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Leading learning and skills

National Learner Satisfaction Survey: Highlights from 2003/04

March 2005

Of interest to everyone involved in sustaining and improving levels of learner satisfaction across the post-16 education and training sector

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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 post-16 education and training 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.

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.

Learners were also asked about the quality of advice and guidance they received, whether learning support was satisfactory, and the impact that learning had made on their lives.

As with previous surveys, results for 2003/04 show that there are high levels of satisfaction across the sector. In particular, the satisfaction rate for learners in work based learning has increased.

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.

Survey design also enabled researchers to explore the satisfaction levels of different groups of learners, and some measures related to equality and diversity are presented here in brief.

Amid otherwise good news for 2003/04, there is evidence that some learners remain only fairly satisfied and others 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 groups.

Foreword

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The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has now completed its third National Learner Satisfaction Survey. In 2003/04, substantially more learners were surveyed than in previous years. On behalf of the LSC, an independent research organisation conducted telephone interviews with 43,316 learners in further education, work based learning and adult and community learning providers, to ask about their views about the education and training they receive. With three years' data, we now have the ability to show how learners' opinions change over time, and to report with increasing confidence that there are high levels of satisfaction across the further education and training sector.

Interviews conducted with learners over the past three years show that the number of 'extremely satisfied' learners remains stable, and in some instances has increased. However, as the leader in the learning and skills sector, we need to focus on two groups:

- those who are already very or extremely satisfied to ensure that their experiences continue to be of a high standard
- those who are only fairly satisfied or who are dissatisfied, so that over time the numbers in each category are substantially reduced.

Again in 2003/04, the LSC consulted providers through nine workshops. Discussions at these workshops helped develop areas for action that may assist the LSC and its partner organisations – particularly providers, who are critical – respond to the issues raised by learners and make improvements in learners' experiences. More detailed recommendations will be presented in three sector reports to be published in spring 2005.

Background

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1

The 2003/04 National Learner Satisfaction Survey (NLSS) provides the LSC with a third set of increasingly valuable data on the views of post-16 learners in England.

2

With the development of this time series, the LSC is better able to report and comment on longitudinal trends in learner satisfaction, and use the evidence it obtains to work with providers to further improve the quality of provision across England.

3

The LSC surveyed 43,316 learners in 2003/04 compared with 25,111 in 2002/03. This increased sample size provides the LSC with further education data which is sufficiently large and robust enough to be analysed at regional and local LSC levels.

4

The format of the 2003/04 NLSS differs from that used in previous years but learners' responses still allow comparison with data obtained in previous years. This year, a set of core questions was identified from the range of questions asked in previous years and all learners in the survey were asked these core questions. The resulting data thus allows robust analysis at local and regional level. Core questions relate to three sections:

- the quality of teaching and lesson management
- overall satisfaction with the learning experience
- return to learning.

5

As well as the core questions, learners were also asked one additional set of questions these are termed 'modules', and focus on the following areas of learners' experiences:

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

6

This report sets out highlights from the findings of the 2003/04 survey. It includes an analysis of results from the core questions, and highlights of results from the module questions. More detailed analyses will be available in three sector reports to be published in spring 2005.

Key Messages

7

The key message here is that we have a number of reasons to celebrate:

- almost all learners in the survey, across all areas of provision, are 'fairly', 'very' or 'extremely' satisfied with their learning experiences. The percentage of 'extremely' satisfied learners remains stable compared with 2002/03, and in 2003/04 showed an increase among learners in the work based learning sector
- overall satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning is very high among learners in the survey
- compared with the previous year's survey, in 2003/04 there is a notable increase in the percentage of learners in the survey now saying that they get a 'buzz' from learning
- a higher percentage of learners in the survey (compared with 2002/03) say they now have greater enthusiasm for their subject, and have developed skills they can use for their jobs
- in 2003/04, the percentage of learners in the survey experiencing problems on their courses decreased, compared with 2002/03, across most types of provision.

8

Although there are many examples of satisfaction among learners, the 2003/04 survey does highlight areas where learners are less than satisfied:

- compared with 2002/03, learners in the survey this year were somewhat less likely to give a 9 or 10 out of 10 for different aspects of teaching and learning, a result which is consistent across all types of provision
- across all types of provision, there has been an increase in the percentage of learners in the survey saying that some lesson time is wasted
- around 1 in 10 learners in the survey continue to make a complaint about courses, with this year's results showing an increase in the percentage of learners in the survey saying that there was no outcome to their complaint.

Abbreviations used

9

The following abbreviations are used in the notes to the figures and tables:

- Further Education – **FE**
- Work Based Learning – **WBL**
- FE delivered by Adult Learning Providers – **FE by ALP**
- non-accredited Adult and Community Learning – **non-accredited ACL**.

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

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, for example in figure 1.

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 for course choice, reflect learners' multiple response options and thus will usually sum to far more than 100 per cent.

In order to compare percentage results across different years of the survey we use change in 'percentage points'. Table 1 uses this notation, for example, for 'knowledge of the subject' by FE providers, for 2003/04, there is a –1 percentage point fall in learners rating this 9 or 10 out of 10, compared with 2002/03. This is different from a change of –1 per cent between the two years' results.

