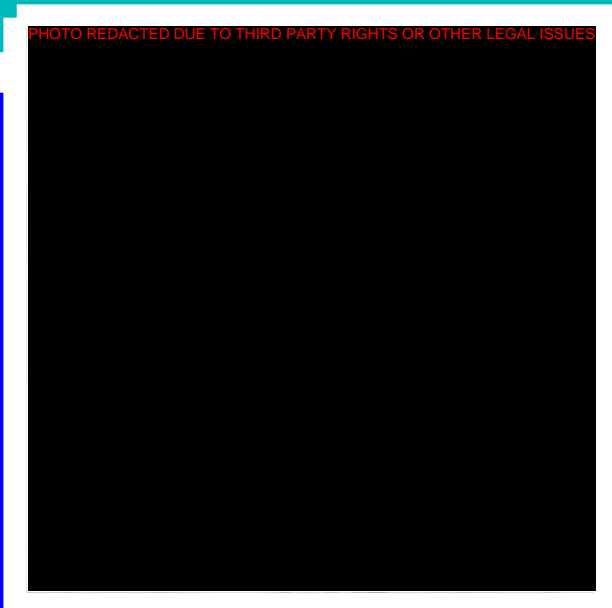


# National Learner Satisfaction Survey 2002/03

1. Executive Summary

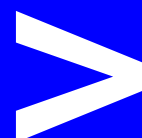
2. Introduction



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Learning+Skills Council

## 1.1 Introduction

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is responsible for post-16 learning in England. This includes further education (FE), adult and community learning (ACL) and work based learning (WBL) for young people. Early in 2002, the LSC commissioned the National Learner Satisfaction Survey covering learners in these three sectors to help the LSC and its partners understand and respond more effectively to learners' needs. A report on the first survey, covering the academic year 2001/02, was published in November 2002. This new report, on the findings of the latest survey covering the academic year 2002/03, provides a more detailed analysis of groups of learners and enables comparisons between levels of satisfaction recorded in the two surveys.

In the first survey, over 13,000 telephone interviews were conducted with learners between April 2002 and August 2002. Interviewing for the latest survey took place between January 2003 and August 2003 and involved over 25,000 telephone interviews. This new report describes the findings of the 2002/03 survey and where appropriate, provides comparisons with the 2001/02 survey.

## 1.2 Further education sector

### Overall satisfaction with the learning experience

Satisfaction remains extremely high. The proportion of 'extremely' satisfied learners has increased since the last survey, with scores for other further education (FE) colleges and sixth form colleges showing the most notable improvement.

Table 1.1 Overall satisfaction with the learning experience

FE	All FE		General FE colleges		Sixth form colleges		Other FE colleges*	
	2002/03	Shift since 2001/02	2002/03	Shift since 2001/02	2002/03	Shift since 2001/02	2002/03	Shift since 2001/02
Base: all respondents								
Unweighted	19,947		17,369		1,935		643	
Weighted	19,947		18,370		1,172		405	
	%		%		%		%	
Extremely satisfied	23	+3	23	+3	23	+7	25	+5
Very satisfied	40	-4	40	-4	42	-7	43	-1
Fairly satisfied	27	+1	27	+1	27	-1	24	-1
Neither/nor	3	=	4	+1	3	=	2	=
Fairly/very/extremely dissatisfied	6	-1	6	-1	5	=	5	-2

\* 'Other' includes agriculture/horticulture colleges, art and design and designated colleges. Special needs residential colleges are not included

### ***Demographic and personal circumstances***

The least satisfied learners are still those aged 16-18, but they are being joined by learners aged 19-24. The ratings for these slightly older learners have fallen since 2001/02. A total of 52 per cent of men and 58 per cent of women aged 19-24 are 'extremely' or 'very' satisfied, a five per cent and four per cent drop respectively since 2001/02.

White learners are much more likely to be 'extremely' satisfied with the whole experience than minority ethnic learners. Indian learners are five percentage points less likely than 2001/02 to be 'extremely' satisfied.

### ***Course and provider variables***

In terms of qualifications, learners on General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) and A Level/AS Level courses are still the least likely to provide an 'extremely' satisfied rating. Since 2001/02, the combined 'extremely' and 'very' satisfied rating has fallen for learners taking A/AS Levels, National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), Access and professional courses.

### **The 'fairly' satisfied learner**

Analysis of the responses of learners expressing themselves 'fairly' satisfied overall shows that they are significantly less positive about a wide range of issues relating to their learning. Potential actions for 'pushing' them up the satisfaction scale to become 'very' or 'extremely' satisfied include:

- ensuring that all learners receive consistent and effective pre-entry advice
- ensuring that learners make the most suitable choice of course
- improving the quality of teaching and encouraging teachers to address problems with individual learners
  
- taking care to support learners with difficulties by having adequate systems in place to support those who ask for help and ensuring that formal and informal complaints are dealt with to the best of the provider's ability.

### **Drivers of satisfaction**

As in 2001/02, statistical analysis has been used to assess the contribution each area of learning makes in driving overall satisfaction. In FE, the 'drivers' of satisfaction are:

1. quality and management of teaching (40 per cent)
2. pre-entry advice (24 per cent)
3. support for learners (19 per cent)
4. the learning environment (16 per cent).

Further analysis indicates priority areas for action. If improvements are made in these priority areas, this is likely to have the greatest impact on learners' overall satisfaction.

### **Key area 1: Quality of teaching and training**

#### **Priorities for action**

The elements of teaching and training that fall into the priority 'action' category are:

- making subjects interesting and enjoyable for learners
- understanding learners and how they like to learn
- the support given to learners, for example, in improving their study techniques or time management
- more effective planning of lessons
- setting clear targets to help learners improve
- providing prompt and regular feedback on progress
- more effective management for groups or learners
- managing the group of learners.

