

Open Access to Education

Research Study Conducted for
The Sutton Trust

April - May 2004

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Introduction

This report presents the findings of a survey among **parents**. The research was conducted by MORI (Market & Opinion Research International) on behalf of The Sutton Trust.

The objectives of the research were to look at issues regarding access to education, and in particular private and higher education, from the perspective of parents with at least one child up to age 19 currently in education, or a child approaching school age.

Methodology: Questions were placed on the MORI Omnibus, the regular MORI survey among the general public. A nationally representative quota sample of **644** parents (aged 15 and over) was interviewed throughout Great Britain by MORI in 201 different sampling points.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face, in respondents' homes, using CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) between 29th April and 4th May 2004.

Reporting: In the graphs and tables, the figures quoted are percentages. The size of the sample base from which the percentage is derived is indicated. Note that the base may vary – the percentage is not always based on the total sample. Caution is advised when comparing responses between small sample sizes.

As a rough guide, please note that the percentage figures for the various sub-samples or groups generally need to differ by a certain number of percentage points for the difference to be statistically significant. This number will depend on the size of the sub-group sample and the % finding itself - as noted in the appendix.

Where an asterisk (*) appears it indicates a percentage of less than one, but greater than zero. Where percentages do not add up to 100% this can be due to a variety of factors – such as the exclusion of 'Don't know' or 'Other' responses, multiple responses or computer rounding.

Publication of Data: Our standard Terms and Conditions apply to this, as to all studies we carry out. Compliance with the MRS Code of Conduct and our clearing of any copy or data for publication, web-siting or press release which contains any data derived from MORI research is necessary. This is to protect our client's reputation and integrity as much as our own. We recognise that it is in no one's best interests to have survey findings published which could be misinterpreted, or could appear to be inaccurately, or misleadingly, presented.

Summary of Findings

NB. Respondents were asked to relate their responses to their eldest child. In doing so, their responses could reflect either their eldest child's current educational situation, assuming that child was in the 5-19 age range, or future educational situation, assuming the child was approaching school age.

Type and Location of School

As might be expected, the eldest child of the majority of respondents attends, or will attend, a state primary or secondary school nearest to their parent's home.

Almost two-fifths of respondents (39%) say that their eldest child is, or will be, attending the nearest state primary school to their home and nearly a fifth (18%) say that their eldest child is, or will be, attending the nearest state secondary school to their home. (The higher percentage attending primary school reflects the fact that the eldest child of the majority of respondents (57%) is in the 0-10 years old age range).

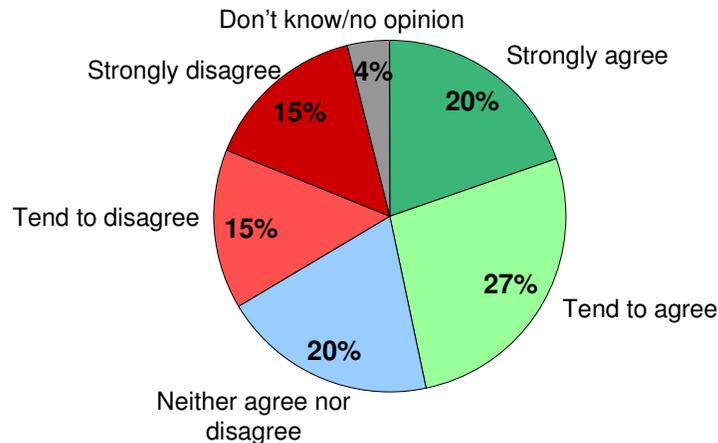
A further fifth (22%) say their child is, or will be, attending a state primary or secondary school further away from their home but within their home local education authority. Only a minority (8%) said their child attended, or will attend, a primary or secondary school in another local education authority.

