

Circular 00/28

Quality Improvement

Target-setting: Outcomes 1999-2000 and Arrangements for 2000-01

Summary

This circular requests information from colleges on outcomes of target-setting in 1999-2000. It provides guidance on setting, monitoring and reporting on annual targets for levels of retention and achievement. In addition it provides an analysis of improvement in retention and achievement rates between 1997-98 and 1998-99 and the outcomes compared with targets set for 1998-99. Responses are requested by 31 March 2001.

Contents

	<i>paragraph</i>
Introduction	1
Targets for 2000-01	4
Advice and support	6

Annexes

- A Additional guidance
- B Format of targets
- C Analysis of retention and achievement rates 1997-98 to 1998-99 and comparisons with targets for 1998-99

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Target-setting: Outcomes 1999-2000 and Arrangements for 2000-01

- annex B sets out the format in which targets should be sent
- annex C provides an analysis of the targets colleges set for 1998-99 and the extent to which they were achieved and an analysis of the targets set by colleges for 1999-2000.

Introduction

1 The process of setting and achieving annual targets for student retention and the achievement of qualifications should be central to each college's strategy for raising standards. This circular provides guidance on the process of setting targets for 2000-01. It also provides information on the outcomes of targets set to improve levels of retention and achievement for 1999-2000. Responses are requested by 31 March 2001.

Background

2 Colleges have been sending as requested their annual targets for retention and achievement to the Council since May 1999. Targets for improvement have increasingly become an important element in annual quality assurance cycles.

3 The procedure for sending targets to the Council and format requested were amended in 2000 to take into account issues raised during the first year. In 2000, non-sector college providers of further education will be establishing baseline data which can be used for setting targets in future years and will therefore start to use targets to raise retention and achievement.

Targets for 2000-01

4 For 2000-01, the timetable set out in Circular 00/01, *Quality Improvement: Target-setting in 1999-2000* applies. By the end of March 2001, colleges are requested to send finalised achievements for 1999-2000 and agreed targets for 2000-01 to the Council. The format is unchanged from 1998-99 and is set out in annex A. Colleges are asked to send their targets electronically on the form available on the Council's website.

5 In order to assist colleges, the following information is provided:

- annex A provides additional guidance on setting targets for retention and achievement

Advice and Support

6 The Council's website has the following information which is intended to help colleges:

- form for entering targets for 2000-01 with supporting guidance
- list of suppliers of kitemarked software.

These will be found at our website (www.fefc.ac.uk/targets). Colleges needing further advice on target-setting should, in the first instance, contact their college inspector on matters concerned with the target-setting process or the targets themselves, or the Council's research and statistics help desk on 024 7686 3224 for help on technical matters.



Additional Guidance

Introduction

1 The following guidance is additional to that set out in Circular 00/01, *Quality Improvement: Target-setting in 1999-2000* and should be read in conjunction with that circular. All colleges in the further education sector are requested to send targets on retention and achievement to the Council via the form available on the Council's website by 31 March 2001.

Treatment of Qualifications of Unknown Notional Level

2 Some of colleges' provision is recorded in the individualised student record (ISR) on qualifications where the notional level is not available from the qualifications database. These are mainly qualifications which colleges have recorded using generic qualification codes. The majority are notional level 1 qualifications, but some are at higher levels. There are two ways of recording these qualifications on the target-setting response form. Where the notional level of the qualification is known internally within the college, then these qualifications should be included at the appropriate notional level with the number of starters identified separately in the 'of which level X' row of the form. Where the college is not able to reassign these qualifications to an appropriate notional level, they should be included either in 'long level X' part of the form or with all other short qualifications if they are of fewer than 24 weeks in length.

3 Colleges should note that, once a notional level has been assigned to a qualification, it will be included in benchmarking data at that level. Qualifications identified as level X should therefore be included at an appropriate level if at all possible.

Role of the College Inspector

4 Colleges are requested to keep college inspectors informed of their progress in setting targets. To make sure that college inspectors have an opportunity to comment on targets before they are sent to the Council, colleges should send a copy of their targets to their college inspector by 31 December 2000. College inspectors will want to assure themselves that:

- targets for retention and achievement are set annually for college programmes
- the college has focused attention on those programmes which have performed poorly
- a wide range of staff are involved in setting targets
- the college has taken account of previous rates of retention and achievement and national benchmarks and set targets designed to improve levels of retention and achievement or maintain them at a high level
- where targets are set which are below levels achieved previously, there is a clear rationale for doing so
- targets set are both challenging and realistic.