These are high drivers of satisfaction with comparatively lower satisfaction ratings. Improvements made in these 'action areas' will yield maximum impact on overall levels of satisfaction with the learning experience.

Aspects of teaching and training that should be promoted for this sector are 'how the teachers relate to the learners' and 'their knowledge of the subject'. Ensuring that feedback is motivating is another measure where performance is comparatively high.

### **Satisfaction with the quality of teaching**

Satisfaction with teaching remains high compared with 2001/02, with the percentage of 'extremely' satisfied learners increasing slightly in general FE colleges and more markedly in sixth form colleges and other FE colleges.

Table 1.2: Satisfaction with teaching, 2002/03 compared with 2001/02.

	All FE		General FE colleges		Sixth form colleges		Other FE colleges*	
	2002/03	Shift since 2001/02	2002/03	Shift since 2001/02	2002/03	Shift since 2001/02	2002/03	Shift since 2001/02
Base: all respondents								
Unweighted	19,947		17,369		1,935		643	
Weighted	19,947		18,370		1,172		405	
	%		%		%		%	
Extremely satisfied	25	+2	25	+2	26	+8	29	+7
Very satisfied	37	-3	37	-2	39	-6	39	=
Fairly satisfied	27	+1	27	+1	27	-2	24	-5
Neither/nor	3	=	3	=	2	-1	2	-1
Fairly/very/extremely dissatisfied	7	=	7	-1	5	+1	5	-2

\* 'Other' includes agriculture/horticulture colleges, art and design and designated colleges. Special needs residential colleges are not included

## Effective use of learning sessions

Compared with 2001/02, more learners commented on unproductive lesson or session time. The balance has shifted from learners saying no time is wasted to learners saying that up to a quarter of teaching hours are wasted. The decline in productive lesson time is greatest for learners at general FE colleges.

Table 1.3: Number of teaching hours wasted by provider type: in % compared with 2001/02

Provider type	% point difference between 2002/03 and 2001/02 in learners saying that no lesson time is wasted
All further education	-9 percentage points
General further education colleges	-10 percentage points
Sixth form colleges	-3 percentage points
Other FE colleges	-9 percentage points

The most common cause of disruption is the late arrival of other learners (65%).

### *Demographic and personal circumstances*

Age is still the predominant factor in driving satisfaction with teaching, although gender also appears to have an impact. Women are significantly more likely to score aspects of teaching nine or 10 out of 10 than men. Among Asian learners, there is a far greater gender divide in ratings, with women much more satisfied than men.

In the 2002/03 survey, however, levels of satisfaction do not rise so clearly with the increasing age of learners, as was the case in the previous survey. Men aged 19-24 fall below men aged 16-18 in their overall satisfaction with teaching and with individual aspects of teaching. The two measures on which their levels of satisfaction are significantly lower than for men aged 16-18 are:

- support provided for learners
- the quality and availability of teaching materials.

One of the factors, which may explain generally lower satisfaction ratings of younger learners is the high proportion of teaching hours they perceive to be wasted. They are much more likely to experience the following scenarios:

- other students arriving late (five minutes or more)
- other students making a noise or disrupting the class
- being left hanging around with nothing to do
- teachers/tutors arriving late (five minutes or more)
- lessons finishing early.

Across all measures of the quality of teaching, it is learners with disabilities who express the highest levels of satisfaction. Within this group it is women and those aged 19+ who are the most satisfied. This indicates a need to get younger men up to the same levels of satisfaction

Minority ethnic learners still rate the quality of teaching lower than white learners, although compared with 2001/02, mixed race and Indian learners have shown some increase in levels of satisfaction with matters relating to relationships with the learner. Other points are:

- ratings from black African and black Caribbean learners have fallen since 2001/02 (by at least five per cent points) on all measures relating to relationships with the learner
- black African learners however, show an above average likelihood to rate teachers nine or 10 out of 10 on management of learning issues such as planning and target setting
- those on General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses are most likely to be 'extremely' satisfied; those studying for A/AS Levels and GNVQs least likely.

### ***Key area 2: Pre-entry***

#### **Priorities for action**

All aspects of pre-entry showed equal weight in terms of driving satisfaction. Action or review should therefore focus on the low performing areas, which are:

- ensuring that advice is useful for those who seek it
- ensuring that expectations are met (which is inextricably linked to the previous point)
- ensuring, where possible, that learners get their first choice of provider.

#### **Course suitability**

Only seven per cent of learners in FE said that they had not chosen the most suitable course. Learners aged 16-18 and learners taking GNVQs or A/AS levels were more likely to think they had made a wrong choice. These learners, together with minority ethnic learners (other than black Africans), were least likely to feel the course matched their expectations.

## **Choosing the course**

Learners aged 16-18 were much more likely than other learners to have received advice from most sources. Women aged 16-18 were significantly more likely than men to talk to teachers, friends, parents or other family members. Learners from minority ethnic groups (apart from black Caribbean learners) were more likely to have sought advice from a variety of sources and to receive advice from their family.

Schools' careers advisers were deemed the least useful source of advice, with nine per cent of respondents finding them 'not very' useful. In contrast, teachers at colleges were thought to be the most useful source of advice, with 95 per cent finding them either 'very' or 'fairly' useful.

## ***Key area 3: Support for learners***

### **Priorities for action**

Once again all aspects of support for learners showed equal weight in terms of driving satisfaction. Action or review should be prioritised on the low performing areas, which are:

- ensuring that learners do not experience problems
- ensuring that formal and informal complaints are understood and properly handled.

