>	82%	81%	82%	82%	80%	80%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	87%	86%	86%	88%	85%	86%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	43%	44%	50%	40%	46%	52%
	<i>median</i>	54%	57%	62%	53%	58%	62%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	68%	69%	75%	65%	69%	76%

**Table 7. General FE and tertiary colleges: enrolments on notional level 2 long qualifications**

		16-18			19+		
		95-96	96-97	97-98	95-96	96-97	97-98
<b>Number of starters</b>		261,500	295,400	300,700	302,100	344,800	377,700
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	77%	76%	76%	79%	78%	80%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	55%	57%	63%	57%	59%	64%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCSEs (%)		46%	41%	35%	34%	27%	21%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		16%	14%	13%	3%	2%	2%
NVQs (%)		18%	20%	21%	25%	26%	27%
Other (%)		20%	25%	32%	38%	45%	51%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	72%	72%	73%	74%	73%	75%
	<i>median</i>	78%	76%	77%	79%	78%	79%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	81%	80%	80%	84%	83%	84%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	45%	47%	56%	50%	52%	58%
	<i>median</i>	54%	58%	66%	58%	62%	68%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	66%	69%	74%	68%	73%	77%

see paragraph 17 of annex B for notes on GCSEs

Table 8. General FE and tertiary colleges: enrolments on notional level 3 long qualifications

		16-18			19+		
		95-96	96-97	97-98	95-96	96-97	97-98
<b>Number of starters</b>		276,000	292,900	297,800	286,100	312,300	297,100
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	80%	77%	77%	80%	79%	79%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	66%	68%	71%	56%	56%	63%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCE A/AS levels (%)		58%	58%	55%	28%	23%	21%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		30%	28%	27%	16%	13%	12%
NVQs (%)		4%	5%	5%	14%	17%	19%
Other (%)		8%	10%	13%	42%	47%	48%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	74%	72%	72%	76%	73%	74%
	<i>median</i>	80%	77%	76%	81%	79%	79%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	85%	82%	81%	85%	83%	83%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	55%	57%	62%	50%	52%	57%
	<i>median</i>	65%	66%	70%	57%	60%	66%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	73%	75%	76%	68%	70%	75%

Table 9. General FE and tertiary colleges: enrolments on notional level H long qualifications

		16-18			19+		
		95-96	96-97	97-98	95-96	96-97	97-98
<b>Number of starters</b>		2,300	2,100	2,400	34,300	37,900	39,100
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	85%	83%	84%	85%	83%	82%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	66%	72%	73%	54%	56%	61%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
NVQs (%)		13%	8%	9%	34%	37%	34%
Other (%)		87%	92%	91%	66%	63%	66%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	71%	72%	75%	81%	78%	76%
	<i>median</i>	92%	88%	91%	88%	85%	84%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	100%	100%	100%	93%	91%	89%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	40%	50%	50%	36%	40%	41%
	<i>median</i>	75%	76%	80%	54%	57%	61%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	100%	100%	100%	75%	74%	77%

**Table 10. Sixth form colleges: enrolments on notional level 1 long qualifications**

		16-18			19+		
		95-96	96-97	97-98	95-96	96-97	97-98
<b>Number of starters</b>		17,500	24,100	33,300	8,500	10,500	12,500
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	76%	78%	80%	69%	66%	73%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	74%	72%	68%	70%	73%	71%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		5%	3%	2%	1%	1%	1%
NVQs (%)		1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Other (%)		93%	97%	97%	98%	97%	98%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	69%	71%	75%	60%	63%	62%
	<i>median</i>	81%	82%	83%	77%	74%	78%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	89%	86%	88%	88%	89%	89%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	60%	52%	61%	60%	60%	57%
	<i>median</i>	76%	84%	81%	79%	80%	83%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	92%	96%	92%	95%	95%	99%

