Skills Funding Agency

Learner Satisfaction Survey 2014 to 2015

Technical Report

This report was undertaken by Ipsos MORI on behalf of the Skills Funding Agency.

July 2015

Of interest to colleges, other training organisations and the general public interested in the research, analysis and calculation phases of the 2014 to 2015 Learner Satisfaction Survey.

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1. Introduction

Purpose of this Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to give the SFA (SFA), the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), the Department for Education (DfE) and other interested parties detailed descriptions, analysis and explanations of all phases of the research, analysis and calculation stages of the 2014 to 2015 Learner Satisfaction Survey.

1.2 This report should enable the SFA and others to replicate precisely the approach adopted. As a result, it contains necessarily technical information but, wherever possible, we provide explanations to assist non-specialist readers.

2. Methodology

Overview of the survey

2.1 The main survey mechanism was an online survey, available 24 hours a day from 3 November 2014 to 29 March 2015, which learners accessed using a link to a dedicated survey page. Colleges and other training organisations could either distribute the link separately or embed it in their intranets, with the latter offering them the option of posting an accompanying link to internal surveys. Guidance on how to do this was contained in the provider guidance notes that the SFA posted on the FE Choices pages on the .GOV.UK website.

2.2 To complete a survey learners needed their provider code (UKPRN number). They also needed their individual learner number (LearnRefNumber field of the individualised learner record (ILR) or unique learner number (ULN). This year we accepted both learner reference numbers and ULNs. The UKPRN was validated in real time using an online database and respondents were only able to continue with the survey if they input a valid UKPRN. However UKPRNs are issued consecutively, which means that learners mistyping the number could easily submit a valid but incorrect identifier. This potential error was detected and corrected for during the validation phase using ILR details (see Section 5).

2.3 As colleges and other training organisations submit full learner records retrospectively, we cannot validate learner codes in real time. Therefore we asked learners to provide personal details that were later matched into the ILR during the extensive post-survey validation and checking phase (see Section 5).

2.4 Colleges and other training organisations with learners for whom it was impossible to complete online surveys (for example, those based in locations without internet access) were able to apply to use paper questionnaires. These were provided as a printable template with embedded, scannable, provider codes. Colleges and other training organisations applied to use this approach through the FE Choices Information pages on the GOV.UK website or through the Provider Extranet. The closing date for the paper survey was set at 9 March 2015 to allow for the longer processing period required for paper surveys.

2.5 The survey contained the same nine core questions used in previous versions. A 10th question, asking learners whether or not the course had met their expectations was added for the first time in the 2014 to 2015 survey. The final question on the questionnaire (introduced in 2013 to 2014) asked learners if they would recommend their learning provider to friends or family.

2.6 Learners completing the survey online were invited to select the environment in which they learnt:

- Learning at a college.
- Learning programmes, such as apprenticeships.
- Training programmes for employees trained in their workplace.

The questionnaires had an identical structure but related to three different learning environments. They used language that learners in those environments would understand.

Similarly, colleges and other training organisations of those learners completing the paper-based survey were asked to decide which version/s of the questionnaire were most appropriate for their learners.

Three versions of the paper questionnaire template in PDF format were sent to staff co-ordinating the paper surveys. These co-ordinators were invited to select the most appropriate version for their learners.

The questionnaire

2.7 The survey questionnaire included the same nine scoring questions used in the 2013 to 2014 Learner Satisfaction Survey, retaining the 0 to 10 rating scale with bipolar labels only (very bad and very good). The new question, asking learners whether or not the course had met their expectations, also used the same 0 to 10 rating scale. We analysed the responses to this question and shared them with colleges and other training organisations, but they did not form part of the overall learner satisfaction score this year.

2.8 The final question on the questionnaire, added last year, asked learners how likely they were to recommend their course to friends and family. This had six response options: extremely likely, likely, neither likely nor unlikely, unlikely, extremely unlikely and does not apply. We did not include responses to this question in the final overall score but reported them separately as percentage values.

2.9 All versions of the survey contained clear data-protection statements developed as a result of long-term dialogue with the SFA legal team. These are evident in the explanatory copy at the start of the survey (refer to Annex 7 for details). Legal and ethical issues are discussed further in Section 6.

Technical aspects of the online survey

2.10 Technical issues relating to completing questionnaires online were tested extensively during the 2007 to 2008 Framework for Excellence pilot and the subsequent surveys in 2007 to 2008 (Version 1) and 2008 to 2009 (Version 2). Specifically, 2008 to 2009 technical testing on colleges and other training organisations premises included:

- testing the survey web link and questionnaire accessibility from different provider locations and checking successful transmission to Ipsos MORI's survey analysis system
- testing the in-built validation checks and checking arrangements to ensure that learners could enter provider codes and individual learner numbers
- matching learner details from test submissions using dummy learner numbers and provider codes
- monitoring the live online survey navigation and completion process
- discussing, where applicable, the testing of the questionnaire from multiple sites and/or remote access to the survey for off-site learners
- testing user navigation through the survey and any technical issues relating to this
- testing completion of the questionnaire using different input devices and screen resolutions, including desktop and laptop computers and BlackBerrys

2.11 The testing process confirmed the full technical functionality of the survey and the ability of learners to transmit responses from a wide range of devices in a range of settings. In September 2009 further testing took place of colleges' and other training organisations' ability to run links to the survey alongside their own internal surveys. This linking approach was explained in the 2014 to 2015 Learner Satisfaction Provider Guidance Notes (available at Annex 8). In addition, at the start of each year's Learner Satisfaction Survey, we ask colleges and other training organisations to test the accessibility, functionality and compatibility of the on-screen survey with their own IT infrastructure (refer to paragraph 2.24).

Technical aspects of the paper survey

2.12 A paper-based survey was available for those learners for whom it would be impossible to complete a web-based survey. This option was only available with the prior agreement of the SFA project manager.

2.13 We sent three versions of the paper questionnaire template in PDF format to staff co-ordinating the paper surveys. As mentioned earlier, we asked them to decide which version/s of the questionnaire were most appropriate for their learners. We also sent survey co-ordinators a set of guidelines on how to reproduce the questionnaires and conduct the survey with learners.

2.14 To ensure compliance with minimum type size guidelines, we designed all three versions for printing in landscape format on double-sided A3-sized paper. RCU staff liaised directly with survey co-ordinators in colleges and other training organisations. Those using paper questionnaires collated the completed surveys in sealed envelopes and arranged for couriers to collect them to ensure there was no risk of them going astray.

2.15 At the end of the survey process, RCU arranged for a secure courier to collect the completed survey forms and deliver them to the company's headquarters. On receiving the questionnaires RCU carried out an initial checking process to assess the suitability of questionnaires for scanning. Wherever possible, RCU processed the surveys using a high-specification scanner using Formic optical character-reader software. This software scans and captures the data from each survey response and also has the added advantage of retaining a full image of the

document. Where scanned entry was not possible (for example because colleges or training organisations had photocopied the questionnaire in A4 or used staples), RCU entered the responses manually and subjected them to 10% re-entry validation. RCU also captured an electronic image of all questionnaires entered manually for secure electronic storage.

Provider communications

Extranet guidance and daily updates

2.16 In October 2014 the SFA sent a letter to the principals/chief executives of all colleges and other training organisations. The letter set out the details of the 2014 to 2015 survey and included a reminder of the provider's UKPRN number and personalised password (new colleges and other training organisations were supplied with a password for the first time). This information allowed each in-scope provider to access the FE Choices extranet site (Provider Extranet) containing survey information specific to their organisation. Ipsos MORI hosted the site, which included updates for all three FE Choices satisfaction surveys: Learner Satisfaction, Community Learner and Employer Satisfaction.

2.17 For the Learner Satisfaction Survey the Provider Extranet also hosted guidance to help colleges and other training organisations meet their minimum sample requirements. This included a sample size calculator for them to calculate the overall minimum target for responses to the survey.

2.18 The Provider Extranet also included an information sheet in Excel that contained daily response rate information. The sheet was updated daily and informed colleges and other training organisations of how many of their learners had submitted survey responses successfully by the end of the previous day. This response rate report also recorded the breakdown of responses between the 16 learner subgroups, which are detailed in paragraph 4.12. We provided this level of detail to help colleges and other training organisations monitor the representativeness of their sample.

Technical and policy-related assistance

2.19 Colleges and other training organisations had three main routes to gain assistance during the survey:

i. Contacting the SFA Service Desk directly.
ii. Visiting the Contact Us website page for the Learner Satisfaction and Employer Satisfaction surveys (http://fechoices.ipsos-mori.com/contactus.aspx).
iii. Visiting the FE Choices Information pages on the GOV.UK website.

2.20 The Contact Us website page was part of the Provider Extranet but colleges, other training organisations could access it. Visitors were presented with answers to a series of frequently asked questions and were able to submit a query to Ipsos MORI if they required further information. They then forwarded any queries relating to policy issues to the SFA.

It is not possible to present figures for the number of people who accessed the site. However, as in 2014 the success of the system is evident from the reduced number of queries about the Learner Satisfaction Survey submitted to the dedicated Ipsos MORI email address (learnersatisfaction@ipsos.com), compared to previous years. The mailbox for this address was staffed during office hours by the Ipsos MORI research team (refer to paragraph 2.22).

2.21 Where colleges and other training organisations or learners submitted queries relating to policy or survey results, these were forwarded onto the Service Desk at servicedesk@sfa.bis.gov.uk for the SFA to answer. In total, we forwarded 20 queries to the SFA, ranging from questions about eligible colleges and other training organisations and learners, survey timescales, analysis, response rate methodology and learner identification.

2.22 In addition, there were 302 queries from colleges and other training organisations to Ipsos MORI compared to 324 in the previous year. The two most common types of queries were requests for a password to the Provider Extranet and questions about the daily response rate reports.

2.23 The Provider Extranet also presented colleges and other training organisations with the opportunity to register their contact details to receive updates on issues relating to the FE Choices surveys. A total of 709 members of staff from 563 colleges and other training organisations provided their details.

Technical operation of the online survey

Testing the on-screen survey

2.24 The on-screen survey was made available to colleges and other training organisations for testing between 27 and 31 October 2014. During this window colleges and other training organisations were able to test accessibility, functionality and compatibility of the on-screen survey with their own IT infrastructure. Colleges and other training organisations were able to fully simulate the respondents' experience and were allowed to submit responses containing 'test data'. We then deleted this data from the response database before the survey went live on 3 November 2014. There were 184 test records attempted during the testing phase.

Delivering the on-screen survey

2.25 The on-screen survey was available for 24 hours each day, every day of the week from midday on 3 November 2014 to midnight on 29 March 2015. In addition to the main on-screen survey, a 'British Sign Language' (BSL) version of the survey was available for 2014 to 2015 for learners with literacy difficulties, learning difficulties or visual impairments (refer to Section 7).

2.26 There were no reported technical difficulties with the on-screen surveys. The following table shows the number of visits to the main Learner Satisfaction Survey and the BSL version of the main survey during the survey window. The survey website received 521,786 visits, 358,435 of which (69%) resulted in a successful submission of a survey response. The remaining 163,351 (31%) of the visits are classed as incomplete responses, which accounts for all occasions where the website was visited but no final response was submitted. However, on most of these occasions (73%) respondents did not progress to the log-in stage of the survey, which suggests that some visitors did not intend to submit a response.

2.27 A further 10% (15,729) of incomplete responses were failed attempts to log in to the survey (a process that required the provider UKPRN number and their own learner reference number). These incomplete responses could indicate that some learners were trying to start the survey without the necessary information. It is likely that most of these learners returned to the site subsequently and made successful responses. The final 17% of the incomplete responses were from learners who successfully logged in but did not complete the survey. These incomplete responses could have resulted from learners opting out of the survey, losing their internet connection while completing the survey, or failing to select "submit" at the end of the process. The proportion of incomplete responses has remained consistent with previous years' results. The reduction of the fieldwork period has reduced the number of completed responses. However, the number of visits converting into a successful survey submission has increased by 11% (2013 to 2014: 58% and 2014 to 2015: 69%).

Table 1: Visits to the Learner Satisfaction Survey 2014 to 2015 web page

	Main LS survey	**BSL survey**	**Total**
Total Visits	**521,786**	**1,513**	**523,299**
Complete responses (pre-validation)	**358,435**	**294**	**358,729**
Incomplete responses	**163,351**	**1,219**	**164,570**
Did not visit log-in screen	119,211	1,057	120,268
Failed log-in	15,729	92	15,821
Successful log-in but incomplete response	28,411	70	28,481

2.28 As shown in the Table 2 below, just over four-fifths of the responses were submitted between January and March 2015, whilst 18.8% were submitted before Christmas (2013 to 2014: 9.9%). This increase may be due to a reduction in the fieldwork period (in 2013 to 2014, fieldwork ended in April rather than March) and also as a result of the reminder communications that the SFA issued in its monthly electronic newsletter Update.

Table 2: Monthly breakdown of responses to Learner Satisfaction Survey 2014 to 2015

Month (Main LS survey only)	Number of responses	% total	Cumulative %
November 2014	18,424	5.1	5.1
December 2014	30,712	8.6	13.7
January 2015	71,244	19.9	33.6
February 2015	111,644	31.1	64.7
March 2015	126,411	35.3	100.0
Total	358,435	100.0	

Source: Learner Satisfaction Survey Data: Online and Paper responses

Data storage and file transfer

2.29 The raw survey data was stored securely through the Dimensions (IBM SPSS Data Collection) research software.

2.30 The SQL server in Dimensions is only available through the Interviewer Server Administration portal and this greatly increases security. Any code within surveys is contained on the server side, so it is not susceptible to common attacks such as SQL injection attack vectors. Access to the Interviewer Server portal is password controlled. Only staff assigned to the project have access to the password.

