



Skills Funding
Agency

Minimum Standards

How the Skills Funding Agency will apply
Minimum Standards for 2012/13

January 2014

Of interest to colleges and training organisations

Background

The Government is committed to increased freedoms and flexibilities and reduced bureaucracy and government intervention in the further education (FE) sector.

After extensive discussions with the FE sector and a review of Minimum Levels of Performance (MLP), we have introduced Minimum Standards that are:

- **Simple** – by removing: (a) the complex exemptions methodology and (b) the use of weighted guided learning hours (glh) success rates in Classroom-based Learning, instead applying the new Minimum Standards to conventional qualification success rates (QSR).
- **Transparent** – by using the standard and conventional QSR used across the FE sector the approach is transparent to all colleges and training organisations; it will support them to identify their own underperformance.
- **Fair** – we will apply fairly and transparently the Agency's intervention, as described in the [Approach to Intervention](#) document.

From December 2013, we have applied Minimum Standards to the 2012/13 Minimum Standards reports released by The Data Service on the Provider Gateway.

The New Minimum Standards Methodology

Provision types

We will apply Minimum Standards separately to the following four types of provision that colleges and training organisations deliver:

- i. Classroom-based Learning (adults¹ only) – long (more than 24 weeks)
- ii. Classroom-based Learning (adults only) – short (from 5-24 weeks duration)
- iii. Workplace Learning (adults only)
- iv. Apprenticeships (all ages).

¹ Agency-funded 18+ learners.

Thresholds

The following thresholds indicate the success rate below which we consider that provision does not meet the Minimum Standard:

- Classroom-based Learning:
 - long duration: 63% (including AS-level) and 75% for A-levels
 - short duration: 65% (excluding AS-level, which will be 63%) and 75% for A-levels
- Workplace Learning: 68%
- Apprenticeships: 55%.

We will apply the thresholds to success rates at qualification aim and Apprenticeship framework level. If the qualification aim or Apprenticeship framework success rate is below the minimum threshold, then we will classify that specific qualification or framework as falling below the acceptable standard.

Tolerance level

We will then calculate the number of starts or leavers who experience education and/or skills training provision in qualifications or frameworks below the Minimum Standard in each provision type as a proportion of the total.

If the proportion of starts or leavers in underperforming education and/or skills training provision exceeds the tolerance level, the provision type is in the scope of formal intervention, as set out in our document, [Approach to Intervention](#).

The Minimum Standards tolerance level is the total proportion of starts or leavers on qualification aims or Apprenticeship frameworks that had success rates below the Minimum Standards thresholds for each provision type. For 2012/13, the tolerance level is set at 40% of total starts or leavers that a college or training organisation delivers in qualifications or frameworks below the minimum threshold.

Qualifications in scope

The new Minimum Standards include all publicly funded qualifications that contribute to the calculation of QSRs for 2012/13; it does not include the following:

- functional skills
- Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) unit-sized aims
- Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS).

Classroom-based Learning of very short course duration (less than five weeks) is also excluded from Minimum Standards.

All distance learning is in scope because the new Minimum Standards are based on QSR. Distance learning was not in scope for MLP because of the complexity of weighting by glh.

Proportionality

We will not intervene formally where the proportion of starts or leavers in underperforming education and/or skills training provision exceeds the tolerance level but there are fewer than 100 starts or leavers in the success rate cohort for that provision type. We expect a college or training organisation in this position to set challenging quality improvement targets as a priority, and we will ask about their progress.

Failure to Meet Minimum Standards

If a college or training organisation fails to meet Minimum Standards, the Agency's [Approach to Intervention](#) will apply. We may also use the results of Minimum Standards to inform business decisions. If we do this, we will specify how as part of those business processes.

Minimum Standards College and Training Organisation Reports

The Minimum Standards college and training organisation reports highlight education and/or skills training provision that falls below Minimum Standards at qualification level: subject sector area, QCF-size and each individual qualification aim/Apprenticeship framework.

The reports are intended to support colleges and training organisations to identify poor performance and improve quality.

Colleges and training organisations should ensure that they do not use the Minimum Standards thresholds as quality benchmarks for performance. The average success rates are significantly above the thresholds used in the Minimum Standards, and colleges and training organisations should aim much higher than this and continue to aspire to excellent education and/or skills training provision for all their learners.

We expect all colleges and training organisations to set challenging quality improvement targets using appropriate benchmarking data. It is for colleges and training organisations to identify the improvements required in the quality of the learners' experience to achieve this.

Consultation with the FE Sector on Minimum Standards

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Skills Funding Agency have consulted widely with organisations that represent colleges and training organisations, including:

- the Association of Colleges
- the Association of Employment and Learning Providers
- the 157 Group
- the Sixth Form Colleges' Association
- LEA FEA (network of local authority lead officers for Adult and Community Learning)
- NATSPEC (the Association of National Specialist Colleges)
- individual colleges and training organisations
- the Learning and Skills Improvement Service
- Ofsted
- the Department for Education
- the Education Funding Agency.

As part of our consultation and communication, we published shadow Minimum Standards reports in spring 2013. These allowed colleges and training organisations to see how they would have performed based on 2011/12 QSR data. This enabled them to identify areas for improvement before we went live with the new Minimum Standards from December 2013 based on 2012/13 QSR data.

The Future for Minimum Standards

We intend to review the Minimum Standards thresholds and tolerances each year and will notify the FE sector of any changes as soon as possible before the implementation of any changes.

We are currently considering a number of possible developments for Minimum Standards in the future, which may involve:

- including OLASS provision from 2014/15
- including functional skills in Classroom-based Learning from 2013/14
- the use of QCF categories from 2013/14
- reviewing the requirement to have a distinction between Classroom-based and Workplace Learning
- looking at wider performance measures beyond success rates.



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