RESEARCH

BIS | **Department for Business Innovation & Skills**

Prepared for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

By IFF Research

Mark Winterbotham

Laura Godwin

IFF Research Ltd

Chart House

16 Chart Street

London N1 6DD

Tel: 020 7250 3035

The views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

Contents

1 Introduction

Background, aims and objectives

1.1   The Skills Funding Agency and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) require high quality, reliable information on the number of learners undertaking their first Full Level 2 or Full Level 3 qualification in order to be able to determine how effective funding of learning is in upskilling the working-age adult population, and to provide progression-based performance management information to support other programmes and initiatives, such as the Framework for Excellence, the Government's performance assessment framework for further education colleges and post-16 education and training providers.

1.2   The Individual Learner Record (ILR) database has been used as a key source of information on the prior qualification levels of learners, but previous research has indicated that the ILR appears to overstate the proportion that are studying for their first Full Level 2 qualification. If correct this clearly has important implications, in particular it could lead to concerns about the accuracy of the ILR as a credible source of information about levels of firstness in publicly funded qualifications, and might lead to alternative information sources being required.

1.3   The Skills Funding Agency set up a Sponsor Board to oversee a range of activities designed to ensure that users can have greater confidence in the ILR data returned by providers, and as part of its action plan for addressing recording of prior attainment, the current research was commissioned to:

- Repeat previous quantitative prior qualification surveys but with an emphasis on provider level analysis allowing a comparison of ILR v. survey assessments of firstness for a representative sample of providers across FE (Adult Learner Responsive), Train to Gain, and Apprenticeship funding streams.

- Undertake qualitative research among providers to explore how the level of prior attainment is recorded, to identify best practice, and to investigate collection problems.

Methodology

1.4   There were two separate elements to the survey, a quantitative survey of learners and a qualitative survey of providers. We discuss each in turn.

Quantitative survey of learners

1.5   A total of 5,033 learners were interviewed for the survey. The sample came from the ILR and consisted of those in learning on 1st November 2008 (excluding those without a telephone number and excluding those marked as not wishing to be contacted for research purposes). All were aged 19 plus at the start of their course and were studying Full Level 2 or Full Level 3 courses. All learners selected for the survey had information on prior attainment recorded on the ILR (including where it was indicated that the learner had

no prior qualifications), allowing comparisons to be made between this information and that obtained through the survey.

1.6   Rather than being randomly selected across the whole ILR, the learners were selected from larger providers to enable more reliable provider-level analysis. In total the 5,033 learners were selected from 94 providers.

1.7   Initial provider level quotas were set with the aim of ensuring a base of 50 learner interviews per funding stream, per provider. In total 40 providers were selected to provide 50 Adult Learner Responsive learner (ALR) interviews each, 40 to provide 50 Train to Gain learner interviews each, and 20 to provide 50 Apprenticeship learner interviews each. Five providers were selected to provide both ALR and Train to Gain interviews, and one to provide both Train to Gain and Apprenticeship interviews. In three providers, the number of interviews actually achieved was low, and in the provider level analysis these have been excluded (see the appendix for further details).

1.8   The target was for 5,000 interviews split 2,000 Adult Learner Responsive learners (2,002 were achieved), 2,000 Train to Gain learners (2,015 were achieved) and 1,000 Apprenticeship learners (1,016 were achieved). Quotas were also set within each funding stream on an interlocked age by learning level matrix. The profile of the achieved interviews is appended (Table A.4).

1.9   The questionnaire exactly replicated that used for previous Prior Achievement surveys, but with the addition of a question asking learners whether, prior to the course they were on in November 2008, they had ever undertaken any other learning with the same provider. This was to help understand issues around ILR information on prior attainment being updated prior to subsequent courses. The questionnaire is appended (Appendix B).

1.10   It is important to note that the survey aimed to provide reliable provider level analysis by undertaking a minimum number of interviews per provider, and did not seek to interview or to present results for a representative sample of learners (a Prior Achievement study among a representative sample of adult learners on provision in November 2008 has already been conducted). For this reason no weighting has been applied to the survey data: within each funding stream, though, the profile of the achieved interviews closely matches the profile of all adult level 2 and level 3 learners on provision in November 2008 (see Appendix A Table A.5). We do in Chapter 3 report some learner level data – it is important to note this is to show the extent of potential ILR data problems, not to report on the exact extent of these issues, which have already been discussed in a previous Prior Achievements report.

Qualitative survey of providers

1.11   In total, 41 in-depth, face-to-face interviews were undertaken with providers. These took place from 16th April to 20th May 2010. On average these lasted a little over an hour. The topic guide used for the discussion is appended (Appendix C).

1.12   Quite often more than one person at each provider participated in the interview, indeed in total 67 respondents were involved in the discussions. The initial approach sought the person at the provider best able to speak about how their organisation collects

information from learners on their prior qualifications, and in all cases respondents confirmed that they were the best or one of the best people to speak on these issues. A wide range of job titles were covered by the research, including:

Principal; Assistant Principal; Information Funding Manager; Head of MIS; Central Data Services Manager; Train to Gain Manager; Apprenticeships Manager; Head of Audit and Compliance; Head of Adult Learning; Business Development Manager; Head of Employer Engagement; Director of Student Records; Director of Student Support; Director of Student Progression; National Sales Manager; Employer Response Contract Coordinator.

1.13   All but two of the providers selected for the study were those that had been included in the quantitative stage of the survey. The aim was to ensure a broad spread by funding stream, region and by FE College v. other types of provider.

A note on determining the level of highest prior qualification (quantitative survey)

1.14   Information on the qualifications that people had attained prior to their course was gathered in the following way. Survey respondents were first asked to indicate whether they had achieved any qualifications from school, college or university, from an apprenticeship, through work or government schemes or through any other sources. Those who confirmed that they had achieved a prior qualification from these sources were read a list of qualifications and asked to confirm whether or not they had achieved each of these, and to give details of any other qualifications (including those achieved outside of the UK) not appearing on this list.

1.15   From this list of qualifications achieved and answers to supplementary questions regarding the number and level attained, a highest level was assigned to each respondent. Slightly different figures result depending on how 'other qualifications' are dealt with. The default method used in previous research in this Prior Achievement series (replicating the approach taken in the Labour Force Survey) ignores 'other' qualifications (including all those attained outside the UK) with regards to determining highest prior qualification level if the respondent has achieved any of the qualifications read out to them. If an 'other' qualification is the only qualification an individual says they have, then it is assigned to a level in a pre-determined (random) manner (55% are assigned to Full Level 1, 35% are assigned to Full Level 2, 10% are assigned to Full Level 3). A number of non-'other' qualifications are also assigned to levels in set ratios. If an apprenticeship is the highest qualification then half these learners are assigned as having achieved a Level 2 qualification and half a Level 3. If a CSYS is the highest qualification then 67% are allocated as a Level 2 and 33% a Level 3. If A levels, AS levels or O levels are the highest qualification but the learner is unsure how many that they have, then level is determined using the results of those that do have such qualifications as their highest and assigning the proportion of learners at each level.

1.16   However, because a core aspect of this survey was determining the extent to which information on the ILR may be inaccurate in this report we do not allocate level in this way. This is simply because where we are showing the proportion of cases where the ILR prior level differs from the level that is derived from the information given by the learner during the survey, randomly allocating a level for other qualifications may lead to a level being derived which suggests a discrepancy where none exists. In these cases we have simply

said the survey prior attainment level is inconclusive. The exception to this is cases where whichever level the other qualification was randomly assigned to would be higher or lower than that on the ILR for that learner.

2 Executive Summary

2.1   This report details the findings of a project involving two distinct elements: a quantitative survey of 5,033 adult learners undertaking level 2 and level 3 courses in late 2008, and a qualitative study consisting of 41 face-to-face depth interviews with providers.

2.2   The quantitative study confirmed findings of previous Prior Achievement research that there is a wide discrepancy between the level of prior qualifications reported on the ILR and that which emerges from the survey (when respondents are read an extensive list of qualifications and asked which they have). In particular the survey reported a higher prior qualification level for almost half (48%) of the 5,033 learners interviewed, though for one in nine learners (11%) a lower level was found. The survey was more likely to find a higher level of prior qualification than reported on the ILR for:

- Train to Gain and Apprenticeship streams (53% and 54% respectively, compared with 39% for the Adult Learner Responsive stream);

- Learners studying with private (non-FE college) providers (55% v. 45% among FE colleges). This difference is explained in part by the different types of provision offered by Colleges and private training providers; reflecting the pattern in the ILR, the learners surveyed from the private providers are primarily on Train to Gain and Apprenticeship provision, where discrepancies in ILR and survey measures of prior attainment are more commonplace.

2.3   Specifically among learners described on the ILR as undertaking their first Level 2 (a total of 2,778 respondents), based on the information on their prior qualifications given during the survey almost half (48%) would not be first Level 2 learners. This was particularly high for the Apprenticeship stream (65%); where claims of first Level 2 learning are made for Apprenticeship learners, they are more likely to be challenged by the survey results than those made for ALR learners or Train to Gain enrolments.

2.4   It is important to note that part of these discrepancies would be expected based on the way prior achievement is recorded on the ILR. A requirement of the ILR (not that this is always understood or followed by all providers) is that the level of prior achievement is based on what the learner has when they first come to the provider, not what they have when they start a particular course. Hence a learner arriving at a provider with a highest qualification below level 2 who undertakes a Full Level 2 qualification with the provider and progresses with them to a level 3 qualification, would / should be recorded on the ILR for this latter course as undertaking their first Full Level 2 qualification (despite their having achieved a Full Level 2 when they start the level 3 course). For the survey, the questioning asks simply about the qualifications at the time they start the course. However, even among survey respondents who were studying with the provider for the first time who were recorded on the ILR as studying for their first Full Level 2 (a base of 2,202 respondents) the survey found that in 46% of cases these learners already had a level 2 qualification. (In comparison 56% of the 576 respondents continuing their study with the same provider who were recorded on the ILR as being first Full Level 2 learners indicated on the survey that they already had qualifications at level 2 when starting their course).

2.5   When the issue of the accuracy of the prior attainment information for adult learners is raised with providers, the most common sentiment is that it is accurate (give or take the potential for occasional data entry errors) based on the information given to them by learners. Nearly all providers indicate that there are inevitably some errors in the information provided by learners (the reasons for this are described below), and hence few describe their prior attainment information as 100% accurate. Some felt unable to comment on the potential level of inaccuracy (having nothing on which to base the likely accuracy or not of learner information), most of the rest estimating that around 1% to 5% might be inaccurate, and a small number putting the likely inaccuracy at 20%.

2.6   A key aim of the study was to assess differences by provider. Results show wide variation in the ILR v. survey measure of first Level 2 discrepancy, though discrepancies existed for all providers surveyed. In total there were 70 providers where at least 20 adult learners were interviewed who were shown on the ILR as undertaking their first Full Level 2. Information from these learners given for the survey suggests that for all 70 of these providers at least a quarter of these first Level 2 learners had prior qualifications at level 2. For around half the providers, at least 50% of ILR defined first Level 2 learners already had a Full Level 2 qualification. Such high level of ILR v. survey discrepancies was more common among private (non-FE college) providers and for learners funded through the Apprenticeship stream.

2.7   The reasons given by providers as to why learners might provide inaccurate information covered:

- Potential dishonesty if learners are aware that they are eligible for fee remission if they indicate that they do not have qualifications at Level 2.

- Learners believing that some qualifications are not relevant, for example if it is specific to a vocational area which is not related to the new course they are enrolling on.

- Learners not always including qualifications or certificates achieved through work (for example a number of providers spoke of Train to Gain assessors questioning people who said they had no prior qualifications, and finding they had sometimes achieved certificates or units of qualifications).

- Some confusion about full qualifications and units, though providers felt this might lead to some learners overstating their level – providers often had examples of cases where people initially indicated that they had a Full Level 2 qualification when on questioning they had only achieved units.

- Not remembering qualifications achieved some time ago, clearly more of an issue for older respondents.

2.8   In additional to these learner factors, some providers felt that ILR inaccuracies may result from other providers being less rigorous than they are regarding collecting prior qualifications information (e.g. accepting learner information at face value or not undertaking double checks with other information provided by or that they have about the learner) or some providers even indicating learners had no prior qualifications to fill up courses for which they had contracts.

2.9   Prior qualification information is generally collected on an enrolment form and / or the Individual Learning Plan in two main ways.

- Most often these forms asks for all the qualifications attained to date, asking for the type of qualification, the date it was attained and the level or grade achieved. This is later assigned to a highest level by a member of staff. A few variations were seen:

    o   One provider only asked for the qualifications obtained in the last 5 years (this will clearly act to underestimate prior attainment on the ILR)

    o   Another asked for the learner's highest qualification, and any relevant qualifications achieved in the last 5 years (leaving it to the learner to determine 'relevant' and 'highest');

    o   A few asked only for written details of the learner's highest qualification, rather than all qualifications.

- A minority (around a third) ask just for the level of their highest qualification to be ticked. In most cases this was accompanied by a detailed list of examples of qualifications and their levels for the respondent to refer to (in cases where this was not provided on the form this it was because this was decided in discussion between the learner and a member of staff).

2.10   Hence in most cases the decision on the level of the prior qualification level is made by a member of staff, rather than the learner. The decision on the level is usually described as straightforward based on the information supplied by the learner. More difficult cases are foreign qualifications, some older qualifications, and some specific industry-specific qualifications, though these were usually just described as taking longer (and most could easily access to NARIC for foreign qualifications, or the Learning Aims Database). Providers were confident that they personally or the staff making the decisions on prior level were suitably trained to be able to do this, with training being described as being at least annual (typically in preparation for the key September enrolment period), and staff being supplied with regular guidance and updates.

2.11   Although providers generally indicated that they had to take information provided by the learner at face value and rely on their honesty, a number pointed out that checks would be carried out on the data. These included:

- In some cases qualification information is collected on a number of forms (the main ones being an application form, an enrolment form and an Individual Learning Plan) and the consistency between the information is checked.

- For Employer Responsive streams a provider may have information from the employer on the learner's level, and this can be used as a check. That said many thought employer supplied information on qualifications is often inaccurate (for example because it is not kept up to date or employees may have exaggerated their qualifications to their employer).

- For learners that have studied with the provider before information given on the form can clearly be checked against information supplied previously by the learner.

- Running of DSAT or other checks on the quality of the information. This can highlight such things as a higher than usual level of learners with no qualifications or qualifications unknown which can then be investigated further.

- Internal audits whereby a number of learner records would be selected and an audit trail conducted on the supporting information. This mainly checks that information from a form has been copied onto the IT system correctly (it is not the case as with younger learners that providers ask to see certificates and keep records of the qualifications that adult learners say they have)

2.12   There was variation in how a form indicating no prior qualifications would be handled. Some providers appeared to take the view that it is very unlikely that individuals would genuinely have no qualifications at all, and will check this with the learner in each case. Similarly some pointed out that their Train to Gain assessors are trained to explore this issue in their discussions with the learner at the workplace, and if the learner says they have no prior qualifications they will ask outright if have achieved certificates or qualifications or units of qualifications at work or since leaving school. Other providers made no particular mention on this issue. Certainly the number of learners indicating that they have no prior qualifications contributes to the discrepancy between the ILR and the survey assessment of highest prior achievement: among the 4,530 learners interviewed where the survey information suggested a definite prior level, 21% were recorded as having no prior qualification on the ILR compared with 11% based on their survey data.

Recommendations

2.13   Most providers ask learners to write in all the qualifications that they have and then staff assign the highest level. Others however ask learners simply to indicate their highest level (with a checklist explaining the main qualifications that fall within different levels): given that very few of these providers also ask the learner to write in the specific qualifications that they have, very few checks can be made on the information provided by the learner. Hence we believe that asking for the full list of qualifications a learner has is preferable, and ideally the learner would also be asked to assess their highest level. If both bits of information are collected from the learner (the specific qualifications and the highest level) then in all cases where provider staff disagreed that the qualifications listed were of the level indicated by the learner this would be checked with the learner.

