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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

ADVANCE WARNING OF A NEW PUBLICATION ON LEVEL 2 AND 3 ATTAINMENT BY YOUNG PEOPLE MEASURED USING MATCHED ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

ISSUE

1. The Department and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) share a PSA target to “Increase the proportion of 19 year olds who achieve at least level 2 by 3 percentage points between 2004 and 2006, and a further 2 percentage points between 2006 and 2008, and increase the proportion of young people who achieve level 3.”¹
2. This Statistical First Release (SFR) does not contain any data. Instead it:
 - sets out a new methodology for the measurement of the PSA target;
 - gives advance warning of a new SFR based on this new methodology.
3. The first publication of the new SFR is planned for February 2005. Its content will form the 2004 baseline for the 2006 target. Additional tables will be put on the web at a later date.

BACKGROUND

4. A targeted review of the Measurement of Attainment of Young People in England was carried out under the National Statistics (NS) Education and Training Theme in 2004. The review report presents a comparative view of two measurement methods: the old methodology based on the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and a new administrative measure using matched data on academic and vocational attainment. The report was published on 10 September 2004 and is available on the NS website:
www.statistics.gov.uk/methods_quality/quality_review/education.asp.
5. Previously the level 2 and 3 targets for 19 year olds were measured on an annual basis using the Autumn LFS. This is a well-established independent source that facilitated measurement of the target in a clear and timely way. The Department reports LFS figures once a year in the SFR

¹ For more details on the Government's PSA targets see the Treasury website:
www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/documents/public_spending_and_services/publicservice_performance/pss_perf_table.cfm

entitled “The Level of Highest Qualification of Young People and Adults in England”, most recently for Autumn 2003:

www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000447/index.shtml. The next SFR will report the out-turn for the 2004 target using Autumn 2004 data.

6. The review identified several weaknesses with the LFS measure:

- it is necessary to combine ages 19 to 21 to measure the 19 year old target with sufficient accuracy. However, even with this grouping the sampling error of ± 1.4 percentage points is still large relative to the change it attempts to measure;
- young people’s data includes a high proportion of proxy answers (mainly parents) – with some unable to accurately recall what qualifications/level their child has attained;
- a large number of the reported qualifications are classified as ‘other’ and it is hard to assign these to an appropriate level;
- it appears to overstate academic achievement in comparison with administrative sources.

7. The Review Board made a number of recommendations, the key ones being:

- to move to an administrative measure using matched data to set a baseline for 2004;
- that consistency should be maintained where possible with the relevant cohort of the 16 year old target and the current LFS definition to ensure the 3% incremental target remains meaningful;
- the denominator should be the size of the cohort at age 14 (year 10) as measured by the Annual Schools Census (ASC);

8. The key benefits of the administrative measure were identified as:

- No sampling errors, which allows figures to be produced for single year ages. The new measure will be subject to different kinds of error arising from matching and coverage issues, but these will still be smaller than LFS sampling errors.²
- No reliance on respondent (actual or proxy) memory or accuracy, as data is collected directly from Awarding Bodies or learning providers.
- More responsive to changes in the qualifications system.
- Able to track progression of groups of individuals over time – consequently better able to identify priority groups for focused policy support.
- Improved modelling and projections of attainment of level 2.
- Increased accuracy at a sub-national level.

METHODOLOGY

9. This SFR only summarises key elements of the new methodology. For full details please see the Quality Review Report.

10. The administrative method combines data from three sources:

² An annual assessment will be made – see section 2 of the Review Report for more details.

- School Examination Results Analysis Project (SERAP) database held by Bath University on academic achievement.
 - National Information System for Vocational Qualifications (NISVQ) database held by the Department which collects data on vocational achievements – National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and Vocationally Related Qualifications (VRQs).
 - Individualised Learner Record (ILR) database held by the LSC on qualifications obtained through Further Education (FE) and Work-based Learning (WBL).
11. Achievements in the three data sources have been linked together at an individual level. This technique depends on the use of personal identifiers such as name, date of birth, gender and locational data where available. Results will only be published at an aggregate level ensuring individuals' confidentiality is protected.
12. The denominator will be the size of the cohort aged 14 as measured in ASC. For example, the denominator for the cohort aged 19 in 2004 (academic age 18 at the start of 2003/04) will be the number of pupils of academic age 14 in 1999/00.

