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Seeking the Views of Learners: Findings from the LSC's first national learner satisfaction survey 2001/02

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Summary Report



Learning+Skills Council

Partner Organisation

NOP was commissioned to conduct the survey following a rigorous European tendering process.

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 LSC's 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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Foreword

Any good business will tell you it is vital to listen to the views of customers in order to improve. In the case of the Learning and Skills Council and the post-16 education and training sector, this means the learners who are at the heart of everything we do.

That is why I am so pleased to introduce this report detailing the early findings of the first comprehensive and wholly independent survey of education and training in England for people aged 16 and over.

We have asked learners what they think and they have told us. They will continue to do so over the next four years as interviews are conducted with more than 110,000 people undertaking further education, work based learning and adult and community learning courses across the country.

This will allow us to build a truly comprehensive picture of learner perceptions and to implement changes necessary to achieve the levels of world-class education and training to which we are committed.

These early findings, the result of 13,000 interviews, indicate high levels of satisfaction with learning provision, of which the sector should be rightly proud. They also highlight areas where improvements are needed and we will work with our partners to ensure that these are made.

This national learner survey was central to our first corporate plan and, 18 months after our creation, it has borne its first fruits. I would like to thank the many organisations that formed the advisory group overseeing the research, Professor John Bull who chaired it, the colleges and providers who supported it and NOP, which carried out the work.

Above all I would like to thank the thousands of learners who have given their time to provide us with the information we need to make a difference.



Bryan K. Sanderson
Chairman, The Learning and Skills Council

The survey is designed to help the LSC and its partners understand and respond better to learners' needs. Its main aims are to measure the degree of learners' satisfaction with LSC provision across England and to establish a benchmark against which trends in levels of satisfaction can be identified.

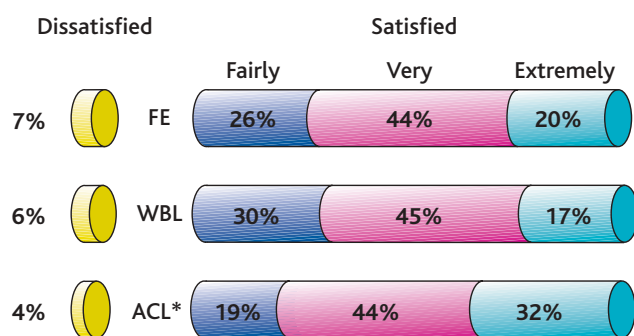
Introduction

- 1 The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) was set up in April 2001 to secure the funding and planning of education and training for over 16 year olds in England including those in further education, adult and community learning and work based training for young people. Early in 2002, the LSC commissioned NOP to carry out an independent national learner satisfaction survey, covering learners in these three sectors. NOP was responsible for the collection of data and reporting the findings.
- 2 The survey is designed to help the LSC and its partners understand and respond better to learners' needs. Its main aims are to measure learners' levels of satisfaction with LSC provision across England and to establish benchmarks against which to monitor trends in learners' levels of satisfaction.
- 3 This report summarises the findings from the first two waves of a five-year, 15-wave research programme. Over 13,000 telephone interviews were carried out with a randomly selected sample of learners in further education, work based learners and learners in adult and community provision during wave one (15 April to 17 May 2002) and wave two (5 June to 14 August 2002). This provides a solid, initial base of evidence on learner satisfaction and needs. It will be supplemented by further work, possibly involving:
 - qualitative research to deepen our understanding of the issues faced by particular learner groups;
 - longitudinal research to assess the link between learner satisfaction and the outcome of their learning; and
 - correlation of learner satisfaction data with other quality measures.
- 4 The findings are covered under the following headings:
 - overall satisfaction with the learning experience;
 - satisfaction with teaching/training;
 - course choice;
 - early impressions;
 - early leavers and learners seriously thinking of leaving;
 - satisfaction with facilities;
 - problems encountered and complaints made;
 - current attitudes to learning and effects of the course; and
 - summary and conclusions.
- 5 This report covers the main highlights of the survey and focuses on:
 - further education including general further education colleges, sixth form colleges and agriculture/horticulture, art and design and designated colleges. Specialist residential colleges for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are not included;
 - work based learning; and
 - accredited adult and community learning.
- 6 The survey also covered non-accredited adult and community learning. The findings for this are not described in this report. They are, however, covered in the full technical report, together with detailed descriptions of the finding for further education, work based learning and accredited adult and community learning. The full report also provides a detailed explanation of the sampling methodology. It can be accessed on www.lsc.gov.uk.

Overall Satisfaction with the Learning Experience

7 Overall satisfaction with the learning experience is high. The percentages of learners describing themselves as extremely or very satisfied are shown in chart 1.

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



Base: further education (10,000), work based learning (2,032), accredited adult and community learning (723).

*Non-accredited adult and community learning not included

8 Importantly, the levels of reported dissatisfaction are low.

9 Satisfaction levels are largely influenced by aspects of the learning experience, and quality of teaching/training is the most important of these. Satisfaction is also influenced by factors such as learners' motivation and by the type and length of course or learning programme. Consistently across all our groups, older and part-time learners report higher levels of satisfaction than their full-time younger counterparts, which is partly the reason for the higher satisfaction scores shown in the accredited adult and community learning sector.

What drives satisfaction?

10 Across all three sectors, the quality of teaching is the dominant influence on learners' levels of satisfaction with their overall learning experience. This is shown by the reasons that respondents themselves cite for satisfaction and dissatisfaction. It is also backed up by statistical analysis which has been used to derive drivers of satisfaction. The process involves establishing a correlation between how learners feel about different components of the learning experience and how satisfied they are with their experience overall.

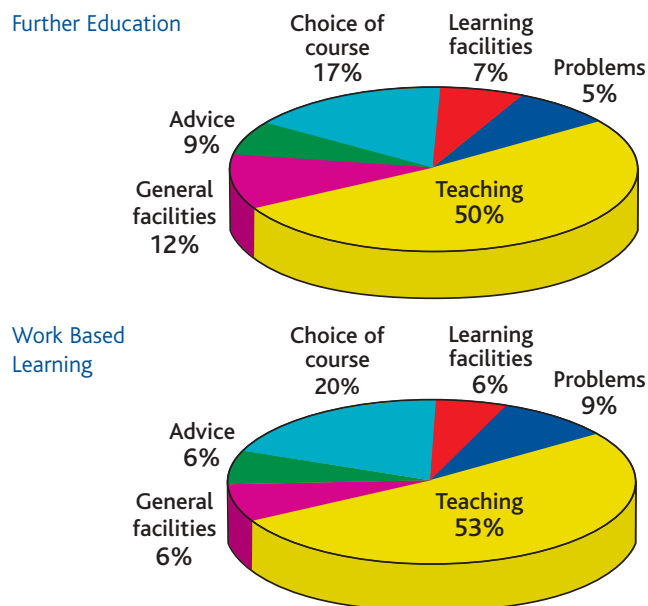
2 Overall satisfaction with the learning experience

The components of the learning experience were grouped as follows:

- teaching;
- choice of course;
- general facilities;
- learning related facilities;
- advice received; and
- problems experienced.

11 Charts 2 and 3 show the relative influence of these different factors on overall levels of satisfaction among learners in the further education and work based learning sectors, the two sectors for which we had the largest sample sizes. A similar analysis can be carried out for accredited adult and community learning after future waves, once the sample size is sufficiently large.

Charts 2 and 3. What drives satisfaction?



12 The picture for further education and work based learning provision is similar.

- Teaching is the main driver followed by choice of course.
- Facilities are more important as determinants of satisfaction for further education learners than they are for work based learners and there is a distinction between general facilities, for example canteens and facilities for socialising, and learning-related facilities such as information technology centres and libraries. The former play a more influential role among further education learners.