**Table 11. Sixth form colleges: enrolments on notional level 2 long qualifications**

		16-18			19+		
		95-96	96-97	97-98	95-96	96-97	97-98
<b>Number of starters</b>		81,000	82,700	78,900	10,900	12,200	10,500
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	79%	79%	79%	66%	65%	70%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	77%	74%	86%	74%	73%	79%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCSEs (%)		73%	68%	65%	58%	49%	46%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		9%	8%	9%	3%	2%	2%
NVQs (%)		1%	1%	1%	8%	10%	7%
Other (%)		17%	23%	26%	32%	40%	45%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	75%	77%	75%	62%	58%	62%
	<i>median</i>	80%	81%	80%	74%	69%	74%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	85%	84%	83%	86%	81%	85%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	65%	61%	83%	62%	60%	68%
	<i>median</i>	83%	81%	91%	79%	80%	85%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	92%	93%	96%	90%	94%	96%

see paragraph 17 of annex B for notes on GCSEs

Table 12. Sixth form colleges: enrolments on notional level 3 long qualifications

		16-18			19+		
		95-96	96-97	97-98	95-96	96-97	97-98
<b>Number of starters</b>		177,200	200,900	208,900	9,400	10,900	9,600
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	83%	77%	76%	62%	59%	62%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	84%	85%	85%	68%	69%	71%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCE A/AS levels (%)		95%	93%	90%	71%	67%	61%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		4%	4%	4%	6%	6%	5%
NVQs (%)		0%	0%	0%	5%	7%	10%
Other (%)		1%	3%	5%	19%	20%	24%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	77%	71%	70%	55%	48%	54%
	<i>median</i>	83%	76%	76%	67%	64%	64%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	87%	82%	81%	78%	73%	75%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	79%	82%	81%	62%	67%	63%
	<i>median</i>	84%	86%	87%	73%	74%	76%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	87%	89%	89%	81%	84%	86%

**Table 13. Specialist colleges: enrolments on notional level 1 long qualifications**

		16-18			19+		
		95-96	96-97	97-98	95-96	96-97	97-98
<b>Number of starters</b>		2,100	3,200	3,300	3,900	4,900	4,800
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	84%	85%	86%	80%	79%	83%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	65%	69%	75%	58%	63%	69%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		2%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%
NVQs (%)		46%	29%	20%	26%	24%	11%
Other (%)		53%	70%	79%	74%	76%	89%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	69%	79%	84%	75%	74%	77%
	<i>median</i>	85%	90%	89%	87%	83%	85%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	90%	95%	93%	93%	94%	91%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	41%	64%	64%	40%	52%	51%
	<i>median</i>	63%	78%	85%	62%	73%	70%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	87%	92%	100%	82%	86%	96%

**Table 14. Specialist colleges: enrolments on notional level 2 long qualifications**

		16-18			19+		
		95-96	96-97	97-98	95-96	96-97	97-98
<b>Number of starters</b>		6,100	7,100	7,000	6,500	7,300	7,500
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	84%	84%	84%	83%	79%	78%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	76%	83%	81%	68%	76%	80%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCSEs (%)		5%	4%	5%	1%	1%	1%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		30%	29%	27%	3%	3%	2%
NVQs (%)		38%	35%	34%	42%	35%	33%
Other (%)		27%	32%	34%	54%	62%	64%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	82%	78%	81%	78%	74%	78%
	<i>median</i>	87%	84%	84%	85%	82%	82%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	88%	88%	89%	88%	89%	84%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	74%	77%	70%	56%	66%	65%
	<i>median</i>	79%	84%	85%	69%	74%	77%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	87%	88%	91%	83%	85%	86%

see paragraph 17 of annex B for notes on GCSEs

Table 15. Specialist colleges: enrolments on notional level 3 long qualifications