Core Questions

Overall satisfaction with the learning experience

10 Figure 1 shows that overall satisfaction with the learning experience, across the entire sector, continues to be very high for most learners in the survey. Around 90 per cent of learners in each area of provision say they are 'fairly', 'very' or 'extremely' satisfied. The percentage of dissatisfied learners in the survey remains low for all provision across the three years of the survey.

11 Figure 2 shows that the percentage of learners in the survey saying they are 'extremely' satisfied with their learning experience increased between 2001/02 and

2002/03 in the further education sector. However, the change between 2002/03 and 2003/04 is less well pronounced. Since 2002/03, there has been an increase in the number of 'extremely' satisfied learners in work based learning, but for other areas of provision, proportions show a decrease compared with 2002/03.

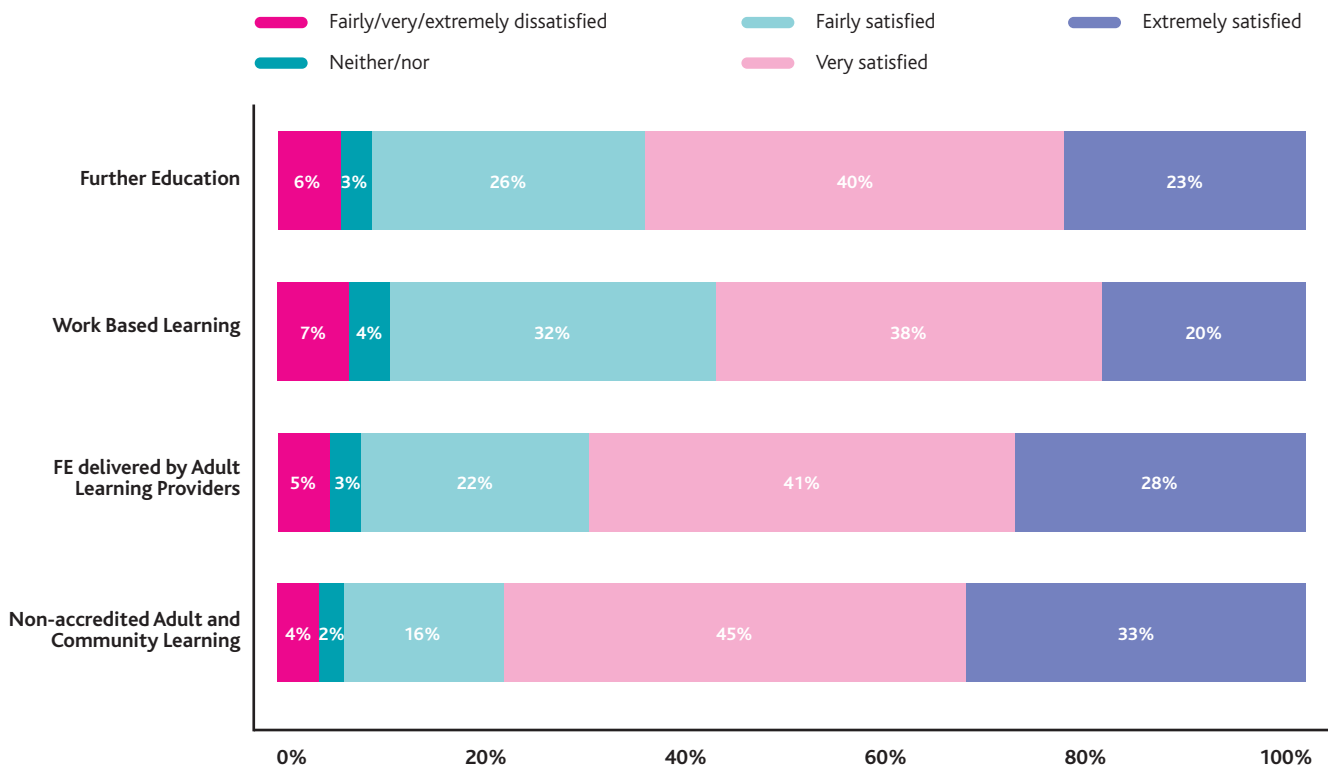
12 The percentage of learners in the survey saying they are 'fairly' satisfied with their learning experiences remains stable compared with the results in 2002/03. This is shown in Figure 3. In 2003/04, there is a small increase in 'fairly' satisfied learners for non-accredited ACL and work based learning providers.

13 In 2002/03, the LSC reported that it hoped to see a decrease in the percentage of learners in the survey who are 'fairly' satisfied with their learning experience. Over time, the aim is for these learners to become 'very' or 'extremely' satisfied. However, data gathered for 2003/04 suggests that there has yet been no marked shift in this direction over the three surveys.

14 Analysis of 'fairly' satisfied learners reveals that they have slightly worse experiences relating to most measures, including:

- satisfaction with advice pre-entry
- likelihood of feeling they have chosen the right course
- satisfaction with teaching
- experience of 'wasted' teaching time

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



Base: FE 31,786; WBL 6,111; FE by ALP 1,652; non-accredited ACL 3,767

- experience of difficulties
- satisfaction with support
- likelihood of thinking about leaving the course.

