

# Benchmarking Data 1996-97 to 1998-99

*Retention and  
Achievement Rates in  
Further Education  
Colleges in England*

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September 2000

**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL***

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# Benchmarking Data 1996-97 to 1998-99

## 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 the further education sector in England, for the period 1996-97 to 1998-99, and updates *Benchmarking Data 1995-96 to 1997-98* published in September 1999.

### Key findings

2 The results show an increase in retention and achievement from 1996-97 to 1998-99, particularly for achievement rates in general further education and tertiary colleges. This is consistent with the *Statistical First Release* of July 2000, and initial analysis of performance indicators for colleges for 1998-99, which will be published in October 2000.

3 Analysis of the benchmarking data for 1998-99 shows that:

#### Retention rates

- retention rates increased slightly between 1996-97 and 1998-99, and now stand at around 80% for most qualifications
- the improvement in retention rates of adults over a three-year period in sixth form colleges identified in 1997-98 has continued. The increase averaged five percentage points over the three-year period 1996-97 to 1998-99, although there are relatively low numbers of these students.

#### Achievement rates

- there has been an increase in achievement rates between 1997-98 and 1998-99 for most age groups and at most levels of qualification. This builds on gains between 1996-97 and 1997-98
- for example, achievement rates for students aged 16-18 studying notional level 1 qualifications increased from 59% to 63% between 1997-98 and 1998-99, building on the increase from 57% in 1996-97
- achievement rates for adults studying for qualifications at notional level 3 increased by 9% over the three-year period from 58% in 1996-97 to 67% in 1998-99
- general further education and tertiary colleges which recruit a high proportion of their students from disadvantaged areas have shown significant improvements in achievements over the three-year period. For example, adults studying notional level 3 qualifications have increased 10 percentage points over the three years to 63% in 1998-99
- the variability in achievement between colleges is becoming smaller as colleges with the lowest achievement rates show the highest levels of improvement. For example, the achievement rate for adults studying at notional level 1 increased by eight percentage points between 1996-97 and 1998-99 for the bottom quarter of colleges.

### Background

4 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 allows colleges to assess their performance and assists their planning of

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action programmes to improve the retention and achievement rates of their students.

5 At the Council's request, all colleges should now set annual targets for improving students' retention and achievement rates. Institutional target-setting using benchmarking 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 will be published in October 2000.

### Approach

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

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

8 The Council publishes national benchmarking data on levels of retention and achievement in three ways, which are updated annually as set out below. All the benchmarking data are available on the Council's website at [www.fefc.ac.uk](http://www.fefc.ac.uk) under the pages 'Data' then 'Analysis and Benchmarking'.

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

10 The underlying methodology used to update the benchmarking data to 1998-99 remains the same as for previous years. The methodology takes advantage of changes to the 1997-98 ISR by taking into account students transferring on to another qualification, and more details of the outcomes of qualifications. These changes are set out in detail in annex B.

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

**Table 1. Publication of benchmarking data**

<i>Source of information</i>	<i>Annual update in</i>	<i>Published in hard copy</i>	<i>Available on the Council's website</i>
<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

## Layout Illustration

		16-18			19+		
		96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
<b>Table 1. All colleges: enrolments on notional level 1 long qualifications</b>							
<b>Number of starters</b>	<b>A</b>	186,800	227,700	242,000	380,400	413,400	411,300
<b>Retention rate</b>	<b>B</b> mean	80%	81%	81%	80%	79%	78%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	<b>C</b> mean	57%	59%	63%	57%	61%	63%
<b>Breakdown of number of starters</b>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		6%	5%	5%	2%	2%	2%
NVQs (%)		8%	9%	9%	7%	7%	7%
Other (%)		86%	87%	86%	91%	91%	91%
<b>Measures of college variability</b>							
<b>Retention rate</b>	<b>25th percentile</b>	75%	77%	77%	72%	73%	73%
	<b>Median</b>	81%	82%	82%	79%	80%	79%
	<b>75th percentile</b>	85%	86%	87%	86%	86%	86%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	<b>25th percentile</b>	46%	50%	55%	49%	54%	57%
	<b>Median</b>	62%	66%	67%	61%	63%	67%
	<b>75th percentile</b>	79%	81%	77%	78%	78%	78%

**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. The figure shown is the mean for all students

**D** '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

**E** Measures of college variability

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

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

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

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

13 The final group of benchmarking data shows the results for general further education and tertiary colleges which recruit a high proportion of their students from deprived areas and which have a widening participation factor for 1998-99 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.

