

# **Benchmarking Data 1998–99**

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

**External Institutions**



# Contents

	<i>para.</i>
Introduction	1
Background	1
Layout Illustration	2
Using the Benchmarking Data	3
Annexes:	5
A Benchmarking Data 1998–99: Retention and Achievement Rates	7
B Definitions	13



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# Benchmarking Data 1998–99

## Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education in England

### Introduction

1 This publication sets out for the first time benchmarking data on levels of retention and achievement for external institutions in England, for the period 1998–99, and can be compared with information for colleges: *Benchmarking Data 1996–97 to 1998–99 Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England*, published in September 2000.

### Background

2 The publication of national benchmarking data is part of the Council's strategy to support external institutions in raising the standards of their work. Benchmarking data on student retention and achievement allows external institutions to assess their performance and assists their planning of action programmes to improve the retention and achievement rates of their students.

3 The report of the review group chaired by Professor Bob Fryer CBE, *External Institutions: The Final Report of the Review Group*, December 1999, recommended that the Council should publish benchmarking information for external institutions. In addition, external institutions are expected to record baseline data for retention and achievement, and they are encouraged to set targets for improving students' retention and achievement rates. Institutional target setting using benchmarking should become an integral part of external institutions' strategies to secure continuous improvement.

### Approach

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

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

6 The Council publishes national benchmarking data on levels of retention and achievement for further education colleges and external institutions. The benchmarking data are available on the Council's web site (<http://www.fefc.ac.uk>) under the pages 'Data' then 'Analysis and Benchmarking'.

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

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

## Layout Illustration

<b>1</b>		<b>2</b>	
<b>Table 1. All external institutions: enrolments on notional level 1 long qualifications</b>			
		<b>16–18</b>	<b>19+</b>
		<b>3</b>	
		98–99	98–99
<b>Number of starters</b>	<b>A</b>	3,000	79,500
<b>Retention rate</b>	<b>B</b> Mean	69%	79%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	<b>C</b> Mean	68%	60%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i> <b>D</b>			
GNVQ and precursors (%)		2%	1%
NVQs (%)		1%	1%
Other (%)		9%	99%
<i>Measures of institution variability</i> <b>E</b>			
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	56%	65%
	<i>Median</i>	70%	73%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	82%	83%
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	50%	53%
	<i>Median</i>	70%	74%
	<i>75th percentile</i>	90%	91%

**1** at national level (all external institutions), and for external institutions 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 teaching 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. 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 institution variability':

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

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

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

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

10 The final group of benchmarking data shows the results for external institutions 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 external institutions would recruit at least half of their students from disadvantaged areas.

## Using the Benchmarking Data

### Comparing results

11 External institutions 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.

12 External institutions may determine which benchmarking data are the most appropriate for their provision. For example, an external institution 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 institution might choose to compare its results for level 1 provision with the level 1 benchmarking data shown in table 5 of annex A for external institutions with high levels of deprivation, while using the benchmarking data in tables 2 to 4 for the remainder of their provision.

### Kitemarked software

13 At this stage, external institutions do not need to use kitemarked software to produce retention and achievement results using the same calculation method as the Council. Guidance notes on how to calculate baseline figures for retention and achievement rates were issued to all external institutions at the beginning of November 2000 by the Council.

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## Benchmarking data post-April 2001

14 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 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 Learning and Skills Council.

### Queries

15 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 e-mail on [fundstat.desk@feffc.ac.uk](mailto:fundstat.desk@feffc.ac.uk)



# Annexes

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# Benchmarking Data 1998–99

## Retention and Achievement Rates

Table 1. All external institutions: enrolments on notional level 1 long qualifications

Table 2. All external institutions: enrolments on notional level 2 long qualifications

Table 3. All external institutions: enrolments on notional level 3 long qualifications

Table 4. All external institutions: enrolments on short qualifications

Table 5. External institutions with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on notional level 1 long qualifications

Table 6. External institutions with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on notional level 2 long qualifications

Table 7. External institutions with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on notional level 3 long qualifications

Table 8. External institutions with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on short qualifications

*See annex B for details of the definitions used*

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

		<b>16-18</b>	<b>19+</b>
		98-99	98-99
<b>Number of starters</b>		3,000	79,500
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	69%	71%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	68%	60%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>			
GNVQ and precursors (%)		2%	1%
NVQs (%)		1%	1%
Other (%)		97%	99%
<i>Measures of institution variability</i>			
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	<i>56%</i>	<i>65%</i>
	<i>median</i>	<i>70%</i>	<i>73%</i>
	<i>75th percentile</i>	<i>82%</i>	<i>83%</i>
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	<i>50%</i>	<i>53%</i>
	<i>median</i>	<i>70%</i>	<i>74%</i>
	<i>75th percentile</i>	<i>90%</i>	<i>91%</i>