2.31 The survey database was hosted by the Internet Service provider Rackspace with the following security measures:

- Strictly monitored access to all data centres, using keycard protocols, biometric scanning protocols and continuous interior and exterior surveillance.
- Access limited to data centre personnel only, without exception.
- All data centre employees undergo thorough background security checks before being employed.

2.32 Having been extracted into a password-protected SPSS file, 'raw data' was transferred to RCU from Ipsos MORI using a secure File Transfer Protocol website. This information was then used to produce weekly updates for the SFA project manager and to begin the process of response validation.

3. Sample design

3.1 Sampling for the Learner Satisfaction Survey rests entirely with colleges and other training organisations to generate a sufficient and representative sample, although they are expected to take account of guidance, which was shared on the Learner Satisfaction pages of the GOV.UK website. All eligible learners attending an eligible college or other training organisation within the survey window (3 November 2014 and 29 March 2015) were potential participants (the "population").

3.2 The SFA's guidance notes for colleges and other training organisations (Annex 8) reflected this by advising colleges and other training organisations of approaches that would help ensure "learners view participation as a right, rather than an obligation". The FE Choices Guidance 2014 to 2015 referred to giving all learners the "right to fill in the survey". It referred "providers using a sampling approach" to use an online calculator available on the .GOV.UK website to identify the minimum required sample. Colleges and other training organisations entered the number of eligible learners they expected to have in the survey period and the calculator showed the minimum required sample. The guide encouraged exceeding this minimum because some responses might prove to be duplicates or from ineligible learners.

3.3 The sample size calculator presents a minimum sample size colleges and other training organisations need to achieve to gain a valid score. This is based on the number of responses that would allow 95% certainty that the result that emerged would be within 3% of the result that would have been obtained had every learner responded to the survey (Annex 5). The calculator also took account of the policy decision to set the maximum target as 70% of their learners where that resulted in a smaller value. The calculator reflected the standard market research formula for calculating minimum sample sizes. This is composed of four main elements:

i. The population (in this case the total number of eligible learners).
ii. The confidence level (how certain you want the result to be).

iii. The confidence interval (the margin for error you are willing to accept).

iv. The estimated true level of the figure you are trying to measure (in this case the satisfaction level of learners which was assumed to be 80%). The figure of 80% was established as a conservative estimate of satisfaction levels based on the results of the Version 1 survey. The calculator has been based on this figure since then.

3.4 This approach is based on the assumption that all members of the population have an equal chance of being selected to take part in the survey. Where this appears not to have been the case, and when the pattern of responses differs clearly from the make-up of the population, the sample is said to be biased or "skewed".

3.5 We asked colleges and other training organisations to aim for a sample size that would give a margin for error or "confidence interval" 3% either side of the true level of learner satisfaction. However, following the approach agreed with BIS and the SFA we accepted samples up to a confidence interval of 5%, provided they were not badly balanced (that is, 'skewed').

3.6 The Provider Extranet is a secure online website that allowed colleges and other training organisations to monitor the absolute number of responses as the survey progressed.

3.7 In the guidance notes, we advised colleges and other training organisations to "ensure that the balance of responses is broadly representative of your learners in terms of age, gender and level of study." It also encouraged, without defining the term, a "random sample".

4. Post-survey data preparation and quality checks

Data preparation

4.1 In 2014 to 2015, 358,729 learners (95.6%) completed the main online survey and a further 16,569 (4.4%) completed paper surveys. After validation checks were completed and duplicates removed, there were 348,148 responses by eligible learners attending eligible colleges and other training organisations. The number of paper-based surveys showed a reduction of around 2,000 from last year, indicating that online methods continue to become increasingly embedded each year. RCU supplied results for 831 colleges and other training organisations that were either on the final eligible provider list or took part in the survey if they had been eligible at some point in the survey period.

4.2 Annex 3 records the ILRs used in the validation process that followed the survey's closure. The validation work used the ILR return R06 2014 to 2015, which covered the period of learning from the start of the academic year to 6 February 2014. The validation process ensured:

- the removal of duplicate responses (the last response was retained)
- the reallocation of learners who had completed the UKPRN number incorrectly
- the removal of responses from ineligible learners

As in previous years, the small percentage of unmatched learners was assumed to be from valid respondents. This was based on the premise that colleges and other training organisations would only ask eligible learners to participate.

4.3 We entered the data from the paper-based survey questionnaires using a combination of electronic scanning and manual data entry. We used the Formic Survey Design and Data Capture System for scanning questionnaires and then used a 100% manual verification and editing procedure. The questionnaires that we could not scan we entered manually using Snap software. Snap has built-in data validity checks that ensure all entered data is within set parameters, which are predefined when setting up the survey. In addition, all the manually entered data were subject to a 10% re-entry and verification check by a supervisor.

4.4 We combined the two datasets from the electronic and manual data capture processing and carried out a further verification check to ensure consistency between the two sets of data.

4.5 Annex 4 describes the process of matching responses to the ILR and gives the fields used to match them. We applied all 120 automatic matching combinations. A final manual matching process followed, in which we checked “near-misses” in aspects such as surname or date of birth. Following these processes, we matched 94% of all respondents to the ILR.

4.6 Within the final dataset there were a substantial number of duplicate responses which were needed removing. We removed these using the following two-stage process:

i. The first stage was to focus on respondents who had been matched through to the ILR and therefore had an accurate unique learner reference. The dataset was flagged to identify any repeated learner references. Following the identification the response which was entered last was taken to be the valid response and all other responses were removed. For the responses which were not matched into the ILR, we identified duplicates by tracing instances where respondents had input exactly the same information for the surname, forename, date of birth, gender, age band, learner reference and UKPRN. Again we used the first instance of duplicate records and removed all other responses.

ii. In the next stage, we removed the following invalid responses from the dataset:

- Where the word `Test` appeared in any name field (except if the forename was entered correctly, for example a respondent named 'Richard Test').
- Any response using a clearly obscene or bogus name.
- Responses using UKPRN 99999999 (the SFA Test code).

4.7 The next process identified whether respondents were eligible during the survey window. Following the matching of respondents to the ILR, we updated each record to indicate if the respondent fell into one or more of the following funding groups:

- 16 to 19 EFA funding.
- Adult skills funding.
- Other SFA funding.
- Other EFA funding.
- 24+ Advanced Learning Loans.

The only exceptions were:

- learners under 16
- learners on Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) provision

4.8 All linked responses had their key characteristics updated from the ILR to ensure accurate comparison of response levels to the 16 learner groups used for the weighting and skew calculations. Respondents not linked to the ILR were presumed to be eligible and their entered data correct.

4.9 The 16 learner groups were:

1. 16 to18 females with a highest level at Entry Level or unknown level
2. 16 to 18 females with a highest level at Level 1
3. 16 to 18 females with a highest level at Level 2
4. 16 to 18 females with a highest level at Level 3 and above
5. 16 to 18 males with a highest level at Entry Level or unknown level
6. 16 to 18 males with a highest level at Level 1
7. 16 to 18 males with a highest level at Level 2
8. 16 to 18 males with a highest level at Level 3 and above
9. 19+ females with a highest level at Entry Level or unknown level
10. 19+ females with a highest level at Level 1
11. 19+ females with a highest level at Level 2

12. 19+ females with a highest level at Level 3 and above
13. 19+ males with a highest level at Entry Level or unknown level
14. 19+ males with a highest level at Level 1
15. 19+ males with a highest level at Level 2
16. 19+ males with a highest level at Level 3 and above

4.10 The final calculation of eligible learners and provider profiles was based on the ILRs:

- R06 2014 to 2015, which the SFA provided.
- The calculation took into account the number of eligible learners who attended the college or training organisation during the survey window. The final element of this process was to calculate the college or training organisation learner profiles. Each learner within each of the relevant datasets was flagged into one of the 16 categories.

Data quality checks

4.11 Ipsos MORI carried out the following quality checks on the raw learner response data:

- Checked all questions were present.
- Ran frequency counts for each question to check that
  (i) all codes were included
  (ii) the correct number of people had answered the question
- Checked the total number of responses for each college or training organisation matched the daily updates.
- Sense-checked the distribution of responses against the previous year's data.

4.12 RCU also carried out the following quality checks before delivering the final Learner Satisfaction Survey dataset to the SFA:

- Created the data outputs using two different production processes and compared the data outputs for any differences. RCU only delivered data to

the SFA when there was 100% agreement between the two independent production processes carried out by different personnel.

- Ensured that final outputs met RCU-defined validation rules (this meant that mean scores had to be between 0 and 10).
- Experienced personnel manually sense-checked scores and missing score reason codes in comparison with previous years' results to identify any anomalies.
- Peer reviewed all syntax used for the production of outputs.

4.13 In addition to the above, RCU carried out the following quality checks (these took place before the final set of interim data shared with colleges and other training organisations (Report 3) on the Provider Extranet):

- Compared outputs in Interim Report 3 and equivalent outputs in the main dataset.
- Experienced personnel manually sense-checked reports.

5. Data analysis following the preparation of the survey data

Introduction

5.1 The key quantitative elements of the data analysis phase were:

- calculating base sizes and minimum sample size targets
- applying corrective weightings, for sample skew and survey method
- applying tests for sample validity
- calculating final scores

Validation

5.2 We used the latest available ILR datasets to calculate the number of eligible learners attending each college or training organisation in the survey period (3 November 2014 to 29 March 2015). We then used this figure to calculate the minimum returned sample size that would generate 95% confidence that the measured results were within 5% of the estimated true value, providing the sample was broadly representative. During the course of the survey, Ipsos MORI hosted a Provider Extranet, giving daily updates on the total number of returned online surveys. They broke these into the 16 learner categories to help colleges and other training organisations take action to ensure their sample was not skewed.

5.3 Following validation of the response data ineligible learners and duplicate submissions were removed. At this final stage 548 colleges and other training organisations passed the threshold for either sample that gave a 95% confidence level with a 5% confidence interval or the threshold of at least 70% of all eligible learners providing valid responses. Sample sizes with a confidence interval of 3% or less automatically passed the quality test. Those with confidence intervals between 3% and 5% were checked for skew, together with those who had 70% of all eligible learners providing valid responses. Any college or other training organisation with fewer than 10 eligible learners or 10 responses was considered to have failed the quality test.

Skew testing

5.4 We used the skew test to ensure that the degree of bias within the sample that colleges and other training organisations submitted was within acceptable parameters. Analysis of ILR data for the population (refer to paragraph 4.2) produced a profile of learners for each individual college or other training organisation, based on the 16 categories listed in paragraph 4.10.

5.5 The measure for skew was derived from comparing the spread of a college's or other training organisation's returned sample across these categories to its population profile based on the ILR. In a perfectly representative sample, the percentage of learners within each of the 16 categories would be exactly the same as the percentage of learners within each category based on the ILR data. The skew factor was defined as the sum total percentage of respondents within each category that were above or below the required percentage for a perfectly representative sample (Annex 5 records the formula used). Skew factors up to 40% were defined as correctable with the application of appropriate weighting. Skew factors above 40% were regarded as not correctable.

5.6 The exception was samples that were well in excess of the minimum required to generate a confidence interval of 5%. In these cases skew resulted from over-sampling, where colleges and other training organisations appeared to have followed the guidelines to encourage as many learners as possible to take part in the survey but had had particular success with some groups (typically 16- to 18-year-olds). Where the returned sample was large enough to generate a confidence interval or 3% or less, the sample was considered valid regardless of its initial skew.

Corrective weighting

5.7 The sampling process was managed by colleges and other training organisations at the time of the survey, rather than being based on the ILR after the learning was completed. It was therefore inevitable that most samples would be skewed to a greater or lesser degree. To ensure that no college or other training organisation was advantaged or disadvantaged by the skew in their sample, we applied weightings to all returned samples. These ensured that samples were rebalanced to be representative in terms of age, gender and highest level of study before

calculating a score. This allowed a fair comparison between colleges and other training organisations. The combinations of age, gender and level of study produced 16 different categories (paragraph 4.10) and returned samples were compared to population profiles for each college or training organisation using these categories. The formula used to calculate skew is set out in Annex 5.

5.8 Detailed analysis of the 2012 to 2013 and 2013 to 2014 survey results showed that the survey method of paper or online had an extremely small and diminishing impact on survey responses. Therefore, the approach that BIS and the SFA agreed for the 2014 to 2015 survey was not to apply a weighting factor for survey method.

Scoring

5.9 All the scoring questions in the survey have 11-point response scales, from “0” representing “very bad” through to “10” representing “very good.” No intervening points on the scale are labelled. Responses of “not applicable” (or missed questions in the case of paper responses) were removed from the numerator and denominator before making any score calculations, ensuring they had no impact on the calculation of the college’s or other training organisation’s score.

5.10 We calculated each college’s or other training organisation’s weighted total of valid survey responses after any correction for skew (Annex 5), although this was typically neutral.

5.11 We divided the points total from the weighted scoring responses by the total number of weighted scoring responses to give a mean score out of 10. Annex 6 provides a flow chart to explain this process. We assigned equal weighting to all in the score calculation.

Reporting of results

5.12 For each individual college or training organisation, RCU produced three tailored, detailed interactive reports that were downloadable from the Provider Extranet:

- Report 1 (shared in January 2015) was based on the first six weeks of survey responses.

- Report 2 (shared in March 2015)
- Report 3 (shared in May 2015) included all survey data and was available to colleges and other training organisations within two months of the survey closing.

5.13 These reports included an overall score for each survey question, with breakdowns by age, gender and level of study. RCU analysed the question on how likely learners were to recommend their learning provider to friends and family to show the percentage of learners that were extremely likely, likely, neither likely nor unlikely, unlikely or extremely unlikely to recommend their learning provider. We also produced a combined percentage score to show the proportion of learners that were likely or extremely likely to recommend their college or other training organisation.

