



Skills Funding
Agency

FE Choices Learner Satisfaction Survey Guidance

October 2015

Of interest to all colleges and other training organisations.

1. FE Choices Learner Satisfaction Survey Guidance

Introduction

The learner satisfaction survey for 2014 to 2015 runs from 2 November 2015 to 1 April 2016. We will publish information and guidance on the [FE Choices information pages](#) on our website throughout the survey period and publish related articles in our [Update](#) newsletter.

Colleges and other training organisations participating in the survey will need to visit the [Provider Extranet](#) regularly. Here we will provide regular updates on all aspects of the surveys, including near-live feedback to individual colleges and other training organisations on their response rates. To access this site you will need your UK Provider Reference Number (UKPRN) and your unique password, which we have sent to your principal or chief executive.

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

First, check whether you are in scope for the learner satisfaction survey by consulting the [Information pages](#) on GOV.UK.

How to support the survey

To participate fully in the survey and ensure you gain a valid score, colleges and other training organisations need to visit the [Provider Extranet](#) regularly.

We send your principal or chief executive a web link, password and log-on. These allow your organisation to check response rates to the online survey at any time during the survey period. We will update these figures daily and inform you of your achieved responses and the extent to which your response pattern appears to represent your organisation.

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

You will only get a score in the survey if the number of learners who respond is a sufficiently large and representative sample of all the in-scope learners in your

organisation during the entire survey period. To determine your minimum sample size, estimate the number of in-scope learners you will have between 2 November 2015 and 1 April 2016 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 taking 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 reject samples if they are badly skewed (that is, if some learner's groupings are over or under-represented). Use the figure obtained as a guide only. We strongly encourage colleges and other 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 other 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 'number for your college or learning provider'.

It is important learners enter this number because it ensures that their responses are attributed to your organisation correctly. Learners cannot access the survey without the UKPRN. Also distribute this number to any subcontractors that deliver in-scope learning on your behalf and ask them in turn to communicate this to any of your

learners who are with them. If this learning is part of your in-scope provision, we will include it when we calculate the number of eligible learners for your organisation. Some colleges and other training organisations routinely use unique learner numbers (ULNs) or learner reference numbers as intranet log-ins and appear on learner ID cards. This means that learners will have the number easily available to them. If this is not the case in your organisation, please consider the best way to get this information to learners in readiness for the survey. Some learners may not be familiar with the terminology or know that their ULN or personal learner reference number is the 'learner id'. The ULN and personal reference number are both allocated to learners at enrolment, or shortly afterward

Learners will still be able to complete the survey if they have lost or forgotten their learner reference number. However, 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. They also protect colleges and other training organisations by ensuring that learners cannot enter duplicate submissions.

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 other 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 smart phones, tablets or other devices that have access to the internet

You can access the survey and complete it from any internet-enabled communication device. The survey will be available 24 hours a day from 2 November 2015 to 1 April 2016. Learners can complete it from any internet-linked computer,

palm top, BlackBerry or other smart phone. For more details, refer to the [Learner Satisfaction](#) webpages of our website on GOV.UK.

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'. For more details, read the 'Guidance on hyperlink-embedded method for linking the learner satisfaction survey with your college or provider survey', which is available on the [learner satisfaction](#) webpages of our website on GOV.UK.

To comply with the Data Protection Act 1998, 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 homepage.

Course-level feedback

We have devised a robust methodology for obtaining subject-level information using data recorded on the ILR and [Learning Aims Search](#). This means that we will be able to identify a subject area for most respondents. Therefore, we would urge all colleges and other training organisations to maximise the number of learners completing the survey. This will greatly increase your ability to analyse the survey findings at subject level.

Decide when to administer the survey during the survey window:

2 November 2015 until 1 April 2016

Colleges and other training organisations can decide how they administer 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. All learners in learning during this period are entitled to take part, including those whose learning programmes end in or before December 2015.

Colleges and other training organisations can inform us of their planned survey

start and end dates on the [Provider Extranet](#).

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

In exceptional circumstances, colleges and other training organisations can apply to use paper surveys. For example, some learners may find it impossible 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, follow the link on the [Provider Extranet](#).

Colleges and other 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 and/or disabilities. It is not acceptable for staff to interview learners or summarise views obtained in other ways. Couriers will collect all responses from colleges and other training organisations on **11 March 2015**; we will only include responses collected at that time in the response calculation.