2.14   Questions asking for qualifications should be more standardised, and should emphasise the need for the learner to write in all the qualifications achieved whether through school, work or elsewhere; not just the highest qualification (since the individual may not understand which is the highest, or may naturally think simply of the most recent), not just those achieved in the last 5 years (since this may well exclude their highest qualification) and not just those relevant to the course (again likely to exclude their highest qualification).

2.15   Similarly more detail on why the question is being asked of the learner may also improve data quality (this emphasising the need to measure progression rather than potential fee remission). This would reduce instances where learners may only write in qualifications they see as relevant to the course in question.

2.16   Part of the reason for the discrepancy between the ILR and the survey measure of first Level 2-ness is differences in the proportion of learners described as having no prior qualifications – this being much higher on the ILR than found on the survey. Some providers appear to take a much harder line than others on accepting at face value information that people having no prior qualifications. More guidance could be issued on this, for example an expectation that if it is above a certain level, a proportion of these cases should be checked directly with the learner.

2.17   There is very wide variation in how progression within a provider is handled in terms of prior attainment data on the ILR. While some providers understand that the prior qualification on the ILR is based on the learner's situation when they first 'walk through the doors', this appears to be a minority of providers: the majority say they would change the prior attainment if a learner started a new course after achieving another qualification with the provider (or would do so as long as the new course was in a new academic year). Guidance on this needs to be re-emphasised, as varying practice on this issue clearly has significant implications for ILR prior attainment levels.

2.18   The Managing Information Across Partners (MIAP – now renamed the Learning Records Service) database is considered by providers as the key means by which improvements can be made in the quality of recording of learner prior attainment. However, looking up records for every learner is potentially a significant administrative burden, and others questioned if data protection laws would allow it to be used in this way.

3   Comparisons of survey and ILR prior qualification level

3.1   In this chapter results are compared between the survey and the ILR regarding prior qualification level. This is both regarding overall discrepancies in the level, and more specifically regarding whether learners have a prior Full Level 2 qualification or not. The analysis is first presented at a learner level (which looks at the question of 'for what proportion of learners covered by the survey is there a discrepancy between the survey and the ILR level of prior qualifications?') and then at a provider level (which looks at the question 'what is the variation between providers in the level of discrepancy between the survey and the ILR prior qualification level?').

Learner level analysis

3.2   Table 3.1 shows the extent to which the survey and the ILR differ on the assessment of prior qualification level. It is important to note that this discrepancy may not always be critical in the sense of affecting firstness – if the ILR indicates that a person has no prior qualifications and the survey suggests that they have a qualification below Level 2, then this is much less critical from a policy angle than where the ILR records a learner as having prior qualifications below level 2 and the survey indicates they have qualifications at level 2 or higher. The issue of discrepancies regarding first Level 2 qualifications is discussed later in the chapter.

3.3   Across all learners interviewed, the ILR and survey information on prior achievement level was consistent in just under two-fifths of cases (37%). Where the two measures did not give the same level, the tendency was for the survey to indicate a higher level of prior qualifications than recorded on the ILR: overall for approaching half of all learners (48%) the level recorded by the ILR was lower than found for the survey, while the reverse was true for one in nine learners (in 11% of cases the ILR appeared to over-state the prior achievement of learners). In a further one in twenty cases the survey measure of highest prior attainment was inconclusive (see note at paragraph 1.16). Overall the survey of learners again confirms (as with previous studies) that the ILR appears to under-report the level of prior qualifications held by adult Level 2 and Level 3 learners.

3.4   Table 3.1 also shows how discrepancies between the ILR and survey measures differ according to the funding stream of the learner aim, the type and region of provider, and the level of the course. This shows that:

- There was a greater level of agreement between ILR and survey measures of highest prior attainment for learners falling under the Adult Learner Responsive (ALR) stream (43% agreement) compared to those who had been enrolled on a Train to Gain course (34%) or an Apprenticeship (29%). Correspondingly, the survey was more likely to record a higher level of prior attainment than the ILR for Apprenticeship (54%) and Train to Gain (53%) learners than found for ALR learners (39%). The potential reasons for these discrepancies are explored in more detail through the rest of this chapter.

- The level of consistency is higher for FE Colleges as opposed to other types of training provider. This difference is explained in part by the different pattern of provision offered by FE Colleges and private training providers; reflecting the pattern in the ILR, the learners covered by the private providers included in this research were primarily on Train to Gain and Apprenticeship provision, where discrepancies in ILR and survey measures of prior attainment are more commonplace. However, even in FE Colleges, the survey suggests that the ILR overstates learner prior attainment in as many as 45% of cases (compared with 55% among other providers).

- By region, ILR underestimates of prior attainment level appear more common than average in the South East (54%), North East (52%) and Greater London (51%).

Table 3.1: Comparison of the survey and ILR measures of prior qualification level

Row percentages	Base		ILR and survey measure the same	ILR higher	Survey measure higher	Survey inconclusive**
All learners	*5,033*	%	37	11	48	5
Adult Learner Responsive stream	*2,002*	%	43	14	39	5
Train to Gain	*2,015*	%	34	9	53	4
Apprenticeship stream	*1,016*	%	29	9	54	9
FE College	*3,627*	%	39	12	45	5
Private training provider / other	*1,406*	%	30	9	55	7
East of England	*625*	%	40	8	46	5
East Midlands	*406*	%	38	9	47	5

Row percentages	Base		ILR and survey measure the same	ILR higher	Survey measure higher	Survey inconclusive**
Greater London	*565*	%	32	13	51	5
North East	*187*	%	36	8	52	4
North West	*771*	%	40	12	44	5
South East	*594*	%	30	10	54	6
South West	*549*	%	37	9	48	6
West Midlands	*768*	%	35	13	49	4
Yorkshire and Humberside	*568*	%	41	13	42	4
Full Level 2 learning	*2,981*	%	36	10	49	4
Full Level 3 learning	*2,052*	%	37	11	45	7

** 'Survey inconclusive' refers to cases where the level of the highest prior qualification as recorded in the survey cannot be definitively determined (see further explanation at paragraph 1.16).

3.5   There is also a difference by level, with the survey indicating a significantly higher prior attainment level than the ILR for learners studying at Level 2 (49%), compared with those studying at Level 3 (45%). This is linked to a difference in the degree of employer-responsive provision offered at the two levels. The Level 2 learner cohort were more likely to be Train to Gain learners (50%, compared to 25% of the Level 3 learners), and as we have commented the level of discrepancy is higher than average on Train to Gain provision.

3.6   There are no significant differences in the level of discrepancy by age of learner. Despite some providers saying that they have more difficulty in accurately recording prior attainment for older learners (see paragraphs 4.20 and 4.28), the learner-level data does not show a significantly higher level of discrepancy for those aged 45 plus compared to younger learners.

3.7   An area of key policy interest is the precision of the ILR data on the 'firstness' of Level 2 learning. Hence the consistency between ILR and survey measures of the proportion of Level 2 and Level 3 learners enrolling without any prior attainment at Full Level 2 is of key importance. The remainder of this section examines the extent of variations in the recording of Level 2 firstness specifically.

3.8   Figure 3.1 looks at how the actual prior qualification levels compare on the two datasets, for the same learners. The comparison is shown only for those learners where a definite prior qualification level was recorded through the survey questioning (4,530 out of the 5,033 learners interviewed – 90%). This reveals that compared with the survey measure, the ILR data reports a much higher proportion of adult learners entering Level 2 and Level 3 courses without any prior qualifications at all (21% v. 11%), or only qualifications at below Full Level 2 (54%, compared to 34% on the survey measure). Therefore, the ILR data states a much higher 'firstness' of Full Level 2 learning than found for the survey.

Figure 3.1: Comparison of ILR and Survey highest prior level

All learners with definite prior achievement level from both the ILR and from the survey (LFS measure) (4,530)
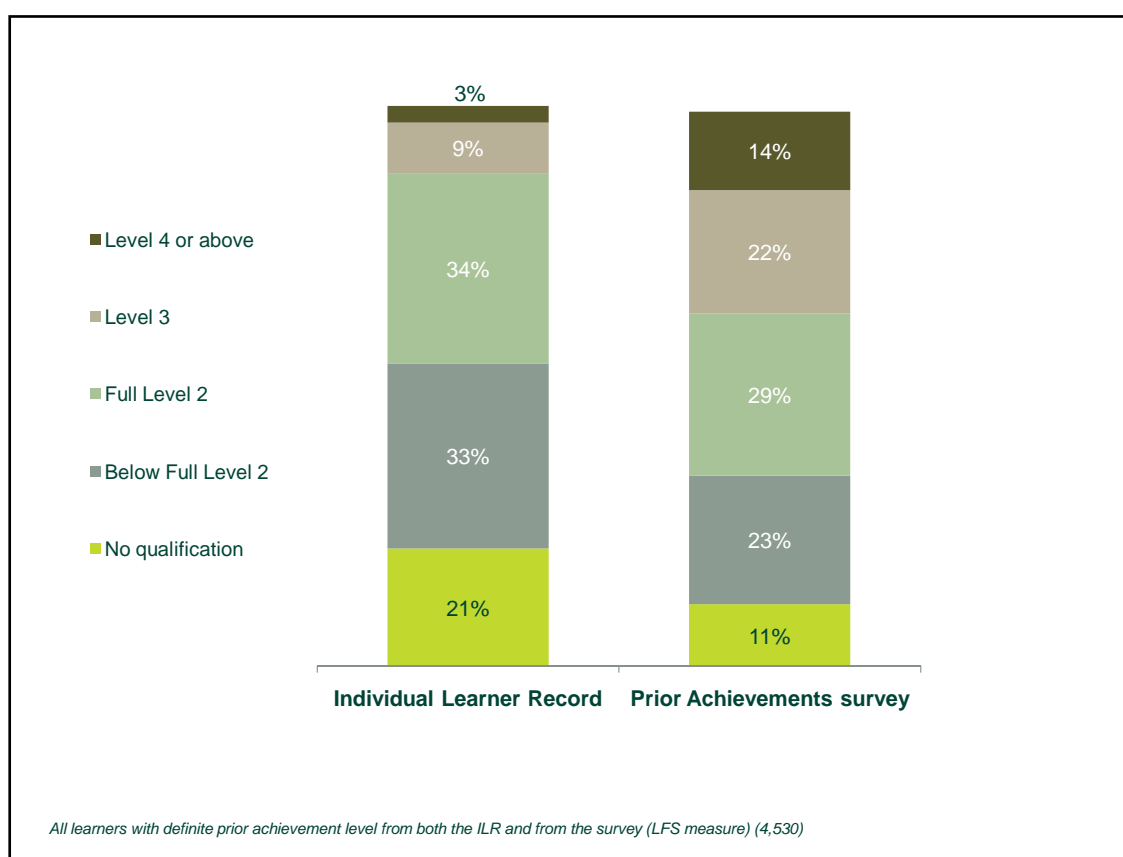
3.9   The issue of differing results on Level 2 firstness are described in Table 3.2, which summarises the match between ILR and survey assessments of prior Level 2 attainment. The table shows that among all Level 2 and Level 3 learners interviewed, in around one quarter of cases (27%) whilst the ILR indicates a first Level 2 learner, the survey indicates that the learner already had a Full Level 2 qualification before starting their course. This figure (highlighted in the shaded column of data in Table 3.2) can be considered the key

'error' in assessing firstness, and will be used to assess accuracy of recording across individual providers and provider types in the remainder of this section.

Table 3.2: Comparison of the survey and ILR measures of prior level 2 qualifications (among those shown on the ILR as first Level 2 learners)

Row percentages	Base: All learners		ILR and survey agree First Level 2	ILR says first Level 2, survey indicates prior attainment at Full Level 2	ILR says first Level 2, survey inconclusive	Not recorded as a first Level 2 on the ILR
	5,033	%	25	27	4	45
Adult Learner Responsive stream	2,002	%	19	21	2	58
Train to Gain	2,015	%	36	31	6	27
Apprenticeship stream	1,016	%	14	29	2	55
FE College	3,627	%	25	25	4	47
Private training provider / other	1,406	%	25	31	4	40
East of England	625	%	31	27	4	38
East Midlands	406	%	28	26	4	42
Greater London	565	%	26	31	5	38
North East	187	%	21	31	3	45

Row percentages	Base: All learners		ILR and survey agree First Level 2	ILR says first Level 2, survey indicates prior attainment at Full Level 2	ILR says first Level 2, survey inconclusive	Not recorded as a first Level 2 on the ILR
North West	771	%	20	25	1	53
South East	594	%	27	30	6	37
South West	549	%	21	21	4	53
West Midlands	768	%	22	29	3	46
Yorkshire and Humberside	568	%	26	22	3	48
Full Level 2 learning	2,981	%	35	30	5	29
Full Level 3 learning	2,052	%	10	21	1	68

3.10   The pattern in the incidence of this key discrepancy on the ILR in assessing Level 2 firstness mirrors that seen in the overall discrepancy of ILR and survey measures of prior attainment. Again, the discrepancy rates are higher for 'employer-responsive' streams than for learner-responsive; 29% for Apprenticeships and 31% for Train to Gain, compared to 21% for the ALR stream. In the same way, discrepancies in recording Level 2 firstness are more prevalent amongst private training providers (applying to 31% of all learners from these providers, compared to 25% of FE College learners).

3.11   As seen previously, Greater London, the South East and North East come out as the regions with the highest discrepancy rates.

3.12   Again, discrepancies in recording prior attainment at Level 2 are more prevalent for Level 2 rather than Level 3 learners. Three in ten learners who had been studying on Level 2 courses (30%) were marked on the ILR as first Level 2 learners on enrolment but found

on the survey to have prior attainment at Level 2. This compares to one fifth (21%) of all Level 3 learners.

Whilst it is important to understand the overall likelihood of errors in recording prior first Level 2 qualifications occurring for different types or levels of provision, it is also necessary to understand that the overall discrepancy rate is linked to the overall number of claims of first Level 2 learning made. The proportion of learners not described as being a first Level 2 learner is shown in the final column of data in Table 3.2. This shows for instance, that for the majority of learners in our Train to Gain sample (73%) the ILR record indicates that they had no prior attainment at Level 2 or above, whereas this was the case for only two-fifths (42%) of those enrolling for ALR courses. In order to fully understand the likelihood that a particular claim of firstness on the ILR will be accurate, it is necessary to look at the survey assessment of prior attainment specifically among learners indicated on the ILR as being first Level 2 learners, a base of 2,778 respondents – this is shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Comparison of the survey and ILR measures of prior level 2 qualifications (among those shown on the ILR as first Level 2 learners)

Row percentages	*Base: All learners recorded on the ILR as first Level 2*		**ILR and survey agree First Level 2**	**ILR says first Level 2, survey indicates prior attainment at Full Level 2**	**ILR says first Level 2, survey inconclusive**
All recorded on the ILR as first Level 2	*2,778*	%	45	48	7
Adult Learner Responsive stream	*845*	%	46	49	4
Train to Gain	*1,478*	%	49	43	9
Apprenticeship stream	*455*	%	31	65	4
FE College	*1,936*	%	46	47	7
Private training provider / other	*842*	%	42	51	7

Row percentages	Base: All learners recorded on the ILR as first Level 2		ILR and survey agree First Level 2	ILR says first Level 2, survey indicates prior attainment at Full Level 2	ILR says first Level 2, survey inconclusive
East of England	390	%	50	44	6
East Midlands	235	%	49	45	7
Greater London	353	%	42	50	8
North East	103	%	39	56	5
North West	360	%	43	54	3
South East	375	%	44	48	9
South West	256	%	46	45	9
West Midlands	411	%	40	53	6
Yorkshire and Humberside	295	%	51	42	7
Full Level 2 learning	2,114	%	49	43	8
Full Level 3 learning	664	%	31	65	4

3.13   As shown in Table 3.3, the survey confirms the ILR first Level 2 assessment in over two-fifths (45%) of cases. In approaching half of cases (48%), however, the survey indicates that the learners already had a Full Level 2 qualification before starting their course.