Reports 2 and 3 included further breakdowns by Subject Areas, Apprenticeships and Subcontractors. In addition, Report 3 showed the college's or other training organisation's Interim Overall Learner Satisfaction Score, based on the nine scoring questions (where applicable).

Course-level feedback

For the 2013 to 2014 survey we devised a successful methodology for obtaining subject-level information using data recorded on the ILR and Learning Aims Reference Application. The methodology removed the need for learners to complete additional course-level questions as they had been asked to do for previous surveys. This methodology was again used for the 2014 to 2015 survey.

6. Legal and ethical issues

Compliance issues

6.1 The contractors appointed to deliver the 2014 to 2015 Learner Satisfaction Survey, RCU Ltd. and Ipsos MORI, both adhere fully to the Market Research Society Code of Conduct and are accredited under the international market research industry standard ISO 20252. These both place a heavy emphasise obtaining informed consent from survey respondents to their involvement in any survey and ensures that the uses of respondents' answers are made clear to them before they participate.

6.2 The Code of Conduct and ISO 20252 also require full compliance with data protection legislation, which ensures that the arrangements for holding and sharing of a respondent's answers are made clear to the individual before they consent to take part. In the case of public bodies such as the SFA, this requirement has to be taken into account alongside the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, under which an organisation can be asked to make data it holds available to a third party.

6.3 During the development of the 2008 to 2009 version of the survey, the then LSC's Learner Satisfaction performance indicator lead worked closely with the LSC's solicitor to ensure compliance with all these aspects. A particular challenge was to ensure that any form of wording required by legislation was presented to learners in clear and accessible language, so that the learner could be judged to have given informed consent to their participation. Almost inevitably these parts of the questionnaire had a higher standard measure of unintelligibility (the 'SMOG' test rating is a measure of readability that estimates the years of education needed to understand a piece of writing, summaries of which are available across the internet, for example at http://www.readabilityformulas.com/smog-readability-formula.php).

6.4 It was particularly important to make clear to learners that although the survey was confidential it was not anonymous. This is because the identification of learners was essential to allow validation and to support linkage to ILR data in

order to enhance analysis (without asking a long series of cross-referencing questions).

6.5 The protections built into the survey were as follows:

- A statement on the opening page that “your answers will go directly to two survey companies – Ipsos MORI and RCU”.
- A statement on the next page to reassure respondents that the survey analysis would produce aggregate results, not identifiable responses, and that “None of your lecturers, trainers or supervisors will be able to see your answers”.
- Explanation of the prime purpose of the survey, namely that the results would be used **“**to tell future learners what different colleges are like”.
- Confirmation at the end of the survey that the process had followed the rules of the Market Research Society and provision of a direct email address for Ipsos MORI that respondents could use if they had any concerns.
- Guidance on the proposed length of time for which we would retain the data and an opportunity to accelerate this: “Ipsos MORI and RCU will keep your answers for no more than 18 months”.
- A final check that learners were happy with their responses before they hit the submit button.

Undertakings given to learners

6.6 The FE Choices Learner Satisfaction Survey is a complex logistical and methodological exercise, with 831 colleges and other training organisations eligible for the 2014 to 2015 survey. To ensure that the results of the Learner Satisfaction Survey gave a fair and consistent assessment of the views of learners, the circumstances in which learners made their responses had to be as consistent as possible. Sections 2 and 3 of this report explain the approaches taken to ensure that the survey was as accessible as possible, undertaken at a standard time, towards the end of the learning period, and that there were no biases resulting from the selection of learners. However, to trust the robustness of the results it was important that the atmosphere in which we gathered learners’ views (such as the way staff introduced the survey to learners and how it was administered) was as consistent as possible.

6.7 The SFA made available guidance notes for colleges and other training organisations on the GOV.UK website (Annex 8).

Opt-out on data storage

6.8 The ability of learners to opt out on having their responses stored for 18 months is a standard approach in surveys. This allows respondents with any concern about the security and confidentiality of their responses to have them deleted. Normally this does not preclude the respondents' answers from contributing to the survey outcomes.

6.9 Incoming data from the online survey was subject to daily encrypted backups, which we stored off-site in-line with the RCU Information Security Policy. We have stored all the responses from the survey in password-protected areas of secure data-servers, with limited access rights for authorised personnel. We have encrypted all back-ups and stored them off-site. Paper surveys are stored securely at RCU with back-up scans on a secure server. We will delete electronic copies and shred paper copies 18 months after the survey closed.

7. Equality, diversity and accessibility issues

Compliance with web accessibility standards

7.1 The questionnaire was designed to be user-friendly. In-survey navigation buttons allowed respondents to return to questions and review their answers before submitting their final responses. Additionally, a progress bar appeared at the top of each screen to provide respondents with a continuous update on how many questions remained. The 2008 to 2009 testing confirmed that the navigation was fully accessible to users that do not use a computer mouse.

7.2 The survey was compatible with handheld computers, such as BlackBerry devices and smartphones.

7.3 Learners were also able to change the background colour (particularly important for learners with visual impairment or dyslexia) and size of the font using prominently placed ‘accessibility buttons’. This aspect was informed by guidance on the Royal National Institute for the Blind website.

7.4 The main online questionnaire was developed to minimise respondent error and increase its accessibility for all ability levels. Where possible, we put in place checks to make sure that respondents were not inputting incorrect data (for example, the date of birth format was illustrated and the program corrected for minor deviations from this). Respondents were also informed automatically if they had failed to complete an essential field. When such errors were made, prompt screens appeared to inform respondents of the necessary corrective action to continue with the survey.

7.5 A ‘British Sign Language’ (BSL) version of the survey was developed for 2014 to 2015. This was designed for learners with literacy difficulties, learning difficulties or visual impairments and was developed with accreditation from the Campaign for Plain English. The BSL version of the survey incorporated a video into every page of the online survey; each video provided a signed version of the text, with a voiceover that read out the question and instruction wording.

7.6 The guidance notes made clear that colleges and other training organisations were to use discretion when deciding whether or not to include individual learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in their sample. Where the application of such discretion would significantly impact on the potential population (total number of eligible learners) for the survey, colleges and other training organisations were advised to notify the SFA. Colleges and other training organisations also had the option of applying to use paper questionnaires for learners for whom on-screen completion would be impossible (Section 2).

8. Timescales

8.1 The survey took place as planned from 3 November 2014 to 29 March 2015.

8.2 Paper surveys were collected following the survey closing on 9 March 2015.

8.3 The technical report was completed on 25 June 2015.

8.4 The data, as required by the data specification, was submitted by the agreed date to the SFA on 8 June 2015.

9. Summary of key methodological aspects

- **Population base:** all eligible learners.
- **Required confidence level:** 95%.
- **Required confidence interval:** 5%.
- **Small provider concession:** sample over 70% deemed sufficient.
- **Acceptable skew level:** up to 40%, providing the achieved confidence interval is 5% or lower (or 70% for small colleges and other training organisations). Any college or other training organisation with a confidence interval of 3% or less is not tested for skew.
- **Basis for corrective weightings:** 16 categories (two genders, two age bands, four levels).
- **Assumed satisfaction level in sample calculator:** 80%.
- **Observed satisfaction level for confidence interval calculation:** 85%.
- **Rating scale:** 0 to 10 for nine scoring questions, five-point agreement scale for provider recommendation question.
- **Approach to invalidated respondents:** allow.
- **Inclusion of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities:** provider discretion based on guidance provided to encourage participation where appropriate.

Annex 1: Identification of eligible colleges and other training organisations

The SFA produced the list of eligible colleges and other training organisations and updated it at different points during the survey window. The SFA used the list to inform colleges and other training organisations that they were required to take part in the Learner Satisfaction Survey.

After the survey window closed the SFA produced a final provider list, which was used to calculate the final results.

The table below is taken from the SFA website and shows which provider types are eligible for the survey.

Table 3: Which provider types are eligible for the survey

Provider grouping	Learner Satisfaction
General FE Colleges	Yes
Independent Specialist Providers	No
Specialist Colleges (including Art & design, and Land based)	Yes
Dance and Drama Academies	No
Specialist Designated Institutions	Yes
Higher Education Institutions	Yes
Private training organisations	Yes
Other Public Funded Institutions	Yes
Private Sector Public Funded Institutions	Yes

Annex 2: Identification of eligible learners

The criteria that determined which learners were eligible for the survey were set out in the Learner Satisfaction Survey provider guidance 2014 to 2015. Learners attending eligible colleges and other training organisations and their subcontractors between 3 November 2014 and 29 March 2015 were eligible for the survey if they met any one of the following criteria:

- 16 to 19 EFA funding.
- Adult skills funding.
- Other SFA funding.
- Other EFA funding.
- 24+ Advanced Learning Loans.

The only exceptions were:

- learners under 16
- learners on OLASS provision

While all eligible learners were entitled to take part in the Learner Satisfaction Survey, colleges and other training organisations were free to decide whether to attempt a census of all such learners or to attempt to achieve a representative sample.

Annex 3: Dataset used in sample verification

1. Single ILR (R06) 2014 to 2015.

Annex 4: ILR fields used to match and validate survey responses

RCU used a two-stage process to link the survey responses through to the ILRs for 2014 to 2015. In Stage 1, RCU designed a protocol to link the survey responses to the ILR using key fields in each dataset. The fields used were surname, forename, initial (derived from forename), date of birth, gender, age band, learner reference, unique learner number and provider reference number (UKPRN). To allow for this process fields were recoded to enable a direct match between the datasets (for example, in the survey data gender was coded 1 for Female and 2 for Male, while in the ILR these are coded F and M).

RCU then designed a process hierarchy, which used the most robust matching first, with all the possible fields for matching, then removed fields in order of least impact. This resulted in 120 different matching combinations which linked the survey data and the ILR. Following the automated matching, a further manual process was undertaken to match responses that could not be done automatically. Once a match was established, the survey data was then updated to include the learner identifier from the ILR and the process used to match.

In each process the UKPRN was used to filter by college or other training organisation. However, in some later processes this was excluded to catch any respondent who had entered the UKPRN incorrectly but other check list information correctly.

Table 4: ILR fields used to match and validate survey responses

Order	UKPRN	Learner Ref	Unique Learner Number	Surname	Date of Birth	Forename	Initial	Ageband	Gender
1	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
4	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
5	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
6	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
7	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
8	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
9	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
10	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
11	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
12	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
13	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
14	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
15	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗
16	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗
17	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓
18	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓
19	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓
20	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓
21	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
22	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
23	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
24	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
25	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
26	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
27	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
28	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
29	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
30	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
31	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓
32	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓
33	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
34	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
35	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
36	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
37	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
38	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
39	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
40	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
41	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓
42	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓
43	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
44	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
45	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗
46	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗
47	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
48	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
49	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
50	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
51	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
52	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
53	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
54	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
55	✓	✓	✗	Forename	✓	Surname	✓	✓	✓
56	✓	✗	✓	Forename	✓	Surname	✓	✓	✓
57	✓	✓	✗	Forename	✓	Surname	✓	✓	✗
58	✓	✗	✓	Forename	✓	Surname	✓	✓	✗
59	✓	✓	✗	Forename	✓	Surname	✓	✗	✓
60	✓	✗	✓	Forename	✓	Surname	✓	✗	✓
61	✓	✓	✗	Forename	✓	Surname	✓	✗	✗
62	✓	✗	✓	Forename	✓	Surname	✓	✗	✗

Order	UKPRN	Learner Ref	Unique Learner Number	Surname	Date of Birth	Forename	Initial	Ageband	Gender
63	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
64	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
65	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
66	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
67	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
68	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
69	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
70	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
71	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗
72	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗
73	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓
74	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓
75	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓
76	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓
77	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
78	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
79	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
80	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
81	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
82	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
83	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
84	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
85	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
86	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
87	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
88	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗
89	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓
90	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓
91	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
92	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
93	✓	✗	✗	Forename	✓	Surname	✓	✓	✓
94	✓	✗	✗	Forename	✓	Surname	✓	✓	✗
95	✓	✗	✗	Forename	✓	Surname	✓	✗	✓
96	✓	✗	✗	Forename	✓	Surname	✓	✗	✗
97	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
98	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
99	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
100	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
101	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
102	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
103	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
104	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
105	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
106	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
107	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
108	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
109	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
110	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
111	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗
112	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗
113	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓
114	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓
115	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓
116	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓
117	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
118	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
119	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
120	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
99	Manually Matched								
null	Not Matched								

Annex 5: Formulas used to calculate confidence intervals and skew

Confidence interval (minimum sample size)

Sample Size Calculation (as used in the sample size calculator):

$$Sample\ Size = \frac{Z^2\ x\ p\ x\ (1-p)}{c^2}$$

Correction for Finite Population (for known population size):

$$Adjusted\ sample\ size = \frac{Sample\ Size}{1 + \frac{Sample\ Size - 1}{N}}$$

Confidence interval of a returned sample:

$$Confidence\ Interval = Z\ x\ \sqrt{\frac{px(1-p)}{n}}\ x\ \sqrt{\frac{N-n}{N-1}}$$

Where:

Z = Z value (for example, 1.96 for 95% confidence level).
p = Assumed / observed % expressed as a decimal (for example, 85% satisfied = 0.85).
c = Confidence interval, expressed as decimal (for example, ± 5% = 0.05).
N = Number of eligible Learners on provider's ILR.
n = Number of valid responses.

Skew formulas

Skew calculation:

$$Skew = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{16} |r_i - s_i|}{2}$$

Where:

i = Each individual learner category, ranging from 1 to 16.
r = Percentage of learners on the provider's ILR in the i^{th} category.
s = Percentage of learners in the sample in the i^{th} category.
| | = Absolute value.

