

Benchmarking Data 1997/98 to 1999/2000

Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England



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Contents

	Paragraph number
Introduction	1
Background	8
Layout Illustration	17
Using the Benchmarking Data	21

Annexes

Annex A:	Benchmarking Data 1997/98 to 1999/2000: Retention and Achievement Rates
Annex B:	Definitions
Annex C:	Illustration of the Effect of Qualification Type Mix

Benchmarking Data 1997/98 to 1999/2000

Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England

Introduction

1 This publication sets out benchmarking data on levels of retention and achievement in further education colleges in England, for the period 1997/98 to 1999/2000. This is the first benchmarking publication to be produced by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and updates *Benchmarking Data 1996-97 to 1998-99* published in September 2000 by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC).

2 The LSC was established in July 2000 by the *Learning and Skills Act 2000*. To fulfil its duties the LSC will build on the work of its predecessor organisations, the FEFC and TECs, and will give a central focus to raising quality and standards. The LSC's strategy to support colleges in raising the standards of their work includes the continuation of the publication of national benchmarking data. The distribution of national benchmarking data on student retention and achievement allows colleges to assess their performance and assists their planning of action to improve the retention and achievement rates of their students.

3 The National Audit Office (NAO) report, *Improving Student Performance*, identified a range of best practice in improving student

performance in colleges and made recommendations on what additionally colleges can do to help students achieve their qualifications. One key recommendation is that the Council should encourage more benchmarking between like colleges, focusing on improving performance at the poorest performing and middle ranking colleges. This publication and the key benchmarking data sets included, is designed to encourage colleges to use national benchmarking data actively to set their sights on achieving realistic and challenging improvements in student performance for their type of college.

4 The LSC has a network of 47 local offices and has instigated a regular process of performance review for all providers. Local LSCs will be mindful of the NAO recommendations and will use benchmarking data to assess the position of individual institutions.

5 The LSC corporate plan *Strategic Framework to 2004* raises the profile of several areas of provision, for example, improving the achievement of both young people and adults at level 2 and level 3. Colleges can use this publication and the benchmarking data to assist in improving student performance in these areas.

Key findings

6 The results show an overall increase in achievement from 1997/98 to 1999/2000, particularly for achievement rates in general further education and tertiary colleges. The achievements are calculated at enrolment level for each qualification-bearing course. Retention rates have remained stable between 1997/98 and 1999/2000. This is consistent with the *Statistical First Release* published by the Council on 27 July 2001, and with initial analysis of *Summary statistics for Further Education institutions, England 1999/2000*, which will be published in October 2001.

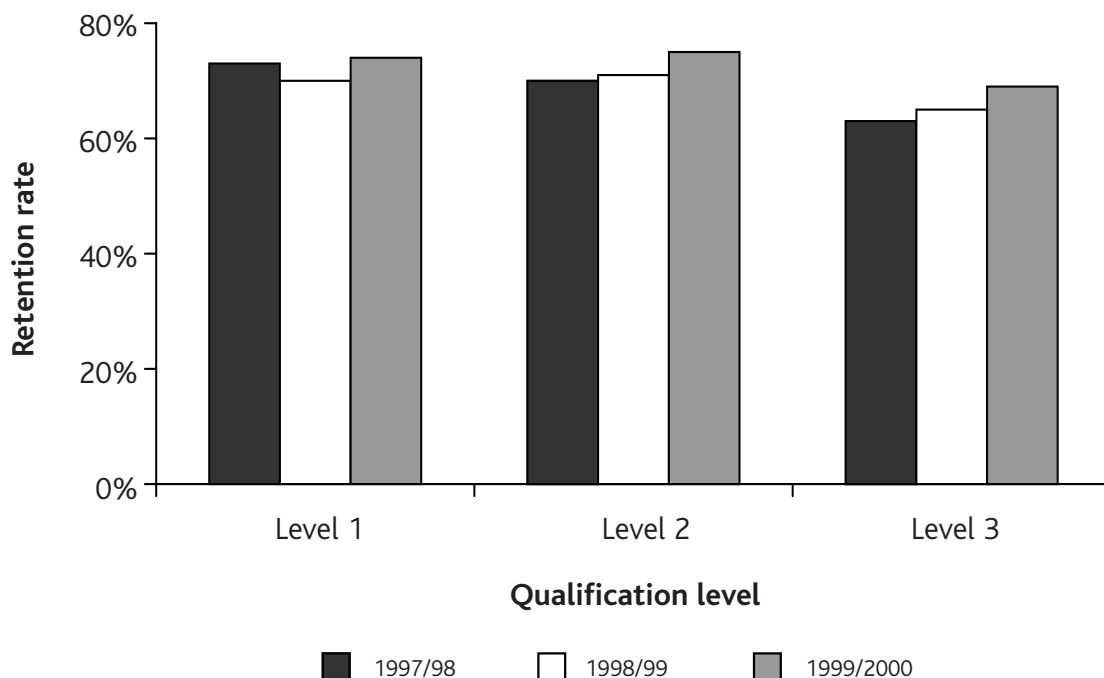
7 Analysis of the benchmarking data for 1999/2000 shows that:

- retention rates for adults attending sixth form colleges (predominantly on evening courses) have continued the upward trend identified in 1998/99. This increase averaged four percentage points between 1997/98 and 1999/2000, and retention rates now stand at around 73% although there are relatively low numbers of these students. The variability in retention between sixth form colleges is becoming smaller as sixth form colleges with the lowest retention rates for adults show the highest levels of improvement.

Retention rates

- retention rates remained stable between 1997/98 and 1999/2000, standing at around 79% for long qualifications and 92% for short