14 Results for 1996-97 and 1997-98 have been recalculated from *Benchmarking Data 1995-96 to 1997-98* published in September 1999, to include more colleges and 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

15 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 2000-01 and beyond.

16 The Council provided a set of results to each college for the period 1995-96 to 1997-98 in the same format as the benchmarking data publication during the autumn 1999 term. This information will be updated to show the 1996-97 to 1998-99 results and will be sent to colleges during autumn 2000.

17 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 17 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.

18 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 by September 2000 on the Council's information website at [www.fefc.ac.uk](http://www.fefc.ac.uk) under the pages 'Data' then 'Analysis and Benchmarking' then 'Benchmarking Data 1996-97 to 1998-99'.

19 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 in 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

20 As of August 2000, there were 15 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 Council's website under the pages 'Data' then 'Analysis and Benchmarking'.

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21 Kitemarked software enables colleges to analyse their results prior to receiving results from the Council in the autumn. The Council is working closely with software suppliers to ensure that they are kept up-to-date with developments.

### **Accreditation**

22 One of the requirements for colleges applying for accredited status is that the college should demonstrate high or improving levels of student retention and achievement. Annex C of Circular 98/41 *Applying for Accredited Status* sets out how to use the benchmarking data for the period 1995-96 to 1996-97 to interpret this criterion. The spreadsheet referred to in annex C of Circular 98/41, has been updated to include 1997-98 data, and will be further updated for the 1996-97 to 1998-99 period by the end of September 2000.

### **Benchmarking data post-April 2001**

23 The Learning and Skills Act 2000 sets out a proposed programme of reform for post-16 learning. As part of this reform, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) will be established from April 2001. This organisation will be responsible for the funding, planning and quality of post-16 education and training, excluding higher education. It is expected that *Benchmarking Data* will continue to be published by the LSC.

### **Queries**

24 Queries about this publication should be directed to the funding and statistics support desk on 024 7686 3224 or by fax on 024 7686 3249 or by email on [fundstat.desk@fetc.ac.uk](mailto:fundstat.desk@fetc.ac.uk)

# Annexes

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# Benchmarking Data 1996-97 to 1998-99

## Retention and Achievement Rates

### Sector statistics

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

*See annex B for details of the definitions used*

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

		16-18			19+		
		96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
<b>Number of starters</b>		186,800	227,700	242,000	380,400	413,400	411,300
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	80%	81%	81%	80%	79%	78%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	57%	59%	63%	57%	61%	63%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		6%	5%	5%	2%	2%	2%
NVQs (%)		8%	9%	9%	7%	7%	7%
Other (%)		86%	87%	86%	91%	91%	91%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	75%	77%	77%	72%	73%	73%
	<i>median</i>	81%	82%	82%	79%	80%	79%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	87%	86%	87%	86%	86%	86%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	46%	50%	55%	49%	54%	57%
	<i>median</i>	62%	66%	67%	61%	63%	67%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	79%	81%	77%	78%	78%	78%

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

		16-18			19+		
		96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
<b>Number of starters</b>		401,500	401,200	409,400	383,500	418,200	418,600
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	77%	77%	77%	78%	79%	79%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	61%	67%	71%	60%	65%	66%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCSEs (%)		45%	39%	35%	27%	20%	18%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		13%	13%	12%	2%	2%	2%
NVQs (%)		17%	17%	18%	26%	27%	29%
Other (%)		26%	31%	35%	45%	52%	51%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	72%	73%	74%	71%	72%	72%
	<i>median</i>	78%	78%	78%	77%	79%	78%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	82%	82%	82%	83%	84%	83%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	51%	60%	63%	54%	61%	63%
	<i>median</i>	65%	72%	73%	66%	71%	72%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	81%	85%	85%	80%	81%	82%