Format of Targets

1 The format for the target information requested by the Council is unchanged from 1999-2000. The form will be made available to colleges electronically by the end of November 2000. The password for accessing the form will be sent to principals when the form is made available.

2 In addition to details of targets, the form requests information such as the date at which targets were considered by the corporation and contact details for enquiries. For targets for 2000-01, colleges will also be asked to provide the date on which targets were sent to their college inspector for comment.

Figure 1. Format for targets for 2000-01

Qualification type	Level		16-18		19+	
			1999-2000 outcomes	2000-01 targets	1999-2000 outcomes	2000-01 targets
Long	1	No. of starters				
		of which level X				
		Retention rate (%)				
		Achievement rate (%)				
	2	No. of starters				
		of which level X				
		Retention rate (%)				
		Achievement rate (%)				
	3	No. of starters				
		of which level X				
		Retention rate (%)				
		Achievement rate (%)				
H	No. of starters					
	of which level X					
	Retention rate (%)					
	Achievement rate (%)					
X	No. of starters					
	Retention rate (%)					
	Achievement rate (%)					
Short	All levels	No. of starters				
		of which level X				
		Retention rate (%)				
		Achievement rate (%)				

Analysis of Retention and Achievement Rates 1997-98 to 1998-99 and Comparison with Targets for 1998-99

1 To help colleges set targets for 2000-01, the results of an analysis of two data sets are presented in this annex as follows:

- firstly, individual college benchmarking data for 1997-98 and 1998-99 were analysed to determine the actual levels of improvement achieved by colleges between 1997-98 and 1998-99
- secondly, the improvements in retention and achievement rates achieved by colleges in 1998-99 were compared with the improvements that colleges set themselves via their targets for 1998-99.

Data Source

2 As part of the target-setting initiative, colleges were required to show their own calculations of outcome retention and achievement rates for both 1997-98 and 1998-99, the former being returned to the Council in May 1999 and the latter in March 2000. For reasons of consistency, these two data sets have formed the basis for calculating actual year-on-year improvements and also the improvements against targets.

3 The national averages for retention and achievement rates based on the target-setting returns closely match the national averages calculated using individualised student record (ISR) data in *Benchmarking Data 1996-97 to 1998-99: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England* published on 1 September 2000. Any differences are not statistically significant.

4 Target-setting data for 1999-2000 was received from 409 colleges by March 2000. Due to the need to make comparisons with baseline figures, the number of colleges included in the analysis is determined by those who returned credible baseline data by May 1999.

Actual Improvement 1997-98 to 1998-99

5 Table 1 shows average rates of improvement in retention. The numbers and rates of improvement shown relate to all colleges which showed improvement in retention, regardless of the corresponding change in achievement.

Table 1. Colleges showing an improvement in their overall retention rate, 1997-98 to 1998-99

<i>College retention rate 1997-98</i>	<i>Colleges (No.)</i>	<i>Average improvement (%)</i>
Under 70%	14	4
70-80%	70	3
Over 80%	94	2
All improving colleges	178	3

6 Table 2 shows the range of improvements which colleges made in achievement rates. This includes all colleges improving achievement, regardless of the change in retention.

Table 2. Colleges showing an improvement in their overall achievement rate, 1997-98 to 1998-99

<i>College achievement rate 1997-98</i>	<i>Colleges (No.)</i>	<i>Average improvement (%)</i>
Under 40%	7	5
40%-50%	11	6
51%-60%	37	6
61%-70%	56	6
71%-80%	61	3
81%-90%	31	2
Over 90%	6	1
All improving colleges	209	4

7 Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate that colleges which start from a position of relatively poor retention or achievement are more likely to make significant improvements than those which have already achieved high levels.