Adult Retention Rates in Sixth Form Colleges

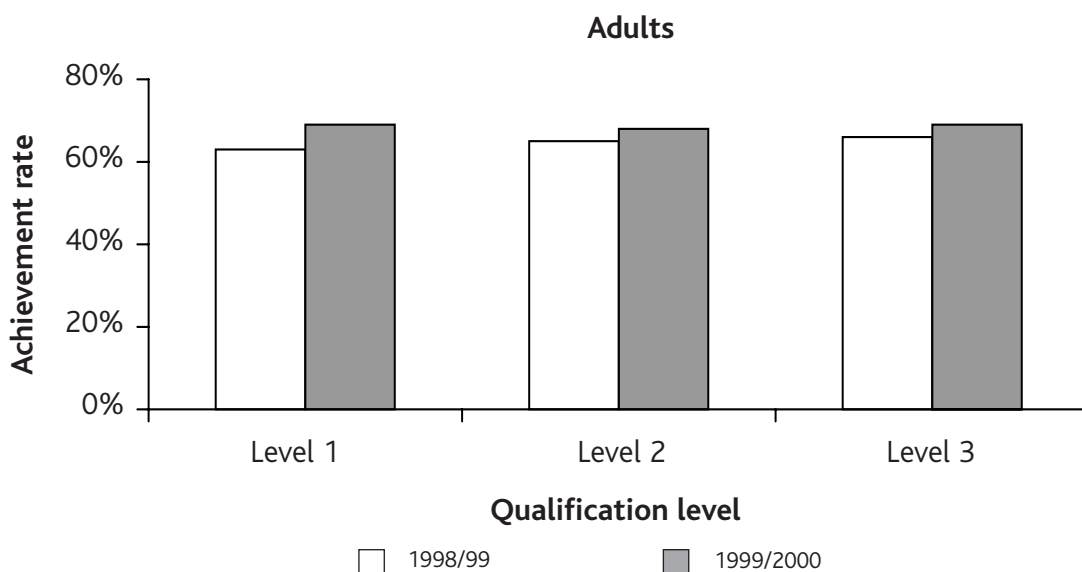
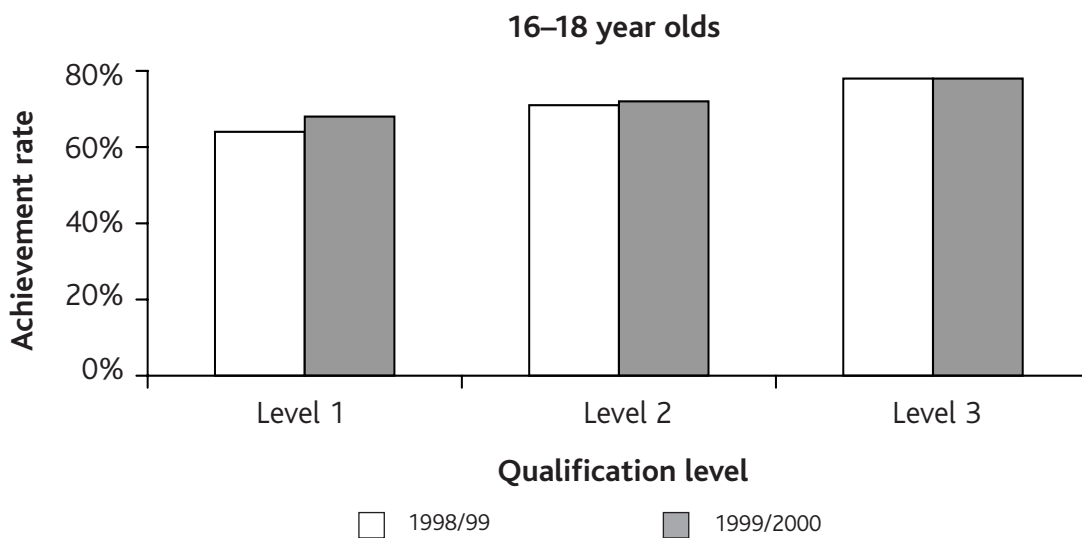


Achievement rates

- there has been an increase in achievement rates between 1998/99 and 1999/2000 at most levels of qualifications. Overall achievement rates now stand at 71% for long qualifications and 75% for short qualifications. In general, the increases in achievement rates have been higher for adult students than for students aged 16–18
 - for example, for level 1 qualifications, whilst achievement rates for students aged 16–18 increased from 64% to 68%

- between 1998/99 and 1999/2000, achievement rates for adults increased by 6% from 63% to 69% over the same period
- the achievement rate for adult students studying level 3 qualifications increased by 3 percentage points between 1998/99 and 1999/2000 building on a gain of 3% between 1997/98 and 1998/99. Achievement rates for 16–18 year old students studying level 3 qualifications remained stable

Achievement Rates in Sector Colleges 1998/99 and 1999/2000



- general further education and tertiary colleges which recruit a high proportion of their students from disadvantaged areas have shown the most significant improvements in achievements over the three-year period. For example, the achievement rate of adults studying level 1 qualifications has increased 11 percentage points over the three years to 66% in 1999/2000. Similarly the achievement rates of 16–18 year olds studying level 2 and level 3 qualifications have increased by 12% and 6% respectively over the three-year period
- the variation in achievement between colleges is becoming smaller as colleges with the lowest achievement rates show the highest levels of improvement. For example in 1997/98 a quarter of colleges had achievement rates at or below 61% for adults studying at level 2. This had increased to 66% in 1999/2000, narrowing the range between upper and lower quartile from 20% to 16%
- colleges with the highest achievement rates continue to improve in most areas. For example in 1997/98 a quarter of colleges had achievement rates at or above 78% for adults studying qualifications at level 1. This had increased to 83% in 1999/2000.

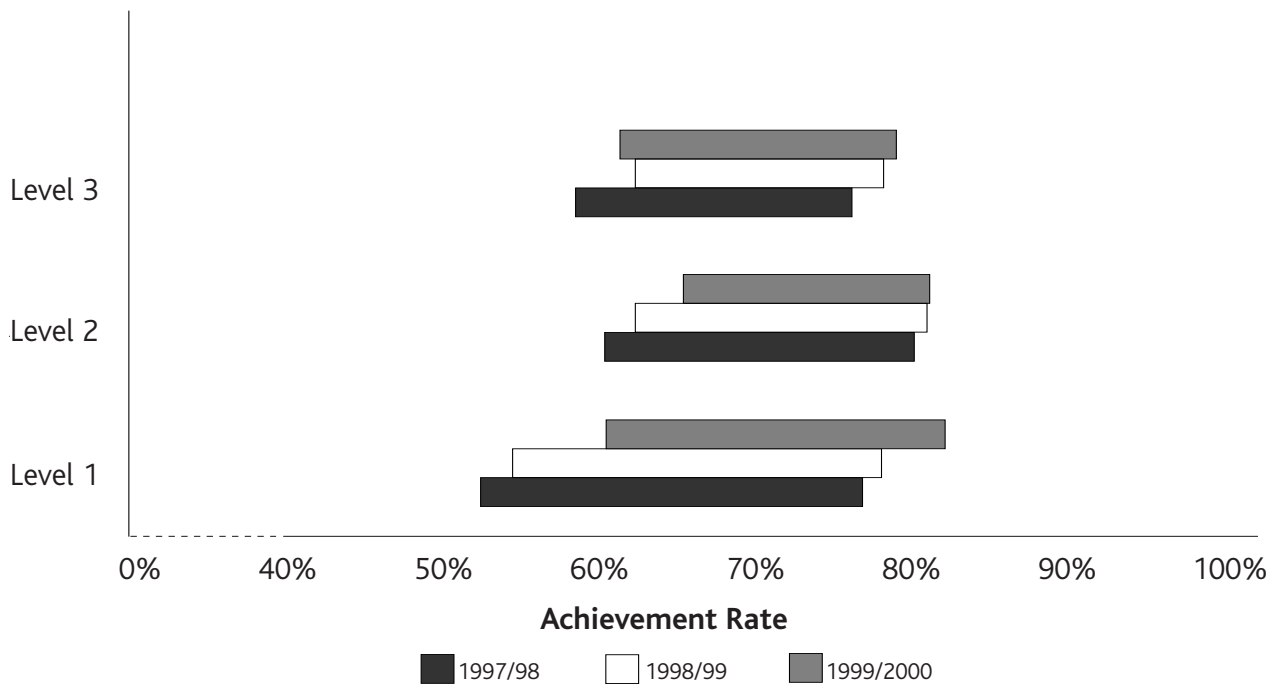
Background

8 The publication of national benchmarking data is part of the Council's strategy to support colleges in raising the standards of their work. Benchmarking data on student retention and achievement allow colleges to assess their performance and assist their planning of action programmes to improve the retention and achievement rates of their students.