see paragraph 14 of annex B for notes on GCSEs

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

		16-18			19+		
		96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
<b>Number of starters</b>		516,800	526,300	537,700	351,800	340,300	345,500
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	77%	77%	78%	78%	78%	79%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	75%	76%	77%	58%	65%	67%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCE A/AS levels (%)		70%	67%	64%	24%	21%	19%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		20%	19%	18%	12%	11%	10%
NVQs (%)		3%	3%	3%	17%	18%	19%
Other (%)		8%	11%	15%	46%	49%	52%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	72%	71%	72%	69%	69%	72%
	<i>median</i>	77%	76%	77%	77%	77%	78%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	82%	82%	82%	83%	83%	83%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	63%	66%	67%	55%	59%	63%
	<i>median</i>	73%	75%	76%	65%	69%	71%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	85%	85%	85%	76%	78%	79%

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

		16-18			19+		
		96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
<b>Number of starters</b>		5,400	5,200	4,600	80,900	79,500	76,000
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	83%	85%	84%	84%	83%	84%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	69%	73%	66%	58%	59%	66%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%
NVQs (%)		4%	5%	7%	19%	19%	21%
Other (%)		96%	95%	93%	80%	81%	78%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	71%	73%	68%	79%	76%	77%
	<i>median</i>	87%	86%	85%	86%	84%	85%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	100%	100%	95%	90%	89%	90%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	36%	45%	50%	46%	47%	52%
	<i>median</i>	68%	67%	70%	61%	62%	65%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	89%	87%	100%	77%	79%	78%

Table 5. All colleges: enrolments on short qualifications

		all ages		
		96-97	97-98	98-99
<b>Number of starters</b>		1,064,400	1,286,800	1,193,600
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	95%	95%	94%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	75%	78%	77%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>				
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	90%	91%	90%
	<i>median</i>	95%	95%	94%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	98%	97%	97%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	59%	60%	65%
	<i>median</i>	77%	78%	77%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	88%	89%	87%

# Benchmarking Data 1996-97 to 1998-99

## Retention and Achievement Rates

### By college type

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

		16-18			19+		
		96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
<b>Number of starters</b>		160,900	193,300	204,200	365,600	396,700	393,000
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	80%	81%	81%	80%	79%	78%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	55%	58%	61%	57%	61%	62%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		6%	5%	6%	2%	2%	2%
NVQs (%)		9%	10%	10%	7%	7%	7%
Other (%)		85%	85%	84%	91%	91%	91%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	75%	77%	77%	74%	74%	73%
	<i>median</i>	80%	81%	81%	80%	80%	79%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	86%	85%	85%	86%	85%	85%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	45%	50%	54%	47%	53%	56%
	<i>median</i>	57%	61%	64%	58%	62%	66%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	69%	73%	72%	68%	74%	73%

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

		16-18			19+		
		96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
<b>Number of starters</b>		317,200	321,400	326,400	364,400	400,800	400,300
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	76%	76%	77%	78%	79%	79%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	58%	63%	67%	59%	65%	66%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCSEs (%)		40%	34%	30%	27%	20%	18%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		14%	13%	12%	2%	2%	2%
NVQs (%)		20%	21%	22%	26%	27%	29%
Other (%)		26%	32%	36%	45%	52%	51%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	72%	72%	73%	73%	75%	74%
	<i>median</i>	76%	77%	77%	78%	79%	78%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	80%	80%	80%	83%	83%	82%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	47%	56%	59%	52%	58%	62%
	<i>median</i>	59%	66%	68%	63%	67%	69%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	70%	74%	76%	73%	76%	77%

see paragraph 14 of annex B for notes on GCSEs

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

		16-18			19+		
		96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
<b>Number of starters</b>		320,700	322,700	327,100	335,500	325,900	329,700
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	78%	77%	77%	78%	78%	79%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	68%	70%	72%	58%	64%	66%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCE A/AS levels (%)		57%	55%	51%	23%	20%	18%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		28%	27%	26%	12%	11%	10%
NVQs (%)		4%	5%	4%	18%	18%	19%
Other (%)		10%	14%	18%	46%	50%	53%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	72%	71%	72%	74%	74%	75%
	<i>median</i>	77%	76%	77%	79%	79%	78%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	82%	81%	81%	83%	83%	83%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	57%	62%	64%	53%	58%	62%
	<i>median</i>	66%	70%	71%	61%	66%	70%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	74%	77%	77%	69%	75%	75%