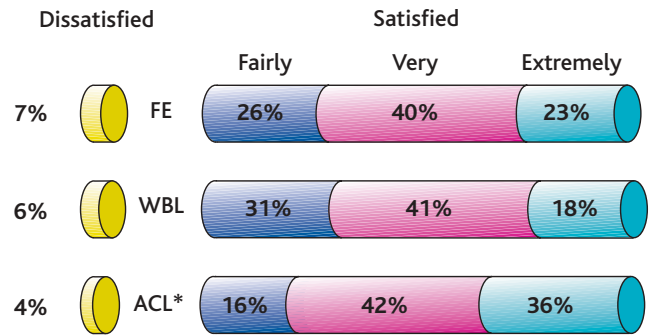
Satisfaction with Teaching/Training

- 13 Given that quality of teaching is a major contributor to satisfaction it is good to see that learners rank most aspects of teaching fairly highly, and some, very highly.
- 14 Satisfaction with the quality of teaching broadly tallies with learners' levels of satisfaction with the learning experience overall. The percentages of learners saying they are extremely or very satisfied with the quality of teaching are shown in chart 4.

Further education

- 15 There is some variation in the levels of satisfaction expressed by different groups of learners. Although levels of satisfaction are high amongst all groups, they are lower amongst younger learners and certain groups of ethnic minority learners. Chart 5 shows the percentages of learners who say that they are extremely or very satisfied with the overall quality of teaching.

Chart 4. Overall, how satisfied are you with the quality of teaching or training at your college, provider or workplace?



Base: further education (10,000), work based learning (2,032), accredited adult and community learning (723)
 *Non-accredited adult and community learning not included

Chart 5. Percentage of learners who are extremely or very satisfied with the overall quality of teaching (further education)



16 The aspects of teaching (chart 6) which receive the highest ratings from learners relate to the teachers':

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

These are positive strengths and indicate the learners valuing and respecting teachers. The lowest rated factor is 'understanding you and how you like to learn'.

17 The following groups give ratings that are consistently below average.

Group	Factors given a low rating
16 to 18 year olds	Understanding you and how you like to learn. Making the subject interesting and enjoyable. Managing the group of learners.
Ethnic minority students (particularly Asian and mixed race)	Understanding you and how you like to learn. Making the subject interesting and enjoyable. How well they relate to you as a person.
Indian students	All aspects relating to management of learning (rather than the management of the learner).

Difficulties in engaging younger learners are more common on level 3 courses than level 1 and 2 courses.

18 It is also noteworthy that 16 year olds in sixth form colleges give consistently higher ratings for teaching than their counterparts (16 to 18 year olds studying level 3 in general further education colleges). General further education college learners are most critical of aspects such as the planning of lessons and management of the group of learners.

Chart 6. How would you rate teachers/trainers on the following aspects of teaching/training? (ratings given for learners in further education)



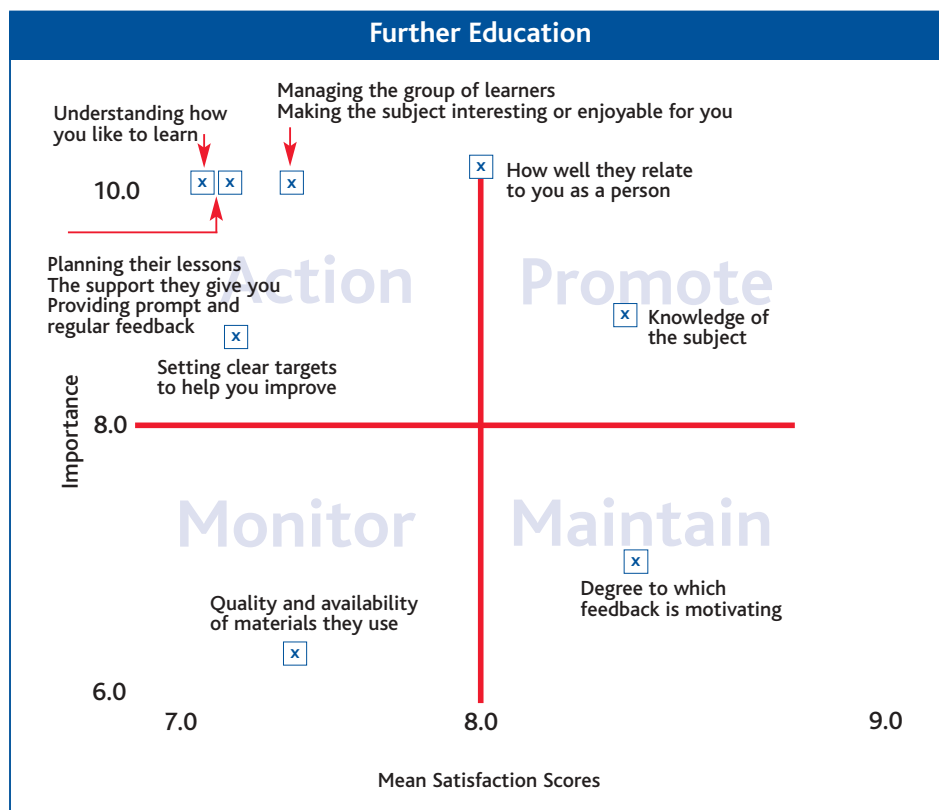
Effective use of learning sessions

19 Just under half the learners in the further education sector feel that at least some of their teaching hours are not put to good use, with 12% saying that over a quarter of teaching hours are unproductive. In line with other data, it is the 16 to 18 years olds studying for level 3 who are most likely to come to this conclusion. Those studying in general further education colleges feel that more lessons are wasted than those in sixth form colleges.

20 When asked why they feel some lessons are unproductive, the reasons given mainly relate to:

- being left waiting around (17%);
- staff shortages, including cancellation of lessons (13%);
- student disruption (which links in with the lower ratings on management of the learner group) (12%); and
- boring teaching styles (10%).

Chart 7. Diagram showing the aspects of teaching that are most important to learners, and their levels of satisfaction with each key aspect



Note: The axis on the grid is built around the scores given, so it does not start at zero. There are no mean satisfaction scores below seven out of ten and no mean importance scores below six out of ten.

*Includes general further education college, sixth form colleges and agriculture/horticulture, art and design and designated colleges

Priorities for action

21 Statistical analysis was used to assess the relative importance of each aspect of teaching in influencing overall levels of satisfaction. This can be mapped against mean satisfaction scores to highlight relative priorities. Looking at chart 7, those elements which appear in the top left-hand quarter of the grid have a higher priority, in that they attract lower performance scores but have a higher impact on satisfaction relative to the others. In order of priority, the main aspects of teaching and learning for colleges to address relate to:

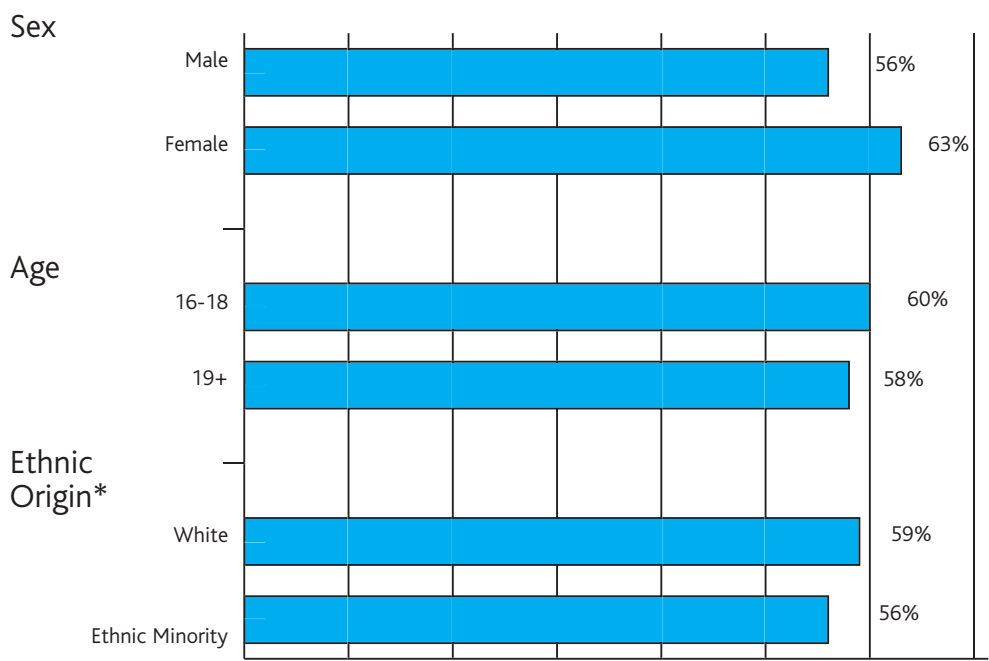
- understanding how you like to learn;
- the support given;
- planning of lessons;
- prompt and regular feedback;
- managing the group of learners;
- making the subject interesting and enjoyable; and
- target-setting.

