

# Prior attainment and the ILR

Department for  
**Innovation,  
Universities &  
Skills**

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A Good  
Practice Guide



# Table of contents

Section	Page
Foreword	3
Acknowledgements	4
Introduction	6
1. Data collection and entry	9
2. Senior Management Team (SMT) representation and review	13
3. Standardisation of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)	16
4. Process efficiencies	20
5. Reliance on key individuals	26
Areas of future support and guidance	29
Provider toolkit	31
Provider actions checklist	33



# Foreword

This guide is intended to help all staff in colleges who are involved in collecting and recording data on LSC-funded adult Level 2 provision, including senior staff.

Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets are not exciting stuff, but they are an essential part of driving Government priorities. For skills, the Adult Level 2 Target is one of the key targets supporting the Government's Skills Strategy, published in 2003. Level 2 qualifications provide the minimum platform of skills for employability that all adults should have to survive and prosper in the world of work in the 21st Century. Both the current 2010 target, and the new targets resulting from Lord Leitch's review of skills, set high ambitions to increase the number of adults qualified to Level 2 or higher: getting to over 90 per cent of adults by 2020.

For the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), this means an increasing priority for raising the skills of those without qualifications and ensuring that they have first call on public funding, at a time when there is pressure on skills budgets.

But it also means that we rely on colleges and providers to be able to respond to that shift in priorities and to keep us informed about progress towards the Target. They have to target and recruit more learners without Level 2 qualifications, and they have to ensure they have high quality management information available to track how they are doing. This includes accurate and reliable recording of prior qualifications of learners being enrolled in the college.

Whilst many providers have high quality, reliable data on learners' prior qualifications, in some areas, significant numbers of adult learners' previous qualifications are not being recorded. This makes it difficult to track progress towards the Target. That is why DIUS and LSC commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to carry out a study in two LSC regions into why there are wide variations in the proportion of this essential data being recorded for adults on full Level 2 courses.

We also asked PwC to identify colleges which have developed very effective systems to record prior attainment and to make this available more widely. This Good Practice Guide has been produced as a result of this work and I believe that it provides a really practical guide for colleges and other providers on how to manage the recording of this data as effectively as possible. It includes some well-tested approaches to collecting, recording and managing data within a college, which can save time for data management staff, improve performance and help colleges in supporting progression of learners to higher skill levels and further learning. I hope you will find it useful.

**Philip Edmeades**  
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**Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills**

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The providers who contributed as part of the ILR coding and prior attainment review were:

### North West Region

• Blackpool and the Flyde College	• MANCAT	• Warrington Collegiate
• Carlisle College	• Myerscough College	• West Cheshire College
• Lakes College West Cumbria	• St Helens College	• Wigan and Leigh College
• Liverpool Community College	• Stockport College	

### East of England Region

• Barnfield College	• College of West Anglia	• Norfolk County Council
• Bedford College	• Dunstable College	• Suffolk New College
• Cambridge Regional College	• Hertfordshire Regional College	• Thurrock and Basildon College

### Disclaimer

The Department for Innovation Universities and Skills, and PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, have produced this good practice guide. It is not intended to be a substitute for detailed funding guidance or other mandatory guidance which is issued by the Learning and Skills Council in relation to prior attainment and ILR data coding. In producing this guide the Department for Innovation Universities and Skills, Learning and Skills Council and PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP accept no responsibility for providers failing to meet funding requirements as a result of non-compliance with the requirements of mandatory guidance.

# Introduction

## Background

This Good Practice Guide follows an investigation into ILR (Individualised Learner Record) coding and prior attainment data. The review was conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC) and included a series of workshops and site visits to a number of selected providers in the North West, and East of England regions. It focused on identifying the key issues faced by providers, current actions undertaken to improve prior attainment data, areas of good practice and future support and development requirements.

The message from providers, the Department for Innovation Universities and Skills and the Learning and Skills Council is clear; although data is improving in this area, more can be done to ensure all providers minimise the extent of 'not known' values reported for adult prior attainment on the ILR. This good practice guide has been produced to help providers to assess their current actions and identify ways to improve their data using real-life case study examples from other providers.

## Introduction

The guide is aimed at helping providers assess what actions can be taken to improve prior attainment data collection and allow them to challenge their existing systems and procedures. The options offer a choice of ways to address data collection and recording in an efficient manner. In addition, this guide provides real-life examples of provider actions being undertaken.

Tangible outcomes from the use of this guide may include:

- reducing the number of 'unknowns' for learner

prior attainment

- reducing the amount of time taken to follow up incomplete or inaccurate data collected
- reducing the number of times you record prior attainment information on the ILR
- increase the level of importance and reporting upon prior attainment and Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets.

We recognise that there are some restrictions on where improvements can be made because of the nature of some of the data collected by providers, for example, many learners may genuinely be unaware of their prior attainment (e.g. international qualifications or old qualifications). We urge you, however, to challenge your current ways of working so as to see whether you can gain efficiencies and improve data recorded on the ILR, whilst continuing to meet LSC funding requirements without compromise to quality.

## Key highlights from initial review

Providers were engaged across the two regions: East of England; and the North West, through a series of workshops and visits. These interactions clarified the key issues, provider concerns, areas of future support and guidance, current actions undertaken to improve prior attainment data and good practice case studies to support these.