15

Figures 4, 5, 6 and 7 show overall satisfaction with the learning experience, over time in each sector. The data show that overall, there is very slight reduction in the percentage of learners in the survey saying that they are dissatisfied with their learning experience. There is little evidence of a shift in the number of dissatisfied learners becoming 'fairly' satisfied, or of 'fairly' satisfied learners becoming 'very' or 'extremely' satisfied.

16

In the further education sector, there has been little change over the three years of the NLSS in the proportion of learners in each category (Figure 4).

17

In work based learning, the emerging pattern is mixed. The percentage of learners in the survey who are dissatisfied has increased over three years, as has the percentage of learners who are 'fairly' satisfied and 'extremely' satisfied. This results in a decrease in the percentage of learners in the survey who are 'very' satisfied (which will account for a shift in satisfaction both to the more positive and the more negative ends of the scale) (Figure 5).

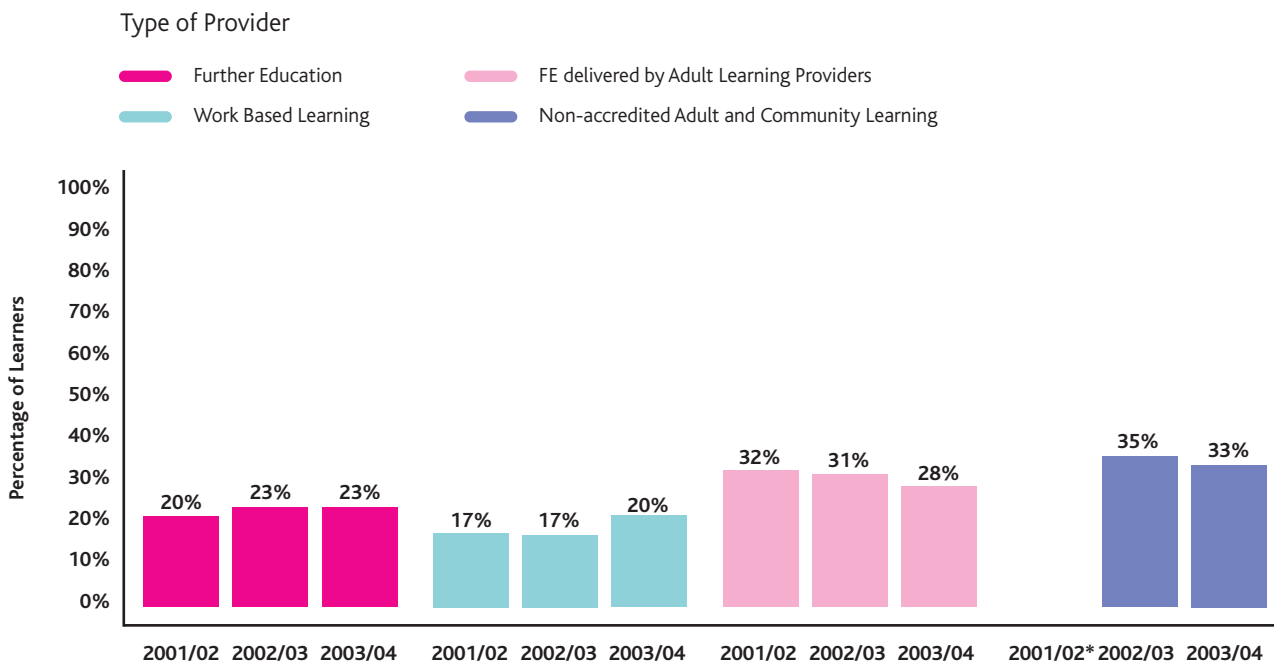
18

In further education programmes delivered by adult learning providers, there is less of a positive trend as the percentage of 'very' and 'fairly' satisfied learners in the survey remains static compared with 2002/03. There are now fewer learners saying they are 'extremely' satisfied (Figure 6).

19

The data for two years derived from non-accredited ACL learners shows that there is a slightly higher percentage of 'fairly' dissatisfied learners in the survey, and a slightly lower percentage of 'extremely' satisfied learners in 2003/04 compared with 2002/03 (Figure 7).

Figure 2: Overall satisfaction with the learning experience: rating 'extremely' satisfied, by type of provision over time.



