



Skills Funding  
Agency

# FE Choices Learner Satisfaction Survey 2013/14: Guidance for Colleges and Training Organisations

November 2013

Of interest to colleges and training organisations

## **Contents**

1. Guidance for colleges and training organisations (page 2)
2. Help for learners (page 10)
3. Minimum sample size calculator (page 13)
4. Guidance on selecting qualifications for colleges and training organisations (page 14)

## **1. Guidance for colleges and training organisations**

### **Introduction**

The Learner Satisfaction survey for 2013/14 runs from 18 November 2013 to 13 April 2014. We will publish information and guidance on the [FE Choices information pages](#) on our website throughout the survey period and we will post notices in our [Update](#) newsletter.

Colleges and training organisations that are taking part in the survey will need to visit the [Provider Extranet](#) on a regular basis. The [Provider Extranet](#) will give regular updates on all aspects of the surveys, including near-live feedback to individual colleges and training organisations on their response rates. To access this site you will need your UKPRN code and your unique password, which we have sent to your principal or chief executive.

### **As a college or training organisation, what do you need to do?**

**Check whether you are in scope for the Learner Satisfaction Survey by consulting the [Structure of FE Choices pages](#) on our website.**

### **How to support the survey**

To participate fully in the survey and ensure you gain a valid score, colleges and training organisations will need to visit the [Provider Extranet](#) on a regular basis. We have sent to your principal or chief executive a web link, password and log-on that will allow your organisation to check response rates to the online survey at any time during the survey period. We will update these figures on a daily basis and will tell you your achieved responses and the extent to which your response pattern appears to be representative of your organisation.

## New developments to the survey

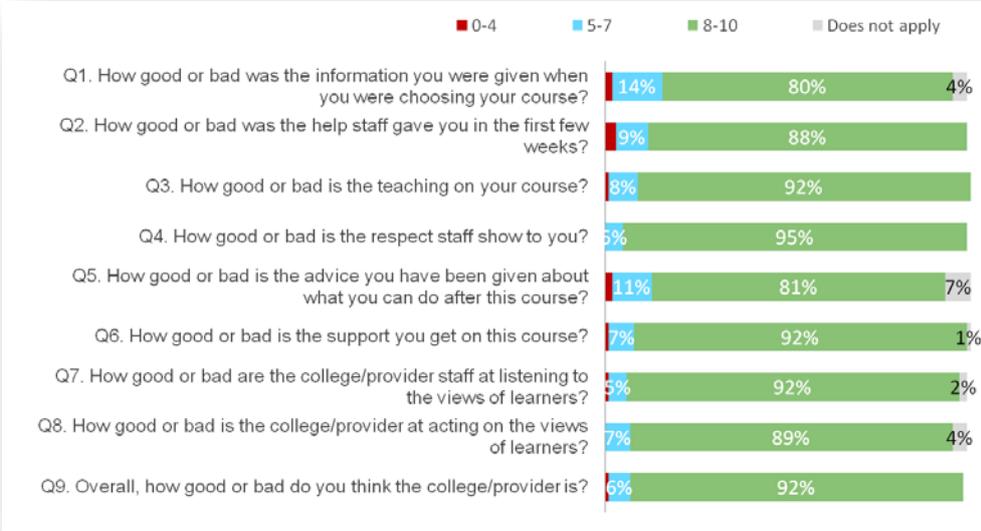
### New additional question

This year there will be a new question asking the learner if they would recommend the college or training organisation to friends or family.

### New indicative reports to help inform you

This year we will share three indicative reports with you detailing your organisation’s learner responses to the survey. For example, you will be able to see how different groups of learners are responding to each of the 10 core questions, by age, gender and level of study. The reports contain visually-engaging charts and tables which will allow you to easily identify key findings to help with planning your self-assessment.

An example of the type of information that will be shown against the overview of responses is detailed below:



These will be available in mid- January to report the period up to Christmas, early March to report the period up to February half-term and mid-May to report right up to the end of the survey.

The Provider Extranet also gives you the opportunity to let us have contact details for staff that are involved in the survey as well as giving us the dates that you plan

to run the survey so we do not send you unnecessary reminders. For more details, please see the relevant pages on the [Provider Extranet](#).

**Consider the best way to give as many in-scope Skills Funding Agency and EFA-funded learners as possible the opportunity to take part in the survey**

You will only be able to get a score in the survey if the number of learners responding is a sufficiently large and representative sample of all the in-scope learners in your organisation during the entire survey period. To check what your minimum sample size is likely to be, please estimate the number of in-scope learners you will have between 18 November 2013 and 13 April 2014 and use the online calculator, which is available on the [Provider Extranet](#).