A number of areas of focus for providers around prior attainment data collection were highlighted and are summarised as follows:

- **16 to 18-year-olds and adult learners:** Providers often prioritise learners aged 16-18 over adults as they constitute the largest proportion of their funding, and it is easier to

collate prior attainment data for this group than for adult learners;

- **Full-time and part-time learners:** Equally, there is a tendency to focus on full-time learners as prior attainment data is generally easier to collect than for part-time learners
- **Firstness and the employer responsiveness agenda:** Employers generally do not view first full Level 2 courses as a priority. In many instances the employers only want learners to get skilled or re-skill for specific jobs. This encourages providers to offer more bite-sized qualifications but conflicts with government targets for adults for full Level 2 qualifications
- **Fee remission and prior attainment self-certification:** Providers often rely on learner self-certification, but learner knowledge of fee remission rules has led to some misrepresentation of data. Also, providers do not always retain evidence of prior attainment which can cause difficulties if a change of learner status is later identified
- **Integration of MIS teams:** Improved data collection was evident in providers whose MIS / data teams were part of their senior management teams
- **Learner volumes and data at first contact:** Some providers argued that although it was most efficient to collect prior attainment data at the first contact with the learner, this is often not possible due to the volume of people attending information / welcome events;
- **Level 2 and Train to Gain Targets:** Providers successful in delivery through either Level 2 or Train to Gain suggested that they are constructively balancing learners between the two areas in order to achieve both Targets;
- **Progression:** Innovative ways of encouraging learner progression are being developed,

including guaranteeing places on Level 2 courses, shorter courses leading to full qualifications, and creative fee structures; and

- **Prioritisation:** Although completing prior qualifications is mandatory in the Individual Learner Record (ILR), providers do have the option of noting 'not known'. To increase the accuracy of data, some providers prioritise collection for certain courses (first Level 2, full Level 2 and full-time learners).

The workshops also highlighted that providers had, over the years, developed their own processes for monitoring, recording and reporting prior attainment that was specific to their college. We recognise that prior attainment data is improving across both regions, with examples of some providers achieving better results than others. This is often as a result of taking simple actions. The issues and actions that were raised by providers fall into five broad categories that are outlined in further detail within this guide:

- 1. Data collection and entry**
- 2. Senior management team representation and review**
- 3. Standardisation of IAG**
- 4. Process efficiencies**
- 5. Reliance on key individuals.**

## Action signs

In this guide we have used a number of “signs” for you to help consider the actions that may need to be taken within your organisation. The signs are as follows:

## Annexes

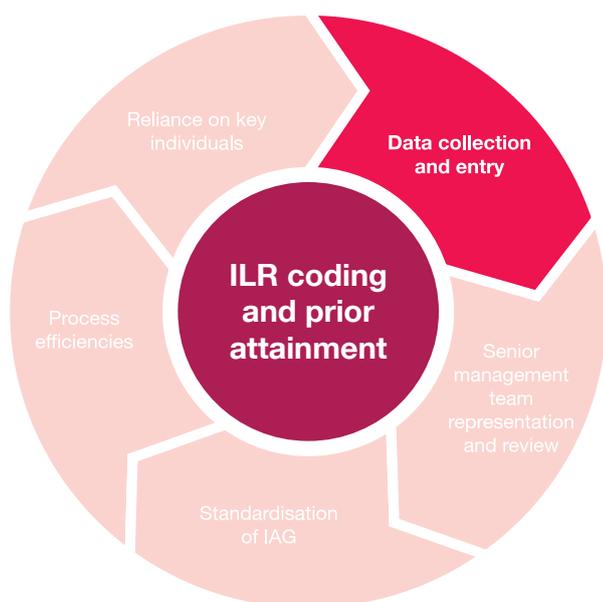
At the end of this guide we have included a provider toolkit with links to some tools to help support you in improving prior attainment data and coding.

	<b>Immediate action</b>		<b>Questions</b>
	<b>Key issues</b>		<b>Best Practice</b>

This guide includes examples of good practice from a number of providers for each of the categories listed above. Whilst providers have demonstrated good practice in one area, they may not necessarily be performing ‘well’ in all categories. It is strongly recommended that providers work across each and all of these categories so as to improve performance and promote better data collection and recording for prior attainment. Processes adopted should also be embedded within daily activities and linked to the provision priorities of each provider.

# 1. Data collection and entry

The systems, documentation and methods of data collection and entry should incorporate prioritisation of key data for providers. This should be timely and should capture data at the most relevant point from the learner.



## Aims and objectives

- a. To collect ILR prior attainment data for every adult learner.
- b. To complete ILR data field L35. In particular, striving to identify prior attainment levels achieved by adult learners as opposed to recording 'not known'.



## Issues

### Prioritisation of data

Providers who are struggling to collect prior attainment data are prioritising certain learners or courses, and targeting these areas for follow-up. Provider examples of priority groups have included full-time learners, full Level 2 learners and first Level 2 learners. Prior attainment data may be recorded for 'such priority groups' but not for all learners. **The need to capture firstness**

Many providers are aware of the Level 2 targets but importance of 'firstness' is not always recognised, reported on by Senior Management Teams or considered a priority.

### Timing of data entry onto ILR

Many providers are collecting prior attainment data during the enrolment process but updating the ILR almost six months later. Some providers exclude prior attainment from enrolment altogether and follow up during admissions. Delays could add to potential omissions and performance against the L35 field.



## What are the options?

### 1. **Where possible, collect data upon entry into college (enrolment and/or induction).**



*“Enrolment process and procedures – objectives:*

- *Maximise prior attainment data collection at enrolment;*
- *Use prior attainment data for target setting and firstness reports;*
- *Identify records where data is incomplete;*
- *Collect missing data through academic departments; and*
- *Link data completeness through to certification”*

Hertfordshire Regional College



*“Our Norfolk County Council Customer Service Centre (CSC) initially enrolls the bulk of our learners directly onto TERMS (provider software). They have also been trained in much the same way as the curriculum teams. They use an Adult Education script that they read to callers that enables them to ask pertinent questions relevant to the data we need to record about them. To date, we have been asking tutors to collect information about prior attainment but this has not been particularly successful. On receipt of the clarification providers have asked for from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) about the prior attainment levels, we will look to incorporate this question within the CSC script so that we capture the information at the point of registration to a course.”*

Norfolk County Council

### 2. **Following data collection on entry, use prompts at various points in the year where learner contact is already pre-agreed to obtain prior attainment information.**



*“Prior attainment data collection activities:*

- *Collected at enrolment – primarily for FT learners.*
- *Use of previous year data values.*
- *Report on “unknowns” and try to contact learner through tutors or direct.”*