3.14   The analysis presented in Table 3.3, based as it is only on those learners for whom the ILR states Level 2 firstness, reveals a different pattern than the overall analysis shown

in Table 3.2 in terms of funding stream and level of learning. The incidence of this key 'error' on the ILR in assessing Level 2 firstness is highest for Apprenticeship learners (65%), 'average' for ALR learners (49%) and below average for Train to Gain (43% - the survey agreed with the ILR assessment that they had no prior level 2 in almost half (49%) of cases). **So where claims of first Level 2 learning are made for Apprenticeship learners, they are more likely to be challenged by the survey results than those made for ALR learners or Train to Gain enrolments.**

3.15   The previous pattern of discrepancy by Level 2 and Level 3 learning is also reversed here. Where the ILR indicates that a learner entering a Level 3 course has no prior attainment at Full Level 2, the survey is more likely to indicate this as erroneous as compared to an analogous claim for someone enrolling on a Full Level 2 course. This pattern by level holds for all three funding streams (ALR, Train to Gain and Apprenticeships). Because the Train to Gain cohort contains fewer learners taking courses at Level 3 (26%, compared to 50% and 52% of ALR and Apprenticeship learners respectively), this also contributes to the lower discrepancy rate for this stream.

3.16   These patterns by type of provision and level of learning can perhaps be explained with reference to the anticipated level of prior qualification individuals should have before undertaking a Level 3 course, and the link between prior attainment level and funding for different types of training. It is usual for learners applying for Level 3 courses to have progressed from learning at Full Level 2, and for successful prior attainment at this level to be a pre-requisite for gaining a place on a Level 3 course. Therefore it stands to reason that claims that a given learner is not already qualified to Full Level 2 before starting a Level 3 course are more likely to be wrong than when a learner is starting a Level 2 course. Within the Train to Gain stream, where provision is primarily marketed as only appropriate for or available to learners without Level 2 attainment, it may be that the 'first Level 2' learners put forward are more likely to be genuine.

3.17   However, it should be noted that even for Level 2 courses and Train to Gain provision, the survey still indicates a concerning level of overstatement on ILR claims of Level 2 firstness, reflecting the views of some providers that false claims may be put forward in order to secure Train to Gain funding (see the following chapter).

3.18   The survey indicates that the type of provider has a slight but statistically significant impact on the accuracy of first Level 2 information returned on the ILR, with the overall discrepancy rate (shaded in Table 3.3) significantly lower for FE Colleges than for other training providers. This shows that the higher discrepancy rate amongst private training providers carries over when looking specifically at first Level 2 learners.

3.19   By region, the survey suggests that overstatement of first Level 2-ness is significantly higher than average in the North East (56%), the North West (54%) and the West Midlands (53%), and significantly lower in Yorkshire and Humberside (42%).

3.20   It is interesting to look at the extent to which discrepancies in recording of Level 2 firstness might be linked to the way prior attainment is recorded for those who have previously studied with the provider. A requirement of the ILR (not that his always understood or followed by providers) is that the level of prior achievement is based on what the learner has when they first come to the provider, not what they have when they start a particular course. Hence a learner arriving at a provider with a highest qualification

below level 2 who undertakes a Full Level 2 qualification with the provider and progresses with them to a level 3 qualification, would / should be recorded on the ILR for this latter course as undertaking their first Full Level 2 qualification (despite their having attained a Full Level 2 when they start the level 3 course). For the survey, the questioning asks simply about the qualifications at the time they start the course. For this reason, among Level 3 learners that had studied with the provider previously, some of the cases where the ILR shows no prior Level 2 qualifications and the survey indicates they have a prior Level 2 may be legitimate in that the ILR is recording what it is intended to record.

3.21   Table 3.4 below shows that the discrepancy rate is indeed higher for those who had studied with the provider before (at 56%). Furthermore, around a third (34%) of all Level 3 learners who were recorded as first Level 2 learners on the ILR but not through the survey (a base of 433 learners) had studied with the same provider before starting their Level 3 course. This indicates that for some learners the discrepancy between the survey and the ILR assessment of prior qualifications at level 2 is 'legitimate'. However, despite these effects, as shown in Table 3.4, even among respondents who were studying with the provider for the first time who were recorded on the ILR as studying for their first full Level 2 (a base of 2,202 respondents) the survey found that in 46% of cases these learners already had a Level 2 qualification.

Table 3.4: Comparison of the survey and ILR measures of prior level 2 qualifications – by prior learning at the provider

Row percentages	*Base: All recorded on the ILR as first Level 2*		**ILR and survey agree First Level 2**	**ILR says first Level 2, survey indicates prior attainment at Full Level 2**	**ILR says first Level 2, survey inconclusive**
All recorded on the ILR as first Level 2	*2,778*	%	45	48	7
Undertaken any prior learning with the provider	*576*	%	40	56	4
Not undertaken any prior learning with the provider	*2,202*	%	46	46	7

3.22   It is also possible to specify the actual type of prior qualification held by learners where the ILR and survey measures give different levels of attainment. Table 3.5 lists the

specific highest prior qualifications held by those learners with a prior qualification at Full Level 2 or above on the survey data, where the ILR gave the highest prior attainment level as 'no qualification'. This sheds light on the type of prior qualifications missed or omitted from the ILR, contributing to differences in reported firstness.

Table 3.5: Highest prior qualification where survey indicates a prior Full Level 2 or higher and where ILR stated no prior qualifications

Base: *All learners recorded on the ILR as having no prior qualifications, who survey shows as having prior attainment at Full Level 2 or above*	*474*
	%
NVQ Level 2	18
O level, GCSE grade A-C or equivalent (Level 2)	15
Apprenticeship (Level 2)	11
A level or equivalent	11
Degree	7
NVQ Level 3	6
OND,ONC,BTEC etc, national	5
Diploma in Higher Education	4
City & Guilds advanced craft	3
City & Guilds craft	3
HNC,HND,BTEC etc higher	3
Other HE below degree	3
GNVQ intermediate	2
GNVQ advanced	2
BTEC,SCOTVEC first or general diploma	2
Nursing qualification (Level 4)	1
International Baccalaureate	1
NVQ Level 4 or 5	1
Access to HE	1

3.23   The prior qualifications revealed by the survey for these learners recorded as having no prior qualifications were most commonly:

- NVQ Level 2 (18% - 20% for the Train to Gain learners)

- GCSEs/O levels at Full Level 2 (15%)

- Level 2 Apprenticeships (11% - 15% for Adult Learner Responsive course learners)

- A Levels (11%)

3.24   Clearly there is a mix of academic and vocational qualifications that are apparently missed from ILR records. In a substantial number of cases, the person recorded on the ILR as having no prior qualifications was actually qualified to Level 4 or above before enrolment (through having undertaken a degree, a HNC/HND/BTEC higher, or a NVQ Level 4 or 5).

Provider level analysis

3.25   The data presented thus far have shown ILR v. survey first Level 2 discrepancy rates at a learner level. A key aim of this research, however, has been to reveal to what extent the inaccuracies in recording firstness are concentrated or isolated in a small number of providers, or evident to a broadly similar extent across providers. The following analysis focuses on the proportion of providers showing evidence of discrepancies in the ILR assessments of firstness, and the percentage of providers showing these discrepancies for small or large proportion of learner records.

3.26   Table 3.6 shows the proportion of providers who exhibit different rates of discrepancy on firstness, that is the proportion of learners recorded on the ILR as first Level 2 learners who the survey shows as having prior attainment at Full Level 2. This shows that none of the 70 providers had a zero 'discrepancy rate' for their first Level 2 learners, and for just over half of providers, where firstness was claimed on the ILR, survey data suggest this was erroneous in just over half (52%) of cases. For 8 of the 70 providers (11%) at least two thirds of claims of firstness on the ILR were disputed by the survey data. Note that only those providers with a base size of at least 20 'ILR-defined first Level 2' learners are included in this analysis.

Table 3.6: The proportion of providers exhibiting different 'discrepancy' rates in the recording of first Level 2 learning – by provider type

	Provider type		
	All	FE College	Private training provider/ other
Base: All providers with at least 20 ILR first Level 2 learners surveyed	*70*	*49*	*21*
	%	%	%
Zero discrepancy rate	-	-	-
1% up to 24% discrepancy rate	-	-	-
25% up to 32% discrepancy rate	9	8	10
33% up to 49% discrepancy rate	39	41	33
50% up to 65% discrepancy rate	41	45	33
66% or over discrepancy rate	11	6	24
Discrepancy rate: the percentage of learners recorded on the ILR as first Level 2 learners who survey shows as having prior attainment at Full Level 2			

3.27   As shown in Table 3.6, private training providers were more likely than FE Colleges to have a 'discrepancy' rate on their first Level 2 learners of at least 66% - one quarter of the private training providers covered by the survey, compared to just three of the 49 FE colleges (6%).

3.28   Providers in certain regions were more likely to show a discrepancy rates of 50% or over for first Level 2 ILR records. Compared to the overall figure of 53% across all providers, the following regions show a greater proportion of providers with high discrepancy rates:

- West Midlands (9 out of 11 providers have a discrepancy rate of 50% or more)

- North West (7 out of 9 providers)

- Greater London (5 out of 7 providers)

Providers with high discrepancy rates were less common in Yorkshire and Humberside (2 out of 8 providers), the East Midlands (2 out of 7 providers) and the East of England (3 out of 10 providers).

3.29   Table 3.7 again shows the proportion of providers exhibiting different discrepancy rates, but this time broken down by the funding stream delivered. This again confirms that overall discrepancy rates are highest when referring to Apprenticeship provision; the majority of providers (80%) showed discrepancy rates of 50% or over for this provision, compared to just over half of providers delivering ALR provision (55%) and one third of those delivering Train to Gain provision (33%).

Table 3.7: The proportion of providers exhibiting different 'discrepancy' rates in the recording of first Level 2 learning – by funding stream

	All	Adult Learner Responsive	Train to Gain	Apprenticeship
Base: All providers with at least 20 ILR first Level 2 learners surveyed	*70*	*22*	*39*	*15*
	%	%	%	%
Zero discrepancy rate	-	-	-	-
1% up to 24% discrepancy rate	-	-	-	-
25% up to 32% discrepancy rate	9	-	13	-
33% up to 49% discrepancy rate	39	45	54	20
50% up to 65% discrepancy rate	41	50	31	40
66% or over discrepancy rate	11	5	3	40
Discrepancy rate: the percentage of learners recorded on the ILR as first Level 2 learners who survey shows as having prior attainment at Full Level 2				

3.30   For 40 of the 94 providers covered by the survey (43%), the ILR estimate of firstness for their adult Level 2 and Level 3 learners was significantly higher (at the 95% confidence level) than that indicated by the survey data for the same learners. This group was made up of 23 FE colleges (34% of all FE colleges covered) and 17 other providers (63% of these providers).

3.31   In only five providers (4 FE Colleges and 1 other private provider) was the survey rate of firstness higher than the ILR-derived rate, and in no case was this difference statistically significant.

4 Qualitative Research

4.1   In this chapter we present results from interviews conducted with 41 providers. These were conducted face-to-face, and in the majority of cases a number of respondents were present. A wide range of job titles were covered including: Principal; Assistant Principal; Information Funding Manager; Head of MIS; Train to Gain Manager; Apprenticeships Manager; Head of Audit and Compliance; Head of Adult Learning; Business Development Manager; Head of employer engagement Director of Student Records; Director of Student Support; Director of Student Progression; National Sales Manager; Employer Response Contract Coordinator. Interviews lasted around an hour on average.

4.2   In this chapter we look particularly at:

- How information on prior qualifications is collected, including what questions are asked, when and by whom, and what checks are made on the information

- Who assigns the level of each learner's highest prior qualification

- How confident providers are about the accuracy of the information on highest prior qualification level recorded in field L35 on the ILR

- What challenges they face in accurately recording highest prior qualification

- How is the information on prior qualifications collected?

4.3   At enrolment, learners receive an information, advice and guidance (IAG) session with a tutor or course advisor to ensure that the programme they have applied for is appropriate to their situation and prior learning experience. An Enrolment Form or Learning Agreement is completed, which is where the question about learners' prior qualifications is asked. This may be completed in one of several ways:

- Completed by the learner with staff assistance, during the one-to-one IAG session

- Completion by the course advisor or an administrator with the learner present.

- Completed by the learner in a small group after the IAG session, with a course advisor or member of administration staff present and able to assist with learners' questions. This is especially common for Train to Gain courses where enrolment data is often collected at the learner's workplace by an assessor.

4.4   In all cases the enrolment form requires a signature from the learner to say that the information is correct, with the course advisor or a tutor countersigning.

[Enrolment forms are completed] "Always with a member of staff. If there was not a member of staff with them it would mean that they were not following the college procedure. We always say that they should complete it with the assistance of a member of staff, because they are giving them information advice and guidance. It also ensures

that they are understanding what they are being asked to sign up to … A Full Level 2 to someone outside of the education system means nothing really"

FE provider, West Midlands, both ALR & T2G

4.5   Providers ask for learners' prior qualifications on their Enrolment Form or Learning Agreement. While this information may have been asked earlier, for example on an Application Form or through the learner's employer, the enrolment documents are taken as the official source of this information and provide the basis for data uploaded to the ILR.

4.6   The format of prior qualifications questions on enrolment forms varies, and can be summarised as follows:

- Most often the form asks for all the qualifications attained to date, asking for the type of qualification, the date it is attained and the level or grade achieved. This is later assigned to a highest level by a member of staff. A few variations were seen:

  o   One only asked for the qualifications obtained in the last 5 years;

  o   Another asked for the learner's highest qualification and any relevant qualifications achieved in the last 5 years;

  o   A few asked only for written details of the learner's highest qualification, rather than all qualifications.

- A minority ask just for the level of their highest qualification without written details:

  o   In some cases this was accompanied by a detailed list of examples of qualifications and their levels for the respondent to refer to;

  o   In other cases this was not provided but the expectation was this was a matter for discussion between the learner and a member of staff.

4.7   The most basic format requires the learner to tick the box indicating which level qualification they have. In some cases no additional information is provided to help the learner assess what level the qualifications they hold may be, and no details of the qualification are requested that would help administrative staff check whether the learner has assessed the qualification level correctly.

Prior attainment level:

◯ No qualification   ◯ Entry Level   ◯ Level 1   ◯ Full Level 2

◯ Level 3   ◯ Level 4   ◯ Level 5

4.8   Additional instructions may include "Discuss with tutor", or often the whole form is filled in with a tutor or administrator present. In those circumstances the learner can be guided towards filling in the right level personally, and the lack of detail on the form does not present such significant accuracy concerns. This question format may be difficult for learners to answer accurately if they fill in their enrolment form in a group situation, however, and have less opportunity to ask for help.

4.9   More often, if just the highest level is recorded, prior qualifications questions used by providers offer the learner quite detailed guidance as to what kind of qualifications fit into each level, as outlined below. The learner then simply ticks the box next to whichever qualification level they have achieved. While this substantially reduces confusion, there may be issues for learners who do not find their qualifications in the examples provided.

Prior attainment level (highest qualification achieved to date):

Entry Level	
Other qualifications below Level 1	
Level 1 e.g. 1+ O-levels /CSEs/GCSEs (any grades) NVQ Level 1 / Foundation NVQ 1 AS level Other (e.g. BTEC First Cert, RSA elementary / 1st level)	
Full Level 2 e.g. 5+ O-levels/CSEs/GCSEs (grade A-C) NVQ level 2 / Intermediate GNVQ 1+ A-level /AS-level Other (e.g. BTEC First Diploma / RSA Diploma)	
Full Level 3 e.g. 2+ A-levels / 4+ AS-levels NVQ Level 3 / Advanced GNVQ / AVCE Other (e.g. BTEC National Cert, BTEC National Dip)	

4.10   More common is for forms to ask for a statement of the specific qualifications previously achieved, an example of which is presented below. The most detailed allow five to ten lines for the completion of these qualifications, and ask for all of a learner's prior

qualifications, and in nearly all cases ask for the qualification type / awarding body, date of achieval, grade and year. The highest level qualification would then be identified by an experienced college administrator processing the enrolment forms for entry on to the provider's computer system.

Statement of previously achieved qualifications
Please list all of your examination results gained prior to enrolling on your College course. You must complete all of the details requested below.