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

10 At the Council's request, all colleges now set annual targets for improving students' retention and achievement rates. Institutional target-setting informed by national benchmarking data is now an integral part of colleges' strategies to secure continuous improvement. Colleges used a standard framework for setting targets for the first time during the 1998/99 college year. An analysis of colleges' performance against targets for the 1998/99 college year was published by the FEFC in November 2000 in Circular 00/28 *Target-setting: Outcomes 1999-2000 and arrangements for 2001*.

Adult Achievement Rates in Sector Colleges: Range of middle 50% of colleges



Note: interpretation of the above figure is as follows, taking level 1 qualifications in 1997/98 as an example. The achievement rate for adults at level 1 for a quarter of colleges was below 53%. Similarly, the achievement rate for adults at level 1 for a further quarter of colleges was above 78%. Thus the remaining half of all colleges had an achievement rate for adults between 53% and 78% and this range is shown by the bottom bar in the figure. The figure shows that over a three-year period the middle 50% of colleges have improved their achievement rates and that the range of the middle 50% has narrowed, particularly for level 2 qualifications.

Approach

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

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

13 In previous years the FEFC published national benchmarking data on levels of retention and achievement in three ways. Details of the benchmarking publications to be produced by the Council in 2001 are set out below. All the benchmarking data is available on the Council's website (www.lsc.gov.uk).

14 The underlying methodology used to update the benchmarking data to 1999/2000 remains the same as for the 1998/99 publication produced in September 2000.

Presentation

15 The benchmarking data in this publication include an additional achievement rate not shown in previous publications. This is in response to a request from Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) to show achievement rates for all completers, including those enrolled for qualifications that have been recorded as having completed the course but with an unknown outcome. The achievement rate for all completers includes all completed qualifications in the denominator of the calculation, with qualifications with unknown

outcomes counted as 'not achieved'. This is different from the main achievement rate shown in this and previous publications, where the achievement rate is calculated for all completed qualifications with a **known outcome**. Definitions of calculations are shown in annex B. The original definition of achievement rate was agreed through consultation and designed to account for circumstances where outcomes were unknown at the time data was supplied to the Council.

16 Nationally the achievement rates for all completers are around 4 percentage points below the achievement rates for completers with a known outcome. The inspectorates are keen to see both achievement rates to enable them to make better comparisons of individual college results with national figures.

17 The benchmarking data are set out in annex A. An illustration of the layout of the benchmarking data is shown overleaf.

Source of information	Timing for 2001	Published in hard copy	Available on the Council's website
<i>Benchmarking Data</i> publication showing results by college type and notional level	September	Yes	Yes
Supporting data showing results by college type, notional level and broad qualification type, programme area and subprogramme area	September	No	Yes
National benchmarking data for individual qualifications	September	No	Yes

1		2						
Table 1. All colleges: enrolments on notional level 1 long qualifications								
		16-18			19+			
		97-98	98-99	99-00	97-98	98-99	99-00	
Number of starters	A	209,600	208,500	221,500	380,000	359,300	402,800	
Retention rate	B	Mean	81%	81%	80%	80%	78%	79%
Achievement rate	C	Mean	60%	64%	68%	62%	63%	69%
Achievement rate (all completers)	D	Mean	56%	59%	64%	58%	60%	64%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>								
		E						
GNVQ and precursors (%)		4%	5%	4%	0%	0%	0%	
NVQs (%)		9%	10%	9%	7%	7%	6%	
Other (%)		87%	86%	86%	93%	92%	93%	
<i>Measures of college variability</i>								
		F						
<i>Retention rate</i>	25th percentile	77%	76%	75%	73%	73%	73%	
	Median	81%	81%	81%	80%	79%	80%	
	75th percentile	86%	87%	86%	86%	86%	85%	
<i>Achievement rate</i>	25th percentile	50%	56%	61%	53%	55%	61%	
	Median	66%	66%	71%	64%	67%	73%	
	75th percentile	81%	78%	81%	78%	79%	83%	
<i>Achievement rate (all completers)</i>	25th percentile	46%	51%	54%	47%	50%	55%	
	Median	59%	61%	64%	60%	61%	67%	
	75th percentile	73%	72%	75%	71%	71%	75%	

1 at sector level (all colleges), by college type, and for GFEC/TC (general further education and tertiary colleges) with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas

2 by notional NVQ level

3 by student age group at the start of the qualification

A 'number of starters': the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. See annex B for a full explanation.

B 'retention rate': the percentage of qualifications which students have completed as expected or where the student is continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification. The figure shown is the mean for all students.

C 'achievement rate': the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included as achievements. Qualifications with unknown outcomes are excluded from the calculation. The figure shown is the mean for all students.

D 'achievement rate (all completers)': the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of all completed qualifications. Partial achievements are not included as achievements. Qualifications with

unknown outcomes are included as 'not achieved'. The figure shown is the mean for all students.

E 'breakdown of number of starters': the breakdown of the number of enrolments started, shown between five broad types of qualification: GCSEs; GCE A/AS levels; GNVQs and their precursors; NVQs; and other qualifications such as Access and City and Guilds Wordpower qualifications.

F Measures of college variability

'25th percentile': the retention/achievement rate that three-quarters of colleges meet or surpass

'median': the retention/achievement rate that half of colleges meet or surpass

'75th percentile': the retention/achievement rate that the top quarter of colleges meet or surpass

Tables on the Council's website also show data for 10th and 90th percentiles.

'10th percentile': the retention/achievement rate that nine-tenths of colleges meet or surpass

'90th percentile': the retention/achievement rate that one-tenth of colleges meet or surpass

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

19 The final group of benchmarking data shows the results for general further education and tertiary colleges that recruit a high proportion of their students from deprived areas and which have a widening participation factor for 1999/2000 of 1.025 or higher.

Typically these colleges would recruit at least half of their students from disadvantaged areas. Retention and achievement rates for this group of colleges are lower than for other colleges.

20 Results for 1997/98 and 1998/99 have been recalculated from *Benchmarking Data 1996-97 to 1998-99* published in September 2000, to take account of revisions to colleges' data and the qualifications database. More details and definitions are available at annex B.

Using the Benchmarking Data

Comparing results

21 Colleges will be able to measure their performance by comparing their results with the published benchmarking data. This information will support the process of setting targets for 2001/02 and beyond. Individual college results will also be used by local LSCs to compare and evaluate the performance of providers.

22 The FEFC provided a set of results to each college for the period 1996/97 to 1998/99 in the same format as the benchmarking data publication during the autumn 2000 term. This information will be updated to show 1997/98 to 1999/2000 results and will be sent to colleges in September 2001.