### **Difficulties encountered**

Almost three in five (61 per cent) learners in FE have encountered difficulties in managing their learning. The three most common difficulties identified were:

- fitting course commitments around domestic commitments, particularly in the case of female learners
- maintaining personal motivation
- keeping up with the required standard of work.

Difficulties were more commonly faced by minority ethnic learners. Black Caribbean learners were the most likely to have faced difficulties on their course, with 69 per cent of them claiming to have done so.

Five difficulties faced by black Caribbean learners more often than other learners were:

- dealing with money pressures
- managing to keep up with the standard of work required

- travel to college
- fitting course commitments around domestic commitments
- extra help which had been promised but not provided.

Minority ethnic learners, particularly mixed raced learners, are more likely than other learners to have faced difficulties with numeracy, with 13 per cent identifying this as a difficulty.

Almost three quarters of learners with disabilities aged 16-18 identified difficulties in managing their learning. The two main difficulties, mentioned by over a quarter of the learners, were with reading or writing (30 per cent) and with maths or numeracy (28 per cent).

Younger learners with disabilities are also far more likely than other learners to have encountered the following difficulties:

- travel to college
- keeping up with the standard of work required
- extra help promised but not provided
- dealing with money pressures.

While black Caribbean learners are most likely to have encountered difficulties on the course, they are among the least likely to have actually sought help or advice about them. Only 30 per cent of those experiencing difficulties sought help. Only a fifth of learners from an Asian background sought help or advice, the lowest of any ethnic group.

Although 16-18 year old learners with disabilities are more likely than others to have encountered difficulties, almost half (49 per cent) sought help or advice, compared with an average of 27 per cent for all learners.

Overall, two fifths (41 per cent) of those in FE who sought help or advice found the response 'very' useful, with 35 per cent finding it 'fairly' useful. One in ten found the response 'not at all useful'.

#### ***Key area 4: The learning environment***

##### **Priorities for action**

In terms of facilities that are most important in driving satisfaction, but least important in performance, the analysis shows that there are not as many priority areas for action in FE colleges compared with work based learning. There are two main issues, both of which relate to socialising, which the research shows is particularly important for younger learners.



They are:

- canteen/café
- facilities for socialising.

### **Satisfaction with the facilities**

The highest rated facilities continue to be the IT resources, the library/learning centre and facilities for people with disabilities.

Compared with 2001/02, there has been a rise in levels of satisfaction with most facilities, notably childcare facilities and specialist equipment. For childcare facilities, there has been a seven per cent increase (from 34 per cent to 41 per cent) in those rating them nine or 10 out of 10. The ratings of specialist equipment rose from 31 per cent to 36 per cent.

As in 2001/02, men aged 19-24 were least likely to rate any facilities a nine or 10 out of 10.

Learners most likely to give higher ratings to most facilities were:

- learners with disabilities
- women aged 25+
- black and Asian learners
- learners with a prior qualification below Level 2.

### ***The impact of learning***

Over three-quarters of learners enjoy learning and get a 'buzz' from it. This is six percentage points higher than 2001/02. Some 86 per cent of learners who left school with negative feelings about education now feel an increased confidence in their ability to learn. Almost three-quarters of them now get a 'buzz' from learning. This has improved since the 2001/02 survey.

The proportions of learners agreeing with the benefits of learning are high, but slightly lower than in the earlier survey. Over 80 per cent agree that learning has improved their confidence, enthusiasm and skills (although the percentages are marginally lower than previously).

There are no significant differences in the benefit of learning by gender, but younger respondents are more likely to agree to all the benefits. The most significant variances are for 'confidence socially', 'confidence in ability to learn' (particularly in the case of men) and managing time and responsibilities.

The impact of learning differs according to socio-economic group; the 'lower' the grouping, the greater the impact. Many benefits are acknowledged more by learners with disabilities. Higher proportions of minority ethnic learners, when compared with white learners, also acknowledge many of the benefits. A total of 63 per cent of learners are 'very' likely to undertake another course in the next three years, according to the latest survey. In terms of ethnicity, only black Africans are significantly more inclined to say that they will be very likely to undertake further learning in the next three years. Learners in the 'higher' socio-economic groups are also slightly more inclined than other learners to be 'very' likely to undertake further learning.

### ***Early leavers***

The main reasons for leaving are:

- health (15 per cent) tutor poor/problems with teaching (14 per cent)
- too much work (12 per cent).

Health is much more of a reason for leaving in the latest survey than in 2001/02.

Asian learners were more likely than other learners to leave owing to pregnancy, personal problems, childcare or family commitments. Interestingly, the men in this group were much more likely to mention personal problems or family commitments as reasons than men in any other ethnic group. These reasons also affected older Asian learners more than older white or older black learners.

Some 61 per cent of those who left early now have a job. One in ten is looking for work. Men were significantly more likely than women to be in work. Learners aged 19 and over were more likely to have found work than those aged 16-18. Learners from minority ethnic groups were less likely than others to be in work (48 per cent compared with 62 per cent).

Reasons for considering leaving are:

- tutor poor/problems with teaching (19 per cent)
- too much work (19 per cent)
- work being too difficult (14 per cent).

## **1.3 Work based learners**

### **Overall satisfaction with the learning experience**

Nine out of ten work based learners are satisfied with their learning experience. Results are similar in the academic years 2002/03 and 2001/02, although the proportion of those 'very' satisfied decreased by three percentage points.

