

Leading learning and skills

# National Learner Satisfaction Survey: Further Education Report 2003/04

## August 2005

Of interest to everyone involved in sustaining and improving levels of learner satisfaction across the further education sector

### In partnership with NOP Research group

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.

## For information

Of interest to everyone involved in sustaining and improving levels of learner satisfaction across the further education sector

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# Executive Summary

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The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has now carried out the third National Learner satisfaction Survey (NLSS). For 2003/04 the survey is based on over 43,000 learners receiving tuition or training through further education, work based learning and adult and community learning providers. This is a substantially larger number of learners than in earlier surveys, and helps to ensure that information deriving from the NLSS remains robust.

This report summarises the main findings of the 2003/04 survey for further education (FE).

Researchers explored learners' views of the quality of teaching, their overall satisfaction with their learning experience, and whether they would be likely to return to learning within three years on the basis of this experience.

As with previous surveys, results for 2003/04 show that there are high levels of satisfaction across the further education sector. The key findings also indicate that more learners now get a 'buzz' from their learning, and more are saying that their courses have helped them in their jobs.

Amid otherwise good news for 2003/04, there is evidence that some learners remain only fairly satisfied and other dissatisfied. Thus a challenge for the sector is to address and resolve shortcomings in learners' experiences wherever possible, and improve the numbers found in the 'very' and 'extremely' satisfied group.

# Foreword

On behalf of the LSC, an independent research organisation conducted telephone interview with 43,316 learners in further education, work based learners and adult and community learning.

In this report we cover the findings from the further education sector. This includes learners from general FE colleges, sixth form colleges and specialist colleges, including land based and art and design colleges.

There are many reasons to celebrate the findings from this report and the positive results are a real tribute to all those working in the sector.

We strongly encourage all learning providers to use the National Learner Satisfaction Survey methodology and core questions, and to benchmark their own institutions against the national picture. This will help providers to identify priority areas for improvement as well as areas in their own institutions where learners' satisfaction rates may be better than the national picture.

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# Introduction

1

In the academic year 2001/02, the LSC launched an annual survey to obtain national measures of learner satisfaction in the post-16 provision it funds. The 2003/04 survey provides the third year of results from the National Learner Satisfaction Survey (NLSS). The survey consists of three waves of interviews throughout the academic year and is designed to cover the following learner types:

- those in the further education sector, that is, those attending general further education colleges, sixth form colleges and other specialist further education institutions
- those undertaking work based learning
- those undertaking adult and community learning (both accredited and non-accredited).

2

A national picture is valuable in that it provides a comprehensive overview of education and training in England for people aged 16 and over. It also provides a facility to look in detail at the experiences of certain sub-groups within the learner base, for example including younger learners and learners from minority ethnic backgrounds.

3

Headline findings over time from the core questions can be found in **the National Learner Satisfaction Survey: Highlights from 2003/04** document, available from the LSC website.

4

As for previous years of the NLSS, the LSC has consulted with both providers and learners through focus groups to explore issues arising from the evidence shown in the report. These focus group findings are reported later in the report.

5

For the first time in 2003/04 the findings for **learndirect** learners have been reported separately from the FE sample for some of the core questions. This work with **learndirect** is being developed further for next year's survey.

## National Learner Satisfaction Survey methodology

6

For the 2003/04 survey 43,316 learners in total were interviewed. Of these learners 31,786 were from the further education sector. The increased number of interviews in NLSS 2003/04 allowed for a greater number of further education learners to be interviewed compared to previous years. The increased sample of further education learners was designed to allow for robust analysis over time of the core question results at local LSC level. A minimum of 500 FE-funded learners per local LSC were interviewed and responses to the core questions can therefore be analysed over time to local level.

The number of interviews, by type of provision, are listed below.

7

For the 2003/04 survey, the questionnaire underwent changes to reduce interview length to approximately 10 minutes. This allowed for a greater number of learners to be interviewed. The interviews took place by telephone in three waves between February and June 2003. A set of core questions were asked to learners in every wave and covered the areas:

- overall satisfaction with learning experience
- overall satisfaction with the quality of teaching and management of learning
- likelihood to return to learning in the future.

8

In addition to the core questions, each wave of interviews consisted of a particular set of modular questions. The modular questions covered the areas of:

- pre-entry advice and guidance
- support for learning
- impact of learning.

9

More information on the NLSS methodology, including the full questionnaire for the three waves, can be found from the NLSS core methodology and guidance document available on the LSC website.

	2003/04
	No. of interviews
Further education (total)	31,786
of which:	
general FE	27,629
sixth form college	3,380
other	777
Work Based Learning	6,111
Accredited Adult and Community Learning	1,652
Non-accredited Adult and Community Learning	3,767
Total	43,316

## New Measures of Success

### 10

The NLSS highlights broad areas where actions could be made to improve the learning experience of learners. However, results from the NLSS cannot reflect specific challenges and priorities of individual colleges or providers in all provisions. From the NLSS it is difficult to isolate findings that are most relevant at local or college/provider level. Data at a local level is essential for identifying priorities for action within a particular area or institution.

### 11

The New Measures of Success programme is developing a set of measures to be used by the LSC, Department for Education and Skills (DfES), the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and it is recognised that many providers are already engaged in collecting the views of their learners and many examples of good practice already exist. Through the new measures programme providers are being encouraged to replicate the methodology and core questions from the NLSS. This will allow providers to benchmark their own performance against the national picture and present comparative data which local LSCs and the inspectorates recognise as robust.

### 12

Framing local research to match national research will provide local colleges and providers with an opportunity to benchmark their results against the national average, that is, it provides a context against which to view and judge the local picture. Such an approach will also encourage standardisation of learner satisfaction survey instruments within an area.

### 13

The LSC has produced supporting materials to support colleges and providers in carrying out local level surveys and benchmarking the results against the national picture. The document *National Learner Satisfaction Survey: guidance on the core methodology and core questionnaire* is available from the LSC website. There is also an interactive website containing the NLSS results, with a benchmarking module, which can be accessed at <http://researchtools.lsc.gov.uk>. Using this website, providers can input local level results and these can be benchmarked against the national picture.

### 14

These supporting materials will assist providers in achieving the following:

- producing learner satisfaction survey results at a local level
- allowing comparisons with the National Learner Satisfaction Survey (NLSS).

## Abbreviations used

### 15

At times the following abbreviations are used in the reporting of the NLSS results:

- further education – FE
- work based learning – WBL
- FE provided by adult learning providers – FE by ALP
- non-accredited adult and community learning – non-accredited ACL.

### 16

Where there is discussion of data presented in figures and tables in this report, data subsequently mentioned and/or described is directly derived from the figures and tables.

### 17

Percentages: for clarity and brevity, and in accordance with normal practice, percentages in the figures are rounded to whole numbers. This means, where appropriate, they do not always add up to 100 per cent.

### 18

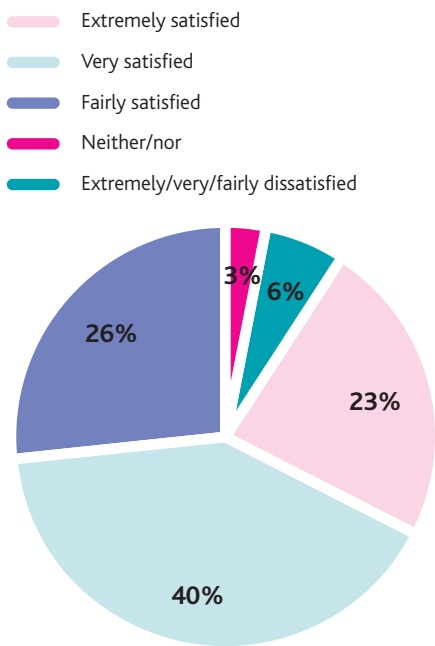
For some questions in this survey, as in earlier surveys, learners are offered a range of options where they can select as many or as few as they choose. Resulting percentages expressed, for example course choice, reflect learners' multiple response options and thus will usually add up to far more than 100 per cent.

### 19

In order to compare percentage results across different years of the survey we use the notation of change in 'percentage points'.

# Overall satisfaction with the learning experience

**Figure 1: Overall satisfaction with learning experience in further education sector.**



Base: 31,786

**20**

Of the learners involved in this survey, 89 per cent are satisfied with their learning experience, with 63 per cent 'extremely' or 'very' satisfied. In contrast only 6 per cent of learners are dissatisfied, and just 3 per cent neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. These results are shown in Figure 1.

**21**

Figure 1 shows 23 per cent of learners in the survey are 'extremely' satisfied with their overall learning experience' and 40 per cent are 'very' satisfied. Only 6 per cent said they were dissatisfied and just 3 per cent neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

**22**

Figure 2 shows the satisfaction with overall learning experience over three years. The findings for 2003/04 are comparable with those found in 2002/03.

**23**

In respect of age, gender, ethnicity and disability for further education learners, the following patterns emerge.

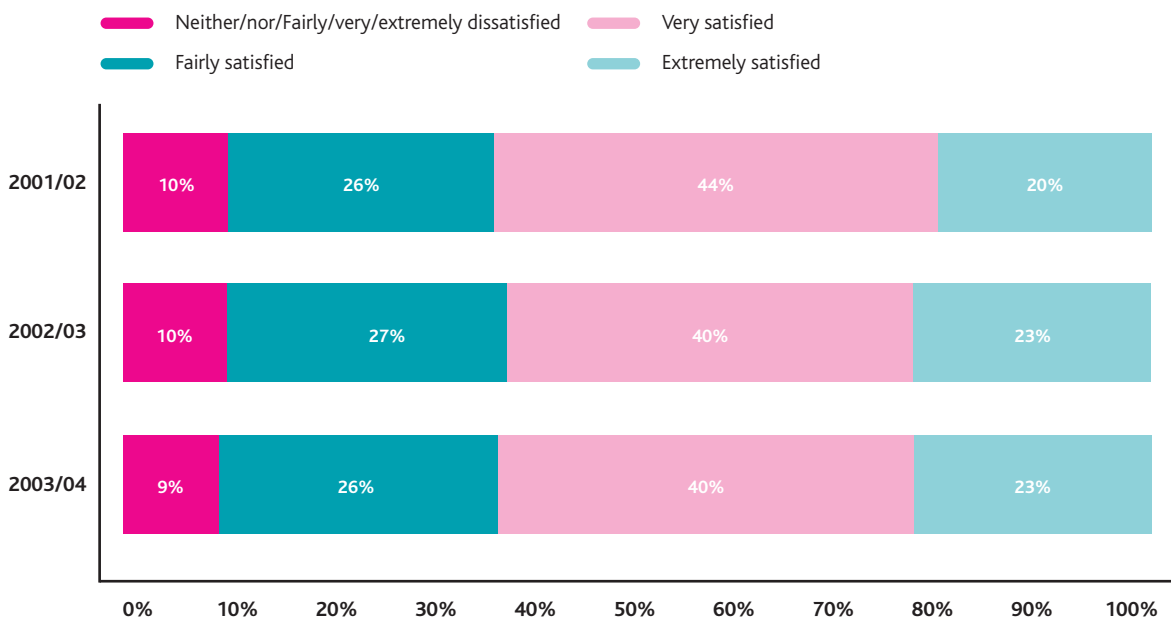
**24**

Older learners generally appear to be rather more satisfied with their overall learning experience: for example 27 per cent of the 25 plus age group were 'extremely' satisfied compared with 18 per cent of 19–24 year olds and 17 per cent of learners aged 16–18 years. Interestingly though, there are only small apparent differences between the age groups on the 'very' satisfied measure, and on the dissatisfied measure (Table 1).

**25**

Female learners appear to be more satisfied with their overall learning experience with 25 per cent 'extremely' satisfied compared with 20 per cent of males. Again, female and male learners in this survey report they are equally 'very' satisfied (40 per cent) and similarly dissatisfied (6 per cent of male learners and 5 per cent of female learners) with their learning experiences (Table 1).

**Figure 2: Overall satisfaction with learning experience, over time.**



Base: 2001/02: 10,000; 2002/03 19,947; 2003/04 31,786



**Table 1: Overall satisfaction with learning experience, by age and gender.**

	Total	Male	Female	16–18	19–24	25 plus
Base: All respondents	31,786	11,773	20,013	7,059	5,067	19,657
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Extremely satisfied	23	20	25	17	18	27
Very satisfied	40	40	40	41	39	41
Fairly satisfied	26	30	25	33	32	23
Neither/nor	3	4	3	4	4	3
Fairly/very/extremely dissatisfied	6	6	5	5	7	6

**26**

Possible explanations for differences are also taken up in respect of specific themes and are addressed later in this report.

**27**

It is interesting to note that learners with disabilities are generally more satisfied than those without disabilities: 29 per cent of learners with disabilities are 'extremely' satisfied with their overall learning experience compared with 23 per cent of learners without disabilities. (Further information on patterns of distribution for learners can be obtained from the Learning and Skills Council website – <http://researchtools.lsc.gov.uk>).

