Framework for Excellence 2009/10 Learner Views survey

1 October 2009 – 12 February 2010

Guidance Notes for Survey Co-ordinators

AS A COLLEGE OR PROVIDER WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO?

1. Check whether you are in scope for the Framework.


Applicability Criteria

All providers that are in scope for the Framework for Excellence in 2009/10 are in scope for the Learner Views performance indicator. This includes learners at sub-contracted organisations if your organisation receives LSC funding for this learning.

The survey is applicable to:

- All 16-18 year-olds taking at least one LSC-funded aim;
- All adults with at least one aim funded through the Adult Learner Responsive funding stream (excluding First Steps provision, OLASS provision where the learner is in custody and other programmes not subject to formula funding.);
- All adults with at least one aim funded through the Employer Responsive Funding Stream.

Providers are urged to ensure that responses are generated from a representative sample of learners on LSC-funded provision. We may not be able to award a grade if your sample is badly skewed.

Learners not funded by the LSC

The survey only applies to LSC-funded learners. Learners whose funding comes from other sources, for example, the Department of Work and
Pensions, will not be counted within the Framework for Excellence. If any survey responses are returned from learners who are not funded by the LSC, these will be extracted by the LSC before the analysis is carried out.

For courses longer than six weeks, it may be best to wait to survey learners until they have been on their course or learning programme for six weeks or more.

Learners who finished their learning programme before 1 October 2009 should not be included in the survey.

2. Check the web links to the test version of the survey during September.

Testing is essential to ensure there is no interference from your firewalls. You are encouraged to test this link widely, including tests from all centres at which learners are based, as firewall settings can differ on different sites. If you have any concerns with this please email learnersviewssurvey@ipsos-mori.com. Please note that providers who had access problems during the survey period in January-February 2009 had all failed to test access prior to the survey going live. We therefore encourage you to take this opportunity to avoid problems once the survey has started. Please note that access to test web links will close on 30 September 2009.

3. Ensure that learners have access to their learner reference number and your unique provider number in preparation for the survey and when they undertake the survey.

Learners log-in to the survey by entering your provider number (UKPRN) and their personal learner reference number, as it appears in field L03 of the ILR.

In some providers, learner reference numbers are used routinely as Intranet logins and appear on learner ID cards, meaning learners will have the number easily available to them. If this is not the case in your organisation, please give consideration to the best way to get this information to learners in readiness for the survey. Please note that learners will still be able to complete the survey if they have lost or forgotten their reference number but if this happens for a high proportion of survey respondents, it will delay our ability to turn the survey results around quickly. Accurate learner reference numbers will also increase the value of response breakdowns we will be able to give you at the end of the survey. The learner reference number is used to confirm that the learner is in scope for the survey and also serves as a protection for providers by ensuring that learners cannot enter duplicate submissions.

Please note that the personal reference number is allocated to learners at the time of enrolment. It is not the Unique Learner Reference Number (ULN) which is being introduced across the country. We cannot use the ULN for the
survey yet because not all learners have a ULN and there can also be delay between learners beginning their learning and receiving a ULN number.

Please ensure that your UKPRN reference number is widely publicised during the survey period. In the survey we refer to this number as the “code number for your college or learning provider”. It is important learners enter this number because it ensures that your learner’s responses are correctly attributed to your organisation. Learners cannot access the survey without the UKPRN. Please note that you should also distribute this number to any sub-contractors who deliver in-scope learning on your behalf; if this learning is part of your LSC-funded provision it will be included when we calculate your in scope learners.

4. Consider how you want to integrate the Framework for Excellence Learner Views survey with your own survey processes.

If you already operate web-based surveys within your organisation, and the option of having learners complete both surveys at the same time is attractive to you, then you may want to use the “hyperlink-embedded method” to link the Framework survey with your own survey.

The advantage of the “hyperlink-embedded method” is that it works from any starting point where you may want to embed the hyperlink – such as a Word document, an email or your intranet home page. This method is therefore versatile and also gives a consistent user experience. Please note that if your learners wish to access the survey from their own home computer, they must first go to the Framework for Excellence pages on the internet, http://ffe.lsc.gov.uk/Surveys.

If you wish to use this method please refer to the step-by-step approach to undertaking the hyper-link embedded method to linking your survey with the Framework for Excellence survey. This is available on the Learner Views pages of the Framework: http://ffe.lsc.gov.uk/learnerviews

5. Decide how to distribute the web link to learners.

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

6. The survey can be completed on hand-held communication devices such as BlackBerrys.

Colleges and Learning Providers which have assessors visiting learners in the workplace may wish to use this technology. If this is of interest contact the Framework for Excellence team by emailing ffelearnerviews@lsc.gov.uk by 21 September 2009, so we can check the survey is compatible with your devices.
7. The survey will be live from 1 October 2009 until 12 February 2010.

Providers can decide how they manage the administration of the survey throughout this period. It will be possible for learners to log on at any time of the day provided that they have their provider’s UKPRN and personal learner reference number to hand. However, the LSC is aware that most providers will ask their learners to complete the survey in organised group sessions, in learning resource centres, or training rooms with website access.

8. Consider the best way to give as many LSC-funded learners as possible the opportunity to take part in the survey.

You can review the likely number of LSC-funded learners that you will need to obtain completed survey responses from by using the online tool available on the Learner Views pages on the Framework for Excellence website: http://ffe.lsc.gov.uk/learnerviews. This will allow you to update the LSC estimate using your knowledge of 2009/10 enrollment numbers. The figure obtained should be used as a guide only and we strongly encourage colleges and providers to exceed this figure to ensure the minimum number of completed surveys is achieved. We also ask you to consider giving as many LSC-funded learners as possible the opportunity to complete the survey.

