

Learner satisfaction rises again

Learner satisfaction has risen again and is at its highest level for four years according to the LSC's annual survey of learners' attitudes to learning experiences.

Quizzing 43,000 learners across Further Education, Work-Based Learning and Adult and Community Learning between February and June 2005, the National Learner Satisfaction Survey (NLSS) for 2004/05 reveals the percentages of learners saying they are 'extremely', 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with their overall learning experience in each sector of LSC-funded provision are:

- Further Education (FE) – 90 per cent
- Work-Based Learning (WBL) – 90 per cent
- FE delivered by adult learning providers – 93 per cent
- Non-accredited Adult and Community Learning (ACL) – 94 per cent.

Learners were questioned about satisfaction levels relating to different aspects of their learning experience: quality of teaching; management of learning; pre-entry advice and guidance; learner support; and the benefits and impacts of learning.

Melanie Hunt, LSC National Director of Learning, said: "The findings of the National Learner Satisfaction Survey are a tremendous achievement for the FE sector. The LSC is delighted that learners' experiences are improving year on year: these improvements suggest that *agenda for change* and initiatives like *Success for All* are delivering significant benefits for learners."

Bill Rammell, Minister of State, Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education added: "This increase in learner satisfaction marks another step forward in the Government's drive towards excellence. Everyone in the sector who has been involved should be justifiably proud."

Tailored analyses of the results are available through the research tools website <http://researchtools.lsc.gov.uk> which contains the complete NLSS 2004/05 dataset.

Leading learning and skills

update

July 2006

The Newsletter for Partners and Stakeholders of the Learning and Skills Council

Awards highlight real value of training

The LSC's third annual Apprenticeship Awards were held on June 15 and celebrated the huge contribution that high quality skills training makes to business success for employers and personal achievement for young employees in the nation's workforce.

British Gas, winner of the Large Employer of the Year Award, employs 650 apprentices and has found its apprentices to be 25 per cent more productive than staff trained elsewhere. "We fully recognise the business benefits of growing our own engineers, they live the culture and our customer service principles are embedded from the very outset," says National Training Manager Willie Nicoll.

Stephen Gardner, the LSC's Director of Apprenticeships, said: "While great progress is being made in meeting this country's skills challenges, our research shows that 16 per cent of employers are still reporting skills gaps in their workforces.

"Therefore, it is imperative that businesses continue to invest in staff training and skills development. With this in mind, we are thrilled to recognise those employers who are investing in the skills of young people to safeguard the workforce of the future."

Apprenticeships, funded and promoted by the LSC, are a combination of on and off-the-job training. They provide 130,000 employers with a means to address recruitment difficulties and ensure a skilled and productive workforce. Currently 270,000 young people aged 16–24 are undertaking an Apprenticeship.

Award winners included:

- Medium-sized employer winner: Slack & Parr
- Small employer of the year: Benchmark
- Advanced Apprentice of the Year Award: John Vickery
- Apprentice of the Year Award: Sarah Herrick
- Personal Achiever of the Year Award (16–18): Jessie Todd
- Personal Achiever of the Year Award (19–24): Lucy Wilkins
- Young Apprentice of the Year: Matthew McCarry

Award details can be found at www.apprenticeships.org.uk. To showcase initiatives being developed by employers to get the most out of Apprenticeships, the LSC launched the Employer Best Practice Guide at the Awards. A copy can be downloaded from the Apprenticeships website.

Get up to speed about specialised Diplomas

Specialised Diplomas, a key element of 14 –19 reform are set to be introduced from September 2008.

The series of new Diplomas will offer young people a real alternative to 'traditional' learning styles through an imaginative, high quality blend of general education and applied learning. The aim is that the new qualifications will accommodate a wide range of aspirations to take a young person wherever they want to go, whether into further or higher education or into the world of work.

The Diplomas will be available in fourteen lines of learning at Levels 1, 2 and 3, covering all sectors of the economy, and they will be rolled out progressively from September 2008, when the first five will be available for teaching in:

- health and social care
- construction and the built environment
- engineering
- IT
- creative and media

Preparation for the introduction of Diplomas is already underway with proposed content for the first five in development. This will allow schools, colleges and others to begin to consider what the new qualifications will mean for them. From 2013, all 14–19 year olds will have the right to take a Diploma course wherever they are in the country. Schools, colleges and others will be expected to deliver specialised Diplomas as part of a collaborative local partnership, rather than independently.

Local partnerships interested in offering any of the first five Diplomas from September 2008 will need to pass through a Gateway process, which will assess their readiness to deliver.

This will identify which providers can offer the Diplomas from 2008, and ensure that they have access to the necessary support as they prepare to do so.

Good local partnerships are key to the successful introduction of the Diplomas and the new national entitlement. From September 2006, all areas of the country will be expected to have a 14–19 partnership in place.