**28**

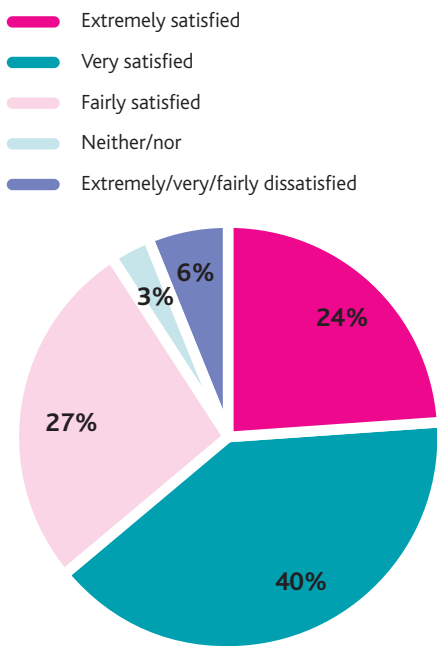
As noted in the introductory section of this chapter, for the first time the 2003/04 survey reports specific data obtained from learners studying through **learndirect**. This shows that levels of satisfaction with **learndirect** experiences are broadly similar to those obtained for all learners; 90 per cent of learners are satisfied (89 per cent for all learners) and 22 per cent (23 per cent for all learners) are extremely satisfied.

**29**

In summary, the findings for learner satisfaction ratings with overall learning experience are very positive. That some 89 per cent of learners in the survey stated they were 'extremely', 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with their overall learning experience is a credit to the sector, though there is no room for complacency in an environment which demands continuous improvement. The consistency of these findings over the past three years of the NLSS does denote responsiveness by the further education sector to demands that it meets learners' needs.

# Overall satisfaction with the quality of teaching

**Figure 3: Satisfaction with the quality of teaching in the further education sector 2003/04.**



Base 31, 786

**30**

**Key Findings:**  
The proportion of learners in the survey who are satisfied with the quality of teaching is high, at 91 per cent. Of these just under a quarter (24 per cent) are 'extremely' satisfied with the quality of teachers/tutors overall, and a further 40 per cent are 'very' satisfied. Just over one in twenty (6 per cent) expressed some dissatisfaction.

**31**

However, at 43 per cent, there is a decrease of -3 percentage points, compared with 2002/03, in the percentage of learners in the survey who believe that none of their lesson time is wasted.

**32**

Figure 3 shows 91 per cent of learners in the 2003/04 survey are satisfied with the overall quality of teaching. Of these learners, 24 per cent are 'extremely' satisfied with the overall quality of teaching and 40 per cent are 'very' satisfied.

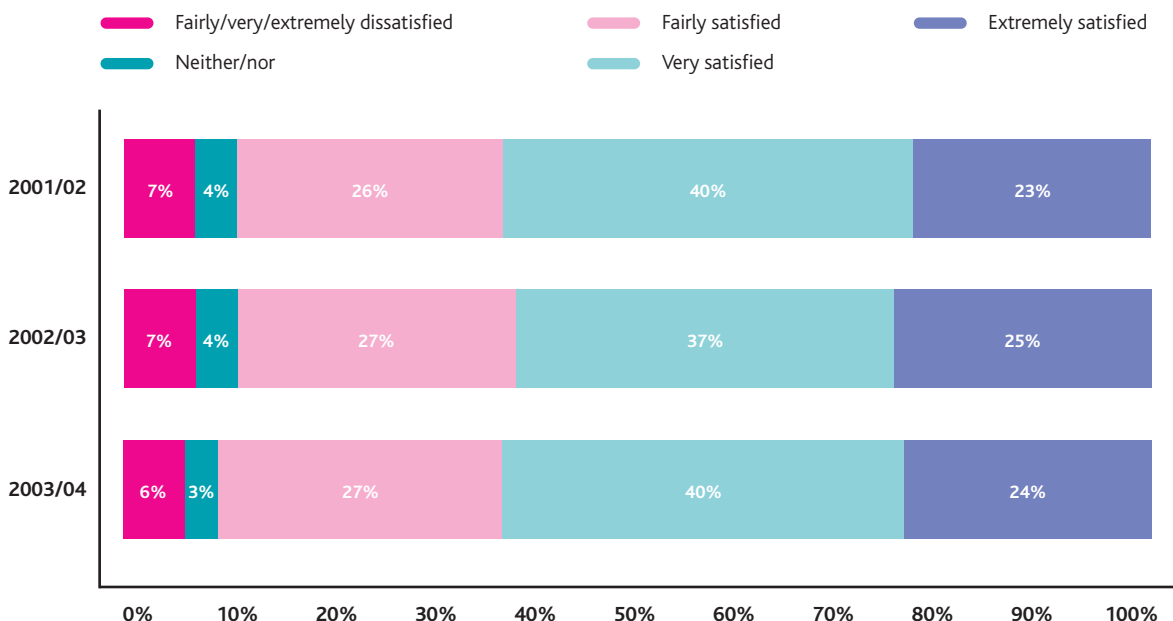
**33**

Ratings for satisfaction with the quality of teaching closely match those given for satisfaction overall. Analysis from 2003/04 showed that the quality of teaching has the biggest impact on learners' overall satisfaction.

**34**

Figures derived directly from Figure 4 show that compared with 2002/03, there has been a slight decrease in the proportion of learners in the survey who are 'extremely' satisfied with the overall quality of teaching (-1 percentage point). However, the proportion who are 'very' satisfied has increased (+3 percentage points) and those who are 'fairly' satisfied is the same compared with 2002/03. There has been a slight 1 percentage point decrease in learners in the survey who are dissatisfied with the overall quality of teaching. The number of learners who continue to report high levels of satisfaction with their learning is very encouraging and must reflect credit on the efforts of further education colleges and their teaching/lecturing staff.

**Figure 4: Overall satisfaction with quality of teaching, over time.**



Base: 2003/04 31,786; 2002/03 19,947; 2001/02 10,000

**Table 2 – Overall satisfaction with quality of teaching, by age and gender.**

	Total	Male	Female	16–18	19–24	25 plus
Base: All respondents	31,786	11,773	20,013	7,059	5,067	19,657
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Extremely satisfied	24	21	26	18	19	27
Very satisfied	40	40	39	41	37	40
Fairly satisfied	27	30	26	33	33	24
Neither/nor	3	3	3	3	3	3
Fairly/very/extremely dissatisfied	5	5	5	5	6	5

### 35

As with overall levels of satisfaction, older learners are generally more satisfied with overall quality of teaching (Table 2), than those in younger age groups. The most marked difference is between 16–18 year olds (18 per cent 'extremely' satisfied) and 25 plus year olds (27 per cent 'extremely' satisfied). Differences in learners' responses for the 'very' satisfied category are minimal however (1 percentage point), as are those reporting dissatisfaction.

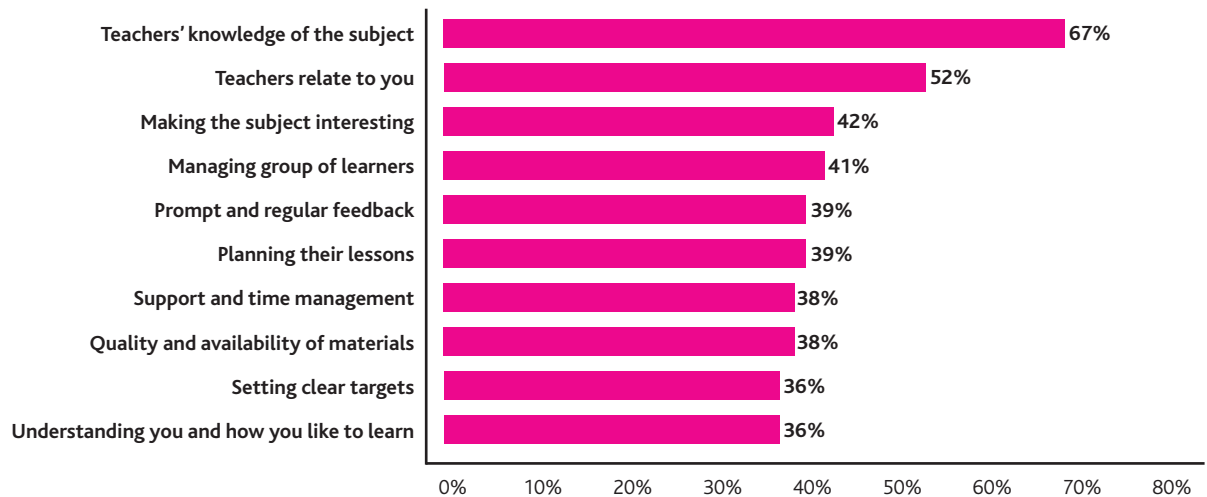
### 36

There are different levels of overall satisfaction with the quality of teaching across a range of vocational areas. The following results were from learners in the survey indicating they are 'very' or 'extremely' satisfied with the overall quality of teaching they receive in a number of fields, where the results compare with the figure of 64 per cent for all areas of learning combined:

- sports, leisure and travel (68 per cent, that is, +4 percentage points)
- the vocational areas 'engineering, technology and manufacturing' (58 per cent, that is, -6 percentage points) and 'business administration, management and professional' (57 per cent, that is, -7 percentage points)
- construction where less than half (49 per cent, that is, -15 percentage points) of learners in the survey were either 'very' or 'extremely' satisfied with the overall quality of teaching.

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Figure 5: Ratings for individual aspects of teaching – the per cent rated as 9 or 10 out of 10 by learners



Base: All respondents rating

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## Individual aspects of teaching

### 37

Key question: how would you rate the teachers, tutors or trainers on the following aspects of teaching/training? (learners were asked about their responses to each of the 10 issues shown in Figure 5).

### 38

Learners in the survey were asked to rate 10 aspects of teaching as a rating out of 10. The percentage of learners in the survey who rated the following aspects of teaching 9 or 10 out of 10 are shown in Figure 5 and listed immediately below in summary:

- knowledge of the subject (67 per cent)
- how well teachers relate to you as a person (52 per cent)
- making the subject interesting or enjoyable (42 per cent)
- understanding you and how you like to learn (36 per cent)
- setting clear targets to help learners improve (36 per cent).

### 39

Compared with 2002/03, the proportion of learners in the 2003/04 survey awarding each aspect of teaching a 9, or 10 out of 10 has decreased for most aspects of teaching.

### 40

A notable decrease, compared with 2002/03, was in the proportion of learners in 2003/04 giving a 9 or 10 out of 10 for the 'quality and availability of teaching materials' (-3 percentage points). Were this trend to continue over time, it might suggest very real problems with colleges meeting learners' essential needs for material to support high standards of teaching and learning, thus it should be monitored.

### 41

The two aspects of teaching which received the highest percentage of learners in the survey giving a 9 or 10 out of 10 were 'knowing the subject' and 'relating to learners as people'.

**Table 3: Ratings for aspects of the quality of teaching – the per cent rated as 9 or 10 out of 10 by learners, by age and gender.**

	Total	Male	Female	16–18	19–24	25 plus
Base: All respondents rating	31,786	11,773	20,013	7,059	5,067	19,657
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Knowledge of the subject	67	64	69	63	61	70
How well they relate to you as a person	52	46	56	40	44	58
Managing the group of learners	41	33	45	30	32	46
Making the subject interesting or enjoyable	42	35	46	29	33	48
Planning their lessons	39	32	42	32	33	43
Providing prompt and regular feedback on progress	39	33	42	33	33	42
Understanding you and how you like to learn	36	30	40	25	29	42
Quality and availability of teaching materials	38	35	41	34	33	42
The support they give you, for example, in improving study techniques or time management	38	31	42	34	33	40
Setting clear targets to help learners improve	36	31	39	32	31	39

**42**

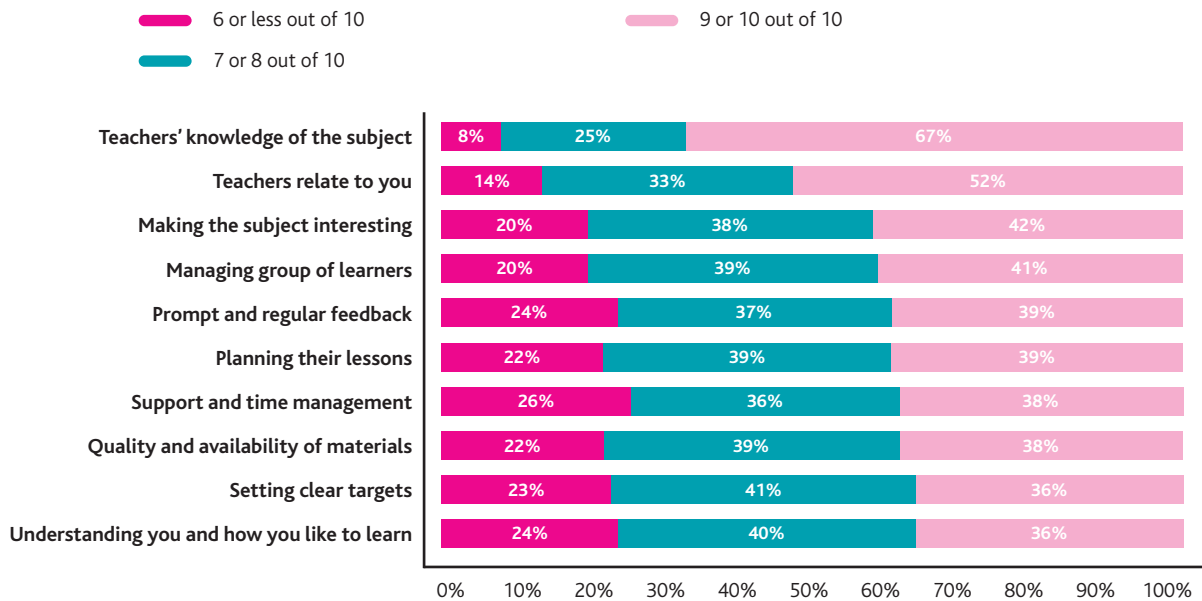
As with overall satisfaction with the quality of teaching, females and older learners in the 2003/04 survey are more satisfied on individual measures, as they were last year. These are shown in Table 3.