Bedford College

 *“The MIS Manager has devised an admissions evening/event in order to streamline the admissions process by offering initial interviews with tutors as well as induction and course information. This was in part designed to prevent the long queues of learners and reduce waiting times before learners are offered a formal place. It also provides an opportunity to capture prior attainment information and pre-populate enrolment forms prior to enrolment.”*

West Cheshire College

**3. If considered less bureaucratic, retain copies of prior attainment on file for learners who are continuing with the provider, for the benefit of future records.**

 *Prior attainment process:*

- *Some courses have entry requirements, therefore learners must prove grades prior to enrolment;*
- *All prior attainment evidence is photocopied and input – influences L35 field;*
- *Try to collect all data at the point of entry (enrolment), but gaps in data are followed up via communications to curriculum data managers and tutors;*
- *Try and put greater influence on remitted full Level 2/3s for correct prior attainment data; and*
- *Use prior attainment (and qualifications on entry) in value added analysis to encourage tutors to follow up any gaps.”*

Cambridge Regional College

 *“Physical evidence of prior qualifications is scanned into the system for relevant staff to see as part of the enrolment process. The Admissions team obtain copies of the students’ qualifications on entering the course, where prior quals are required to join. These are keyed into the ‘Qualifications’ table of Unit’e’; with name, type, grade, awarding body and date obtained (staff & time permitting). The copies of certificates are then scanned onto the system (staff & time permitting) and are then available as hotlinks on the Myerscope student record.”*

Myerscough College

**4. Use prior attainment data from prior years if learner previously attended the college.**



 *“Learners with us last year have prior attainment data updated from achievements so returners are not an issue. Prior attainment data collection for full Level 2 and 3 is good. On-line enrolment prior attainment data collection is good. Enrolment by telephone, in person and by post is ok. The college have a target of 98% completeness for end of year”*

Hertfordshire Regional College

 *“Prior attainment data capture process involves looking at previous years qualification data if this relates to a returning student”*

Cambridge Regional College

 *“Use is made of previous year’s data for prior attainment values of returning students from a previous level of study”*

Thurrock and Basildon College

 *“The MIS team will actively go through the previous year’s ILR records to pick up prior attainment of learners who have continued in learning. This is done to get records as accurate as possible. College data demonstrates that this practice is assisting in the collection of prior attainment and reducing the level of unknown qualifications.”*

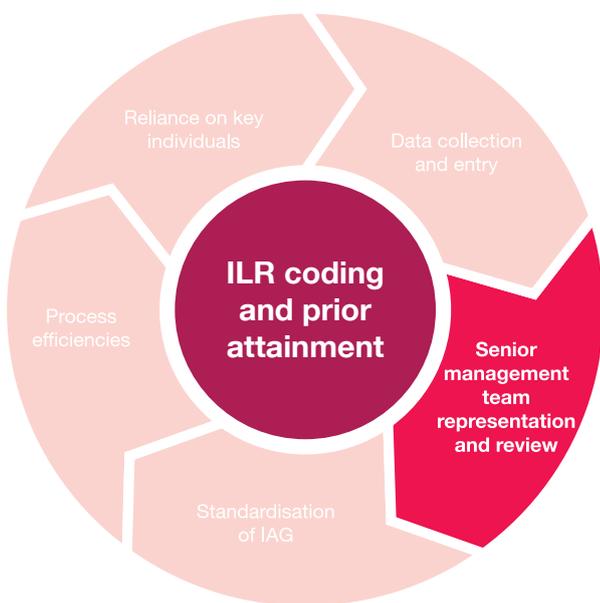
College of West Anglia

**5. If learner data is on-line, allow learner’s access to update/amend/verify their prior attainment qualifications.**

**6. Update the ILR; following enrolment and at specified points in the year, Prior attainment quality checks and follow-up activities performed.**

## 2. Senior Management Team (SMT) representation and review

Management must reinforce the importance of collecting and recording prior attainment data accurately for internal and external needs. This requires time commitment and a clear understanding of provider and LSC priorities.



### Aims and objectives

- To be recognised as an important part of the college structure.
- To raise the profile internally of data requirements and the link to strategic planning, LSC priorities and Government targets.

### ! Issues

#### Continuity of staff with 'knowledge'

Providers often rely on one or a few key individuals with deep knowledge of the ILR, funding rules and prior attainment coding structures. Knowledge needs to be shared otherwise data could deteriorate when staff leave the provider.

#### MIS training and input into provider decision-making and planning cycles

The importance of the data team is not always recognised or appreciated in the planning and decision-making process. Provider and LSC targets are often not sufficiently communicated to MIS teams to raise the profile of crucial data that must be collected and recorded.

#### Understanding of implications upon performance and/or funding

The purpose and use of prior attainment data may not be fully appreciated by provider staff particularly where there is not a direct access to or interest from SMTs. This leads to a lack of understanding of the impact upon performance and/or funding.



## What are the options?

### 1. **Include MIS/data team representation at senior level on provider Senior Management Teams.**



*“During the Programme Planning Documentation (PPD) process a senior Vice Principal and two MIS Managers discuss government priorities with academic staff to ensure understanding of data collection requirements for the college”*

MANCAT



*“There is a cycle of monthly management meetings in the college. One of these is specifically for monitoring. There is a report back on every funding stream and every target. This information feeds into the Finance and Resources Committee. The outcomes of management team meetings are shared with all staff on a monthly basis”*

West Cheshire College

### 2. **College Principal demonstrates buy-in and provides ‘recognised’ input into data requirements and priority areas for the college.**



*“To provide the relevant training to staff on Value Added the staff development programme has been used. Relevant course tutors were bought in to learn how to use the systems and value added data. The staff could see the Principal involved in this training, resulting in greater buy-in.*

Dunstable College



*“The college performs excellently in relation to full Level 2 prior attainment. Data is collected at the point of contact, the enrolment process is robust and errors are checked and chased diligently. The CIS department and manager have a high profile in the college, reporting directly to one of two deputy principles i.e. by passing the need to report to a vice principal.”*

Stockport College

**3. Report regularly on prior attainment (as a whole, Level 2 learners, full-time learners and first Level 2 learners). Submit status reports to SMT for consideration.**



