



Skills Funding  
Agency

# FE choices: community learner satisfaction survey 2014 to 2015

October 2014

Of interest to colleges and training organisations

## **Introduction**

The FE choices community learner satisfaction survey for 2014 to 2015 will run from Monday, 3 November 2014 to Sunday, 29 March 2015.

We will publish information and guidance on our [FE choices information webpages](#) throughout the survey period and we will also post notices in [Update](#), our weekly communication to colleges and training organisations.

Community learning colleges and training organisations that are taking part in the survey will need to visit the [Provider Extranet site](#) regularly. The Provider Extranet will give regular updates on all aspects of the surveys, including near-live feedback to individual colleges and training organisations on their response rates to the online survey. To access this site you will need your UKPRN provider code and your unique password, which we have sent to your Head of Learning or Chief Executive.

**As a community learning colleges and training organisation, what do you need to do?**

### **How to support the survey**

To participate fully in the survey and ensure your organisation gains a valid score colleges and training organisations will need to visit the [Provider Extranet](#) regularly. We have sent to your Head of Learning or Chief Executive a web link, password and log-on that will allow your organisation to check response rates to the online survey at any time during the survey period. These figures will be updated each day and will indicate your achieved responses.

We recommend that colleges and training organisations use this information to monitor responses, to ensure that they achieve the minimum number of completed questionnaires that they will need to return to give a reliable measure of learner satisfaction.

The Provider Extranet also gives you the opportunity to let us have contact details for staff that are involved in the survey, and supply us the dates that you plan to run the survey so that we do not send you unnecessary reminders.

**Consider the best way to give as many in-scope learners as possible the opportunity to take part in the survey**

The learners that will be in scope for this pilot survey are community learners, funded through the community learning budget.

Colleges and training organisations will only gain a valid score in the survey if the number of learners responding is sufficiently large and is a broadly representative sample of all the in-scope learners in your organisation during the entire survey period. All participating colleges and training organisations will receive feedback, regardless of the responses they receive.

To check what your minimum sample size is likely to be, please estimate the number of in-scope learners you will have between 3 November 2014 and 29 March 2015 and use the online calculator on the Provider Extranet.

The figure obtained is an estimate and therefore only a guide; we encourage colleges and training organisations to exceed this figure to ensure that they achieve the minimum number of completed surveys. We recommend that you aim for a census approach to the survey, rather than a sampling approach, and start the survey early to allow enough time. By carrying out a census, you will make sure that you get enough valid responses to obtain a score.

Your learners (and those of your subcontracted colleges and training organisations) can log into the survey by entering your UKPRN. Please ensure that your learners have access to the UKPRN. If you do not know your UKPRN, please visit the [UK Register of Learning Providers \(UKRLP\) website](#), where you can access details. In the survey we refer to this number as the 'code number for your learning provider'.

It is important learners enter this number because it ensures that your learners' responses are correctly attributed to your organisation.

Learners cannot access the survey without the UKPRN. Please note that you should also distribute this number to any subcontractors who deliver in-scope learning on your behalf, and ask them to communicate it to those of your learners who are with them. If this learning is part of your in-scope provision it will be included when we calculate your results.

### **Ensuring your learners have details to log into the survey**

Learners are also asked to enter their unique learner number (ULN) or learner reference number when they log in. Please note that learners will still be able to complete the survey if they do not have their ULN or learner reference number, but if this happens for a high proportion of survey respondents it will delay our ability to turn around the survey results quickly.

In some colleges and training organisations, ULNs or learner reference numbers are used routinely as intranet log-ins and appear on learner ID cards, which means that learners will have the number readily available. If this is not the case in your organisation, please consider the best way to get this information to learners in readiness for the survey. (Some learners may not be familiar with the terminology and know their ULN or personal learner reference number as the 'learner id'.)

Accurate ULNs or learner reference numbers will also increase the value of response breakdowns we will be able to give you at the end of the survey. We use the ULN or the learner reference number to confirm that the learner is in scope for the survey and it also protects colleges and training organisations by ensuring that learners cannot enter duplicate submissions.