**43**

There are significant differences in satisfaction ratings for aspects of overall quality of teaching across age groups and gender (Table 3).

- For the aspect of teaching 'how well they relate to you as a person', 40 per cent of 16–18 year old learners in the survey gave a 9 or 10/10 rating compared with 58 per cent of the 25 plus age group, a difference of 18 percentage points.
- When rating 'understanding you and how you learn' the percentage of learners in the survey who gave 9 or 10/10 rating with this aspect of teaching is 25 per cent for 16–18 year old learners compared with 42 per cent of the age group 25 plus, a difference of 17 percentage points.
- A significantly greater percentage of female learners, compared with male learners, gave 9 or 10/10 ratings for all the aspects of quality of teaching. For example, 46 per cent of female learners in the survey gave a 9 or 10/10 rating for 'making the subject interesting and enjoyable' compared with 35 per cent of male learners in the survey, a difference of 11 percentage points.

**Figure 6: Ratings for aspects of the quality of teaching – the per cent rated as 6 or less, 7 or 8 and 9 or 10 out of 10 by learners.**



Base: 31,786

**44**

The emergence and continuance of both gender and age differences in survey results suggests a need to look more deeply at the events and circumstances involved in teaching and learning so that colleges gain informed understandings about these differences, why they occur and what actions might be taken to reduce disparities and thus raise satisfaction levels overall.

**45**

For completeness, Figure 6 shows the range of responses to the different aspects of teaching when learners were asked to rate the different aspects on a scale of 1 to 10. These are grouped in the following categories: 6 or less, 7 or 8, 9 or 10.

**Lesson time lost**

**46**

Given the importance of effective teaching and learning, learners were asked again in 2003/04 to rate the amount of time they felt was wasted.

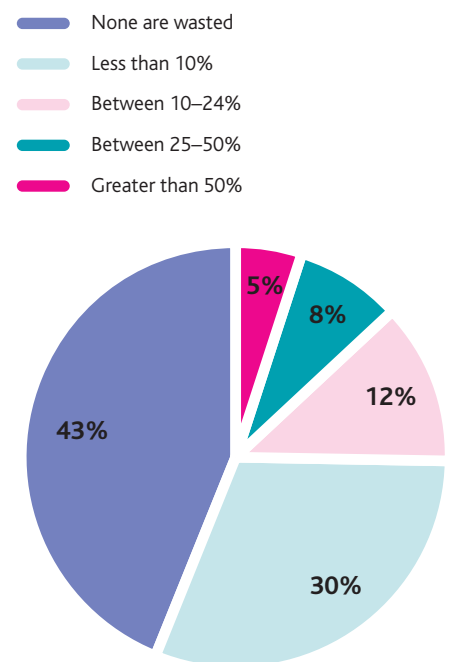
**47**

Figure 7 shows when learners in the survey were asked to rate whether they considered any of their lesson time to be wasted, 43 per cent of learners responded 'none is wasted'.

**48**

Of the other learners in the survey, 55 per cent claimed they considered some of their lesson time as wasted (2 per cent of learners responded 'don't know'). Of those reporting some of their lesson time as wasted, 30 per cent stated that 'less than 10 per cent of lesson time was wasted'. Of the learners reporting time was wasted, the number stating that 'more than half are wasted' was 5 per cent.

**Figure 7: Percentage of wasted lesson time.**



Base: 31,786

**49**

It should be noted that learners' opinions about what constitutes wasted lesson time can and does vary and this question therefore reports learners' perceptions of wasted lesson time rather than making categorical statements.

**50**

Compared with results from 2002/03, these results show an decrease in the percentage of learners (-3 percentage points) who considered none of their lesson time to be wasted.

**51**

There are again some notable differences in learners' ratings for wasted lesson time, across age groups and gender differences. Younger learners consider that more lesson time has been wasted compared with older learners in the survey. Also male learners in the survey consider that more lesson time is wasted compared with female learners. This is shown in Table 4 and discussed below.

**52**

Results across gender:

- of female learners in the survey, 47 per cent responded about wasted lesson time that 'none are wasted'. This compares with 37 per cent of male learners in the survey
- the percentage of learners who rated 'more than a half is wasted' shows no difference across gender with 5 per cent of male and female learners giving this response.

**53**

Results for different age groups appear immediately below.

- It is notable that 27 per cent of 16–18 year old learners in the survey, when asked about lesson time, stated that 'none is wasted', which is significantly lower than the result for the 25 plus age group of learners, of which 51 per cent responded that 'none is wasted'. This is a difference of 24 percentage points, strongly suggesting that older learners had quite different views about teaching and

learning and the amount of time wasted during their lessons, and that perhaps younger learners are more relaxed about time spent on task when compared with older learners.

- The response 'less than 10 per cent of time is wasted' was given by 41 per cent of 16–18 year old learners in the survey. This is significantly higher than the 26 per cent of 25 plus learners who gave this response.

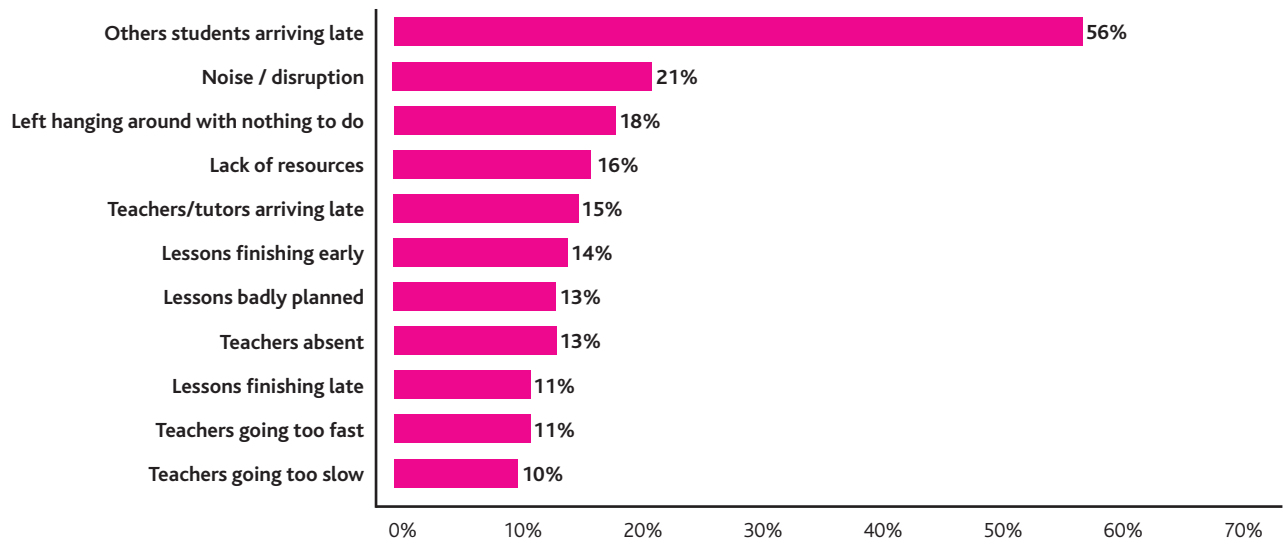
**54**

Overall, of course, both the LSC and providers need to be concerned about questions relating to learners' perceptions that potentially valuable lesson time is lost due to wastage, in some cases this is regarded as a large amount.

**Table 4: Percentage of wasted lesson time, by gender and age 2003/04.**

	Total	Male	Female	16–18	19–24	25 plus
Base: All respondents	31,786	11,773	20,013	7,059	5,067	19,657
	%	%	%	%	%	%
More than a half are wasted	5	5	5	5	6	4
Between a quarter and a half are wasted	8	10	8	11	11	7
10–24% are wasted	12	14	11	15	14	10
Less than 10% are wasted	30	33	28	41	33	26
None are wasted	43	37	47	27	35	51

Figure 8: Issues experienced on course, on a fairly regular basis.



Base 31,786

**Note:** these questions are non-exclusive in nature, meaning that learners can and do give multiple responses rather than a simple division into either yes or no. Thus it also means that results are broadly, though in some cases strongly, indicative rather than offering absolute or categorical statements about a particular item.

## Learners' experiences

### 55

In order to provide more understanding about how learners reacted to a range of situations, they were asked whether they had encountered particular issues in their learning. The percentage of learners who responded that they encountered the following situations on a 'fairly regular basis' is shown in detail in Figure 8 and summarised below:

- other students arriving late by five minutes or more (56 per cent)
- other students making a noise and disrupting the class (21 per cent)
- being left hanging around with nothing to do (18 per cent)
- teachers/tutors being absent (13 per cent)
- lessons being badly planned/disorganised (13 per cent).

### 56

It is interesting that two of the issues which least concerned learners, that is, mentioned by the lowest percentage in the survey, were teachers going too fast, and in contrast teachers going too slowly. Though the overall situation is far from ideal, with around 1 in 10 learners (11 per cent) reporting concerns in these areas.

### 57

Again there are apparent differences across age groups in terms of situations that learners encounter on a regular basis. A higher percentage of learners in the 16–18 age group cite they encounter all these situations on a regular basis, compared with learners in the 25 plus age group. Of 16–18 year olds, 33 per cent mention 'being left hanging around with nothing to do', compared with only 12 per cent of the 25 plus age group.



**Table 5: How do you feel about the feedback on how you are doing from your teachers/tutors, by age and gender.**

	Total	Male	Female	16–18	19–24	25 plus
Base: All respondents	31,786	11,773	20,013	7,059	5,067	19,657
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Motivating	74	73	75	73	71	75
No effect either way	18	20	17	20	21	17
Demotivating	4	4	4	4	5	3

**58**

Two salient issues arise here: first, are age group differences based on perceptions about what each group thinks of as time wasting; or are there real differences between the ways teachers/tutors act and react to 16–18 year olds and those who are aged 25 and over? In either case, more detailed investigation may be warranted so that there is a greater degree of certainty about learners' perceptions in the first instance, or to determine if teachers/lecturers really do respond to different age groups in different ways.

**59**

Again, the incidence of learners arriving late for lessons and this being seen as a possible cause of time wasting needs further investigation, particularly since it touches upon various issues, including how courses are organised and the physical demands they make on students moving to or between locations, whether mechanisms exist within institutions to counter persistent lateness and the effects it has on classroom management, and what other factors might be involved in addressing this issue.

**60**

It is interesting that there are a number of apparent differences between the perceptions of younger and older learners, that is, 16–18 year olds and those aged 25 plus. There is no readily available explanation for this result, and it clearly demands further more detailed analysis, again as noted earlier. It is possible that these differences stem from learners' backgrounds, with those aged 25 years or more having made a greater commitment to learning, and investing substantial time and energy in their choices while managing other demands.

**Feedback from teachers/tutors****61**

Effective and consistent feedback from teachers and tutors is usually considered one of the characteristics of sound approaches to pedagogy. Thus it is generally regarded as an axiom of effective teaching and learning and important to learner perceptions.

**62**

In 2003/04, learners were asked to rate the extent to which they received feedback from their teachers and tutors, with overall responses shown in Table 5.

**63**

It is encouraging that the data in Table 5 show almost three quarters (74 per cent) of learners in the 2003/04 survey found the feedback they received from teachers and tutors was motivating. It is also encouraging to note the low number (4 per cent) of learners expressing the view that teacher/tutor feedback was de-motivating. Perhaps somewhat worryingly, though, 18 per cent of learners also reported that they found feedback to have no effect.

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### Learners' experiences by gender and age group

#### 64

In respect of learners' views on how they found feedback from their teachers and tutors, there are notable differences between gender and age group. Three quarters of female learners in the survey responded that they found feedback motivating, compared with 73 per cent of male learners.

#### 65

Both female and male learners reported identical levels of de-motivation (4 per cent) from teacher and/or tutor feedback.

### Summary

#### 66

Ratings for satisfaction with overall quality of teaching (91 per cent of learners satisfied) closely match satisfaction ratings for overall learning experience (89 per cent of learners satisfied). This result seems to follow expectation.

#### 67

If further education is to play its full part in preparing learners to participate in the knowledge economy, it will be necessary to ensure that standards of teaching and learning are high, particularly in those domains closely related to new products, processes and industries.

#### 68

It needs to be emphasised here that no individual college will imitate or mirror results obtained through the National Learner Satisfaction Survey 2003/04, and any similarity in broad terms is purely by chance. In general terms it is felt that colleges will gain most from the survey by endeavouring as far possible to replicate the methodology employed at local level. Where this is possible, refer to the Learning and Skills Council website for approaches to the methodology. Colleges will also gain the benefit of national benchmarking.