*“Information regarding priority targets is passed down from the Senior Leadership Team. Enrolment staff were then instructed to prioritise L2E (Level 2 Entitlement) and L3E (Level 3 Entitlement) over benefits fee remission”*

Stockport College



*“The MIS team is well linked into the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) via the information manager. Curriculum leaders / managers recognise the weaknesses in using prior attainment data and have developed a system of diagnostics to better ascertain learners needs.”*

Warrington Collegiate



*“Performance Management Data is widely available to college staff and there are regular review meetings with the Academic Board and SMT to monitor progress.”*

Dunstable College

**4. Generate LIS/other reports to discuss prior attainment performance**



*“Validation errors are sent out every week to Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Heads of Section. In this way the numbers of ‘not known’ prior attainment learners are monitored to look for year on year improvements.”*

Carlisle College

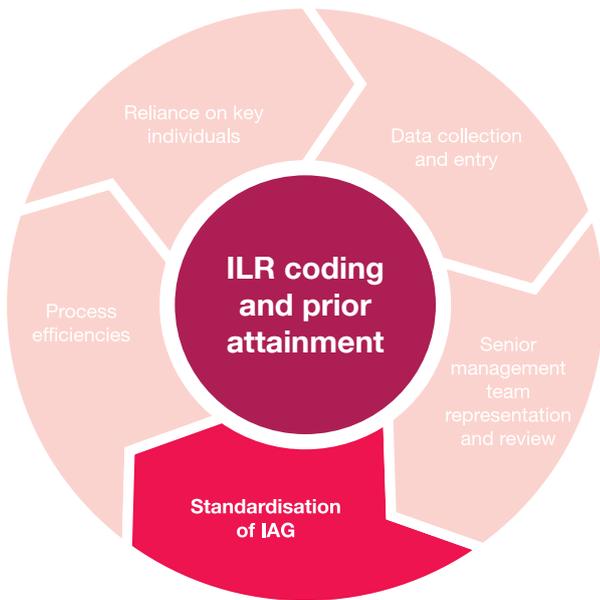


*“The college has done some significant work in improving the collection of prior attainment data resulting in the development of their own bespoke system. The college now actively collects prior attainment for all full-time learners in as much detail as possible. This data is then used by the senior management team for analysis such as Value Added/Distance Travelled and learner entitlement.*

Hertfordshire Regional College

# 3. Standardisation of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

Consistency in guidance availability, clarification of LSC requirements and the importance placed on key targets/priority areas must be understood at all levels within a college to enable both learners and staff to appreciate the importance of data requirements.



## Aims and objectives

- a. To ensure that all providers and their staff have a clear understanding of the IAG required for learners attending courses at their establishments.



## Issues

### Poor knowledge and understanding of firstness

Some providers have expressed instances of poor knowledge and understanding of the importance of firstness and prior attainment data. This is particularly true where targets and use of prior attainment data was not known across the college.

### Inconsistent Information, Advice and Guidance

We noted examples of provider staff who received prior attainment and enrolment training, but continued to provide inconsistent information advice and guidance to learners.

### Fee remission

Confusion over what can and cannot be remitted is leading to incorrect advice to learners. This can lead to unrealistic expectations around learner entitlement resulting in reduced funding and non-achievement of core targets for providers.



## What are the options?

5.

**Seek clarity over funding and ILR specification guidance with the LSC, and update staff training on prior attainment.**



*“Within the scope of this project the collection of prior attainment data had been re-prioritised by the LSC through the L35 ILR field. From a business perspective this was useful for us for two reasons. Firstness and student target setting.”*

Hertfordshire Regional College

6.

**Document all training material used at the start of the year, and ensure this is refreshed for any changes in policy. Enable all users to access this information on the intranet.**



*“Each curriculum member receives an overview of the service and the provision it offers. Staff who undertake data inputting are led through the ILR field by field via TERMS (software used for recording ILR information) and an explanation offered as to the relevance and importance of each piece of data. Training is delivered by the Data Quality officer, who regularly monitors the standard of the data in key areas, prior attainment being one of these. Where weaknesses are identified, refresher training is provided. Procedures and paperwork for gathering the information are reviewed and where necessary, amended accordingly. Regular workshops are run to inform users of any funding and data updates.”*

Norfolk County Council

7.

**Ensure prior attainment ILR coding training is provided on at least an annual basis, including demonstration of the tools and techniques that can be used to identify the levels obtained.**





*“MIS staff produce an annual enrolment procedure manual. They then inform enrolment staff and learners of updated requirements’ on an annual basis. This allows enrolments to be completed with fewer queries, and covers the following requirements: eligibility of learner, fees / waiver options, L2 & L3 entitlement, type of learner, fee remission and prior attainment. The manual assists the SLT / SMT to monitor enrolments more swiftly, target reports are also available quickly, and this reduces errors/omissions on ILR data”*

Warrington Collegiate



*“As part of the lecturing staff induction process they are introduced to the CIS department where they are given an overview of the department, informing them of what documentation is to be completed and an understanding as to why. Part of this process includes completion of the enrolment form, they are also provided with a booklet on how to complete an enrolment form section by section. This includes the collection of previous qualifications achieved. Follow up workshops are carried out during July and August to re-enforce the process and advise staff of any changes in anticipation of forthcoming enrolment sessions.*

*One of the benefits is that we have well informed and trained lecturing/enrolling staff that have a clear understanding of exactly what is to be completed and why it is important to collect such data.*

*As a result there is less follow up required from the CIS staff due to completeness and accuracy of information from the onset resulting ultimately in resources being put to better use.*

*The resources used for training and updates ensure we maximise the efficiency of our resources to ensure enrolments are accurate.*

*This has not been an easy process to improve our performance and it has taken nearly three years to get to the position we are in now.”*

Lakes College West Cumbria

**8. Introduce spot checks on data entered by staff to quality assure that training has been effective.**



*“Enrolment and staff training involves:*

- Mandatory training for enrolment staff;*
- Follow up of staff where there are large number of errors/missing data;*
- Data checkers process enrolment forms prior to input;*
- Mystery shoppers ensure staff training has been understood and is effective; and*
- Email all students with unknown prior attainment – updating records online.*