We recommend that you aim for a census approach to the survey rather than a sampling approach and start the survey early to allow enough time. By doing a census you will make sure that:

- you get enough valid responses to obtain a score and
- your responses are representative of your learner population with regard to age, gender and level of study.

**Colleges and training organisations whose responses are not representative of their learner population cannot be awarded a score**

We will correct minor imbalances but samples will be rejected if they are badly skewed, that is if some learner's groupings are over or under represented. The figure obtained should be used as a guide only and we strongly encourage colleges and training organisations to exceed this figure to ensure they achieve the minimum number of completed surveys. Your learners (and those of your subcontracted colleges and training organisations) can log in to the survey by entering your UKPRN and their personal Learner Reference Number, as entered on the Individualised Learner Record (ILR). Please ensure that your learners have access to this information. If you do not know what your UKPRN number is, please

visit the [UK Register of Learning Providers](#) (UKRLP) website, where you can access details. In the survey we refer to this number as the 'code number for your college or learning provider.'

It is important learners enter this number because it ensures that your learners' responses are correctly attributed to your organisation. Learners cannot access the survey without the UKPRN. Please note that you should also distribute this number to any subcontractors who deliver in-scope learning on your behalf and ask them in turn to communicate this to your learners who are with them. If this learning is part of your in-scope provision, it will be included when we calculate the number of eligible learners for your organisation.

In some colleges and training organisations, ULNs or Learner Reference Numbers are used routinely as intranet log-ins and appear on learner ID cards, meaning learners will have the number easily available to them. If this is not the case in your organisation, please give consideration to the best way to get this information to learners in readiness for the survey. Some learners may not be familiar with the terminology and know their ULN or personal learner reference number as the 'learner id'.

Please note that learners will still be able to complete the survey if they have lost or forgotten their Learner Reference Number but if this happens for a high proportion of survey respondents, it will delay our ability to turn the survey results around quickly. Accurate ULNs or Learner Reference Numbers will also increase the value of response breakdowns we will be able to give you at the end of the survey. We use the ULN or Learner Reference Number to confirm that the learner is in scope for the survey and serve as a protection for you as the provider by ensuring that learners cannot enter duplicate submissions.

Please note that the ULN and personal reference number are both allocated to learners at or shortly after the time of enrolment. Please ensure your learners use either the ULN or their personal learner reference number. This is essential to

ensure the accuracy of the survey.

Learners will complete the survey by following a link to the dedicated survey webpage. Colleges and training organisations could distribute the link in emails, messages on their intranet, and letters or posters, depending on the approach that will get the best response.

### **Decide if it would be beneficial for some of your learners to complete the survey on hand-held communication devices such as BlackBerrys**

You can access the survey and complete it from any internet-enabled communication device. The survey will be available 24 hours a day from 18 November to 13 April and can be completed from any internet-linked computer, palm top, BlackBerry or other smart phone. More guidance on this is available on the [Learner Satisfaction web pages](#) of our website.

### **Consider how you want to integrate the Learner Satisfaction survey with your own survey processes**

If you want learners to complete one of your own surveys after the Learner Satisfaction survey, you may want to use the 'hyperlink-embedded method' to achieve this. For guidance on how to link the surveys, please read 'Guidance on hyperlink-embedded method for linking the Learner Satisfaction survey with your college or provider survey', which is available on our [website](#).

To comply with the Data Protection Act, it is important that you follow this guidance. The advantage of the 'hyperlink-embedded method' is that it works from any starting point where you may want to embed the hyperlink – such as a Word document, an email or your intranet home page. This method is therefore versatile and gives the user a consistent approach when completing the surveys.

### **Course-level feedback**

In a change to this year's survey, learners will **not** be asked to complete additional course-level questions.

This is because we have devised a more robust methodology for obtaining subject level information using data recorded on the ILR and LARA database. This means that we will be able to identify a subject area for the large majority of respondents. Therefore, we would urge all colleges and training organisations to maximise the number of learners completing the survey as this will greatly increase your ability to analyse the survey findings at subject level.

**Decide when to administer the survey during the survey window:**

**18 November 2013 until 13 May 2014**

Colleges and training organisations can decide how they manage the administration of the survey throughout this period. It will be possible for learners to log on at any time of the day, and from any location and any computer, provided that they have their provider's UKPRN and personal Learner Reference Number to hand. All learners on programmes during this period are entitled to take part including learners, whose learning programmes end in or before December 2013. Colleges and training organisations can let us know what their planned survey start and end dates are on the [Provider Extranet](#).