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

might choose to compare its results for level 1 provision with the level 1 benchmarking data shown in table 18 of annex A for general further education and tertiary colleges with high levels of deprivation, while using the benchmarking data in tables 7 to 9 for the remainder of their provision.

24 Where the college's performance is different from the benchmarking data, the college will wish to explore the reasons for this by calculating retention and achievement rates for particular parts of the college's provision and comparing these with statistics for similar provision at national level. To facilitate this comparison, a more detailed breakdown of the benchmarking data by broad type of qualification, and individual qualification aim will be available in September 2001 on the Council's website at www.lsc.gov.uk.

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

Kitemarked software

26 As at July 2001 there were fifteen software suppliers offering kitemarked software to colleges to produce retention and achievement results using the same calculation method as the Council. A list of these suppliers with contact details is available on the FEFC website under 'Data' then 'Analysis and

Benchmarking'. The FEFC website can be accessed via the Council's website.

Queries

27 Queries about this publication should be directed to the Funding and Data Support Desk on 024 7649 3724 or by fax on 024 7649 3749 or by e-mail (fundstat.desk@lsc.gov.uk).

Annex A: Benchmarking Data 1997/98 to 1999/2000

Retention and Achievement Rates

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

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

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

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

Table 5. All colleges: enrolments on short qualifications

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Table 13. Sixth form colleges: enrolments on notional level H long qualifications

Table 14. Specialist colleges: enrolments on notional level 1 long qualifications

Table 15. Specialist colleges: enrolments on notional level 2 long qualifications

Table 16. Specialist colleges: enrolments on notional level 3 long qualifications

Table 17. Specialist colleges: enrolments on notional level H long qualifications

Table 18. General FE and tertiary colleges with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on notional level 1 long qualifications

Table 19. General FE and tertiary colleges with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on notional level 2 long qualifications

Table 20. General FE and tertiary colleges with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on notional level 3 long qualifications

Table 21. General FE and tertiary colleges with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on notional level H long qualifications

See annex B for details of the definitions used.

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

		16-18			19+		
		97/98	98/99	99/2000	97/98	98/99	99/2000
Number of starters		209,600	208,500	221,500	380,000	359,300	402,800
Retention rate	mean	81%	81%	80%	80%	78%	79%
Achievement rate	mean	60%	64%	68%	62%	63%	69%
Achievement rate (all completers)	mean	56%	59%	64%	58%	60%	64%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		4%	5%	4%	0%	0%	0%
NVQs (%)		9%	10%	9%	7%	7%	6%
Other (%)		87%	86%	86%	93%	92%	93%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	25th percentile	77%	76%	75%	73%	73%	73%
	median	81%	81%	81%	80%	79%	80%
	75th percentile	86%	87%	86%	86%	86%	85%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	25th percentile	50%	56%	61%	53%	55%	61%
	median	66%	66%	71%	64%	67%	73%
	75th percentile	81%	78%	81%	78%	79%	83%
<i>Achievement rate (all completers)</i>	25th percentile	46%	51%	54%	47%	50%	55%
	median	59%	61%	64%	60%	61%	67%
	75th percentile	73%	72%	75%	71%	71%	75%

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

		16-18			19+		
		97/98	98/99	99/2000	97/98	98/99	99/2000
Number of starters		369,900	357,600	386,100	364,600	360,100	397,200
Retention rate	mean	77%	77%	78%	79%	78%	79%
Achievement rate	mean	67%	71%	72%	66%	65%	68%
Achievement rate (all completers)	mean	64%	67%	68%	62%	62%	64%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCSEs (%)		41%	37%	31%	22%	19%	15%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		13%	12%	11%	4%	3%	3%
NVQs (%)		16%	17%	15%	25%	27%	23%
Other (%)		30%	34%	42%	50%	51%	59%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	25th percentile	73%	74%	74%	71%	72%	73%
	median	78%	77%	78%	78%	78%	79%
	75th percentile	82%	82%	83%	84%	83%	83%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	25th percentile	61%	63%	65%	61%	63%	66%
	median	71%	72%	74%	71%	72%	73%
	75th percentile	85%	85%	83%	81%	82%	82%
<i>Achievement rate (all completers)</i>	25th percentile	57%	60%	61%	54%	57%	59%
	median	67%	69%	70%	63%	67%	69%
	75th percentile	77%	79%	78%	73%	75%	76%

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

		16-18			19+		
		97/98	98/99	99/2000	97/98	98/99	99/2000
Number of starters		493,900	487,200	506,200	312,700	298,900	312,300
Retention rate	mean	78%	77%	78%	79%	78%	78%
Achievement rate	mean	77%	78%	78%	63%	66%	69%
Achievement rate (all completers)	mean	75%	76%	76%	59%	62%	65%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCE A/AS levels (%)		69%	66%	61%	21%	19%	16%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		18%	17%	17%	11%	10%	9%
NVQs (%)		3%	3%	2%	18%	18%	17%
Other (%)		10%	14%	20%	50%	53%	58%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
Retention rate	25th percentile	72%	72%	72%	69%	72%	72%
	median	77%	77%	78%	77%	77%	77%
	75th percentile	82%	81%	83%	83%	82%	82%
Achievement rate	25th percentile	67%	67%	69%	59%	63%	62%
	median	75%	76%	78%	69%	71%	71%
	75th percentile	85%	86%	85%	77%	79%	80%
Achievement rate (all completers)	25th percentile	63%	65%	66%	52%	57%	58%
	median	73%	74%	75%	63%	64%	66%
	75th percentile	82%	83%	83%	71%	73%	73%

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

		16-18			19+		
		97/98	98/99	99/2000	97/98	98/99	99/2000
Number of starters		5,200	4,100	2,800	76,200	68,900	59,200
Retention rate	mean	85%	84%	81%	84%	84%	81%
Achievement rate	mean	73%	67%	68%	58%	61%	61%
Achievement rate (all completers)	mean	69%	63%	64%	54%	57%	55%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%
NVQs (%)		4%	6%	6%	17%	18%	20%
Other (%)		96%	94%	94%	82%	81%	79%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
Retention rate	25th percentile	75%	70%	67%	78%	77%	74%
	median	86%	84%	82%	85%	84%	82%
	75th percentile	100%	95%	100%	90%	90%	89%
Achievement rate	25th percentile	50%	50%	50%	46%	52%	50%
	median	67%	69%	75%	61%	64%	65%
	75th percentile	88%	100%	100%	79%	77%	80%
Achievement rate (all completers)	25th percentile	41%	47%	38%	41%	45%	43%
	median	62%	65%	67%	55%	59%	59%
	75th percentile	81%	92%	93%	69%	70%	71%