		16-18			19+		
		95-96	96-97	97-98	95-96	96-97	97-98
<b>Number of starters</b>		3,900	5,400	5,500	4,500	5,500	5,300
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	82%	81%	81%	83%	78%	79%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	82%	84%	86%	66%	70%	78%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCE A/AS levels (%)		6%	6%	5%	4%	4%	4%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		63%	63%	65%	29%	27%	25%
NVQs (%)		6%	7%	7%	20%	18%	20%
Other (%)		25%	24%	22%	47%	51%	51%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	80%	76%	77%	77%	73%	74%
	<i>median</i>	85%	83%	82%	82%	81%	80%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	90%	87%	86%	90%	86%	87%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	69%	76%	76%	53%	62%	68%
	<i>median</i>	85%	88%	87%	72%	79%	82%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	88%	93%	93%	83%	86%	91%

Table 16. Specialist colleges: enrolments on notional level H long qualifications

		16-18			19+		
		95-96	96-97	97-98	95-96	96-97	97-98
<b>Number of starters</b>		-	-	-	-	800	800
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	-	-	-	-	60%	74%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	-	-	-	-	76%	90%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		-	-	-	-	0%	0%
NVQs (%)		-	-	-	-	27%	22%
Other (%)		-	-	-	-	73%	78%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	-	-	-	-	60%	61%
	<i>median</i>	-	-	-	-	90%	84%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	-	-	-	-	100%	95%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	-	-	-	-	70%	81%
	<i>median</i>	-	-	-	-	83%	98%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	-	-	-	-	92%	100%

**Table 17. General FE and tertiary colleges with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on notional level 1 long qualifications**

		16-18			19+		
		95-96	96-97	97-98	95-96	96-97	97-98
<b>Number of starters</b>		15,100	20,900	25,200	50,500	66,200	70,400
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	76%	75%	78%	78%	78%	75%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	46%	45%	47%	45%	48%	53%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		9%	6%	5%	4%	4%	3%
NVQs (%)		12%	13%	12%	7%	9%	9%
Other (%)		79%	81%	83%	89%	87%	88%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	72%	70%	73%	72%	74%	71%
	<i>median</i>	77%	74%	79%	79%	77%	78%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	82%	79%	83%	84%	82%	81%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	36%	37%	38%	28%	34%	43%
	<i>median</i>	48%	51%	52%	45%	50%	57%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	61%	61%	63%	61%	66%	66%

**Table 18. General FE and tertiary colleges with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on notional level 2 long qualifications**

		16-18			19+		
		95-96	96-97	97-98	95-96	96-97	97-98
<b>Number of starters</b>		38,800	45,100	44,000	56,400	66,900	65,800
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	74%	75%	75%	76%	77%	76%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	51%	49%	56%	51%	50%	59%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCSEs (%)		52%	48%	42%	34%	25%	20%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		16%	16%	15%	4%	3%	3%
NVQs (%)		14%	16%	17%	24%	28%	34%
Other (%)		18%	21%	25%	39%	45%	43%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	68%	66%	68%	71%	71%	71%
	<i>median</i>	74%	73%	72%	77%	75%	76%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	79%	80%	81%	82%	83%	82%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	38%	41%	46%	44%	44%	50%
	<i>median</i>	46%	44%	55%	51%	51%	58%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	63%	59%	63%	62%	62%	68%

see paragraph 17 of annex B for notes on GCSEs

**Table 19. General FE and tertiary colleges with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on notional level 3 long qualifications**

		16-18			19+		
		95-96	96-97	97-98	95-96	96-97	97-98
<b>Number of starters</b>		35,100	34,500	36,000	49,800	52,500	49,800
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	78%	76%	77%	76%	75%	75%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	60%	58%	58%	54%	50%	57%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCE A/AS levels (%)		59%	57%	53%	27%	23%	20%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		29%	28%	28%	22%	16%	16%
NVQs (%)		4%	5%	6%	10%	14%	17%
Other (%)		8%	9%	13%	41%	47%	47%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	66%	70%	69%	74%	72%	70%
	<i>median</i>	76%	76%	75%	78%	78%	76%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	84%	83%	82%	81%	81%	82%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	47%	51%	51%	47%	49%	51%
	<i>median</i>	55%	57%	60%	54%	55%	57%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	67%	65%	67%	68%	63%	67%