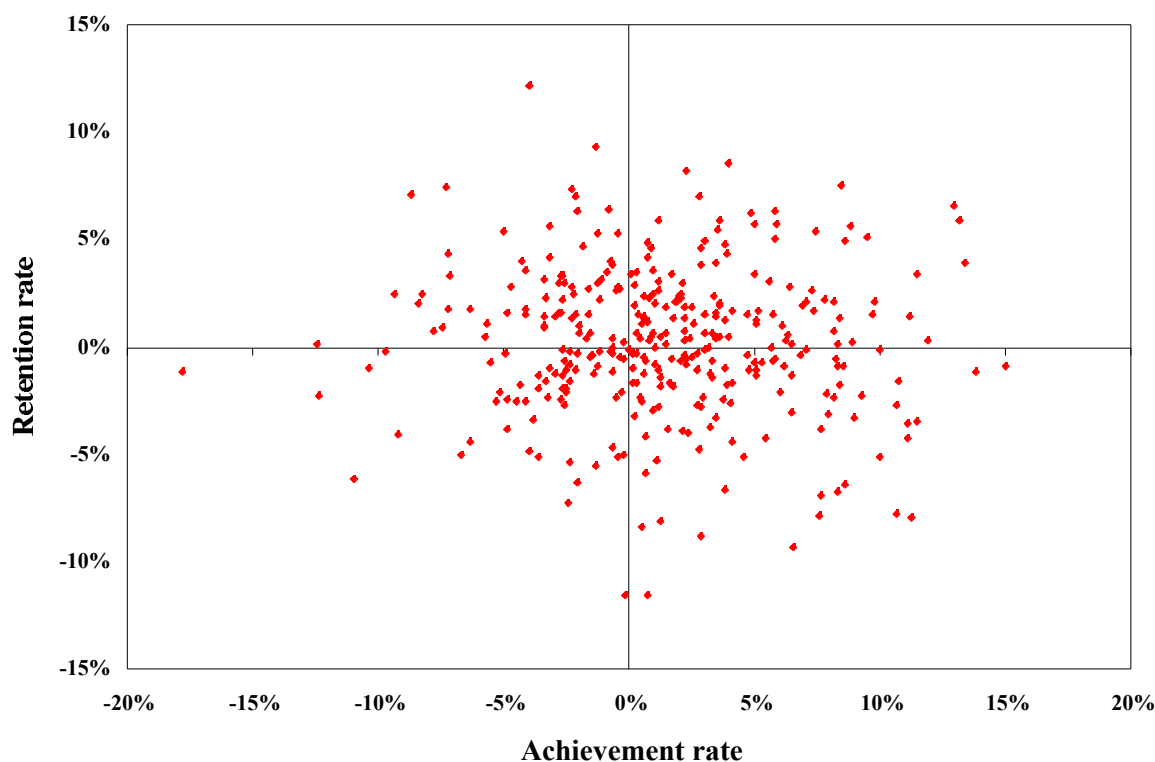
8 Analysis shows that 52% of colleges improved their aggregated retention rate and 62% improved

their aggregated achievement rate. There are also indications that gains can be made by colleges which are already performing well. Of those colleges which returned data, almost a third improved both their overall retention and achievement rates between 1997-98 and 1998-99.

Of these, about 25% improved their achievement rate at notional levels 1, 2 or 3 from a starting point within the top quartile for their college type.

9 As indicated in figure 1, over 80% of colleges providing data improved their overall retention or achievement rate, or both.

Figure 1. Improvement in retention and achievement rates, 1997-98 to 1998-99



10 Colleges in the lowest quartile for achievement rates are twice as likely to have improved both retention and achievement rates compared with colleges in the top quartile. Analysis also shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the numbers of different types of college (that is, specialist college, general FE college, sixth form college, and so on) in each quadrant. Those colleges failing to show an overall improvement most frequently had difficulty raising retention and achievement at level 1 and for students aged 19 or over. Nevertheless, the majority of colleges were able to show improvement in retention or achievement rate above national benchmarks for at least one level in the qualification framework.

Actual Improvement Compared with Targeted Levels of Improvement from 1997-98 to 1998-99

11 An analysis of actual improvement compared with targeted levels of improvement is set out below. This first analysis of outcomes compared with targets shows that setting challenging yet realistic targets is a skill which is not yet fully developed across the sector. While the majority of colleges have improved their retention and achievement rates, many have not done so to a level which meets their targets.