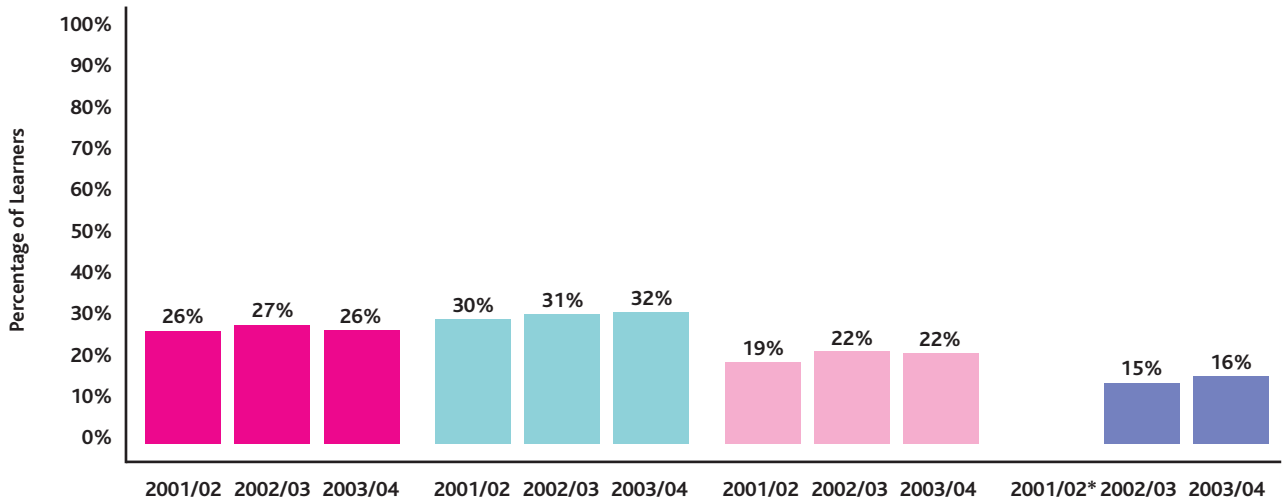
Base: 2003/04: FE 31,786; WBL 6,111; FE by ALP 1,652; non-accredited ACL 3,767. 2002/03: FE 19,947; WBL 2,003; FE by ALP 1,203; non-accredited ACL 1,958. 2001/02: FE 10,000; WBL 2,032; FE by ALP 723

***Note:** Non-accredited ACL sample size in 2001/02 is too small to use as comparison against other years.

Figure 3: Overall satisfaction with the learning experience: rating 'fairly' satisfied by type of provision over time.

Type of Provider

- Further Education
- FE delivered by Adult Learning Providers
- Work Based Learning
- Non-accredited Adult and Community Learning

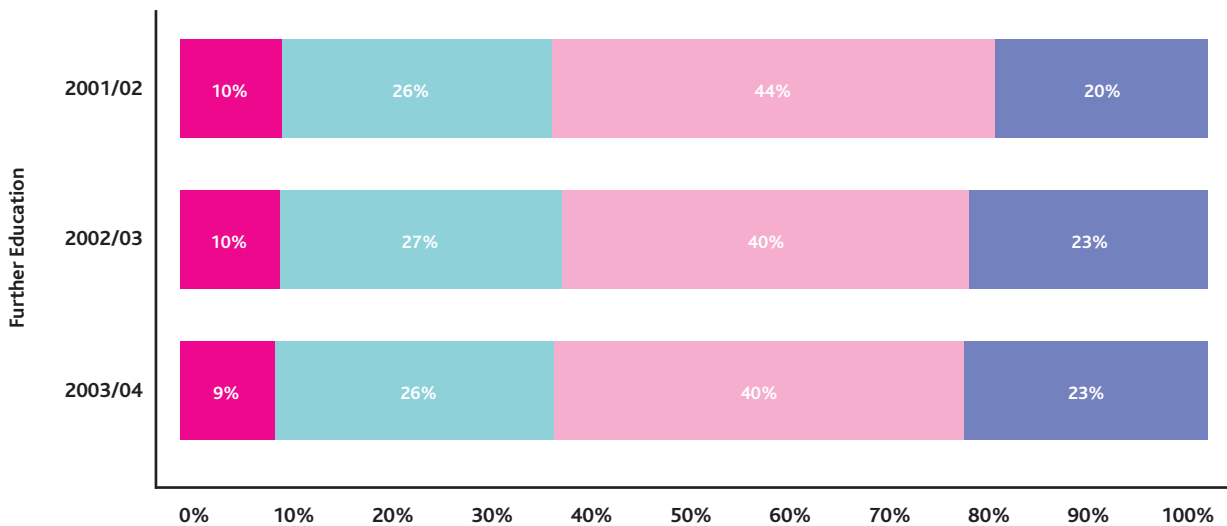


Base: 2003/04: FE 31,786; WBL 6,111; FE by ALP 1,652; non-accredited ACL 3,767. 2002/03: FE 19,947; WBL 2,003; FE by ALP 1,203; non-accredited ACL 1,958. 2001/02: FE 10,000; WBL 2,032; FE by ALP 723

*Note: Non-accredited ACL sample size in 2001/02 is too small to use as comparison against other years.