Subject/qualification title	Level e.g. GCSE, A-level	Grade	Year taken	Confirmed by tutor

---

4.11   Other similarly-formatted enrolment forms, however, ask specifically for the learner's "highest level qualification", and only allow space to enter one or two qualifications. This latter approach relies more on the student being able to recognise their own highest level qualification, which they may not do accurately. Again, however, this issue can be assuaged if the form is filled out with the tutor present. One provider explains why they chose this latter format:

"We gave a lot of thought [around asking for all qualifications] but ultimately we thought that would put us back into the same position that we felt we were in with the self-declaration form … Sometimes the learner felt it quite difficult to remember everything that they had done, and for some, it is quite a sensitive issue because they might not want people to know that they did not do quite as well academically … We also felt that [asking for the highest qualification] made the learner think about it a lot more rather than just writing down a series of qualifications."

FE provider, West Midlands, both ALR & T2G

4.12   One provider's form asked for learners' highest level qualifications in the last five years. This clearly has the potential to grossly overestimate first Level 2 learning. That said the subsequent fee remission self-declaration would still require them to sign that they had not ever achieved a Full Level 2 qualification.

4.13   In addition to these prior qualification details, learners entitled to fee remission are asked to sign a declaration confirming that the details they have given are true, and outlining the consequences if they have made a false admission. This was usually a separate form, though was sometimes part of the enrolment form.

I do not have to pay tuition fees now because:
(please tick any boxes that apply and sign if claiming Level 2 or Level 3 entitlement)
<list of reasons, one excerpted below>

◯ I am claiming Level 2 entitlement 19+ students only.
  I confirm that all the information on this form is correct and I declare that I do not already have a full Level 2 qualification or above. I understand that if I have declared false information the Provider may take action against me to reclaim the tuition fees and any support costs provided.

Signed (learner)   Date
Signed (learning provider)   Date

4.14   Providers use this declaration to confirm the qualification levels of these learners and for their audit trail.

"The enrolment administrator will say that they need to sign the terms and conditions, but they also need to sign to declare [their qualifications], which will make them feel a bit uncomfortable, rightly or wrongly, but it serves a purpose … I think that gives it a bit more emphasis, so if somebody is thinking about not disclosing all information you can generally tell."

FE provider, Yorkshire & Humberside, both ALR & T2G

4.15   The same prior qualification questions tend to be asked for both Train to Gain and Adult Learner Responsive provision, though a slightly different approach often exists between under 19s and those aged 19 plus, with younger learners needing to provide their certificates to show they are sufficiently qualified to take the course, the form being more GCSE focussed (these often pre-coded) and their being asked to indicate all the qualifications they have, rarely just their highest.

4.16   However, although the key questions asked of learners for Train to Gain / Employer Responsive provision tends to be the same, the means by which the information is collected is different. This is because in nearly all cases it is collected by assessors on the employer's premises. A key impact of this is that assessors are often described as being very experienced in probing learners about their previous qualifications, in particular where someone says they have no prior qualifications (some providers commented that in this day and age having no qualifications at all is very unlikely). Hence while the format of the form itself clearly influences the content of what information is provided, it is also influenced by the extent to which it tends to be completed by or with a member of staff there to guide the learner.

4.17   While providers are often provided with information on learners' prior qualifications by employers, this was never reported as being the sole or main determinant of prior qualifications, and prior qualification information is collected from or double checked with the learner regardless. In part this is because the employer information may be out of date,

or indeed the learner may have mis-informed their employer, but mainly because providers understand the key importance of collecting the information directly from the learner, with this information then signed by the learner.

"[Information from the employer] is only a starting place because we have discovered sometimes that some learners may well tell their employers that they have a qualification and then tell us in private that they never finished it. It is a starting place only … There are some employers that have very comprehensive staff development records, or records of their team member's qualifications, but we can't just rely on that being accurate. It is backed up by individual discussions with the learner which is kept in the learning plan as confidential information related to the funding."

FE Provider, Yorkshire & Humberside, T2G

"If the lead comes from the employer or the Train to Gain Broker, the initial information may be 'we have this person and they have XYZ so therefore they are eligible to do it' but we still do the data collection with the learner, we don't take what [the employer / Broker] have said as read, we follow the process with every learner in every case. And usually we get minimal information from the employer."

Private provider, North West, T2G

 "[Information from employers, business link advisors, careers advisors or nextstep advisors] is always validated, because we don't trust that they necessary tell the truth. We have had instances where employers have coerced their employees to declare that they don't have an existing level 2 and when we do individual advice and guidance we find that they do have an existing level 2."

FE provider, South West, both ALR & T2G

Assigning the level of learners' highest prior qualifications

4.18   Where the forms ask for the highest qualification level, clearly the learner's prior qualification level is already indicated on the enrolment form, and this information is simply data entered.

4.19   For the providers where learners fill in a full list of all the qualifications they hold, the level of each learner's highest qualification is decided centrally by trained staff in the data input team or by administrators (in a few cases this was done by a single person).

"This decision is made by someone within the student records team, overseen by a manager and ultimately me as the director of student records. We use the SFA guidance to determine the qualifications level"

FE provider, East Midlands, T2G

"The decision would be made by the MIS office. If they have any queries would refer to their line manager. We have a sheet which comes from the LSC which shows the qualification they have got and what level it is at."

FE provider, South West, both ALR & T2G

4.20   In the vast majority of these cases the decision on the highest level is straightforward, though older qualifications, some work-based, industry-specific qualifications and those acquired overseas can be more problematic. If the information on the enrolment form is not sufficient to determine prior level, they may send the form back to the course advisor or tutor to gather more detail from the learner, or they may consult other sources (the Learning Aim Database, or NARIC for overseas qualifications). If the form is blank on this question providers indicated the form would be returned to the tutor or learner (and not assumed to be 'no prior qualifications').

4.21   One provider commented that for auditing purposes the learner's opinion on the level of their prior qualifications must be treated as final, even if the advisor believes these to have been at a different level:

"Ultimately, we are aware that it is the learner who has to identify their level not us. You can get disparity where the learner might say [their qualification] is equivalent to this level and we think it is different. Ultimately, we have been told that it is the learner who has to specify the level – it has got to come from them … you have to be a little bit careful because from an audit point of view, we must never be steering the learner to give an answer – it has to be them that declares it."

FE provider, West Midlands, both ALR & T2G

4.22   In many cases enrolment form will be checked by the course tutor who has to sign it off, and discrepancies or missing information can be caught at this stage, for example where the learner has to write in the qualifications they have as well as simply tick a box for their highest level.

4.23   Whether the form asks for the highest qualification level or for all the qualifications attained, further checks are possible at the data entry stage. Administrators will check for missing data (e.g. boxes not ticked, forms not signed) and return them if necessary, but this stage is also an opportunity for other inconsistencies to be checked (e.g. between information provided on different forms such as the Individual Learning Plan, or between learner and employer information. or for learners that have studied with them before information given in previous years).

"It comes in here and the paperwork is checked for accuracy, and also to make sure that we have everything we need to create an eligible learner on the system. One of the things we do is look at that prior attainment field and make sure that matches with everything else in the paperwork. You can find that people will say they have this level on the ILR and on the ILP they will say something different. That could be a genuine mistake, but in any situation like that we have to make sure the learner understands exactly what we have asked them, and if there is any disparity, to clear that up because we can't process that paperwork. If someone says they have a Level 2 on their ILR, but Level 3 on the ILP, that would automatically concern so we would have to go back to the learner."

FE provider, West Midlands, both ALR & T2G

"Now if we've found that the information they'd given to us on that (Enrolment form) differs to what they're giving us on the (Personal Learning Plan) then I think there'll be a discussion – 'Hang on a minute'. For example, I'll be quite honest, we've had some people who've said 'I've got a Level 3 qualification prior to doing a Train to Gain' and then when they've come to do a Train to Gain they suddenly haven't. And we would then turn around and say; 'Hang on there must be something amiss.' Either they gave us false information the first information the first time, or they're giving us false information now and we would ask that question of them."

FE provider, East of England, T2G

4.24   Another more systematic check on data quality and completeness is the Data Self-Assessment Toolkit (DSAT) issued by the LSC (some also have their own similar internal data quality checks). Providers indicate they use information on this for such things as the number of learners recorded as qualifications unknown to evaluate how accurately qualification information may be being collected and entered.

"There is a report that is embedded into the MIS system and run periodically. That pulls up any irregularities in learner data … like if someone has already got a Level 3 and they are doing another Level 3, which may or may not be an irregularity, it could then be checked."

FE Provider, Yorkshire & Humberside, T2G

4.25   Others conduct their own regular internal audits:

"The Team Leader pulls together a sample and request all the live 'in learning' information that is required at the point of sign-up and photocopies of original documentation. As it is a working document such as progress reviews, update ILPs, they are all held off site with either the partner or employer; all this information is requested and it is audited to the same standard as the LSC. If there is any information missing or any inconsistencies they will crop up then and will be fed back to them."

FE provider, East Midlands, T2G

Provider confidence in the accuracy of ILR highest prior qualifications data

4.26   The general consensus among providers is that given the information presented to them by the learner they are confident (other than the possibility of occasional human error) that this information is assigned to a highest prior level and entered onto the ILR correctly. However, providers admit that they are reliant on the honesty and accuracy of the information provided by the learner regarding qualification information (and of course while it is possible to ask for evidence of qualifications it is not possible to ask for evidence of not having qualifications at a particular level).

"We can only go by what student has given us so it can never be 100%. No college would ever say 100% accurate – probably 80%. Because it's based on what students give us so if student has given us false information then we have to go with false information. That is going to change in future with MIAP – where you can go into peoples' records and see their actual certificates."

FE provider, South East, ALR

"That is always a tricky one. This is a question I get asked a lot at training; what if the learner tells us that they have a qualification below a Level 2 and it transpires later that they have a Level 3. The answer I have to give is that in all truthfulness, all [you] can do is tell the learner exactly what you need them to answer – the highest level of qualification, and trust that they are answering honestly. Ultimately it is their declaration."

FE provider, West Midlands, both ALR & T2G

"It is as accurate as the information the learner gives us, so if they are giving us the correct information it is 100% accurate, which they are signing to say they are….[It's]impossible to say how accurate [the learner-provided information is], we go by what the learner tells us, where relevant, if we have got to see the information we do see it, but where we are taking the learner's word we are recording what they tell us and on that side what they tell us to what goes onto the system is 100% accurate."

FE provider, South West, both ALR & T2G

"You can never be one hundred percent because we are down to the learner telling us that this is the case. The funding requirements do not state that we have to have evidence of certificates to prove it. Let's hope it never does! It is down to self-declaration by the learner, and each does fill a self-declaration form in, which is signed by them, ourselves and by the employer. We are in the hands of their honesty. Based on the audits they've done, the inaccuracies are very low."

FE Provider, Yorkshire & Humberside, T2G

4.27   Potential dishonesty was the most common reason cited as to why respondents believed the prior qualification information had the potential to be inaccurate. This could be learners becoming aware that there would be no tuition fees if they indicated they had no

prior level 2, but the same could also apply to employers seeking free training, and even in theory tutors wanting to fill their courses.

"Because it can affect the fees they pay, I do think it is open to abuse. People soon catch on that if they tic, or declare that they haven't got a level 2, then the course they will be going on, an NVQ in Hairdressing or whatever, will not have any tuition fees."

FE provider, Yorkshire & Humberside, both ALR & T2G

"I've no evidence of the extent but a suspicion that some people are ticking lower than they have got to get the fees paid."

FE provider, East Midlands, ALR

"If they have already got a Full Level 2, they ought to pay for that. Now, frankly, if you were an adult and you knew that, you would not produce your certificates for your first Level 2. We can collect the qualification to show they have sufficient to go onto the next level but what we can't do is make them produce certificates that we don't necessarily know they have got or not. I don't think it happens a lot because I don't think the learners we have here are savvy enough to know all that."

FE provider, East Midlands, ALR

"A previous student who was BSc the year before, so L5, was applying for a L2 course - was caught out because of her fees. Because she's already recorded on system at a higher level it comes up as an error on the student database. So previous year she was L4, then this year she was recorded on her form as L2 and as result was given a L3 entitlement and when ILR ERROR came out it looked strange so we pulled out her previous year file and it said she had a Bachelor's Degree."

FE provider, London, ALR

"We have occasionally had – and I'm talking about [cases] on one hand, where they have got a level 3 qualification or a partial level 3 and they have not told us about it … I can only think of two or three instances where there has been a problem, and in all those cases it was a level 3 qualification that had not been declared."

FE provider, Yorkshire & Humberside, ALR

4.28   Another cause of incorrect details on the ILR relates to honest but inaccurate information being provided. This includes older learners forgetting about qualifications achieved some time ago; people being confused about grades, levels and qualifications generally (one example given was the occasional case where someone 'does not appreciate that an Entry Level 3 qualification isn't a Level 3 qualification'); and some providers citing instances where learners had marked that they had a prior Level 2 when on investigation this was not a Full Level 2.

4.29   When respondents were asked to estimate the proportion of learners where the highest prior qualification information was accurate, some felt this was impossible to know,

but most felt it was accurate for at least 90% of adult learners, while a few put the figure at as low as 80%.

"The level of inaccuracy would, at a guess, be less than 5%"

FE provider, East Midlands, ALR

"Hard to say, but inaccuracies minimal. I reckon accuracy is in high 90%s"

FE provider, West Midlands, both ALR & T2G

"I would speculate at about 5 - 10% inaccuracies"

Private provider, North West, T2G

"I would say 99% for FL2 and FL3"

FE provider, Yorkshire & Humberside, T2G

"I think [accuracy] is in the high 90's... I would say there would only be the odd one who wants to gain the use of public funds to suit their individual needs, but only the odd one because we are always dealing with the employer to begin with."

FE provider, West Midlands, T2G

4.30   This generally high level of confidence is based around having:

- Regular training for staff on collection of qualification information and the assigning to highest level. This is usually given annually as part of general training on enrolment, and is given prior to the key enrolment time of September

- Regularly updated guidance on qualifications provided to staff

- Systems in place to double check the information provided by learners (for example checking consistency between forms they have completed)

4.31   Other providers pointed out that, although the decision on highest prior qualification depends on self-declared information from the learner, this is not accepted carte blanche if it looks unreasonable. One indicated this would cover such things as a nineteen year old saying they had a Level 5, someone enrolling onto a Level 3 course and they have no previous qualification, or someone enrolling on a Level 3 where they already had a Level 3. Other indicated that internal checks are undertaken, for example asking and collecting a learner's prior qualifications on more than one form; comparison with the employer's prior qualification details; or for learners that had studied with the organisation before, checking with the information given previously.

Challenges to more accurate collection of highest prior qualification information

4.32　Given the impossibility of asking someone to prove the absence of a qualification at a certain level, and the ultimate reliance on the honesty of the learner, many providers thought there was little more that could be done to improve prior qualification information for adult learners.

4.33　The only significant change would be when the MIAP database covers the whole adult population such that the qualifications achieved of each learner, identified via a unique learner reference number (ULN), could be identified. This was admitted to being a long way off, but even if and when it is developed some expressed concerns that data protection legislation would make accessing the information problematic. Some were also concerned about the increased administrative burden it would entail.

4.34　Providers reported that it was usually very easy to collect accurate prior qualifications data from younger learners, particularly those straight out of school or college, as they had a clear understanding of the qualifications they had recently completed. The prior qualifications of older learners can often be more difficult to determine, however, due to the time elapsed since they did these qualifications. This is a particular issue for work-related qualifications learners may have studied some years ago, where they cannot remember the awarding body or level of the subject they have studied.

"For adults it is ages in some cases since they took their exams and they have forgotten or they have lost their certificates. That is the biggest problem."

FE provider, Yorkshire & Humberside, ALR

4.35　Non-UK qualifications can also be particularly challenging for providers to assign to a level. Providers can consult the NARIC database to identify UK equivalent qualifications, but this requires training and costs were sometimes seen as prohibitively high. Others would ask seek information on the level of international qualifications internally (for example foreign language tutors).

4.36　Providers often felt that learners on vocational courses may have difficulties remembering their previous qualifications as they were more likely not to have been particularly engaged at school and thus were less likely to have recalled details – or saved certificates – for their qualifications:

"The truly vocational courses like hairdressing, motor vehicle, hospitality and catering are a greater challenge as those people will not be academic and really did not care about their qualifications and those people often do not even collect their certificates and the school will have shredded them. People will say I have got my City and Guilds and you say that is an awarding body, but they do not know at what level."

