Introduction

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES), the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the Office for Standards in education (Ofsted), Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI), and Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) made a commitment to develop the measures of success for the learning and skills sector. Further information on these new measures is available on the LSC website at www.lsc.gov.uk/ffe.

The Framework for Excellence is a comprehensive performance assessment framework for the Further Education system. It takes forward the Government’s commitments to ensure there is clearer information on performance, as set out in Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances, which was published by the Government in late March 2006. Measures of success will be used to derive performance indicators, leading to a single performance rating.

Further information about the Framework for Excellence is available in the online consultation document – Framework for excellence: a comprehensive performance assessment framework for the further education system.

The following are the most frequently asked questions about the measures. There are further FAQs by sector also available on the LSC website at www.lsc.gov.uk/ffe

Measures of success and Framework for Excellence

What is the relationship between the measures of success and the Framework for Excellence?

Framework for Excellence is a small, standard set of performance indicators which is being developed by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), in consultation with providers, inspectorates and other stakeholders. Framework for Excellence builds on and includes the Measures of Success.

What are the measures of success?
The measures of success are as follows:

Qualification success rates

Developing harmonised and more informative measures of qualification success rates that can be applied to LSC-funded providers in further education, work based learning and school sixth forms.

Value added and distance travelled

This involves:

developing a value added measure for learners aged 16-19 who are studying for graded qualifications at Level 3

developing a distance travelled measure for learners aged 16-19 who are studying for qualifications at Levels 1 and 2 and un-graded qualifications at Level 3

Recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA)

An approach for assuring the quality of learners’ learning programmes and activities. It is intended to raise learning providers’ capacity to monitor their effectiveness and impact at an individual learner level and to provide a framework and principles for managing the quality of learning.

Provider responsiveness to employers

Refining and improving existing measures of how far providers are meeting employer skills needs to support the Skills Strategy.

Learner satisfaction

To establish standards for collecting and responding to the view of learners against national benchmarks which, when monitored and assessed over time, will reveal trends in learner satisfaction and point to where improvements in provision are needed.
Learner destinations

To help key partners understand the impact of different learning routes on individuals’ employability, career paths and rates of promotion. The information will also help learners make informed decisions about which learning route to take.

Why are measures of success being developed?

The new measures result from a consultation undertaken by the partners in 2003-04. The consultation document is available online as Measuring success in the learning and skills sector.

The focus of the measures is on:

- improving teaching and learning
- improving institutional management
- providing fair and valid comparisons of provider performance across the learning and skills sector.

Will the implementation of the new measures of success impose bureaucracy or extra burden on providers?

No, minimising the burden on providers has been a primary concern during the development of the measures and Framework for Excellence.

Will the measures apply in all types of learning and skills provision?

Yes. However, not all measures will apply in all circumstances. For example, value added and distance travelled only cover qualifications approved under Section 96 of the Learning and Skills Act.

Provider Gateway
The Provider Gateway is a secure web portal which was launched in August 2005. The Provider Gateway is accessible to adult and community learning provider, colleges, schools with sixth forms, work-based learning providers, Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) and Local Authorities, as well as the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI).

The Provider Gateway enables providers to upload and view their own information and to share this information with the LSC and inspectorates. This approach reduces bureaucracy by requiring information to be submitted just once.

Please click on the following link to access the Provider Gateway: https://gateway.lsc.gov.uk.

Value added and distance travelled

What’s the difference between value added and distance travelled?

The scope of the qualifications included in the value added (VA) measure is different to that in the distance travelled (DT) measure. The VA measure includes graded Level 3 qualifications, while the DT measure includes other approved qualifications at Levels 1 and 2, as well as pass/fail Level 3 qualifications like National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), key skills and Apprenticeships.

VA data can be used as a predictive tool for the attainment of individual learners based on their prior attainment. The DT data may be used to predict the achievement and attainment of a group of students. Both VA and DT data are contained in the Learner Achievement Tracker which is accessed through the Provider Gateway portal. You will need a user name and password to access the site securely and you will only have access to your own organisation’s data.