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

		<b>16-18</b>	<b>19+</b>
		98-99	98-99
<b>Number of starters</b>		4,100	43,800
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	69%	73%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	71%	69%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>			
GCSEs (%)		79%	36%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		0%	0%
NVQs (%)		2%	3%
Other (%)		19%	61%
<i>Measures of institution variability</i>			
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	<i>56%</i>	<i>67%</i>
	<i>median</i>	<i>68%</i>	<i>75%</i>
	<i>75th percentile</i>	<i>78%</i>	<i>83%</i>
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	<i>56%</i>	<i>62%</i>
	<i>median</i>	<i>71%</i>	<i>76%</i>
	<i>75th percentile</i>	<i>86%</i>	<i>90%</i>

**Table 3. All external institutions: enrolments on notional level 3 long qualifications**

		<b>16-18</b>	<b>19+</b>
		<i>98-99</i>	<i>98-99</i>
<b>Number of starters</b>		1,800	22,200
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	69%	73%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	58%	62%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>			
GCE A/AS levels (%)		79%	26%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		1%	1%
NVQs (%)		1%	4%
Other (%)		19%	69%
<i>Measures of institution variability</i>			
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	<i>56%</i>	<i>66%</i>
	<i>median</i>	<i>69%</i>	<i>77%</i>
	<i>75th percentile</i>	<i>80%</i>	<i>87%</i>
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	<i>39%</i>	<i>49%</i>
	<i>median</i>	<i>50%</i>	<i>69%</i>
	<i>75th percentile</i>	<i>73%</i>	<i>87%</i>

**Table 4. All external institutions: enrolments on short qualifications**

		<b>all ages</b>
		<i>98-99</i>
<b>Number of starters</b>		103,200
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	87%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	64%
<i>Measures of institution variability</i>		
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	<i>82%</i>
	<i>median</i>	<i>87%</i>
	<i>75th percentile</i>	<i>93%</i>
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	<i>54%</i>
	<i>median</i>	<i>75%</i>
	<i>75th percentile</i>	<i>89%</i>

**Table 5. External institutions: with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on notional level 1 long qualifications**

		<b>16-18</b>	<b>19+</b>
		<i>98-99</i>	<i>98-99</i>
<b>Number of starters</b>		700	17,400
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	54%	60%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	68%	62%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>			
GNVQ and precursors (%)		3%	1%
NVQs (%)		3%	2%
Other (%)		94%	97%
<i>Measures of institution variability</i>			
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	<i>46%</i>	<i>60%</i>
	<i>median</i>	<i>58%</i>	<i>70%</i>
	<i>75th percentile</i>	<i>64%</i>	<i>78%</i>
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	<i>58%</i>	<i>52%</i>
	<i>median</i>	<i>68%</i>	<i>73%</i>
	<i>75th percentile</i>	<i>80%</i>	<i>96%</i>

**Table 6. External institutions: with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on notional level 2 long qualifications**

		<b>16-18</b>	<b>19+</b>
		<i>98-99</i>	<i>98-99</i>
<b>Number of starters</b>		700	8,200
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	65%	67%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	67%	67%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>			
GCSEs (%)		80%	33%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		0%	0%
NVQs (%)		5%	10%
Other (%)		15%	57%
<i>Measures of institution variability</i>			
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	<i>54%</i>	<i>60%</i>
	<i>median</i>	<i>65%</i>	<i>69%</i>
	<i>75th percentile</i>	<i>78%</i>	<i>82%</i>
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	<i>51%</i>	<i>62%</i>
	<i>median</i>	<i>69%</i>	<i>79%</i>
	<i>75th percentile</i>	<i>78%</i>	<i>91%</i>

**Table 7. External institutions: with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on notional level 3 long qualifications**

		<b>16-18</b>	<b>19+</b>
		<i>98-99</i>	<i>98-99</i>
<b>Number of starters</b>		-	3,800
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	-	67%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	-	63%
<i>Breakdown of number of starters</i>			
GCE A/AS levels (%)		-	12%
GNVQ and precursors (%)		-	4%
NVQs (%)		-	13%
Other (%)		-	71%
<i>Measures of institution variability</i>			
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	-	<i>64%</i>
	<i>median</i>	-	<i>72%</i>
	<i>75th percentile</i>	-	<i>85%</i>
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	-	<i>54%</i>
	<i>median</i>	-	<i>81%</i>
	<i>75th percentile</i>	-	<i>99%</i>

Key: - fewer than 500 starters

**Table 8. External institutions: with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas: enrolments on short qualifications**

		<b>all ages</b>
		<i>98-99</i>
<b>Number of starters</b>		19,000
<b>Retention rate</b>	mean	81%
<b>Achievement rate</b>	mean	68%
<i>Measures of institution variability</i>		
<i>Retention rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	<i>77%</i>
	<i>median</i>	<i>85%</i>
	<i>75th percentile</i>	<i>91%</i>
<i>Achievement rate</i>	<i>25th percentile</i>	<i>57%</i>
	<i>median</i>	<i>70%</i>
	<i>75th percentile</i>	<i>91%</i>



# Definitions

## Summary of Calculation Method

1 The benchmarking methodology for external institutions is the same as that used to calculate college benchmarks except that the calculations use two years of ISR returns compared with five years for colleges.