As already discussed, the priority for addressing these aspects of teaching and learning is higher for some groups of learners than for others.

Work based learning

22 Whilst there were relatively few gender-related differences in rating the quality of teaching in further education, these were quite marked amongst work based learners (chart 8). Female trainees give a higher rating to the overall quality of teaching/training compared with male trainees, 63% saying they were extremely or very satisfied compared with 56% of male trainees.

Chart 8. Percentage of learners who are extremely or very satisfied with the overall quality of teaching (work based learning)



*At this point, it is not statistically robust to breakdown ethnicity into individual ethnic minority groups from the sample

- 23 Ratings given to the different aspects of teaching and training are similar to those for learners in the further education sector (chart 9).
- 24 Although in general, satisfaction rates are high, the groups of learners which appeared to be least satisfied with the quality of teaching are listed in the adjacent table, together with the factors that were given a lower rating.

Group	Factors given a low rating
Male learners	How well they relate to you as a person. Understanding you and how you like to learn. Making the subject interesting and enjoyable. The support they give you (particularly those aged 19 or over). Setting clear targets to help you improve. Prompt, regular feedback on progress.
Learners with level 3 qualifications on entry	Most factors.
Learners whose training is delivered by colleges	The support they give you. How well they relate to you as a person.

Chart 9. How would you rate teachers/trainers on the following aspects of teaching/training? (ratings given for work based learners)



Base: All rating
Work based learners 2,032

25 The quality of the trainer/learner relationship is significantly lower for male learners than it is for female learners. It is also notable that older males (aged 19 or over) give the lowest rating of any group for the support provided.

Effective use of learning sessions

26 As with further education, just under half the work based learners felt that some of their training hours were not productive. The reasons for wastage are also very similar. They include:

- learner disruption (16%);
- being left waiting around (14%);
- boring teaching styles (10%); and
- staff shortages, including cancellation of training sessions (9%).

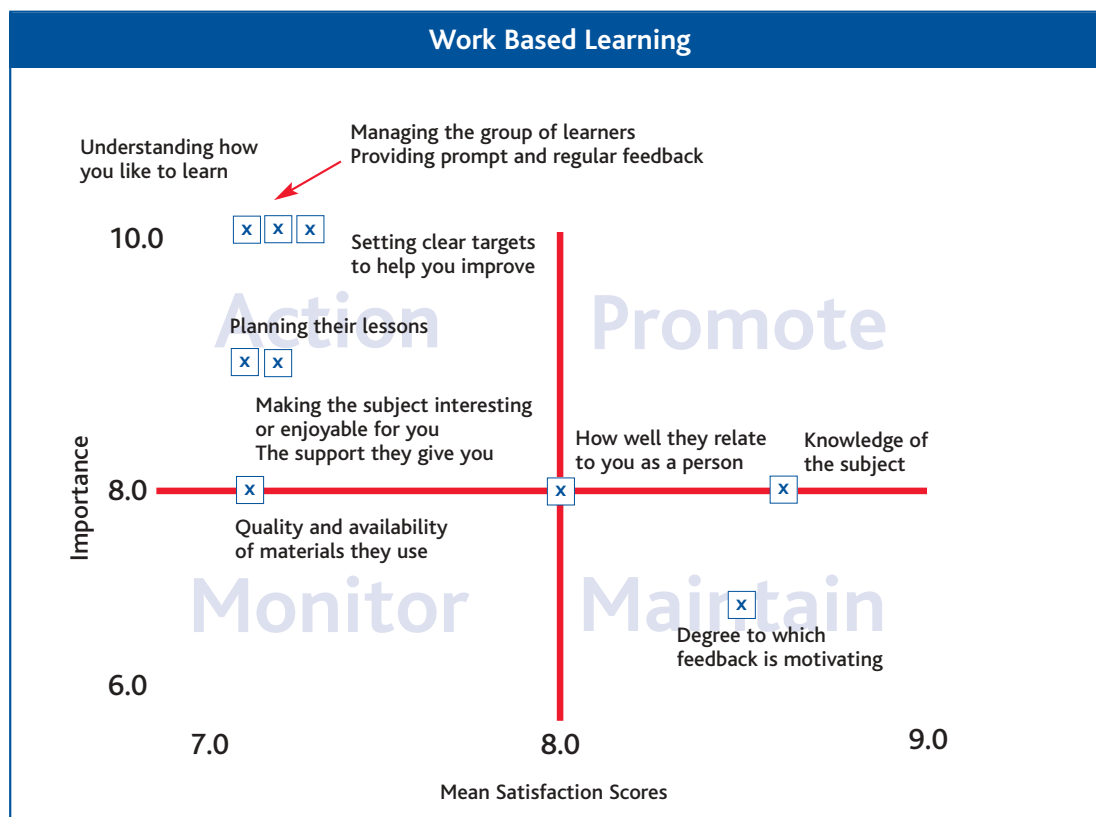
Priorities for action

27 In order of priority, the main aspects for training and learning for providers to address relate to:

- understanding how you like to learn;
- managing the group of learners;
- providing prompt and regular feedback;
- setting clear targets;
- planning learning sessions;
- making the subject interesting or enjoyable; and
- the support they give to learners.

Chart 10 shows all aspects of training and where the priorities lie.

Chart 10. Diagram showing the aspects of training that are most important to learners, and their levels of satisfaction with each key aspect



Note: The axis on the grid is built around the scores given, so it does not start at zero. There are no mean satisfaction scores below seven out of ten and no mean importance scores below six out of ten

Accredited adult and community learning

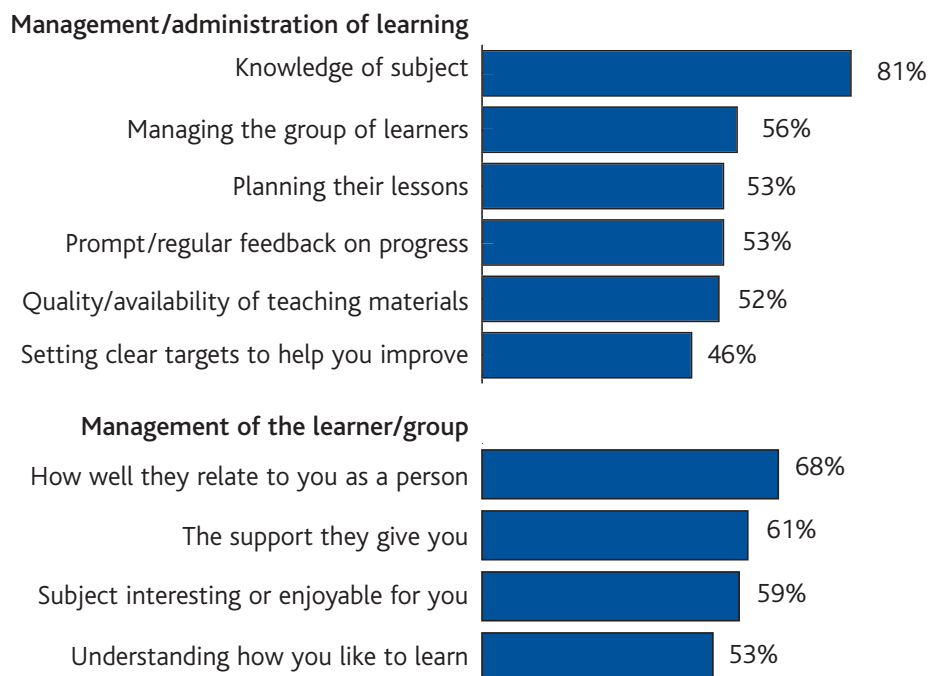
- 28 In this sector we identified very few problems. All ratings are high. The aspect of teaching with which adult and community learners on accredited courses expressed least satisfaction was the setting of clear targets (chart 11).
- 29 Relatively few learners in accredited adult and community provision feel that there are teaching hours which are unproductive (33%). They are most likely to mention lack of time with the tutor as a factor in how time is wasted.