Table 5. All colleges: enrolments on short qualifications

		all ages		
		97/98	98/99	99/2000
Number of starters		1,151,400	1,004,200	1,132,000
Retention rate	mean	94%	93%	92%
Achievement rate	mean	78%	76%	75%
Achievement rate (all completers)	mean	73%	72%	71%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>				
<i>Retention rate</i>				
	<i>25th percentile</i>	90%	90%	89%
	<i>median</i>	95%	94%	93%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	97%	97%	96%
<i>Achievement rate</i>				
	<i>25th percentile</i>	61%	65%	66%
	<i>median</i>	78%	77%	77%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	89%	87%	86%
<i>Achievement rate (all completers)</i>				
	<i>25th percentile</i>	56%	59%	59%
	<i>median</i>	68%	70%	71%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	83%	80%	80%

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

		16-18			19+		
		97/98	98/99	99/2000	97/98	98/99	99/2000
Number of starters		174,600	172,500	184,200	363,400	342,000	382,200
Retention rate	mean	82%	80%	80%	80%	78%	79%
Achievement rate	mean	59%	62%	66%	61%	63%	68%
Achievement rate (all completers)	mean	56%	59%	62%	58%	60%	64%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		4%	5%	5%	0%	0%	0%
NVQs (%)		10%	11%	11%	7%	7%	7%
Other (%)		86%	84%	84%	93%	92%	93%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	25th percentile	77%	76%	76%	75%	73%	74%
	median	81%	81%	80%	80%	79%	79%
	75th percentile	85%	85%	85%	85%	84%	84%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	25th percentile	50%	54%	60%	53%	55%	61%
	median	61%	63%	67%	63%	65%	71%
	75th percentile	73%	72%	76%	73%	73%	78%
<i>Achievement rate (all completers)</i>	25th percentile	47%	52%	55%	49%	51%	57%
	median	57%	60%	63%	60%	61%	67%
	75th percentile	68%	68%	71%	68%	69%	73%

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

		16-18			19+		
		97/98	98/99	99/2000	97/98	98/99	99/2000
Number of starters		285,600	277,000	289,900	346,800	342,800	375,900
Retention rate	mean	77%	76%	77%	80%	79%	79%
Achievement rate	mean	63%	67%	68%	66%	65%	68%
Achievement rate (all completers)	mean	60%	64%	65%	62%	62%	64%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCE A/AS levels (%)		36%	31%	26%	21%	19%	15%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		13%	12%	12%	4%	3%	3%
NVQs (%)		20%	22%	19%	25%	28%	24%
Other (%)		31%	35%	42%	50%	51%	59%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	25th percentile	73%	73%	73%	74%	74%	74%
	median	77%	77%	77%	79%	78%	79%
	75th percentile	80%	80%	80%	84%	82%	82%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	25th percentile	56%	59%	64%	58%	60%	65%
	median	66%	68%	70%	67%	68%	71%
	75th percentile	73%	75%	77%	76%	76%	78%
<i>Achievement rate (all completers)</i>	25th percentile	53%	57%	60%	54%	57%	61%
	median	62%	65%	66%	63%	65%	67%
	75th percentile	70%	71%	72%	70%	72%	73%

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

		16-18			19+		
		97/98	98/99	99/2000	97/98	98/99	99/2000
Number of starters		284,500	279,200	284,000	298,300	284,500	295,800
Retention rate	mean	78%	77%	77%	79%	79%	79%
Achievement rate	mean	70%	72%	73%	63%	65%	69%
Achievement rate (all completers)	mean	69%	70%	71%	59%	62%	65%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCE A/AS levels (%)		55%	51%	47%	20%	18%	15%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		27%	26%	25%	11%	10%	9%
NVQs (%)		5%	4%	4%	18%	18%	17%
Other (%)		14%	18%	23%	51%	54%	59%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
Retention rate	25th percentile	72%	71%	72%	74%	75%	75%
	median	76%	76%	76%	79%	78%	79%
	75th percentile	82%	81%	80%	84%	82%	82%
Achievement rate	25th percentile	63%	64%	65%	58%	61%	62%
	median	70%	71%	72%	66%	70%	71%
	75th percentile	77%	78%	80%	75%	74%	79%
Achievement rate (all completers)	25th percentile	61%	62%	62%	53%	58%	59%
	median	68%	69%	70%	63%	64%	67%
	75th percentile	75%	76%	77%	69%	71%	73%

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

		16-18			19+		
		97/98	98/99	99/2000	97/98	98/99	99/2000
Number of starters		3,900	3,700	2,600	74,500	67,200	57,600
Retention rate	mean	84%	83%	81%	85%	84%	81%
Achievement rate	mean	64%	65%	69%	58%	61%	60%
Achievement rate (all completers)	mean	60%	62%	65%	53%	56%	55%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%
NVQs (%)		6%	5%	5%	17%	18%	20%
Other (%)		94%	95%	95%	82%	81%	79%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
Retention rate	25th percentile	75%	71%	67%	79%	78%	76%
	median	86%	83%	82%	85%	83%	82%
	75th percentile	100%	93%	100%	89%	89%	88%
Achievement rate	25th percentile	50%	50%	50%	45%	51%	49%
	median	67%	67%	75%	60%	63%	63%
	75th percentile	86%	93%	100%	72%	73%	74%
Achievement rate (all completers)	25th percentile	43%	48%	40%	41%	46%	44%
	median	64%	63%	67%	54%	59%	58%
	75th percentile	80%	86%	92%	65%	69%	69%

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

		16-18			19+		
		97/98	98/99	99/2000	97/98	98/99	99/2000
Number of starters		32,300	32,700	31,700	12,100	13,400	15,800
Retention rate	mean	78%	81%	82%	73%	70%	74%
Achievement rate	mean	70%	70%	77%	68%	75%	77%
Achievement rate (all completers)	mean	59%	63%	70%	54%	61%	68%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		3%	2%	2%	1%	1%	0%
NVQs (%)		1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%
Other (%)		96%	97%	97%	98%	99%	98%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	25th percentile	74%	75%	75%	61%	65%	69%
	median	81%	82%	82%	76%	77%	79%
	75th percentile	88%	89%	89%	87%	91%	91%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	25th percentile	54%	63%	71%	59%	56%	67%
	median	79%	81%	81%	77%	82%	82%
	75th percentile	92%	91%	89%	95%	94%	93%
<i>Achievement rate (all completers)</i>	25th percentile	44%	47%	53%	35%	45%	51%
	median	64%	65%	71%	59%	60%	68%
	75th percentile	84%	81%	81%	77%	81%	83%

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

		16-18			19+		
		97/98	98/99	99/2000	97/98	98/99	99/2000
Number of starters		78,400	74,300	88,200	11,300	11,500	14,100
Retention rate	mean	79%	79%	82%	70%	71%	75%
Achievement rate	mean	83%	85%	82%	77%	78%	78%
Achievement rate (all completers)	mean	75%	78%	77%	62%	68%	70%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCSEs (%)		65%	61%	51%	46%	37%	31%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		8%	9%	8%	3%	3%	3%
NVQs (%)		1%	1%	1%	7%	10%	10%
Other (%)		26%	29%	41%	44%	49%	56%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	25th percentile	75%	76%	77%	62%	64%	70%
	median	80%	80%	82%	73%	69%	78%
	75th percentile	84%	85%	86%	86%	82%	87%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	25th percentile	81%	81%	77%	66%	72%	71%
	median	91%	90%	89%	82%	87%	82%
	75th percentile	95%	95%	93%	94%	94%	95%
<i>Achievement rate (all completers)</i>	25th percentile	67%	73%	67%	50%	54%	56%
	median	81%	83%	80%	64%	71%	72%
	75th percentile	88%	90%	90%	80%	84%	81%