Learners will complete the survey by following a link to the dedicated survey webpage. Colleges and training organisations could distribute the link in emails, messages on their intranet, and letters or posters, depending on the approach that will get the best response.

## **Consider how you want to integrate the community learner satisfaction survey with your own survey processes**

If you want learners to complete one of your own surveys after the FE choices community learner survey, you may want to use the 'hyperlink-embedded method' to achieve this. For guidance on how to link the surveys, please read the [guidance on hyperlink-embedded method](#) for linking the learner satisfaction survey with your own survey. To comply with the Data Protection Act 1998, it is important that you follow this guidance.

The advantage of the 'hyperlink-embedded method' is that it works from any starting point where you may want to embed the hyperlink – such as a Word document, an email or your intranet homepage.

### **Decide when to administer the survey during the survey window: 3 November 2014 until 29 March 2015**

Colleges and training organisations can decide how they manage the administration of the survey throughout this period. It will be possible for learners to log on at any time of day, and from any location and any computer, provided that they have their colleges and training organisation's UKPRN and personal learner reference number to hand. All learners on programmes during this period are entitled to take part, including learners whose learning programmes end in November 2014.

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

The community learner satisfaction survey is an online survey and is open for a lengthy period of time.

However, colleges and training organisations can apply to use paper surveys if it is impossible for some learners to complete the survey online during the survey period.

If this is the case for some of your learners, and you wish to apply for paper surveys, please follow the link on the [Provider Extranet](#).

All paper surveys **must** be completed by a learner, or by someone with a learner support role if the learner has learning difficulties or disabilities. It is not acceptable for staff to interview learners or summarise views obtained in other ways.

For more information, please refer to the '**help for learners**' section below.

The paper-based survey window closes earlier than the online survey on **9 March 2015**. All responses will be collected by courier from colleges and training organisations on **11 March 2015** and we will include in the response calculation only for those responses that are collected at that time.

### **Sell the benefits of the survey**

Some colleges and training organisations approach surveys of this kind as a purely administrative exercise. However, there is evidence that learners will respond better to the survey if they understand its importance and see it as part of their entitlement as a learner. Colleges and training organisations should consider the best way to publicise the survey at an early stage, so that learners see it as an opportunity to share their views, rather than as an obligation.

### **Convey the ease with which learners can complete the survey**

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

**Plan to include all community learners for whom you are in receipt of the community learning budget, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those for whom English is a second language.**

For more information, please refer to the '**help for learners**' section below.

Before the survey, ensure that your learners have access to either their unique learner number (ULN), if this is available, or their personal learner reference number as entered on the individualised learner record (ILR).

## **Delivering your results**

At the end of the survey we will use your learners' responses to calculate your FE choices learner satisfaction community learning score. We will also give you further information on your learners' responses to each question and the pattern of responses by broad learner group.

If you have any questions, please:

- refer to the FAQs on the [Provider Extranet site](#), or
- refer to the [FE Choices information pages](#) on our website, or
- email: [servicedesk@sfa.bis.gov.uk](mailto:servicedesk@sfa.bis.gov.uk).

## **2. Help for learners**

We have designed the questions to be, wherever possible, applicable to all learners in the learning context they have selected, that is, on a course, a learning programme or a training programme. We have also aimed to make the wording as clear as possible.

We realise that some learners will need help with the process of completing the survey. We ask you to use your professional judgement to ensure that any help you provide has the most neutral effect possible on the answers the learners give. If someone is giving a learner significant help, for example, acting as a translator or entering the answers on the survey on behalf of a learner who is unable to record their answers directly, we ask you to let us know this in the survey.

If a learner feels that a particular question does not apply to them at all, they can select 'This does not apply to me' and then complete the rest of the survey. We expect occurrences of this to be very rare. Some learners may ask what a question means. The questionnaires are being completed by hundreds of thousands of

learners all over the country in a wide variety of learning contexts and we need to avoid any distortion that might result from different staff giving different explanations. If learners do not understand a word or phrase in a question, please restrict any help to dictionary definitions of terms. For example, if a learner asks what the word 'advice' means, it would be fine to say 'advice means information and explanations given to help you decide about something' but not to give examples of specific advice sessions that the learners might have received from your organisation since this could influence their response.

