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National Learner Satisfaction Survey Highlights from 2002/03

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Partner Organisation

NOP Research Group is the UK arm of NOP World, the ninth largest research agency in the world. In the UK, NOP employs around 600 staff and it is split into specialist divisions. The team working on the LSCs national learner satisfaction survey is in the division that specialises in social research and there are 20 researchers dedicated to this field. The team has relevant experience of both large-scale social research surveys and of carrying out customer satisfaction research.



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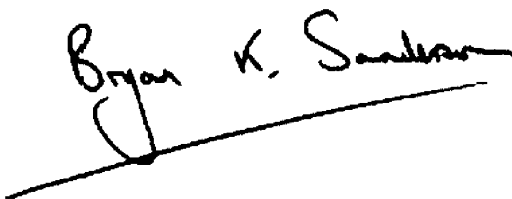
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Foreword

When I announced that the Learning and Skills Council was launching its National Learner Satisfaction Survey, I was unsure what we would find. But like any good business, we needed to know, good or bad, what our customers thought of our product – in this case the education and training they receive.

The survey is the largest survey of the views of learners ever undertaken in this country. It was conducted by a team of independent researchers. Interviews in 2002/03 reflect 2001/02 and show extremely high levels of satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning offered through our three major routes: further education, work based learning and adult and community learning. Findings also indicate areas where further improvements can be made for learners.

The survey findings are something of which our partners in the sector can feel proud. The survey proves that we are progressing from a very strong base in our drive to improve the quality of post-16 education in this country.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bryan K. Sanderson". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a solid horizontal line.

Bryan K Sanderson
Chairman, the Learning and Skills Council

National Learner Satisfaction Survey Highlights from 2002/03

Key Messages

1 The Learning and Skills Council's (LSC's) National Learner Satisfaction Survey is the largest survey of the views of post-16 learners ever undertaken in England. It provides an invaluable insight into learners' perceptions of what is already working well in post-16 education and training and what might be improved.

2 The key message is that we have many reasons to celebrate:

- almost all learners across all provision are satisfied with their learning experience. The number of learners in further education who are 'extremely' satisfied has increased since 2001/02;
- importantly, most learners are also satisfied with the quality of teaching and training, which is the main driver for overall learner satisfaction. This too has increased for learners in further education and work based learning;
- a growing majority of learners who left school with negative feelings about education now feel positive about learning; and
- learners report a wide range of benefits from their learning, including developing skills which can be used for employment.

3 Although satisfied, a substantial number of learners do experience some difficulties while on their course, including financial problems – and this has increased slightly from last year.

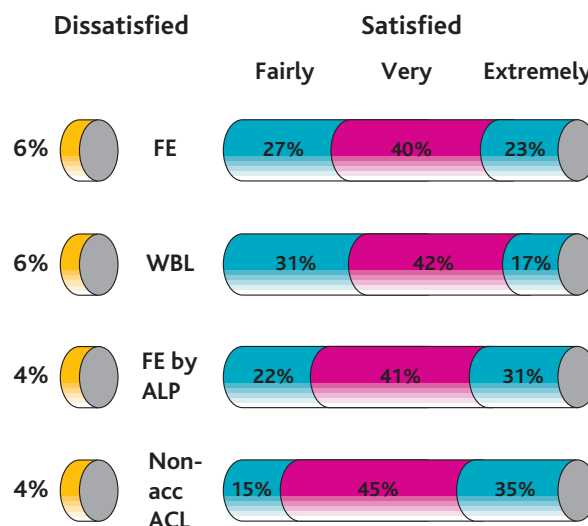
4 Statistical analysis of the survey results provides us with clear priorities for action, which will help colleges and providers improve the quality of the learning experience for learners.

5 The survey is the 'voice of the learner' and responding to its findings will allow us to truly put learners at the heart of what we do.

Overall Satisfaction with the Learning Experience

6 Overall satisfaction with the learning experience is once again very high for all learners across all provision. Importantly, levels of dissatisfaction are low – only 6% of learners in further education (FE) and work based learning (WBL) express any dissatisfaction, and dissatisfaction is even lower for other types of provision. (Chart 1).

Chart 1: Overall, how satisfied are you with your current learning experience at your college, workplace or provider?