# Information and guidance prior to entry

## 69

As with earlier surveys, the one carried out in 2003/04 sought information about why learners chose their courses, how advice was sought, and its value to the learner.

## 70

Key Findings:

- almost three fifths of learners surveyed (59 per cent) said convenience/location of provider was a factor in their choice of provider
- nearly nine in 10 learners (89 per cent) said their reason for attending a course was to advance their skills and knowledge in this area.

## Factors influencing choice of course

### 71

Among learners surveyed in 2003/04, the most common reasons (89 per cent) given for learning were 'to advance my skills and knowledge in this area' and 'for my own personal interest'. The next most common reason was 'because I like the subject' (82 per cent), followed by 'to gain qualifications' (76 per cent).

### 72

It is interesting to observe the similarity between learners' responses, particularly when there appears to be no direct relationship between the statements 'to advance my skills and knowledge in this area' and 'for my own personal interest'. In fact, the two may be quite different objectives, suggesting a need for more careful future analysis of learners' choices and factors influencing them.

The figure below provides details of the factors influencing learners' choice of course.

## Differences by age

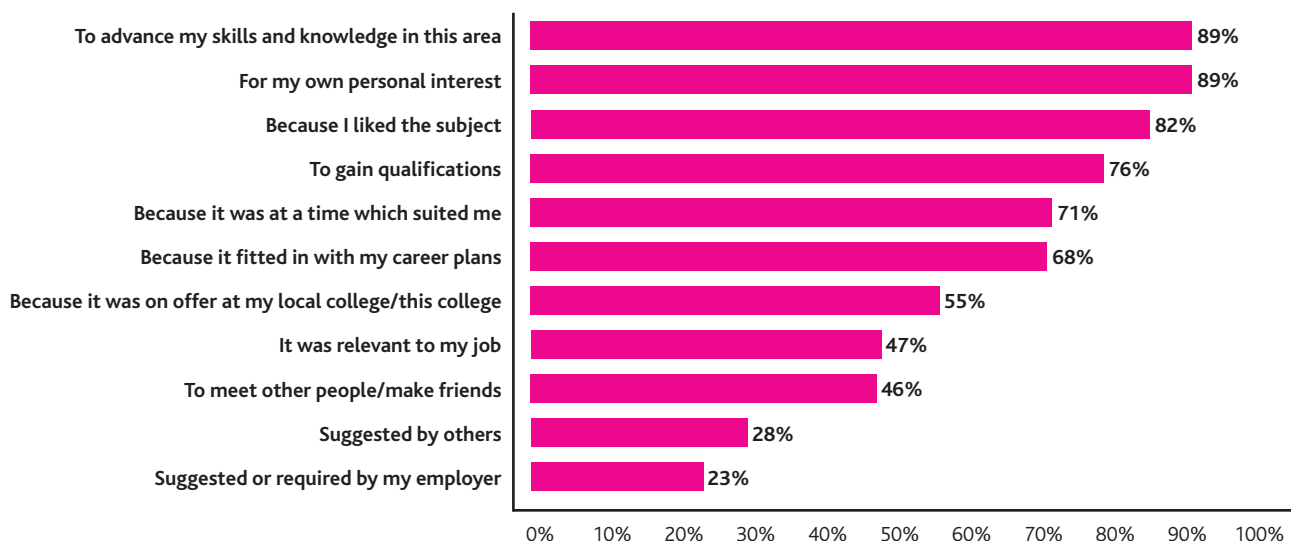
### 73

Results from the 2003/04 survey suggest there are noticeable disparities in learners' reasons for choosing courses across different age groups, as shown in Table 6. For example, it is interesting to note that learners in the survey aged 25 and over appear less likely to choose the course for career or qualification aims and are more likely to cite suitability of timing as a reason for choice. In contrast, 16–18 year old learners in the survey, overwhelmingly stated (94 per cent) 'to gain qualifications', compared with around two thirds (66 per cent) of learners aged 25 plus.

### 74

Other differences are noted in the reason 'because it was at a time that suited me' which was given by three quarters (75 per cent) of 25 plus learners in the survey, compared with less than two thirds (61 per cent) of 16–18 year old learners,

Figure 9: Factors influencing choice of course



Base: 13,125

Note: these questions are non-exclusive in nature, meaning that learners can and do give multiple responses rather than a simple division into either yes or no. Thus it also means that results are broadly, though in some cases strongly, indicative rather than offering absolute or categoric statements about a particular item.

Table 6: Factors influencing choice of course, by age and gender

	Total	Male	Female	16–18	19–24	25 plus
Base: All respondents	13,125	4,915	8,210	3,155	1,955	8,014
	%	%	%	%	%	%
To advance my skills and knowledge in this area	89	90	89	91	89	89
For my own personal interest	89	89	89	93	88	88
Because I like the subject	82	83	82	92	85	78
To gain qualifications	76	76	76	94	90	66
Because it was at a time that suited me	71	67	73	61	66	75
Because it fitted in with my future career plans	68	70	68	85	84	59
Because it was on offer at my local college/this college	55	54	55	58	51	55
It was relevant to my job	47	49	46	49	53	45
To meet other people/make new friends	46	45	47	68	52	38
Suggested by others	28	30	27	39	34	23
Suggested or required by employer	23	24	23	24	30	21

**75**

It also seems that 16–18 year old learners in the survey may be more influenced by social aspects of their choices, with just over two thirds (68 per cent) stating 'to meet other people/make new friends' as an influential factor, compared with about two fifths (38 per cent) of learners aged 25 plus.

**76**

Further, it is apparent that among 16–18 year olds in the survey, that 'personal interest' (93 per cent) and 'because I like the subject' (92 per cent) were factors markedly influential on course choice.

**77**

There were little differences between the percentage of male and female learners in respect of responses about 'to advance my skills and knowledge in this area' (90 per cent and 89 per cent respectively), 'for my own personal interest' (89 per cent), 'to gain qualifications' (76 per cent). This suggests that both groups saw these issues as almost equally important.

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## Factors influencing choice of provider

### 81

It is interesting to observe the reasons learners adduce for their choice of provider and/or place of learning. While this has immediate import for the result of the 2003/04 survey, it has wider implications for learners and providers which might bear more detailed investigation.

### 82

As shown in Figure 10, results obtained for the 2003/04 survey suggest that learners' main reasons for choosing particular providers or places of learning are:

- convenience of location (59 per cent)
- offered course that I wanted (31 per cent).

### 83

When these results are considered in combination with the issues noted above, this presents providers with some challenging issues, notably how to offer learners what they want at times that suit.

### 84

Interestingly, learners in the 2003/04 survey did not rank very highly at all the factor 'best reputation for my course', with only 4 per cent of learners indicating this as a reason for their choice. This compares with 12 per cent of learners who responded that the reputation of the provider in general influenced their choice of provider.

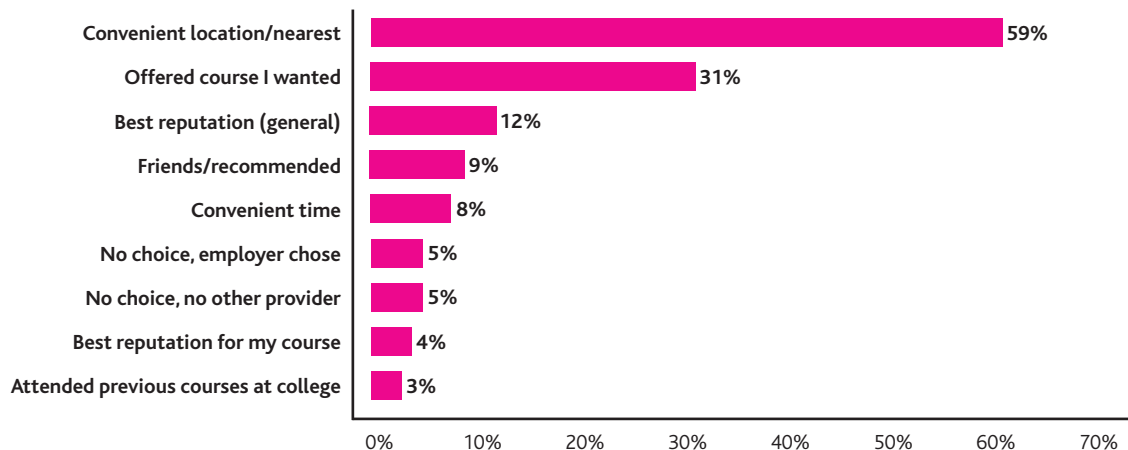
### 85

What the 2003/04 survey reveals is an interesting combination of results, particularly for younger learners, where gaining qualifications and some of the more social reasons are the most influential. But just how these combine is an issue needing more detailed study. For 25 plus learners in the survey however, time and availability are more influential and social issues less well marked than for younger learners. This latter issue raises interesting questions for providers who are attempting to meet both individual and wider demands, but where accessibility to courses is a key issue in take-up.

### 78

There was a very slight difference with respect to 'because I like the subject' between male learners (83 per cent) and female learners (82 per cent). The greatest difference between responses by gender is regarding the factor 'because it was at a time that suited me', 67 per cent of male learners compared with 73 per cent of female learners (+6 percentage points).

Figure 10: Main reasons for choosing a provider



Base: 13,125

Note: these questions are non-exclusive in nature, meaning that learners can and do give multiple responses rather than a simple division into either yes or no. Thus it also means that results are broadly, though in some cases strongly, indicative rather than offering absolute or categorical statements about a particular item.

**86**

The 2003/04 survey suggests that convenience of location is foremost among the reasons why learners chose certain providers; this finding thus casts at least some doubt on other influences on learner choice of provider, no matter how well or badly informed or who the source of advice and/or guidance is. Interestingly, relatively few learners (just 12 per cent) indicate that provider reputation is a factor influencing their choice, and even fewer learners (just 4 per cent) cite provider reputation as a factor in particular courses.

**87**

This situation is important as learner choice within the further education sector is now widening, even though learners so far seem reluctant to make use of other than convenient providers. Over time, however, and as learners become aware of the advantages of a particular provider, the propensity to chose the local and/or convenient provider may diminish, ending a

more or less captive market. This factor notwithstanding, learners do need access to largely impartial sources of advice and/or guidance so that they can make more fully informed choices.

**Sources of pre-entry advice and guidance**

**88**

Clearly, the extent to which learners and prospective learners receive advice and guidance which is at least adequate, meets their needs as individuals and limits the intrusion of bias or partiality, is critically important for them to make informed choices. It follows that: can information and guidance given to learners before entry to further education be enhanced to improve learner satisfaction?

**Sources of advice**

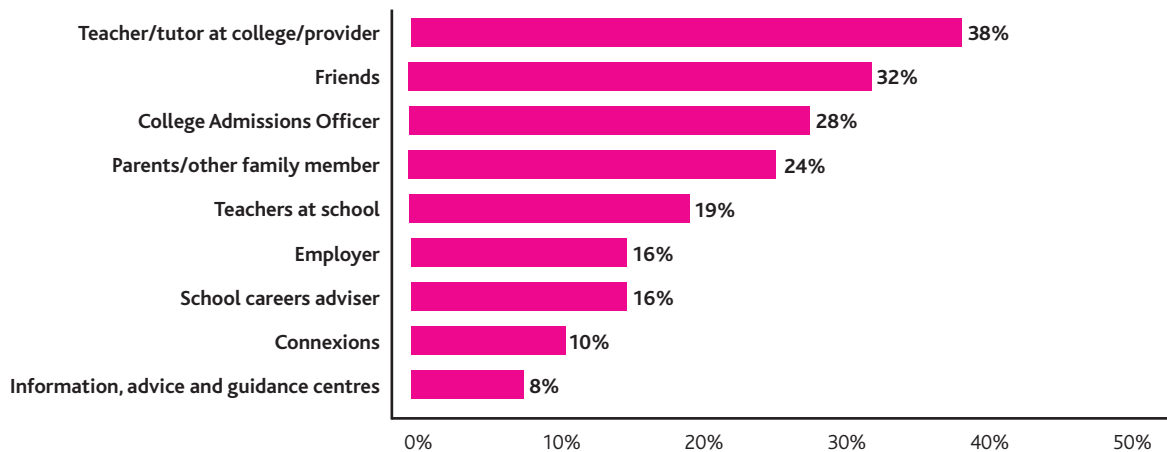
**89**

To ascertain where and how learners obtained advice and guidance, those participating in the 2003/04 survey were asked if they received information from any of the sources shown in Figure 11 appearing below.

**90**

Evidence from this survey and more generally indicates the importance of advice about courses and programmes to learner choice. In 2003/04, around two fifths (38 per cent) of learners stated that 'teachers/tutors at college' were a source of advice. Only a tenth (10 per cent) of learners in general stated that an advisor at Connexions' was a source of advice, though this rises to nearly a quarter (24 per cent) of learners aged 16–18 years, suggesting that with this group Connexions is literally making better connections, though nowhere near the level of teachers/tutors at colleges.