Weighting

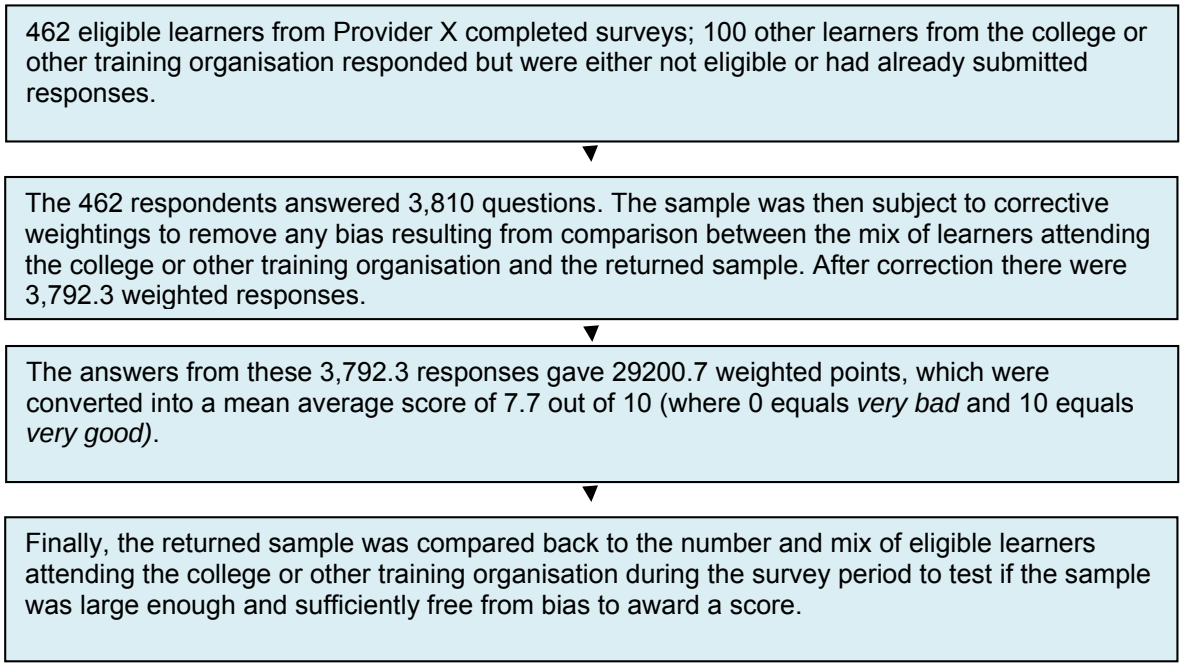
The first stage of producing a weighting factor was to calculate a quotient for each of the 16 categories. We calculated this by taking the percentage of learners in the sample and dividing by the percentage of learners on the provider's ILR. A value greater than one would mean that the college or other training organisation had over-sampled in that particular learner category and a value of less than one would mean that they had under-sampled.

RCU then calculated the inverse of this quotient to produce the weighting factor for each of the 16 categories. Every individual learner in the sample was then assigned a weighting factor depending on the category to which they belonged according to their age, gender and level of study. We then applied the assigned weighting factor to the individual's score.

In effect, the scores of individual learners in under-represented categories had a slightly greater impact on the overall provider score than the scores of individual learners from over-represented categories. However, because this is a neutral weighting system the overall net effect on sample base size is zero where all learners could be assigned to one of the 16 categories. In practice, not all learners could be matched to a category and so these were assigned a weighting factor of one, producing slight variations in sample base sizes when weightings were applied.

Annex 6: Formulas used to calculate scores for valid samples

How an example provider's score was calculated:



Colleges and other training organisations that were not awarded a score were allocated a Missing Score Reason Code (MSRC) to describe the reason why they did not receive a valid score. These are shown in Table 5 below, along with the number of colleges and other training organisations receiving each MSRC:

Table 5: Missing Score Reason Code (MSRC) to describe why providers did not receive a valid score

Missing Score Reason Code	Description	Providers
NULL	Score is robust and can be shown	548
66	No ILR available to assess the sample reliability of the responses to the survey	13
67	Provider did not participate in the survey	92
68	Only invalid responses to the survey were received	6
69	The Skew % test was not passed	6
70	The Confidence Interval % test was not passed	159
71	There were fewer than 10 eligible learners on the ILR	7

Annex 7: Copies of each questionnaire

Examples of qualifications for question (i)

Read the list of qualifications below and tick the relevant box to tell us the highest level of qualification you are taking now. If you are not sure, ask a member of staff.

Entry Level 1, Entry Level 2 or Entry Level 3
(For example: Entry Level Award, Entry Level Certificate, Entry Level Diploma)

Level 1
(For example: Level 1 Award, Level 1 Certificate, Level 1 Diploma)

Level 2
(For example: Level 2 Award, Level 2 Certificate, Level 2 Diploma, Apprenticeship, GCSE)

Level 3
(For example: Level 3 Award, Level 3 Certificate, Level 3 Diploma, Advanced Apprenticeship, Access to Higher Education, A level, AS level)

Level 4 and above
(For example: Award, Certificate or Diploma in level 4 or above, Degree, Higher National Diploma, Higher National Certificate)

Skills Funding Agency

FE Choices
Learner Satisfaction Survey 2014 to 2015

Welcome to this short Learner Satisfaction Survey. Learners all over England are answering these questions. Your answers are very important. The Skills Funding Agency will use your answers to tell future learners what different colleges are like.

In the questions that follow we use the word "college" to mean a further education college, adult learning provider or university.

Your completed survey will go to two survey companies - Ipsos MORI and RCU. Ipsos MORI and RCU will add your answers to the answers from other learners. They will send us, the Skills Funding Agency, the results. None of your lecturers, trainers or supervisors will see your answers.

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Ipsos MORI and RCU will keep your answers for no more than 18 months. If you want us to destroy your answers before then, please email us at servicedesk@sfa.bis.gov.uk.

If you are happy to take part in the survey, please carry on.

Provider Code 1 1 1 1

(a) What is your personal learner number?
(Please ask your college if you do not know it).

(b) First name

(c) Surname or family name

(d) Date of birth (dd/mm/yy for example, 15/02/82)

d d / m m / y y

Please answer the following questions by marking [x] in the box.

(e) Are you writing in the answers yourself?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Yes, with someone helping me
- ☐ No, someone is writing in my answers for me

(f) How old are you?

☐ Under 19 ☐ 19 to 24 ☐ 25 or older

(g) Are you:

☐ Female? ☐ Male? ☐ Prefer not to answer

(h) Does any part of your course lead to a qualification?

- ☐ Yes (please answer question (i) below)
- ☐ No (please go to Q1 opposite)
- ☐ Don't know (please go to Q1 opposite)

(i) If yes, what is the highest level of qualification you are taking now?

(Choose the level you think your highest course is at. If you do not know, check the examples on the back page or ask a member of staff at your college. Please choose one option).

- ☐ Entry Level 1, Entry Level 2 or Entry Level 3
- ☐ Level 1
- ☐ Level 2
- ☐ Level 3
- ☐ Level 4 and above
- ☐ I don't know

To answer the following questions please give each a score out of 10, where 0 is very bad and 10 is very good. Try to answer every question. If a question does not apply to you at all, choose the "Does not apply" option. (Some questions do not have this option.)

	Very Bad										Very Good	Does not apply
Q1 How good or bad was the information you were given when you were choosing your course?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	☐
Q2 How good or bad was the help staff gave you in the first few weeks?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	
Q3 How good or bad is the teaching on your course?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	
Q4 How good or bad is the respect staff show to you?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	
Q5 How good or bad is the advice you have been given about what you can do after this course?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	☐
Q6 How good or bad is the support you get on this course?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	☐
Q7 How good or bad is the college at listening to the views of learners?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	☐
Q8 How good or bad is the college at acting on the views of learners ?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	☐
Q9 Overall, how good or bad do you think the college is?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	
Q10 How good or bad has the course been at meeting your expectations?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	

Q11 How likely is it that you would recommend the college to friends or family?

- ☐ Extremely likely
- ☐ Likely
- ☐ Neither likely nor unlikely
- ☐ Unlikely
- ☐ Extremely unlikely
- ☐ Does not apply

Thank you very much for your time.

Examples of qualifications for question (i)

Read the list of qualifications below and tick the relevant box to tell us the highest level of qualification you are taking now. If you are not sure, ask a member of staff.

Entry Level 1, Entry Level 2 or Entry Level 3
(For example: Entry Level Award, Entry Level Certificate, Entry Level Diploma)

Level 1
(For example: Level 1 Award, Level 1 Certificate, Level 1 Diploma)

Level 2
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If you are happy to take part in the survey, please carry on.

Provider Code
1 1 1 2

(a) What is your personal learner number?
(Please ask your college if you do not know it).

(b) First name

(c) Surname or family name

(d) Date of birth (dd/mm/yy for example, 15/02/82)

d d / m m / y y

Please answer the following questions by marking x in the box.

(e) Are you writing in the answers yourself?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Yes, with someone helping me
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(f) How old are you?

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- ☐ Entry Level 1, Entry Level 2 or Entry Level 3
- ☐ Level 1
- ☐ Level 2
- ☐ Level 3
- ☐ Level 4 and above
- ☐ I don't know

To answer the following questions please give each a score out of 10, where 0 is very bad and 10 is very good. Try to answer every question. If a question does not apply to you at all, choose the "Does not apply" option. (Some questions do not have this option.)

	Very Bad										Very Good	Does not apply
Q1 How good or bad was the information you were given when you were choosing your training programme?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	☐
Q2 How good or bad was the help staff gave you in the first few weeks of your training programme?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	
Q3 How good or bad is the teaching or training on your programme?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	
Q4 How good or bad is the respect training staff show to you?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	
Q5 How good or bad is the advice you have been given about what you can do after this training programme?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	☐
Q6 How good or bad is the support you get on this training programme?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	☐
Q7 How good or bad is the learning provider at listening to the views of learners?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	☐
Q8 How good or bad is the learning provider at acting on the views of learners?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	☐
Q9 Overall, how good or bad do you think the learning provider is?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	
Q10 How good or bad has the training programme been at meeting your expectations?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	

Q11 How likely is it that you would recommend the learning provider to friends or family?

- ☐ Extremely likely
- ☐ Likely
- ☐ Neither likely nor unlikely
- ☐ Unlikely
- ☐ Extremely unlikely
- ☐ Does not apply

Thank you very much for your time.

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d d / m m / y y

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Q2 How good or bad was the help staff gave you in the first few weeks of your training programme?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	
Q3 How good or bad is the training on your programme?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	
Q4 How good or bad is the respect training staff show to you?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	
Q5 How good or bad is the advice you have been given about what you can do after this training programme?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	☐
Q6 How good or bad is the support you get on this training programme?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	☐
Q7 How good or bad are the training staff at listening to the views of apprentices and employees in training?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	☐
Q8 How good or bad is the company at acting on the views of apprentices and employees in training?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	☐
Q9 Overall, how good or bad do you think the company's training programme is?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	
Q10 How good or bad has the training programme been at meeting your expectations?	0 ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐	8 ☐	9 ☐	10 ☐	

Q11 How likely is it that you would recommend the company's training programme to friends or family?

- ☐ Extremely likely
- ☐ Likely
- ☐ Neither likely nor unlikely
- ☐ Unlikely
- ☐ Extremely unlikely
- ☐ Does not apply

Thank you very much for your time.

Click here to change the font size
Click here to change the background colour
If you would like to complete the survey with the help of British Sign Language videos please click here
Skills Funding Agency
Welcome to this short Learner Satisfaction Survey. Your answers will go directly to two survey companies – Ipsos MORI and RCU.
Choose 'Next' to carry on.
Next