**Table 20. General FE and tertiary colleges with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on notional level H long qualifications**

		16-18			19+		
		95-96	96-97	97-98	95-96	96-97	97-98
<b>Number of starters</b>		–	–	–	5,800	5,800	5,300
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	–	–	–	80%	78%	75%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	–	–	–	45%	47%	52%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		–	–	–	0%	0%	0%
NVQs (%)		–	–	–	22%	31%	25%
Other (%)		–	–	–	78%	69%	75%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	–	–	–	74%	73%	67%
	<i>median</i>	–	–	–	80%	79%	76%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	–	–	–	86%	89%	81%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	–	–	–	33%	36%	39%
	<i>median</i>	–	–	–	49%	52%	52%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	–	–	–	62%	67%	61%



# Definitions

## Summary of Calculation Method

1 The Council's chief statistician sent a detailed explanation of the definitions and methods used to calculate the benchmarking data 1995-96 and 1996-97 to all colleges in August 1998. These methods or 'pseudo code' are also available on the Council's website under 'Data' then 'Data Collections'.

2 The methodology remains unchanged for the update to 1997-98 data, except where adjustments are necessitated by changes to the 1997-98 ISR return. These changes were set out in *Technical Discussion Document 16*, which was sent to all colleges on 15 January 1999 by the Council's chief statistician. The changes are also described in *Guidance Notes: Student retention and achievement 1995-96 to 1997-98*, which are available on the Council's website under 'Data' then 'Analysis and Benchmarking' then 'Benchmarking Data 1995-96 to 1997-98'.

- 3 In summary, the changes for 1997-98 are:
- a. colleges were able to record students who transfer to a new qualification aim. These students are excluded from the 'number of starters';
  - b. colleges were able to record students whose learning activities were complete but the exam had not yet been taken. These students are treated in the same way as students who have taken the exam where the result is not yet known, that is, treated as completed with an unknown outcome and therefore excluded from the calculation of achievement rates;
  - c. colleges were able to distinguish between achieved qualifications where achievement funding is being claimed, and achieved qualifications where achievement funding is not being claimed. Both are treated as being achieved for benchmarking purposes.

4 In summary, the method takes data for each college from the following four ISR returns to create the benchmarking data:

- ISR4 (December 1995; 1994-95)
- ISR7 (December 1996; 1995-96)
- ISR10 (December 1997; 1996-97)
- ISR13 (December 1998; 1997-98).

ISR4 is used to provide information on the number of students starting qualifications that were expected to end in 1995-96 or later. The results in this publication were calculated using version 11.3 of the qualifications database.

5 Students and their qualifications are matched across the four years of ISR returns to calculate the number of starters at the beginning of each programme, retention across the whole programme, and achievement levels. Only qualifications which students expected to complete between 1995-96 and 1997-98 are included in the calculations.

6 The benchmarking data are built from cohort level, a cohort being a particular qualification being studied over the same duration expecting to end in the same teaching year. Only cohorts which consist entirely of Council-funded students, or a mixture of Council-funded and non-Council-funded students are included. Overall, 95% of the 'number of starters' in the benchmarking data are Council-funded students and 5% are non-Council-funded students.

7 Further details of the methodology are set out in *Guidance Notes: Student retention and achievement 1995-96 to 1997-98*, available on the Council's website.

## Definitions

### Number of starters

8 The 'number of starters' is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. Details to note on the definition include:

- a. the term 'number of starters' is the same as the term 'expected completions' previously used;
- b. for 1997-98, the number started excludes any student who transferred on to another qualification. The qualification the student transfers into will be included as a start on the new qualification. Analyses of 1997-98 results show less than 1% of all enrolments were recorded as transferring on to another qualification;
- c. students who start on a qualification and withdraw before 1 November in their first year are not recorded on the ISR and as such are excluded from the number of starters;
- d. each qualification a student is enrolled on is shown as a separate 'start';
- e. the 'number of starters' includes some non-Council-funded provision as set out in paragraph 6 above;
- f. a student on a two-year programme who began their studies in October 1995 would appear in the results for 1996-97 as this is the college year in which they expected to complete their qualification, even if they withdrew in the first year of their programme.