In total, then, nearly nine in ten respondents (87%) say that their eldest child is, or will be, attending a state school. In comparison only a minority of respondents (6%) say that their eldest child is, or will be, attending a private primary or secondary school. Those in social classes AB and C1 are significantly more likely than those in social class DE to say their eldest child is, or will be, attending a private school.

Access to Private Schooling

Nearly half of respondents (47%) agree with the idea that children should have the opportunity to go to private school at the Government's or taxpayer's expense, disregarding family income. Just under a third disagree (30%), whereas a fifth (20%) neither agree nor disagree.

Q How far do you agree or disagree that all children should have the opportunity to go to private school, regardless of their family's income, and at the Government's or taxpayer's expense?



Base: All respondents (644)

Source: MORI

Views vary according to respondents' social class. Parents in social class AB are significantly more likely to disagree than those in classes C1, C2 and DE (46% versus 30%, 32% and 18% respectively). Furthermore, almost a quarter (24%) of ABs say they *strongly disagree* compared to around one in seven (15%) of the total sample. It may be that ABs believe it is fair to use a higher family income to access an arguably higher standard of education. Certainly, the research also shows that respondents in households with an income over £30,000 p.a. are significantly more likely to disagree with this proposal. It is also worth noting that these respondents are also the taxpayers who would underwrite this proposal if it were implemented.

However, the findings show that opinion is fairly divided in regard to whether parents actually would send their child(ren) to a private school if expense was not a consideration. Just over a fifth (22%) say they would definitely send their children to private school if money wasn't an issue, with a further 28% saying they would probably would do so in the same circumstances. On the other hand, three in ten (29%) say they probably would not send their child(ren), with a further 15% saying they would definitely not do so.

Younger parents (age 15-24) are the most resistant to the idea of sending their child(ren) to private school even if being able to afford it was not an issue. Over

a third (34%) say they would definitely not do so, which is significantly different from the total (15%) as well as most older age groups¹.

Transport to School

Six in ten parents (59%) say that difficulties with transport have been, or will be, a factor in deciding on a school for their child, although only one in ten (11%) say this factor matters a *great deal*. On the other hand, two in five (38%) do not think transport difficulties would be a factor at all.

Respondents from London and the South East are significantly more likely than respondents in most other areas to think that transport difficulties are a factor in selecting a school. This probably reflects the well-known traffic and transport infrastructure problems in these areas. Respondents in the East Midlands and the North West also report this to be a factor.

Parents with an eldest child aged 17-19 and in education are significantly more likely to consider transport difficulties a factor in school choice compared to parents of 11 to 16 year olds, 5 to 10 year olds and children below the age of four (80% compared to 54%, 62% and 57% respectively²). A contributing factor to why transport is likely to be more of an issue for parents of children over 16 years old is the increased costs incurred when these children begin paying full-fare public transport costs.

The great majority of respondents (82%) think that the Government should introduce a school-bussing scheme similar to the ‘yellow school buses’ in America. Only a minority (7%) is against such a scheme. This finding may derive from parents perceiving organised school transport as having safety, cost, convenience and reduced traffic density/congestion benefits. Support for such a scheme is widespread amongst parents regardless of social class and region. Most supportive of the idea are parents with children aged between 17 and 19 (91% in favour compared to 82% of the total sample³). Again, reduced public transport costs are likely to drive support from such respondents.

School Selection through Entrance Testing

Half of respondents (50%) believe that pupils of differing academic ability should be selected to go to different types of state or private secondary school on the basis of how well they do in an entrance test at age 11 or 12. Around a third (36%) do not agree with this kind of selection.

Support for selection based on entrance tests is significantly higher for men than for women (55% compared to 46%). It may be that mothers are more conscious of the stress that testing places on their children, or are less inclined to regard it

¹ Indicative finding: small base size.

² Indicative finding: small base size.

³ Indicative finding: small base size.

as a 'necessary evil'. It may also be that men are inherently more competitive than women and so men place more value on selection by merit.