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Click here to change the background colour
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Skills Funding Agency
Ipsos MORI and RCU will add your answers to the answers from other learners. They will send us, the Skills Funding Agency, the results. None of your lecturers, trainers or supervisors will see your answers.
If you want to go back at any time choose 'Back'.
Back
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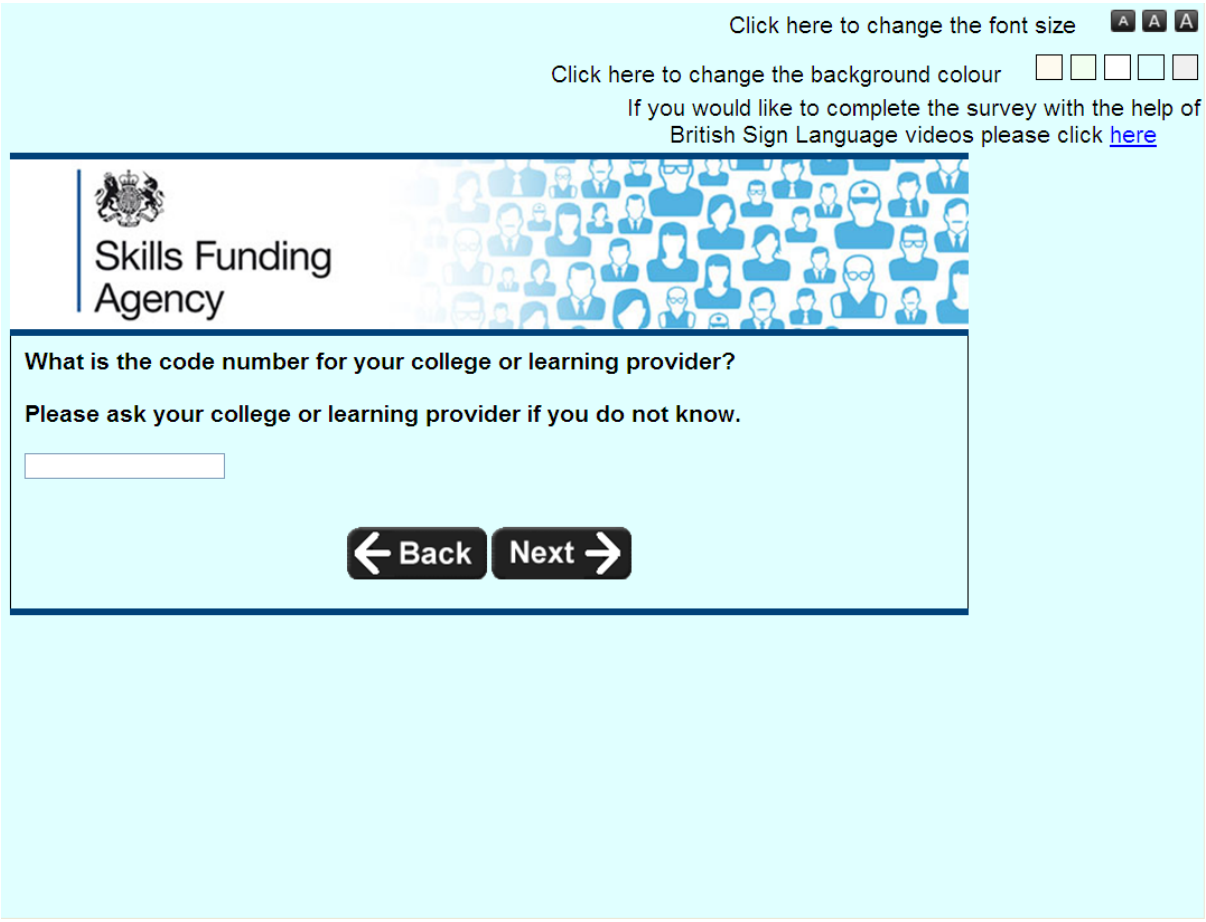
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Skills Funding Agency
What is the code number for your college or learning provider?
Please ask your college or learning provider if you do not know.
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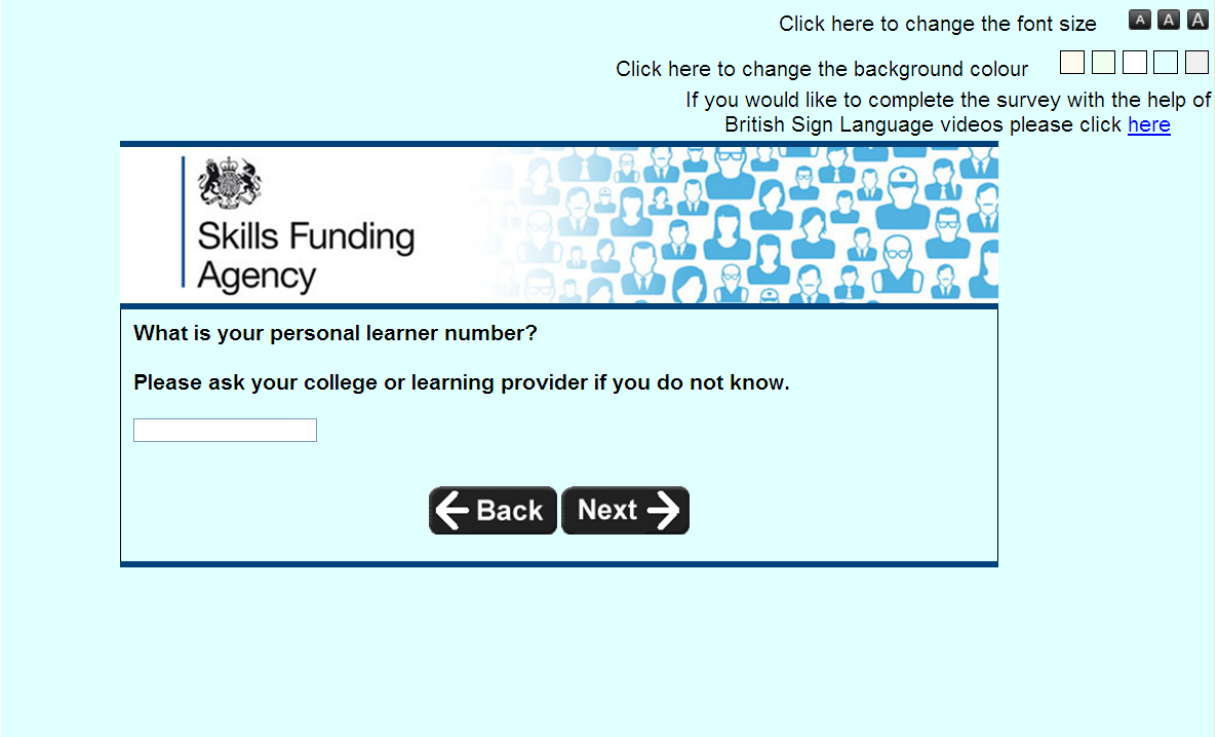
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Skills Funding Agency
What is your personal learner number?
Please ask your college or learning provider if you do not know.
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If you would like to complete the survey with the help of British Sign Language videos please click here
Skills Funding Agency
Give the details below.
First name
Surname or family name
Date of birth
(dd/mm/yy for example 15/02/82)
Next

Click here to change the font size
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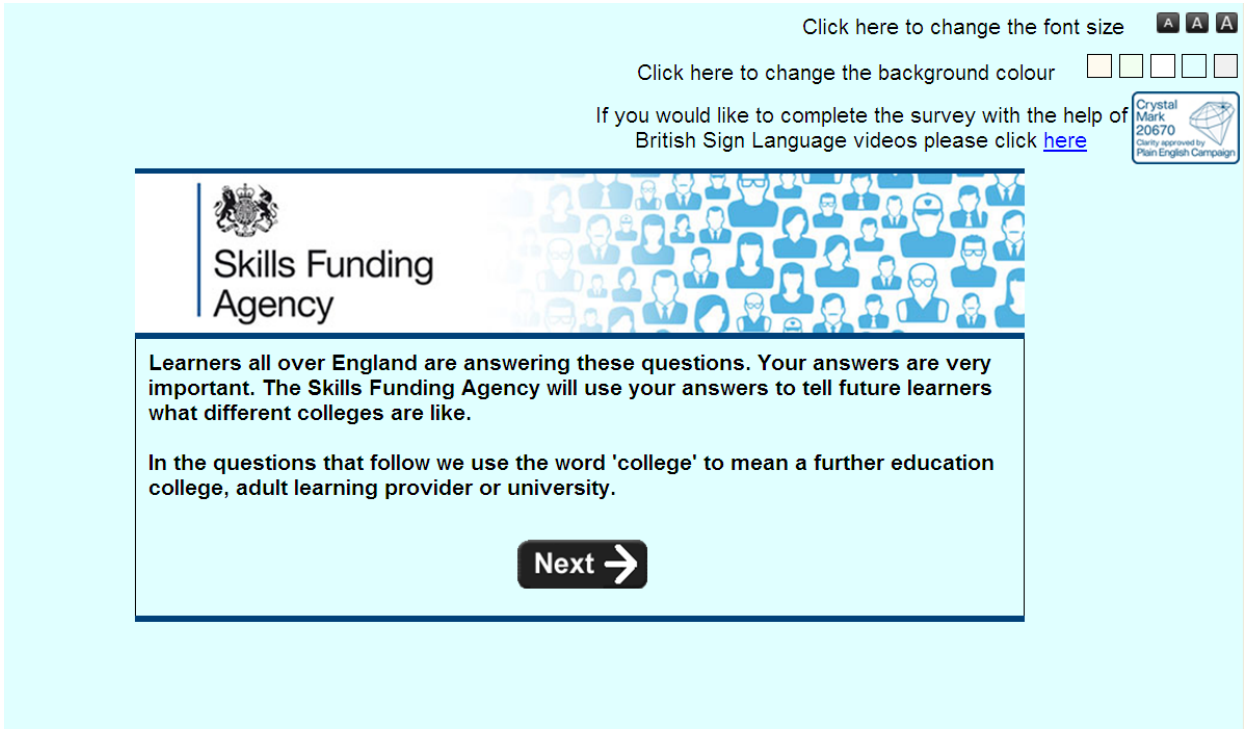
If you would like to complete the survey with the help of British Sign Language videos please click here
Skills Funding Agency
Please choose the relevant box below to tell us whether you are:
at a college, adult learning provider or university
taking an Apprenticeship, or a Traineeship or on a workplace learning programme
being trained by your employer
Please ask your college, learning provider or training staff if you do not know.
Back
Next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Next

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Skills Funding Agency
progress
Are you putting in the answers yourself?
Yes
Yes, with someone helping me
No, someone is putting in my answers for me
Back
Next

Click here to change the font size
Click here to change the background colour
If you would like to complete the survey with the help of British Sign Language videos please click here
Crystal Mark 20670
Clarity approved by Plain English Campaign
Skills Funding Agency
progress
The questions start on the next screen. We ask you to give a score out of 10, where 0 is very bad and 10 is very good.
Try to answer every question. If a question does not apply to you at all, choose the 'Does not apply' option. (Some questions do not have this option.)
Choose 'Next' below to continue.
Back
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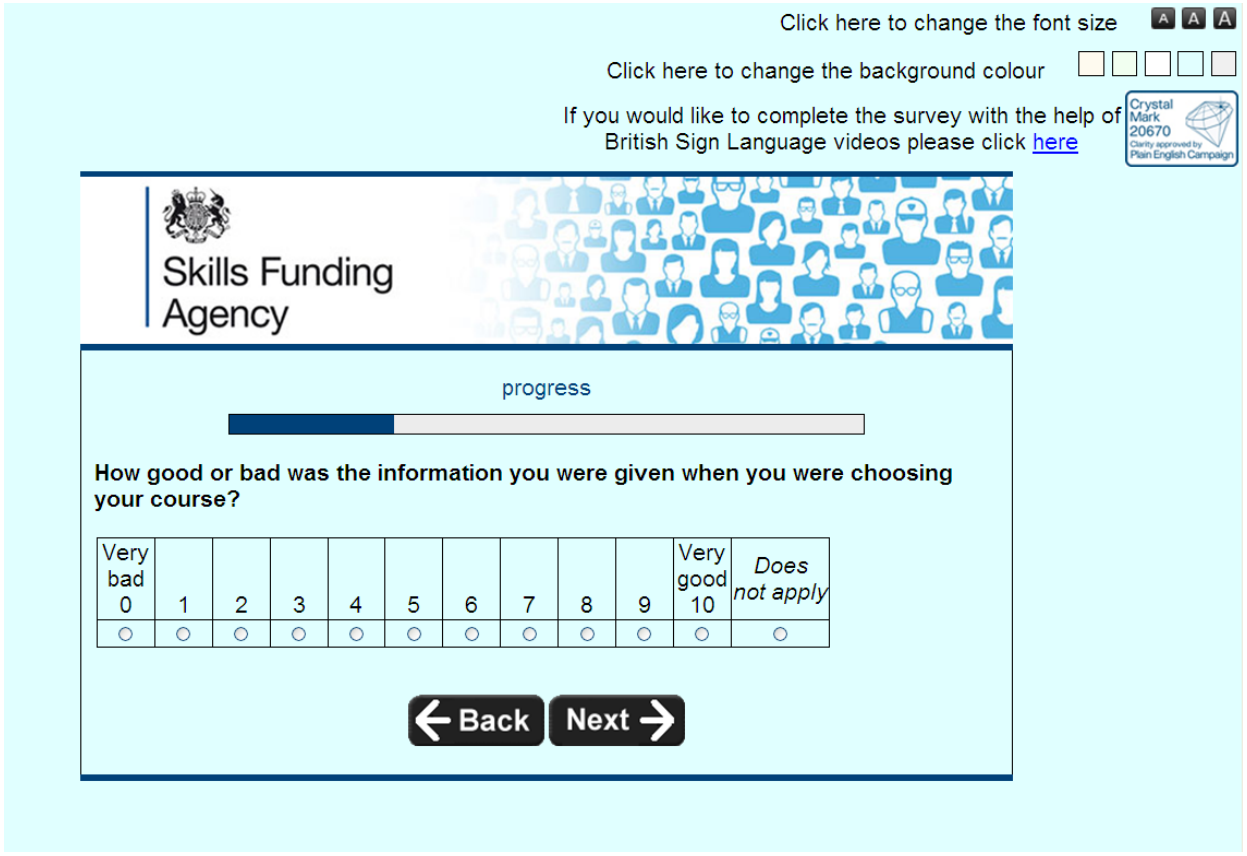
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If you would like to complete the survey with the help of British Sign Language videos please click here
Crystal Mark 20670
Clarity approved by Plain English Campaign
Skills Funding Agency
progress
How good or bad was the information you were given when you were choosing your course?
Very bad 0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
Very good 10
Does not apply
Back
Next

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Skills Funding Agency

progress

How good or bad was the help staff gave you in the first few weeks?

Very bad 0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very good 10
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Back Next

Click here to change the font size

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Skills Funding Agency

progress

How good or bad is the teaching on your course?