### Retention rate

9 The retention rate is the number of students continuing or completed, divided by the number of students who started the qualification, excluding transfers out. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification.

### Achievement rate

10 The achievement rate is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved divided by the number of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included.

### Age

11 A student's age-group is calculated from their age as at 31 August in the college year they started their qualification. Students of unknown age are included in the age-group 19 and over. Students under 16 years are included in the 16-18 age-group. All tables except table 5 show the benchmarking data divided by two age-groups: 16-18, and 19 and over.

### Short qualifications

12 A qualification is 'short' if it has an expected length of fewer than 24 weeks. In practice, most (over 80%) short qualifications are of 12 weeks' duration or less.

13 Short qualifications are shown separately, in table 5, since the retention and achievement rates for these qualifications are significantly different from those of longer qualifications.

### Notional NVQ level

14 Qualifications are grouped according to their NVQ level or notional equivalent according to the categorisation of each qualification on the Council's qualification database. The levels are:

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| level 1 | includes qualifications at level 1 and level 'E' (entry level), such as NVQs, foundation GNVQs and other foundation or pre-foundation qualifications   |
| level 2 | includes level 2 NVQs, intermediate GNVQs and precursors (BTEC first certificate or first diploma, City and Guilds Diploma of Vocational Education at intermediate level), GCSEs and other intermediate level qualifications |
| level 3 | includes level 3 NVQs, advanced GNVQs and precursors (BTEC national certificate or national diploma, City and Guilds Diploma of Vocational Education at national level),   |

GCE A and AS levels and other advanced level qualifications

level H all level 4 and 5 qualifications including HNCs, HNDs, access to HE qualifications, NVQs at levels 4 and 5, and other higher level professional qualifications.

15 Qualifications with unknown (level X), unspecified (no level), mixed (level M) or invalid notional level (level F) are excluded from the benchmarking data in this publication and the supporting benchmarking data, as interpretation would be difficult and uses limited. These qualifications are however included in the benchmarking data for individual qualifications on the Council's website.

16 Many HND and HNC qualifications are recorded as notional level X in version 11.3 of the qualification database instead of level H. The notional level for these qualifications has been assigned to level H for the purposes of all benchmarking data.

### GCSEs

17 Before 1997-98, some colleges recorded all GCSEs at grades A\* to G as an achievement in the ISR outcome field, other colleges recorded grades A\* to C as an achievement, and some colleges used a mixture of both practices. The GCSE achievement rates in the 1995-96 and 1996-97 benchmarking data are, therefore, a mixture of GCSEs at grades A\* to G and A\* to C.

18 It is not possible to identify which colleges have followed which practice since there are instances where GCSEs at grades D to G can attract achievement funding, and therefore can be recorded as achieved in the outcome field.

19 From 1997-98, GCSEs at grades A\* to C should be coded in the ISR against outcome code 6 'qualification aim achieved and achievement funding is being claimed'. In addition, some GCSEs at grades D to G will be included against this code where the college can claim achievement units. These are

described in *How to Apply for Funding 1997-98* as follows: 'where a student's learning agreement includes as the primary learning goal, a programme of adult basic education leading to a GCSE in English or mathematics where the highest grade achievable is a C, then GCSE grades D to G will be acceptable for achievement purposes'.

20 All GCSEs at grades D to G not in the category above should be coded in the ISR as outcome 7 'qualification aim achieved and achievement funding is not being claimed'. This ensures that all GCSE grades are captured.