Sell the benefits of the survey

Some colleges and other 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 other 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 learners can complete the survey

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

Plan to include all SFA 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 other training organisations who wish to use **paper-based surveys** have until **30 November 2015** to apply. We expect colleges and other 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 2016**.

Further information is available on the [FE choices information pages](#) on GOV.UK.

Before the survey, 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 ILR

We will use your learners' responses to calculate your learner satisfaction score, which we will publish on GOV.UK and the National Careers Service website.

If you have any questions, please:

- refer to the FAQs on the [Provider Extranet](#)
- go to the FE Choices information pages on [.GOV.UK](#)
- email the [service desk](#)

2. Help for learners

Wherever possible, we have designed the questions to apply 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 made the questions as clear as possible.

Some learners will need help to complete the survey. Use your professional judgement to ensure that any help you provide has the most neutral effect possible on the answers the learners give. 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.

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 these occurrences to be very rare.

Some learners may ask what a question means. Hundreds of thousands of learners in England complete the questionnaires in a wide variety of learning contexts and we need to avoid any distortion that might result from 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 is acceptable to say, 'advice means information and explanations given to help you decide about something'. However it is unacceptable to give examples of specific advice sessions that the learners might have received from your organisation, since this could influence their response. We have tested the questions with learners undertaking ESOL programmes and believe that most learners with a learning level of Entry 3 or above will be able to complete the online survey unaided.

Appropriate briefing of learners

We ask colleges and other 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. We will take seriously any allegations of inappropriate actions to influence the outcomes of the survey.

Support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those undertaking programmes in ESOL in the learner satisfaction survey

All learners have access to a response scale, which features icons of 'smiley' and 'sad' faces to indicate satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

We are not producing a British Sign Language (BSL) version of the survey due to the prohibitive cost.

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

We commissioned research visits to a number of colleges and other 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 other 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, please email the [Service Desk](#) mailbox by **5 February 2016**. Let us know how many learners you are not including. This will ensure that we can take this into account when judging your minimum sample size.

Participation in the survey is optional for learners, but colleges and other training organisations should make every attempt to ensure that learners have the opportunity to take part. However, colleges and other training organisations will need to make provision for learners to opt out at any stage during the survey process and ensure that they do not contact these learners 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 from 2 November 2015 to 1 April 2015. We recommend that all your learners have 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 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 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 other training organisations, we set a ceiling of 70% of in-scope learners and no training provider will need 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. We apply corrective weightings to account for any bias in the sample, but this is not possible where the 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 that we fund. 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 other 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 other training organisations on the profile of learners who have answered the survey. After the survey ends we check this information against the ILR.

5. New developments to the survey

New questions

Following a review of the questions in consultation with stakeholders, learners and staff at colleges and other training providers new questions are being introduced this year.

We produce different version of the survey for learners in each learning environment. The college version of the questions follows below for reference.

- Very Dissatisfied Very Satisfied
- ☹️ 😊
- Q1 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with **the teaching on your course?** 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Q2 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with **the way staff treat you?** 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Q3 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with **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 Does not apply
- Q4 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with **the support you get on this course?** 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Does not apply
- Q5 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that **the course is meeting your expectations?** 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- Q6 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that **your college responds to the views of learners?** 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Does not apply
- Q7 Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you **with your college?** 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Q8 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

Q9 How do you usually travel to your college? Please select all of the types of transport that you use for your journey.

- Walk
- Bicycle
- Drive a car or van
- Car or taxi passenger
- Motorcycle or scooter
- Train or tube
- Bus
- Other method of travel

Q10 How long does your journey to your college usually take?

- 15 minutes or less
- Between 15 and 30 minutes
- Between 30 and 45 minutes
- Between 45 and 60 minutes
- More than 60 minutes

Q11 How much do you usually spend on travel to and from your college each week?

- Nothing
- £10 or less
- Between £10 and £20
- Between £20 and £30
- More than £30
- Prefer not to say

Interim reports to help inform you

We will share two indicative reports with you detailing your organisation's learner responses to the survey. For example, you will be able to see how different groups of learners are responding to each of the 10 core questions, by age, gender and level of study. The reports contain visually-engaging charts and tables which will allow you to easily identify key findings to help with planning your self-assessment. We will issue the reports in February to report the period up to February half-term and at 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.



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