Guidance has been published to support Local Authorities, local LSCs and providers in creating successful and sustainable partnerships and is available on the 14–19 Gateway area of the DfES website (www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19), which also contains more information on the Gateway process.

Partnerships that wish to pass through the Gateway should begin working with their local LSC and Local Authority straight away to begin planning.

If you have any queries about specialised Diplomas, contact diploma@qca.org.uk. This is a joint enquiry point from the DfES, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and the Sector Skills Development Agency.

Talk to 'Des'

The LSC has launched a consultation service offering education providers and stakeholders an opportunity to influence the future for disabled people.

Talk to Des is a dedicated email address for those who wish to receive further information or who want to submit their views about national LSC functions or policies which make it difficult for disabled people.

The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 introduced a public duty aimed at promoting equality for people with disabilities including employees or service users or those who wish to be such.

Authorities such as the LSC, also have the additional responsibility of producing a Disability Equality Scheme (DES) and an action plan to achieve improvement. The target date for publishing Disability Equality Schemes and action plans is 4 December 2006.

The LSC is already reviewing its national functions and policies to identify those that are relevant to disability equality, and to further identify potential barriers to access or participation for disabled people, whether employees or learners.

As part of this process it will be involving (active participation) disabled people and others in developing its DES and action plan.

Talk to Des can be reached at des@lsc.gov.uk

£10.5M funding for sixth form growth

The LSC has set aside £10.5 million to give exceptional and limited support to schools with significantly expanding sixth forms in 2006/07.

As part of Priorities for Success, the LSC's funding strategy for 2006/07, the LSC is adjusting school sixth form allocations to reflect changing pupil numbers in the following year's allocations, not through an 'in year' adjustment as previously.

The LSC recognises, from consultation, the difficulties faced by some schools with significantly expanding sixth forms in 2006/07, the first year of the revised funding arrangements.

This exceptional funding will be for 2006/07 only. It represents the 'savings' from a marginally lower than projected 2005 sixth form intake and will be used to support local agreements on expansion, as well as providing a transition from making an in-year adjustment.

Information about the exceptional funding and the criteria that apply is available in a new document, *Exceptional Funding for Significant School Sixth Form Growth in 2006/07*, on the LSC website.

Sustainable development high on FE agenda

Sustainable development practices are being integrated into everyday operations by learning and skills providers in England, with over half of FE institutions having a sustainable development policy in place, according to new research commissioned by the LSC.

The research report supports the LSC's Sustainable Development Strategy, *From Here to Sustainability*. Over 150 FE colleges and learning providers participated in the survey, which revealed FE institutions are taking account of sustainability and environmental issues in every aspect of their operation from management and building design to teaching and the development of the curriculum.

The report revealed that over two thirds have completed sustainability audits and half report that their buildings operate good sustainable development practice. One in three have a sustainable development 'champion' to drive change and 77 per cent of institutions have students undertaking volunteering activity in the community as part of their learning programmes.

Mary Heslop, LSC Policy Director, said: "The findings represent a real achievement for the FE sector. Not only is the sector working hard to improve the learning environments for our students but our efforts are crucially educating learners, teachers and the wider community on how to live in a more sustainable and environmentally aware way."

The findings were the focus of a conference, *'From Here to Sustainability'*, in June. Mary Heslop added: "With sustainable development high on the public agenda, there is increasingly recognition that sustainability is an issue for today, not tomorrow. That's why we highlighted at the conference that we expect all providers to carry out an audit and put in place a sustainable development action plan.

As part of its commitment to sustainable development, the LSC commissioned the Turner Townsend Report, which examined the relationship between design quality, costs and sustainable development.

As a result, the LSC is uplifting its capital investment costs criteria for providers by 10 per cent, a ring-fenced amount targeted specifically at sustainable elements of building design, construction and services.

The research was carried out by the Learning and Skills Network (LSN). For further information on the report go to www.lsneducation.org.uk/events.

Great places to learn

The LSC Capital Grants Council met in June to approve grants from its capital budget and to confirm changes to its capital policies and grant arrangements.

Plans approved ranged from the relocation of the Joseph Chamberlain and Gateway Colleges to new skills centres at City College, Birmingham and Ashfield School.

The Council agreed to extend the present feasibility fee support arrangements to include three levels of pre-contract fee support, for larger projects in particular. These changes will enable colleges to work up applications, both in principle and in detail, to a greater degree of certainty and in some cases bring in specialist advisers and project managers at an earlier stage.

This is intended to help reduce the time taken for project implementation programmes and focus pre-contract design activity.

An agreement in principal was also reached that will see colleges given the opportunity to apply to increase project costs by up to 10 per cent of net building costs providing that they can demonstrate effective sustainability in design and construction.

