

June 2002

Learners have their say

The most comprehensive survey of post-16 education and training to be conducted in England has been launched by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

Known as the 'National Learner Satisfaction Survey', it aims to provide a wealth of information to help the LSC and other stakeholders improve the quality of education and training for young people and adults aged over 16.

A total of 112,000 current and past students and trainees will be questioned in stages over five years about their learning experiences.

The study began during 2002 and will be conducted annually until at least 2006.

The project is central to the LSC's pledge to put learners first in its drive to significantly raise skills levels among young people and adults.

The LSC's first corporate plan, published in 2001, promised to give learners – its 'customers' – a say in their provision. This is essential to enable the Council to achieve its key targets for significantly widening participation and improving achievement in post-16 learning.

Satisfaction

The survey will gather a nationally representative sample of data that measures learners' levels of satisfaction with the education or training they receive from LSC-funded providers.

The aim is to establish national yardsticks which, when monitored and assessed over time, will reveal crucial trends in learner provision and point to where improvements are needed.

Analysis of the in-depth data will help the LSC shape its future policies and focus post-16 facilities and services more keenly on the needs of learners. It will also provide vital evidence to allow the LSC and learning providers to take action to improve the quality of their provision.

Feedback

It will provide crucial feedback on a whole range of post-16 issues, such as:

- learners' motivation for learning
- quality of teaching or training
- impact of learning on individuals
- reasons for leaving courses or failure to complete learning programmes.

Learners are being asked to provide general demographic information relating to their ethnic group, gender and any disability. The LSC wants to gauge if learners' experiences are of the same quality, irrespective of their backgrounds. They will be asked about any potential barriers to learning they encounter, such as money pressures or discrimination, and the quality of facilities, such as childcare, IT or sports amenities.

The survey is not intended to duplicate local surveys by colleges and other providers.

Findings will be reported at national and regional level and will be made public to colleges, other education and training providers and interested parties directly on the LSC's Internet website (www.lsc.gov.uk) or via a link to a dedicated site.

The survey will examine provision in all categories of post-16 learning for which the LSC is responsible, including further education colleges, work-based learning and adult and community learning provision.

The survey will be extended later to gather information from pupils in school sixth forms.

The powerful initiative will investigate existing provision across a wide range of learning – from basic skills programmes for adults with poor literacy and numeracy and trainees taking NVQ qualifications as part of a Modern Apprenticeship while in employment, through to school sixth formers or college students studying GCE A levels.

An examination of provision in specialist residential colleges for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities will be built into the study at a later date.

The LSC is creating a high-level advisory group that is likely to include representatives of the Association of Colleges (AoC) and the Association of Learning Providers (ALP). The intention is to ensure the survey benefits all the parties in post-16 learning.

The group will assist the LSC in examining the findings and deciding how best use can be made of the data.

Data protection

The LSC has been careful from the outset to consider the implications of the *Data Protection Act 1998* to ensure the sampling process adopted for further education colleges and external institutions is appropriate.

The LSC's legal advice is very clear and includes confirmation from the Data Protection Commissioner's office that the LSC's approach to the learner survey and sampling of learners in colleges and other providers is appropriate.

NOP World, one of the UK's most respected research agencies, has been commissioned to conduct the study.

In 2002, it will comprise two stages of fieldwork involving thousands of learners. The first took place during April and May, with the second scheduled for June/July. Final results for the year are expected to be published in the autumn.

In the four years between 2003 to 2006, fieldwork will be carried out in the spring, summer and autumn and annual results will be published from each year's findings. Each year a total of 24,000 learners will take part.

In total, 112,000 learners will provide feedback over the five years. Learners taking part are selected at random from within post-16 categories with the assistance of colleges and other providers.

The survey is being conducted by telephone using a largely standard questionnaire. Face-to-face interviews are being conducted, where necessary.

The Learning and Skills Council was set up by the Government in April 2001 to take over the roles of the former Further Education Funding Council and Training and Enterprise Councils. It has a national office and 47 local LSCs.

Its creation was the biggest single investment in post-16 education and training the country has seen. It represents the first truly unified approach to the challenge of attracting people into learning, improving the quality of provision and raising the skills of young people and adults.

The LSC's total budget is £7.3 billion in 2002-03.

For further information about the Learning and Skills Council, visit our web site (www.lsc.go.uk) or call our help line on 0845 019 4170.