Course Choice

- 30 Choice of course is an important factor in determining learners' levels of satisfaction and, correspondingly, in determining the likelihood of their leaving the course early. Reasons for choosing a particular subject and course vary principally by age, but there are also some interesting differences related to gender and ethnicity.

- 31 For those in further education, the predominant reasons are a mix of personal interest and career-related factors (table 1). Qualifications are a factor, but are only mentioned by 27% of learners, perhaps reflecting the fact that they are seen as a means to an end rather than an end in themselves. Work based learners are much more likely to give career-related motivations than the other types of learner and the employer's role and influence is cited in 19% of cases. Learners in accredited adult and community provision mainly cite personal interest factors, but not exclusively. Around 28% mention work-related reasons.

Chart 11. How would you rate teachers/trainers on the following aspects of teaching/training? (ratings given for learners on accredited adult and community courses)



Base: All rating
Accredited adult and community learning 723

32 Age influences motivation. It is also a key variable when looking at whether learners feel they have chosen the right course. In general, older learners are more confident that they have made the right choice. Given that choice of course is such an important factor, it is good to see that over 90% of all learners feel they have made the right choice. It should be borne in mind, however, that our survey does not include the 'earliest' of the early leavers in further education or accredited adult and community learning, that is those who left within the first two months of the autumn term.

Further education

33 There are interesting differences between certain groups of learners in their motives for choosing particular courses:

- ethnic minority students were generally more likely to cite career-related/self-development objectives than white students;
- people with disabilities were more likely to cite personal interest factors and correspondingly less likely to mention career-related motivations; and
- those studying for GCE A/AS levels were more likely than average to be motivated by personal interest and those studying GCSE, by the desire to gain qualifications.

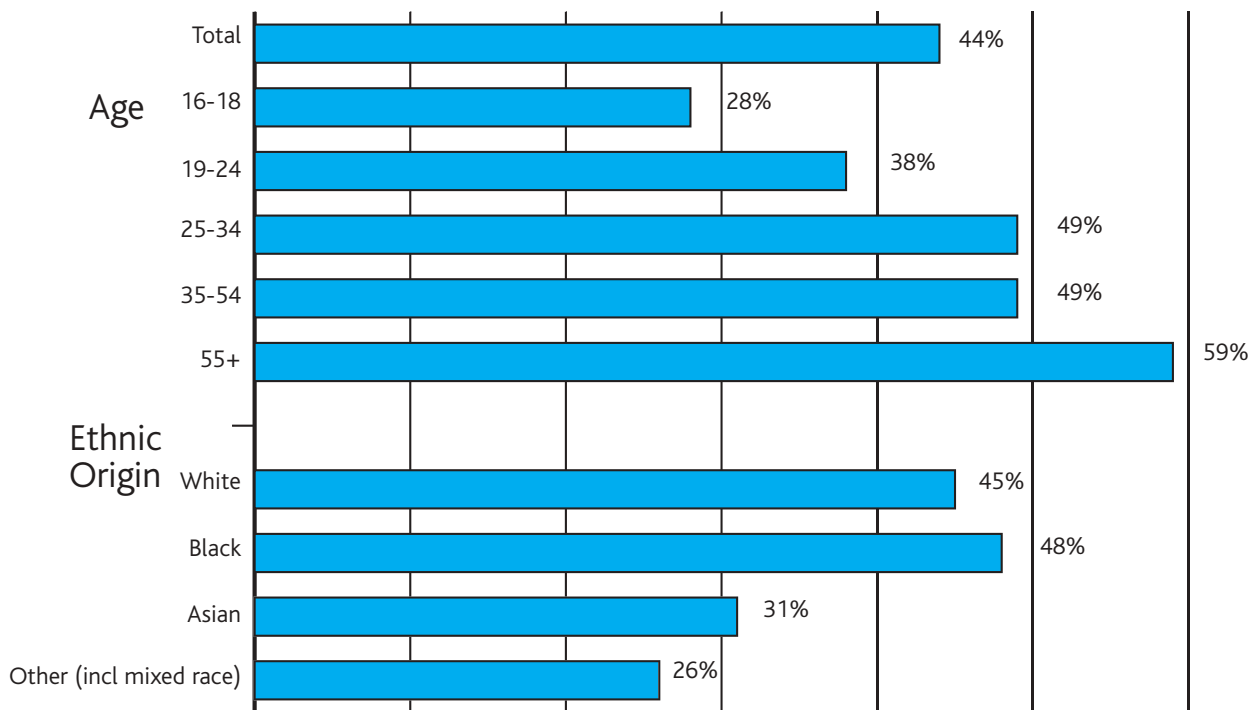
Table 1: Why did you choose this particular course of study/training?

	Provision type		
	Further education	Work based learning	Accredited adult and community learning
Base: All respondents			
Unweighted	10,000	2,032	723
Weighted	10,000	N/A	N/A
	%	%	%
For my own personal interest	42	28	43
Fitted in with career plans/relevant to my job	38	52	28
To gain qualifications	27	29	21
Learn/advance my skills and knowledge in this area	24	24	31
I like the subject	11	9	11
Suggested by my employer	3	12	0
Required by my employer	3	7	0
To meet other people	1	2	0

34 Nine out of ten further education students feel they had chosen the right course and a similar proportion were satisfied with the information they had been given about the course. There were relatively few significant differences by type of course or by age, gender and ethnicity. There is a marginal age effect, with 16 to 18 year olds and those studying GCE A/AS levels being the most likely to feel they had chosen the wrong course, but it must be stressed that this is only marginal. Mixed race learners stand out as being twice as likely as other students to feel they have chosen the wrong course and to be dissatisfied with the information provided, but the size of the sample is small so these results need to be treated with caution.

35 When asked how closely the course matched their expectations, 44% of further education learners said the course matched their expectations very closely (chart 12). The likelihood of the course matching expectations increases with age. Responses to this question also vary by ethnicity but much of this variation can be explained by the age profiles of the different groups (there is a higher proportion of students aged 25 and over amongst the white and black students than amongst Asian and other groups).

Chart 12. Match of course to expectations (further education)
% saying very close match



Base: All further education students (10,000)