Appropriate criteria are currently being considered and further details will also be announced in the LSC's new Capital Handbook later this summer.

Philip Head, Director Infrastructure & Property Services at the LSC said: "The LSC is committed to the redevelopment of the further education estate to create the high quality colleges and campuses that are essential for young people to develop skills fit for the modern economy. To support this priority, the LSC makes capital grants available towards the cost of many building and redevelopment projects that are underway or in planning in the learning and skills sector around the country."

Further details of these changes and how to apply for fee support (which will apply to all qualifying projects approved on an in principle basis since 1 April 2006) will be published in the LSC's new Capital Handbook later this summer.

Colleges with any queries should contact the LSC's Regional Property Adviser or ring or email Bally Mandara or Paul Stokes at the LSC's national property Services team for further information.

- Bally Mandara – Bally.Madara@lsc.gov.uk
024 7682 3220
- Paul Stokes – Paul.Stokes@lsc.gov.uk
024 7682 5608

Full details of the Council's meeting can be found online at www.lsc.gov.uk

'Seize the day'

College leaders attending the LSC's *agenda for change* roadshows throughout the nine English regions in June and July were told that there had never been a better time for the FE sector to 'seize the day' and play its rightful role in equipping the nation's workforce with the skills it needed.

LSC Chief Executive Mark Hayson and Ray Dowd, the LSC's *agenda for change* Champion, together with LSC Regional Directors, urged college principals and other senior partners from further education institutions around the country to drive forward the vitally-important transformation programme in the FE sector.

This was the third year the summer roadshows have been held to report progress and gather feedback from the sector and they have proved to be invaluable events in maintaining the momentum of *agenda for change* and its seven key themes, which includes the transformation of the LSC itself into a smaller, more dynamic organisation. Mark Haysom assured colleges leaders that the roadshows were a great opportunity, in particular, for the LSC to listen carefully to the views of people on the frontline of post-16 education and training on the issues and challenges of most concern to them in transforming the sector and delivering the objectives in the Skills and 14–19 White Papers and the more recent FE White Paper.

The Chief Executive said that together, the sector and the LSC had so far delivered on the key objectives they had been set – there were now more 16–18 young people in learning than ever before; the Apprenticeships PSA target had been achieved and Skills for Life targets to improve adult literacy and numeracy had been exceeded. These were successes to build on through *agenda for change* and achieve the aim of creating a high quality, demand-led system of post-16 education and training that was more responsive to the needs of employers, individuals and local communities.

Ray Dowd, reviewing progress on the key themes of *agenda for change*, also stressed the vital role the FE sector has to play in providing skills for the national economy. It was essential, he told college leaders, that the pace of change in the sector was stepped up and that further education became more efficient, flexible and responsive. Through the transformation programme, he told the roadshows, there had never been a better time for colleges and other training institutions to "seize the day."

For more information visit www.lsc.gov.uk

Sector Data

The LSC collects, analyses and publishes statistical information from and about the sector it funds.

This includes benchmarking data, college accounts, data collected by the LSC and Statistical First Releases. Sector Data can be accessed through the Documents Channel of the LSC website (www.lsc.gov.uk) under Subject Listing. More published data and information about data collection can also be found in the Data Section of the Partners Channel on the website.

Simplifying providers' returns

The LSC has published all funding estimate/claim forms and Individualised Learner Record (ILR) funding auditor opinions for the year 2006/07 in a new online booklet.

The booklet will prove useful to every further education (FE) provider, each of which is required to provide the LSC with three returns for 2006/07 stating the learner numbers and associated total funding estimated or generated by the college or other provider with reference to the 2006/07 FE funding allocation.

The booklet provides guidance to colleges, other providers and funding auditors on how to complete and return the forms and sets out the deadlines for the various returns required from colleges and other providers for 2006/07. It also includes the annual self-declaration form on partner providers introduced from 2005/06.

It also includes an example of a reconciliation statement, together with guidance on the calculation of any retrospective clawback of funds for 2006/07 for non-plan-led funding providers. Any updates to this booklet will be published on the LSC website from summer 2006.

The booklet, *FE ILR Funding Estimate/Claim 2006/07*, together with annexes, is available on the Documents Channel of the LSC website (www.lsc.gov.uk) under Subject Listing/Funding Learning/Further Education.

Summer break

LSC Update will be taking a break over the summer and will return rejuvenated in the autumn.

LSC Update is published monthly and is available in hard copy and online versions. It can be downloaded from our website (www.lsc.gov.uk) through the Documents section of our national home page by selecting Series on the menu bar.

We value your views, so please let us have your comments on the content and style, or any ideas on how you think we could improve LSC Update at lscupdate@lsc.gov.uk.

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