*The benefits of the above process have included wide dissemination of the importance of returning complete and accurate data, and staff awareness that inadequate practice will be monitored, identified and followed up. The time involved in using mystery shoppers and follow up activity has not been quantified at present.”*

St Helens College



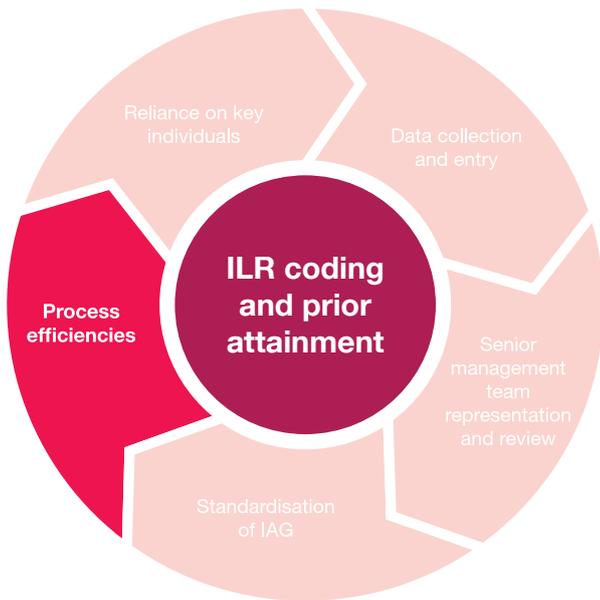
*“All enrollers have to pass test on inputting and enrolling to the learner database. Access to the learner database is not given until they have successfully passed the test. Refresher training has to be taken every July/ August ready for enrolment. This training includes changes in data collection.*

*All academic staff have to attend enrolment training that is separate from the enrolment staff. This informs them of all the changes and what is expected of them with regard to the collecting of learner data via the advice and guidance provided one-to-one with the learner.”*

Blackpool and the Flyde College

# 4. Process efficiencies

Consistency in guidance availability, clarification of LSC requirements and the importance placed on key targets/priority areas must be understood at all levels within a college to enable both learners and staff to appreciate the importance of data requirements.



## Aims and objectives

- To identify ways to reduce bureaucracy in the collection of essential data
- To enable 'leaner' processes for enrolment and prior attainment data capture



## Issues

### Multitude of data collection methods

Providers are splitting data collection (through admissions and enrolment procedures) between different departments including MIS, learner services, heads of department for subject areas and others. This is adding to the complexity of data collection.

### Responsibility shared amongst different individuals/departments within a provider

Where data collection is shared amongst provider staff, there is often an absence of clarity over who is responsible for prior attainment data collection. This is diluting the impact of the process, leading to incomplete and/or inaccurate data.

### Controls over enrolment often overlooked

Some providers are overlooking controls in place to capture prior attainment data, and continuing to enrol and admit learners onto courses, recording 'not known' for L35. This is a particular concern for courses where knowledge of prior attainment is a pre-requisite for the course.



## What are the options?

### 1. **Improve the use of existing IT environment to promote prior attainment data collection.**



*“The college provides integrated information systems across all functional data systems and embeds them as core to the management of the business from curriculum to strategic management. This enables users of the information to view their live data and to understand that it is theirs (the user’s) and not ‘ours’ (MIS’s). Therefore we have closed the loop on data ownership. This means that the whole business is conscious of and helps support a clean set of data and a clean ILR. It also means that everyone is supportive of new systems for data capture and information systems to support the business process”*

Hertfordshire Regional College



*“The college works on a ‘collect once use many times’ principle. Once recorded and entered onto the MIS system, the data feeds into the intranet; all staff, particularly curriculum staff can then pull off reports in order to chase prior attainment data or obtain information relating to the course that individuals have enrolled on.”*

Carlisle College



*“The college has an extensive intranet; there is a CIS home page which contains live reports for use by curriculum staff. It (the system) is very well used and understood across the college.”*

Liverpool Community College

### 2. **Reduce chasing of incomplete forms by introducing defined quality checks**



*“The front of house (reception) function within the college plays a major part in the enrolment process, some initial advice and guidance is given and important referrals are made to other members of staff. Prior attainment fields are flagged on the system used on the front of house computer screens. This has the added benefit that reception staff can spend time doing other duties when not enrolling, which the college finds to be a more efficient system than employing banks of imputers for prolonged periods of time.”*

Carlisle College

### 3. Increase the extent of data capture at first point of contact



*“Academic staff have an enrolment checklist (one of the questions specifically relates to prior attainment). The application form captures prior attainment information. If completed online, this can be checked and cross referenced to any previous records of attainment that the learner may have. The data is also inputted onto the system. Prior attainment is also collected and inputted after the interview with the tutor.*

*Level 1 learners are encouraged to further their learning at the end of the course and are provided with a pre-populated enrolment form in August to ensure that this can be done efficiently before the main enrolment period in September.*

*There are robust testing and assessment procedures for adults prior to the main enrolment process to ensure that the learners’ needs are being met and they are being given the best advice, guidance and support during their learning.*

*There is a significant role for reception staff during enrolment. After the tutor has been seen, all learners have to go to reception, their form is checked there for accuracy and completeness and referred to the appropriate person / function if necessary.*

*Enrolment is scheduled so that different courses / curriculum areas arrive on different days.*

*There are a number of internal deadlines and targets to hit for staff involved in the enrolment process i.e. learner must complete their enrolment form within four weeks, payment plan must be completed by learner within four weeks, MIS staff take five minutes to input the enrolment form, short course enrolment takes no more than two minutes. Staff are almost measured daily on their inputting performance, action is taken on an exception basis.*

*Incomplete enrolment information is pro-actively chased e.g. learners are called by Reception Services if they haven’t shown up at enrolment.”*