Work based learning

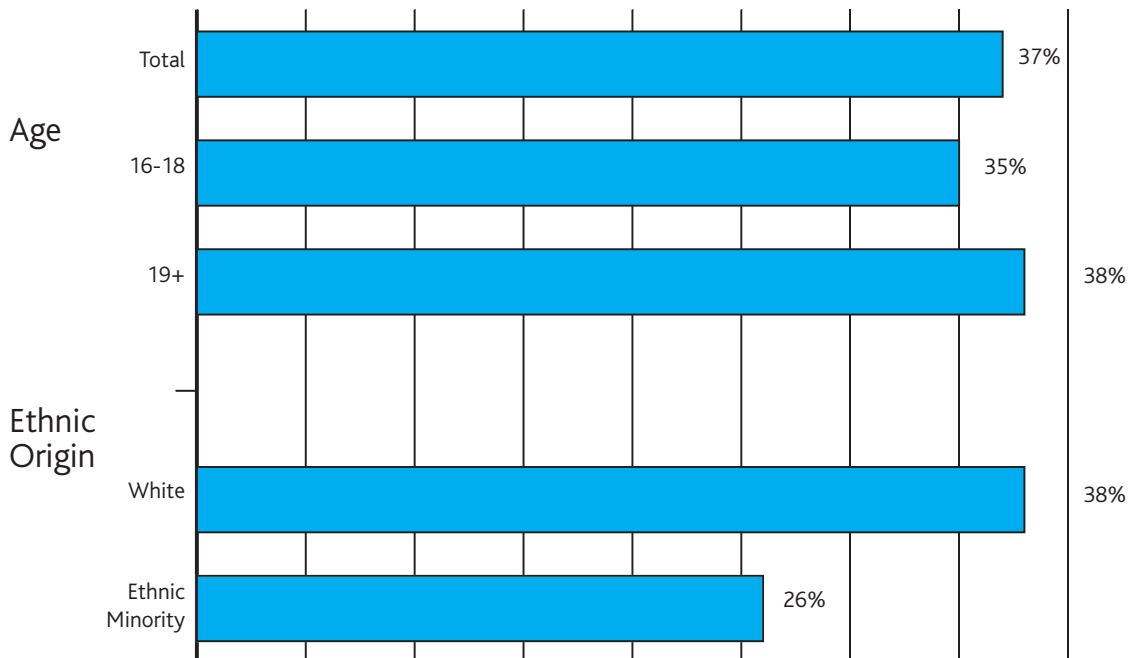
- 36 Amongst work based learners, female learners aged 19 or over are less likely to talk in terms of personal interest/liking for the subject and more likely to mention career-related and qualification-related motives for choosing their course or training. They are also twice as likely as their younger counterparts to mention that the course had been suggested by their employer, which is also true of male learners aged 19 or over.
- 37 In contrast to the findings for the further education sector, ethnic minority learners are more likely than average to be motivated by personal interest.

- 38 Generally, work based learners are content with their course choice: 93% feel they have chosen the most suitable course and 82% say that the course matches their expectations, with 44% saying it matches very closely. Females aged 19 or over were marginally more likely to feel that the course matched their expectations very closely (chart 13).

Accredited adult and community learning

- 39 The high levels of personal motivation expressed by this group are matched by the very high proportion of learners feeling that they have chosen the right course (96%) and that they have had sufficient information.

Chart 13. Match of course to expectations (work based learning)
% saying very close match



Base: All work based learners (2,032)

Early Impressions

- 40 Nearly all learners said they were made to feel welcome. Of the learners who felt they were not made to feel welcome, those in further education referred to a variety of administrative matters causing difficulties, whilst work based learners focused more on personal interaction.
- 41 Health and safety information was given to the majority of learners. However, this varied according to the type of learner and the subject. Work based learners were much more likely to have received such information than other learners. Part-time learners were much less likely than their full-time counterparts to have been provided with information on health and safety.

Early Leavers and Learners Seriously Thinking of Leaving

- 42 Early leavers left their courses for a variety of reasons. The main reasons (given by 5% or more) are listed in table 2.

Table 2. Early leavers - reasons for leaving

	Provision type	
	Further education	Work based learning
	%	%
% who left early or failed	6	9
Reasons for leaving		
Wrong course	17	11
Personal reasons	16	10
Too much work	8	2
Got a job/changed job	9	39
Poor quality tutor	13	8
I was sick/lost a lot of time	9	4
Couldn't keep up	5	3
No help from employer	8	8
Tutors kept changing	5	1
College poorly run	5	5
Financial reasons	4	9
Problems at work	<0.5	6

Note: the number of early leavers in the accredited adult and community provision (6% i.e. 41 in total) is too small for us to provide a breakdown of reasons

- 43 It should be stressed that for further education and accredited adult and community learning the survey does not show the complete picture as far as early leavers are concerned, given that our sample captures those students who were still attending courses in November 2002 and, therefore, excludes those who left before that date.
- 44 Interestingly, the profile of early leavers by age, sex and ethnicity differs very little from the general profile of learners. The differentiating factors are those which one might expect, that is that early leavers are much less likely to be satisfied with their learning experience and their course choice. Whilst these two elements are factors in their decision to leave/think of leaving, personal circumstances and difficulties coping with the course are also important factors.

Further education

Early leavers

- 45 There was a marginal difference in start date between early leavers and the rest in that 82% of early leavers had started their course on time compared with 87% of all learners in the survey. Otherwise, the main difference is that whilst 91% of further education learners felt they had chosen the most suitable course, only 71% of early leavers felt this. Although choice of course is clearly a factor in early leaving, it is not the sole factor. Other factors, in order of importance, prompting their decision to leave, are:

- personal reasons including sickness, getting a job, family reasons;
- poor teaching and lack of support from college/tutors; and
- struggling to cope.

Learners seriously thinking of leaving

- 46 Younger students are marginally more likely to have considered leaving than older students. Again, course choice was a factor in prompting them to consider leaving but more important were problems with tutors and with college organisation. Struggling to cope was also a factor. Many of these students had managed to overcome these problems, sometimes with the help of tutors or parents, and hence had decided to stay on. The remainder had decided to persevere with their course because they did not want to waste the effort they had already put in.

Work based learning

Early leavers

- 47 Work based learning has the highest proportion of early leavers (9%) and learners who have seriously thought of leaving (18%). There were no significant differences between the profiles of early leavers and the average learner profile by age, sex and ethnicity. A major reason why trainees left early was that they had changed their job or got a job. This accounted for around four out of ten leavers.

Learners seriously thinking of leaving

- 48 Women aged 19 or over were marginally more likely to have considered leaving than other groups of learners. It is tempting to speculate that this may link into the earlier finding that they were less likely to have chosen a course for personal interest and that employers played a bigger role in the selection of their course. The reasons for thinking of leaving were very similar to those given by further education learners; they were a mix of dissatisfaction with choice of course, dislike of methods of training and problems coping with the work.

Accredited adult and community learning

- 49 Those who had left early or considered leaving, generally did so because of problems with the course, or problems juggling commitments.

Satisfaction with Facilities

- 50 There is a good deal of variation in the way in which facilities are rated, between types of learner and provider, but little of the variation is related to age, gender or ethnicity. The general pattern is that information technology equipment and library facilities gain the highest ratings (around eight out of ten) whilst facilities for socialising and canteens receive the lowest ratings (around seven out of ten). Opportunities to socialise emerged in our initial qualitative research as an important factor in learners' enjoyment of the learning experience, particularly in the case of younger learners. This was confirmed when we asked them about the good and bad aspects of their course. Improving social facilities may well raise levels of satisfaction overall. The question is whether it will improve learning outcomes, although it may help to improve retention.

Further education

- 51 The range of mean score ratings spans from 8.2 out of 10 for information technology facilities/equipment to 6.8 for social facilities. The biggest variation in ratings is by type of institution. Students at sixth form colleges give higher ratings to:
- libraries/learning centres;
 - information technology equipment and facilities; and
 - sports facilities and equipment.
- 52 The facilities for which students at sixth form colleges give a worse rating than further education college students were childcare and facilities for people with disabilities.

Work based learning

- 53 Work based learners whose training is delivered by training providers give lower ratings for most facilities, the exception being information technology facilities. The results reflect the fact that many training providers will not have the infrastructure that a college or workplace can offer. The widest discrepancies relate to sports and canteen facilities.

Accredited adult and community learning

54 Many of the facilities listed are not perceived by learners as relevant in the accredited adult and community learning sector. Where learners were able to rate the facilities (for example library, information technology equipment, specialist equipment for their course) scores were relatively high, with older learners again giving higher scores than younger learners.

Problems Encountered and Complaints Made

55 Learners in the further education and work based learning sectors are more likely to experience problems (table 3). They also seem to be more disposed to seek help with those problems than learners in the accredited adult and community learning sector. Further education learners and work based learners are also more likely to make complaints and more likely to make complaints specifically about teachers and trainers.

Further education

56 The most common problems among further education learners as a whole, concern juggling commitments. There are other specific problems which need highlighting.

Group	Problems more likely to have
Younger learners	Keeping up with the standard of work.
Black Caribbean/ mixed race students	Money pressures. Basic skills. More likely to have multiple problems.
Learners with children	Home commitments.
19 to 24 year olds	Money pressures.

57 A third of those with problems sought advice but older students, particularly male students and part-time students are less likely to seek advice. However, those who have sought advice rate its usefulness highly.