FE provider, South West, both ALR & T2G

4.37   The forthcoming QCF was a worry for several colleges, as the quotation below illustrates. Providers are concerned that the definition of a Full Level 2 or Full Level 3 qualification may become increasingly complicated.

"We worry about QCF: when people can get units from different awarding bodies or the same one, but in lots of different subjects, how you are going to know what that actually means as each of the sector skills councils have a different perspective on what a Full Level 2 or 3 looks like? So whilst it is complicated now, it is going to be horrendous next year."

FE provider, South West, both ALR & T2G

4.38   It is worth noting that not all providers treat firstness as a key internal measure. Some see it as contributing to 'distance travelled' measures and others feel it is important to the extent this is where the emphasis on funding is likely to be, but others feel that is something of a false measure since a previous Level 2 could have been achieved in a completely different field or a very long time ago – for these the issue of improving the accuracy of the recording of firstness seemed relatively unimportant.

 "You have got to ask, 'Why would you want it more accurate?' to a certain extent because, on the whole, if someone already has a Level 2 qualification, they won't want another Level 2 unless they have changed industry, in which case it might be perfectly justifiable that they might need another Level 2 in something else. On the whole, people want to move to the next level so, to a certain extent, I have to say, what is the value in knowing all that more accurately unless it is about progression?"

FE provider, East Midlands, ALR

Whether prior attainment is amended if learners move from a Level 2 to a Level 3 course

4.39   There was wide variation as to how providers handle a learner progressing with them from a Level 2 to a Level 3 course, and whether their prior qualification level would be amended when they started the Level 3 provision. Around half the providers said the prior qualification level would be changed, with the remainder split between those saying it would not and those indicating that it would depend.

4.40   Those that were aware that in this situation the prior qualification should not be amended were clear, as counter-intuitive as this may seem, that the ILR L35 field should be based on the level when the learner first enrols with the organisation.

4.41   Most of those saying that the prior qualification level would be changed remarked that it had to be changed for their internal systems since a new enrolment form or a new ILP would have to be completed.

4.42   A number who did amend their records if a learner moved from Level 2 to Level 3 provision seemed to be aware that the guidance is for it not to be changed.

"The ILR information is incorrect because it states that we should be putting the prior level of attainment as at the time when you start at the college and we don't think it should be. We think it should be looked at each year …If somebody is taking a first Full Level 2 and they get that qualification we need to put that they got a Level 2 at the end of that year … If you look at L35, the instructions say that it [should be recorded as] whatever they started with at the college, which does not seem right to us … we think the instructions are incorrect … they need to clarify the guidance. Is it when they start at the college or on a course?"

FE provider, Yorkshire & Humberside, T2G

"It would be the highest level when doing enrolment not when they first walk through the door. Why should it matter if the learner does a Level 2 at XXX college down the road, and comes to us for a Level 3, compared with the person doing a Level 2 with us and then moving on to a L3?"

FE provider, London, T2G

4.43   As noted, some providers say the decision whether the level of the learner would be changed would depend on particular circumstances. This was usually dependent on the academic year of completion (providers noted that the prior qualification could not be changed within the same academic year), or the learning programme (some saying if they moved to a different learning programme then it would be changed).

4.44   A number of points follow:

- The fact that different practices are being adopted by different providers means that consistency in the ILR is being undermined

- The fact that a significant number of providers amend the prior achievement of a learner who continues learning within the organisation at a higher level indicates that the ILR will be underestimating the proportion of Level 3 learners with a first Full Level 2 qualification (underestimating it in the sense that if the guidance practice of not amending the level was adopted by all providers)

- The guidance approach has the implication that a learner with no prior qualifications enrolling with a provider for a Level 2 course, who completes, stays with the provider and undertakes a Level 3 course would be recorded on the ILR when undertaking their Level 3 course as undertaking a first Level 2, while an identical learner in the same situation but who simply switches provider for their Level 3 course would be recorded on the ILR when undertaking their Level 3 course as already having Level 2 qualifications.

5 Summary of provider practices and discrepancy rate

5.1   To provide an alternative view on provider practices in recording prior attainment information, the table overleaf summarises provider characteristics alongside the 'discrepancy rate' for firstness recording as measured in the quantitative survey of learners. The table shows the key discrepancy rate in recording first Full Level 2 learning - the percentage of learners recorded on the ILR as first Full Level 2 learners whom the 2010 provider-level survey shows as having prior attainment at Full Level 2.

5.2   The table shows only those providers who were covered by the qualitative research and had over 20 learners surveyed in the quantitative work who were studying for their first Level 2 qualification according to the ILR. This meant that the discrepancy rate could be reliably calculated, and that the practices employed in that provider could also be characterised. This does mean that more of the Train to Gain providers are represented, as they tended to have more learners marked as first Level 2 learners on the ILR.

5.3   Providers are ranked from lowest to highest discrepancy rate in terms of recording first Level 2 learning on the ILR. It is important to note that in all cases, in excess of 25% of claims of first Level 2 learning were challenged by the survey questioning, so the levels of discrepancy are quite high even in the top-ranked providers.

5.4   From this tabulated data, it is relatively hard to discern clear patterns in terms of which practices lead to the greatest accuracy in recording where a learner does or does not have a prior Full Level 2 qualification. Assuming that the practices reported as protocol by providers are a good reflection of how things work in practice, the main conclusions from this provider-level analysis would be as follows.

- The most common method for recording information about prior qualifications is to get the learner to supply details of all prior qualifications, and then have staff assign a highest level of prior qualification from this information. It is clear that there is a lot of room for variation in the outcome of this approach, with a wide range of discrepancy rates for providers using this method. It is important that full instructions are given to learners to include all qualifications and that staff have the knowledge to accurately code level.

- Whether learners fill out enrolment forms in a one-to-one interview or in a group session, there is some evidence that accuracy is enhanced in scenarios where prior qualifications can be cross-checked with employer records of vocational training undertaken.

- The providers undertaking three of the four key checks identified tended to show fewer discrepancies than those conducting fewer checks. Note, as highlighted in the report, there are limited checks that are (or can be) carried out that check the veracity of claims for first Level 2 learning. Most providers are relying on the self-declaration from learners.

- The large majority of the providers listed in the table update ILR records of attainment based on the outcome of previous learning at the provider. This should lead to more accurate recording of first Full Level 2 learning, although this runs counter to the current guidance for the ILR. The fact that even the lowest ranked providers say that they update their records supports the conclusion that a failure to update based on prior attainment at the provider is not a major contributor to the discrepancy rate.

Table 5.1 - Summary of provider practices in recording prior qualifications information for adult learners against first Level 2 discrepancy rates

Provider 'rank'	Discrepancy rate*	Learner stream	College vs. Private	Recording practice**	Self completion? ***	Checks carried out****	Records updated based on previous attainment at provider
1	26%	TTG	College	2	2 / 3		Yes
2	26%	TTG	College	1	2	E	Yes
3	31%	TTG	College	1	1	C E I	Varies
4	33%	TTG	College	1	1	C E	Yes
5	34%	TTG	Private	1	1 / 2		Yes
6	34%	TTG	Private	1	1	A C I	Yes
7	35%	FE	College	2	1 / 3	C	Usually yes
8	35%	TTG	College	1	1 / 2	C E	Yes
9	36%	TTG	College	1	1 / 2	E I	Yes
10	38%	TTG	College	1 / 2	1		No
11	39%	TTG	College	1	1	C I	Yes
12	39%	TTG/FE	College	1 / 2	1	C I	Usually yes
13	41%	TTG/FE	College	1	1		No
14	42%	TTG	College	1	1 / 2	C	Yes
15	43%	FE	College	3	4		No

Provider 'rank'	Discrepancy rate*	Learner stream	College vs. Private	Recording practice**	Self completion? ***	Checks carried out****	Records updated based on previous attainment at provider
16	44%	TTG	College	1 / 2	1	A	Yes
17	46%	TTG/FE	College	1 / 2	1 / 3	C	Yes
18	48%	FE	College	1 / 3	1 / 3	I	Yes
19	48%	FE	College	1	1	C	No
20	50%	TTG	College	1	1 / 2	C	No
21	53%	TTG	Private	1	1 / 4	C I	Yes
22	54%	TTG/FE	College	1	1 / 3		Yes
23	55%	FE	College	2	1	I	Yes
24	55%	TTG	College	1	2 / 4	C E	Yes
25	56%	FE	College	1	1		Varies
26	60%	FE	College	1	3		No
27	60%	TTG	Private	1	1 / 2		Yes
28	65%	FE	College	2	1	A	Yes
29	67%	FE	College	1	1 / 2		Yes

* Discrepancy rate: the percentage of learners recorded on the ILR as first Full Level 2 learners whom the 2010 provider-level survey shows as having prior attainment at Full Level 2. The table shows only those providers who were covered by the qualitative research and had over 20 learners surveyed in the quantitative work who were marked on the ILR as studying for their first Level 2 qualification.

** Key for '**Recording practice**':

1 – Ask learner to supply details of all prior qualifications (type, grade, level/grade) - level assigned by member of staff

2 – Ask learners for *level* of highest prior qualification – examples of common qualifications and their levels supplied to aid learner

3– Ask learners for *level* of highest prior qualification – **no** examples of common qualifications and their levels supplied to aid learner

Some providers mix methods 1 & 2, e.g. ask learners for written details only of their highest level qualification, giving examples of which qualifications are at each level.

*** Key for 'Self completion?':

1 - Self completion – during one-to-one session

2 - Self completion – group session

3 - Self-completion – no advisor present

4 - Advisor/administrator completion

**** Key for '**Checks carried out that might reduce underestimation of prior qualifications**':

A – Audit and challenge/reinterview in cases where doubt veracity of prior qualifications information

C - Check for completeness on all forms / data returns – in terms all data of fields required being present. Includes use of DSAT.

E – Cross check employer and learner assessments of prior qualifications

I – Check internal consistency of information on prior qualifications in provider records

6 Conclusions

6.1   This research has confirmed the findings of previous Prior Achievement studies showing a substantial discrepancy between the level of prior attainment recorded on the ILR and that measured by the survey (where respondents are read an extensive list of qualifications and asked to indicate which, and how many and at what level, they had prior to their recent course). Indeed for only around two-fifths of learners did the survey measure of prior qualification level exactly match that recorded on the ILR. The ILR appears to underestimate the level of prior achievement: for almost half of learners (48%) interviewed the survey found a higher level of prior qualification than recorded on the ILR, while the reverse was true for 11% of learners. On one specific issue, the survey suggests that the ILR vastly overestimates the proportion of learners with no prior qualifications at all (this was recorded on the ILR for 21% of the learners interviewed, but found to be the case for 11%).

6.2   The key measure of interest from a policy perspective is the proportion of adult learners undertaking their first Full Level 2 qualification, hence of critical importance is the extent to which the survey findings cast doubt on the proportion of first Level 2 learning recorded on the ILR. Among the learners interviewed that were recorded on the ILR as undertaking their first Full Level 2 qualification (a base of 2,778 learners), in almost half of cases (48%) the survey found they already had prior qualifications at Level 2. The survey data is more likely to challenge the ILR indication of first Level 2 learning for learners undertaking Level 3 courses and Apprenticeships (for which successful prior attainment at Level 2 is often a pre-requisite for gaining a place): in these cases the survey suggests that just under two thirds of those marked on the ILR as having no prior Level 2 qualifications already had qualifications at this level).

6.3   At a provider level, the research covered 70 providers where at least 20 learners were interviewed where the ILR indicated they were undertaking their first Full Level 2 qualification. The survey found that for just over half these providers at least half their learners had a prior Level 2 qualification. Private, non-FE College providers and those delivering Apprenticeships were found to have higher than average first Level 2 survey v. ILR discrepancy rates, but for all providers surveyed the discrepancy rate was at least 25% (i.e. the survey indicates that at least a quarter of their learners recorded on the ILR as undertaking their first Full Level 2 qualification already had qualifications at this level). Hence clearly the issue is not confined to a small number of providers.

6.4   Part of the discrepancies would be expected based on the way prior achievement is recorded on the ILR compared to the survey. A requirement of the ILR (not that his always understood or followed by all providers) is that the level of prior achievement is based on what the learner has when they first come to the provider, not what they have when they start a particular course. In comparison, the survey asks about prior qualifications they had before starting the course. However, even among ILR-defined first Level 2 learners who were studying with the provider for the first time, the survey found that approaching half (46%) already had a Level 2 qualification.

6.5   When the issue of the accuracy of the prior attainment information for adult learners is raised with providers, the most common sentiment is that it is accurate (give or take the potential for occasional data entry errors) based on the information given to them by

learners. Nearly all providers indicate that there are inevitably some errors in the information provided by learners - the exact extent of error is unknown, though assumed to be relatively small. Most providers appeared to feel that the critical issue was to have the right audit trail (i.e. to asked the question of learners and to have got them to sign and confirm the information they provided) more than necessarily the intrinsic accuracy of the information.

6.6   Sources of inaccuracy were felt by providers to include:

- Potential dishonesty if learners are aware that they are eligible for fee remission if they indicate that they do not have qualifications at Level 2.

- Learners believing that some qualifications are not relevant, for example if it is not related to the new course they are enrolling on, or if achieved through work.

- Some confusion about full qualifications and units, though providers felt this might lead to some learners overstating their level – providers often had examples of cases where people initially indicated that they had a Full Level 2 qualification when on questioning they had only achieved units.

6.7   In additional to these learner factors, some providers felt that ILR inaccuracies may result from other providers being less rigorous than they themselves are regarding collecting prior qualifications information (e.g. their accepting learner information at face value or not undertaking double checks with other information that they have about the learner) or some providers even indicating learners had no prior qualifications to fill up courses for which they had contracts.

6.8   Whilst it is clear that providers generally attribute any potential inaccuracies in the ILR record of prior attainment to the information provided by learners (rather than the way they then process this information), findings on provider procedures for information collection and management do point towards some areas which might contribute to greater confidence in the ILR data.

Recommendations

6.9   Most providers ask learners to write in all the qualifications that they have and then staff assign the highest level. Others however ask learners simply to indicate their highest level (with a checklist explaining the main qualifications that fall within different levels): given that very few of these providers also ask the learner to write in the specific qualifications that they have, very few checks can be made on the information provided by the learner. Hence we believe that asking for the full list of qualifications a learner has is preferable, and ideally the learner would also be asked to assess their highest level. If both bits of information are collected from the learner (the specific qualifications and the highest level) then in all cases where provider staff disagreed that the qualifications listed were of the level indicated by the learner this could then be checked with the learner.

6.10   Questions asking for qualifications should be more standardised, and should emphasise the need for the learner to write in all the qualifications achieved whether through school, work or elsewhere; not just the highest qualification (since the individual

may not understand which is the highest, or may naturally think simply of the most recent), not just those achieved in the last 5 years (as some providers ask for, since this may well exclude their highest qualification) and not just those relevant to the course (again likely to exclude their highest qualification).

6.11   Similarly more detail on why the question is being asked of the learner may also improve data quality (this emphasising the need to measure progression rather than potential fee remission). This would reduce instances where learners may only write in qualifications they see as relevant to the course in question.

6.12   Part of the reason for the discrepancy between the ILR and the survey measure of first Level 2-ness is differences in the proportion of learners described as having no prior qualifications – this consistently being much higher on the ILR than found across the Prior Achievement survey series. Some providers appear to take a much harder line than others on accepting at face value information that people have no prior qualifications. More guidance could be issued on this, for example an expectation that if it is above a certain level, a proportion of these cases should be checked directly with the learner.

6.13   There is very wide variation in how progression within a provider is handled in terms of prior attainment data on the ILR. While some providers understand that the prior qualification on the ILR is based on the learner's situation when they first 'walk through the doors', this appears to be a minority of providers: the majority say they would change the prior attainment if a learner started a new course after achieving another qualification with the provider (or would do so as long as the new course was in a new academic year). Guidance on this needs to be re-emphasised, as varying practice on this issue clearly has significant implications for consistency of recording of prior attainment level on the ILR.

6.14   Providers themselves usually think that the Managing Information Across Partners (MIAP – now renamed the Learning Records Service) database is the key means by which improvements can be made in the quality of recording of learner prior attainment. However, looking up records for every learner is potentially a significant administrative burden, and others questioned if data protection laws would allow it to be used in this way.