21 The variable quality of data in the 'grade' field of the ISR means it is not yet possible to differentiate accurately the ranges of GCSE grades. In the benchmarking data for 1997-98 the number of GCSEs achieved is, therefore, calculated from qualifications coded as outcome 6 and 7 in the ISR, which is equivalent to the number of GCSEs achieved at grades A\* to G for all colleges.

22 This means there is a discontinuity in results between 1996-97 and 1997-98, both in this publication and in the supporting data for GCSEs, which suggests a large increase in the achievement rate between the two years. In fact, the majority of the increase is as a result of colleges recording grades D to G as outcome 7 'qualification aim achieved and achievement funding is not being claimed' in 1997-98 compared to recording them as 'no success' in previous years.

23 This discontinuity particularly affects the results for notional level 2 qualifications being studied in sixth form colleges, where around two-thirds of level 2 qualifications are GCSEs. At sector level, the achievement rate for students aged between 16 and 18 studying GCSEs has increased from 61% in 1996-97 to 73% in 1997-98. The 1997-98 achievement rate of 73% comprises 58% where achievement funding is being claimed which are mainly grades A\* to C, and 15% where achievement funding is not being claimed which are mainly grades D to G.

24 The supporting data available on the Council's website will show the achievement rate for 1997-98 GCSEs split between achieved and achievement funding claimed, and achieved and achievement funding not claimed. This information will be available for the sector and by college type.

25 The benchmarking data for individual qualifications available on the Council's website will show the percentage achieving a 'high grade' calculated from the grade field in the ISR to provide an indication of the A\* to C achievement rate.

26 The Council will provide additional guidance to colleges about improving the quality of the data contained in the grade field of the ISR, so that it will be possible in future years to provide a more accurate and comprehensive breakdown of the range of GCSE results from the ISR.

### **Measures of college variability**

27 Measures of college variability for retention and achievement rates enable colleges to compare their results against the range for the sector or particular groups of colleges. The measures are also shown on the supporting data on the Council's website for results by broad qualification type and college type.

28 The results in this publication show the rates which:

- 75% of colleges meet or surpass (25th percentile)
- 50% of colleges meet or surpass (median or 50th percentile)
- 25% of colleges meet or surpass (75th percentile).

In addition, the publication tables and supporting data available on the Council's website show the rates which:

- 90% of colleges meet or surpass (10th percentile)
- 10% of colleges meet or surpass (90th percentile).

29 Measures of variability are published where there are sufficient numbers of colleges to calculate a meaningful result.

30 The measures of variability are calculated at college level in order to provide information on variation between colleges. This is in comparison with the mean retention and achievement rates, which are calculated as the average rate for all the relevant enrolments, weighting each enrolment equally.

31 The measures of variability weight each college equally. This means that students in smaller colleges have a greater bearing on results than those from larger colleges. The results for small groupings, such as qualifications being studied by adults in sixth form colleges, will be affected by this weighting more than others.

32 The differences between the two methods can be seen by comparing the average or 'mean' rate, with 50th percentile or 'median'. In many cases the difference is slight, whereas in others such as notional level 1 qualifications in sixth form colleges, the difference is greater. In this case the median is higher than the mean due to a number of colleges with relatively few students having high levels of retention and achievement. These colleges are given the same weight in the calculation of the median as other sixth form colleges with a larger number of students thereby increasing the median college result.

33 Both the mean retention and achievement rate and the measures of variability are valid and useful measures, depending on whether the overall performance of the sector is of interest (mean retention and achievement rates) or the variability between colleges is the focus (measures of variability).

### **Widening participation factor**

34 Each college has a widening participation (WP) factor calculated by the Council. It is based on the number of students recruited from areas with different levels of deprivation, using a modified version of the Department of the

Environment, Transport and the Regions' index of local conditions. Students with addresses in postcodes with high levels of socio-economic deprivation are allocated a factor according to the level of deprivation. The higher the number of students from such postcodes, the higher the WP factor. The WP factor therefore provides a basis for identifying both individual and geographical disadvantage.