2 Information is taken for each institution from the following ISR returns to create the benchmarking data:

- ISR13 (December 1998; 1997–98)
- ISR16 (December 1999; 1998–99).

The results were calculated using version 12.3 (update 3) of the qualification database.

3 Students and their qualifications are matched across the two 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 in 1998–99 are included in the publication.

4 The benchmarking data are built from cohort level, a cohort being a particular qualification 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.

## Definitions

### Number of starters

5 The ‘number of starters’ is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification during that teaching year. Note:

- a. 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;

- b. Each qualification on which a student is enrolled is shown as a separate ‘start’;
- c. The ‘number of starters’ include some non-Council-funded provision as set out in paragraph 4 above;
- d. Students enrolled on a two-year programme who began their studies in October 1997 would appear in the results for 1998–99 as this is the teaching year in which they expected to complete their qualification, even if they withdrew in the first year of their programme.

### Retention rate

6 The retention rate is the number of students continuing or completing their qualification, divided by the number of students who started the qualification, excluding transfers out. The retention rate calculation uses results for two teaching years. The number of students studying in external institutions on courses longer than two years is small and their omission will not significantly distort the calculated rate.

### Achievement rate

7 The achievement rate is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved divided by the number of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included. The achievement rate calculation only uses results for two teaching years. Again, the number of students studying in external institutions on courses longer than two years is small and their omission will not significantly distort the achievement rate.

### Age

8 A student’s age group is calculated from their age as at 31 August in the teaching 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

4 and 8 show the benchmarking data divided by two age groups: 16–18 and 19 and over.

### Short qualifications

9 A qualification is 'short' if it has an expected length of less than 24 weeks.

10 Short qualifications are shown separately, since the retention rates for these qualifications are significantly different from those of longer qualifications.

### Notional NVQ level

11 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.

12 Level H, level 4 and 5 qualifications including HNCs, HNDs, access to HE qualifications, NVQs at levels 4 and 5, and other higher level professional qualifications have been excluded as they are not Council-funded.

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.

### Measures of institution variability

14 Measures of institution variability for retention and achievement rates enable institutions to compare their results against the range for the sector or particular groups of institutions. The results in this publication show the rates which:

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

15 The measures of variability are calculated at institution level in order to provide information on variation between institutions. 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.

16 Where an external institution has fewer than five students of a particular notional level and age group, their data are not used to calculate measures of variability.

17 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 institutions is the focus (measures of variability). In some categories of the benchmarking data the difference between mean and median are great. This is due to the data being skewed towards higher values rather than being symmetrically distributed for external institutions as is the case for sector colleges.

### Widening participation factor

18 Each institution 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.

19 Specifically, the WP factor has been calculated by comparing the total number of units generated in 1998–99 by each institution, by the number of units excluding widening participation units.

20 Benchmarking data for institutions, which have a widening participation factor of 1.025 or higher are therefore shown separately in tables 5 to 8.

### Presentation issues

21 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 less than 500, results are not shown.

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

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

### Coverage

24 The benchmarking data for 1998–99 have been calculated for 201 (of 227) external institutions where both ISR13 and ISR16 data were available. These include 40 (of 48) external institutions with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas.

25 The 26 institutions excluded from the benchmarking data consist of:

- 5 institutions which have changed their student reference system since

1997–98, due to a merger or otherwise, meaning that it is not possible to match students between ISR returns systematically

- 7 institutions with unreliable data quality
- 14 institutions which had not returned valid ISR16 (December 1999; 1998–99) or ISR13 (December 1998; 1997–98) data in time to be included in the results.

### Comparison with Statistical First Releases and Performance Indicators

26 Analysis of institutions' ISR returns published in *Statistical First Releases and Performance Indicators 1998–99* show counts of students or enrolments on qualifications for a particular teaching year. In comparison, the benchmarking data track students and their qualifications across teaching years and present the results in terms of the numbers expecting to complete their qualifications in a particular teaching year.

27 In *Statistical First Releases and Performance Indicators 1998–99* the age of the student is calculated at 31 August of the current teaching 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.

28 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.

29 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**

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

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