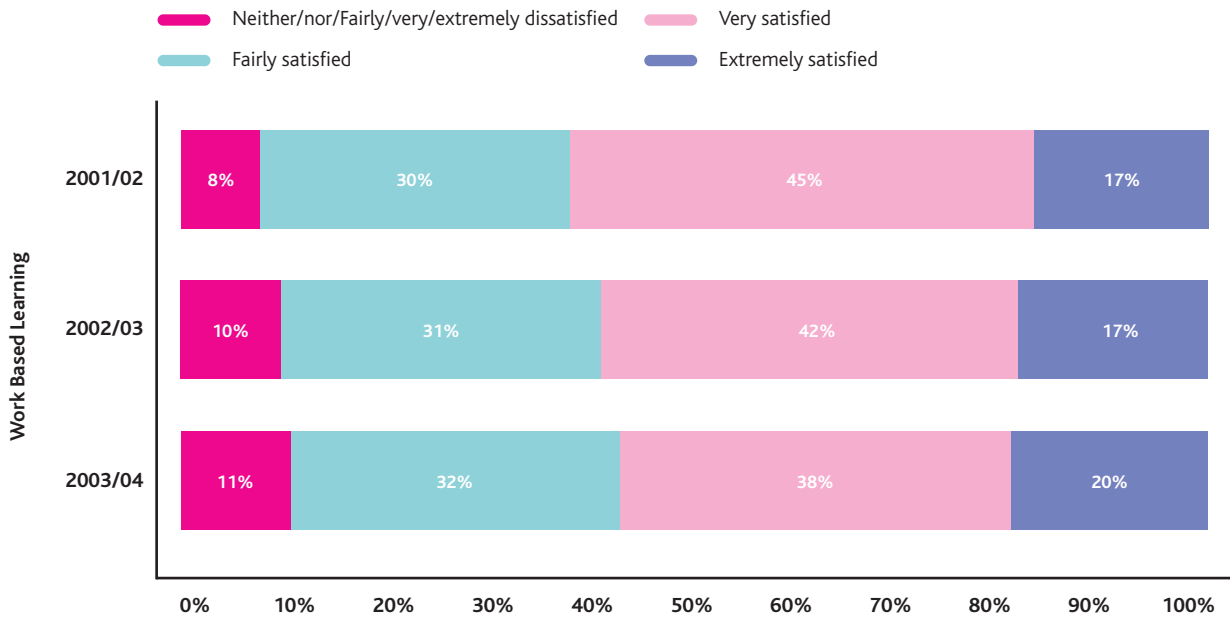
Figure 4: Overall satisfaction with the learning experience in further education.

- Neither/nor/Fairly/very/extremely dissatisfied
- Fairly satisfied
- Very satisfied
- Extremely satisfied



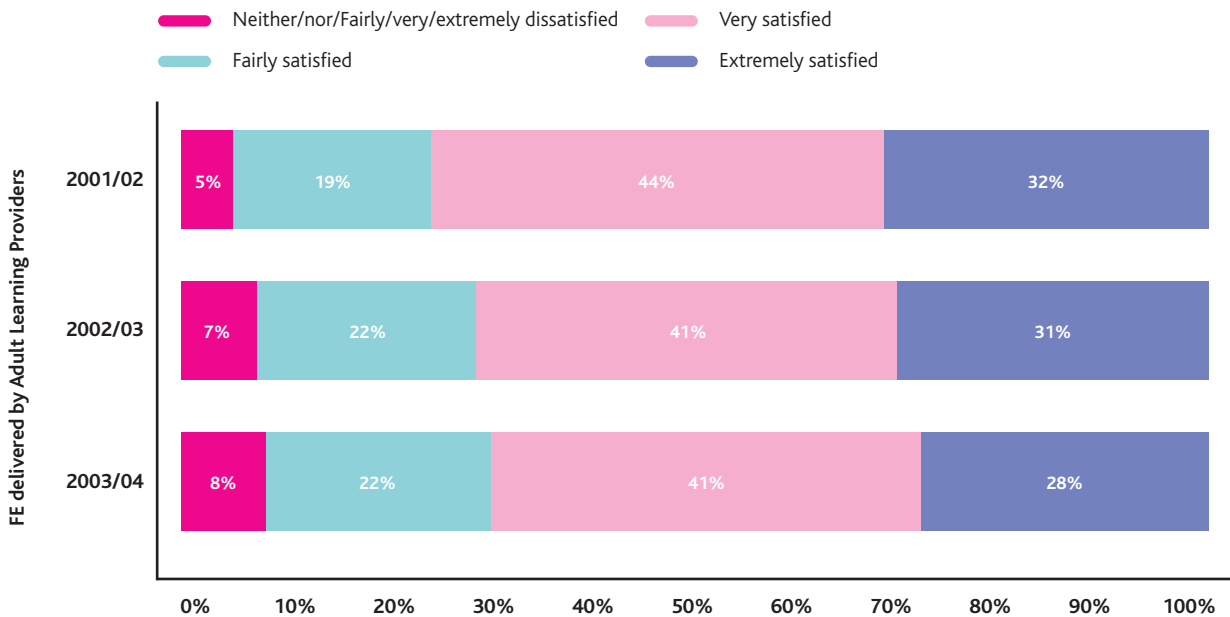
Base: 2001/02: 10,000; 2002/03: 19,947; 2003/04: 31,786

Figure 5: Overall satisfaction with the learning experience in work based learning