MANCAT



*“Enrolment processes and procedures:*

- For full-time learners we collect detailed prior attainment data at enrolment through an on-line system. We run full-time enrolment booths. The end process is photo and ID card print. The qualification on entry capture runs parallel to this, i.e. a member of staff enters their details while they wait for the ID card to print.*
- Any prior attainment details not collected here (e.g. late enrolments) are entered by the back office from a paper form.*
- For part-time learners we are collecting L35 data at enrolment. It is a mandatory field on the on-line enrolment, telephone and in-person enrolment. Enrolment by post is still an issue and we still chase these throughout the year.”*

Hertfordshire Regional College

4. **Clarify clear roles and responsibilities for prior attainment data capture (i.e. MIS, learner services, or lecturers).**



*“Until September 2006, the task of dealing with data had been contained within a central MIS team. The team would provide several different types of progress and monitoring reports on performance against key targets. The service went through a major restructure at this time which saw each of the Senior Management Team (SMT) taking responsibility for one or more curriculum areas and a specified geographical district. In order to make the reports and statistics more meaningful to all concerned, it was felt that each curriculum area should take ownership of their data, including inputting.*

*Our data is becoming increasingly more accurate and in-depth. Since taking ‘ownership’ of the data, curriculum teams now understand that inputting needs to be up to date and complete. They are quick to point out any anomalies they come across in reports and generally show a greater level of interest in what the data can tell them and how they can put it to best use.”*

Norfolk County Council

**5. Do not enrol learners where prior attainment data is withheld by the learner, and is ‘known’ but not provided upon enrolment.**



*“The whole application process is recorded and monitored using an on-line system. Each time a letter goes out it is recorded. So the progress and relative stage of completion for learners’ applications can be quickly assessed.*

*The college produces batch updates, where prior attainment for each individual is looked at together with the highest qualification; the L35 is then updated according to any discrepancy. In some areas of the college, such as A level/GCSE, If the learner has not completed prior attainment documentation, he/she can’t be enrolled. Adult learners enrolling as a first full Level 2 or first full Level 3 are required to sign a declaration stating that they do not already have first full Level 2 or first full Level 3 This was stressed at training for curriculum staff.”*

Liverpool Community College

**6. Existing controls should be implemented with greater rigour to help reduce the extent of ‘not known’ prior attainment recorded on the ILR. Systems should be tailored to enable greater user understanding, easing data collection activity.**



*“When reviewing its enrolment procedures and systems following the summer 2006 enrolment the college IS team proposed the development of a “Real Time System” which would feed directly into ILR reports and provide up to date data on learner status. The existing system comprised of paper forms which following completion were either scanned or data inputted and then verified.*

*The new system proposed would also incorporate data changes such as learner withdrawals, transfer to other courses, amendments to personal data and link with timetables and register management software. It was decided that only a bespoke system would meet this requirement and a small project group of IS staff and the VP was formed to take the project forward.*

*Phase One was brainstorming the process, procedures, the information to be collected, how such a system would impact on potential learners and staff and how the system would benefit the college. Bespoke as opposed to the purchase of an off the shelf product was also investigated.*

*By mid April 2007 the project was ready to move to Phase Two which was the writing of the software, design of screens and initial trials. Two highly committed software developers (from a total IS team of three software developers and two admin officers), delivered Phase Two of the project in two months so that by July 2007 the system went live with the 07/08 enrolments.*

*Designed in a way to ensure all data is collected at each stage and data already stored in respect of those who have already studied at the college is easily retrieved without having to repeat input, the system proved to be an instant success.*

*Introducing the new system with very limited lead in time caused problems in staff training; however these were overcome by the enthusiasm of staff to use the system.*

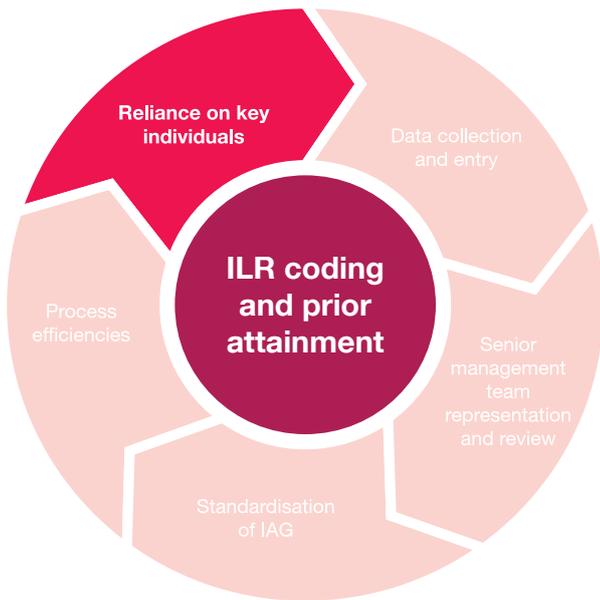
*The advantage of the IS system now in place is the availability of “Real Time Data” which is constantly used for planning and monitoring business objectives and targets.*

*It should be recognised however that this would not have been achieved without the vision and commitment of a very small IS team.”*

Barnfield College

# 5. Reliance on key individuals

Consistency in guidance availability, clarification of LSC requirements and the importance placed on key targets/priority areas must be understood at all levels within a college to enable both learners and staff to appreciate the importance of data requirements.



## Aims and objectives

- To ensure all staff have a core level of understanding of the requirements for obtaining and recording ILR data.
- To enable junior level staff to step in, where there are movements in staff or reduced resource.
- To develop a culture of knowledge sharing within teams.



## Issues

### Absence of knowledge sharing

Significant experience and knowledge of ILR by key individuals is not always capitalised by providers through effective training and development of others. This would enable continuity in processes should key individuals leave.

### Delegation to wider college resources

Significant reliance on course tutors or curriculum staff to complete elements of the enrolment process may not be a long term solution. Significant growth or changes could increase the complexity and the associated training needs. This presents capacity challenges for wider college resources who add on prior attainment tasks to existing roles. De-centralisation of data collection may also dilute the responsibility.



## What are the options?

1.