Significant differences in view between respondents of different social class were notably absent on this issue. This contrasts in some degree with the earlier finding suggesting that ABs were resistant to the idea of opportunities to attend private school regardless of family income. It implies an approval for entrance testing within the AB social class as a more reasonable method of school selection.

School Type Affecting University Application

The majority of parents (62%) agree that pupils from state schools are at a disadvantage when they apply for places at 'top' universities such as Oxford and Cambridge, compared to pupils from private schools. Just one in five (18%) do not think this is the case.

Men are significantly more likely than women to think that attending a state school puts children at a disadvantage in applying to the more elite universities (68% compared to 57%). This again implies a stronger sense of fairness in selection by merit amongst men (see above).

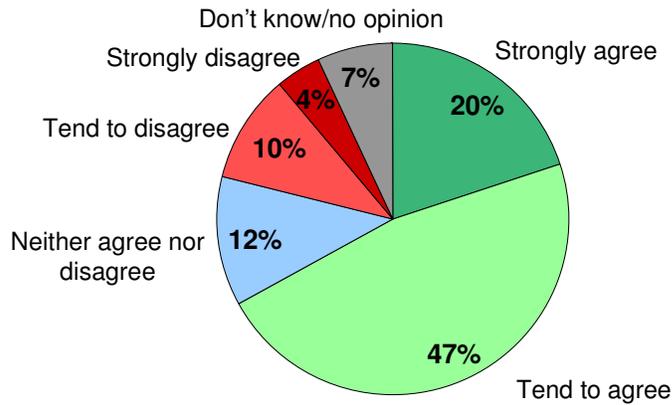
University Places Based on Academic Potential

Two-thirds of respondents (67%) think that a test of academic potential, such as an American-style 'SAT test', would be useful for students who want to apply to university. In contrast only one in seven respondents (14%) do not agree that such a test would be useful. This shows stronger support for testing at the university application stage compared to testing prior to secondary school entry, where half of parents support (50%) and a third do not (35%).

Support for such a test is also higher amongst parents than among teachers, 55% of whom agreed that a 'SAT test' would be useful⁴.

⁴ A representative sample of 984 teachers in England and Wales were interviewed by MORI between 8 October and 7 November 2003. Please note that the question wording used with teachers differed a little from that used with the general public and so these findings cannot be compared directly.

Q How far do you agree or disagree that a test of academic potential, such as an American style 'SAT-test', would be useful for Year 13 students here who want to apply for university?



Base: All respondents (644)

Source: MORI

In contrast to respondents' views on entrance tests for secondary school, women are no less likely than men to agree on the usefulness of a test of academic potential at this stage. It may be that women consider older children to be at a higher stage of development than pre-secondary school children, giving such tests more meaning, or that young people in their late teens are simply better equipped to handle the pressures of testing by virtue of being older (and having already experienced testing).

Parents in social class AB are significantly more likely than other classes to disagree that SAT-style tests would be useful for university applicants (28% disagree versus 14% in C1, 10% in C2 and 8% in DE). This finding may reflect a sense among some parents in the AB class that traditional methods of university application are satisfactory. However, although ABs support for such tests is not as high as other social classes, three in five (59%) nevertheless do think that they would be useful.

Key Findings and Implications

The vast majority of parents have children who are, or will be, attending, the nearest state school to their home but the findings suggest that parents are open to the idea of sending children to other types of school, perhaps further from home, when cost is not an issue. If affordability is removed from the equation, the majority support sending their children to fee-paying, independent or private schools. This implies that the state sector is not meeting the needs or expectations of many parents.

Transport is found to be consideration in accessing education where costs are likely to be incurred or traffic density/congestion is a factor. However, the findings suggest that other factors bear greater weight than transport for the majority of parents.

Selection is not anathema to most respondents, although support is higher for selection at age 18 than at age 11. The findings suggest that parents perceive the value of awarding school and university places against measures of academic ability and potential as tending to outweigh any concerns about the burdens of testing.