35 Analysis of colleges grouped by WP factor showed that it would be useful to publish separate benchmarking data for general further education and tertiary colleges with very high WP factors, as the retention and achievement rates for these colleges as a group were significantly below those of other colleges of the same type. No other groups showed significant differences, although this may reflect the smaller number of colleges in some categories.

36 Benchmarking data for general further education and tertiary colleges recruiting a high proportion of their students from deprived areas (which have a WP factor of 1.025 or higher) are shown separately in tables 17 to 20.

### Presentation issues

37 The 'number of starters' is rounded to the nearest 100 in the benchmarking data in this publication and the supporting data. Where the number of starters is fewer than 500, results are not shown. This means that no information is shown for qualifications at notional level H being studied in sixth form colleges.

38 The percentage breakdown of 'number of starters' may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

39 The benchmarking data for individual qualifications on the Council's website show 'number of starters' unrounded, but do not show benchmarking data for qualifications with fewer than 50 starters.

40 Since the data are calculated at qualification level, students studying more than one qualification will appear once for each of their qualifications.

### Coverage

41 The benchmarking data for 1995-96 to 1997-98 have been calculated for 394 (of 437) colleges where ISR4, ISR7, ISR10 and ISR13 data were available. This includes:

- 34 (of 38) specialist colleges: agriculture and horticulture colleges and art, design and performing arts colleges
- 108 (of 109) sixth form colleges
- 252 (of 290) general further education and tertiary colleges, including designated colleges
- 34 (of 42) general further education and tertiary colleges with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas.

42 The 43 colleges excluded from the benchmarking data consist of:

- 10 colleges that have changed their student reference system since 1994-95, due to a merger or otherwise, meaning that it is not possible to match students between ISR returns systematically
- 22 colleges with poor data quality, identified through inspections and the availability of college performance indicators of publishable quality
- 11 colleges that had not returned valid ISR13 (December 1998; 1997-98) data in time to be included in the results.

### Revised results

43 Results for 1995-96 and 1996-97 have been recalculated from *Benchmarking Data 1995-96 and 1996-97* published in August 1998 for the following reasons:

- this publication includes results of 394 colleges compared to 364 colleges in the August 1998 publication



- the colleges included in the group 'general FE and tertiary colleges with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas' have changed significantly, with the addition of 12 colleges where data are now available, and the removal of four colleges with poor data quality
- a number of colleges have re-sent ISR data, either as a response to the 1996-97 performance indicators update which was published in April 1999, or for other purposes. Revised data are included in this publication
- there have been changes to the qualifications database. For example some qualifications with many enrolments such as basic food hygiene have changed notional level, or the notional level has changed from known to unknown. The latter mainly affects qualifications that were previously recorded as notional level H but are unknown in version 11.3 of the database
- the 75th percentiles shown in this publication have been recalculated to improve their accuracy. In the 1998 publication the 75th percentiles for 1995-96 and 1996-97 results were calculated from each college's achievement rates for GNVQs, NVQs, A/AS/GCSEs and other qualifications for their students in each age-group studying at the relevant notional level. The revised figures are calculated more accurately from the aggregated achievement rate for each college for their students across all types of qualification for the relevant age-group and notional level. The 75th percentiles shown in the supporting data on the Council's website are not affected by this recalculation.

44 The effect of recalculating the benchmarking data for 1995-96 and 1996-97 has been some changes in the number of starters and minor variations to the mean achievement rate in some cases. The recalculation of the 75th percentiles has had a more significant impact, particularly for achievement, in a few cases altering this measure by more than 10 percentage points.

### **Comparison with statistical first releases and performance indicators**

45 Analysis of colleges' ISR returns published in *Statistical First Releases* and *Performance Indicators*, shows counts of students or enrolments on qualifications for a particular teaching year. In comparison, the benchmarking data track students and their qualifications across teaching years and present the results in terms of the numbers expecting to complete their qualifications in a particular teaching year.