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

		16-18			19+		
		96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
<b>Number of starters</b>		4,200	3,900	4,100	78,900	77,900	74,200
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	82%	83%	83%	84%	83%	84%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	68%	65%	65%	57%	58%	62%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%
NVQs (%)		5%	7%	7%	19%	19%	21%
Other (%)		95%	93%	93%	80%	81%	78%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	73%	75%	69%	80%	78%	78%
	<i>median</i>	86%	86%	83%	86%	85%	85%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	97%	100%	93%	90%	89%	89%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	33%	47%	50%	45%	46%	51%
	<i>median</i>	67%	67%	67%	58%	60%	64%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	86%	86%	95%	73%	73%	75%

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

		16-18			19+		
		96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
<b>Number of starters</b>		22,500	31,000	33,500	9,400	11,400	13,300
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	78%	78%	81%	66%	73%	70%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	73%	69%	72%	73%	67%	76%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		4%	3%	2%	2%	2%	2%
NVQs (%)		1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Other (%)		96%	96%	97%	97%	97%	97%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	71%	74%	75%	63%	65%	66%
	<i>median</i>	81%	82%	83%	74%	78%	77%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	86%	88%	89%	90%	89%	90%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	56%	55%	62%	60%	57%	60%
	<i>median</i>	84%	79%	80%	83%	76%	82%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	95%	92%	90%	98%	94%	95%

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

		16-18			19+		
		96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
<b>Number of starters</b>		77,100	72,600	75,500	11,200	9,800	11,300
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	79%	79%	80%	65%	71%	71%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	74%	84%	86%	72%	77%	78%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCSEs (%)		67%	64%	60%	49%	46%	37%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		8%	8%	9%	2%	2%	2%
NVQs (%)		1%	1%	1%	10%	7%	11%
Other (%)		23%	27%	31%	40%	45%	50%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	77%	74%	76%	58%	61%	63%
	<i>median</i>	81%	80%	80%	69%	73%	70%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	84%	84%	86%	81%	86%	82%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	61%	81%	83%	59%	67%	71%
	<i>median</i>	81%	91%	91%	80%	85%	86%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	93%	95%	96%	94%	95%	94%

see paragraph 14 of annex B for notes on GCSEs

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

		16-18			19+		
		96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
<b>Number of starters</b>		190,800	198,000	204,900	10,600	9,300	10,300
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	77%	76%	78%	60%	62%	65%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	86%	85%	84%	69%	69%	68%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCE A/AS levels (%)		93%	90%	87%	66%	60%	50%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		4%	4%	4%	5%	5%	4%
NVQs (%)		0%	0%	0%	7%	10%	11%
Other (%)		3%	6%	9%	22%	25%	35%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	71%	70%	72%	50%	53%	57%
	<i>median</i>	76%	76%	77%	65%	64%	68%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	82%	81%	82%	73%	74%	77%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	82%	81%	78%	67%	62%	66%
	<i>median</i>	86%	87%	87%	74%	75%	78%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	89%	89%	90%	84%	86%	88%

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

		16-18			19+		
		96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
<b>Number of starters</b>		1,100	1,200	–	800	500	500
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	88%	91%	–	63%	76%	76%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	69%	96%	–	80%	77%	68%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		0%	0%	–	0%	0%	0%
NVQs (%)		0%	1%	–	33%	30%	39%
Other (%)		100%	99%	–	67%	70%	61%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	–	–	–	50%	67%	67%
	<i>median</i>	87%	80%	–	83%	78%	82%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	–	–	–	94%	100%	100%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	–	–	–	50%	63%	60%
	<i>median</i>	–	57%	–	90%	100%	100%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	–	–	–	100%	100%	100%

*Key: – insufficient number of colleges to calculate this percentile (fewer than 500 starters)*

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

		16-18			19+		
		96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
<b>Number of starters</b>		3,300	3,500	4,300	5,300	5,300	5,000
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	86%	87%	89%	80%	82%	83%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	71%	75%	68%	66%	70%	69%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		1%	1%	3%	0%	0%	0%
NVQs (%)		30%	22%	15%	23%	12%	12%
Other (%)		69%	77%	82%	77%	88%	87%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	81%	80%	83%	73%	76%	79%
	<i>median</i>	89%	88%	87%	86%	84%	88%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	95%	92%	93%	93%	89%	91%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	63%	65%	64%	54%	55%	60%
	<i>median</i>	78%	83%	72%	73%	70%	73%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	92%	100%	88%	85%	89%	91%