**Figure 11: Sources of pre-entry advice and guidance about learners' choice of course/provider.**



Base: 13,125

Note: these questions are non-exclusive in nature, meaning that learners can and do give multiple responses rather than a simple division into either yes or no. Thus it also means that results are broadly, though in some cases strongly, indicative rather than offering absolute or categoric statements about a particular item.

**Table 7: Sources of pre-entry advice and guidance about learners' choice of course/provider, by age and gender.**

	Total	Male	Female	16–18	19–24	25 plus
Base: All respondents	13,125	4,915	8,210	3,155	1,955	8,014
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Teachers/tutors at college/provider	38	38	38	55	41	31
Friends	32	33	31	51	38	23
College admissions office	28	28	27	32	29	26
Parents or other family members	24	27	22	57	34	9
Teachers at school	19	22	17	55	21	5
Employer	16	16	16	9	19	18
Advisor at an information and guidance centre	8	8	7	7	9	7
Advisor at Connexions	10	12	9	24	13	4
School careers advisor	16	20	14	54	20	2

### Sources of pre-entry advice by age group

#### 91

Within the context of the 2003/04 survey, there was no limit on the number of sources of advice that learners could respond they had used. Results indicate that 16–18 year old learners do use a greater range of sources than those aged the 25 plus.

#### 92

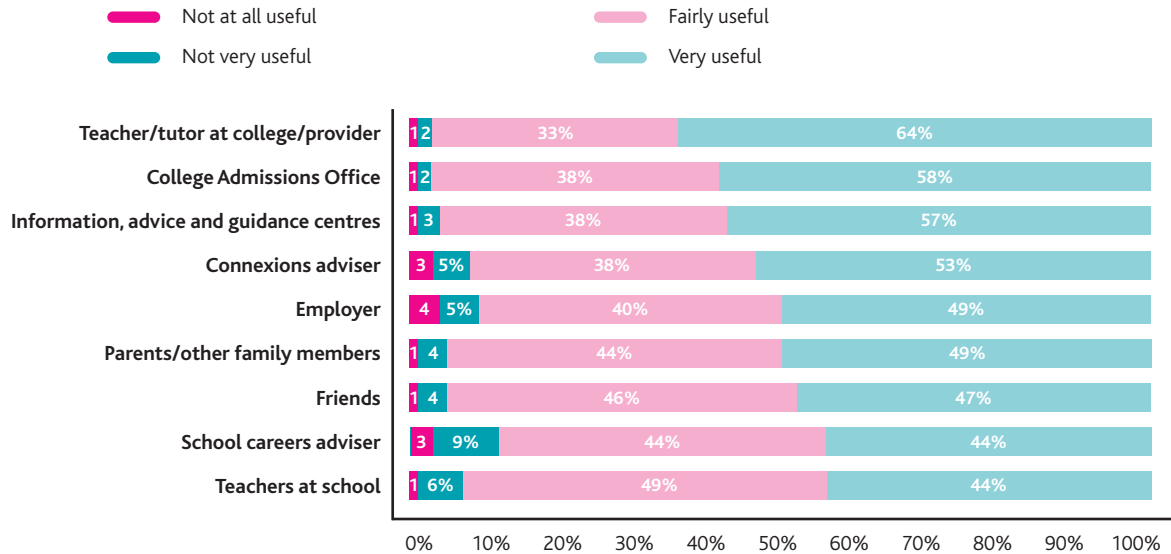
As noted above, there are noticeable differences between the sources of advice about courses/programmes between students of different ages. This is even more manifest when considering the influence of families on learner choice, where for over half of (57 per cent) 16–18 year olds parents and family remain the single most common source of advice. Full details of results are shown in Table 7.

#### 93

As might be expected, the influence of family declines with the age of learner, with about a third of (31 per cent) learners aged 25 plus indicating 'teachers/tutors at college' as the most common source of advice, though this leaves over two thirds dependent on other sources of advice and guidance. Formal advice and guidance provided by information and advice (IAG) centres is noted as an influence by very few learners but college admissions offices more frequently.



Figure 12: How do you rate the usefulness of the following advice received?



Base: Respondents using advice source

Note: learners were asked to rate the usefulness of the advice from a maximum of two sources. If learners cited more than two sources of advice used, they were then asked the usefulness of two sources selected at random.

#### 94

In 2003/04 results, learners' overall responses suggested that their teachers/tutors at the provider were their greatest source of pre-entry advice and guidance about course/provider. Regarding this response, there are no gender related differences with 38 per cent of male and female learners reporting teachers/tutors at the provider as a source of advice and/or guidance.

#### 95

Regarding 'parents or other family members' as a source of advice or guidance about choice of course or provider a greater percentage of male learners (27 per cent) compared with female learners (22 per cent) cited this source.

### Usefulness of advice received

#### 96

As noted above, learners have access to a range of sources of advice about courses and programmes in further education, foremost among them, though not necessarily the most informed are learners' families. Figure 12 shows how useful learners found the advice they received. Of the range of sources available to learners in the 2003/04 survey, the following are identified as very useful:

- teachers/tutors at college/provider (64 per cent)
- college admissions office (58 per cent)
- advisor at an information and guidance centre (57 per cent)
- advisor at Connexions (53 per cent)
- parents or other family members (49 per cent)
- employers (49 per cent)
- friends (47 per cent)
- school careers advisor (44 per cent)
- teachers at school (44 per cent).

#### 97

In usefulness of advice, teachers/tutors at colleges/providers are the sources most likely to be rated 'very' useful, with about two thirds (64 per cent) of learners in the 2003/04 survey giving this response.

#### 98

It is noticeable from the 2003/04 survey that the number of learners citing IAG centres as a source of advice and/or guidance was low, with fewer than one in 10 (8 per cent) responding to this question. Perhaps in some contrast, of those who did use information and advice centres, over half (58 per cent) indicated that they found the advice very useful. This suggests that the service provided is quite well regarded, although knowledge about availability is perhaps quite weak.

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**99**

Results obtained in the 2003/04 survey suggest that some provider and other sources of advice and/or guidance are rated highly by frequency and the usefulness of the information they provide. For example, Connexions is generally rated as being very useful when advice is obtained from this source, but it is not used very often which tends to limit the utility and effectiveness of the advice given.

**100**

Among other sources, learners in the 2003/04 survey identified just over two fifths (44 per cent) of teachers at school and school careers advisors (44 per cent) as being very useful sources of advice and/or guidance.

**101**

Taken together, learners' responses about Connexions and school-based sources of advice and/or guidance may suggest some concerns about the quality and effectiveness of professional advisors and their impact on young people's choices in further education. Moreover, these results point to a substantial reliance on either family and/or friends, or perhaps more importantly college based staff for advice and/of guidance, where the former may not be well-equipped and the latter hardly impartial where potential learners are concerned.

**102**

At national level, survey findings on the incidence of use of independent advice and guidance services is notable. As with Connexions, the evidence suggests that where it can be accessed it is valued, but that far more needs to be done to make it accessible and available to adult learners.

# Support for learners

## 103

This section comments on the issues identified in the 2003/04 survey addressing difficulties, if any, learners experienced on courses, as well as the usefulness of advice sought to support them. Learners' were also asked whether they had received certain health and safety information.

## 104

In terms of its importance to learners, the support they received during their learning experience is second only to the quality of teaching provided. Thus it is a factor likely to be influential in learners' comments and attitudes towards providers.

## 105

This means it is equally important that providers gain understandings about learner's perceptions and that they take these into account when considering the range and type of support structures and mechanisms which exist to assist learners.

## 106

Key Findings from 2003/04 include:

- just over two fifths (43 per cent) of learners surveyed encountered no difficulties of any kind during their learning programme
- of the learners who sought help or advice for these problems, 73 per cent of learners found this advice fairly or very useful.

## Management of learning

### 107

In the 2003/04 survey, learners were asked to rank a number of issues corresponding to the quality of management of administrative experiences they encountered during their learning experiences. Learners ranked each issue using a scale from 1 (very poor) to 10 (excellent).

### 108

The percentage of learners rating items as either 9 out of 10 or 10 out of 10, that is, in the uppermost ranges, is shown in Figure 13.

## 109

For many learners in the 2003/04 survey, the issue 'seeing the same teachers/tutors throughout' was ranked most highly with almost two thirds of those surveyed (65 per cent) rating this item as either 9 or 10 on the scale provided.

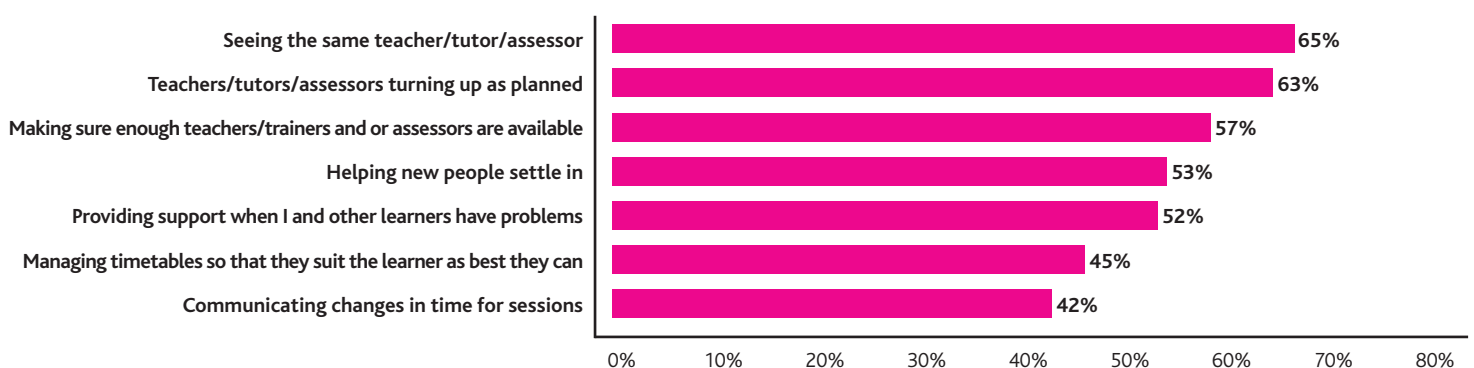
## 110

Equally, many learners in the survey regarded 'teachers/tutors turning up as planned' as an important factor in their learning experience, again with nearly two thirds (63 per cent) or learners rating this item 9 or 10 on the scale provided.

## 111

Other issues attracting a learner rating of 9 or 10 on the scale attracting comments from about half the learners involved in the survey were 'making sure enough teachers/tutors are available', 'helping new people settle in' and 'providing support when I or other learners have problems'.

**Figure 13: The percentage of learners awarding a 9 or 10 out of 10 for the management of administrative issues experienced on courses.**



Base: All respondents rating

**Table 8: The percentage of learners awarding a 9 or 10 out of 10 for the management of administrative issues experienced on course, by gender and age group.**

	Total	Male	Female	16–18	19–24	25 plus
Base: All respondents rating	8,097	2,931	5,166	1,694	1,352	5,050
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Seeing the same teachers/tutors throughout	65	59	69	55	54	71
Teachers/tutors turning up as planned	63	56	67	49	52	71
Making sure enough teachers/tutors are available	57	51	60	46	44	63
Helping new people settle in	53	47	57	45	47	57
Providing support when I or other learners have problems	52	46	56	46	45	56
Communicating changes in times for sessions	42	34	46	28	33	50
Managing timetables so that they suit the learner the best they can	45	39	49	35	38	50

**112**

The issues which received lower learner ratings, that is, from just over two fifths of learners, were 'managing timetables so that they suit the learner the best they can' and 'communicating changes in times for sessions'.

**Age and gender differences****113**

Ratings for the management of administrative issues experienced on the course by age and gender are shown in Table 8.

**114**

Generally speaking however, it is apparent that learners in the 16–18 year old group, and male learners as a whole, are less satisfied than their older or female counterparts. This is illustrated by approximately one third of male learners (34 per cent) rating management of communicating changes in times for sessions at 9 or 10 on the scale provided, compared with nearly half (46 per cent) of the female learners giving the same ratings on this issue.

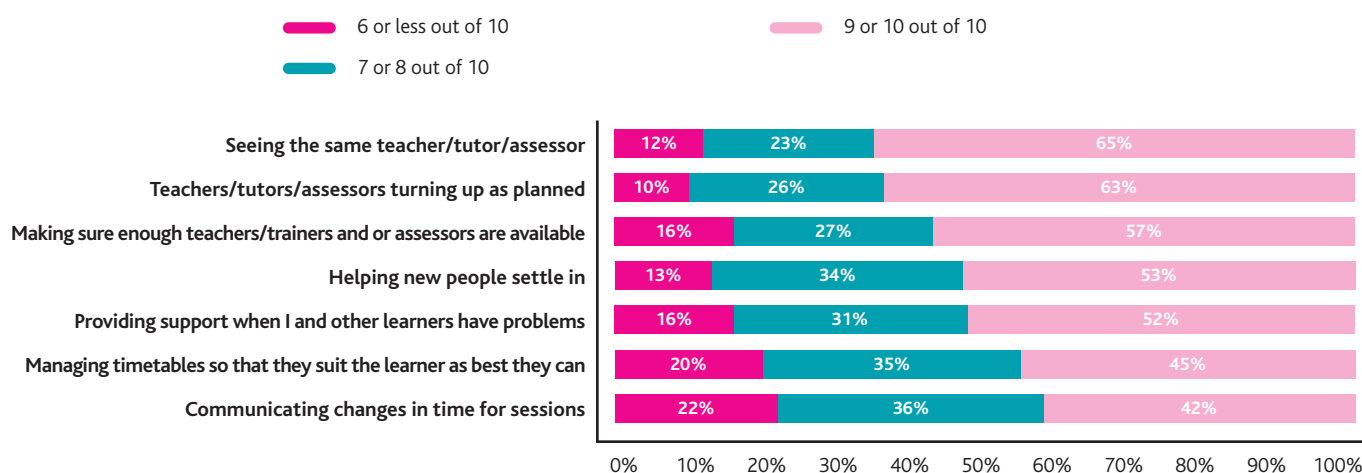
**115**

In the 2003/04 survey, nearly three quarters of those aged 25 plus (71 per cent) rated management of teachers/tutors turning up as planned as 9 or 10 on the scale provided, compared with just under half (49 per cent) of learners in the 16–18 year old group rating the same issue.

