	Circular Number: FE 7/13
Subject:	
Learner Retention, Achievement and **Success – Principles and Definitions**	**Date of Issue:** 12 June 2013

Target Audience:

- Principals / Directors of FE Colleges
- Chairs of Governing Bodies
- FE College MIS Staff
- FE Curriculum Managers
- FE College Finance
- Colleges NI

Status of Contents:
Information

Summary of Contents:

This Circular provides information and guidance on the principles and definitions of learner retention, achievement and sucess.

Related Documents:
FE01-0613; FE 19/12;
FE01-1012

Superseded Documents:
FE 19/12

Expiry Date:
N/A

Enquiries:

Any enquiries about the contents of this Circular should be addressed to:

Stephen McGonagle (Tertiary Education Analytical Services Branch)
Marc Macpherson (Further Education Finance)
Department for Employment & Learning
Adelaide House
39 – 49 Adelaide Street
BELFAST
BT2 8FD

DEL Website:
www.delni.gov.uk

Tel: 028 90 257708
028 90 257583

Email:
stephen.mcgonagle@delni.gov.uk
Marc.macpherson@delni.gov.uk

Introduction

1. As part of the Learner Retention, Achievement and Success Working Group, the Department, in consultation with the Further Education sector, Tertiary Education Analytical Services (TEASB) and the Educational Training Inspectorate, identified a number of issues which highlighted the need for clarification on the definition of learner retention, achievement and success, to ensure that there is a consistent approach throughout the sector to recording data on the Northern Ireland College's Information System (NICIS) to enable quality statistical analysis.

2. The purpose of this guidance is to clarify the principles and definitions for <u>retention, achievement and success, both in terms of one and multi year courses, and the rules around recording full achievement and partial achievement.</u> Full details of how colleges should handle all these scenarios are attached at Annex A.

3. This guidance has been agreed with the FE sector, and in consultation with the Department's Tertiary Education Analytical Services Branch (TEASB) and the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).

Sector Subject Areas

1.   The <u>15 sector subject areas will be used as the basis for monitoring retention, achievement and success</u> – see Annex 1. These have been the basis for the statistical bulletin on <u>Retention and Achievement in 2011/12</u> published on 6th December 2012, and for the performance pack spreadsheet issued prior to the CDP process. It is acknowledged that there are currently some issues arising from the fact that awarding organisations can select more than one SSA code against an RRQ course code. This, coupled with the fact that the FLU extract automatically "lifts" the first SSA code listed by awarding organisations, and not necessarily the one identified by colleges as the most appropriate, has led to some inconsistencies between data produced by colleges and by the Department. However, this issue is currently being investigated.

Definitions

2.   <u>The definitions for retention, achievement and success will be those set out in Annex 2</u>. Particularly noteworthy is the principle that, for the purposes of monitoring and reporting, only those enrolments that reach the first Funding Eligibility Indicator [i.e. 1st November for full time, (identified by student mode of attendance SMOA =1) or reach one ninth of the course duration, for part time (identified if SMOA is not 1)] will be counted. This is consistent with the approach taken by ETI when using data for inspections. This has not been the approach taken by the Department in the past when producing retention, achievement and success reports from FELS, and was not the approach taken in the production of the first performance pack spreadsheet. However, it will be the approach taken in the production of the next performance pack

spreadsheet, and will be the approach taken in the production of reports from FELS as soon as is possible.

3. <u>Colleges will ensure that all learners enrolling on a course for which there is a qualifications (or part qualifications eg units) outcome have a Unique Learning Number (ULN)</u>. This will aid monitoring retention, achievement and success for those learners on 2-year courses. It is worth noting that DEL continues to aspire to the adoption of a strategic approach to the use of the Learning Records Service's ULN, and associated learner record, across the education and training sectors in Northern Ireland, and there is reference to this in the NEETs strategy. As part of this, the Department of Education is now giving serious consideration to adopting the use of the ULN for all pupils in year 11 and above.

4. To begin with, the Department's reports (and performance packs) will continue to be based on final year enrolments. However, the Department will move to reporting and monitoring retention, achievement and success across multi-year courses as soon as a robust way of doing this has been identified and agreed with the sector.

Enrolments

5. <u>The position regarding 1-year courses is straightforward</u>, and the approach outlined at paragraph 2 above applies. However, it is clear that, depending on the course in question, <u>it is possible to deliver 2-year courses as a single 2-year course (approach 1), or as two separate 1-year courses (approach 2)</u>. Currently, both of these approaches are followed in the FE sector, with one college routinely adopting approach 2. In essence, this is a curriculum issue that will require further consideration with curriculum managers, ETI, and others. However, while these two approaches remain they will be handled from a retention, achievement and success perspective as follows:

Approach 1: retention and success will be counted from 1 November (full time) and one ninth into the course duration (part time) of the final year enrolment. However, this will be reviewed once the issues outlined at paragraph 4 above have been resolved.

Approach 2: retention and success will be counted separately for each of the two 1-year enrolments ie from 1 November (full time) and one ninth into the course duration (part time) of each of the two enrolments.

Retention

6.   The retention rate is the % of students who have enrolled (as set out in paragraph 2 above and in Annex 2) and who have not withdrawn from their course or who have withdrawn but have fully or partially achieved.