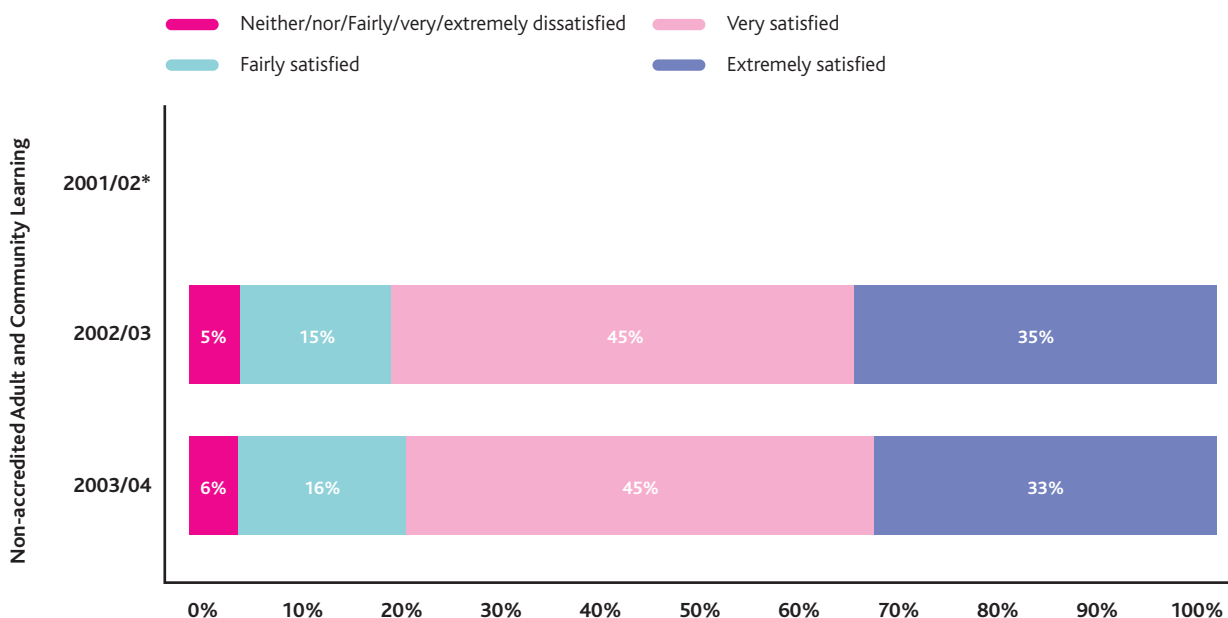
Base: 2001/02: 2,032; 2002/03: 2,003; 2003/04: 6,111

Figure 6: Overall satisfaction with the learning experience in further education delivered by adult learning providers.



Base: 2001/02: 723; 2002/03: 1,203; 2003/04: 1,652

Figure 7: Overall satisfaction with the learning experience in non-accredited Adult and Community Learning.



Base: 2002/03: 1,958; 2003/04: 3,767

*Note: 2001/02 sample size too small to use as comparison with other years.

Quality of teaching and learning

20

In the previous two years of the NLSS, results showed that the quality of teaching and training has the biggest influence on overall satisfaction levels. This trend continues in 2003/04, and it is encouraging to see, as in previous years, that among learners in the survey, there are very high levels of satisfaction with the quality of teaching and training. Figure 8 shows that across all types of provision, around 9 in 10 learners are 'fairly', 'very' or 'extremely' satisfied.