FE – Further Education
 FE by ALP – Further Education delivered by Adult Learning Providers
 WBL – Work based learning
 Non-acc ACL – Non-accredited adult and community learning

Bases: FE 19,947, WBL 2,003, FE provided by adult learning providers (FE by ALP) 1,203, non-accredited adult and community learning (non-accredited ACL) 1,958

7 For further education, the number of learners saying they are 'extremely' satisfied has increased since 2001/02. The most significant improvement in the proportion of learners saying they are 'extremely' satisfied has been for sixth form colleges and other FE colleges. For other forms of provision there is very little change in the ratings of 'extremely' satisfied compared with 2001/02. (Chart 2).

Chart 2: Overall satisfaction with the learning experience: rating 'extremely' satisfied by provider type

	2002/03 shows an increase in % extremely satisfied of:
All further education	+3 percentage points
General further education college	+3 percentage points
Sixth form college	+7 percentage points
Other FE college*	+5 percentage points
Work based learning	0 percentage points
FE delivered by Adult Learning Providers	-1 percentage point

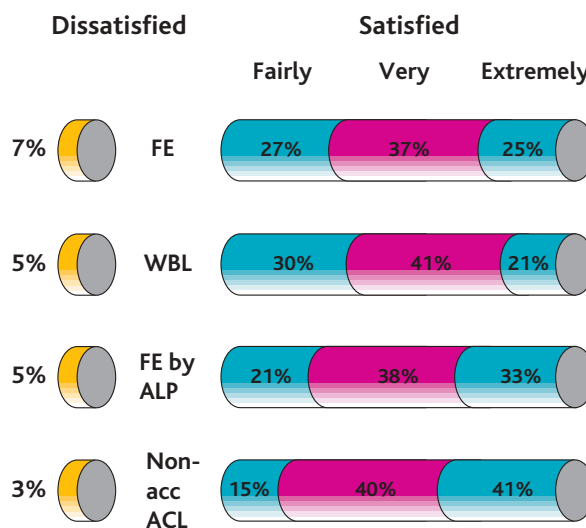
* Other includes agricultural/horticulture colleges, art and design and designated colleges.

8 In 2002/03, although at least 90% of learners are satisfied with their learning experience, the 'fairly' satisfied learners are a key target group. Although they have expressed a level of 'satisfaction', we hope to see the proportion of these learners decreasing over time and the percentage of those who are 'very' or 'extremely' satisfied increasing. Analysis of the 'fairly' satisfied learner reveals that they have slightly worse experiences relating to most measures including: satisfaction with advice pre-entry; likelihood to feel they have chosen the right course; satisfaction with teaching; experience of 'wasted' teaching time; experience of difficulties; satisfaction with support and likelihood to think about leaving the course.

Quality of Teaching and Training

9 In 2001/02, the quality of teaching and training was ascertained to have the biggest influence on overall satisfaction. It is encouraging to see, therefore, that in 2002/03, as in the previous year, there are very high levels of satisfaction with the quality of teaching and training. Across all types of provision, over nine in ten learners are satisfied. (Chart 3).

Chart 3: Overall, how satisfied are you with the quality of teaching or training at your college, provider or workplace?



FE – Further Education
FE by ALP – Further Education delivered by Adult Learning Providers
WBL – Work based learning
Non-acc ACL – Non-accredited adult and community learning

Bases: FE 19,947, WBL 2,003, FE provided by adult learning providers 1,203, non-accredited adult and community learning 1,958

10 Within further education, compared with 2001/02, there has been an increase in the percentage of learners 'extremely' satisfied with the quality of teaching and training in most types of provision – most notably sixth form colleges and other FE colleges (Chart 4).

Chart 4: Overall satisfaction with the quality of teaching: rating 'extremely' satisfied by provider type

	2002/03 shows an increase in % 'extremely' satisfied of:
All further education	+2 percentage points
General further education college	+2 percentage points
Sixth form college	+8 percentage points
Other FE college*	+7 percentage points
Work based learning	+3 percentage points
FE delivered by Adult Learning Providers	-3 percentage points

* Other includes agricultural/horticulture colleges, art and design and designated colleges.

11 The aspects of teaching that receive the highest ratings across all provision are:

- teachers' knowledge of their subject; and
- teachers' ability to relate to the learner as a person.

12 Over 75% of learners are motivated by feedback on their progress from the teacher, but a minority find it demotivating.

13 Aspects of teaching with slightly less positive ratings include the planning of lessons: the quality of learning materials and managing groups of learners. The lowest rated factors are teachers' understanding of how learners like to learn, support they give to learners – for example, in improving study techniques and time management – and setting clear learning targets to help learners improve.