Appendix A – Methodological details

Sampling by provider

The sample of learners for the quantitative research was selected from those studying with larger providers to enable more reliable provider-level analysis. In total the learners were selected from 94 providers.

Initial provider level quotas were set with the aim of ensuring a base of 50 learner interviews per funding stream, per provider. 40 providers were selected to provide 50 Adult Learner Responsive learner interviews each, 40 to provide 50 Train to Gain learner interviews each, and 20 to provide 50 Apprenticeship learner interviews each. Five providers were selected to provide both ALR and Train to Gain interviews, and one to provide both Train to Gain and Apprenticeship interviews (meaning that the total number of providers was 94, rather than 100).

Table A.1 shows the regional distribution and provider type for the 94 providers covered in the quantitative survey. Some rows add to more than the total (the first column of data) since for some providers learners were interviewed for multiple streams.

Table A.1: The profile of providers covered in the quantitative survey

	Total	Adult Learner Responsive stream	Train to Gain stream	Apprenticeship stream
Base	*94*	*40*	*40*	*20*
	n	n	n	n
Region				
East of England	12	3	7	3
East Midlands	9	2	6	1
Greater London	10	6	5	0
North East	4	2	1	1
North West	14	8	2	5

	Total	Adult Learner Responsive stream	Train to Gain stream	Apprenticeship stream
Base	*94*	*40*	*40*	*20*
South East	10	1	5	5
South West	11	3	4	4
West Midlands	14	8	6	1
Yorkshire & Humberside	10	7	4	0
Provider type				
FE College	67	39	29	4
Private training provider / other	27	1	11	16

Table A.2 gives the distribution of learner interviews achieved per provider. The providers have been anonymised. In the table, '*' indicates where the base for the funding stream in that provider is below 35 interviews. In these cases the base was considered to be less reliable, and no 'provider' level analysis was undertaken with these providers.

Table A.2: The profile of providers with learners covered by the quantitative survey

Provider	Adult Learner Responsive	Train to Gain	Apprenticeship
Provider 1			50
Provider 2	50		
Provider 3	59		
Provider 4	27*		
Provider 5		50	
Provider 6			50
Provider 7			61
Provider 8		50	
Provider 9		63	
Provider 10	50		

Provider	Adult Learner Responsive	Train to Gain	Apprenticeship
Provider 11		60	
Provider 12	59		
Provider 13		50	
Provider 14	53		
Provider 15		47	
Provider 16		51	
Provider 17			50
Provider 18		50	
Provider 19		50	
Provider 20		60	
Provider 21			59
Provider 22	50	50	
Provider 23	50		
Provider 24	50	50	
Provider 25	50		
Provider 26	50		
Provider 27	50		
Provider 28		50	
Provider 29		50	
Provider 30	50		
Provider 31			50
Provider 32			49
Provider 33	50		
Provider 34	50		
Provider 35	50		
Provider 36	51	60	
Provider 37		59	
Provider 38			52
Provider 39	50		
Provider 40		50	
Provider 41			58
Provider 42	50		
Provider 43	50		
Provider 44		49	
Provider 45	52		
Provider 46	50		
Provider 47		50	
Provider 48		37	
Provider 49			49
Provider 50	50	51	
Provider 51		60	
Provider 52		60	
Provider 53	50		
Provider 54		50	

Provider	Adult Learner Responsive	Train to Gain	Apprenticeship
Provider 55			60
Provider 56	50		
Provider 57		49	
Provider 58		60	51
Provider 59			49
Provider 60		50	
Provider 61	50		
Provider 62	50		
Provider 63		50	
Provider 64	50		
Provider 65	50		
Provider 66	50		
Provider 67	50		
Provider 68			49
Provider 69		42	
Provider 70	50		
Provider 71		50	
Provider 72		50	
Provider 73	50		
Provider 74	50		
Provider 75	50	51	
Provider 76	50		
Provider 77		50	
Provider 78			50
Provider 79	50		
Provider 80	51		
Provider 81			53
Provider 82		6*	
Provider 83		50	
Provider 84		50	
Provider 85			60
Provider 86		50	
Provider 87		50	
Provider 88		50	
Provider 89		50	
Provider 90			16*
Provider 91			50
Provider 92			50
Provider 93	50		
Provider 94	50		
Total learners	**2,002**	**2,015**	**1,016**

Representatives from 41 providers took part in qualitative interviews. The profile of these providers is shown in Table A.3.

Table A.3: The profile of providers with learners covered by the qualitative survey

Total	41
	n
Region	
East of England	3
East Midlands	4
Greater London	6
North East	1
North West	4
South East	6
South West	4
West Midlands	8
Yorkshire & Humberside	5
Provider type	
FE College	37
Private training provider / other	4
Type of provision interviewed about	
Adult Learner Responsive stream	18
Train to Gain stream	18
Both ALR and Train to Gain provision	5

Profile of surveyed learners

The quota targets for the learner survey were calculated to ensure a spread of interviews directly proportional to the course level and age of learners in the population of eligible learners derived from the ILR. The following table shows the profile of the achieved learner interviews.

Table A.4: Profile of the achieved interviews

	19-24	25-44	45 to retirement age	Over retirement age	Total
Adult Learner Responsive					
FE Full 2	355	516	111	13	995
FE Full 3	564	378	62	2	1,006
Total	*919*	*894*	*173*	*15*	*2,001*
Train to Gain					
FE Full 2	212	837	434	14	1,497
FE Full 3	70	308	136	4	518
Total	*282*	*1,145*	*570*	*18*	*2,015*
Apprenticeship					
FE Full 2	370	99	23	0	492
FE Full 3	405	103	23	0	531
Total	*775*	*202*	*46*	*0*	*1,023*

Table A.5 shows the profile of learners interviewed for this 2010 survey, compared to the profile of the total relevant population from which these records were drawn (in learning November 2008). There is a very close match between the profiles for all three streams, with the only main difference being in the gender balance of the Apprenticeship learners (52% male in the survey, compared with 57% in the population of Apprenticeship learners).

Table A.5: Profile of learners with which interviews achieved compared to overall population

	Current survey	Full learner population (November 2008 in learning figures)
Adult Learner Responsive	100%	100%
Male	44	43
Female	56	57
19-24	46	46
25-44	45	44
45-retirement	9	9
Over retirement age	1	1
White	77	78
Asian	10	8
Black	8	8
Mixed / Other	4	4
Not stated	1	2
Economically active at time of interview	84	86
Economically inactive at time of interview	16	14
Train to Gain	100%	100%

	Current survey	Full learner population (November 2008 in learning figures)
Male	38	39
Female	62	61
19-24	14	14
25-44	57	57
45-retirement	28	29
Over retirement age	1	1
White	87	84
Asian	4	6
Black	4	6
Mixed / Other	2	3
Not stated	2	1
Economically active at time of interview	97	96
Economically inactive at time of interview	3	4
Apprenticeships	100%	100%
Male	52	57
Female	48	43

	Current survey	Full learner population (November 2008 in learning figures)
19-24	76	76
25-44	20	20
45-retirement	4	4
Over retirement age	-	-
White	91	91
Asian	4	4
Black	2	2
Mixed / Other	1	2
Not stated	2	1
Economically active at time of interview	98	98
Economically inactive at time of interview	2	2

Sample outcomes and response rate for the learner survey

6.15   In total, c.13, 000 learners were called at least once for the survey, resulting in 5,033 complete interviews. The number called includes many for whom no definite outcome was achieved.

6.16   The response rate can be taken to be the number of completed interviews (5,033) as a proportion of all definite outcomes in scope (i.e. excluding wrong numbers or those

not recalling the course detailed on the ILR). In effect, this is derived from the following calculation:

Completed interviews / (Completed interviews + Quit during interview + Refused + Other dead outcome)

6.17   The response rate for this survey was 65%.

Appendix B – Learner survey questionnaire

2010 Prior Achievements Questionnaire 2010

IFF Research

J4876

Screener

INT1) Can I speak to (NAMED RESPONDENT) please?

Yes   1   Continue to intro (INT2)

No – no longer lives there 2   ASK INT1A

No – refusal 3   Thank and Close

Call back   4   Make appt

INT1A)   Can you give me the correct number for [NAMED RESPONDENT]?

RECORD NEW PHONE NUMBER AND RE-DIAL

DP INSTRUCTION: LOOP BACK TO INT1

Yes   RECORD NEW NUMBER FOR NAMED CONTACT. UPDATE SAMPLE WITH NEW TEL NO.

No   THANK AND CLOSE

WHEN SPEAKING TO NAMED RESPONDENT

INT2) Hello, my name is XXX and I'm calling from IFF Research, an independent market research company. We are conducting a survey on behalf of Skills Funding Agency, formerly part of the Learning and Skills Council, of people who were on [FE / Apprenticeship/Train to Gain] courses at colleges or training providers in late 2008 (i.e. the year before last). It is an important study for the Skills Funding Agency, and will help them understand the qualifications that people had before starting their learning.

The interview only takes about 10 minutes. All responses you give will be strictly confidential – we are only reporting anonymised responses back to the Skills Funding Agency.

Would now be a convenient time to undertake the interview (or could I call you back later at a more convenient time)?

REASSURANCES: USE AS NECCESSARY

Where did you get my name / number from? The sample was drawn at random from records held by the Learning and Skills Council on recent learners [in FE/on Apprenticeships/Train to Gain].

Who are the Skills Funding Agency?: The Skills Funding Agency is a new government organisation which took over many of the functions of the LSC, and are responsible for planning and funding high-quality vocational education and training for adults in England.

Contacts:

At IFF – XXXX at IFF Research on XXXX

At the Skills Funding Agency XXXXX

IFF works strictly within the Market Research Society Code of Conduct. The MRS has a freephone number, 0500 396999.

First can I just check, in late 2008 were you enrolled on a course at (INSERT COLLEGE or PROVIDER)?

[IF ASKED ADD 'by late 2008 we mean 'November' 2008]

Yes   1   ASK Q1a

No / not sure 3   THANK AND CLOSE

1a)   Which of the following apply...(READ OUT)?

Are you still on the same course   1

Or did you complete the course   2

Or did you not complete the course   3

(DO NOT READ OUT) Don't know   X

ASK ALL

1b)   Which course or programme [TEXT SUB: are you enrolled on (Q1a=1) / were you enrolled on in November 2008 (Q1a NOT 1)] at (INSERT COLLEGE or PROVIDER)]?

Text: 1   Go to Q2

2)   The first area I would like to cover is any qualifications you may have had BEFORE you started the [INSERT TEXT FROM Q1b] course or programme with [NAME OF PROVIDER]. I am interested in any qualification you had before starting the course, whether you got it at school or college or through work or training; and no matter how long ago you got them. So do you have any qualifications from any of the following? READ OUT

Yes   No   Don't know

A   School, college or university   1   2   3

B   Connected with work, whether your current employer or a previous one   1   2   3

C   From government schemes   1   2   3

D   From an Apprenticeship   1   2   3

E   From having been educated at home, when you were of school age 1   2   3

IF NO/DON'T KNOW TO ALL OPTIONS AT Q2 ASK Q3 (OTHERS GO TO QUALIFICATIONS SECTION)

3)   So can I just check, you left full time education with no qualifications and have not gained any qualifications since then, for example through work or returning to college?

Correct – no qualifications 1   CHECK SECTION ON ADDITIONAL DFES QUESTIONS

No – DO have qualifications   2   GO TO QUALIFICATIONS SECTION

Not sure if what have counts as a qualification 3   GO TO QUALIFICATIONS SECTION

Can't remember if have qualification   4   THANK AND CLOSE (THIS DOES NOT COUNT AS AN INTERVIEW)

IF ANY QUALIFICATIONS:

4)   Before I run through some qualifications, can you tell me if you had any qualifications specific to Scotland or Wales before starting your [INSERT TEXT FROM Q1b] course (ADD IF NECESSARY: such as SCOTVEC or SCEs)?

Yes – Scottish   1   IF THIS SINGLE CODED EXCLUDE UNDERLINED IN ITALICS AT Q5

Yes – Welsh 2   IF THIS SINGLE CODED EXCLUDE THOSE IN PLAIN UNDERLINING AT Q5

No   3   EXCLUDE QUALIFICATIONS UNDERLINED IN FOLLOWING TABLE

5)   I'd like to run through a list of qualifications to see which you had BEFORE starting your [INSERT TEXT FROM Q1b] course. (IF Q2 has at least one Yes among first 4 statements: "Please include all those acquired from [list statements answered YES AT Q2_a to Q2_d]". However, please do NOT include the qualifications which your [INSERT TEXT FROM Q1b] course is/was intended to lead to. READ OUT.

INTERVIEWER INSTRUCTION: PLEASE READ OUT ALL PRECODES TO CHECK WHETHER RESPONDENT HAS THAT QUALIFICATION. ADD IF NECESSARY THAT WE NEED TO DOUBLE CHECK THAT THEY DO NOT HAVE CERTAIN QUALIFICATIONS, AND THAT AFTER THIS MAIN QUESTION, THE SURVEY IS MUCH SIMPLER.

ALL QUALIFICATIONS ATTAINED OUTSIDE THE UK SHOULD BE CODED AS OTHER FOREIGN CODE 31 (EXCEPT INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE).

Code Max level achievable with qualification

A degree level qualification acquired in the UK including foundation degrees, a BSc, a BA, MA or a PhD, graduate membership of a professional qualification a PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate of Education), or higher   1   5

A Diploma in Higher Education: this usually takes two years full-time or three years part-time. (Examples are DipHE in youth and community work, or DipHE in design)   2   4

HNC / HND (Higher National Certificate / Higher National Diploma) 3   4

ONC / OND (Ordinary National Certificate / Ordinary National Diploma)   4   3

BTEC / BEC / TEC / EdExcel/ LQL   5   4

SCOTVEC, SCOTEC or SCOTBEC   6   4

Teaching qualification other than PGCE 7   4

Nursing or other medical qualification (excluding nursery nurse qualifications) not yet mentioned (please do not include first aid courses)   8   4

Other Higher Education qualifications below degree level   9   4

A levels (if respondent aged 60 plus add: including Higher School Certificate and Matriculation Higher), Vocational A levels or equivalent   10   3

NVQ / SVQ   12   5

GNVQ / GSVQ   13   3

AS-level / vocational AS-level or equivalent   14   3

Certificate of 6th Year Studies (CSYS)   15   3

Access to HE   16   3

O levels or AO levels (if respondent aged 60 plus add School Certificate and Matriculation) [nb ended in 1988]   17   2

Standard/Ordinary (O) Grade/Lower (Scotland) 18   3

GCSEs [nb introduced from 1988] or Vocational GCSEs   19   2

CSEs [nb ended in 1988]   20   2

National Qualifications including Advanced Higher, Higher, Intermediate and Access qualifications   21   4

RSA or OCR 22   4

City and Guilds   23   3

YT Certificate   24   1

Key Skills / Core Skills (Scotland) 25   2

Basic Skills including Skills for life/literacy/numeracy/ESOL   26   1

Welsh Baccalaureate   27   Level 3

International Baccalaureate (acquired in the UK or elsewhere)   28   Level 3

Entry Level Qualifications   29   1

Any other professional or vocational qualification such as HGV or first aid qualification (IF YES: Can you tell me what such qualifications you have?) INTERVIEWER NOTE: INCLUDE HEALTH AND SAFETY AND FOOD HYGIENE CERTIFICATES HERE. MULTICODE OK.   30   Level derived (if highest) from next but one section

Any foreign, non-UK qualifications (IF YES: Can you tell me what such qualifications you have?)