46 In *Statistical First Releases* and *Performance Indicators* the age of the student is calculated as at 31 August of the current college year, while in the benchmarking data the student's age is calculated as at 31 August of the year the qualification started. Both these approaches are valid. The approach to calculating benchmarking data is based on the requirement to track students between years.

47 The methods used to calculate retention in the benchmarking data differ from the methods used in the calculation of performance indicators published in *Performance Indicators 1996-97* as shown in table 1.

48 The methods used to calculate achievement in the benchmarking data differ from the methods used in the calculation of performance indicators published in *Performance Indicators 1996-97* as shown in table 2. The differences are less marked for achievement than for retention.

**Table 1. Calculation of retention**

<i>Benchmarking data: Retention</i>	<i>Performance indicators: Retention</i>
Qualification level	Student level
Retention over the whole programme	In-year retention
Shown by notional level, age-group and expected length of qualification	Shown by mode of attendance
Can include non-Council-funded students where they are in a cohort with Council-funded students	Council-funded students only

**Table 2. Calculation of achievement**

<i>Benchmarking data: Achievement</i>	<i>Performance indicators: Achievement</i>
Qualification level	Qualification level
Completed qualifications with known outcomes as base	Completed qualifications with known outcomes as base
Excludes partial achievement	Includes partial achievement as half
Shown by notional level, age-group and expected length of qualification	Shown by three lengths of qualification, according to guided learning hours
Can include non-Council-funded students where they are in a cohort with Council-funded students	Council-funded students only

## Illustration of Effect of Qualification Type Mix

1 The example below shows how the benchmarking data at annex A can be adjusted to match the mix of qualifications at an individual college, where the mix of qualifications at the college is significantly different from the national mix.

2 The example relates to adult students studying at level 3 in a general further education college. The starting point is the average retention and achievement rates for different level 3 qualifications for all general further education colleges and for our example college.

3 In our example college, the level 3 provision for adults includes many more NVQs, and fewer GCE A/AS levels, GNVQs and Other qualifications than nationally. In order to check whether the published benchmarking data for all level 3 qualifications are an appropriate comparator, the following calculation may be used:

Average GFEC/TC retention rate =	79%
GFEC/TC retention rate for mix of qualifications in example college comprising:	
10% GCE A/AS retention rate of 69% =	6.9
5% GNVQ retention rate of 70% =	3.5
50% NVQ retention rate of 83% =	41.5
35% Other long retention rate of 83% =	29.05
	80.95%
	rounds to 81%

**Table 1. Notional level 3 qualifications, students aged 19 and over**

	<i>Average for GFEC/TC</i>			<i>Example College</i>
	<i>retention rate %</i>	<i>achievement rate %</i>	<i>breakdown of enrolments %</i>	<i>breakdown of enrolments %</i>
All qualifications	79	63	–	–
GCE A/AS	69	54	21	10
GNVQ	70	73	12	5
NVQ	83	54	19	50
Other long	83	68	48	35

*Note: averages from table 8 of annex A and from supporting data showing benchmarking data by type of qualification, which will be available on the Council's website*



4 The same approach can be used for achievement rates. Strictly, the breakdown of enrolments for completed qualifications with a known outcome should be used rather than the number enrolled, but this is unlikely to have a significant effect:

Average GFEC/TC achievement rate = 63%

GFEC/TC achievement rate for mix of qualifications in example college comprising:

10% GCE A/AS achievement rate of 54% =	5.4
5% GNVQ achievement rate of 73% =	3.65
50% NVQ achievement rate of 54% =	27.0
35% Other long achievement rate of 68% =	23.8
	59.85%
	rounds to 60%

5 As can be seen, the adjusted benchmarking data are similar to the original benchmarking data, despite the very different mix of qualifications in the example college. In practice, mix of qualification types is unlikely to be a significant factor for most colleges.



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