58 A total of 12% in further education have made a complaint of some sort. This rises to 15% amongst sixth form college students. Most complaints in further education are specifically about teachers/trainers. In further education:

- 6% of all learners will have complained about a teacher/trainer or the style in which they teach/train;
- 3% will have made a complaint about the college administration;
- 2% will have made a complaint related to discrimination; and
- 1% will have either complained to the college about personal issues (for instance juggling commitments or travel problems) and/or course-related issues such as the boring nature of the course syllabus.

Table 3. Problems encountered and complaints made

Provision type	Experienced problems	Learners with problems who sought help	Made a complaint of any nature	Made a complaint specifically about teaching/training (or teachers/trainers)
	%	%	%	%
Further education (base: 10,000)	50	33	12	6
Work based learning (base: 2,032)	48	38	14	4
Accredited adult and community learning (base: 723)	43	26	7	3

Work based learning

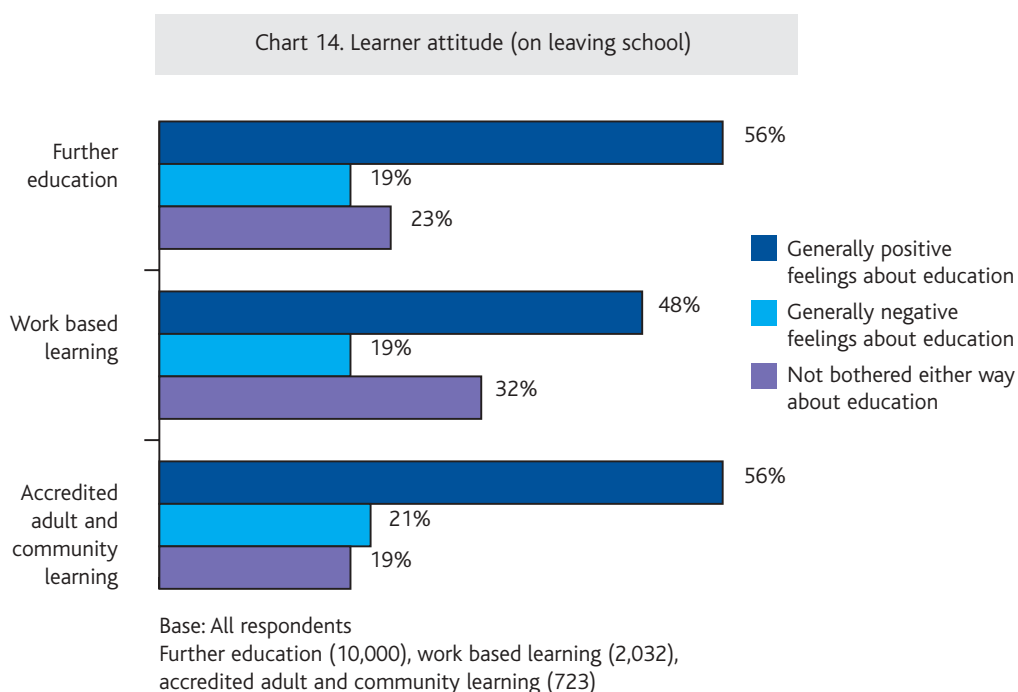
- 59 Whilst juggling commitments is also the main problem for the work based learners, money pressures also rate amongst the most mentioned problems. Those with dependents are more likely to have problems of all types, not just juggling commitments but also money pressure. Those with disabilities also face a wide range of problems. Difficulties with basic skills are the most commonly mentioned.
- 60 Just under four out of ten work based learners (38%) have sought help. Learners with dependents were more likely than average to seek help; those with disabilities were less likely.
- 61 Those learners undertaking training with training providers were more likely to seek advice, but least likely to find it very or quite useful.
- 62 About 14% of work based learners have made complaints; 4% have made a complaint specifically about their trainer or training.

Accredited adult and community learning

- 63 For learners on accredited adult and community learning courses, problems mainly relate to juggling commitments and keeping up with the standard of work required. Older learners (aged 55 and over) experience significantly fewer problems than those below the age of 55.
- 64 Adult and community learners on accredited courses are less likely than other learners to seek help. In this respect, they resemble their equivalents i.e. older students, in the further education sector. Those who have sought help, however, give extremely positive verdicts on its usefulness.

Current Attitudes to Learning and Effects of the Course

- 65 Attitudes to learning are mainly positive, but around four out of ten learners in the further education and accredited adult community sectors say they had left school with generally negative or indifferent attitudes to education (chart 14). Work based learners had the least positive mindset of the three groups, with over half saying they weren't bothered either way, or had negative feelings about education when they left school.



66 In terms of attitudes to learning:

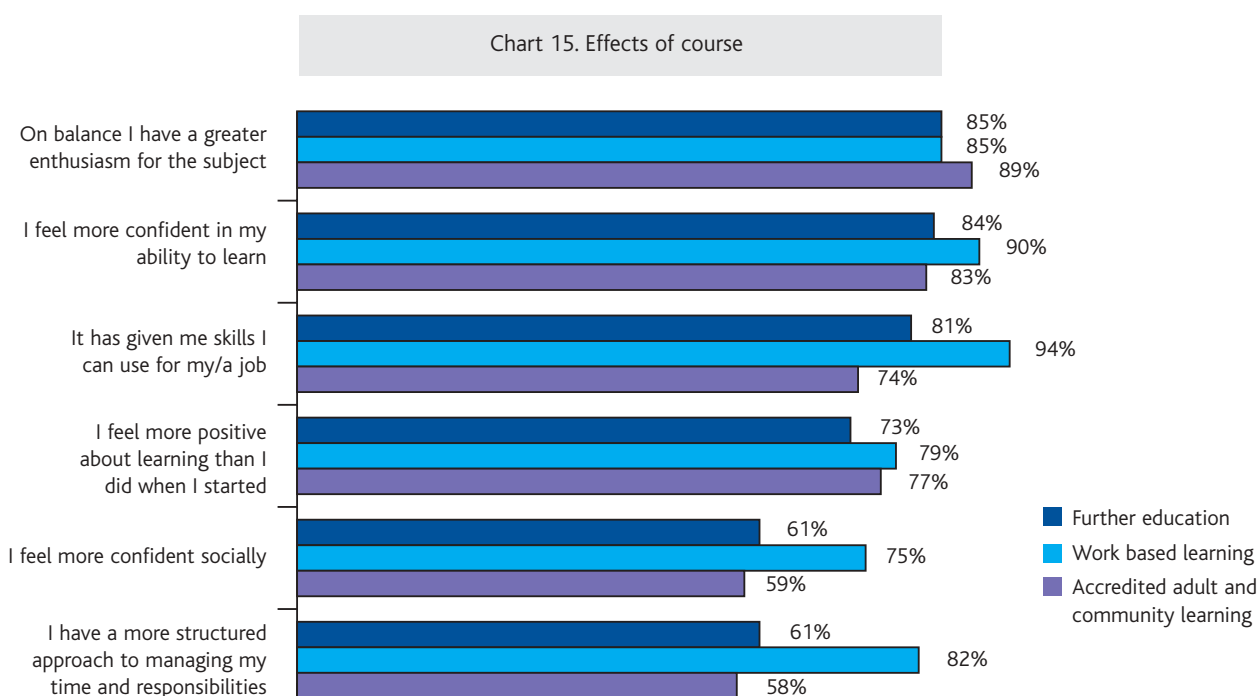
- Seven out of ten further education learners enjoy learning and get a buzz from it. Older learners and female learners across all types of provision are more likely to say that they get a buzz from learning. In further education there are also higher levels of agreement with this statement amongst learners with disabilities and/or dependents.
- Four out of ten learners enjoy learning because of the social aspects. Sixteen to eighteen year olds are influenced by the social aspects of provision. They are most likely to be enjoying them, and their course has given them more confidence to socialise.

- Work based learners are the least likely to get a buzz from learning. This links with their more negative feelings on leaving school.