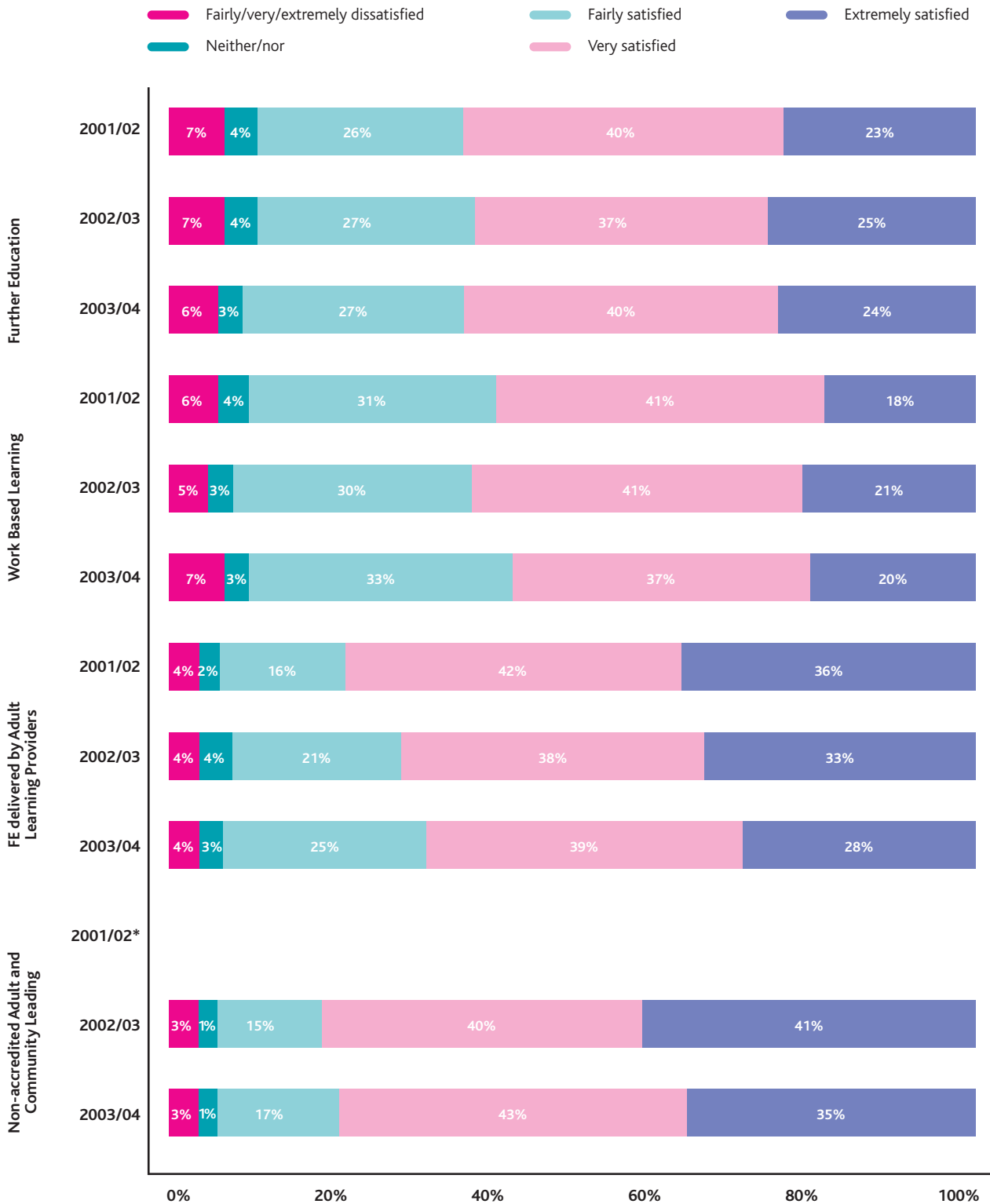
21

The percentage of learners in the survey who are 'extremely' satisfied with the quality of teaching and learning is shown in Figure 9. This is broken down by type of provider and, over the three years of the survey, shows the percentage of learners who are 'extremely' satisfied has decreased compared with 2002/03, across all providers.

22

Teachers' subject knowledge and how well they relate to learners are still the aspects of teaching that receive the highest ratings from learners across all provision.

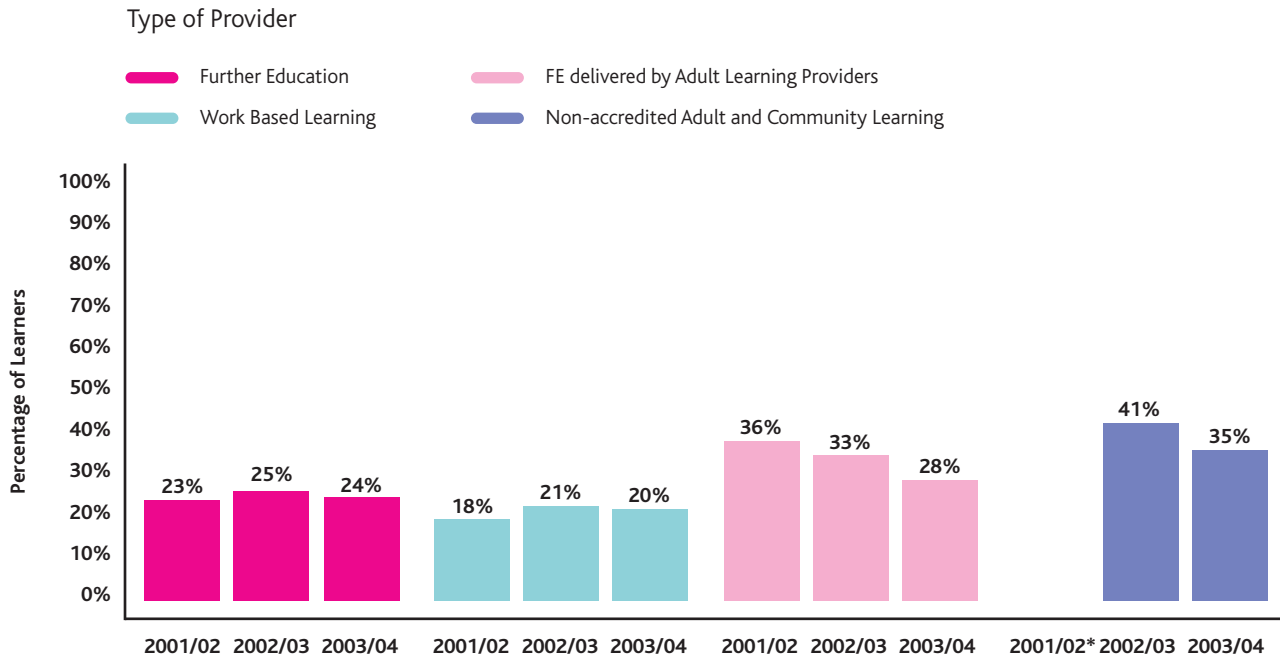
Figure 8: Overall, how satisfied are you with the quality of teaching or training at your college, provider or workplace?