Why has the Learning and Skills Council chosen to use a subject-based methodology?

The Learning and Skills Council believes that using a subject-based methodology reflects the different relationships between prior attainment and achievement and gives the fairest picture of provision across the sector. The subject-based approach also allows providers to look at the performance of their institution in a particular subject and qualification against the national average performance for that subject and qualification.
Processes such as self assessment and inspection already evaluate the value delivered by providers. Why are these measures needed?

By taking the starting points of learners into account, value added (VA) and distance travelled (DT) provide valuable new, sector-wide information about learners’ progress and achievement, which will be used by providers, Local Authorities, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Inspectorates.

How will value added and distance travelled measures be incorporated into self assessment, three-year development planning and Strategic Area Reviews (StAR)?

The Learning and Skills Council anticipates that providers will want to make reference to value added (VA) and distance travelled (DT) in their self assessment plans and, where appropriate, reference may be made to VA and DT in three-year development plans.

How is the starting point calculated?

The starting point for both the value added and distance travelled calculations is the average prior attainment of the student, up to Level 1 and 2 qualifications.

Can the system calculate a starting point for learners with no prior attainment (for example many of those at entry level)?

No, we cannot calculate an appropriate starting point for learners with no prior attainment.

How are value added and distance travelled measures calculated?

Value added (VA) and distance travelled (DT) use a technique called multi-level modelling (MLM), which has been shown to be a valid, fair and statistically sound method of calculation for the post-16 sector. This method can take into account a wider range of learners’ prior attainment and can also produce valid results for institutions with small cohorts of learners.

For VA, attainment of the qualification is used as the outcome measure. DT uses achievement or attainment, depending on the type of qualification.
The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) did explore alternative models for the calculation of VA and DT measures.

How are different types of qualifications scored within an institution’s value added or distance travelled reports?

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority’s (QCA) point score equivalences system is used as the ‘currency’ for scoring qualifications in the measures. These have been developed to take into account the relative length and challenge of each qualification to allow fair comparisons between them. Further information about QCA points is available at http://www.qca.org.uk/.

What data is used and how do you ensure its accuracy?

Data used in the calculations comes from Awarding Bodies and is matched by organisations contracted by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). In the case of distance travelled (DT), additional data is taken from the Individualised Learner Record. Where data is not collected by Awarding Bodies, we are investigating other methods of obtaining valid data, but have agreed that the measures should not result in an increased data collection burden for providers. Providers are able to check their value added (VA) data through the mechanisms currently in place as part of the checking exercise for the Achievement and Attainment Tables (AAT). We will investigate whether there needs to be a similar checking exercise for DT data following feedback from providers.

When will value added (VA) and distance travelled (DT) reports be made available each year?

We anticipate that un-amended VA reports will be made available to providers in October each year. Amended VA and DT reports will be available in January each year.

How big does a group of learners have to be for data to be statistically valid?

For a provider, the threshold is five learners or greater in a cohort. For the national lines, the threshold is eighty learners nationally.

Several providers have raised queries regarding the numbers of learners included in value added (VA) and distance travelled (DT) reports. To measure VA and DT in a consistent and accurate way, learners have to meet certain criteria, and may be excluded for the following reasons:
For the 2004/05 VA measure, fails were excluded from the measure and were therefore not shown in the Learner Achievement Tracker. Further information on the treatment of fails for 2005/06 data can be found in the online document Treatment of fails in the calculation of Value Added and Distance Travelled for the Learner Achievement Tracker (published 3rd August 2006).

Does the distance travelled calculation use qualification success rates or achievement rates as the outcome measure?

The work-based learning (WBL) distance travelled (DT) outcome measure is based wholly on qualification success rates as there is no agreed definition of achievement rate in the WBL sector.

Currently, in Further Education (FE):

qualification success rates are used for National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)

achievement rates are used for all other qualifications.