67 The impacts that the current experience of learning have had on learners' perceptions of themselves as learners are highly positive (table 4). The pattern is similar across all of the learner types but work based learners are somewhat more likely to report effects.

Table 4: Which of the following statements about learning apply to you and the way you feel now?

	Provision type		
	Further education	Work based learning	Accredited adult and community learning
Unweighted	10,000	2,032	723
Weighted	10,000	N/A	N/A
	%	%	%
I enjoy learning and get a buzz from it	70	48	81
I enjoy learning mostly because of the social aspects	41	48	43
I am carrying on learning because I cannot think of anything better to do	11	12	9
I don't really enjoy learning	5	11	4



Base: All respondents
chart shows % agreeing

68 It is interesting to compare the attitudes towards learning which respondents had when leaving school with how they feel now.

- Almost nine out of ten of all learners who left school with a negative attitude said that this course had made them more confident in their ability to learn.
- At least seven out of ten learners in further education or accredited adult and community learning who had developed a negative attitude about learning at school said that they were now getting a 'buzz' from learning. Whilst this shift in attitude is lower for work based learners (four out of ten now say that they are getting a 'buzz' from learning), it still accounts for a substantial proportion of learners.
- Over eight out of ten (83%) further education learners who left school with negative feelings about education say that they now feel more positive about learning than they did when they started their current course.

Further education

- 69 Over eight out of ten students have greater enthusiasm for the subject, increased confidence in their ability to learn and feel they have acquired skills they can use in a job.
- 70 Over eight out of ten 16 to 18 year olds say that their current learning experience has made them feel more confident socially.

Work based learning

- 71 Work based learners are more likely than other types of learners to report the positive impact which their training has had on them. This is interesting given that they entered training with a slightly less positive mindset. Learners point to the benefits of work-related activities, such as developing skills they can use for a job and having a more structured approach to managing their time and responsibilities.

Accredited adult and community learning

- 72 Whilst this group of learners were no more positive about education on leaving school than those in the further education and work based learning sectors, there is evidence that their views have changed since leaving school. They are, for example, more likely than other learners to say that they enjoy learning and get a buzz from it. It is interesting, however, that they are less likely than the other learner groups to say that their current course has had an impact on their motivation and confidence, possibly an indication of the fact that they are a more mature group of learners and judge the impact of their present courses from a higher base of motivation and confidence than their younger counterparts in the other sectors.

Good and bad aspects of the course

- 73 When asked to volunteer the good and bad aspects of their course, learners dwelt on the sense of achievement and the social benefits as the positives, and gave lack of time and the need to juggle commitments as the negatives. There are also some comments about poor facilities amongst the negative aspects.

'The work is sometimes difficult. The workload often too much to handle.'

'The workload and lack of facilities, like there's not a proper common room.'

'There's a bit of pressure to get the work done on time. We haven't got any lockers and have to carry around our stuff all day. There's not that many socialising places.'

- 74 On the positive side:

'Qualifications and the chance to meet new people. It helps you with your job and gives you something to aim towards.'

'You meet new people that like the same stuff as you and it's a laugh but you still get your work done as well.'

'I enjoy learning. I've learnt more stuff than before. Its given me the A levels I need to get into university.'

'It's easy to manage the course. I enjoy the atmosphere within the courses and the way they help us to learn. It's a specialist sort of way of learning.'

'The social aspects are great. I am given the independence to learn by myself. The teachers always treat us as individuals.'

Summary and Conclusions

Further education

- 75 Satisfaction ratings for this sector are good, with 64% of learners saying they are extremely or very satisfied with the overall learning experience and with the quality of teaching. Quality of teaching is the dominant influence on overall levels of satisfaction.
- 76 Given the importance of teaching, it is reassuring to see that only 7% express dissatisfaction with the overall quality of teaching.
- 77 In addition, a high proportion of learners report positive effects from their learning experience:
- seven out of ten are getting a buzz from learning;
 - four out of ten are enjoying learning mostly because of the social aspects; and
 - over eight out of ten have a greater appreciation for the subject, feel that the learning has given them the skills they can use in their job and feel more confident in their ability to learn.
- 78 It is also noteworthy that 83% of those who left school with negative feelings about education say that they now feel more positive about learning than they did when they started their current course.
- 79 Whilst the overall picture is very positive there are certain groups whose rating of their experience is consistently below average. The group that stands out is that of 16 to 18 year olds who, whilst broadly happy, clearly encounter some problems with teaching methods. They give teaching staff lower ratings on 'understanding you and how you like to learn' and on 'making the subject interesting and enjoyable'. Analysing the responses of 16 to 18 year olds in relation to types of provider, it can be seen that the ratings given for teaching by those at sixth form colleges, compared with those given by their equivalents in further education colleges (studying level 3), are at least 10% points higher for most aspects of teaching. However, similar ratings are given by both groups for how well they are learning now. The most noticeable areas in which 16 to 18 year old learners are most critical relate to the management of teaching, including the planning of lessons and managing the group of learners.
- 80 Other learner groups express higher than average levels of dissatisfaction with particular aspects of teaching.
- 19 to 24 year olds are concerned with the management of their teaching, in particular the planning of lessons, target-setting and provision of feedback.
 - Ethnic minority learners, particularly Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian and mixed race learners, are concerned about methods of teaching and express some dissatisfaction with how teachers relate to them and teaching management (particularly among the Indian students).
- 81 Just under half the learners in further education felt that some lessons had been unproductive (a similar finding was shown for work based learning). The main reasons for this were organisational or administrative (such as 'left waiting around', 'staff shortages, including cancelled lessons', 'disruption from other learners'). In some cases, teaching methods were mentioned as being ineffective.
- 82 The most common problem experienced by further education learners relates to their difficulty in juggling commitments, particularly in the case of students with dependents, their work commitments and their home commitments. Black and mixed race students are more likely to have experienced multiple problems including money pressure and, in the case of black male students, problems with basic skills. Keeping up with the standard of work is cited as more of a problem for 16 to 18 year olds than for older learners (aged 19 or over).

- 83 Support by college staff for students encountering problems is valued. However, only a third who have experienced problems have sought help. This is potentially a lost opportunity to improve their experience particularly when around 80% of those who have sought help found it very or quite useful. In 12% of cases, learners had felt compelled to make a complaint (not necessarily a formal complaint but nevertheless a complaint in the eyes of the student). Just over a third of these complaints resulted in a satisfactory outcome, but two thirds stated that there had either been an unsatisfactory outcome or no outcome at all, from the perspective of the student.
- 84 Young learners are much more likely to cite the social elements of the learning experience as a key factor in their enjoyment of learning, yet their rating of the social facilities provided receive the lowest ratings. Improvement of these would raise overall levels of satisfaction amongst members of this group. The impact it would have on learning outcomes is, however, debatable, although it may help to improve retention.

Conclusions for further education

- 85 In assessing what these findings mean for providers within the further education sector, we need to take account of the fact that young learners may have different needs and different expectations of learning. They are much less likely than their older counterparts to get a 'buzz' out of learning. It appears, therefore, that work needs to be done with this group to identify ways of engaging them more effectively. This work also needs to be carried out for individual groups of ethnic minority learners.
- 86 There is work to be done on ensuring that learners in the 16 to 18 age group receive adequate advice to steer them towards the right course or subjects. Older learners encounter few problems here, possibly having the maturity and/or experience to judge which subjects or levels will suit them best. Amongst younger (16 to 18 year old) learners, the wrong choice of course is much more likely to be a factor that leads them to leave early. Whilst this only affects a minority of our sample, it is possible that increased liaison between colleges and schools and improved educational guidance to give students a better flavour of what their course might involve could reduce some of this wastage and some of the problems arising from it.

- 87 The research points to a number of ways in which ethnic minority students do not feel as well served as white students and action needs to be taken to address these. In addition, we need to increase our understanding of the factors that are creating dissatisfaction for these groups of students.