**116**

Overall results deriving from the 2003/04 survey suggest that colleges are strongest in those aspects of learner support which follow sound administrative systems, for example, regularly getting teachers/lecturers in front of learners in classrooms, and dealing with female and older students. Colleges appear weaker when dealing with support requiring systemic flexibility, such as providing support for learners or matching teaching times to individual needs, or dealing with males and younger learners.

**Figure 14: The percentage of learners awarding a 6 or less, 7 or 8 and 9 or 10 out of 10 for the management of administrative issues experienced on courses.**



Base: All respondents rating

## 117

In Figure 14 we show all ratings for the management of the above issues, grouped in categories 6 or less, 7 or 8 and 9 or 10 out of 10.

## Health and safety guidance

### 118

Given the importance of occupational health and safety to learners and to colleges, learners were asked if they were informed about certain health and safety issues.

### 119

The percentage of learners in the 2003/04 survey who responded they had been informed about the following issues is:

- emergency arrangements for fire (82 per cent)
- emergency arrangements for first aid and how to report an accident (64 per cent)
- who to ask for any health and safety advice or instructions (66 per cent)
- any dangers involved with your training and how to work safely (64 per cent).

### 120

It is perhaps unsurprising that there are differences between learners' responses to occupational health and safety issues related to the areas/sectors in which they are learning. In some instances these responses might suggest some cause for concern, particularly where more than one third or in some cases nearly half the number of respondents indicates a lack of up to date knowledge. Responses to these health and safety questions by area of learning are shown in Table 9.

### 121

In the 2003/04 survey, the highest percentage of learners who say they have been informed about health and safety issues is in hairdressing and beauty therapy for three out of the four categories. The area of learning with the highest percentage of learners who had been informed about any dangers involved with your training and how to work safely is construction (87 per cent).

### 122

It might be expected that learners' responses would show some variation between broadly practical and broadly classroom based learning experiences which may place quite different emphases on occupational health and safety issues. So it seems to be a matter of concern that around one fifth of learners (22 per cent) in construction did not feel they were adequately informed about who they should ask for any health and safety advice.

**Table 9: The percentage of learners who say they have been informed about the health and safety issues, by area of learning.**

Area of Learning (sample base)	Emergency Arrangements for Fire		Emergency Arrangements for first aid and how to report an accident		Any dangers involved with your training and how to work safely		Who to ask for any health and safety advice or instructions	
	Yes	%	Yes	%	Yes	%	Yes	%
Informed								
Science and mathematics (369)	76		53		63		59	
Land Based Provision (163)	74		72		81		68	
Construction (339)	86		81		87		77	
Engineering, technology and manufacturing (378)	83		77		78		77	
Business administration, management and professional (985)	84		64		53		66	
Information and communication Technology (1,482)	82		63		70		67	
Retailing, customer service and transportation (99)	77		61		54		69	
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel (483)	83		70		68		73	
Hairdressing and beauty therapy (446)	89		82		85		81	
Health social care and public services (1,007)	82		68		63		65	
Visual and performing arts and media (811)	85		63		74		69	
Humanities (493)	81		52		46		59	
English, Languages and Communication (818)	77		49		39		54	
Foundation Programmes (209)	77		60		57		66	

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### 123

One critical issue to emerge from the 2003/04 survey is for providers and the LSC to ensure that the quality of advice and guidance surrounding occupational health and safety issues for learners is planned, timely, accurate and comprehensive. Emerging evidence suggests that numbers of health and safety related issues arise early in learners' experiences, which strongly suggests the need for effective programmes at the very outset of courses and programmes, reinforced on a regular basis throughout learners' experiences.

### 124

Colleges may be unaware that the LSC has available a number of resources dealing specifically with occupational health and safety issues, these include:

- safe learner website – a joint good practice website with the Association of Colleges (AoC) and the Association of Learning Providers (ALP) and for colleges and providers [www.safelearner.info](http://www.safelearner.info)
- supply of the BE SAFE booklet for all learners
- the Safe Learner Line – a confidential line that learners can contact by phone, email or text to report their concerns about learner safety (0808 800 4000).
- BE SAFE DVD and Risk IT video/DVD suitable for use at induction
- promotion of the Health and Safety Procurement Standards
- other publications for supervisors and employers (all available from the LSC helpdesk 0870 9006800).

### 125

The evidence obtained from the 2003/04 survey suggests that all colleges need to carry out studies of learners' awareness about occupational health and safety issues, ensuring that they have up-to-date advice and know what to do in the event of an incident, no matter how minor. Further, colleges might consider whether the LSC's safelearner guidance should be used to inform good practice.

## Difficulties encountered

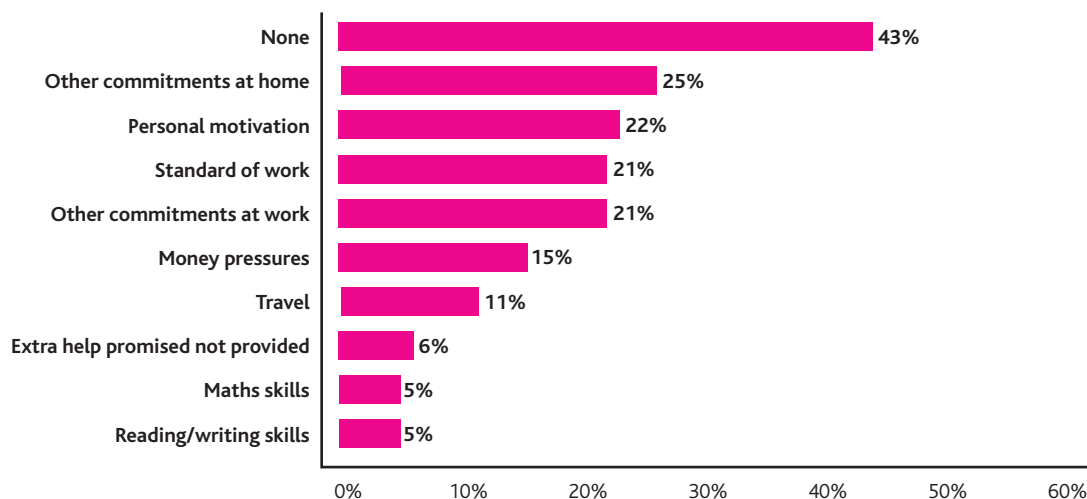
### 126

In order to obtain some measures of the difficulties learners encounter during their learning experiences, those involved in the 2003/04 survey were asked to identify problems they may have encountered.

### 127

In 2003/04, 43 per cent of learners said they had experienced no problems since they started their course. Of learners who did experience problems, shown in Figure 15, the five most common were:

- managing to fit course commitments in with other commitments at home (25 per cent)
- maintaining your personal motivation (22 per cent)
- managing to fit course commitments in with other commitments at work (21 per cent)
- managing to keep up with the standard of work required (21 per cent)
- dealing with the money pressures (15 per cent).

**Figure 15: Since you started the course have you had any problems with the following?**

**Note:** these questions are non-exclusive in nature, meaning that learners can and do give multiple responses rather than a simple division into either yes or no. Thus it also means that results are broadly, though in some cases strongly, indicative rather than offering absolute or categorical statements about a particular item.

Base: 8,097

### 128

Findings for 2003/04 are broadly similar to those obtaining in 2002/03, with a noticeable increase (+6 percentage points) in the number of learners reporting no problems with their learning experiences in 2003/04.

### 129

Table 10 shows the most notable difference in learners' difficulties by gender is over one quarter of female learners (28 per cent) who have experienced a problem managing to fit course commitments in with other commitments at home, compared with around one fifth of male learners (21 per cent).

### 130

A higher proportion of 25 plus learners experienced no problems (44 per cent) compared with 16–18 year old learners (38 per cent). More 16–18 year compared with 25 plus learners reported difficulties with: travelling to college, dealing with money pressures and managing to keep up with the standard of work required. Older learners (25 plus) reported more difficulties with managing other commitments at home and work, compared with younger learners (16–18). These results are shown in Table 10.

### 131

From further analysis, there is a substantial difference between learners without a disability compared with learners having a disability encountering a problem with reading/writing skills, with only very small numbers of the former (5 per cent) and rather larger numbers of the latter (15 per cent).

## Learners seeking help or advice for difficulties

### 132

In 2003/04, the survey asked if learners who experienced problems on their course sought advice or help from the college, provider or workplace on any of these matters.

### 133

The resulting data (see Table 11), show that less than one third of learners (28 per cent) who encountered problems actually sought advice or help to resolve that problem. In other words, over two thirds of learners who reported encountering problems with their learning experiences did not seek help resolving the issues involved.



**Table 10: Since you started the course have you had any problems with the following? By age and gender.**

	Total	Male	Female	16–18	19–24	25 plus
Base: All respondents	8,097	2,931	5,166	1,694	1,352	5,050
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Managing to fit course commitments in with other commitments at home	25	21	28	20	21	28
Managing to fit course commitments in with other commitments at work	21	20	21	16	20	22
Maintaining your personal motivation	22	22	22	25	23	20
Managing to keep up with the standard of work required	21	19	22	25	22	19
Travel to college/training centre	11	12	11	19	14	8
Dealing with money pressures	15	15	15	20	24	11
Reading/ writing skills	5	6	5	6	7	5
Extra help you were promised not being provided	6	6	6	7	9	5
Maths or numeracy skills	5	5	5	8	7	4
No problems	43	44	42	38	42	44

**Table 11: Have you sought advice or help from the provider on any of these matters?**

	Total	Male	Female	16–18	19–24	25 plus
Base: All respondents experiencing problems	4,720	1,683	3,037	1,066	812	2,842
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	28	25	29	37	32	24

**134**

It is interesting that in 2003/04, among 16–18 year old learners who encountered problems during their learning experience over one third (37 per cent) did seek help. This compares with less than a quarter (24 per cent) of learners aged 25 plus who sought assistance to resolve a problem or difficulty.

**135**

As noted above, less than a third (28 per cent) of the learners involved in the 2003/04 survey sought help when they encountered a problem or difficulty. However, as shown in Figure 16, of this number nearly three quarters (73 per cent) said the advice they received was very or fairly useful, suggesting that the majority of learners who sought help obtained it. In contrast, numbers of learners stated that they found the advice received 'not very useful' (15 per cent) or 'not useful at all' (12 per cent).

**136**

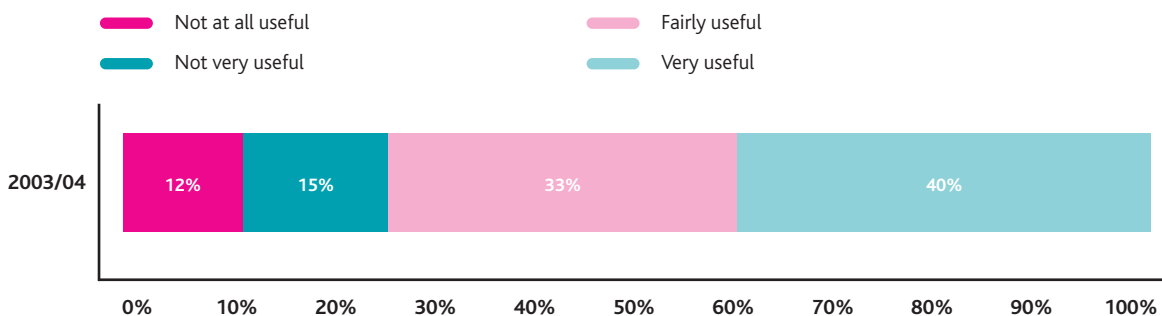
It is noteworthy that only 28 per cent of learners in the 2003/04 survey sought help when they encountered difficulties or problems. Perhaps more encouraging is that the large majority of them did receive useful assistance, though there is no room for complacency given the numbers also reporting little or no useful advice was forthcoming.

**Complaints**

**137**

An important consideration here is that learners concerns as noted in the 2003/04 survey are self-defined, and do not mean that learners sought or instituted a formal process to deal with their particular complaint.