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

		16-18			19+		
		97/98	98/99	99/2000	97/98	98/99	99/2000
Number of starters		204,500	202,900	216,000	10,200	9,800	11,100
Retention rate	mean	78%	78%	80%	63%	65%	69%
Achievement rate	mean	86%	85%	85%	70%	72%	74%
Achievement rate (all completers)	mean	83%	83%	82%	57%	61%	63%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCE A/AS levels (%)		90%	88%	81%	60%	52%	44%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%
NVQs (%)		0%	0%	0%	9%	12%	12%
Other (%)		5%	8%	14%	27%	33%	40%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	25th percentile	71%	72%	76%	53%	56%	61%
	median	77%	77%	81%	64%	69%	71%
	75th percentile	82%	82%	84%	74%	78%	80%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	25th percentile	82%	79%	81%	62%	66%	61%
	median	87%	87%	86%	74%	77%	73%
	75th percentile	89%	90%	90%	86%	88%	88%
<i>Achievement rate (all completers)</i>	25th percentile	79%	78%	78%	49%	55%	55%
	median	84%	84%	84%	61%	65%	63%
	75th percentile	88%	88%	89%	76%	78%	77%

Table 13. Sixth form colleges: enrolments on notional level H long qualifications

		16-18			19+		
		97/98	98/99	99/2000	97/98	98/99	99/2000
Number of starters		1,200	–	–	600	600	500
Retention rate	mean	89%	–	–	76%	73%	72%
Achievement rate	mean	96%	–	–	77%	70%	79%
Achievement rate (all completers)	mean	92%	–	–	55%	52%	42%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
NVQs (%)		1%	–	–	28%	30%	29%
Other (%)		99%	–	–	72%	70%	71%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	25th percentile	66%	–	–	67%	53%	40%
	median	81%	–	–	81%	81%	77%
	75th percentile	95%	–	–	100%	94%	91%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	25th percentile	–	–	–	64%	63%	55%
	median	57%	–	–	90%	100%	87%
	75th percentile	–	–	–	100%	100%	100%
<i>Achievement rate (all completers)</i>	25th percentile	–	–	–	15%	22%	21%
	median	50%	–	–	52%	50%	41%
	75th percentile	–	–	–	80%	68%	95%

Key: – insufficient colleges to calculate this percentile, fewer than 500 starters

Table 14. Specialist colleges: enrolments on notional level 1 long qualifications

		16-18			19+		
		97/98	98/99	99/2000	97/98	98/99	99/2000
Number of starters		2,700	3,400	5,700	4,400	3,900	4,800
Retention rate	mean	86%	88%	88%	82%	83%	84%
Achievement rate	mean	73%	66%	69%	69%	69%	65%
Achievement rate (all completers)	mean	58%	60%	61%	60%	62%	60%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		1%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%
NVQs (%)		22%	14%	8%	11%	12%	7%
Other (%)		77%	84%	90%	89%	88%	93%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	25th percentile	81%	82%	80%	75%	79%	80%
	median	88%	86%	88%	82%	88%	85%
	75th percentile	93%	93%	91%	89%	91%	95%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	25th percentile	61%	65%	58%	51%	60%	52%
	median	80%	75%	79%	70%	78%	72%
	75th percentile	99%	89%	90%	91%	89%	86%
<i>Achievement rate (all completers)</i>	25th percentile	49%	47%	51%	41%	50%	46%
	median	67%	72%	72%	62%	70%	64%
	75th percentile	88%	83%	86%	85%	84%	84%

Table 15. Specialist colleges: enrolments on notional level 2 long qualifications

		16-18			19+		
		97/98	98/99	99/2000	97/98	98/99	99/2000
Number of starters		6,000	6,400	8,000	6,500	5,800	7,300
Retention rate	mean	85%	85%	84%	77%	79%	82%
Achievement rate	mean	82%	79%	77%	82%	78%	75%
Achievement rate (all completers)	mean	77%	74%	70%	71%	71%	67%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCSEs (%)		7%	4%	4%	1%	1%	1%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		28%	25%	20%	2%	3%	3%
NVQs (%)		35%	32%	20%	31%	32%	25%
Other (%)		30%	40%	56%	66%	65%	72%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	25th percentile	80%	81%	78%	77%	75%	75%
	median	85%	85%	85%	81%	79%	83%
	75th percentile	89%	90%	88%	85%	85%	87%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	25th percentile	74%	71%	73%	73%	71%	71%
	median	84%	77%	79%	81%	78%	78%
	75th percentile	90%	87%	85%	85%	85%	84%
<i>Achievement rate (all completers)</i>	25th percentile	68%	65%	70%	56%	62%	66%
	median	79%	74%	75%	69%	69%	72%
	75th percentile	86%	85%	83%	81%	83%	80%

Table 16. Specialist colleges: enrolments on notional level 3 long qualifications

		16-18			19+		
		97/98	98/99	99/2000	97/98	98/99	99/2000
Number of starters		4,800	5,000	6,300	4,200	4,500	5,400
Retention rate	mean	80%	81%	83%	79%	81%	83%
Achievement rate	mean	85%	86%	81%	77%	73%	67%
Achievement rate (all completers)	mean	79%	82%	80%	61%	64%	61%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCE A/AS levels (%)		7%	6%	5%	5%	3%	2%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		64%	64%	58%	30%	27%	20%
NVQs (%)		7%	7%	3%	15%	16%	17%
Other (%)		23%	23%	33%	50%	53%	61%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
Retention rate	25th percentile	76%	78%	76%	69%	75%	79%
	median	82%	80%	83%	80%	82%	85%
	75th percentile	86%	86%	88%	86%	88%	89%
Achievement rate	25th percentile	75%	82%	79%	70%	66%	60%
	median	85%	87%	84%	78%	81%	70%
	75th percentile	91%	90%	89%	89%	86%	79%
Achievement rate (all completers)	25th percentile	70%	77%	77%	54%	57%	49%
	median	78%	83%	83%	69%	70%	64%
	75th percentile	85%	87%	89%	78%	79%	76%

Table 17. Specialist colleges: enrolments on notional level H long qualifications