12 Half of those colleges which provided data exceeded their targets for qualifications that represent 50% of their total provision. Figures 2 to 5 indicate that average performance levels have improved from 1997-98 to 1998-99, but not to the extent planned when targets were set.

Figure 2. Improvement in retention rate for 16–18 year olds

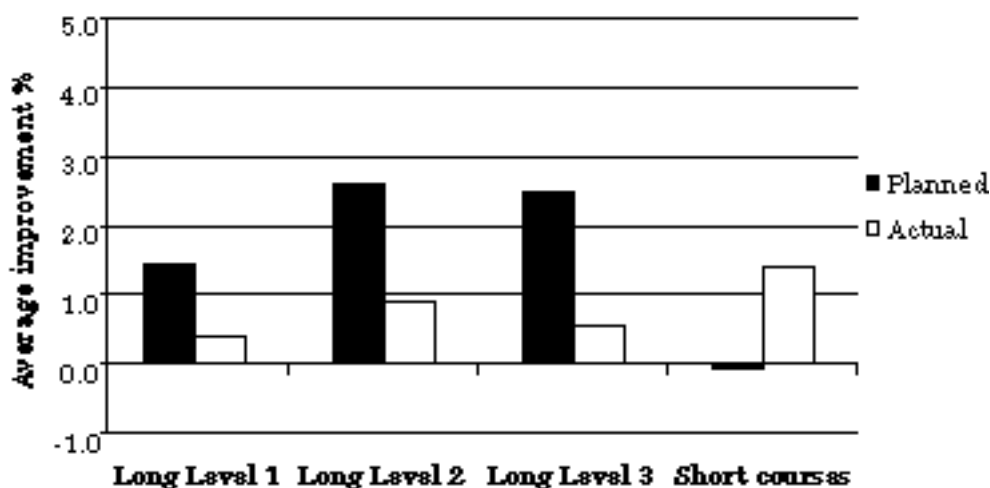


Figure 3. Improvement in retention rate for students over 19

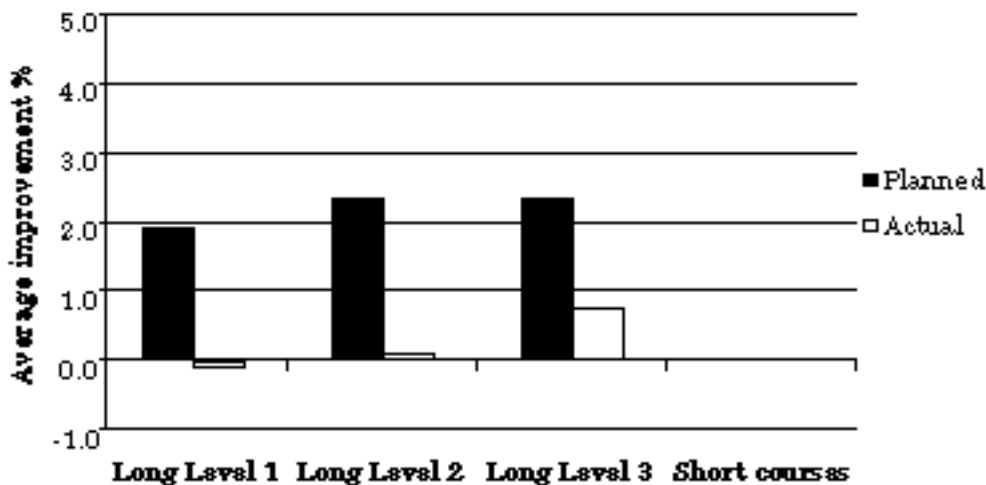


Figure 4. Improvement in achievement rate for 16–18 year olds

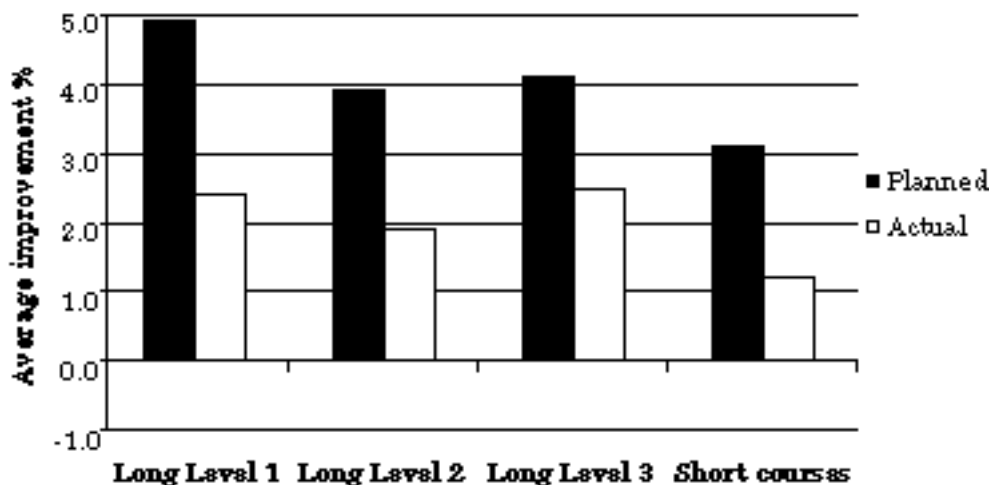
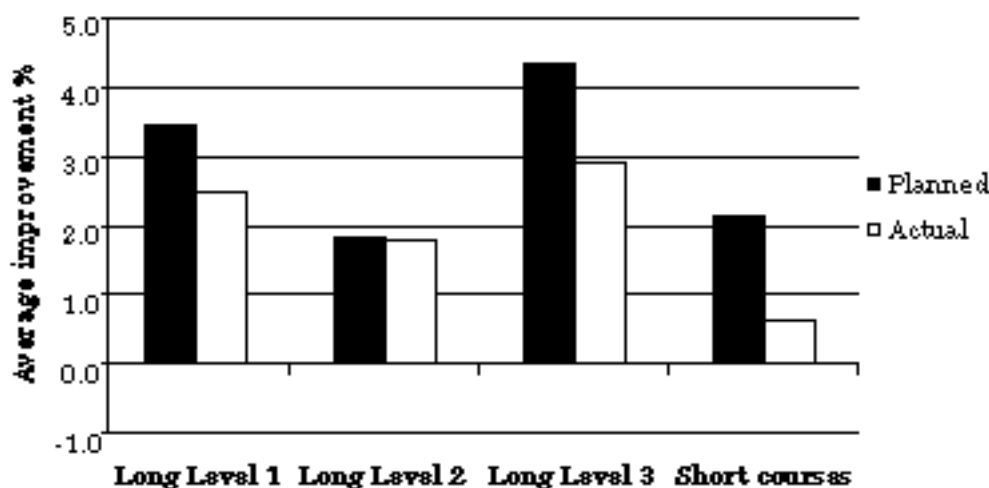


Figure 5. Improvement in achievement rate for students over 19



Target Levels of Improvement 1998-99 to 1999-2000

13 An analysis of the targets colleges set for improvement is set out in tables 3 and 4.

Targets for 403 colleges were included in the analysis. In summary:

- the median target improvement was around 2 percentage points for both

retention and achievement rates and a similar median level of improvement was targeted across age groups and notional levels

- the range of target improvement was greater for achievement than retention and the range of improvement in retention rates was greater for 19+ students than for 16-18 year olds.

Table 3. Target levels of improvement in retention and achievement rates 1998-99 to 1999-2000 for 16-18 year olds: All colleges that sent targets

		Retention			Achievement		
		25th percentile	Median	75th percentile	25th percentile	Median	75th percentile
Long qualifications	Level 1	0	1	4	1	3	7
	Level 2	1	2	4	1	2	5
	Level 3	1	2	5	1	2	5
Short qualifications		-1	0	2	1	3	7

Note: all figures given as percentage point target improvement

Table 4. Target levels of improvement in retention and achievement rates 1998-99 to 1999-2000 for students over 19: All colleges that sent targets

		<i>Retention</i>			<i>Achievement</i>		
		<i>25th percentile</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>75th percentile</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>75th percentile</i>
Long qualifications	Level 1	0	2	4	1	2	6
	Level 2	1	2	5	1	2	6
	Level 3	1	2	5	1	2	6
	Level H	0	1	4	1	2	8
Short qualifications		-1	0	2	0	2	5

Note: all figures given as percentage point target improvement

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