Overall, what seems important to parents, particularly from the lower social classes, is that there is a level playing-field when it comes to accessing education. They want their children to benefit from an education that suits their particular ability, whether it is provided by the state or privately.

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20 May 2004 *Checked & Approved:*

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Technical Details

Sample Design

The sample design is a constituency based quota sample. There are 641 parliamentary constituencies covering Great Britain. From these, we select one in three (210) to be used as the main sampling points on the MORI Omnibus. These points are specially selected to be representative of the whole country by region, social grade, working status, MOSAIC rurality, tenure, ethnicity and car ownership. Within each constituency, one local government ward is chosen which is representative of the constituency.

Within each ward or sampling point, we interview ten respondents whose profile matches the quota. The total sample therefore is around 2,100 (10 interviews multiplied by 210 sampling points).

Gender:	Male; Female
Household Tenure:	Owner occupied; Council Tenant/HAT; Other
Age:	15 to 24; 25 to 44; 45+
Working Status	Full-time; part time/not working

These quotas reflect the socio-demographic makeup of that area, and are devised from an analysis of the 1991 Census combined with more recent ONS (Office of National Statistics) data. Overall, quotas are a cost-effective means of ensuring that the demographic profile of the sample matches the actual profile of GB as a whole, and is representative of all adults in Great Britain aged 15 and over.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork is carried out by MORI using CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing). All interviews are conducted face to face, in the home - one interview per household. No incentives are offered to respondents.

Weighting and Data Processing

Data entry and analysis are carried out by an approved and quality-assured data processing company. The data are weighted using 6 sets of simple and interlocking rim weights for social grade, standard region, unemployment within region, cars in household, and age and working status within gender. This is to adjust for any variance in the quotas or coverage of individual sampling points so that the sample is representative of the GB adult population.

Statistical Reliability

Because a sample, rather than the entire population, was interviewed the percentage results are subject to sampling tolerances – which vary with the size of the sample and the percentage figure concerned. For example, for a question where 50% of the people in a (weighted) sample of 644 respond with a particular answer, the chances are 95 in 100 that this result would not vary more than four percentage points, plus or minus, from the result that would have been obtained from a census of the entire population (using the same procedures). The tolerances that may apply in this report are given in the table below.

Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at or near these levels (at the 95% confidence level)			
	10% or 90% ±	30% or 70% ±	50% ±
Size of sample on which survey results are based			
100 Interviews	6	9	10
200 Interviews	4	6	7
300 Interviews	3	5	6
400 Interviews	3	4	5
500 Interviews	3	4	4
644 Interviews	2	4	4
<i>Source: MORI</i>			

Tolerances are also involved in the comparison of results between different elements of the sample. A difference must be of at least a certain size to be statistically significant. The following table is a guide to the sampling tolerances applicable to comparisons between sub-groups.

Differences required for significance at the 95% confidence level at or near these percentages			
	10% or 90% ±	30% or 70% ±	50% ±
Size of sample on which survey result is based			
129 and 199	7	10	11
281 and 362	5	7	8
245 and 375	5	7	8
<i>Source: MORI</i>			

Definition of Social Grades

The grades detailed below are the social class definitions as used by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, and are standard on all surveys carried out by MORI (Market & Opinion Research International Limited).

Social Grades			
	Social Class	Occupation of Chief Income Earner	Percentage of Population
A	Upper Middle Class	Higher managerial, administrative or professional	2.9
B	Middle Class	Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional	18.9
C1	Lower Middle Class	Supervisor or clerical and junior managerial, administrative or professional	27.0
C2	Skilled Working Class	Skilled manual workers	22.6
D	Working Class	Semi and unskilled manual workers	16.9
E	Those at the lowest levels of subsistence	State pensioners, etc, with no other earnings	11.7

Questionnaire and Topline Results

Computer Tables