		16-18			19+		
		97/98	98/99	99/2000	97/98	98/99	99/2000
Number of starters		–	–	–	1,000	1,100	1,100
Retention rate	mean	–	–	–	76%	81%	81%
Achievement rate	mean	–	–	–	81%	77%	80%
Achievement rate (all completers)	mean	–	–	–	78%	72%	77%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		–	–	–	2%	1%	0%
NVQs (%)		–	–	–	7%	11%	8%
Other (%)		–	–	–	92%	88%	92%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
Retention rate	25th percentile	–	–	–	72%	77%	73%
	median	–	–	–	83%	88%	85%
	75th percentile	–	–	–	95%	96%	96%
Achievement rate	25th percentile	–	–	–	63%	62%	67%
	median	–	–	–	79%	76%	85%
	75th percentile	–	–	–	94%	95%	100%
Achievement rate (all completers)	25th percentile	–	–	–	60%	57%	52%
	median	–	–	–	75%	75%	79%
	75th percentile	–	–	–	89%	80%	91%

Key: – fewer than 500 starters

Table 18. General FE and tertiary colleges with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on notional level 1 long qualifications

		16-18			19+		
		97/98	98/99	99/2000	97/98	98/99	99/2000
Number of starters		19,500	20,700	21,700	58,900	57,600	64,300
Retention rate	mean	77%	74%	76%	76%	73%	76%
Achievement rate	mean	49%	59%	64%	55%	58%	66%
Achievement rate (all completers)	mean	49%	56%	62%	54%	56%	63%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		8%	8%	7%	1%	1%	1%
NVQs (%)		11%	14%	12%	6%	7%	6%
Other (%)		81%	77%	81%	93%	92%	93%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	25th percentile	69%	68%	70%	71%	71%	70%
	median	77%	73%	76%	75%	76%	74%
	75th percentile	80%	79%	79%	81%	80%	79%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	25th percentile	40%	49%	56%	43%	48%	52%
	median	51%	56%	62%	54%	60%	71%
	75th percentile	59%	67%	75%	70%	68%	75%
<i>Achievement rate (all completers)</i>	25th percentile	39%	46%	53%	42%	47%	48%
	median	50%	55%	62%	52%	55%	62%
	75th percentile	59%	63%	67%	70%	64%	74%

Table 19. General FE and tertiary colleges with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on notional level 2 long qualifications

		16-18			19+		
		97/98	98/99	99/2000	97/98	98/99	99/2000
Number of starters		35,500	31,900	33,900	51,500	50,200	52,900
Retention rate	mean	75%	72%	73%	76%	75%	75%
Achievement rate	mean	57%	65%	69%	57%	63%	66%
Achievement rate (all completers)	mean	56%	63%	66%	56%	60%	62%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCSEs (%)		45%	40%	34%	21%	18%	16%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		16%	15%	15%	7%	6%	4%
NVQs (%)		15%	18%	16%	27%	29%	27%
Other (%)		24%	27%	35%	44%	46%	53%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	25th percentile	68%	67%	67%	71%	72%	71%
	median	72%	71%	75%	74%	75%	74%
	75th percentile	80%	78%	78%	82%	80%	79%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	25th percentile	46%	59%	64%	49%	56%	58%
	median	57%	63%	68%	57%	61%	66%
	75th percentile	66%	70%	73%	63%	71%	71%
<i>Achievement rate (all completers)</i>	25th percentile	46%	56%	60%	48%	54%	56%
	median	57%	62%	65%	54%	60%	63%
	75th percentile	64%	67%	72%	61%	67%	69%

Table 20. General FE and tertiary colleges with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on notional level 3 long qualifications

		16–18			19+		
		97/98	98/99	99/2000	97/98	98/99	99/2000
Number of starters		30,000	29,100	29,000	44,100	41,700	41,200
Retention rate	mean	77%	73%	75%	76%	75%	75%
Achievement rate	mean	59%	64%	65%	58%	63%	66%
Achievement rate (all completers)	mean	58%	63%	64%	57%	60%	63%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCE A/AS levels (%)		57%	55%	51%	20%	18%	16%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		27%	28%	27%	15%	13%	12%
NVQs (%)		4%	4%	4%	14%	15%	14%
Other (%)		12%	12%	18%	50%	54%	58%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	25th percentile	68%	67%	67%	70%	71%	72%
	median	75%	74%	73%	74%	76%	75%
	75th percentile.	82%	78%	80%	80%	80%	81%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	25th percentile	54%	56%	60%	52%	56%	61%
	median	60%	66%	67%	58%	64%	67%
	75th percentile	67%	70%	71%	67%	69%	74%
<i>Achievement rate (all completers)</i>	25th percentile	54%	56%	57%	52%	55%	60%
	median	60%	65%	66%	55%	60%	63%
	75th percentile	66%	69%	70%	64%	64%	69%

Table 21. General FE and tertiary colleges with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on notional level H long qualifications

		16–18			19+		
		97/98	98/99	99/2000	97/98	98/99	99/2000
Number of starters		–	–	–	9,600	9,000	6,600
Retention rate	mean	–	–	–	81%	78%	76%
Achievement rate	mean	–	–	–	50%	56%	55%
Achievement rate (all completers)	mean	–	–	–	47%	51%	54%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		–	–	–	0%	0%	0%
NVQs (%)		–	–	–	11%	11%	14%
Other (%)		–	–	–	89%	89%	86%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	25th percentile	–	–	–	72%	73%	71%
	median	–	–	–	78%	78%	75%
	75th percentile	–	–	–	84%	82%	83%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	25th percentile	–	–	–	40%	50%	45%
	median	–	–	–	47%	57%	51%
	75th percentile	–	–	–	62%	64%	64%
<i>Achievement rate (all completers)</i>	25th percentile	–	–	–	40%	45%	44%
	median	–	–	–	47%	55%	50%
	75th percentile	–	–	–	62%	60%	59%

Key: – fewer than 500 starters

Annex B: Definitions

Summary of Calculation Method

1 The methodology used to calculate the benchmarking data has not changed from last year. A detailed explanation of the methodology or 'pseudo code' is available on the FEFC website under the pages 'Data' then 'Data Collections' then 'Standard algorithms: Pseudo code'. The FEFC website can be accessed directly via the Council's website.

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

- ISR7 (December 1996; 1995/96)
- ISR10 (December 1997; 1996/97)
- ISR13 (December 1998; 1997/98)
- ISR16 (December 1999; 1998/99)
- ISR19 (December 2000; 1999/2000).

ISR7 is used to provide information on students starting qualifications that expected to end in 1997/98 or later, i.e. courses of three years or more duration. In a similar manner, ISR10 is used to provide information on students starting qualifications that were expected to end in 1997/98 or later, for example students on a two-year GNVQ programme expecting to end in 1997/98. The results in this publication were calculated using version 13.3 (update 3) of the qualification database.

3 Students and their qualifications are matched across the five years of ISR returns using the student reference, course code, start date and expected end date to calculate the number of starters at the beginning of each programme, retention across the whole programme, and achievement levels. Only qualifications that students expected to complete between 1997/98 and 1999/2000 are included in this publication.