QUALIFICATIONS TO BE COUNTED (2004 to 2006)

13. The LFS currently counts all qualifications respondents say they have at level 2 or higher. The main qualification categories at level 2 are NVQs, Intermediate GNVQs, GCSEs, RSA Diplomas and City & Guilds Craft/Part 2. Some of the qualifications in these categories will not have QCA (Qualifications Curriculum Authority) accreditation and/or may not be a full level 2.
14. Originally the Review Board recommended that the numerator included “accredited academic and vocational qualifications at level 2 or higher deemed ‘full’ on the QCA list. Combinations of GCSEs and GNVQs will be allowed. In addition a number of non-regulated vocational qualifications will be counted.”
15. However, since the Review Report was published three significant changes have been made to the calculation of the numerator:
- Only accredited qualifications will be counted – the assignment of level and width to non-accredited qualifications is unreliable and accredited qualifications are the Department's main policy levers.
 - All NVQs will count as ‘full’.
 - All VRQs with QCA width of 80% or greater will count as ‘full’.
16. The following qualifications will be counted at level 2:
- 1 full GCSE at grade A* to C equals 20%
 - 1 short GCSE at grade A* to C equals 10%
 - 1 full intermediate GNVQ equals 80%
 - 1 part 1 intermediate GNVQ equals 40%
 - 1 AS level (including VCE) at grade A to E equals 50%
 - 1 A/A2 level (including VCE) at grade A to E equals 100%

- 1 Advanced GNVQ pass equals 100%
- 1 NVQ pass at level 2 or higher equals 100%
- 1 'full' VRQ pass at level 2 or higher equals 100%

17. The following qualifications will be counted at level 3:

- 1 AS level (including VCE) at grade A to E equals 25%
- 1 A/A2 level (including VCE) at grade A to E equals 50%
- 1 Advanced GNVQ pass equals 100%
- 1 NVQ pass at level 3 or higher equals 100%
- 1 'full' VRQ pass at level 3 or higher equals 100%

18. The only combination allowed will be GCSEs with intermediate GNVQs – so for example a person with 1 full GCSE and 1 full intermediate GNVQ will have 100% of level 2. Qualifications at different levels will not be combined, so for instance GCSEs will not be combined with AS levels. NVQs and VRQs will not be combined.

19. GCSEs and GNVQs will be subject to discounting, as will AS and A/A2 levels. For example, say a learner gains 1 short GCSE (10%) in 2000 and 1 full GCSE (20%) in the same subject in 2001. Correct discounting means the person has 10% of a full level 2 in 2000 and then 20% in 2001 as the short GCSE is replaced by the full one.

20. As recommended by the Review Board (see Section 3 of the report), the level 2 numerator will exclude learners with qualifications at level 3 or above with no prior attainment or learning. These learners will still count towards the level 3 target.

21. From 2006 the measure will move closer to the definition used for the 16 year old PSA target. For more information about this definition please see this SFR:
www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000528/index.shtml

IMPACT OF NEW MEASURE

22. It is expected that the administrative measure will be around 5 to 7 percentage points lower than the LFS measure. This is partly because the new measure reports 19 year olds only and partly because of the tighter definition of what counts towards the target. Section 4 of the Review Report contains a detailed comparison of the two measures.

23. Table 1 is an illustration of how the assessment will be presented in the new SFR:

Table 1: Percentage attaining level 2 and level 3 by age (19 in 2004 cohort)

Age	Attained level 2+	Attained level 3
16 (in 2001)		
17 (in 2002)		
18 (in 2003)		
19 (in 2004)		