### **Appropriate briefing of learners**

We ask colleges and training organisations to encourage learners to complete the survey. However, encouraging learners to reflect in their answers anything other than their genuine perception of their experiences is not acceptable. The National Union of Students (NUS) is working with us to encourage learners who feel that they have been unfairly monitored or influenced during their completion of the survey to make this known to the Agency. Any allegations of inappropriate actions to influence the outcomes of the survey will be taken seriously by us.

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

Learners can access a version of the survey in British Sign Language (BSL) by clicking on the icon on the left-hand side of the page. This version also includes a voice-over which may also help ESOL learners or other groups of learners who would benefit from hearing the questions spoken out loud.

We commissioned research visits to a number of colleges and training organisations with substantial concentrations of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This led to a number of recommendations that we have incorporated into the design of the survey and the survey website. We ask colleges and training organisations to use their discretion when deciding whether to survey learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and to not include learners who would be distressed, or for whom the survey would be inappropriate.



If you expect your exclusion of these learners to have a significant impact on the number of learners undertaking the survey and your ability to achieve sufficient sample size, then please contact us by emailing the [service desk mailbox](#) by **6 February 2015**. You will need to let us know how many learners will be omitted. This will ensure that we can take this into account when judging your minimum sample size.

We realise that some learners will need help with the process of completing the survey online. We ask you to use your professional judgement to ensure that any help you or your colleagues give allows learners' views to be recorded as accurately as possible without influencing those views. The online survey asks that anyone helping a learner to record their views indicates this and describes the type of help they provide.

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

The learner satisfaction survey allows people who are helping learners to complete the survey on their behalf, to record that fact by indicating this in their online responses.

We have tested the questions with learners undertaking ESOL programmes and believe that the vast majority of learners with a learning level of Entry 3 or above will be able to complete the online survey unaided. Participation in the survey is optional for learners, but colleges and training organisations should make every attempt to ensure that learners have the opportunity to take part. Colleges and training organisations will, however, need to make provision for learners to be able to opt out

at any stage during the survey process and to ensure that these learners are not then contacted again about the survey.

### **3. Minimum Sample Size Calculator**

The community learner satisfaction survey will be accessible online 24 hours a day, seven days a week between 3 November 2014 and 29 March 2015. We strongly recommend that all your learners are given the opportunity to take part.

You will only be able to obtain a score in the survey if the number of learners responding represents a sufficiently large sample of all the in-scope learners in your organisation during the survey period.

The minimum number that you will need to guarantee a valid score is based on the sample size required to give 95% confidence that the score is accurate to +/-3%. The calculator will help you to estimate this, but we strongly urge you to aim for a sample well above this minimum figure in case of invalid or duplicate responses. Enter the total number of in-scope learners you expect to have in the green box and the minimum required sample will appear in the yellow box.

To ensure that the minimum sample size is realistic for smaller colleges and training organisations we set a ceiling of 70% of in-scope learners and no colleges and training organisation will be required to exceed this percentage. Therefore the minimum sample size generated by the calculator is based on either the 70% rule or 3% confidence interval, whichever is the smaller.

Remember that some responses may be ruled invalid if they are duplicates or if the learners are not on community learning provision funded by the Skills Funding Agency. These factors can lead to your final sample being smaller than the original number of responses submitted by your learners. Always aim for a response well above the required minimum.

Learners that are in-scope for the community learner satisfaction survey are those funded through the community learning budget.



© Crown copyright 2014

You may re-use this information (excluding logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence.

To view this licence,  
visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/>  
or e-mail: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This document is also available from our website [www.gov.uk/sfa](http://www.gov.uk/sfa)

If you have any enquiries regarding this publication or require an alternative format, please contact us [info@sfa.bis.gov.uk](mailto:info@sfa.bis.gov.uk)

Publication number – P – 140134