**Figure 16: Usefulness of help or advice received**



Base: 1,343

**Table 12: Learners who made a complaint to their provider, by age and gender.**

	Total	Male	Female	16–18	19–24	25 plus
Base: All respondents	8,097	2,931	5,166	1,694	1,352	5,050
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	11	11	11	18	14	9

**138** Table 12 shows, of learners in the 2003/04 survey, just over a tenth (11 per cent) reported that they had made a complaint about some part of their learning experience, a figure comparable with findings from 2002/03.

**139** Given this consideration, it is noteworthy that learners' complaints generally turned on:

- the poor quality of teaching (13 per cent of those who complained)
- lack of equipment or poor/inadequate learning materials (9 per cent of those who complained)
- teachers not showing up for the class (7 per cent of those who complained).

**140** The percentage of learners who made a complaint is shown by age and gender in Table 12.

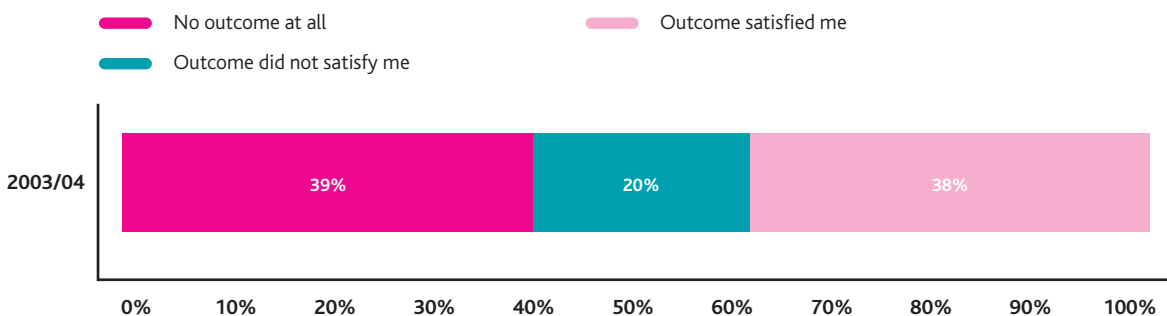
**141** Among learners in the 2003/04 survey, age related differences are apparent with just under a fifth (18 per cent) of 16–18 year olds complaining, compared with 9 per cent of learners aged 25 plus.

**142** No gender related differences are apparent for 2003/04 learners in the survey, with 11 per cent of female and male learners responding that they have made a complaint to their college.

**143** It is interesting to note that the biggest difference between complaints is found within types of institutions and occurs in respect of teaching quality, with nearly one quarter (23 per cent) of complaints from students in sixth form colleges in this area, compared with 12 per cent in general further education colleges.

**144** Of learners in the survey who made a complaint, nearly two fifths (38 per cent) said the outcome satisfied them, about one fifth (20 per cent) said the outcome did not satisfy them, and nearly two fifths (39 per cent) said there was no outcome (Figure 17).

**Figure 17: Outcome of complaint.**



Base: All respondents making a complaint

# The impact of learning

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## 145

In the 2003/04 survey learners were asked about the benefits they had received from their learning experience and the impact that learning had on them as a person.

## 146

Key findings:

- that a high percentage of learners (84 per cent) say they are now more confident in their ability to learn
- overall, more than three quarters (78 per cent) of learners say they enjoy learning and get a 'buzz' from it.

## 149

Examining learners' responses by age, Table 13 shows interesting age related differences: over two thirds (67 per cent) of 16–18 year old learners had generally positive views about education, compared with slightly over half (55 per cent) of learners aged 25 plus.

## 150

Generally negative feelings about education also showed some age related differences, with about a fifth (21 per cent) of learners aged 25 plus responding to this statement, compared with slightly more than 1 in 10 (13 per cent) of 16–18 year old learners in the survey.

## 151

All age groups responded broadly the same way about not being bothered either way about education or being indifferent, with around one fifth of all learners responding to this statement.

## 152

Gender differences in learners' responses are generally not as well marked as those obtaining across age, also shown in Table 11. For example, nearly three fifths (59 per cent) of female learners responded that they had generally positive feelings about education, compared with just over half (55 per cent) of male learners.

## Learners' feelings towards education when leaving school

## 147

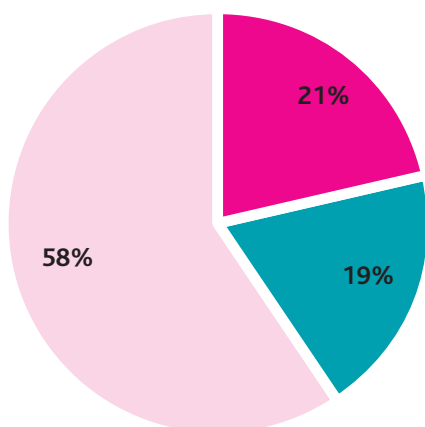
One of the important aspects of surveying learners is to gather information about what might have changed, particularly in terms of their attitudes and perceptions as a result of their learning experiences, and how learners now view past and present experiences. This means it is important to try to gain some measure of learners' views about their experiences prior to entering current learning courses, and where possible compare or contrast these with those obtaining now.

## 148

Figure 20 shows, that in the 2003/04 survey, over half (58 per cent) of learners had generally positive feelings about education when leaving school, compared with around a fifth (19 per cent) who were generally negative, and another fifth (21 per cent) of learners who were neither positive nor negative about their views on schooling.

**Figure 18: Learners' feelings about education when leaving school 2003/04.**

- Generally positive feelings about education
- Not bothered either way about education – indifferent
- Generally negative feelings about education



Base: 10,564

**Table 13: Learners' feelings about education when leaving school, by age and gender.**

	Total	Male	Female	16–18	19–24	25 plus
Base: All respondents	10,564	3,927	6,637	2,210	1,760	6,593
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Generally positive feelings about education	58	55	59	67	58	55
Generally negative feelings about education	19	18	19	13	17	21
Not bothered either way about education – indifferent	21	25	19	19	23	22

**153**

There was a very slight (1 per cent) difference between female and male learners in expressing negative feelings about education, but slightly more males (25 per cent) than females (19 per cent) were not bothered either way about education or indifferent.

## How learners feel about learning now

**154**

Questions here seek to elicit responses which provide information about how learners feel about learning at present. Learners are asked which statements apply to them and the way they feel about learning now.

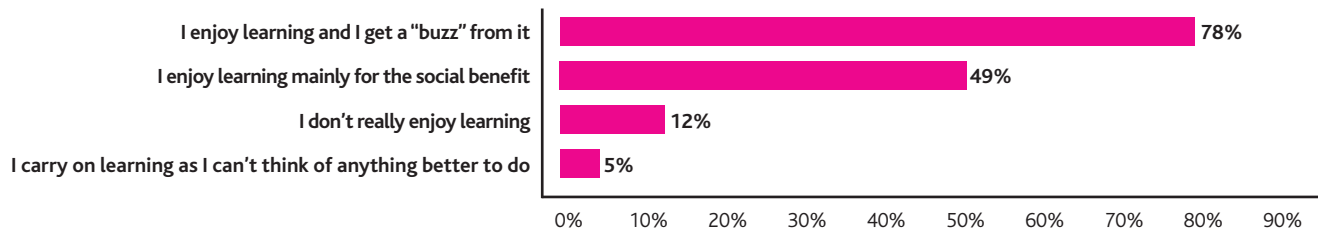
**155**

In 2003/04, nearly four fifths (78 per cent) of learners said they enjoyed learning and get a 'buzz' from it. Interestingly, among learners in the 2003/04 survey who left school with negative attitudes towards education, over three quarters (76 per cent) now get a 'buzz' from it. The overall but slight increase in the percentage of learners who say they get a 'buzz' from learning in 2003/04 compared with 2002/03 results (+2 percentage points) is encouraging.

**156**

It is also interesting that there has been a noticeable increase in the number of learners in the survey who say they enjoy learning for the social aspects, 49 per cent in 2003/04, compared with 39 per cent who responded in 2002/03, a difference of 10 percentage points between the two years.

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**Figure 19: How learners feel about learning now?**

Base: 10,564

Note: these questions are non-exclusive in nature, meaning that learners can and do give multiple responses rather than a simple division into either yes or no. Thus it also means that results are broadly, though in some cases strongly, indicative rather than offering absolute or categorical statements about a particular item.

### 157

A very positive finding was the small number (just 5 per cent) of learners in both the 2002/03 and in 2003/04 surveys who reported that they didn't really enjoy learning. That having been said, more than 1 in 10 learners in 2002/03 (12 per cent) and 2003/04 (12 per cent) reported that 'I am carrying on learning because I can't think of anything better to do'. These results are presented in tabular form in Table 14.

### Age and gender differences

#### 158

In the analysis of 2003/04 survey results, gender differences emerge from questions about the extent to which learners get a 'buzz' from their learning experiences.

#### 159

Just over four fifths (82 per cent) of female learners in the 2003/04 survey are likely to say 'I enjoy learning and get a buzz from it', compared with fewer than three quarters (73 per cent) of males in the survey. Full details of learners' responses, by age and gender, are shown in Table 14.

### 160

There is a small but noticeable difference too in the number of female and male learners in the survey responding to the statement 'I am carrying on learning because I can't think of anything better to do', with 15 per cent of males and 11 per cent of females.

#### 161

Similarly, the number of female learners in the survey (4 per cent) responding to the statement 'I don't really enjoy learning', is slightly but noticeably lower than for male learners (6 per cent).

#### 162

The 2003/04 survey found little difference between female (50 per cent) and male (48 per cent) of learners who responded 'I enjoy learning mostly because of the social aspects'.

### 163

Another contrast arises from learners' responses to the statement 'I am carrying on learning because I can't think of anything better to do', where nearly one fifth (18 per cent) of 16–18 year olds agreed, compared with 1 in 10 (10 per cent) of learners aged 25 plus.

#### 164

It is also interesting to observe that rather more learners in the 25 plus age group – over four fifths (86 per cent) are likely to say 'I enjoy learning and get a buzz from it', compared with fewer than two thirds (61 per cent) of learners in the 16–18 year old group

#### 165

In response to the question 'I enjoy learning mostly because of the social aspects', there are quite marked differences in the responses of learners in different age groups: almost two thirds (63 per cent) of 16–18 year old learners identified with this statement, compared with fewer than half (44 per cent) of learners aged 25 plus, a difference of 19 percentage points overall.

**Table 14: How learners feel about learning now, by age and gender?**

	Total	Male	Female	16–18	19–24	25 plus
Base: All respondents	10,564	3,927	6,637	2,210	1,760	6,593
	%	%	%	%	%	%
I enjoy learning and get a buzz from it	78	73	82	61	70	86
I am carrying on learning because I can't think of anything better to do	12	15	11	18	15	10
I enjoy learning mostly because of the social aspects	49	48	50	63	54	44
I don't really enjoy learning	5	6	4	9	7	3

## Benefits of learning

### 166

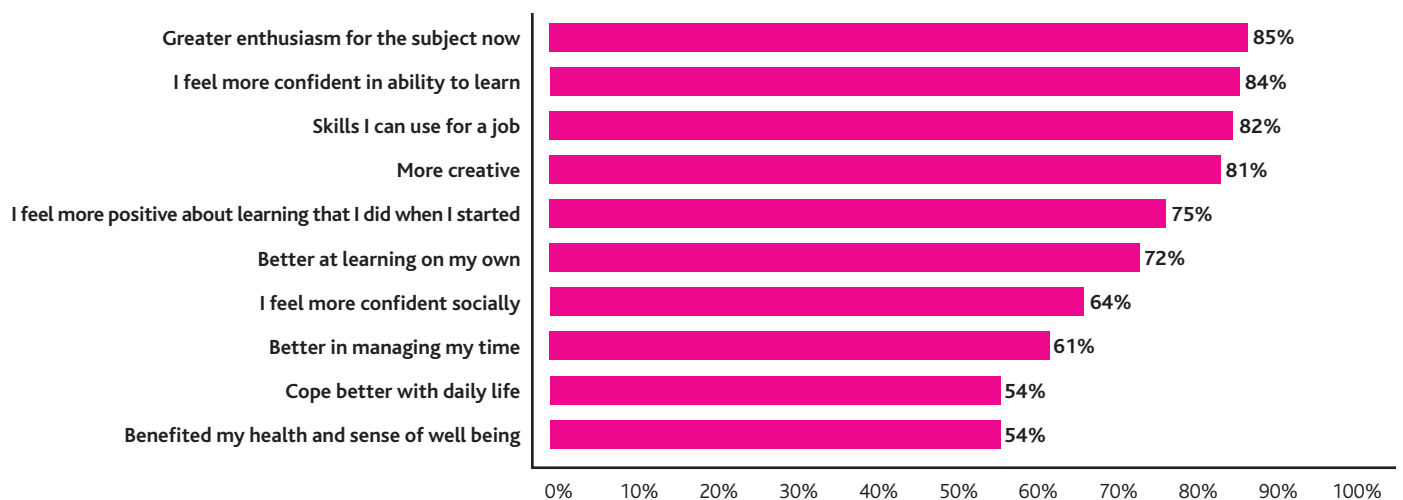
Learners in the 2003/04 survey were able to identify which advantages stemmed from their learning experience. Learners were asked to agree or disagree with statements regarding the effect their learning

experience had on them personally. Full details of learner responses are shown in Figure 18 with the most common benefits being:

- I have a greater enthusiasm for the subject (85 per cent)
- I feel more confident in my ability to learn (84 per cent)

- it has given me skills I can use for a job (82 per cent)
- I am more creative and prepared to try new things (81 per cent)
- I am more positive about learning than I was when I started (75 per cent).