Work based learning

- 88 Satisfaction with the overall learning experience and with the quality of training is also high for work based learners: 62% and 59% respectively said they were extremely or very satisfied.
- 89 Only 6% of work based learners expressed any dissatisfaction with the overall quality of teaching.
- 90 As in the further education sector, the quality of teaching is of prime importance in determining overall levels of satisfaction. There are relatively few gender-related differences in the rating of aspects of teaching in further education. These are more marked in work based learning.
- 91 Male learners are much less likely than female learners to feel that the trainer relates to them, makes the subject interesting, understands how they like to learn or provides enough support. In short, the quality of the teacher/learner relationship is much poorer for male learners than it is for female learners. Male learners also give lower ratings to the management of their training, most notably on target-setting and feedback. Another group expressing consistently lower than average levels of satisfaction are trainees with level 3 entry qualifications.
- 92 Looking at the ratings by provider, colleges receive lower ratings than training providers or workplaces, the largest discrepancies occurring over the support given and relating to the learner as a person.
- 93 Part of the problem for male learners may be their mindset on entering the learning programme. They are less likely than female learners to have left school with positive feelings about education (54% of females compared with 43% of males). It should be stressed, however, that despite their lower rating of some aspects of provision, their assessment of the impact of their current learning experience is positive and equals that of female learners.

94 Work based learning has the highest proportion of learners reporting positive impacts, in particular:

I feel more confident in my ability to learn	90%
It has given me skills I can use for my/a job	94%
I have greater enthusiasm for the subject	85%
I feel more positive about learning than when I started	79%

95 Whilst lower than for other learners, 48% said that they were getting a buzz from learning.

96 These figures provide evidence that the learning experience provided is managing to shift the attitudes of some learners who started out with relatively poor motivation.

97 Just over half the work based learners felt that some sessions had been unproductive. A similar finding was shown for further education. Again, as for learners in further education the main reasons behind this were having been left waiting around, disruption of learning and staff shortages. Trainers' methods of training were also criticised.

98 Work based learning has the highest proportion of early leavers and learners who considered leaving in our sample (9% and 18% respectively). However, there are no significant differences between the profiles by age, sex or ethnicity of early leavers and the average learner profile. The main reason for leavers leaving early was that they had changed their job or got a job. This accounted for around four out of ten leavers. The other main reasons given were that it was the wrong course (11%), personal reasons (10%), financial reasons (9%) and/or support not being good from the tutor/assessor (8%) or employer (8%).

99 Women aged 19 or over were marginally more likely to have considered leaving than other groups of learners. The reasons for thinking of leaving were a mix of wrong choice of course, dissatisfaction with teaching or training and problems coping. Choice of course does not generally appear to have presented many problems for work based learners as a whole (93% feel they have chosen the right course). It is interesting, however, that female learners aged 19 or over were less likely to cite personal interest as a factor in their choice of course and more likely to cite career or qualification aims.

100 There was a higher than average mention of employers' influence on choosing courses for work based learners. There may, therefore, be an element of 'doing it because I have to if I want to get on' among this group. More research will need to be done to investigate if this has a positive or negative impact on motivation and satisfaction.

101 Just under half the work based learners said that they had experienced problems. Whilst these are mainly caused by difficulty in juggling commitments, money pressures are also a factor, particularly amongst the small proportion who have dependents. Four out of ten of those who had problems sought help, the highest proportion across the three sectors. Those whose training is delivered by training providers were the most likely to seek advice, but the least likely to find that advice useful.

Conclusions for work based learning

102 Learners in work based learning provision appear to have had less positive experiences at school than their counterparts in the further education sector. This is particularly the case with the older males (aged 19 and over). If satisfaction levels are to be raised amongst this group, ways of securing a better sense of engagement amongst male learners need to be identified. This will possibly entail providing more, and better tailored, support for this group (bearing in mind their lower levels of motivation).

103 A further issue for the sector concerns how to ensure consistent quality of support across the different provider types, given the evidence of variation in support. This is a particular issue for colleges to address.

104 It is also worth considering how to encourage learners to continue learning if they change their job. The research indicates that job changes are a major factor behind early leaving. It is possible that the number of trainees leaving early could be reduced given appropriate information about the options for continuing the course.

Accredited adult and community learning

105 This sector elicits the highest satisfaction scores. Three quarters (76%) of learners in accredited adult and community learning said that they were extremely or very satisfied with their overall learning experience, and 78% were extremely or very satisfied with the quality of teaching.

106 To some extent the scores reflect the fact that older learners dominate this sector and generally, in customer satisfaction research, older customers tend to be more generous in their rating of a service or experience. However, the fact remains that in this sector we identified very few problems. All ratings are high.

107 The aspect rated lowest within teaching and learning (although not low in absolute terms) for accredited adult and community learning was the setting of clear targets. Relatively few feel that there are any unproductive teaching hours, but lack of time with the tutor is seen as a significant factor.

108 The high levels of personal motivation expressed by this group (81% say they enjoy learning and get a buzz from it) are matched by the very high proportions feeling that they chose the right course (96%) and had sufficient information.

109 Whilst the adult and community learners on accredited courses are less likely to experience problems there is still a significant proportion who do (43%). Older learners (aged 55 or over) experience significantly fewer problems than those below the age of 55. The problems mainly relate to juggling commitments and keeping up with the standard of work required. Interestingly, learners in accredited adult and community learning are less likely to seek advice or help than learners in the further education and work based learning sectors. Only 26% sought help. This would appear to be a reflection of age in that the figures are similar amongst their peers in the further education sector.

Conclusions for accredited adult and community learning

110 There was so little dissatisfaction expressed by learners in accredited adult and community provision that it is difficult to suggest any overall actions that would raise levels of satisfaction. However, some adult and community learners would welcome better or more access to tutors and

to support. The part-time/short course nature of adult and community provision may result in reduced opportunities for access, and so suitable arrangements for learners in this type of provision are needed.

Next Steps

111 It is intended that findings from the survey will be used to guide national policy and strategic developments, as guide the work of local LSCs, colleges and other providers. The LSC is keen to use the positive findings from the survey to promote the post-16 education and training sector and to encourage participation in education and learning. It also wishes to start working with partners to start addressing areas of concern.

112 The LSC will take advice from the external advisory group, which advises on all aspects of the survey, about the strategies for more widely sharing and using findings, and the areas where attention should be focused to raise standards in the sector. Membership of the advisory group is given at the annex.

113 NOP will prepare guidance and information on the methodology and core questions so that colleges and other providers can replicate the national survey at local level and compare their findings with findings from the national survey. The LSC will publish this guidance in Spring 2003.

114 This first survey provides a solid, initial base of evidence on learner satisfaction and needs. It will be supplemented by further work, possibly involving:

- qualitative research to deepen our understanding of the issues faced by particular learner groups;
- longitudinal research to assess the link between learner satisfaction and the outcome of their learning; and
- correlation of learner satisfaction data with other quality measures.

115 The LSC welcomes your comments on the survey findings, and suggestions on how improvements might be made to increase learners' satisfaction with post-16 learning. Please contact Neil Robertson (Neil.robertson@lsc.gov.uk) or Janet Smith (Janet.smith@lsc.gov.uk) with your comments.

Annex

National learner satisfaction survey advisory group membership

External representation

Professor John Bull (CBE)	Chair of Devon and Cornwall LSC
Chris Berry	NATSPEC Secretariat, NATSPEC
Dr John Brennan	Director of FE Development, Association of Colleges
Graham Hoyle	Chief Executive, Association of Learning Providers
Dr Ursula Howard	Director for Research, Learning and Skills Development Agency
Dr Peter Lavender	Director for Research, Development and Information, NIACE
Caroline Lewis	Policy Officer, SKILL: National Bureau for Students with Learning Difficulties
Katt Price	Vice President Further Education, National Union of Students
Professor Tom Schuller	Dean of Faculty and Professor of Lifelong Learning Faculty of Continuing Education, Birkbeck, University of London
Susan Tuckett	Principal Norwich School of Art and Design

LSC representation

Avril Willis	Director of Quality and Standards
Toni Fazaeli	Assistant Director, Quality and Standards
Neil Robertson	Performance Monitoring Project Manager
Janet Smith (Clerk)	Performance Evaluation Manager