**Providers should develop continuity arrangements to mitigate the risk of key people temporarily/ permanently leaving. (Where providers experience staff changes or vacancies leading to no representation this can have an adverse effect on the data. Contingency plans should be available for other MIS team members to step into the role if needed.)**



*Examples:*

- *Look to share the operational experience that exists within the team.*
- *Develop an open culture of sharing knowledge.*
- *Put in place contingency arrangements for key personnel not being available for work during busy periods.*

2.

**Develop opportunities for staff to share knowledge on the ILR, reports, good practice, guidance and other matters concerning prior attainment data.**



*“Customer Support Service (CSS) staff deliver training in May and June to curriculum staff, but this isn’t mandatory. However, attendance is quite good because staff have a vested interest in turning up. Fee remission and how prior attainment relates to that is a particularly difficult area for new staff to become accustomed to. CSS staff have put together a pack of examples of fee remission to facilitate better training.”*

Liverpool Community College



*“The MIS will play a role in reading and understanding the new guidance that comes out of the LSC. The MIS manager will read the guidance, clarify understanding and produce a document for the college. The document produced will be a simplified version of the guidance and will be presented to the senior levels of management in the college. These managers will then transfer knowledge within their own team.”*

College of West Anglia



*“The Data Management Team have a good understanding of the data that they are collecting and look to proactively share it with staff throughout the college. Significant work has been done to promote the use of data through the college encouraging joint ownership. One example of this is curriculum data managers who focus on specific curriculum areas to ensure the data is as accurate as possible. Prior attainment data provides evidence of effective data collection practices taking place”*

Cambridge Regional College

**3. Ensure any delegation for prior attainment data collection is adequately monitored (e.g. identify a clear responsibility for MIS to follow up) and simplify processes to ensure ease of collection and documentation on the ILR.**



*“The Academic Registrar will chase Heads of Faculty in order to follow up on enrolment forms where prior attainment has not been appropriately completed. The Heads of Faculty will then chase their faculty staff to follow up with students/ enrolments concerned”*

Carlisle College



*“Ownership of data is embedded with individual members of curriculum / academic staff to ensure that they are accountable for the data / volumes in their area.”*

MANCAT

# Areas of future support and guidance

The review highlighted a number of areas, where providers identified a need for future support and guidance. A summary of these is noted below.

## Communication and Relationships

- In addition to regional forums, providers would value alternative opportunities to debate their interpretation of the ILR and funding guidance. These opportunities would be beneficial in identifying any additional actions required and how other providers are tackling data issues.
- Providers are working collaboratively with neighbouring colleges and should consider strengthening relationships further, through improved communication. This will assist in identifying similarities in systems, collectively resolve data issues and facilitate the sharing of good practice.
- Early communication of LSC priorities was seen as crucial for colleges to implement changes within the academic year. Strengthening the links with LSC and Partnership teams would benefit providers in improving their understanding of developments around the ILR. Building these closer relationships may lead to direct briefings on the ILR, funding changes and priorities, from the LSC, as opposed to third party organisations.

## Prior attainment data

- The sector must consider how to address issues such as prior attainment data in a consistent manner. Current investment from the LSC in a single database of learner information would assist providers and save time and resources spent on collating information that already exists. However, the roll out of MIAP (Managing Information Across Partners) and the Unique Learner Number (ULN) are not expected to be fully operational within the timescales for current PSA Targets to which DIUS and the LSC are currently working. A consistent approach agreed by the sector would ensure providers and departments are all working towards the same goals.
- Assistance is required for the translation of international qualifications in identifying prior attainment (L35) data for the ILR. Development of a tool similar to the qualifications calculator (see Annex) would be useful in mapping international qualifications for prior attainment purposes.

## Definitions

- Colleges have used guidance material and ILR specification to interpret definitions for 'Level 2' and 'firstness', for adult learners who are unfamiliar with the terminology or their meaning. A consistent set of simple definitions and examples that are learner friendly would be welcomed by the sector to promote consistency of future interpretations.

## ILR Funding and other guidance

- There is an annual release of revised LSC funding guidance and details of key changes to the ILR. Where possible, these changes (and the reason for the change) could be made more explicit in the manual itself (as opposed to a separate document) and/or advertised clearly on the LSC website. This would facilitate clear communication internally within providers.
- Implementation and preparation for changes has proved difficult where they are released too late. Earlier LSC notification to providers (say in May), could ensure that necessary steps are taken to implement required changes prior to the new academic year. This would be particularly helpful for revising enrolment forms prior to printing, issuing Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) and including additional advice in their prospectus

- It is worth considering more investment in the ILR Manual (funding guidance) at the beginning of the process to clarify and communicate the correct interpretations effectively. This would reduce anxiety, reduce the time taken to understand what is required and improve the quality of the subsequent data obtained.

## Internal Developments

- Benefits have been realised through review of processes and training for staff involved in collating prior attainment data for adult learners. An end-to-end review of enrolment processes may highlight inefficiencies that could be streamlined to reduce the amount of time required for each task. As each process is mapped, it can then be validated with members of staff, isolating the root cause of any inefficiency.

# Provider toolkit

We have identified a series of tools that are currently in use by providers and the LSC with regard to understanding, capturing and recording prior attainment data on the ILR. The table below outlines the tools available, along with a description of what they are and links to where they can be found:

Tool	Description
<b>Funding Guidance</b>	<p>Funding policy guidance for Further Education, Work Based Learning, Train to Gain and others are available on the LSC provider website (see link). Each guidance document refers to the ILR requirements for prior attainment and the reasons for its collection. This is particularly useful in training staff to become more knowledgeable about the data needs and any funding implications.</p> <p><b>Link:</b> <a href="http://www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/funding-policy/">http://www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/funding-policy/</a></p> <p><b>Further details:</b> See link for funding guidance downloads. Note the 2008/2009 funding guidance is still under development at the time of this report.</p>
<b>ILR Specification</b>	<p>Learner Data set field L35: A guide to ILR data coding requirements for the L35 field (prior attainment).</p> <p>Annex G –Prior attainment levels: A guide to the overall attainment level of learners that have achieved various combinations of qualifications.</p> <p><b>Link:</b> <a href="http://www.theia.org.uk/ilr/ilrdocuments/ilrdetail.htm">http://www.theia.org.uk/ilr/ilrdocuments/ilrdetail.htm</a></p> <p><b>Further details:</b> See link for full guidance and 2008/2009 specification</p>
<b>Learning Aims Database</b>	<p>Identification of qualifications and/or similar qualification for assignment of skills attainment level.</p> <p><b>Link:</b> <a href="http://providers.lsc.gov.uk/LAD/aims/searchcriteria.asp">http://providers.lsc.gov.uk/LAD/aims/searchcriteria.asp</a></p> <p><b>Further details:</b> The Learning Aim Database (LAD) contains information about all LSC-recognised learning aims offered by providers who return ILR data to the Council. It includes learning aim information required to complete ILR data returns, as well as funding and statistical data.</p> <p>The LAD is available online via the LSC provider extranet LAD page.</p> <p>There are options to search the current database or download the database (current and archived versions, in various formats). The online LAD and the latest download represent the most current data.</p>
<b>Qualifications Calculator</b>	<p>The qualifications calculator is a tool which can assist learners and providers alike to identify the prior attainment level achieved to date. It is a simple tool, which relies on learner knowledge of the courses/grades undertaken. These are entered into the tool step by step (illustrated by the screen shots below) and culminate in a final screen indicating the level of prior attainment achieved by the learner. It has been deemed very useful for skills brokers / pledge employers / IAG providers / FE providers and others.</p> <p><b>Link:</b> <a href="http://www.qualificationscalculator.co.uk/">http://www.qualificationscalculator.co.uk/</a></p> <p><b>Further details:</b> Please note - This tool should be used for guidance purposes only, and providers must assess a learner's prior attainment upon enrolment, as this is not the only method that may be used to ascertain a learner's achievement of qualification levels.</p>

Tool	Description
<p><b>LSC Statement of priorities</b></p>	<p>A guide to the areas of focus for LSC in terms of targets for 2008/9 to 2010/11 – “Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives, our Statement of Priorities”.</p> <p>“The targets contained in the Statement of Priorities reflect an aim to raise the educational achievement of all children and young people, and to narrow the gap in achievement between children from low income families and their peers. For adults, the aim is to improve the skills of the population and deliver a world class skills base by 2020, improving the skills of those in work and importantly those currently not working and excluded from the labour market.</p> <p>Meeting these targets will require an increase in the proportion of people of working age achieving functional literacy and numeracy skills, a higher proportion of working adults qualified to at least a full Level 2 and 3 and an increase in the proportion of Apprentices who complete the full Apprenticeship framework.”</p> <p><b>Link:</b> <a href="http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/nat-statementofpriorities-nov07.pdf">http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/nat-statementofpriorities-nov07.pdf</a></p> <p><b>Further details:</b> Follow link for downloadable guidance.</p>

# Provider actions checklist

The checklist below summarises each of the actions identified in this good practice guide, and will be useful for providers to measure your current position and future developmental needs.

Section/Action	Embedded practice	Performed often but not embedded	Performed on an ad hoc basis	Never performed
<b>Data collection and entry</b>				
1. Where possible, collect data upon entry into college (enrolment and/or induction).				
2. Following data collection on entry, use prompts at various points in the year where learner contact is already pre-agreed to obtain prior attainment information.				
3. If considered less bureaucratic, retain copies of prior attainment on file for learners who are continuing with the provider, for the benefit of future records.				
4. Use prior attainment data from prior years if learner previously attended the college.				
5. If learner data is on-line, allow learners access to update/amend/verify their prior attainment qualifications.				
6. Update the ILR; following enrolment and at specified points in the year, Prior attainment quality checks and follow-up activities performed.				
<b>Senior Management Team (SMT) representation and review</b>				
1. Include MIS/data team representation at senior level on provider Senior Management Teams.				
2. College Principal demonstrates buy-in and provides 'recognised' input into data requirements and priority areas for the college.				
3. Report regularly on prior attainment (as a whole, Level 2 learners, full-time learners and first Level 2 learners). Submit status reports to SMT for consideration.				
4. Generate LIS/other reports to discuss prior attainment performance				

Section/Action	Embedded practice	Performed often but not embedded	Performed on an ad hoc basis	Never performed
<b>Standardisation of IAG (Information, Advice and Guidance)</b>				
1. Seek clarity over funding and ILR specification guidance with the LSC, and update staff training on prior attainment.				
2. Document all training material used at the start of the year, and ensure this is refreshed for any changes in policy. Enable all users to access this information on the intranet.				
3. Ensure prior attainment ILR coding training is provided on at least an annual basis, including demonstration of the tools and techniques that can be used to identify the levels obtained.				
4. Introduce spot checks on data entered by staff to quality assure that training has been effective.				
<b>Process efficiencies</b>				
1. Improve the use of existing IT environment to promote prior attainment data collection.				
2. Reduce chasing of incomplete forms by introducing defined quality checks				
3. Increase the extent of data capture at first point of contact				
4. Clarify clear roles and responsibilities for prior attainment data capture (i.e. MIS, learner services, or lecturers).				
5. Do not enrol learners where prior attainment data is withheld by the learner, and is 'known' but not provided upon enrolment.				
6. Existing controls should be implemented with greater rigour to help reduce the extent of 'not known' prior attainment recorded on the ILR. Systems should be tailored to enable greater user understanding, easing data collection activity.				

Section/Action	Embedded practice	Performed often but not embedded	Performed on an ad hoc basis	Never performed
<b>Reliance on key individuals</b>				
<p>1. Providers should develop continuity arrangements to mitigate the risk of key people temporarily/ permanently leaving. (Where providers experience staff changes or vacancies leading to no representation this can have an adverse effect on the data. Contingency plans should be available for other MIS team members to step into the role if needed.)</p>				
<p>2. Develop opportunities for staff to share knowledge on the ILR, reports, good practice, guidance and other matters concerning prior attainment data.</p>				
<p>3. Ensure any delegation for prior attainment data collection is adequately monitored (e.g. identify a clear responsibility for MIS to follow up) and simplify processes to ensure ease of collection and documentation on the ILR.</p>				