What are 95 per cent confidence intervals?

The value added (VA) or distance travelled (DT) score is the best estimate of the provider’s effect on the performance of its learners for the given qualification or subject/qualification, but how good is our estimate of the VA or DT score? The 95 per cent confidence intervals help us to answer this question by telling us about the accuracy of this best estimate (i.e. the VA or DT score). The confidence intervals do this by giving us the range between which can expect the actual VA or DT score to lie. The wider the range (in other words the wider the confidence intervals), the less accurate the VA or DT score is, and this is why we need to consider the confidence intervals when interpreting the Learner Achievement Tracker (LAT) outputs.

What is the Learner Achievement Tracker?

The Learner Achievement Tracker (LAT) is software which produces three types of value added (VA) and distance travelled (DT) reports:

Summary charts
National comparison graphs

National chances charts.

The LAT has been tested by providers from across the sector and key stakeholders.

How can providers use value added and distance travelled as a motivational tool with learners?

A key driver for developing value added (VA) and distance travelled (DT) measures for 16-19 learners is to provide teachers and trainers with better tools for:

- analysing learner performance
- helping to set targets for individual learners
- tailoring teaching and learning strategies to maximise learner achievement.

The Learner Achievement Tracker includes chances charts which give predictions for individual learners. In the case of pass/fail qualifications, chances charts show a learner’s probability of passing the qualification. In the case of graded qualifications, they show the probability of obtaining each grade.

Who has been involved in the development of the value added and distance travelled measures and the Learner Achievement Tracker?

The value added (VA) and distance travelled (DT) work has been overseen by technical, policy and implementation groups comprising learning provider representative organisations including Association of Colleges (AoC), Secondary Heads Association (SHA), HOLEX, Local Authorities, Sixth Form College Forum, Association of National Specialist Colleges (NATSPEC). A wider group of providers from across the sector were involved in pre-piloting and testing the Learner Achievement Tracker (LAT).

Will providers be able to compare their results with those produced by the A level Information System (ALIS) and the A level Performance System (ALPS)?
The new measures use a different calculation method to existing systems. Nevertheless, reflection on the differences in results from different value added (VA) systems may lead to an enhanced understanding of performance. During the piloting period, we are also exploring the use of comparisons between the VA measure and the values produced by ALIS and ALPS.

What support will be available to providers?

Further information, tutorials and sector specific resources are available on the website at: www.lsc.gov.uk/ffe then click on staff development link.
Qualification success rates

Will all providers be affected by changes to the way success rates are calculated?

These changes will affect all further education and work based learning providers for whom the LSC currently produces success rate data. However, the impact of these changes in the further education sector will be relatively small.

Will the new success rates be used exclusively straight away, or will there be a period during which both methods will be used?

The old and new measures will both be calculated during the 2005/06 academic year. The use of both measures may continue beyond this.

What is the difference between the overall success rate and the timely success rate?

The basic calculation is the same. That is, the calculation method for a particular year:

Qualification success rate (QSR) = \( \frac{\text{Number achieving learning aim}}{\text{Number in cohort}} \) \%

The difference between the two rates is due to different definitions of the cohort:

Overall success rate

\[ \text{Cohort} = \text{learners are counted at the later of the expected end date and actual end date} \]

Therefore, all achievements are captured

Timely success rate

\[ \text{Cohort} = \text{those learners planned to complete in the year} \]

Achievements = those attained at planned end date (or recorded up to one month after planned end date).
In work-based learning, how should the timely success rate measure be used alongside the overall success measure?

The timely method has the advantage of reflecting accurate initial assessment and end date prediction. However, it currently produces a much lower qualification success rate than the overall rate and may, if used as the sole method, be viewed as disadvantaging work-based learning providers. It is envisaged that, as planned end dates become more accurate, the timely success rate will approach the overall success rate. At such a time it might be appropriate to move to using just the timely rate.

Will the timely success rate penalise providers when a learner takes a necessary break in learning, for example due to pregnancy?