Very bad 0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Very good 10
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

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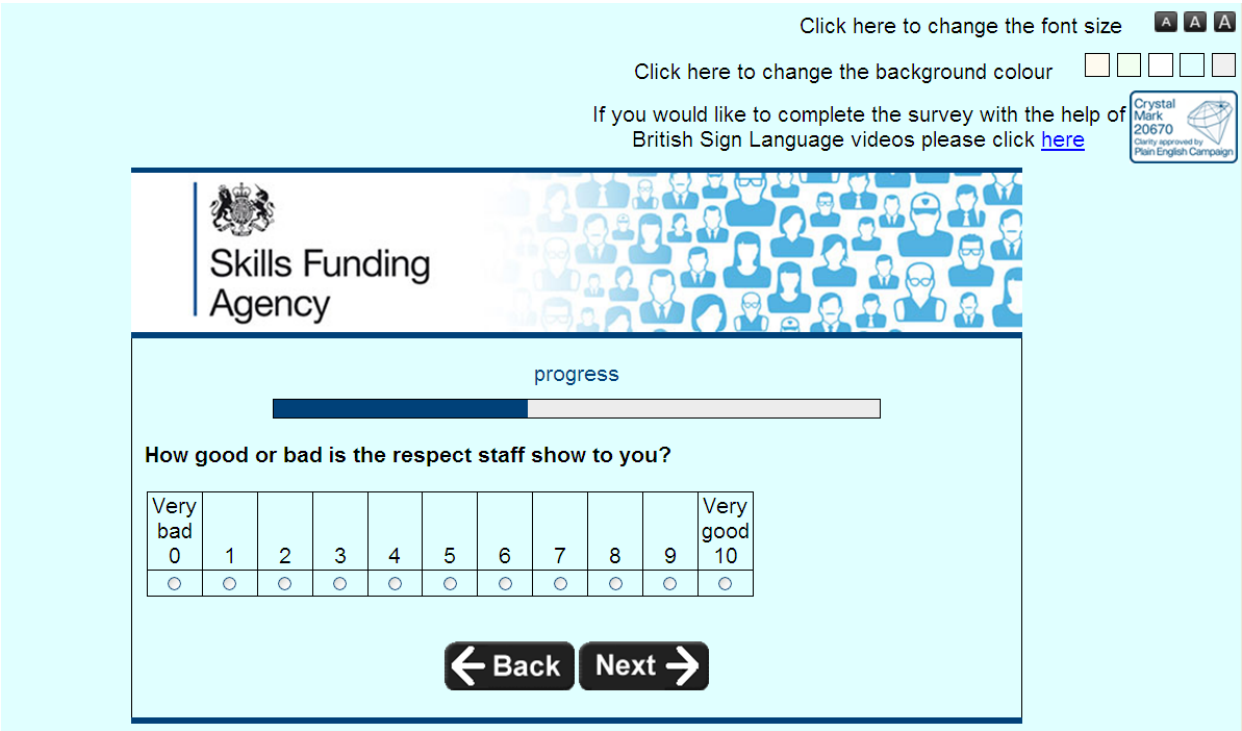
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How good or bad is the respect staff show to you?
Very bad 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very good 10
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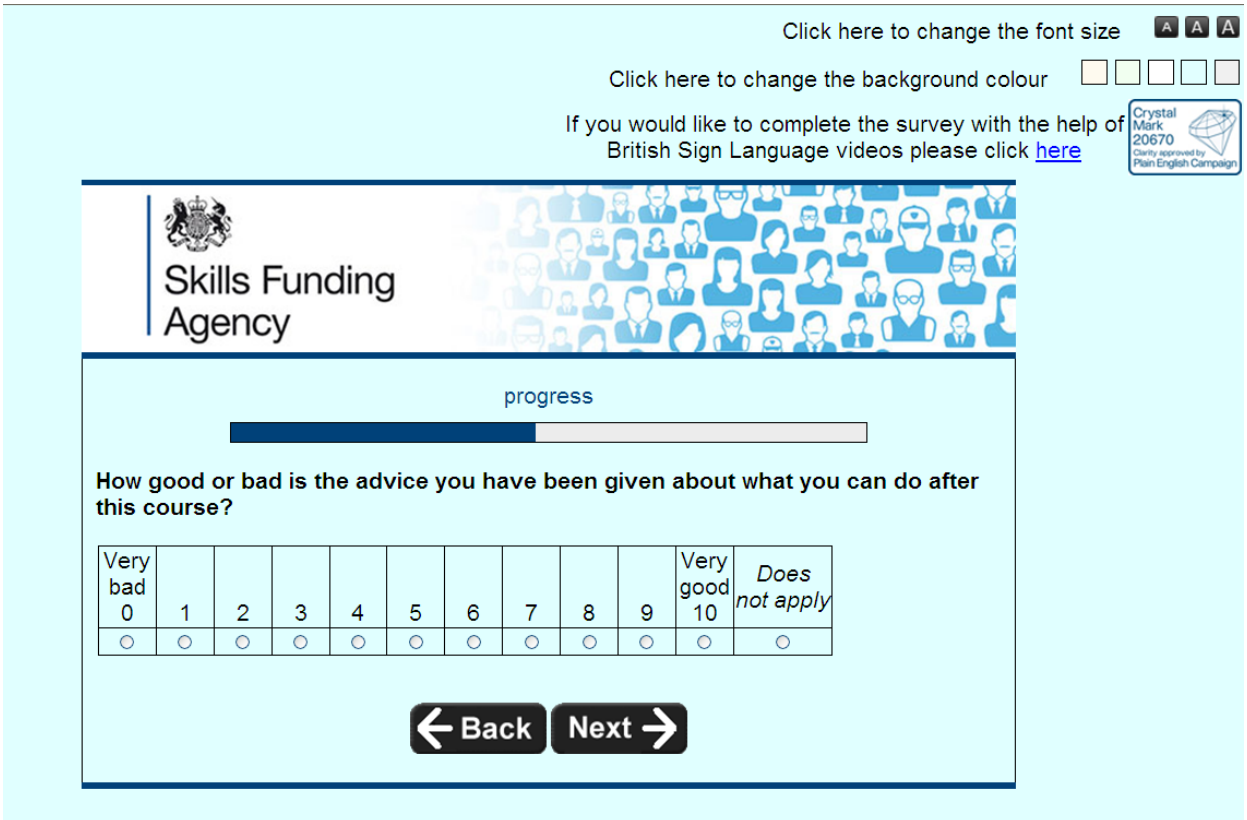
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Very bad 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very good 10 Does not apply
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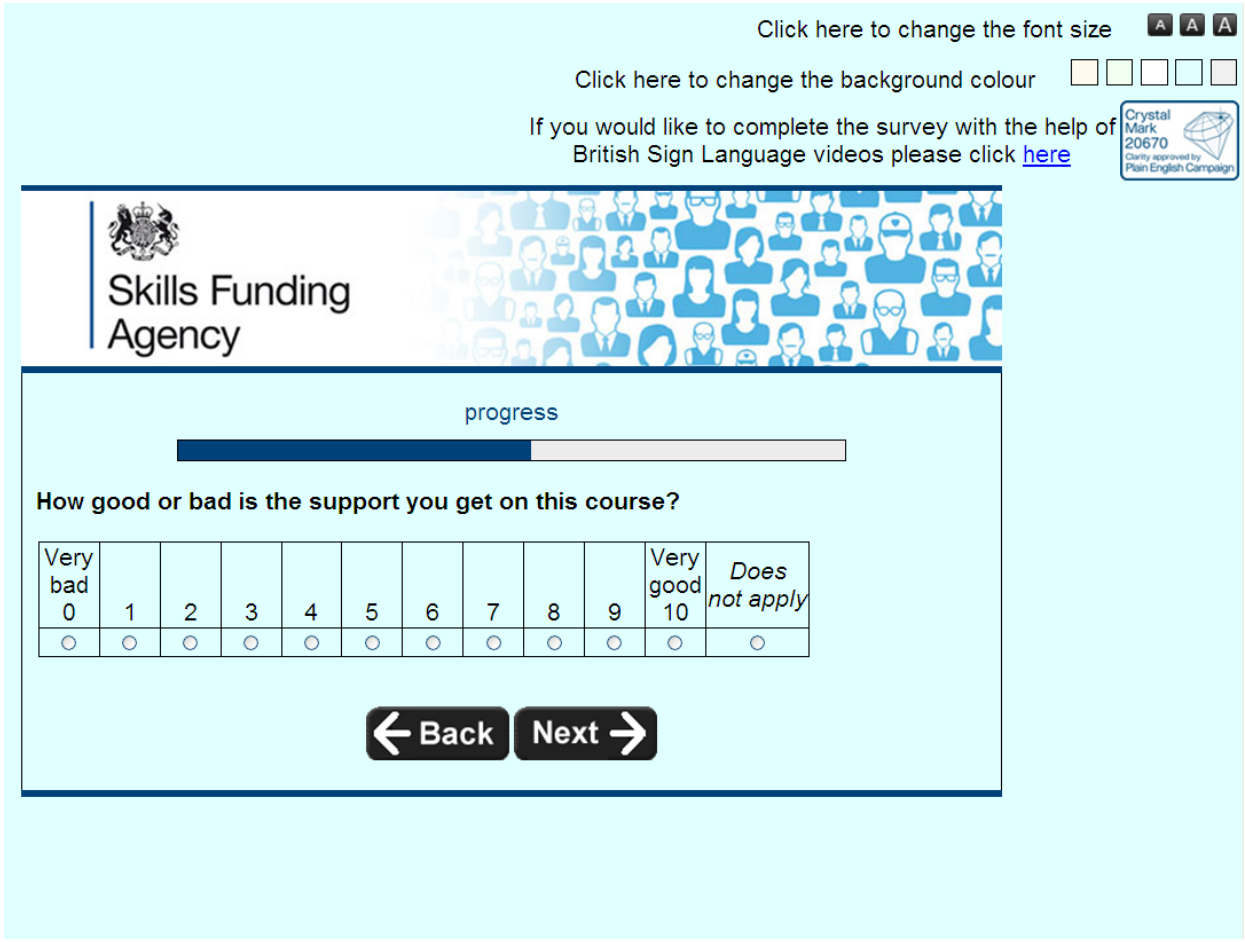
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How good or bad is the support you get on this course?
Very bad 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very good 10 Does not apply
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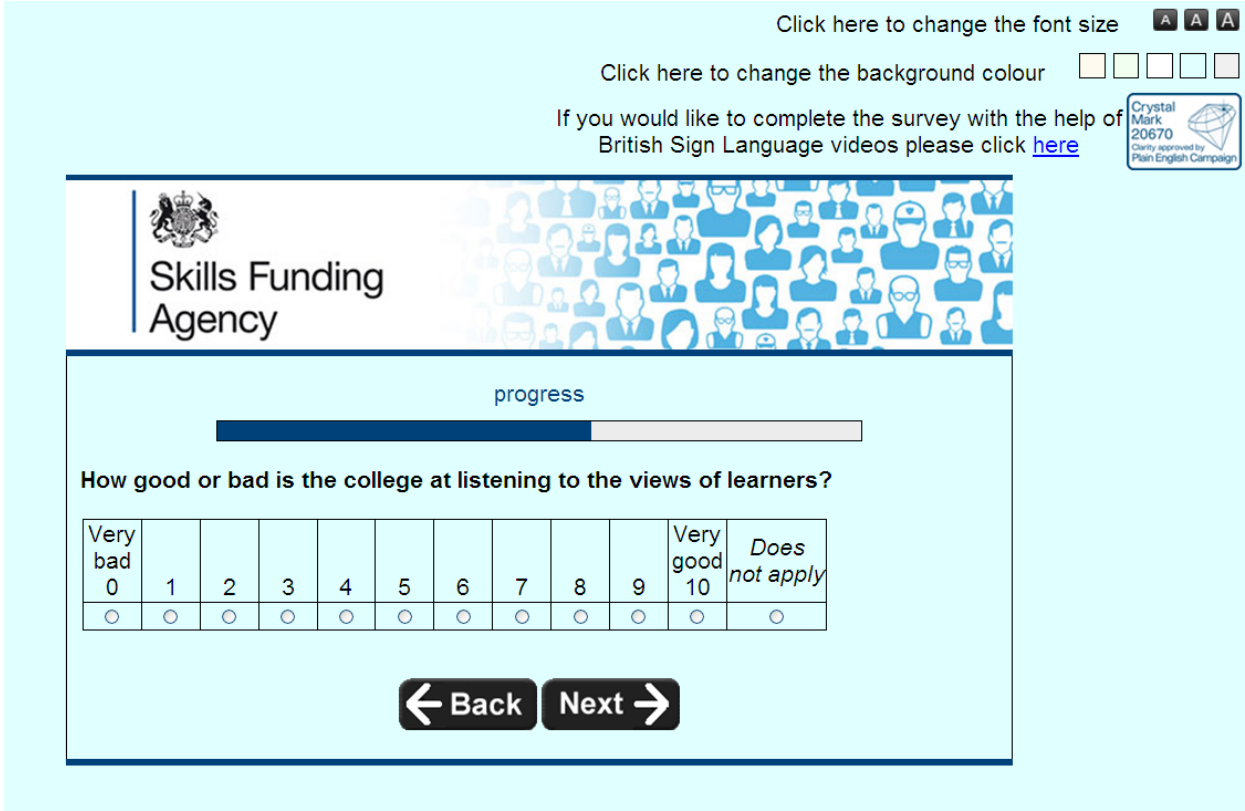
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Skills Funding Agency
progress
How good or bad is the college at listening to the views of learners?
Very bad 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very good 10 Does not apply
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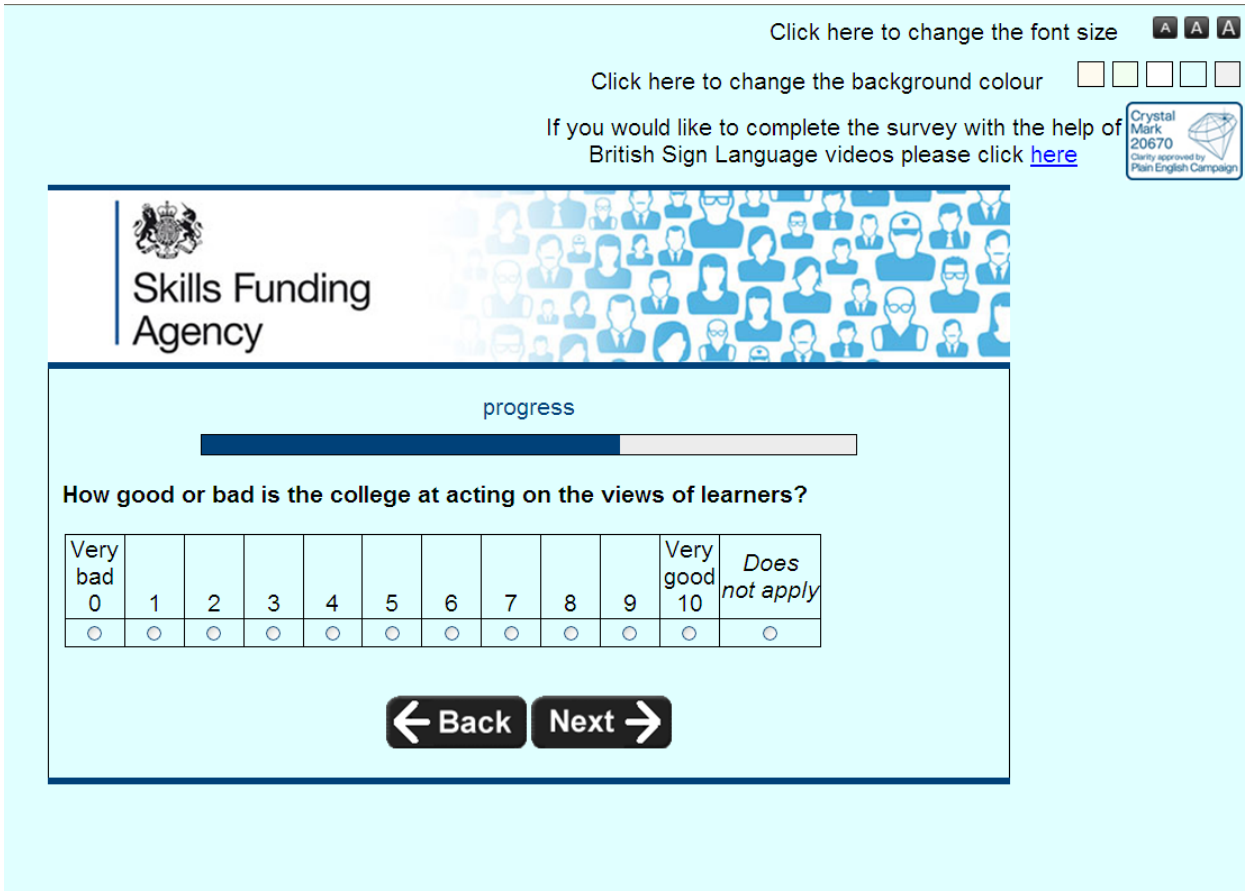
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If you would like to complete the survey with the help of British Sign Language videos please click here
Crystal Mark 20670
Clarity approved by Plain English Campaign
Skills Funding Agency
progress
How good or bad is the college at acting on the views of learners?