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

		16-18			19+		
		96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
<b>Number of starters</b>		7,200	7,200	7,500	7,900	7,600	7,000
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	84%	85%	85%	79%	77%	80%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	83%	81%	78%	75%	80%	74%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCSEs (%)		4%	6%	3%	1%	1%	1%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		30%	29%	26%	3%	2%	3%
NVQs (%)		34%	32%	30%	34%	33%	34%
Other (%)		32%	33%	41%	63%	64%	63%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	78%	80%	81%	74%	78%	75%
	<i>median</i>	84%	85%	87%	82%	82%	81%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	88%	89%	90%	87%	85%	85%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	77%	72%	70%	67%	67%	67%
	<i>median</i>	84%	84%	76%	77%	77%	78%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	88%	90%	88%	85%	85%	82%

see paragraph 14 of annex B for notes on GCSEs

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

		16-18			19+		
		96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
<b>Number of starters</b>		5,300	5,600	5,700	5,700	5,100	5,500
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	81%	81%	82%	79%	79%	81%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	83%	85%	85%	70%	76%	73%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCE A/AS levels (%)		6%	6%	5%	4%	5%	3%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		65%	66%	66%	27%	29%	26%
NVQs (%)		6%	6%	6%	18%	17%	18%
Other (%)		23%	22%	22%	51%	49%	52%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	78%	76%	79%	75%	68%	76%
	<i>median</i>	82%	82%	82%	81%	80%	81%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	86%	86%	86%	86%	87%	88%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	74%	75%	80%	63%	68%	67%
	<i>median</i>	87%	86%	86%	78%	79%	80%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	93%	90%	89%	85%	86%	86%

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

		16-18			19+		
		96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
<b>Number of starters</b>		-	-	-	1,200	1,100	1,300
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	-	-	-	66%	77%	82%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	-	-	-	72%	80%	74%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		-	-	-	1%	1%	1%
NVQs (%)		-	-	-	20%	10%	14%
Other (%)		-	-	-	80%	89%	86%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	-	-	-	69%	71%	77%
	<i>median</i>	-	-	-	85%	83%	89%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	-	-	-	95%	94%	96%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	-	-	-	50%	58%	56%
	<i>median</i>	-	-	-	81%	79%	74%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	-	-	-	90%	95%	95%

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+		
		96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
<b>Number of starters</b>		17,300	21,900	22,900	56,000	61,900	62,500
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	76%	77%	75%	77%	75%	73%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	49%	47%	56%	50%	54%	58%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		9%	8%	8%	4%	4%	4%
NVQs (%)		14%	11%	14%	8%	6%	7%
Other (%)		78%	81%	78%	88%	90%	89%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	70%	69%	68%	73%	70%	71%
	<i>median</i>	74%	78%	73%	75%	76%	75%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	79%	83%	80%	82%	84%	78%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	40%	37%	47%	37%	43%	51%
	<i>median</i>	48%	52%	56%	51%	59%	61%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	62%	62%	66%	66%	70%	69%

**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+		
		96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
<b>Number of starters</b>		35,400	36,500	33,000	51,900	55,600	51,300
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	74%	74%	72%	76%	75%	75%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	51%	55%	63%	52%	59%	62%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCSEs (%)		49%	43%	38%	26%	19%	17%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		17%	16%	16%	3%	3%	2%
NVQs (%)		15%	16%	19%	30%	34%	32%
Other (%)		19%	25%	28%	42%	45%	49%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	66%	68%	67%	71%	71%	71%
	<i>median</i>	73%	71%	71%	75%	74%	75%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	77%	78%	74%	83%	81%	79%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	41%	46%	57%	45%	49%	57%
	<i>median</i>	44%	54%	61%	52%	58%	60%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	59%	63%	68%	64%	68%	70%