Table 1.4: Overall satisfaction with learning experience 2002/03 compared with 2001/02

Work based learning	2002/03	Shift since 2001/02
Base: all respondents	2003	
Unweighted	%	
Extremely satisfied	17	=
Very satisfied	42	-3
Fairly satisfied	31	+1
Neither/nor	4	+1
Fairly/very/extremely dissatisfied	6	=

### ***Demographic and personal circumstances***

The percentage of men saying they are 'extremely' or 'very' satisfied with the learning experience is significantly lower than the percentage of women. This applies to both learners aged 16-18 and aged 19+.

### ***Course and provider variables***

Satisfaction with the learning experience appears slightly higher among trainees who are undertaking their training with training providers or who train solely in their workplace, compared with those attending a college or combining on-the-job training with college.

Satisfaction appears slightly higher among learners who solely attend training providers or train solely in the workplace compared with those attending a college or combine training at a college or provider with training in the workplace.

### **The 'fairly' satisfied learner**

The 'fairly' satisfied learners are less satisfied at every point in the learning experience and less likely to think that they have made the most suitable choice of programme or course.

Actions to 'lift' the ratings further for the 'fairly' satisfied learner are to:

- ensure that advice pre-entry is effective for all users
- ensure learners have made the most suitable choice of course
- encourage trainers and assessors to address problems with individual learners and address quality of training generally
- take care to support those with problems and have adequate systems in place for when learners ask for help)
- ensure that formal and informal complaints are dealt with to the best of the provider's or the workplace's ability.

## **Drivers of satisfaction**

As in the year 2001/02, statistical analysis has been used to assess the contribution each area of learning makes in driving overall satisfaction. In work based learning, the drivers of satisfaction are:

1. quality and management of teaching (37 per cent)
2. pre-entry (29 per cent)
3. the learning environment (18 per cent)
4. support for learners (17 per cent).

Further analysis indicates priority areas for action. Improvements in these priority areas will have the greatest impact on learners' overall satisfaction.

### ***Key area 1: Quality of teaching and training***

#### **Priorities for action**

The priorities for action are:

- making subjects interesting or enjoyable for learners
- understanding learners and how they like to learn
- the support given to learners, for example in improving their study techniques or time management
- planning learners' lessons
- setting clear targets to help learners improve
- providing prompt and regular feedback on progress
- managing the group of learners.

These priorities make a big contribution in driving overall satisfaction, but have comparatively lower satisfaction scores. Focusing on these action areas will make the biggest improvements in terms of improving the experience for learners.

Aspects of teaching and training that drive satisfaction and have comparatively higher satisfaction scores should be promoted, such as how trainers relate to the learners and the trainers' knowledge of the subject. Ensuring that feedback is motivating is another measure where satisfaction scores are comparatively high.

#### **Satisfaction with the quality of teaching and training**

Satisfaction with the quality of teaching has increased since the 2001/02 survey. The mean score has increased and the percentage saying that they are 'extremely' satisfied has increased from 18 per cent to 21 per cent.

## **Effective use of learning sessions**

More learners in the latest survey think that some session time is wasted (50 per cent). The main cause of disruption is the late arrival of other students (63 per cent).

### ***Demographic and personal circumstances***

The 'gap' in overall levels of satisfaction between men and women has remained exactly the same. Having said this, indicators of satisfaction relating to the learner and management of learning show that the gender divide is widening.

The report for 2001/02 highlighted lower levels of satisfaction amongst learners with disabilities. This does not appear the case in the latest survey.

Learners with responsibilities for children at home appear to show higher levels of satisfaction than those without – a positive statement for encouraging these learners onto programmes.

Learners in socio-economic groups D and E consistently give higher scores for satisfaction than learners in groups A and B.

Men are more likely to think that session time is wasted than women and the gap has widened between the two surveys (the nine percentage point variance between men and women in 2001/02 has increased to 14 percentage points in 2002/03). This issue needs investigating.

### ***Course and provider variables***

Learners undertaking all their learning with a training provider are the most satisfied on all issues. Those in a college or combining training in the workplace with training in college are the least satisfied. Those being trained in the workplace only rate individual aspects of training almost as high as those attending training providers. Those undertaking their training solely in the workplace are less inclined to say that time is wasted because they have no large group sessions with other learners, and so the element of disruption is less.

Learners on Level 1 programmes appear to be more satisfied than other learners for many indicators.

Learners on construction, agriculture, engineering, technology and manufacture courses appear least satisfied on many indicators. This may well be due to the predominance of men in these subjects.

## ***Key Area 2: Pre-entry***

### **Priorities for action**

All aspects of pre-entry advice make an equal contribution in driving overall satisfaction. This means action should be focussed on aspects that have comparatively lower satisfaction scores. These are:

- ensuring that advice is useful for those who have sought it
- ensuring that expectations are met.

### **Course suitability**

Only seven per cent of learners felt they had not chosen the most suitable course, but 77 per cent of work based learners felt that their course either closely or quite closely met their expectations.

### **Choosing the course**

The majority of work based learners (55 per cent) received advice about their choice of course/provider from their employer. Overall, work based learners found advice from teachers and tutors at their college/provider most useful, followed by advisers at Connexions. Teachers at school and school careers advisers were deemed the least useful.

### ***Demographic and personal circumstances***

Learners aged 19+, were much more likely to have sought advice than those aged 16-18, regardless of gender. Learners aged 16-18 were more heavily dependent on the following for advice:

- their parents or other family members
- friends (women learners in particular)
- school careers advisers
- advisers at Connexions
- teachers at school.

### ***Course and provider variables***

Learners on retail/customer services and hospitality/sports/leisure courses were less likely to think that their course 'very' or 'quite' closely met their expectations and more likely to say 'too early to say'. Those on hairdressing and beauty therapy courses, on the other hand, were much more likely to say that their course met their expectations 'very' closely.