**Decide if you need to apply for permission to use some paper surveys**

In exceptional circumstances, colleges and training organisations can apply to use paper surveys if it is impossible for some learners to complete the survey online during the survey period. If this is the case for some of your learners and you wish to apply for paper surveys, please follow the link on the [Provider Extranet](#).

Colleges and training organisations have the option of receiving course-level feedback from online survey responses but we cannot offer this facility for paper surveys. Paper survey responses are subject to a small downward statistical adjustment during the calculation of the score to reflect the different pattern of responses for learners completing paper and online surveys.

All paper surveys **must** be completed by a learner or by someone with a learner support role if the learner has learning difficulties or disabilities. It is not acceptable

for staff to interview learners or summarise views obtained in other ways.

All responses will be collected by courier from colleges and training organisations on **12 March 2014** and only those responses that are collected at that time can be included in the response calculation.

### **Sell the benefits of the survey**

Some colleges and training organisations approach surveys of this kind as a purely administrative exercise. However, there is evidence that learners will respond better to the survey if they understand its importance and see it as part of their entitlement as a learner. It would be useful if colleges and training organisations considered the best way to publicise the survey at an early stage, so that learners see it as an opportunity to share their views, rather than an obligation.

### **Convey the ease with which the survey can be completed**

The survey is very short, taking only a few minutes for most learners to complete.

### **Plan to include all Skills Funding Agency or EFA-funded learners including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those undertaking programmes in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).**

Colleges and training organisations who wish to use **paper-based surveys have until 22 November 2013** to apply.

We expect colleges and training organisations that do not make an application by this date to use the online survey.

The paper-based survey window ends earlier than the online survey and the final day is **10 March 2013**.

Further information is available on our [FE Choices information pages](#) part of our website.

**Before the survey please make sure your learners have access to:**

- your provider reference number (UKPRN)
- either their Unique Learner Number (ULN) if this is available or their personal Learner Reference Number as entered on the Individualised Learner Record (ILR).

We will use your learners' responses to calculate your Learner Satisfaction score which we will be publish on the [FE Choices comparison website](#).

**If you have any questions, please:**

- see the FAQs on the [Provider Extranet](#).
- go to the [Learner Satisfaction survey pages](#) of our website.
- contact the [Data Service Helpdesk](#).

## **2. Help for learners**

We have designed the questions to be, wherever possible, applicable to all learners in the learning context they have selected, that is, on a course, a learning programme or a training programme. We have also aimed to make the wording as clear as possible.

We realise that some learners will need help with the process of completing the survey. We ask you to use your professional judgement to ensure that any help you provide has the most neutral effect possible on the answers the learners give. If someone is giving a learner significant help, for example, acting as a translator or entering the answers on the survey on behalf of a learner who is unable to record their answers directly, we ask you to let us know this in the survey.

If a learner feels that a particular question does not apply to them at all, they can select 'This does not apply to me' and then complete the rest of the survey. We expect occurrences of this to be very rare. Some learners may ask what a question means. The questionnaires are being completed by hundreds of thousands of learners all over the country in a wide variety of learning contexts and we need to avoid any distortion that might result from different staff giving different explanations. If learners do not understand a word or phrase in a question, please restrict any help to dictionary definitions of terms. For example, if a learner asks what the word 'advice' means, it would be fine to say 'advice means information and explanations given to help you decide about something' but not to give examples of specific advice sessions that the learners might have received from your organisation since this could influence their response.

### **Appropriate briefing of learners**

We ask colleges and training organisations to encourage learners to complete the survey. However, encouraging learners to reflect in their answers anything other than their genuine perception of their experiences is not acceptable. The National Union of Students (NUS) is working with us to encourage learners who feel that

they have been unfairly monitored or influenced during their completion of the survey to make this known to the Agency. Any allegations of inappropriate actions to influence the outcomes of the survey will be taken seriously by us.

### **Support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those undertaking programmes in ESOL in the Learner Satisfaction Survey**

Learners can access a version of the survey in British Sign Language (BSL) by clicking on the icon on the left-hand side of the page. This version also includes a voice-over, which may also help ESOL learners or other groups of learners who would benefit from hearing the questions spoken out loud.

We commissioned research visits to a number of colleges and training organisations with substantial concentrations of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This led to a number of recommendations that we have incorporated into the design of the survey and the survey website. We ask colleges and training organisations to use their discretion when deciding whether to survey learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and to not include learners who would be distressed, or for whom the survey would be inappropriate.

If you expect your exclusion of these learners to have a significant impact on the number of learners undertaking the survey and your ability to achieve sufficient sample size, then please contact us by emailing the [service desk mailbox](#) by **3 February 2014**. You will need to let us know how many learners will be omitted.