see paragraph 14 of annex B for notes on GCSEs

**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+		
		96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
<b>Number of starters</b>		25,800	28,000	27,800	42,100	43,400	40,300
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	76%	75%	74%	75%	75%	75%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	60%	57%	62%	53%	59%	63%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GCE A/AS levels (%)		58%	54%	52%	24%	19%	16%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		29%	28%	30%	16%	15%	14%
NVQs (%)		4%	5%	5%	13%	17%	17%
Other (%)		9%	12%	13%	47%	49%	53%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	70%	68%	69%	73%	70%	71%
	<i>median</i>	76%	75%	74%	78%	75%	76%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	83%	80%	77%	82%	80%	79%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	52%	53%	56%	50%	53%	58%
	<i>median</i>	57%	59%	65%	54%	59%	64%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	66%	64%	68%	63%	70%	71%

**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+		
		96-97	97-98	98-99	96-97	97-98	98-99
<b>Number of starters</b>		-	-	-	9,400	9,400	8,600
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	-	-	-	81%	80%	79%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	-	-	-	52%	48%	55%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>							
GNVQ and precursors (%)		-	-	-	0%	0%	0%
NVQs (%)		-	-	-	14%	13%	13%
Other (%)		-	-	-	85%	87%	87%
<i>Measures of college variability</i>							
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	-	-	-	76%	71%	74%
	<i>median</i>	-	-	-	83%	78%	78%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	-	-	-	87%	84%	82%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	-	-	-	42%	41%	48%
	<i>median</i>	-	-	-	55%	53%	59%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	-	-	-	63%	64%	71%

Key: - fewer than 500 starters

# 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 Council's website under the pages 'Data' then 'Data Collections' then 'Standard algorithms: Pseudo code'.

2 The methodology is also described in *Guidance Notes Student Retention and Achievement 1996-97 to 1998-99*, which are available on the Council's website under 'Data' then 'Analysis and Benchmarking' then 'Benchmarking Data 1996-97 to 1998-99'. These guidance notes also detail changes to the methodology as a result of changes to the 1997-98 ISR.

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

- ISR4 (December 1995; 1994-95)
- ISR7 (December 1996; 1995-96)
- ISR10 (December 1997; 1996-97)
- ISR13 (December 1998; 1997-98)
- ISR16 (December 1999; 1998-99).

ISR4 is used to provide information on the number of students starting qualifications that were expected to end in 1996-97 or later, for example, courses of three years or more duration. In a similar manner, ISR7 is used to provide information on students starting qualifications that were expected to end in 1996-97 or later, for example students on a two-year GNVQ programme expecting to end in 1996-97. The results in this publication were calculated using version 12.3 (update 3) of the qualification database.

4 Students and their qualifications are matched across the five years of ISR returns to calculate the number of starters at the

beginning of each programme, retention across the whole programme, and achievement levels. Only qualifications which students expected to complete between 1996-97 and 1998-99 are included in the publication.

5 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 which consist 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

6 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 of starters' 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 1998-99 results show less than 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 5 above;

- e. a student on a two-year programme who began their studies in October 1997 would appear in the results for 1998-99 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

7 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

8 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.

### 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 by two age groups: 16-18 and 19 and over.

### Short qualifications

10 A qualification is 'short' if it has an expected length of less than 24 weeks. In practice over 80% 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 of 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. The GCSE achievement rates in the 1996-97 benchmarking data are therefore a mixture of GCSEs at grades A\* to G and A\* to C.

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 From 1997-98, GCSEs at grades A\* to C should be 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 will be included against this code where the college can claim achievement units. These are described in *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 outcome 6 and 7 in the ISR, which is equivalent to the number of GCSEs achieved at grades A\* to G for all colleges.

19 This means there is a discontinuity in results between 1996-97 and 1997-98, both in

this publication and in the supporting data for GCSEs, which suggests a large increase in the achievement rate between the two years. In fact, the majority of the increase is as a result of colleges recording grades D to G as outcome 7 '*qualification aim achieved and achievement funding is not being claimed*' in 1997-98 compared to recording them as 'no success' in previous years.

20 This discontinuity particularly affects the results for notional level 2 qualifications being studied in sixth form colleges, where around two-thirds of level 2 qualifications are GCSEs. At sector level, the achievement rate for students aged 16-18 studying GCSEs has increased from 60% in 1996-97 to 74% in 1998-99. The 1998-99 achievement rate of 74% comprises 66% where achievement funding is being claimed which are mainly grades A\* to C, and 8% where achievement funding is not being claimed which are mainly grades D to G.