### ***Key Area 3: The learning environment***

#### **Priorities for action**

The facilities which should be prioritised for action are:

- library/learning centre
- careers/advice centre
- canteen/café
- sports facilities/equipment
- facilities for socialising.

Some of these may not be applicable to particular environments, such as training in the workplace. However, given the importance of these facilities for socialising, it may be that the employer or provider can organise some form of networking to provide learners on similar types of training with other opportunities for socialising.

#### **Satisfaction with facilities**

Overall satisfaction ratings are around eight per cent lower than those for FE colleges. As in 2001/02, females were more likely to give higher ratings than males to all facilities other than the library/learning centres. Learners based at FE colleges rated all facilities higher than learners at other providers. Learners below Level 2 on entry were more likely to have given a nine or 10 out of 10 to careers centres, learning support services and childcare facilities.

### ***Key Area 4: Support for learners***

#### **Priorities for action**

Once again, all aspects of support for learners have an equal weight in driving satisfaction. The priorities for action are, therefore, the lower performing areas:

- preventing learners from experiencing any problems. When they do, ensuring that help is useful
- ensuring that complaints (formal and informal) are understood and handled properly.

## **Difficulties encountered**

Half of all work based learners have encountered difficulties since starting the course and there are no significant differences by gender. A third of work based learners with difficulties sought help or advice. Men and learners from social groups A and B were less likely to have done so.

Among learners who sought help or advice, four-fifths (82 per cent) found the response they received useful, leaving 18 per cent feeling dissatisfied with the response.

## ***The impact of learning***

Of all learners, work based learners reported the highest number of benefits. This partly reflects that these learners are generally younger and have lower qualifications. The percentage of learners who enjoy learning and get a 'buzz' from it has increased since the 2001/02 survey. Almost nine out of ten say that their confidence in their ability to learn has increased as a result of their current learning. Among those who felt negative about education when leaving school, 45 per cent now get a 'buzz' from learning.

The main benefit of learning, cited by 94 per cent of learners, is that they now have skills they can use in employment. Other benefits are still acknowledged by a high percentage of learners, although some are slightly lower than in the previous survey.

Exploring benefits by gender shows few significant differences. However, younger learners are more likely to say that the training programme had had particular direct benefits for them than learners aged 19+. These benefits revolve around confidence, creativity and being more prepared for daily life.

Learners with no children are much more likely to be feeling more confident socially (71 per cent compared with 62 per cent of learners with children) and more likely to be coping better with daily life (61 per cent compared with 53 per cent of learners with children).

Learners with disabilities are more likely to acknowledge many of the benefits than other learners.

Where the learner undertakes their training appears to make little difference on the proportions agreeing to most benefits. However, there are interesting differences between learners studying different subjects. Benefits are most likely to be reported by learners on construction courses and on hair and beauty programmes. These learners were also most satisfied with trainers and/or assessors). Learners on business and administration programmes are much less likely to report many of the benefits.



Just over eight out of ten learners are likely to undertake further training in the next three years.

### ***Early leavers***

The main reason for leaving was 'changed jobs' (18 per cent). Of those who left early or considered leaving early, younger learners were more likely to say that they were on the wrong course or had financial difficulties.

A higher proportion of those who left said that they had had a job to go to compared with those that thought about it, but stayed. This suggests that most learners will not actually leave until they have something to go to.

Those that stayed on the programme were more likely than those that left to criticise the quality, structure or content of the programme.

## **1.4 Adult and community learning**

### **Overall satisfaction with the learning experience**

#### **Further education delivered by adult learning providers**

Satisfaction is again very high, with 31 per cent 'extremely' satisfied, 41 per cent 'very' satisfied and 22 per cent 'fairly' satisfied.

Most learners on adult and community learning programmes are women (72 per cent). Furthermore, a large proportion of learners are 'older' than for other sections of this report. Learners aged 35+ account for 76 per cent of the sample.

Bearing this in mind, gender and age continue to account for significant differences in levels of satisfaction. In the latest survey, older men are significantly less satisfied, as well as younger men, as seen in the 2001/02 survey (25 per cent of men aged 55+ are 'extremely' satisfied compared with 35 per cent of women aged 55+).

#### **Adult and community learners on non-accredited courses**

Overall satisfaction is high (35 per cent are 'extremely' satisfied, 45 per cent 'very' satisfied and 15 per cent 'fairly' satisfied). These are the highest ratings across all types of provision.

Women are slightly more likely than men to be 'extremely' satisfied (as is the case in all other types of provision). As for other types of provision, the youngest learners are least satisfied. Learners on courses related to health and fitness and service-related courses are most likely to be 'extremely' satisfied with their experience overall.

## **Quality and management of teaching and training**

### **Further education delivered by adult learning providers**

Once again, overall satisfaction is high although slightly lower than last year, with 33 per cent 'extremely' satisfied, 38 per cent 'very' satisfied and 21 per cent 'fairly' satisfied.

Indicators for how the teacher relates to the learner have either stayed the same or dropped slightly. This is also true for indicators on the knowledge and management of teaching.

Four out of ten learners thought that some lessons were unproductive. The main cause of disruption is other students arriving late.

Women generally give higher ratings to all aspects of teaching than men.

### **Adult and community learners on non-accredited courses**

Satisfaction levels are very high, with 96 per cent of learners satisfied with their teaching and 81 per cent being 'extremely' or 'very' satisfied.