**Figure 20: Benefits of learning.**



Base: 10,564

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**167**

In general terms, learner responses to survey questions shown in Figure 18 are higher than results obtaining for 2002/03.

**168**

Table 15 shows the full details of learner responses by age and gender. More specifically, when responses to these questions are analysed by age groups of learners, notable differences occur between the 16–18 year olds and the 25 plus learners:

**169**

'I feel more confident socially' was mentioned by over four fifths (84 per cent) of 16–18 year old learners compared with more than half (56 per cent) of 25 plus learners; and  
'It has given me skills I can use for a job' was mentioned by more than 9 out of 10 (91 per cent) of 16–18 year old learners compared with just over three quarters (77 per cent) of 25 plus learners.

**170**

Age differences can be viewed positively. Improved provision for 16–18 year old learners should be expected to, make a bigger impact on initial preparation for work and on developing personal responsibility and autonomy.

**171**

Lower scores from the 25 plus group probably reflect development already achieved rather than any weakness in provision. Indeed, in only one of the areas surveyed – coping with everyday life – is the rating given by fewer than the half of the 25 plus group; that learning experiences can be both rounded and lifelong.

**172**

Results from 2003/04 show relatively small differences in the percentage of male and female learners citing particular benefits from learning. This is in some contrast to many of the other gender differences obtaining for learner satisfaction reported here. In 2003/04, the most apparent difference is that female learners are more likely to cite 'more confident socially' than male learners (a difference of +2 percentage points).

**173**

In the results for 2003/04, there are encouraging signs for the further education sector, particularly in the progress being made by younger learners and their attitudes to their learning experiences in further education. It is apparent from learners' responses, that school leavers have more positive attitudes towards education and training than older learners, this suggests further encouragement about lifelong and continuing education as well.

**174**

Among younger learners, males who are sometimes stereotyped as reluctant learners often begin their further education experiences in a positive frame of mind, but evidence emerges that this group may be more prone to changing its mind and developing negative views of learning. This needs more careful examination, and possible implications for teaching and learning support within colleges.



Table 15: The benefits of learning, by age and gender

	Total	Male	Female	16–18	19–24	25 plus
Base: All respondents	10,564	3,927	6,637	2,210	1,760	6,593
	%	%	%	%	%	%
I have a greater enthusiasm for the subject	85	85	85	84	82	86
It has given me skills I can use for a job	82	82	82	91	89	77
I feel more confident socially	64	63	65	84	72	56
I feel more confident in my ability to learn	84	83	85	90	87	82
I am better at managing my time and responsibilities	61	62	60	76	70	54
I feel more positive about learning than I did when I started	75	75	75	75	76	74
I am more creative and prepared to try new things	81	81	81	87	85	78
I am better at learning on my own now	72	73	72	83	78	68
It enables me to cope better with daily life	54	55	54	66	61	49
It has benefited my health and sense of well being	54	53	55	57	53	54

**175**

Satisfaction surveys are a very useful measure, but they need not be only end-of-course or summative evaluations of learners' experiences. For example, some evidence of contrasting attitudes between males and females and between subjects of different ages, suggests the need for more local and careful examination of events and circumstances with a view to preventing or limiting learner dissatisfaction and disaffection.

**Likelihood to return to learning within the next three years?****176**

Again, one of the issues of importance to the entire learning community is the extent to which learners wish to continue with their learning experiences and what influences current teaching and learning have on their ambitions or intentions.

**177**

In the 2003/04 survey over four fifths (87 per cent) of respondents said it was likely that they would undertake further learning during the next three years. Over three fifths (61 per cent) of learners responded that it was very likely they would undertake further learning in the next three years. Both results appear very positive indeed. These responses are shown in Figure 21.

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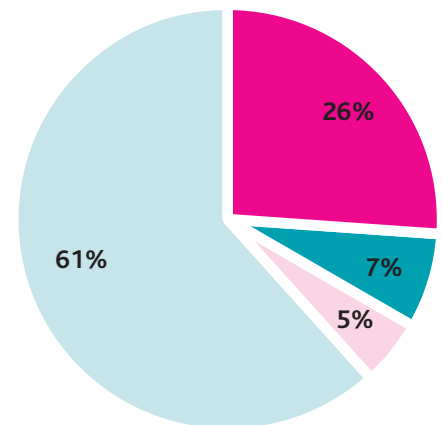
**178**  
Of other learners, around a quarter (26 per cent) say they are fairly likely they would undertake further learning in the next three years.

**179**  
Of learners in the 2003/04 survey, only 5 per cent reported that they would be very unlikely to undertake further learning in the next three years. And only 2 per cent of learners indicated they did not know about their future learning plans.

**180**  
The 2003/04 survey sampled **learndirect** learners. Analysis of the results shows that just over four fifths (82 per cent) of **learndirect** learners say they would be likely to undertake further learning in the next three years of whom about half (52 per cent) say they are very likely to do so and only around 1 in 10 (9 per cent) say they are very unlikely' to do so.

**Figure 21: Likelihood of learning in the next three years.**

- Very likely
- Fairly likely
- Fairly unlikely
- Very unlikely



Base: 31,786

# Areas for action

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## 183

It is interesting that throughout the 2003/04 NLSS results there are a number of apparent differences between the perceptions of younger and older learners, that is, 16–18 year olds and those ages 25 plus and also between male and female learners. This raises the question, are these gender and age group differences based on perceptions about what each group thinks or are there real differences between the ways teachers/tutors act and react to the difference groups? There is no readily available explanation for this result, and it clearly needs further detailed analysis.

## 181

It needs to be emphasised that no individual college will necessarily imitate or mirror results obtained through the National Learner Satisfaction Survey 2003/04. In general terms it is felt that colleges will gain most from the survey by endeavouring as far as is possible to replicate the methodology employed at a local level and benchmarking these local results against the NLSS.

## 182

A supporting document *National Learner Satisfaction Survey: Guidance on the core methodology and core questionnaire* is available from the LSC website (<http://researchtools.lsc.gov.uk>). This document contains the questionnaire used to undertake the 2003/04 NLSS, a paper-based questionnaire of the core questions in the NLSS and calibration tables to compare the NLSS telephone survey results with paper-based questionnaire survey results to aid for benchmarking purposes.

## 184

One of the key issues for providers is to ensure that they are very much aware of and deal with any substantial emerging alienation or dissatisfaction among learners, perhaps more so among males than females and younger learners rather than older. Moreover, providers need to capitalise on the early and evident enthusiasm which most learners bring to their current learning experience.

## 185

Satisfaction surveys are a very useful measure but they need not be only end-of-course or summative evaluations of learners' experiences. For example, some evidence of contrasting attitudes between male and female learners and between subjects of different ages throughout the results in this report, suggests the need for more local and careful examination of events and circumstances with a view to preventing or limiting learner dissatisfaction and disaffection.

## 186

One critical issue to emerge from the survey is for providers and the LSC to ensure that the quality of advice and guidance surrounding occupational health and safety issues for learners is planned, timely, accurate and comprehensive. This needs to be implemented at the very outset of learners' courses and programmes and reinforced on regular basis throughout learners' experiences. The section on **Support for learners** details available help and guidance from the LSC regarding health and safety. These products can be obtained from the LSC helpdesk 0870 9006800.

## 187

It is interesting that the survey found learners who sought help in resolving difficulties with their learning, were generally more satisfied than those who did not seek assistance in this way. This suggests that it might be advantageous for colleges to positively encourage learners to seek and obtain help, which will improve their learning experiences and potentially the outcomes as well.

## 188

Very often providers are ideally placed to exploit the positive message obtained from the 'buzz' learners experience, and the growth of confidence which comes from successful learning experiences.

# Learner focus groups

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## 189

Three focus groups for further education learners were held in December 2004, each lasting approximately one and a half hours and comprising 8 to 10 learners per group.

## 190

Specific criteria for the groups were:

- all attend sixth form college and 16–19 year old learners
- all attend a general further education college and within the age group 16–19 year olds
- all attend a general further education college and 19 plus learners.

## 191

In addition, two mini focus groups were conducted with learners with disabilities.

Each mini focus group consisted of four learners and lasted approximately one and a half hours. Criteria for these groups were:

- all learners undertaking an access course and 16–20 years old
- all learners undertaking vocational courses and 17–22 years old.

## 192

The verbatim quotes which follow are from further education learners about their learning experiences. These should be read in context of examples from individual learners in further education.

## 193

The sample of further education learners interviewed in the 2003/04 National Learner Satisfaction Survey (NLSS) is 31,786. The number of learners involved in focus groups numbers around 40 in total. Thus there are very significant differences in the nature, scope and approach to the overall sample of 31,786 learners compared with the far smaller number of focus group participants.

## 194

This means that quotations and citations from the learners involved with the focus groups simply cannot be used to either prove or disprove findings from the survey. Rather the purpose of the focus groups was to ascertain some additional detail about learners' experiences which could not be gathered by a telephone survey, and thus

these observations remain of interest from this perspective. In a real sense this was an attempt to flesh out learners' views, that is, provide some additional commentary in a qualitative way.

## 195

It is also worth noting that learner responses in the 2003/04 survey are expressed as percentages of their experiences, thus they reflect an aggregation of learners' views and opinions.

## Quotes from learners about their learning experiences

Overall learning satisfaction and impact of learning

## 196

"It's really nice to be in control of my learning, and making decisions about my life."

"I knew I'd have a career, with the training – I knew I'd be able to use it."

"I'm doing it because it's something I've always been interested in."

"I just enjoy it, I find it interesting, I like it quite a lot so I just keep going."

"We don't have to be there, we're there because we want to be there."

"School is like a 9am to 5pm job, college gives you a bit more freedom."

"I just like doing it, it gets me out of bed in the morning...or I'd be in bed until one in the afternoon."

"It's up to you...the teachers aren't going to make you pass, you pass yourself...there's only so much they can do, they help you but at the end of the day if you don't do the work you're not going to pass."

## Overall quality of teaching and training

### 197

"Class sizes are quite nice, big enough to not feel isolated from the rest of the college but not too big so you can't do anything."

"No time is wasted, everything is got in and what we need to know is told to us and it's all pretty well managed."

"They talk to you rather than telling you stuff."

"We get told if we're over 15 minutes late for a lesson we're not allowed in."

It's all relevant stuff, but it does drag on a little when you are doing the same module for 4 weeks."

"There's one teacher who never comes, we always get a supply. We've got an assignment to go in soon – we haven't even started it."

"The teachers keep changing over. The first one was a temporary teacher...the new teacher never knows where the last one left off."

"She [visiting teacher/lecturer] is way above our level, we don't have a clue what she is talking about."

## Key Skills

### 198

"It's frustrating because you could be using your brain to do other things."

## Pre-entry advice and guidance

### 199

"None of us go in there [Connexions] expecting them to hand it to us on a plate but obviously we're going in there because we don't have that guidance from our

families or our friends and we need an external person who knows what they're talking about."

"The college itself gave me a lot of advice."

"If somebody's actually evangelising about a place then there must be something to it."

"I wanted to do Media because I did it at GCSE and got really good marks."

"I had a choice of two but it turned out that one of them didn't exist anymore."

"I made quite a few phone calls because...I'm working full time and I have to earn a living, and I'm a single parent so I needed something that even though it was very structured and organised, I had to fit it in."

## Support for learners including feedback and complaints.

### 200

"A lot of our teachers are willing to help you in lunch hours and stuff, if you need the help."

"If you've got a lot of assignments the teachers will try and work it so you haven't got too much at one time."

"They [teachers/lecturers] have certain times when they see people but you've got to be able to meet that slot...I'm not in that day so I find that really difficult."

"They ask for feedback on what you think, what you think can be done better."

## Health and safety

### 201

"[You get told] how to use equipment safely and then basic stuff like fire exits."

If you don't wear your boots to the lesson, you don't do your practical [part of the lesson]."

"We have to wear overalls and steel capped boots."

## Learner quotes from the mini focus groups

### 202

"Here is better [than school] because you get more freedom."

"I feel more independent...they treat you like an adult."

"You even get friends with the staff...you can actually build up a really good relationship with staff and students here."

"They [staff] treat you like normal adults. They don't look at the wheelchairs, they look at the people inside them. They don't see the wheelchairs as a barrier."

"They [teachers] help you."

"If they didn't have a computer in the college at all then no one in this college could do anything really. Anyone who's got a really bad disability where they can't use their hands, if they didn't have a computer they wouldn't be able to do anything."



### **Related Publications**

*National Learner Satisfaction Survey:  
Highlights from 2003/04*

Publication reference: LSC-P-NAT-050167

*National Learner Satisfaction Survey:  
Core Methodology and Guidance*

Publication reference: LSC-P-NAT-050168

*National Learner Satisfaction Survey:  
Work Based Learning Report 2003/04*

Publication reference: LSC-P-NAT-050170

*National Learner Satisfaction Survey:  
Adult and Community Learning Providers  
Report 2003/04*

Publication reference: LSC-P-NAT-050171

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