21 The supporting data available on the Council's website will show the achievement rate for 1998-99 GCSEs split between achieved and achievement funding claimed, and achieved and achievement funding not claimed. This information will be available for the sector and by college type.

22 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

23 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.

24 The results in this publication show the rates which:

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

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

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

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

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

27 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.

28 The differences between the two methods can be seen by comparing the average or 'mean' rate, with 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.

29 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**

30 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 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.

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

32 Analysis of colleges grouped by WP factor showed that it would be useful to publish separate benchmarks 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 of other colleges of the same type. No other groups showed significant differences, although this may reflect the smaller number of colleges in some categories.

33 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

34 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.

35 The percentage breakdown of the 'number of starters' may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

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

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

## Coverage

38 The benchmarking data for 1996-97 to 1998-99 have been calculated for 382 (of 428) colleges where ISR4, ISR7, ISR10, ISR13 and ISR16 data were available. This includes:

- 33 (of 35) specialist colleges: agriculture and horticulture colleges and art, design and performing arts colleges
- 102 (of 107) sixth form colleges
- 247 (of 286) general further education and tertiary colleges, including designated colleges
- 29 (of 37) general further education and tertiary colleges with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas.

39 The 46 colleges excluded from the benchmarking data consists of:

- 14 colleges that have changed their student reference system since 1994-95, due to a merger or otherwise, meaning that it is not possible to match students between ISR returns systematically

- 24 colleges with poor data quality, identified through inspections and the availability of college performance indicators of publishable quality
- eight colleges that had not returned valid ISR16 (December 1999; 1998-99) data in time to be included in the results.

40 The results for 1996-97 and 1997-98 have been recalculated from *Benchmarking Data 1995-96 to 1997-98* published in September 1999 for the following reasons:

- a number of colleges have revised their ISR data, either as a response to the 1997-98 performance indicators or for other purposes
- the widening participation factor has been recalculated to 1998-99, which has meant colleges included in the group 'general further education and tertiary colleges with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas' have changed
- there have been some changes in the qualifications database, for example some qualifications have changed programme area or have a known notional level whereas previously it was unknown.

41 In most cases the recalculations of retention and achievement are slight. One area where the differences are more noticeable is notional level H qualifications, where the number of starters have increased significantly. This is due to more qualifications being classified as notional level H compared to previously being of unknown notional level.

## Comparison with statistical first releases and performance indicators

42 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 track students and their qualifications across college years and present the results in terms of the numbers expecting to complete their qualifications in a particular college year.

43 In *Statistical First Releases and 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.

44 The methods used to calculate retention in the benchmarking data differ from the methods used in the calculation of performance indicators to be published in *Performance Indicators 1998-99* as shown in table 1.

45 The methods used to calculate achievement in the benchmarking data differ from the methods used in the calculation of performance indicators to be published in *Performance Indicators 1998-99* as shown in table 2. The differences are less marked for achievement than for retention.

**Table 1. Calculation of retention**

<i>Benchmarking data: retention</i>	<i>Performance indicators: retention</i>
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**

<i>Benchmarking data: achievement</i>	<i>Performance indicators: achievement</i>
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

## Illustration of 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 67% =	6.7
5% GNVQ retention rate of 70% =	3.5
50% NVQ retention rate of 83% =	41.5
35% Other long retention rate of 83% =	29.05
	80.75%
	rounds to 81%

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

	<i>Average for GFEC/TC</i>			<i>Example College</i>
	<i>retention rate %</i>	<i>achievement rate %</i>	<i>breakdown of enrolments %</i>	<i>breakdown of enrolments %</i>
All qualifications	79	66	–	–
GCE A/AS	67	57	18	10
GNVQ	70	77	10	5
NVQ	83	59	19	50
Other long	83	70	53	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 = 66%

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

10% GCE A/AS achievement rate	
of 57% =	5.7
5% GNVQ achievement rate of 77% =	3.85
50% NVQ achievement rate of 59% =	29.5
35% Other long achievement rate	
of 70% =	24.5
	63.55%
	rounds to 64%

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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