Men are less likely to be 'extremely' satisfied (37 per cent compared with 42 per cent of women). The relationship between age and satisfaction tends to be linear (i.e. satisfaction increases with age); 31 per cent of learners aged 16-34 were 'extremely' satisfied compared with 42 per cent aged 65+).

Learners on health and fitness courses tend to give higher ratings. Learners on ICT business and basic skills courses are least satisfied.

Indicators for how the teacher relates to the learner are rated highly. The highest indicator is 'how well they relate to you as a person' (72 per cent award a nine or 10 out of 10). The lowest-rated indicator is 'the support they give you, for example in improving study techniques or time management' (55 per cent award a nine or 10 out of 10).

Indicators relating to knowledge and management of teaching are also rated highly. A total of 83 per cent of learners award a nine or 10 out of 10 for teachers' knowledge of the subject. Percentages range from 45 per cent to 60 per cent for the other indicators.

The majority of learners (71 per cent) say that no lesson or session time is wasted. The main cause for disruption tends to be other learners arriving late.

## ***Pre-entry***

### **Further education delivered by adult learning providers**

Just over a quarter of learners sought no advice at all before starting their course. Another quarter went to teachers or tutors at college and about a fifth got advice from friends.

Men aged 55+ differ strongly from the norm on sources of advice used for every one except college admissions office. These older men were much less likely to have sought any advice, 40 per cent having received no advice. Women aged 55+ were also less likely to have received advice (36 per cent received no advice).

Teachers and tutors at colleges and providers were seen as providing the most useful advice. This was followed by the college admissions office and then parents or other family members.

The majority (93 per cent) of learners felt they had chosen the most suitable course. Furthermore, 86 per cent of learners felt that their course either 'very' closely (54 per cent) or 'quite' closely (32 per cent) met their expectations. Fewer learners said 'very' closely in 2002/03 and an increased proportion said 'quite' closely.

Men aged under 35 were the least likely to say 'very' closely. Also, more men under the age of 35 said it was 'too early to say'.

Some 98 per cent of learners said that they had been made to feel welcome.

### **Adult and community learners on non-accredited courses**

A fifth of learners obtained no advice before starting the course. Just over half (51 per cent) of learners made use of adult education leaflets and brochures and 22 per cent went to friends for advice.

Learners aged 16-35 were much less likely to have used adult education leaflets and brochures than other age groups. They were, instead, much more likely to have received advice from parents or other family members.

Some 94 per cent of learners said that they felt they had chosen the most suitable course. Men under 35 were most likely to say that it had not met their expectations (11 per cent).

Nine out of ten (90 per cent) of all learners felt their course closely matched their expectations. This ranged from 85 per cent of learners on ICT, business and basic skills courses to 95 per cent of those on health and fitness courses.

Almost all (98 per cent) of learners said that they had been made to feel welcome.

## ***Support for learners***

### **Further education delivered by adult learning providers**

Over half (54 per cent) of learners had encountered difficulties. Almost a fifth with difficulties had gone on to seek help or advice. Of those that did so, almost three-quarters (71 per cent) felt the advice they received had been 'very' or 'fairly' useful.

Levels of complaint were very low, with only six per cent having complained. The three main areas of complaint were:

- teacher-related complaints, including the quality of teaching
- administration of learning
- course and content-related issues.

### **Adult and community learners on non-accredited courses**

Almost two-thirds (65 per cent) of learners had not encountered any difficulties since starting the course. Learners aged under 35 are more likely to have encountered difficulties than older learners.

Only 16 per cent learners who had experienced difficulties had gone on to seek help or advice. Of those who did, 65 per cent found the help or advice to be useful.

Levels of complaint were also low, with only six per cent having complained. The two main areas of complaint were:

- they were not enjoying the course or simply did not like it
- lack of equipment or poor materials.

## ***The learning environment***

### **Further education delivered by adult learning providers**

All facilities were rated nine or 10 out of 10 by at least four out of 10 learners. Ratings were either the same or higher than last year.

Women rated all facilities higher than males, particularly the library and learning centre and the canteen/café.

### **Adult and community learners on non-accredited courses**

A high proportion of learners on non-accredited courses do not have access to as many facilities as other learners, but when they do use facilities, they rate them highly. Childcare facilities, for example, are rated nine or 10 out of 10 by 56 per cent of female learners.

## ***The impact of learning***

### **Further education delivered by adult learning providers**

The number of learners who enjoy learning and get a 'buzz' from it increased by five percentage points between the two surveys (86 per cent). The number who enjoy learning due to the social aspects decreased from 43 per cent in the 2001/02 survey to 37 per cent in 2002/03.

The percentage of learners who left school with negative feelings about education, but who now enjoy learning and get a 'buzz' from it, increased to 82 per cent. Some 83 per cent who left school with negative feelings about education now have increased confidence in their ability to learn.

Learners report many benefits to learning, although some are acknowledged to a lesser extent since the 2001/02 survey.

The impact of learning is significantly affected by gender and age factors. Women are more likely to agree that their course had particular benefits and younger learners are more likely to acknowledge benefits than older learners.

Learners in socio-economic groups D and E are more likely than those in socio-economic groups A and B to acknowledge all the benefits.

Learners with disabilities are more likely to say that their learning experience has had important benefits, particularly in terms of increased confidence, health and well-being and taking part in the community.

Learners with responsibilities for children in the home are significantly more likely to say that the course has a strong impact. Almost two thirds of these learners will undertake further learning in the next three years.

### **Adult and community learners on non-accredited courses**

Overall, learners on non-accredited courses are more positive about the impact learning has had on them and the benefits they have gained.

Almost nine out of ten (88 per cent) of learners enjoy learning and get a 'buzz' from it. Most benefits are acknowledged by a high number of learners.