A letter has been sent to your Principal/Chief Executive with login details to the survey website. With this letter we have sent each college and provider an estimate of the likely minimum number of completed questionnaires that will need to be returned to give a reliable measure of learner views. This is based on projections from your 2008/09 learner records. You will need to log on to the survey website, using these details, to undertake the web testing (please see Step 3 for details).

9. Avoid generating a skewed sample.

The minimum number of completed surveys that a provider will need to return to give a reliable measure of learner views is based on an estimate of their likely in scope learner numbers. It is also based on statistical modelling that assumes that the achieved sample has been selected randomly and is therefore fully representative. To ensure that all returned samples are free from skew, and can therefore form the basis of fair comparison, the LSC will apply corrective weightings. This means that a provider returning a skewed sample may not receive a valid score even if the total number of responses is above the minimum target. For these reasons, as well as to ensure that learners have the right to express their views, providers should be advised to arrange for as many LSC-funded learners as possible to complete the survey.

It is also essential that a random sample of learners is asked to complete the survey. There are many sources of information on how to create a random sample available on the Internet.
10. Sell the benefits of the survey.

Some colleges and providers approach surveys of this kind as a purely administrative exercise. However, there is evidence that learners will respond better to the survey if they understand its importance and see it as part of their entitlement as a learner.

It would be useful if providers considered now the best way to publicise the survey, so that learners view participation as a right, rather than an obligation. The LSC will issue providers with packs of promotional materials to help with this in September through the surveys site. This will include:

   a) A guide for staff administering the survey with learners
   b) A PowerPoint presentation for learners
   c) A set of posters
   d) Text, ready for your use.

11. Convey the ease with which the survey can be completed.

The survey is very short, taking three to four minutes for most learners to complete.

12. Consider giving learners access to complete the survey from any internet-linked PC at any time of the day during the survey period.

Learners can also complete the survey from any web-linked PC or laptop at any time of day.

Providers should be encouraged not to think that learners will only participate in the survey if they are organised to do so in formal settings. The survey will be available 24 hours a day during the survey period and can be completed from any internet-linked computer. Palm tops and BlackBerrys can be used, and guidance on this is available at http://ffe.lsc.gov.uk/learnerviews.

13. Plan to include of all LSC-funded learners including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those undertaking programmes in ESOL.

The LSC commissioned research visits to a number of providers with substantial concentrations of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This led to a number of recommendations that have been incorporated into the design of the survey and the survey site. The LSC requests that providers use their discretion not to involve in the survey learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, learners who would be distressed, or for whom the survey would be inappropriate.

If you expect your exclusion of these learners to have a significant impact on the number of learners undertaking the survey and your ability to achieve sufficient sample size, then please contact the LSC by emailing
ffelearnerviews@lsc.gov.uk by 31 December 2009. This will ensure that we can take this into account when judging your minimum sample size.

Guidance on administering the survey for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities will also available in the Framework for Excellence Provider Guide 2009/10. There is also a link to the guidance notes on supported completion from the Learner Views pages of the Framework website.

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

Some providers in 2008/09 had great success in including learners with severe or complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities, because they planned ahead for the survey and built discussion of the survey issues into curriculum discussions. The LSC has published examples of successful approaches in Framework for Excellence: Strategies to Increase the Accessibility of Gathering Learners’ Views, which is available on the Learner Views pages of the Framework for Excellence website.

For example, some providers find it most effective to discuss the views of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on a daily or weekly basis, and to log these using a diary approach. Other providers use learner support staff to assist learners in the completion of surveys. Approaches like this are fully acceptable if they allow learners to give their views without influencing those views. The Learner Views online survey allows people who are helping learners to complete the survey, or who are given summative reports on views gathered over an extensive period, to record that fact. Please see the Learner Views pages of the Framework website for guidance on gathering views over time.

We have tested the questions with learners undertaking ESOL programmes and believe that the vast majority of learners with a learning level of Entry 3 or above will be able to complete the online survey unaided. Please use the test version of the survey, available through the surveys page of the Framework for Excellence website (http://ffe.lsc.gov.uk/Surveys/) to anticipate groups of learners who may require support to make the survey accessible.

14. Participation in the survey.

Participation in the survey is optional for learners, but providers should make every attempt to ensure that learners have the opportunity to take part. Colleges and providers will, however, need to make provision for learners to be able to opt out at any stage during the survey process and to ensure that these learners are not then be contacted again about the survey.
15. Monitoring response rates and checking results.

We have sent, by post, to your Principal or Chief Executive a web link, password and login information that will allow your organisation to check response rates to the online survey at any time during the survey period from 1 October 2009 to 12 February 2010. These figures should be viewed in conjunction with the information which will be sent to you in September 2009. These figures will be updated on a daily basis and will tell you your minimum achieved responses and target volumes and the extent to which your response pattern appears to be representative. It is recommended that providers use this information to monitor responses to ensure that they achieve the minimum number of completed questionnaires that will need to be returned to give a reliable measure of Learner Views.

16. Delivering your results

At the end of the survey we will use your learners’ responses to calculate your Learner Views score and grade as part of the process of deriving your Framework for Excellence. We will also give you further information on your learners’ responses to each question and the pattern of responses by broad learner group.