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

Definitions

Number of starters

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

- a. from 1997/98 onwards, the number started excludes any student who transferred onto another qualification. The qualification the student transfers into will be included as a start on the new qualification. Analyses of 1999/2000 results show around 1% of all enrolments were recorded as transferring onto another qualification;
- b. students who start on a qualification and withdraw before 1 November of their first year are not recorded on the ISR and as such are excluded from the number of starters;
- c. each qualification a student is enrolled on is shown as a separate 'start';
- d. the 'number of starters' includes some non-Council-funded provision as set out in paragraph 4 above;
- e. a student on a two year programme who began their studies in October 1998 would appear in the results for 1999/2000 as this is the college year in which they expected to complete their qualification, even if they withdrew in the first year of their programme.

Retention rate

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

Achievement rate

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

Achievement rate (all completers)

8 The achievement rate (all completers) is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved divided by the number of completed qualifications. This denominator includes those completers recorded with unknown outcomes in the ISR, for example outcome code 4 '*exam taken but result not known*' or outcome code 5 '*learning activities are complete but exam has not yet been taken*'. Partial achievements are not included as achievements.

Age

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

Short qualifications

10 A qualification is 'short' if it has an expected length of fewer than 24 weeks. In practice the majority of short qualifications are of 12 weeks duration or less.

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

Notional NVQ level

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

level 1 includes qualifications at level 1 and level 'E' (entry level), such as NVQs, foundation GNVQs and other foundation or pre-foundation qualifications

level 2 includes level 2 NVQs, intermediate GNVQs and precursors (BTEC first certificate or first diploma, City and Guilds Diploma of Vocational Education at intermediate level), GCSEs and other intermediate level qualifications

level 3 includes level 3 NVQs, advanced GNVQs and precursors (BTEC national certificate or national diploma, City and Guilds Diploma of Vocational Education at national level), GCE A and AS levels and other advanced level qualifications

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

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

GCSEs

14 Prior to 1997/98, some colleges recorded all GCSEs at grades A* to G as an achievement in the ISR outcome field, other colleges recorded grades A* to C as an achievement, and some colleges used a mixture of both practices.

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

16 Since 1997/98, GCSEs at grades A* to C have been coded in the ISR against outcome code 6 '*qualification aim achieved and achievement funding is being claimed*'. In addition, some GCSEs at grades D to G are included against this code where the college can claim achievement units. These are described in the FEFC publication '*How to Apply for Funding 1998-99*' as follows:

'where a student's learning agreement includes as the primary learning goal, a programme of adult basic education leading to a GCSE in English or Mathematics where the highest grade achievable is a C, then GCSE grades D to G will be acceptable for achievement purposes'.

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

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

19 The supporting data available on the Council's website will show the achievement rate for 1999/2000 GCSEs split between achieved (achievement funding claimed) and achieved (achievement funding not claimed). This information will be available for the sector and by college type.

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

Measures of college variability

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

22 The results in this publication show the rates which:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Widening participation factor

28 Each college has a widening participation (WP) factor calculated by the Council. It is based on the number of students recruited from areas with different levels of deprivation, using a modified version of the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Index of Local Conditions. Students with addresses in postcodes with high levels of socio-economic deprivation are

allocated a factor according to the level of deprivation. The higher the number of students from such postcodes, the higher the WP factor. The WP factor therefore provides a basis for identifying both individual and geographical disadvantage.

29 Specifically the WP factor has been calculated by comparing the total number of units generated in 1998/99 by each college, by the number of units generated excluding widening participation units.

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

31 Benchmarking data for general further education and tertiary colleges which have a widening participation factor of 1.025 or higher are therefore shown separately in tables 18 to 21.

Presentation issues

32 The 'number of starters' is rounded to the nearest 100 in the benchmarking data in this publication and the supporting data. Where the number of starters is fewer than 500, results are not shown.

33 Measures of college variability are not shown where there is an insufficient number of colleges (fewer than 18) to calculate the percentile.

34 The percentage breakdown of number started may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

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

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

Coverage

37 The benchmarking data for 1997/98 to 1999/2000 have been calculated for 358 (of 424) colleges where ISR7, ISR10, ISR13, ISR16 and ISR19 data were available. This includes:

- 28 (of 31) specialist colleges; agriculture and horticulture colleges and art, design and performing arts colleges
- 101 (of 105) sixth form colleges
- 229 (of 288) general further education and tertiary colleges, including designated colleges
- 28 (of 37) general further education and tertiary colleges with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas.

38 The 66 colleges excluded from the benchmarking data consist of:

- 29 colleges that have changed their student reference system, due to a merger or otherwise, meaning that it is not possible to match students between ISR returns systematically
- 17 colleges with poor data quality, identified during the benchmarking process
- 20 colleges that had not returned valid ISR19 (December 2000; 1999/2000) data in time to be included in the results.

39 The results for 1997/98 and 1998/99 have been recalculated from *Benchmarking Data 1996-97 to 1998-99* published in September 2000 for the following reasons:

- a number of colleges have revised their ISR data, either as a response to the 1998/99 performance indicators or for other purposes
- there have been some changes in the qualification database, for example some qualifications have changed programme area or have a known notional level that was previously unknown.

In most cases the recalculations of retention and achievement are slight.

Comparison with Statistical First Releases and Performance Indicators

40 Analysis of colleges' ISR returns published in *Statistical First Releases and Performance Indicators*, shows counts of students or enrolments on qualifications for a particular college year. In comparison, the benchmarking

data tracks students and their qualifications across college years and presents the results in terms of the numbers expecting to complete their qualifications in a particular college year.

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

42 The methods used to calculate retention in the benchmarking data differ from the methods used in the calculation of FEFC performance indicators as shown in table 1.

43 The methods used to calculate achievement in the benchmarking data differ from the methods used in the calculation of FEFC performance indicators as shown in table 2. The differences are less marked for achievement than for retention.

Table 1. Calculation of retention

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

Table 2. Calculation of achievement

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

Annex C: Illustration of the Effect of Qualification Type Mix

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

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

3 In our example college, the level 3 provision for adults includes many more NVQs, and fewer GCE A/AS levels, GNVQs and 'Other' qualifications than nationally. In order

to check whether the published benchmarking data for all level 3 qualifications are an appropriate comparator, the following calculation may be used:

Average GFEC/TC retention rate = 79%

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

10% GCE A/AS retention rate of 76% = 7.6

5% GNVQ retention rate of 74% = 3.7

50% NVQ retention rate of 81% = 40.5

35% Other long retention rate of 83% = 29.05

80.85%

rounds to 81%

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

	retention rate	Average for GFEC/TC achievement rate	breakdown of enrolments	Example College breakdown of enrolments
All qualifications	79%	69%	–	–
GCE A/AS	76%	73%	15%	10%
GNVQ	74%	82%	9%	5%
NVQ	81%	73%	17%	50%
Other long	83%	64%	59%	35%

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

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

Average GFEC/TC achievement rate = 69%

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

10% GCE A/AS achievement rate of 73% = 7.3

5% GNVQ achievement rate of 82% = 4.1

50% NVQ achievement rate of 73% = 36.5

35% Other long achievement rate of 64% =
22.4

70.3

rounds to 70%

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

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