INTERVIEWER NOTE: INCLUDE ALL QUALIFICATIONS ACQUIRED OUTSIDE THE UK EXCEPT INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE. MULTICODE OK. PROBE FOR

COUNTRY, NAME OF QUALIFICATION, NUMBER ACHIEVED AND UK EQUIVALENT WHERE POSSIBLE31   Level derived (if highest) from next but one section

Which other qualifications, if any, do you have? (LIST)

INTERVIEWER NOTE: ENTER ONE QUALIFICATION ONLY. PROBE FOR TYPE, LEVEL, NUMBER WHERE APPLICABLE AND SUBJECT   32   Level derived (if highest) from next but one section

Any other qualifications? (LIST)

INTERVIEWER NOTE: ENTER ONE QUALIFICATION ONLY. PROBE FOR TYPE, LEVEL, NUMBER WHERE APPLICABLE AND SUBJECT   33   Level derived (if highest) from next but one section

Any other qualifications? (LIST)

INTERVIEWER NOTE: ENTER ONE QUALIFICATION ONLY. PROBE FOR TYPE, LEVEL, NUMBER WHERE APPLICABLE AND SUBJECT   34   Level derived (if highest) from next but one section

SECTION: FOLLOW UP ON QUALIFICATIONS TO DETERMINE HIGHEST LEVEL & 'THINNESS'

Before starting your [INSERT TEXT FROM Q1b] course…..

IF BTEC/ BEC / TEC / EdExcel / LQL AT Q5

6)   Was your highest BTEC qualification…READ OUT AND CODE FIRST THAT APPLIES

At higher level (level 4 or higher) 1   Full (100%) level 4

At National Certificate or National Diploma level (level 3)   2   Full (100%) level 3

A first diploma or general diploma (level 2)   3   Full (100%) level 2

A first certificate or general certificate (below level 2)   4   Full (100%) level 1

(DO NOT READ OUT) not sure   5   = treat as full (100%) level 1 for determining level

IF SCOTVEC / SCOTEC / SCOTBEC AT Q5

7)   Was your highest SCOTVEC qualification…READ OUT AND CODE FIRST THAT APPLIES

At higher level (level 4 or higher) 1   Full (100%) level 4

A full National Certificate (level 3) 2   Full (100%) level 3

A first diploma or general diploma (level 2)   3   Full (100%) level 2

A first certificate or general certificate (below level 2)   4   Full (100%) level 1

Modules towards a National Certificate   5   Part level 1

(DO NOT READ OUT) not sure   6   = treat as part level 1 for determining level

IF A LEVEL AT Q5

8)   Did you have…

One A level (or equivalent) 1   Counts as 50% of level 3

Or more than one   2   Full (100%) level 3

(DO NOT READ OUT) not sure   3   = treat as (50%) level 3 for determining level

IF SCE HIGHERS AT Q5

9)   There is no q9 (moved to q18a)

IF NVQ/SVQ AT Q5

10)   What was your highest level of full NVQ / SVQ…

Level 1   1   Full (100%) level 1

Level 2   2   Full (100%) level 2

Level 3   3   Full (100%) level 3

Level 4   4   Full (100%) level 4

Or Level 5   5   Full (100%) level 5

(DO NOT READ OUT) not sure   6   = full level 1 for determining level

IF GNVQ/GSVQ AT Q5

11)   Was your highest GNVQ / GSVQ at…?

Advanced level 12 units   1   Full (100%) level 3

Advanced level 6 units   2   Part (50%) level 3

[DO NOT READ OUT] Advanced level – unsure of units   3   Full (100%) level 3

Full intermediate level (6 units)   4   Full (100%) level 2

Part one intermediate level (3 units)   5   Part (50%) level 2

[DO NOT READ OUT] Intermediate level – unsure of units   6   Full (100%) level 2

Full foundation level (6 units)   7   Full (100%) level 1

Part one foundation level (3 units)8   Part (50%) level 1

[DO NOT READ OUT] Foundation level – unsure of units   9   Full (100%) level 1

(DO NOT READ OUT) Can't remember / Don't know   10   = full level 1 for determining level

IF AS-LEVEL AT Q5

12)   Did you have…

One AS level 1   Counts as 25% of level 3

Two AS levels   2   Counts as 50% of level 3

Three AS levels   3   Counts as 75% of level 3

Four or more AS levels   4   Counts as 100% of level 3

(DO NOT READ OUT) not sure   5   Counts as 25% of level 3

IF HAVE O LEVELS OR AO LEVELS

13)   How many O levels or AO levels did you have in total? PROMPT IF NECESSARY. IF DON'T KNOW / CAN'T REMEMBER ASK IF LESS THAN FIVE

One   1   Counts as 20% of a level 2

Two   2   Counts as 40% of a level 2

Three   3   Counts as 60% of a level 2

Four   4   Counts as 80% of a level 2

Or 5 or more   5   Full (100%) level 2

Can't remember but less than 5   6   = treat as 20% of a level 2

(DO NOT READ OUT) Can't remember at all   7   = treat as 20% of a level 2

IF HAVE SCE STANDARD / ORDINARY O GRADE

14) How many SCE Standard grades 1-3 or O grades at grade C did you have? PROMPT IF NECESSARY. IF DON'T KNOW / CAN'T REMEMBER ASK IF LESS THAN FIVE

None 1   Counts as full level 1

One   2   Counts as 20% of a level 2

Two   3   Counts as 40% of a level 2

Three 4   Counts as 60% of a level 2

Four 5   Counts as 80% of a level 2

Or 5 or more 6   Full (100%) level 2

Can't remember but less than 5   7   = treat as 20% of a level 2

(DO NOT READ OUT) Can't remember at all   8   = treat as 20% of a level 2

IF HAVE GCSEs

15) How many GCSEs grade C or above did you have? PROMPT IF NECESSARY. IF DON'T KNOW / CAN'T REMEMBER ASK IF LESS THAN FIVE

None 1   Counts as full level 1

One   2   Counts as 20% of a level 2

Two   3   Counts as 40% of a level 2

Three 4   Counts as 60% of a level 2

Four 5   Counts as 80% of a level 2

Or 5 or more 6   Full (100%) level 2

Can't remember but less than 5   7   = treat as 20% of a level 2

(DO NOT READ OUT) Can't remember at all   8   = treat as 20% of a level 2

IF HAVE CSEs AT Q5

16) How many CSEs did you have at grade 1? PROMPT IF NECESSARY. IF DON'T KNOW / CAN'T REMEMBER ASK IF LESS THAN FIVE

None 1   Counts as full level 1

One   2   Counts as 20% of a level 2

Two   3   Counts as 40% of a level 2

Three 4   Counts as 60% of a level 2

Four   5   Counts as 80% of a level 2

Or 5 or more 6   Full (100%) level 2

Can't remember but less than 5   7   = treat as 20% of a level 2

(DO NOT READ OUT) Can't remember at all   8   = treat as 20% of a level 2

IF NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS (SCOTLAND) AT Q5

17)   Was your highest National Qualification… READ OUT AND CODE FIRST THAT APPLIES?

Advanced higher   1   ASK NEXT QUESTION

Higher2   ASK Q18a

Intermediate level 2 3   ASK Q20

Intermediate level 1 4   ASK Q19

Access Level5   Full (100%) level 2

(DO NOT READ OUT) not sure   6   Full (100%) level 2 for determining level

IF ADVANCED HIGHER NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS (SCOTLAND) INCLUDING SCE INTERMEDIATE AT PREVIOUS QUESTION

18)   Did you have … READ OUT AND CODE?

One advanced higher   1   Part (50%) level 4

Or more than one   2   Full (100%) level 4

(DO NOT READ OUT) not sure   3   = Part (50%) level 4 for determining level

IF HIGHER AT Q17

Q18a) Did you have…

One Higher   1   Counts as 33% of level 3

Two Highers 2   Counts as 66% of level 3

Three of more Highers   3   Full (100%) level 3

(DO NOT READ OUT) not sure   4   = treat as 33% of level 3 for determining level

IF INTERMEDIATE LEVEL 1 AT Q17

19)   How many Scottish National Qualifications Intermediate level 1 did you have at grade B or above … READ OUT AND CODE?

None 1   Counts as full level 1

One   2   Counts as 20% of a level 2

Two   3   Counts as 40% of a level 2

Three 4   Counts as 60% of a level 2

Four   5   Counts as 80% of a level 2

Five or more 6   Full (100%) level 2

(DO NOT READ OUT) not sure   7   = treat as 20% of a level 2

IF INTERMEDIATE LEVEL 2 AT Q17

20)   How many Scottish National Qualifications Intermediate level 2 did you have at grade C or above … READ OUT AND CODE?

None 1   Counts as full level 1

One   2   Counts as 20% of a level 2

Two   3   Counts as 40% of a level 2

Three 4   Counts as 60% of a level 2

Four   5   Counts as 80% of a level 2

Five or more 6   Full (100%) level 2

(DO NOT READ OUT) not sure   7   = treat as 20% of a level 2

IF CITY AND GUILDS AT Q5

21)   Was your highest City and Guilds qualification… READ OUT AND CODE FIRST THAT APPLIES?

Advanced Craft / part 3   1   Full (100%) level 3

Craft / part 2 2   Full (100%) level 2

Foundation / part 1 3   Full (100%) level 1

(DO NOT READ OUT) not sure   4   = Full level 1 for determining level

IF RSA / OCR AT Q5

22)   Was your highest RSA or OCR…? READ OUT AND CODE FIRST THAT APPLIES

A higher diploma   1   Full (100%) level 4

An advanced diploma or advanced certificate   2   Full (100%) level 3

A diploma   3   Full (100%) level 2

Or Some other RSA or OCR (including Stage I, II and III)   4   Full (100%) level 1

(DO NOT READ OUT) not sure   5   Treat as full (100%) level 1

IF APPRENTICESHIP AT Q2 (Q2D=1):

ZQ23) When did you complete your apprenticeship? Did you complete before 1995 or in 1995 or   later?

Before 1995 1   Treat as Full Level 2

In 1995 or more recently   2   ASK ZQ24

(DO NOT READ OUT) Can't remember 3   Treat as Full Level 2

IF APPRENTICESHIP ACHIEVED AFTER 1995 (ZQ23=2):

ZQ24) Was your Apprenticeship at …? READ OUT?

Advanced level (Advanced Apprenticeship or Advanced Modern Apprenticeship) 1   Full (100%) level 3

Foundation level (Apprenticeship or Foundation Modern Apprenticeship)   2   Full (100%) level 2

(DO NOT READ OUT) Not sure   3   Treat as Full Level 2

IF 'Welsh Baccalaureate' AT Q5 ASK

24a)   Is your Welsh Baccalaureate … READ OUT?

At Foundation level 1   100% level 1

At the intermediate level   2   100% level 2

Or the advanced level   3   100% level 3

(DO NOT READ OUT) not sure   4   100% level 1

SECTION FOR 'OTHER' AND 'FOREIGN' QUALIFICATIONS AT Q5 (i.e. codes 30-34)

(OTHERS CHECK Q30a)

IF 'OTHER' OR FOREIGN QUALIFICATION CODED AT Q5 (codes 30-34) AND THIS MULTICODED WITH OTHER RESPONSES (including 2 other responses, or an other and a foreign qualification) ASK Q25 (IF 30-34 AT Q5 AND THIS SINGLE CODED ASK Q26)

25)   You've mentioned that you had a number of qualifications before starting your [INSERT TEXT FROM Q1b] course. Which of the following do you regard as the highest qualification? READ OUT. SINGLE CODE ONLY

(INSERT EACH OF THOSE CODED FROM 1-29 IF ANY. ALSO INSERT ANY OF Q2_E AND Q2_F IF CODED)   1   GO TO NEXT SECTION

INSERT TEXT OF 'OTHER' (CODE 30 IF APPLICABLE)   2   ASK NEXT QUESTION

INSERT TEXT OF 'OTHER' (CODE 31 IF APPLICABLE)   3

INSERT TEXT OF 'OTHER' (CODE 32 IF APPLICABLE)   4

INSERT TEXT OF 'OTHER' (CODE 33 IF APPLICABLE)   5

INSERT TEXT OF 'OTHER' (CODE 34 IF APPLICABLE)   6

INSERT TEXT OF ANY FOREIGN QUALIFICATIONS (CODE 31)   7

All equal   8   see instructions below*

Not sure   9   GO TO NEXT SECTION

*if "All Equal" coded, set dummy variable below and re-ask Q25 based on which is most recent.

EQUALDUM = 1 if Q25="All equal"

IF CODES 30-34 AT Q5 SINGLE CODED, OR IF CODE 2 - 7 AT Q25 (OTHERS GO TO NEXT SECTION)

26)   Can you tell me a bit more about this qualification. What age were you when you achieved it?

IF DON'T KNOW EXACT THEN HAVE A RANGE

16 or under   1

17-18 2

19-24 3

25 plus   4

Can't remember   5

27)   Were there entry requirements for starting this qualification, for example could you only start learning for this qualification if you had other qualifications or if you had relevant experience?

Yes – entry requirements   1   ASK Q28

No – entry requirements   2   ASK Q29

Can't remember   3

IF ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

28)   What other qualifications or relevant experience did you need?

IF CODES 30-34 AT Q5 SINGLE CODED, OR IF CODE 2 - 7 AT Q25

29)   How long did it take to achieve this qualification from start to completion? PROMPT WITH RANGES IF NECESSARY

A month or less   1

More than a month but less than 3   2

More than 3 months but less than 6   3

More than 6 months but less than 9   4

More than 9 months but less than a year 5

Between 1 year and 18 months   6

More than 18 months   7

Can't remember   8

Other (RECORD HOW LONG AND DETAILS PROVIDED)   0

IF Q29 = 3-8 OR 0

29a)   And was the course a full-time or part-time course?

Full-time   1

Part-time   2

Can't remember   3

30)   INTERVIEWER EITHER CLASSIFY INTO LEVEL IF CLEAR OR CHECK WITH RESPONDENT: Qualifications are often classified into broad levels. Which of the following broad descriptions do you think comes closest to the level of this qualification?

INTERVIEWER INSTRUCTION – USE PREVIOUS ANSWERS TO HELP GUAGE ESTIMATED LEVEL RELEVANT

        Estimated at:

Level 1 which is entry or foundation level - this includes short courses.   1   = level 1

A level 2 intermediate qualification, such as O levels or City and Guilds craft level 2   = level 2

A level 3 advanced qualification such as A levels, and ONC or OND or a City and Guilds Advanced craft. This is likely to take 2 years to complete, and would not be gained by anyone under 17.   3   = level 3

A first degree (this would take 2-3 years to complete and you would normally need qualifications at A level or equivalent) [Would be 20 plus to acquire this]   4   = level 4

A higher degree like an MBA or a PhD (this would take a number of years to complete and would normally require a first degree). [Would be over 20 to acquire this].   5   = level 5

Don't know / unsure 6   = UNCLEAR

IF SAY 'Teaching qualification other than PGCE' AT Q5 (Q5=7) ASK 30a (OTHERS CHECK Q30b)

30a)   You said earlier that you had some teaching qualification other than a PGCE. Can you tell me a bit about this teaching qualification?

        INTERVIEWER NOTE: IN EACH INSTANCE READ OUT & ASK EACH OF:

•   Where you attained it

•   At what age

•   How long it took

• Whether you needed any qualifications to get on the course and, if so, what qualifications

• Whether it was a full or part-time course?

INTERVIEWER NOTE – ENTER ANSWER TO EACH PART OF QUESTION BEFORE MOVING ONTO NEXT.

NOW CHECK Q30aii

30aii) Was this teaching qualification for…READ OUT (CODE ALL THAT APPLY)

Further Education   1   Now check q30b

Key Stage 4 2

Key Stage 3 3

Key Stage 2 4

Key Stage 1 5

Foundation stage   6

(ONLY READ OUT IF NONE YES) None of the above 7

Can't remember / don't know   8

IF SAY 'Nursing or other medical qualification, excluding nursery nurse qualifications' AT Q5 (Q5=8) ASK Q30b, (OTHERS CHECK NEXT PAGE)

Q30b) You said earlier that you had some Nursing or other medical qualification, excluding nursery nurse qualifications. Can you tell me a bit about this nursing qualification – where you attained it, at what age, how long it took, whether you needed any qualifications to get on the course and, if so, what qualifications and finally whether it was a full or part-time course? Also can you tell me what type of job the qualification was needed for.

INTERVIEWER NOTE – ENTER ANSWER TO EACH PART OF QUESTION BEFORE MOVING ONTO NEXT.