This will ensure that we can take this into account when judging your minimum sample size. We realise that some learners will need help with the process of completing the survey online. We ask you to use your professional judgement to ensure that any help you or your colleagues give allows learners views to be recorded as accurately as possible without influencing those views. The online survey asks that anyone helping a learner to record their views indicates this and describes the type of help they provide.

Some colleges and training organisations have in the past had great success in including learners with severe or complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities, because they planned ahead for the survey and built discussion of the survey issues into curriculum discussions. For example, some colleges and training organisations find it most effective to discuss the views of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on a daily or weekly basis, and to log these using a diary approach. Other colleges and training organisations use learner support staff to assist learners in the completion of surveys. Approaches like this are fully acceptable if they allow learners to give their views without influencing those views.

The Learner Satisfaction survey allows people who are helping learners to complete the survey on their behalf, to record that fact by indicating this in their online responses.

We have tested the questions with learners undertaking ESOL programmes and believe that the vast majority of learners with a learning level of Entry 3 or above will be able to complete the online survey unaided. Participation in the survey is optional for learners, but colleges and training organisations should make every attempt to ensure that learners have the opportunity to take part. Colleges and training organisations will, however, need to make provision for learners to be able to opt out at any stage during the survey process and to ensure that these learners are not then contacted again about the survey.

### 3. Minimum Sample Size Calculator

The Learner Satisfaction survey will be accessible online 24 hours a day, seven days a week between 18 November 2013 and 13 April 2014. We strongly recommend that all your learners are given the opportunity to take part.

As in previous years, you will only be able to obtain a score in the survey if the number of learners responding represents a sufficiently large sample of all the in-scope learners in your organisation during the survey period.

The minimum number that will be needed to guarantee a valid score is based on the sample size required to give 95% confidence that the score is accurate to +/- 3%. The calculator will help you to estimate this, but we strongly urge you to aim for a sample well above this minimum figure in case of invalid or duplicate responses. Enter the total number of in-scope learners you expect to have in the green box and the minimum required sample will appear in the yellow box.

To ensure that the minimum sample size is realistic for smaller colleges and training organisations, we set a ceiling of 70% of in-scope learners and no provider will be required to exceed this percentage. Therefore the minimum sample size generated by the calculator is based on either the 70% rule or 3% confidence interval, whichever is the smaller.

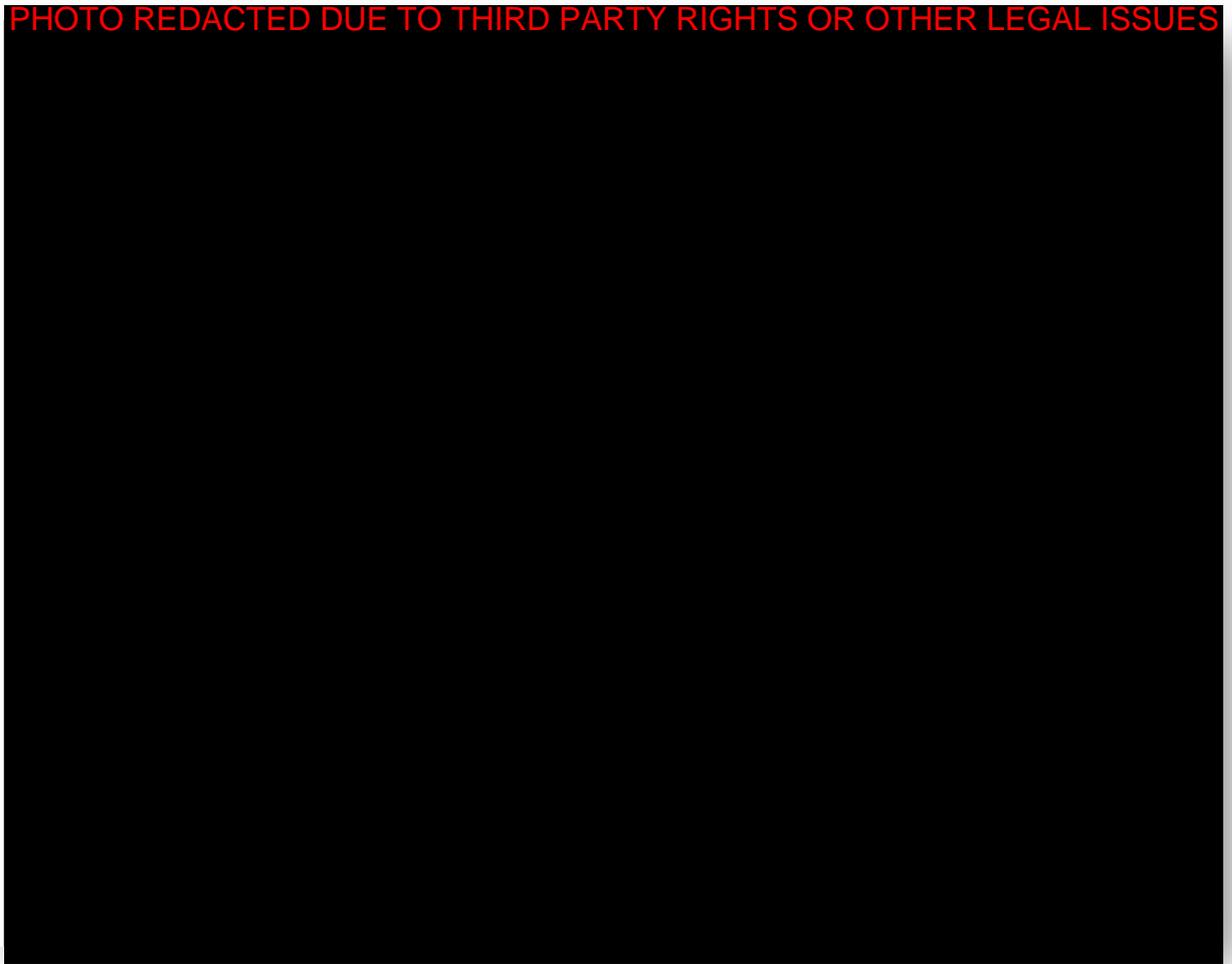
It is important that the sample is broadly representative of your learner population in terms of age, gender and level of study. Corrective weightings are applied to ensure any bias in the sample is accounted for but this is not possible where sample skew is too large. Therefore, badly skewed samples may not receive a valid score. Remember that some responses may be ruled invalid if they are duplicates or if the learners are not on provision funded by us. These factors can lead to your final sample being smaller than the original number of responses submitted by your learners. Always aim for a response well above the required minimum.