The benefits which were acknowledged by a significantly higher percentage of women than men were:

- the ability to learn
- coping better with daily life
- health and wellbeing
- taking a more active part in the community.

In terms of age, many of the benefits affect all to the same degree. There were however, some differences. Younger learners were more likely to agree to the following benefits: gaining skills for a job and confidence in their ability to learn. Older learners were more likely to emphasise health and sense of well being and taking a more active part in the community.

Learners on health and fitness courses were less likely to report benefits related to confidence in learning, but more likely to mention measures related to health and well-being. Ability and confidence to learn was most often stressed by learners on ICT, business and service-related courses.

Among learners who left school with negative feelings about education, 74 per cent now feel more confident in their ability to learn.

In total, 78 per cent of these learners said they were 'very' likely to undertake further learning in the next three years. This is the highest proportion by provision type.

## 2.1 Background

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) was established in April 2001 and took over responsibility for further education (FE), adult and community learning (ACL) and work based learning (WBL) for young people.

An important part of the LSC's ethos in fulfilling its responsibilities to learners is that learners' needs should lie at the heart of everything it does. The LSC's first corporate plan, published in 2001, promised to give learners - its 'customers' - a say in their own learning. This was seen as essential if the LSC was to achieve its key targets for significantly widening participation, improving achievement in post-16 learning and achieving world-class standards by 2010.

The LSC, therefore, commissioned a national survey of post-16 learners' satisfaction with their learning. The survey focuses on learners' perceptions and describes learners' experience from their point of view. The information it provides is intended to help the LSC and other stakeholders improve the quality of education and training for young people and adults aged over 16.

The survey is now in its second year. This report describes the findings for the academic year 2002/03 and compares them with those from the first two waves (Waves 1 and 2) of interviewing in the Spring and Summer terms of the 2001/02 academic year.

## 2.2 Aims

The main aims of the 2002/03 survey are:

- measure the levels of learners' satisfaction with LSC-funded provision across England
- establish benchmarks for tracking trends in learners' satisfaction, which can be used to inform the policy and practice of the LSC and its stakeholders.

### Survey coverage – learner types

The latest survey was designed to cover the following types of learner:

- those in the FE sector; such as learners attending general FE colleges, sixth form colleges and other specialist FE institutions
- those undertaking work based learning
- learners undertaking adult and community learning, including FE delivered by adult learning providers and non-accredited adult and community learning.

The intention is to extend future waves of interviewing to cover school sixth forms and national specialist residential colleges.

### **Survey coverage – question areas**

The main topics covered by the survey are:

- factors affecting choice of subject/learning
- views of the induction process
- satisfaction with quality and management of teaching and training
- support for learners
- satisfaction with learning facilities
- attitudes to learning and the impact of learners' current learning experience
- overall satisfaction with the learning experience and reasons for it
- reasons for early leaving.

## **2.3 Methodology and sampling**

The survey was carried out by means of individual telephone interviews, lasting 20 minutes on average.

The option for a face-to-face interview was built into the study to cater for those who would find a telephone interview difficult; for example, because of language or other communications difficulties. Of the total, 78 of the interviews were undertaken face-to-face.

### **Sampling**

Different sampling methods were used for the different groups of learners to accommodate the differing stages of record keeping for learners and the data protection issues associated with them.

### **Further education sample**

For learners in the FE sector, including those studying FE courses provided by adult learning providers, we began sampling for Wave 3, the first wave of the latest survey, using the same approach we had used in the previous year; i.e. sampling from the individualised student record (ISR).

The ISR does not give names or contact details for learners and, therefore, the sampling exercise depends on the co-operation of the colleges.



Colleges had to give us the names and addresses for the student reference numbers we sampled at random for their college. The ISR was used rather than the new individualised learner record (ILR) because, when we were designing the sampling approach, we were unsure how many colleges would have switched to the new ILR system. It became clear when contacting colleges for details of learners, however, that many colleges had submitted ILR data, which we used instead.

The Wave 3 sample, therefore, was a mix of ISR data, supplemented with contact details provided by colleges and ILR data sampled directly, which included contact details. Because we could not gather sufficient evidence that all learners signing the ILR had agreed that their data could be used for research purposes, all learners were sent a letter giving them the opportunity to opt out of the survey.

The ILR sample for Wave 3 was taken from the November ILR records and for Waves 4/5 from the January ILR records. This means that Wave 3 covers all students still in place in November 2002 and Waves 4/5 cover all students still on courses in January 2003. Neither sample, therefore, includes leavers who left the course before the dates at which the sample was taken.

Full details of the sampling process and the numbers of colleges covered in each wave are included in the technical appendix to this report, together with details of the sample that this generated.

### **Work based learning sample**

Personal details are present on the ILR for work based learning. For each wave we sampled a random selection of 4,000 names with a computer-generated random start. This was checked against the death register before being released for interview. There was no need in this case to send out opt-out letters because all work based learners have signed a declaration indicating whether or not they are willing to have their names passed on to a third party for research purposes.

### **Non-accredited adult and community learning (ACL)**

In 2001/2, we had to use a non-random sampling method to sample non-accredited learners. Learners in this group effectively opted in by signing up to do the survey. In the 2002/03 survey we have been able to adopt a more systematic approach. We contacted a sample of local education authorities (LEAs), checking where learners' records for non-accredited ACL provision were held.

In addition:

- if records were held centrally, we asked the LEA for a database of learners from which we could draw a random sample
- if records were not held centrally, we asked the LEA for details of five providers which we could contact in order to obtain learners' records.