CATI TO DETERMINE HIGHEST QUALIFICATION OR QUALIFICATIONS

IF Q5 SINGLE CODED HIGHEST QUALIFICATION = ANSWER AT Q5

IF Q25 ANSWERED CODE 2-7 TAKE ANSWER OF HIGHEST QUALIFICATION FROM ANSWER AT Q25

IF Q25 ANSWERED AS CODE 1 (REFERRING TO A RESPONSE CODED AT Q5 AS 1-29) AND ONLY ONE ANSWER AT Q5 CODED 1-29 TAKE THIS AS HIGHEST QUALIFICATION

OTHERS TAKE HIGHEST QUALIFICATION (S) FROM HIGHEST QUALIFICATION FROM Q5-Q30 RESPONSES (LEVEL 3 FULL HIGHER THAN A PART LEVEL 3; PART LEVEL 3 HIGHER THAN LEVEL 2 ETC ETC)

NOTE:

IF A LEVEL AND AS LEVEL SELECTED AS HIGHEST THEN ALWAYS CHOOSE A LEVEL A S HIGHEST AND ASK Q32 (ONE QUAL HIGHEST)

IF MORE THAN ONE QUALIFICATION HIGHEST (OTHERS ASK Q32)

31)   From what you have told us about the qualifications you had before starting your [INSERT TEXT FROM Q1b] course, we take it that your highest qualifications were <insert qualifications>. Which of these did you achieve most recently? SINGLE CODE ONLY

<Highest qualification 1>   1   ASK Q32

<Highest qualification 2>   2

<Highest qualification 3>   3

Two or more at the same time   4

Don't know   5

SAY TO ALL WITH QUALIFICATIONS

32)   IF ONE QUALIFICATION HIGHEST: From what you have told us about the qualifications you had before starting your [INSERT TEXT FROM Q1b] course, we take it that your highest qualification was <insert qualification>. How many years ago did you achieve this qualification? IF UNSURE PROMPT WITH RANGES.

IF MORE THAN ONE QUALIFICATION HIGHEST: How many years ago did you achieve [<ANSWER FROM Q31> IF CODES 1-3 OR IF DON'T KNOW OR CODE 4 'the most recent of these qualifications']

EXACT NUMBER OF YEARS AGO THAT ACHIEVED _____   1   RECORD EXACT YEAR (1920-2009)

Don't know   2   ASK Q33

IF DON'T KNOW (OTHERS ASK Q34)

33)   Roughly how many years ago would you say it was…? READ OUT

Within the last 3 years   1

Within the 5 years   2

Within the last 10 years   3

Within the last 20 years   4

Within the last 30 years   5

More than 30 years ago   6

Don't know   7

ASK ALL EXCEPT THOSE SINGLE CODE AT Q5 (IF SINGLE CODED GO TO NEXT SECTION)

34)   Have you gained any other qualifications since your {[<highest qualification> if only one highest qualification identified by CATI] OR [<highest qualification> at q31 if codes 1-3] OR ['these highest qualification' if other answer at q31]}?   Please do not include the [INSERT TEXT FROM Q1b] course [TEXT IF TTGMARCH=2: 'that you were enrolled on in November 2008'] [TEXT IF TTGMARCH=1: 'that you started after March 31st 2009'].

Yes   1   ASK Q35

No   2   GO TO NEXT SECTION

Don't know   3

ASK ALL WITH MORE RECENT QUALIFICATIONS

35)   What was the most recent qualification that you had before starting your [INSERT TEXT FROM Q1B] course? LIST ANSWERS FROM Q5 [PLUS AN OTHER – NOTE TO RESEARCH - WE WILL NEED TO EDIT THESE] AND PROMPT IF NECESSARY

36)   And how many years ago did you achieve <ANSWER FROM Q35>?

EXACT NUMBER OF YEARS AGO THAT ACHIEVED _____   1   RECORD EXACT YEAR (1920-2008)

Don't know   2   ASK Q37

IF DON'T KNOW (OTHERS GO TO NEXT SECTION

37)   Roughly how many years ago would you say it was…? READ OUT

Within the last 1 year   1

Within the last 3 years   2

Within the 5 years   3

Within the last 10 years   4

Within the last 20 years   5

More than 20 years ago   6

Don't know   7

ASK ALL

38)   I'm interested to know the reasons for your studying the [INSERT COURSE AT Q1b] course. Did you go on the course because you thought it would help in your current job, help with future work or career, both or neither.

Help in your current job   1   ASK ALL OF Q39

Help in future work / career   2

Both   3

Neither   4   ASK ONLY CODES IN BOLD AT Q39

Don't Know   5   ASK ALL OF Q39

39)   Can you tell me if the following were a key reason, a part of the reason or not a reason at all for starting your [INSERT COURSE AT Q1b] course (DEPENDING ON HOW ANSWER Q1: that you are currently on (Q1/1) / that you recently left (Q1/2))..? READ OUT.

RANDOMISE STATEMENTS

Key reason   Part of the reasons Not a reason DO NOT READ OUT Not sure / don't know

To get a new job   1   2   3   4

To develop my career   1   2   3   4

To change to a different type of work   1   2   3   4

To gain new skills for my (q38/1 - current job / q38/2 – future work q38/3 – current job or for future work)   1   2   3   4

To help me get a pay rise   1   2   3   4

To help me get a promotion   1   2   3   4

To help me get more satisfaction at work   1   2   3   4

[ONLY ASK IF CODE 2 OR 3 AT Q38] To help me set up my own business   1   2
        3   4

To refresh skills or qualifications that were becoming out of date   1   2   3   4

[ONLY ASK IF CODE 1 OR 3 AT Q38] My employer made me do it 1   2   3   4

To meet legislative requirements 1   2   3   4

I needed to do this course so I could get on to another course that I want to do in the future
          1   2   3   4

For personal interest and development   1   2   3   4

To raise my level of qualifications 1   2   3   4

Were any other reasons important (SPECIFY)   1

40)   Why did you decide to embark on this course WHEN you did i.e. why was it an appropriate time for you as opposed to a couple of years before? DO NOT READ OUT

[MULTICODE OKAY]

Decided it was time to change career   1   ASK Q41

Employer suggested it   2

Personal circumstances favourable e.g. children left home; time on my hands   3

Enable me to progress in the job I was doing at the time   4

Course not available before   5

Interest   6

Progression from a previous course   7

Availability of government initiatives to help with the costs   8

Other (SPECIFY)   0

Don't know   X

41)   At the moment are you …READ OUT – CODE FIRST YES (MAIN ACTIVITY)

(ONLY IF S2=4)

Retired   1

Employed full time (30+ hours a week)   2

Employed part time (less than 30 hours a week)   3

Self-employed   4

On a government-supported training and employment programme

ADD IF NECESSARY: This includes things like New Deal and Work Based Learning programmes, but not education courses without an employment element   5

Unemployed though looking and available for work   6

Unemployed but not looking or not available for work   7

Doing unpaid family work   8

None of the above   X

IF 'UNEMPLOYED BUT NOT LOOKING OR NOT AVAILABLE FOR WORK' (ie q41=7) ASK:

42)   When, if at all, do you expect to be available for work again…READ OUT

Within the next 2 years   1

Within the next 5 years   2

Within the next 10 years   3

More than 10 years 4

Or do you not expect to become available for work again   5

(DO NOT READ OUT) Don't know   X

43)   Finally, can I just check, you mentioned that in late 2008 you were undertaking [INSERT TEXT AT Q1b] course at [INSERT PROVIDER NAME]. Can you tell me if any of the following apply:

Yes   No   Don't know

a)   Immediately before starting that course you were studying another course with the same provider   1   2   3

IF NO AT A)

b)   Had you ever studied with that provider before 1   2   3

SAY TO ALL

INTERVIEWER READ OUT: "You've now reached the end of the survey. Just in case you missed it, my name is X and I am calling from IFF Research on behalf of the Skill Funding Agency. I'd like to thank you ever so much for taking part and I hope you have a pleasant day / evening"

Appendix C – Provider research discussion guide

PPRIVATE& CONFIDENTIAL

      Prior qualifications

PROVIDER TOPIC GUIDE   j4876

April 2010

Start Time:

Respondent:

Job Title:

Provider Name:

Train to Gain only, FE only, or Both

Interviewer:

INTRODUCTION:

      Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research which we are conducting for the Skills Funding Agency, the new agency that has taken over many of the responsibilities of the LSC (Learning and Skills Council), and which is responsible for funding and regulating post 19 adult skills training in England.

All your responses will be strictly confidential – nothing will be reported to our client which will identify an individual or organisation. As a note in total we are interviewing 40 providers across England.

The aim of the interview is to understand how providers obtain information from learners about their prior qualifications, and how the level of their learning is determined for recording on the ILR. We are particularly interested in adult learners undertaking level 2 or level 3 learning.

ASK FOR PERMISSION TO RECORD INTERVIEW

Yes   1

No   2

Background:

1)   Can you tell me a bit about your organisation:

        CHECK FOR

Type of organisation: FE / private training provider / other

Scope of operation: local / regional / national

Approximate number of adult learners aged 19+ (either currently / during academic year)?

Nb write in if figure current or annual

Number of these undertaking full Level 2 courses

Number of these undertaking full Level 3 courses

Number studying through Train to Gain

2)   Job title and respondent's role

3)   The key area of interest is the process by which an adult learner starting level 2 or level 3 provision would come to have information recorded on the ILR for their prior qualification level (this is field L35 on the ILR). Can you tell me how this process works, starting from the initial collection of the information?

So can I just check:

4)   Is the information about the learner's qualifications before starting the course collected on a standard form or questionnaire?

Yes – in all cases   1   ASK Q4a

Yes – in some cases

No   2   ASK Q4d

IF YES – IN SOME CASES

4a)   In which circumstances is this used? Why is this approach not always used?

•   For which types of course? For standard adult courses? Train to Gain courses? Apprenticeships?

- Only where eligibility for the course is based on prior attainment?

- What type of learner?

IF YES USE STANDARD FORM / QUESTIONNAIRE IN SOME OR ALL CASES (Q4)

4b)   What does this form / questionnaire ask?

- Does it ask for the actual qualifications or the level of these (if the latter what guidance on how to determine what level a qualification is?)

- If asks for the specific qualifications: does it ask for all their previous qualifications or just the highest? Is it an open-ended question or do they select from a list of qualifications?

ASK FOR COPY TO BE SUPPLIED

IF USE STANDARD FORM / QUESTIONNAIRE AT Q4

4c)   Is this self-completed by the learner, is it a member of staff asking the learner, or a mix of these?

Self-completed   1   When is this normally done? Is this hard-copy / online / other?

Are there answers ever checked with them? IF SO: in what circumstances?

Staff   2   Who would do this / What is their job title? When is this normally done? How is it normally done (telephone / face-to-face)

Mix   3   Why both (who decides which approach to use)? Which is more common?

Where staff do it who would do this / What is their job title? When is this normally done? How is it normally done (telephone / face-to-face)

IF DON'T USE A STANDARD FORM / QUESTIONNAIRE AT Q4

4d)   Given there is no standard form or questionnaire, how is this information collected?

Are there non-standard forms / questionnaires e.g. that different departments / parts of the organisation complete? IF SO ASK FOR COPIES. How different are the different forms/ questionnaires? Why is this approach adopted?

Is it done orally - if so who does this / what is asked; how is this recorded? What is recorded?

What is asked / collected - the actual qualifications or the level of these (if the latter what guidance on how to determine what level a qualification is?)

ASK ALL

5)   So to what extent is the collection of prior qualifications information undertaken centrally OR done by each department or different business units?

IF NOT CENTRAL: How standardised is the approach?

How, if at all, do you ensure each is doing it in a similar / consistent way?

ASK ALL

6)   So is there guidance, or has there been training for staff, either on how to collect prior qualifications information or how then to determine the level of their highest qualification?

IF YES:

•   Can you say a bit about the content and nature of this guidance / training?

•   Who is the guidance aimed at / who received the training?

•   Has the training and guidance been developed and delivered by college staff, or by/in conjunction with another agency? Which agency?

•   How often is the guidance / training updated? Do materials remain available on a college intranet?

•   ASK FOR COPY OF ANY GUIDANCE

ASK ALL

7)   Is information on the prior qualifications of learners ever based on information supplied by employers, Train to Gain brokers or other external organisations?

IF YES: Can you say a bit about this?

•   Which organisations?

•   What information do they supply (the level, the actual qualifications?)

•   How confident are you in the information they send?

•   Is it taken at face value v. is it always checked or verified with the learner?

•   Is the quality of this information different between different organisations?

ASK ALL

8)   Once the information about the prior qualification of the learner is collected, what happens to this information then?

ASK / CHECK:

What is recorded on any internal IT systems you have – is it all their qualifications, their highest, the level of their highest?

From the records you have and keep, if you had to check a learner's prior qualifications could this be done without re-asking the learner?

Are any checks carried out on the accuracy of data, or reasons for missing data on prior attainment?

8a)   At what stage is the LEVEL of their previous highest qualification – which is entered on the ILR - decided, and who makes this decision (in terms of their job title(s))?

        ASK / CHECK: What guidance is given on deciding what qualifications are at what level?

ASK ALL

9)   How confident are you that where a definite prior level is recorded for a learner's prior qualifications this is 100% accurate in all cases?

IF NOT 100%:

a)   Why do you say that?

b)   Do you think you tend to overestimate prior qualifications, underestimate, do you think this balances out, or have you no evidence either way? If either of the first two – why do you think that?

c)   If you had to estimate for what proportion of level 2 and level 3 learners this information was accurate what would this be?

d)   Are there particular types of learner where you feel the information is less likely to be accurate? If so: why?

e)   What would be required to record prior qualifications more accurately?

ASK ALL

10)   As an organisation what are the main challenges to accurately determining the prior qualification level of adult level 2 and 3 learners? PROBE: What other challenges are there?

• Are the challenges different for particular types of course or learner? In what way? Are there different challenges for standard adult courses vs. Train to Gain courses vs. Apprenticeships?

• What might help you overcome these challenges?

11) Are any of the following difficulties or challenges?

FOR EACH 'YES': Can you say a bit about this – e.g. how often or to what extent is this an issue? Are the challenges different for particular types of course or learner? Are the challenges different for standard adult courses vs. Train to Gain courses vs. Apprenticeships?

Yes   No   IF YES…

We have limited admin resources to do this task   1   2

Learners can't remember what qualifications they have, or the number or level of their qualifications?   1   2

We find it hard to know what level foreign qualifications should be treated as?   1   2

There are particular qualifications we are unsure what level to assign   1   2   IF YES: WHICH?

11a) So far we have focused on the recording of information on the prior attainment of ADULT learners. Could you briefly tell me whether there are any key differences in this process for younger learners (aged 16-18)?

12) Are you aware of guidance issued by the Information Authority about defining level of attainment and firstness?

Yes   1   Ask q12A

No   2   Ask next 'ASK ALL'

Don't know   3

IF YES

12a) Have you or your staff used it?

Yes   1

No   2   Why not?

Don't know   3

IF YES AT Q12

12b)   How useful have you found it?

Very   1   WHY DO YOU SAY THAT?

Quite 2

Not very   3

Not at all   4

Don't know   X

ASK ALL

12c)   How does the college generally keep up-to-date with developments in the qualifications system and new qualifications?

`   What sources of information are used?

•   Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency

•   Awarding bodies

•   LSC / Funding agencies

•   Government departments (BIS)

•   Educational press / websites

•   Other providers / colleagues

•   Other bodies?

        ASK ALL

13)   To what extent is Management Information on prior attainment used internally within the college to inform strategy or to determine performance? Is 'firstness' an important KPI for the college?

14)   A number of surveys seem to show that the ILR (based on provider returns) underestimates the level of prior qualifications i.e. the ILR overestimates the number of adult learners studying for their FIRST level 2 or level 3 qualifications. What do you think the main reasons for this may be? PROBE: why else?

ASK ALL

15) Can I just check, if someone moved from a Level 2 course with you, to a level 3 course, would you amend their prior qualification level when they started the Level 3 provision?

Yes   1

No   2

Depends / in some cases yes, in others no   3   What does it depend on?

Don't know   X

16) Is there anything else you would like to add on the issues we have been discussing?

Thank respondent

I declare that this survey has been carried out under IFF instructions and within the rules of the MRS Code of Conduct.

Interviewer signature: Date:

Finish time: Interview length   mins