14 More than half of learners in further education and work based learning feel that some lesson or training time is wasted. Over a quarter of these learners think that less than 10% of time is wasted and one in ten think that 10-24% of time is wasted. The reasons cited for causing the wasted time include other learners arriving late, other learners disrupting the class, being left waiting with nothing to do, teachers arriving late, lessons being badly planned, lessons finishing early, and teachers being absent.

Course Choice

15 Course choice is also an important factor in determining learners' levels of satisfaction and correspondingly, in determining the likelihood of their leaving the course early. At least nine out of ten learners feel that they have chosen the right course and results are better in 2002/03 than in 2001/02 for most types of colleges and providers.

16 The main factors that influence learners' choice of course are their ambitions to advance their skills and knowledge; for personal interest; because they like the subject; to gain qualifications; and because of links to career plans or relevance to their current job.

17 More than 96% of learners feel they were made to feel welcome at the college or provider.

Difficulties Encountered

18 The number of learners experiencing a difficulty whilst on their course has increased compared with 2001/02 (Chart 5).

Chart 5: Learners who experience difficulties while on their course

	% of learners experiencing difficulties:	2002/03 shows an increase in % who experienced difficulties:
All further education	61	+11 percentage points
Work based learning	51	+3 percentage points
FE delivered by Adult Learning Providers	54	+10 percentage points
Non-accredited adult and community learning	35	comparative data not available

19 The most frequently cited problems are:

- managing to fit course commitments with other commitments at home (up slightly since 2001/02 for most learners – by 7 percentage points for learners in FE);
- maintaining personal motivation;
- managing to keep up with the standard of work required;
- managing to fit course commitments with other commitments at work; and
- dealing with money pressures (up by 3 percentage points since 2001/02 for learners in FE).

20 Slightly fewer learners are seeking help for their problems in 2002/03. Of those learners who had experienced difficulties, the two groups most likely to seek help are FE learners (27% in 2002/03 compared with 33% in 2001/02) and learners in work based learning (33% in 2002/03 compared with 38% in 2001/02). For those that do seek help, at least three-quarters find the response they receive useful. A small minority do not.

Complaints

21 Around one in ten learners have made complaints about their course or their experience. The most common complaints are about the quality of teaching. Around 37% for FE felt there had been a satisfactory outcome to their complaint but some 40% of complainants felt there was no outcome.

Drivers of Satisfaction and Priorities for Action for Further Education Colleges

22 As in 2001/02, statistical analysis has been used to assess the relative importance of each aspect of teaching and learning in influencing overall levels of satisfaction. Further analysis indicates areas of priorities for action. If action is taken in these priority areas, it should yield the greatest impact on overall satisfaction rates.

23 The key drivers and priorities for action for FE are shown below. The same analysis for learners in work based learning will be provided in the work based learning summary report which will be published in January 2004 and made available on the LSC website (www.lsc.gov.uk).

Key area 1: Quality of Teaching and Training

24 About 40% of learners' satisfaction with their overall learning experience is driven by the quality of teaching and training and so this is by far the most important area in terms of making a difference. The aspects of teaching and training that fall into the 'priorities for action' category are:

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

25 All of the above are high in importance but slightly worse in performance compared with the other teaching-related measures. These are the areas where improvements can be made in order to gain maximum impact on satisfaction with the learning experience.

26 Aspects of teaching and training that are important and are rated highly by learners are:

- how teachers relate to learners;
- teachers' knowledge of the subject; and
- ensuring that feedback is motivating.

27 These aspects will benefit from continued promotion as they are all measures that receive comparatively better ratings.

Key area 2: Pre-entry

28 About a quarter of learners' satisfaction with the overall learning experience is driven by aspects of pre-entry and so this is the second important area to focus on. The aspects of pre-entry that fall into the 'priorities for action' category are:

- ensuring that advice is useful for those who have sought it;
- ensuring that expectations are met (this measure is inextricably linked to the one above); and
- ensuring, where possible, that the learner gets their first choice of provider.

Key area 3: Support for Learners

29 Nineteen percent of learners' satisfaction with the overall learning experience is driven by support for learners. The aspects that fall into the 'priorities for action' category are:

- identifying and responding to learners experiencing difficulties as quickly as possible; and
- ensuring that requests for help and complaints (formal and informal) are understood and handled well.

Key area 4: The Learning Environment

30 Sixteen percent of learners' satisfaction with the overall learning experience is driven by the learning environment. In terms of the facilities that are highest in importance but which receive comparatively lower ratings, there are not many priority areas for action. The two areas revolve around socialising (which the research shows is particularly important for younger learners):

- canteen/café; and
- facilities for socialising.