We managed to compile a database of 8,279 learners from a spread of 22 local education authorities. As with FE learners, these learners were sent a letter giving them the opportunity to opt out. As a result of this, 777 learners opted out.

## Sample structure

Table 2.1: Sample sizes for each wave of interviewing

Provision type	2001/2	2001/02/3		
	Waves1/2	Wave 3	Wave 4/5	Total
FE	10,000	6,063	13,884	19,947
Work based learning	2,032	1,000	1,003	2,003
Non-accredited adult and community learning	278	N/A	1,958	1,958
FE provided by adult learning providers	723	352	851	1,203

Given the difficulties involved in sampling learners on non-accredited adult and community courses in 2001/02, and the fact that they were an 'opt-in' sample, we have decided not to show comparisons between the findings for the two years in this report.

Interviewing for the 2001/02 survey was carried out between April and August 2002 (Waves 1/2). Interviewing for the 2002/03 survey took place between January and August 2003 (Waves 3/4/5). The response rates were as follows:

	Waves 1/2	Waves 3/4/5
FE	68 per cent	63 per cent
Work based learning	53 per cent	53 per cent
Adult and community learning	52 per cent*	
FE delivered by adult learning providers		61 per cent
Non-accredited ACL		65 per cent

\* We were unable to separate response rates for FE delivered by adult learning providers and non-accredited ACL in waves 1/2.

These response rates are based on an effective sample with which contact was made. Full breakdowns of the sample outcomes are given in the technical appendix, including details of ineffective and non-contacted sample.

## 2.4 Questionnaire design

There were some changes made to the questionnaire for the 2001/02 survey:

- additional questions were asked about sources of advice and their usefulness. Where people left courses early or completed courses we asked them what they were doing now
- some questions which were previously open-ended are now framed as pre-coded lists or prompts. These include questions investigating the reasons behind 'wasted' teaching hours.

A copy of the 2002/03 version of the questionnaire is included in the appendix of this report.

## 2.5 Reporting

The substantial sample size involved and the robustness of the survey data give us the opportunity to analyse results, particularly for the FE sector, in greater detail and with greater confidence than has been possible to date. It should be stressed, however, that while results for the FE sector can be analysed by standard region, it would be inappropriate to desegregate results to local LSC level or to provider level.

The intention of this report is to highlight the most significant findings of the National Learner Satisfaction Survey. Additional research has been carried out in the past year to delve into some of the issues surrounding dissatisfaction. This has involved:

- focus groups with learners aged 16-18 to explore some of the particular issues for which these learners gave low ratings. A summary of this work is included in the appendix
- workshops with providers to identify the types of action required to lift satisfaction levels and make improvements. Again a summary is included in the appendix.

Those involved in the project are keen that the findings are put to full use. With this in mind, the data from the survey will be made available on the LSC website. It is also intended to supplement this technical report with summary reports for each sector, as well as a summary report giving an overview of the main highlights from the survey for the 2002/03 academic year.

## 2.6 Guidance on interpretation of the data

The FE data has been weighted to correct for over-representation of sixth form college students and under-representation of part-time students. Details of the weighting process are in the technical appendix. The work based learning and adult and community learning data has not been weighted.

Tables for the FE sector show unweighted and weighted bases; that is, numbers of respondents answering the relevant question. For work based learners and adult and community learners, the unweighted bases are shown. Numbers given in brackets indicate that the base size is less than 100 and that such figures should be treated with caution.

As a rough guide, when comparing two samples of 10,000 plus, as in the case of the FE sector total, differences of more than one per cent can be treated as statistically significant. When comparing two samples of 2,000 plus, as in the case of the work based learning sector total, differences of more than two per cent can be treated as statistically significant. And when comparing two samples of 1,000 plus - as in the case of FE provided by adult learning providers - differences of more than three per cent are statistically significant.

Some figures are rounded and may not, therefore, add up to 100 per cent. In cases where answers add to more than 100 per cent because multiple responses have been allowed, a note has been provided.

The following symbols have been used in the tables:

- \* to indicate percentages of less than 0.5 per cent
- to indicate zero per cent.

## 2.7 Terms of reference

**The following terms of reference should be used as a context for descriptions within the report.**

FE	The FE sector includes general FE colleges, sixth form colleges and other FE colleges (comprising agriculture/horticulture, arts and design and designated colleges). It does not include school sixth forms or specialist residential colleges.
Work based learning	FE provided by adult learning providers has been analysed separately. This covers all types of provision, including learners whose training is delivered in the workplace, by a training provider and by colleges.
Early leavers	For FE and FE delivered by adult learning providers, these will be learners that have left their course between the time of drawing the sample and the interviewing period. This means that we will not have included those who started a course and left it before the date that the sample was taken.
Ethnicity	For work based learning, early leavers will be anyone who left the course since entry onto the ILR. We used the data given on the ILR for ethnicity, including the mixed race grouping because we felt the information was more accurate than that given during the telephone interview.
Disability	The questionnaire simply asks the learners if they have any disability or not. Learners with disabilities are, therefore, a self defined group.
Dependants	The survey asks respondents if they are responsible for any children in the home. If so, they are further asked whether they have children under the age of five, children between five and 16 and/or children over 16.
Regression analysis	We have put the data through some extra analysis, including regression analysis. In market research regression analysis is often used to explore the impact (correlation) that particular factors have on an overall score of satisfaction. In this instance, we have looked at the key drivers to overall satisfaction.
Socio-economic grouping	A = Higher managerial, administrative or professional B= Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional C1 = Supervisor or clerical and junior managerial, administrative or professional C2 = Skilled manual workers D = Semi and unskilled manual workers E = State pensioners etc, with no other earnings