7.   Students who are withdrawn but who subsequently go on to full achievement should, for the purposes of monitoring retention, achievement and success, be treated as if they had have not withdrawn and be included in statistics as a completer. The purpose here is to avoid the situation where a withdrawn student is not counted as a completer, but is subsequently counted as an achievement. This also applies to students who are withdrawn and who go on to partially achieve, as set out in DEL Guidance FE01-0613.

Achievement and Partial Achievement

8.   The approach to be adopted for the recording by colleges of achievement and partial achievement is as set out below.

(i)   The underlying principle is that achievement and partial achievement should be measured against the programme of

agreed in the learner's Individual Learning Programme. So, if a student is enrolled on a full qualification, then only the achievement of that qualification will count as an achievement. However, if a student is only enrolled on a part of a qualification (eg a QCF unit), then achievement of that part/unit will count as a full achievement.

(ii)   Based on this principle, achievement will be recorded when those enrolling on a full qualification achieve that qualification, and when those enrolling on a part/unit of a qualification achieve that part/unit. It may be necessary to report separately on these two "types" of achievement, something that will be possible because the RRQ code differentiates between qualifications and units.

(iii)   Partial achievement should be recorded when: the qualification for which a student has enrolled has not been achieved in full, but when either (a) a student achieves a certified component of the intended qualification – for example, a QCF Award instead of a QCF Certificate, or a QCF Certificate instead of a QCF Diploma; or (b) if a student does not achieve a certified component of the intended qualification, but still achieves 50% or more of the intended qualification – for example, 50% or more of the QCF units. It should be noted that 50% or more of QCF qualifications is based on units achieved and not on credits, because even though credits would be a more accurate measure of achievement, credit information is not readily available to colleges from the examination results provided by awarding organisations. However, this situation can be kept under review.

(iv)   Those enrolling on a course leading to a qualification, or part qualification, but who have no intention of taking the qualification, and those with an outcome of "unknown" <u>will be included</u> in the monitoring and statistical reports ie as enrolments and non achievements.

These proposals should not require any amendment to be made to NICIS, as this is not automated within NICIS. The rules outlined above should be used by college staff when deciding how to record learners' outcomes on NICIS, and should ensure a consistency of approach.

Success

9.   The approach outlined above in respect of achievement will apply to success where appropriate.

Timescale for Implementation

10.   As colleges will already have recorded achievements on to NICIS for the 2011/12 academic year, <u>the approach outlined above will be operational from the 2012/13 academic year</u>. Therefore, any achievements recorded on NICIS in respect of the current academic year onwards should adopt this approach. However, one aspect will be implemented from immediate effect – this is, when the Department is producing the detailed performance pack for 2011/12, it will adopt the definition of enrolments described at paragraph 2 above. This definition will also be used in the production of reports from FELS as soon as is possible.

Data

11.   Work is on-going to continue to achieve one data set (ie to bring into one data set the FELS, FESR, ESER, FLU and EF data sets). As part of this, changes to some data extracts will be required to implement

aspects of the approach outlined above. Any changes required will be processed through the normal change control process, including signed off by the BSU Management Group.

12.   The descriptions outlined above should enable us to achieve the ultimate aim of the same data set meeting the needs of, and being used by, all users of college data eg colleges, the various parts of the Department, and the ETI.

On-going Review

13.   It is recognised that changes to curriculum policy, or other policies, may require the arrangements outlined above to be reviewed from time to time. Colleges will be involved in any review process that may be necessary.

Subject Areas

Health, Public Services and Care

Science and Mathematics

Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care

Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies

Construction, Planning and the Built Environment

Information and Communication Technology

Retail and Commercial Enterprise

Leisure, Travel and Tourism

Arts, Media and Publishing

History, Philosophy and Theology

Social Sciences

Languages, Literature and Culture

Education and Training

Preparation for Life and Work

Business, Administration and Law

Learner Retention, Achievement and Success: Definitions

Retention: The percentage of enrolments who complete their programme of study (ie have not withdrawn), or who have withdrawn but have fully or partially achieved. Currently, in the case of 2-year courses, calculations are based on final year enrolments. Enrolments will be counted from 1 November for full time enrolments, and from one ninth into the course duration for part time enrolments.

Achievement: The percentage of completers (non withdrawals) who achieve a full or partial achievement towards a qualification, or part qualification (eg units) if that is what they set out to achieve in their programme of study, and the number of withdrawals who, similarly, achieve a qualification or part qualification.

Success: The percentage of those starting a programme of study who gain a qualification, or part qualification (eg a unit) if that is what they set out to achieve in their programme of study, and the number of withdrawals who, similarly, gain a qualification or part qualification. Currently, in the case of 2-year courses, it is based on final year starts.

NOTES:

(i)   In the case of 2-year courses, the definitions above in respect of retention and success are based on the final year of courses.

(ii)   It is recognised that this gives an overly optimistic view of retention and success, although it is neutral in terms of achievement as defined.

(iii)   However, as soon as is practicably possible, the Department will measure retention and success from the start of periods of study.

(iv)   Retention and success will be counted from 1 November (full time) and one ninth into the course duration (part time). This approach will be reviewed in respect of two year courses when it is possible to track learners across the duration of their courses.

(v)   Transfers will be ignored for the purposes of monitoring retention, achievement and success – the latest enrolment will be the relevant enrolment to include for statistical purposes.

(vi)   Regarding MOA 20/21, and in line with the revised guidance issued in June 2011, for statistical purposes including retention, achievement and success, all "bundled" enrolments will be treated as separate part time enrolments.