Other Key Findings

Attitudes to Learning and Effects of the Course

31 Across all providers, about a fifth of learners had negative feelings about education when they left school.

32 Almost three-quarters of learners in further education and non-accredited adult and community learning who previously had a negative attitude towards education are now getting a 'buzz' out of learning. The proportion is higher for learners in FE delivered by adult learning providers where 82% of the group who had negative attitudes now get a 'buzz' out of learning.

33 The figure is much lower for work based learners (as was the case in 2001/02) but nevertheless 45% of learners who had negative feelings about education when they left school now enjoy learning.

34 More learners in all types of providers who left school with a negative attitude, are now getting a 'buzz' from learning than they were in 2001/02 (Chart 6).

Chart 6: Changing attitudes to learning

2002/03 shows an increase in % who left school feeling negative who now get a 'buzz' from learning:	
All further education	+4 percentage points
Work based learning	+5 percentage points
FE delivered by Adult Learning Providers	+9 percentage points

35 When looking at confidence in their ability to learn, over eight in ten learners across all types of providers, who had previously had a negative attitude, agreed that their confidence in learning had increased as a result of their current learning experience.

36 Over 80% of all learners say they have a greater enthusiasm for their subject and in colleges and work based learning, over 80% say they have developed skills they can use for their jobs. Other wider benefits reported by over 50% of learners include:

- feeling more confident socially;
- feeling more confident in their ability to learn;
- feeling more positive about learning than when they started;
- feeling more creative and prepared to try new things; and
- feeling better at learning on their own.

Many learners also felt better at managing their time and responsibilities and that learning had benefited their health and sense of well-being. At least one in five now take a more active part in the community.

Early Leavers

37 About 5% of those interviewed had left their course early. For early leavers in further education, the main reasons for leaving were that the tutor was poor or there were problems with teaching quality (14%); health (15%); too much work (12%); personal problems, pregnancy or difficulties with children or family commitments (12%) and wrong course (11%). For learners in work based learning the main reasons for leaving were changed jobs (18%); wrong course (17%) and lack of support from work (10%). More than 60% of early leavers now have jobs.

38 The full technical report for 2002/03 includes further analysis of early leavers and also of learners who considered leaving but stayed on their course.

Equality and Diversity Messages

39 As seen in 2001/02, although satisfaction is generally high for all groups, there are some variations. Frequent patterns are:

- females being slightly more likely to say that they are 'extremely' satisfied than males;
- the least satisfied in terms of age are younger learners. In 2001/02, this comprised 16-18 year olds, joined in 2002/03 by the 19-24 year olds. The ratings for these slightly older learners, particularly males, have declined since last year;
- white learners are much more likely to be 'extremely' satisfied with the whole experience than minority ethnic learners. The ethnic group least likely to give a top rating are Indian learners;
- learners taking GNVQ and A/AS courses are still the least likely to gain an 'extremely' satisfied rating – although this is likely to link with the younger age of the learners who are more critical as a group altogether;
- learners with disabilities are often more likely to give a top rating of 'extremely' satisfied than those without disabilities;
- learners with children are often more satisfied than those without children; and
- learners with a prior qualification below Level 2 are also generally more satisfied.

40 In-depth analysis across all these groups and by types of provider and provision will be provided in the technical report of the 2002/03 survey findings which will be available on the LSC website in early January 2004.

Conclusions

41 Three major conclusions arise from this presentation of the National Learner Satisfaction Survey. First, the survey provides the LSC with a wealth of detailed information to examine education and training provision from the viewpoint of learners. Secondly, there are a number of messages about key aspects of learners' experience that are important to learners and where colleges and providers can work to bring about improvements.

42 Although most providers already gather feedback from learners to support quality of provision, approaches used vary in their rigour. Therefore, thirdly, the LSC encourages colleges and providers to adopt the core methodology of the National Learner Satisfaction Survey in order to improve the robustness of their own systems and to benchmark their performance against national data.

Other Key Publications

43 The full technical report and summary report from the 2001/02 survey can be found on the LSC website (www.lsc.gov.uk).

The 2002/03 full technical report and three summary reports for further education, work based learning and adult learning will be available on the LSC website in January 2004. Hard copies of the summary reports will be available in January 2004. For further information on the National Learner Satisfaction Survey, contact Neil Robertson (neil.robertson@lsc.gov.uk).

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