No, providers will not be penalised as a result of such breaks. In ILR field A34 (new in 2005/6), such learners should be coded with completion status 6 (learner has temporarily withdrawn from the aim due to an agreed break in funding). If the learner does not return, this should then be recorded as a withdrawal. If the learner does return, a new aim should be opened up with a new planned end date. The original aim will then be excluded from the success rate calculations.

Will the same method be used for calculating success rate information in school sixth forms?

Work is underway to produce success rate information for school sixth forms which can be compared with other providers in the learning and skills sector. The DfES and others are working towards appropriate data being collected in the January 2007 pupil level annual school census (PLASC) for analysis in autumn 2007 following exam results in summer 2006.

How will specialist colleges for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities be measured since they do not submit data to the ILR? For example, will they be given success rate benchmarks?

At first, it will not be possible to use the new measures for those specialist colleges which do not submit Individualised Learner Record (ILR) returns. Work on developing success measures for these providers will fall within recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA).

Completion should not just be the achievement of the full qualification – providers also want to be recognised for ‘soft outcomes’. How will this system take account of learners who leave early for higher education or for employment?
A separate measure for learner destinations is being developed. The general position of the LSC is that the qualification success measure is associated with gaining qualifications. There are exceptions, however, in some areas of Entry to Employment (E2E), where the goal could be described as progression.

What are the funding implications of the six-week period of grace?

If a learner withdraws less than six weeks after their start date then the provider will receive funding for that learner if they are in learning on a census date. Where providers have acted in good faith, there will not be any retrospective claim from the LSC for such funding to be returned. At present this relates only to WBL provision.

Will learners who leave during the six-week period of grace still have to be logged separately for statistical purposes?

A full Individualised Learner Record is required for all learners, including those who leave in less than six weeks; this will ensure appropriate funding. The success rate calculation process will identify any learners who leave within six weeks and remove them from the analysis.

How will funding work where a learner transfers from one provider to another?

We do not foresee any changes on this particular matter.

Recognising and recording progress and achievement

What is the recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA) measure?

The recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA) measure describes an approach to quality assessment and assurance which is appropriate to both non-accredited and accredited provision in the learning and skills sector.

RARPA is a learner-centred approach that provides a framework for teaching and learning in non-accredited contexts. It is not a data system but information should be used to quality assure and improve learning processes through normal self-assessment activities.
How do new measures of success cover learners on Entry to Employment courses?

Entry to Employment (E2E) is a work-based learning programme tailored for individual learners. The programme does not lead to accredited qualifications and therefore cannot be treated in the same way as Apprenticeships or National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). The recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA) measure applies to E2E.

How can RARPA be applied to short episodes of learning?

The evaluation of the pilot projects showed that the RARPA process can be applied in a fit-for-purpose manner to very short episodes of learning.

Who will use the evidence generated from the RARPA process?

This evidence, together with course or programme level data, will also be used during inspections and in discussions with the local LSC about quality improvement and three-year development plans

Learner satisfaction

What will the learner satisfaction measure at provider level consist of?

It is envisaged that the learner satisfaction measure at provider level will consist of two elements:

an agreed set of standards for processes for provider level collection and use of learner satisfaction information;

a sample of the revised core questions from the National Learner Satisfaction Survey, which providers could use within their level surveys.

Will providers be required to include the core questions within their own surveys?
Work is underway to explore the feasibility and appropriateness of the inclusion of revised core questions within provider’s own surveys and subsequent benchmarking of the results against the national or sector specific picture. The revised core questions will map to both the standards discussed above and the Common Inspection Framework (CIF).

Further information about the National Learner Satisfaction Survey can be found at [http://researchtools.lsc.gov.uk](http://researchtools.lsc.gov.uk).

Learner destinations

The learner destinations measure is currently being developed. Further information about this measure will be available online at [www.lsc.gov.uk/ffe](http://www.lsc.gov.uk/ffe)

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