Very bad 0
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Very good 10
Does not apply
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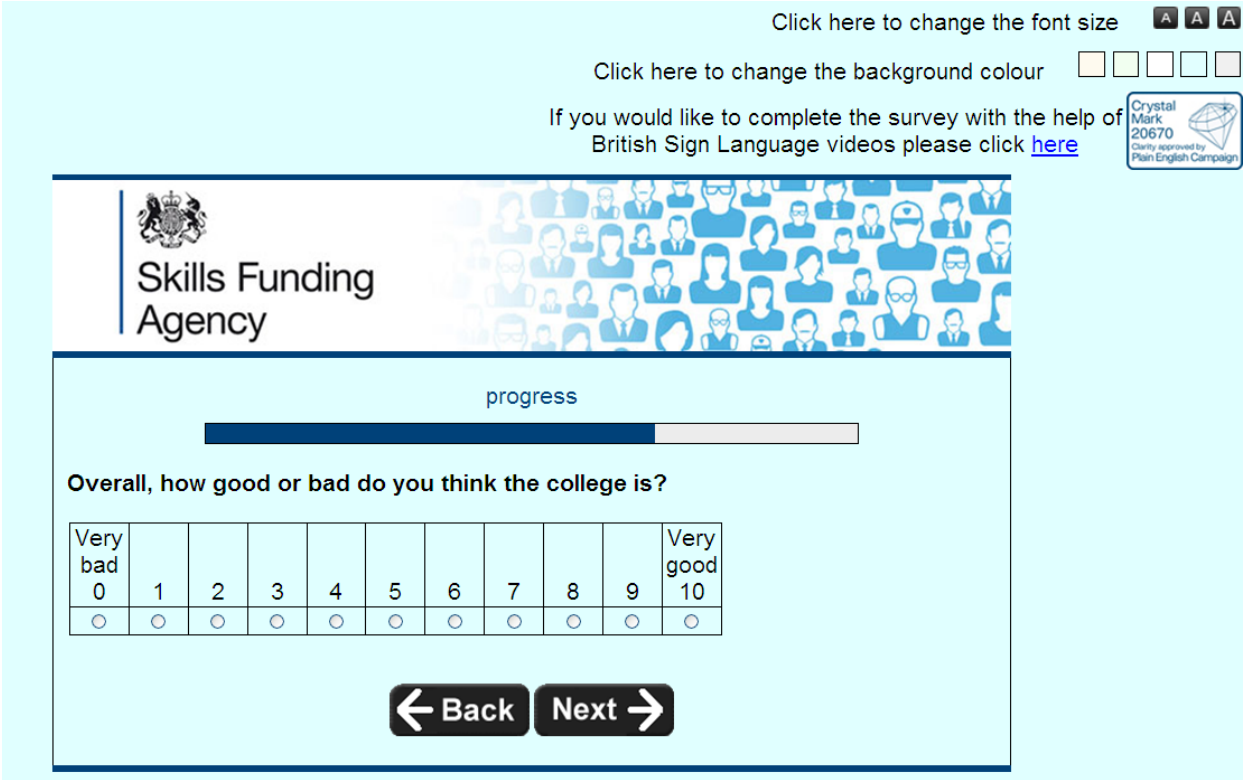
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If you would like to complete the survey with the help of British Sign Language videos please click here
Crystal Mark 20670
Clarity approved by Plain English Campaign
Skills Funding Agency
progress
Overall, how good or bad do you think the college is?
Very bad 0
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Very good 10
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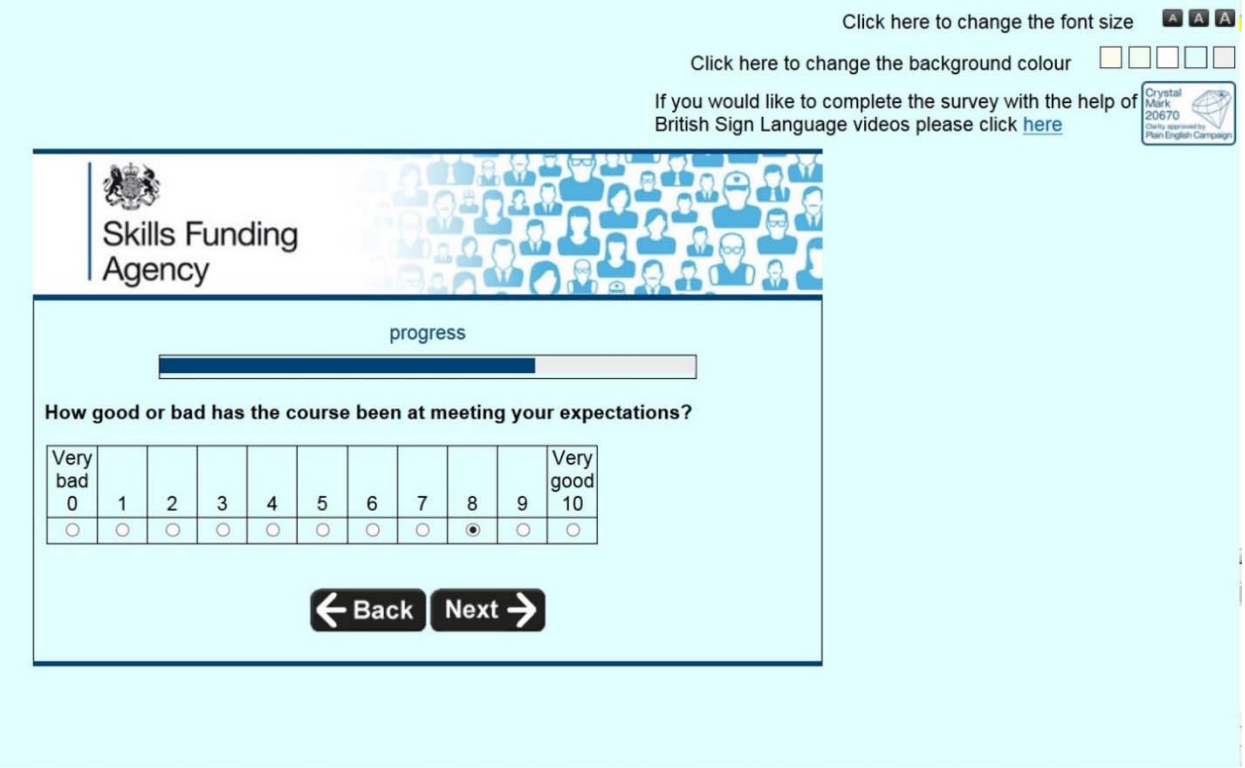
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If you would like to complete the survey with the help of British Sign Language videos please click here
Skills Funding Agency
progress
How good or bad has the course been at meeting your expectations?
Very bad 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very good 10
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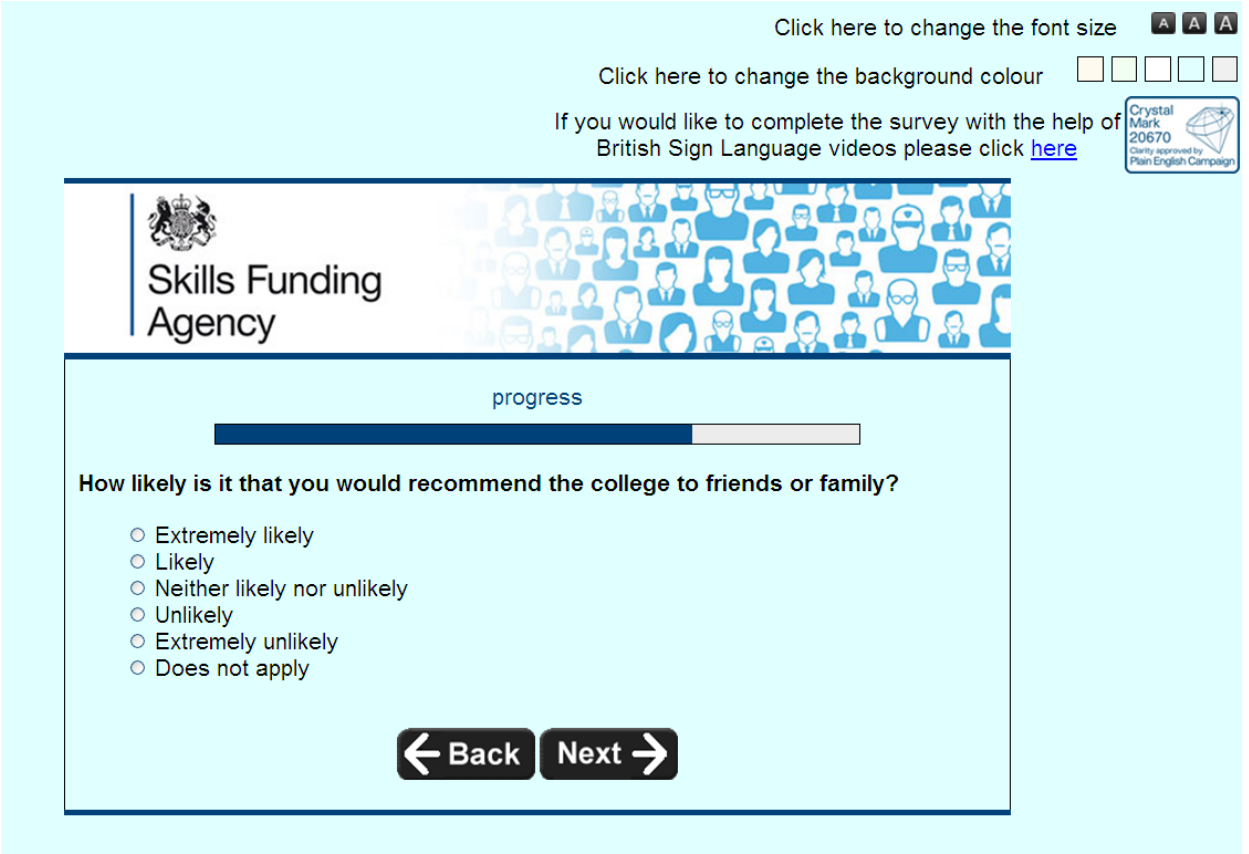
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If you would like to complete the survey with the help of British Sign Language videos please click here
Skills Funding Agency
progress
How likely is it that you would recommend the college to friends or family?
Extremely likely
Likely
Neither likely nor unlikely
Unlikely
Extremely unlikely
Does not apply
Back
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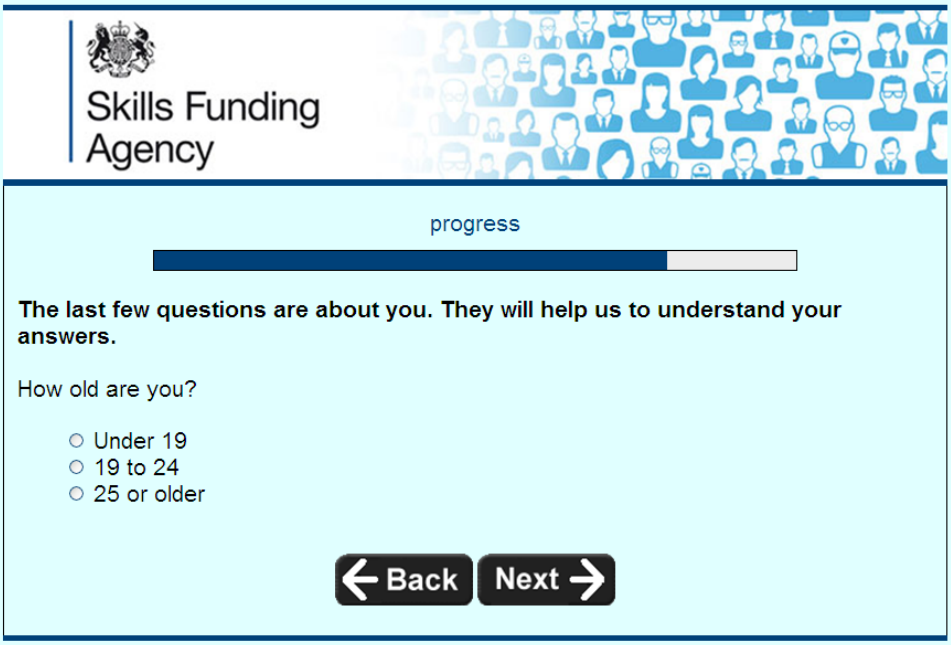
If you would like to complete the survey with the help of British Sign Language videos please click here



