

## Methodology

On Track explores the opinions of learners who either passed a course worth 4 SUMS or more from an FE college in Scotland; or gained a qualification from a Scottish Higher Education institution in 2004. Only those UK domiciled at the start of their course were included.

The third sweep of the On Track: Class of 2004 study was conducted in the summer of 2007. Fieldwork dates were between 10.05.07 and 03.09.07. A reminder questionnaire was sent out to all non-respondents on 15.06.07.

### Recruitment

Full details of the recruitment methodology are contained within the Sweep 1 report ([http://www.sfc.ac.uk/information/information\\_learning/longitudinal\\_survey\\_students.htm](http://www.sfc.ac.uk/information/information_learning/longitudinal_survey_students.htm)).

### Response

A total of 2,717 learners responded to Sweep 2 and provided the sample for the third sweep. In total, 2,717 postal questionnaires were sent to respondents who had completed both previous sweeps of the survey and 1,635 completed surveys were returned. However, 3 of these completed responses were ineligible as they had not passed their 2004 course.

	Mailed out
Continuing eligible sample from Sweep 2	2,714
Response to Sweep 3	1,632
Response Rate	60%

Other respondents were not reached and the table below summarises the sample outcomes.

Breakdown of response	n
Continuing sample for Sweep 2	2,714
Addressee gone away	230
Address incomplete	16
Deceased	2
Refused	3
Total 'non-continuing' sample	251
Continuing sample for Sweep 4	2,463

### Additional sample

In order to help boost the sample for Sweep 3, it was decided that Sweep 3 questionnaires should also be sent out to respondents who had completed Sweep 1 of the survey, but had not completed Sweep 2. Questionnaires were sent to

2,294 respondents who had completed only Sweep 1. Two hundred and fifty-three completed surveys were returned.

However, not all of these completed responses were eligible. Twenty one respondents were not UK domiciles or had not passed their 2004 course (ascertained by an additional question added to the Sweep 3 questionnaire for those respondents who did not complete Sweep 2).

The total achieved sample for Sweep 3 was therefore 1,864.

## Sample Profile

The following table details the demographics of the learners who participated in the On Track study in each sweep.

	Sweep 1		Sweep 2		Sweep 3	
	Unweighted	Weighted	Unweighted	Weighted	Unweighted	Weighted
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	33	42	29	43	28	43
Female	66	57	71	57	72	57
<b>Age</b>						
15-19 years	20	22	13	13	3	5
20-25 years	36	30	39	36	43	39
26-35 years	17	17	17	17	19	18
36-45 years	17	18	19	21	19	21
46-59 years	9	11	10	11	14	14
60+ years	1	2	1	2	2	2
<b>Ethnic Origin</b>						
White	96	96	97	97	97	97
Non-white	3	3	3	3	3	3
<b>Disabled</b>						
Yes	6	7	6	7	5	7
No	92	91	94	92	94	93
<b>Carer</b>						
Yes	3	3	3	4	3	3
No	95	95	97	96	97	96
<b>Children at Sweep 1</b>						
Yes	19	21	22	23	22	24
No/not stated	79	78	78	77	22	20

## Weighting

As in previous sweeps, data is weighted to the same profile at Sweep 1 which represents the population of leavers in 2004. Data is therefore weighted by gender and mode within institutional sector and institution type.

## Presentation and interpretation of the data

When interpreting the findings it is important to remember that the results are only based on a sample of the population and not on the entire population. The respondents are samples of the total "population" so we cannot be certain that the

figures obtained are exactly those we would have obtained if everybody had been interviewed (the “true” values).

As a random sampling approach was taken in Sweep 1, we can, however, predict the variation between the sample results and the “true” values from knowledge of the size of the samples on which the results are based and the number of times that a particular answer is given. The confidence with which we can make this prediction is usually chosen to be 95% - that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the “true” value will fall within a specified range. The table below illustrates the predicted ranges for different sample sizes and percentage results at the “95% confidence interval”, taking into account the effect of weighting the data.

Size of sample on which survey results is based	Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at or near these levels		
	10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
	+/-	+/-	+/-
100	5.9	9	9.8
500	2.6	4	4.4
1000	1.9	2.8	3.1
1864	1.4	2.1	2.3

For example, with a sample of 1,864 where 30% give a particular answer, the chances are 19 in 20 that the “true” value (which would have been obtained if the whole population had been interviewed) will fall within the range of plus or minus 2.1 percentage points from the sample result.