#### 4. Guidance on selecting qualifications for colleges and training organisations

Towards the end of the Learner Satisfaction survey, (**see Annex 1**) we ask learners to tell us the highest level of qualification they are taking. We use this information to feed back near-live information to colleges and training organisations on the profile of learners, which have answered the survey to date. This information is checked against the ILR after the survey has ended. This paper provides guidance to support the information of qualification types in the Learner Satisfaction survey to aid colleges and training organisations and learners to choose the option that best reflects the learning they are undertaking.

Information requested in the survey	Further examples which may help learners select their correct level of learning
Please choose one option Entry Level 1, Entry Level 2 or Entry Level 3 (For example: Entry Level Award, Entry Level Certificate, Entry Level Diploma)	Entry level Award in Motor Vehicle (QCF) Entry Level Certificate in Personal Progress (QCF) Certificate in Adult Literacy [Entry] Certificate in Adult Numeracy [Entry] Functional Skills [Entry] Entry Level Certificate in Skills for Life, Living and Employment
Level 1 (For example: Level 1 Award, Level 1 Certificate, Level 1 Diploma)	Certificate in Business Skills [Level 1](QCF) Certificate in ESOL [Level 1] Certificate in Adult Numeracy [Level 1] Functional Skills [Level 1] Diploma in Retail Skills [Level 1] Certificate in Personal Life Skills [Level 1]
Level 2 (For example: Level 2 Award, Level 2 Certificate, Level 2 Diploma, Apprenticeship, GCSE)	Certificate in Retail Skills (QCF) [Level 2] Certificate in Adult Literacy [Level 2] Certificate in Adult Numeracy [Level 2] Functional Skills [Level 2] Apprenticeship [Level 2] GCSE Certificate in Customer Service [Level 2] Diploma in Professional Cookery [Level 2]
Level 3 (For example: Level 3 Award, Level 3 Certificate, Level 3 Diploma, Advanced Apprenticeship, Access to Higher Education, A level, AS level.)	Diploma in Construction (QCF) [Level 3] Access to Higher Education [Level 3] Advanced Apprenticeship [Level 3] GCSE A Levels GCE AS Diploma in Art and Design [Level 3] Certificate in Business [Level 3]
Level 4 and above (For example: Award, Certificate or Diploma at level 4 or above, Degree, Higher National Diploma, Higher National Certificate)	Diploma in Accounting (QCF) [Level 4] Certificate in Management (QCF) [Level 6] Higher Apprenticeship [Level 4] Certificate in Salon Management [Level 4] Masters

**Annex 1: Example of Highest Qualification Undertaken Selection from survey**





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