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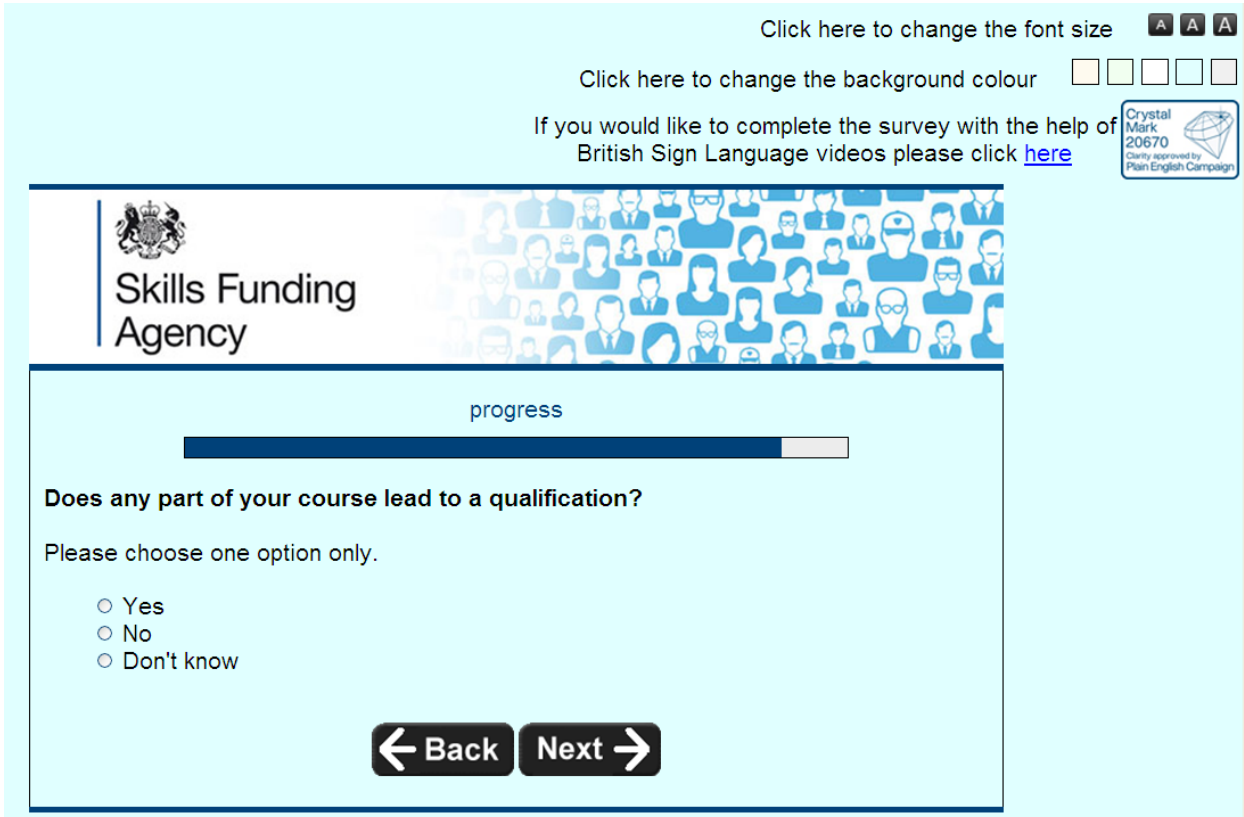
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If you would like to complete the survey with the help of British Sign Language videos please click here
Skills Funding Agency
progress
Does any part of your course lead to a qualification?
Please choose one option only.
Yes
No
Don't know
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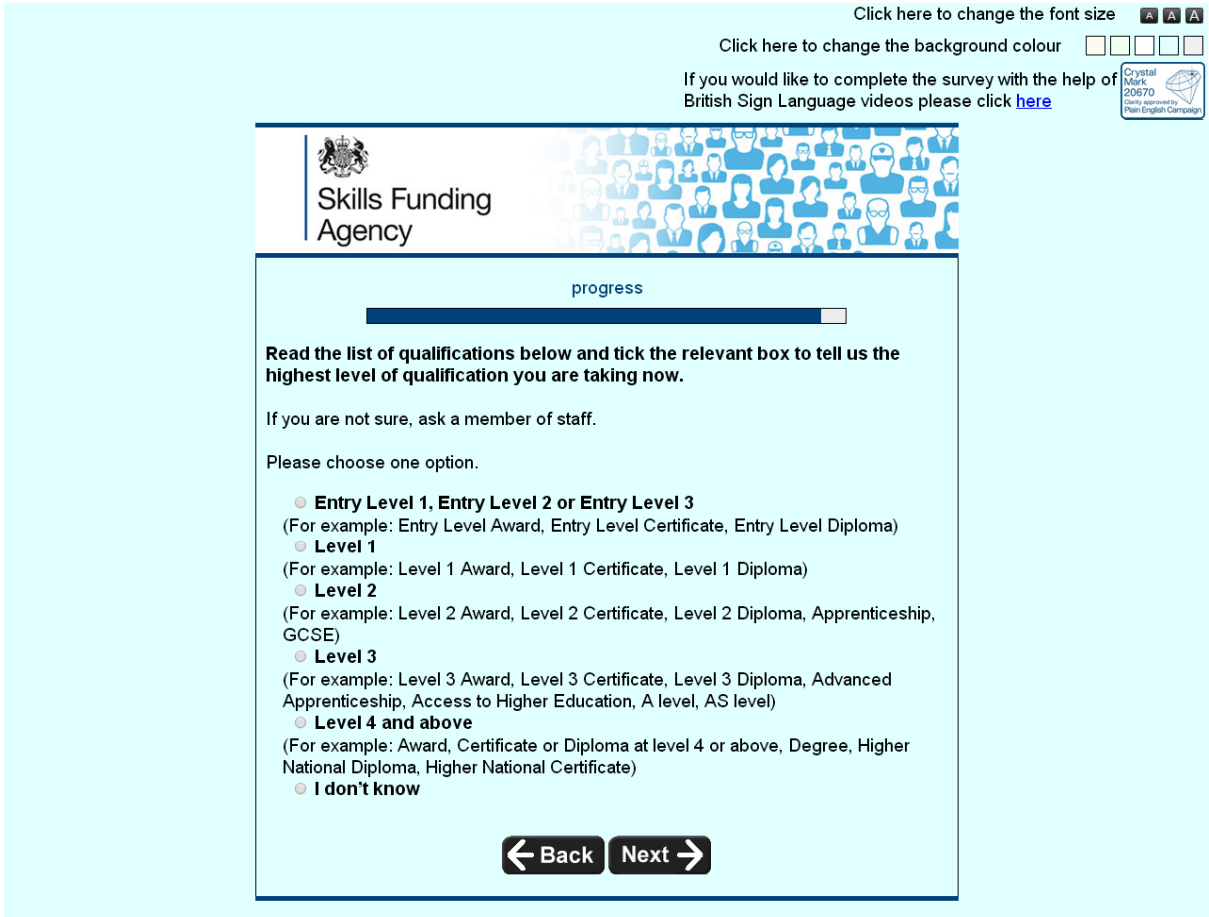
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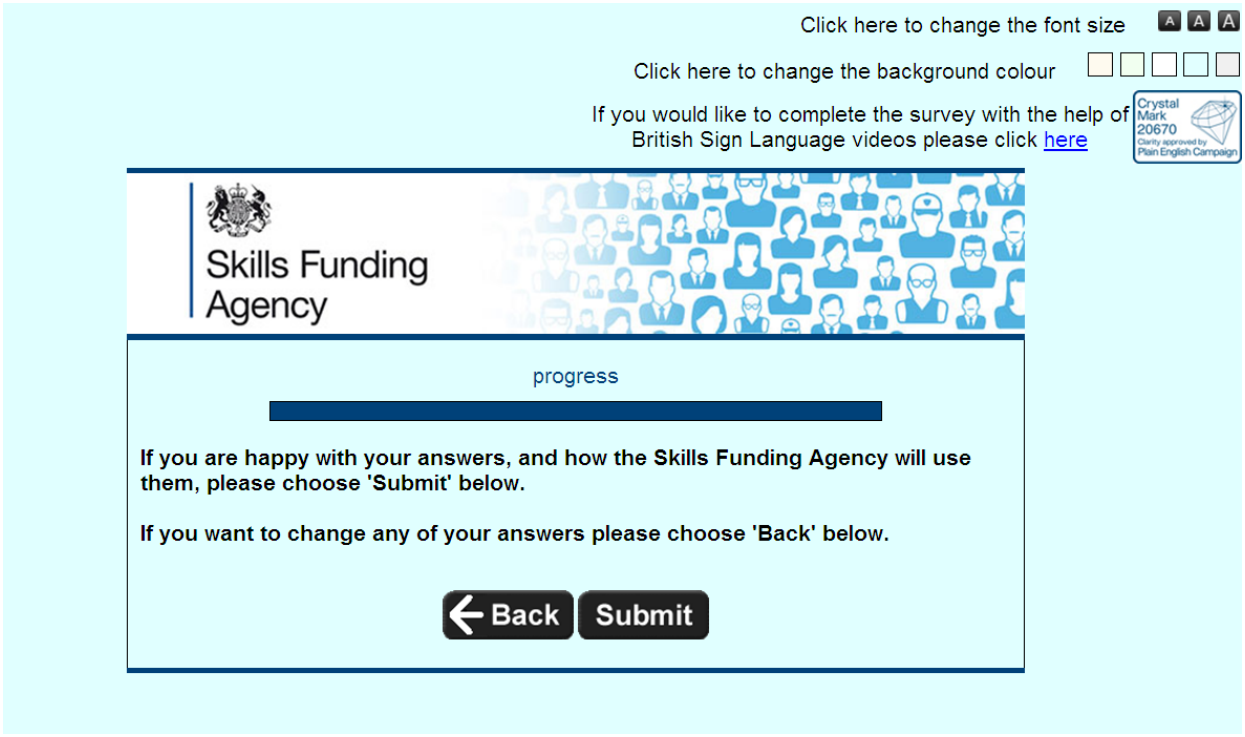
If you would like to complete the survey with the help of British Sign Language videos please click here
Skills Funding Agency
progress
Read the list of qualifications below and tick the relevant box to tell us the highest level of qualification you are taking now.
If you are not sure, ask a member of staff.
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)
Level 1
(For example: Level 1 Award, Level 1 Certificate, Level 1 Diploma)
Level 2
(For example: Level 2 Award, Level 2 Certificate, Level 2 Diploma, Apprenticeship, GCSE)
Level 3
(For example: Level 3 Award, Level 3 Certificate, Level 3 Diploma, Advanced Apprenticeship, Access to Higher Education, A level, AS level)
Level 4 and above
(For example: Award, Certificate or Diploma at level 4 or above, Degree, Higher National Diploma, Higher National Certificate)
I don't know
Back
Next



Was this last screen print correct? The service desk address is incorrect?

Annex 8: Learner Satisfaction Guidance

Learner satisfaction survey 2014 to 2015: guidance for colleges and training organisations

October 2014

Of interest to colleges and training organisations.

1. Guidance for colleges and training organisations

Introduction

The learner satisfaction survey for 2014 to 2015 runs from 3 November 2014 to 29 March 2015. 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 information 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 how good or bad the course or programme has been at meeting their expectations. The results of this question will not be included in the score, but we will provide your organisation with details of your learners' responses.

Interim reports to help inform you

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 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.
The reports will be issued in mid-January to report the period up to Christmas, February to report the period up to February half-term and the end of 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. This will allow you to stay up-to-date with survey reporting.

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 3 November 2014 and 29 March 2015 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
- your responses are representative of your learner population with regard to age, gender and level of study.

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, unique learner numbers (ULN) 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 3 November to 29 March 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.

Course-level feedback

We have devised a 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:
3 November 2014 until 29 March 2015

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 2014.

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.

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 **11 March 2015** 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 1 December 2014 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 **9 March 2015**.

Further information is available on the FE choices information pages on 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 on our website
- email the service desk

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 SFA. 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 **6 February 2015.** 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 3 November 2014 and 29 March April 2015. 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, we ask learners to tell us the highest level of qualification they are taking. We use this information to feedback 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.