Base: 2003/04: FE 31,786; WBL 6,111; FE by ALP 1,652; non-accredited ACL 3,767. 2002/03: FE 19,947; WBL 2,003; FE by ALP 1,203; non-accredited ACL 1,958. 2001/02: FE 10,000; WBL 2,032; FE by ALP 723

*Note: Non-accredited ACL sample size in 2001/02 is too small to use as comparison against other years.

Figure 9: Satisfaction with teaching or training: rating 'extremely' satisfied, by type of provision



Base: 2003/04: FE 31,786; WBL 6,111; FE by ALP 1,652; non-accredited ACL 3,767. 2002/03: FE 19,947; WBL 2,003; FE by ALP 1,203; non-accredited ACL 1,958. 2001/02: FE 10,000; WBL 2,032; FE by ALP 723

***Note:** Non-accredited ACL sample size in 2001/02 is too small to use as comparison against other years.



23

Table 1 shows the difference in percentage points for the results in 2003/04, compared with 2002/03. There is a decrease in percentage points of learners giving 9 or 10 out of 10 for most aspects of teaching and learning.

24

It is interesting to note that more than half the learners in the survey in further education and work based learning feel that some lesson or training time is wasted.

25

Table 2 shows that there has been an increase (+25 percentage points) for learners in further education who say that less than 10 per cent lesson time is wasted. However, there is a decrease across all providers for learners saying that no lesson time is wasted.

Table 1: Percentage point change for 2003/04, compared with 2002/03, for learners in the survey giving 9 or 10 out of 10, for different aspects of teaching and learning, by type of provision.

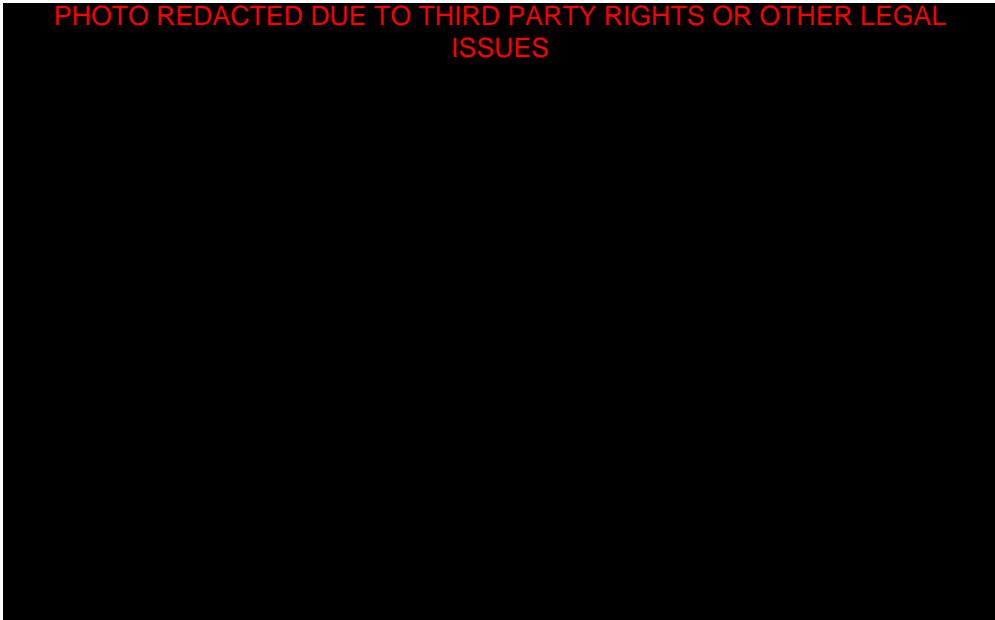
	FE	WBL	FE delivered by ALP	Non-accredited ACL
Knowledge of the subject	-1	-5	-4	-3
How well teachers or trainers relate to you as a person	-2	-3	-1	-4
The support they give you, for example, in improving study techniques or time management	-1	-2	-6	-3
Providing prompt and regular feedback on progress	-1	-2	-5	-4
Setting clear targets to help learners improve	-2	-4	-5	-7
Understanding you and how you learn	-2	-3	-4	-5
Managing the group of learners	0	-3	-1	-3
Quality and availability of teaching materials	-3	-3	-7	-3
Making the subject interesting or enjoyable	-2	-3	-5	-5
Planning their lessons	-1	-3	-6	-4

Base: FE 31,786; WBL 6,111; FE provided by ALP 1,652; non-accredited ACL 3,767

Table 2: The percentage point change for 2003/04, compared with 2002/03, for learners in the survey saying whether lesson time is wasted, by type of provision.

	FE	WBL	FE delivered by ALP	Non-accredited ACL
More than half are wasted	-24	+2	+2	+1
Between a quarter and half are wasted	-3	+2	-1	+1
10 - 24% are wasted	+4	+1	+3	+1
Less than 10% are wasted	+25	+5	+1	+3
None are wasted	-3	-10	-6	-4
Don't know	-1	0	0	-1

Base: FE 31,786; WBL 6,111; FE provided by ALP 1,652; non-accredited ACL 3,767

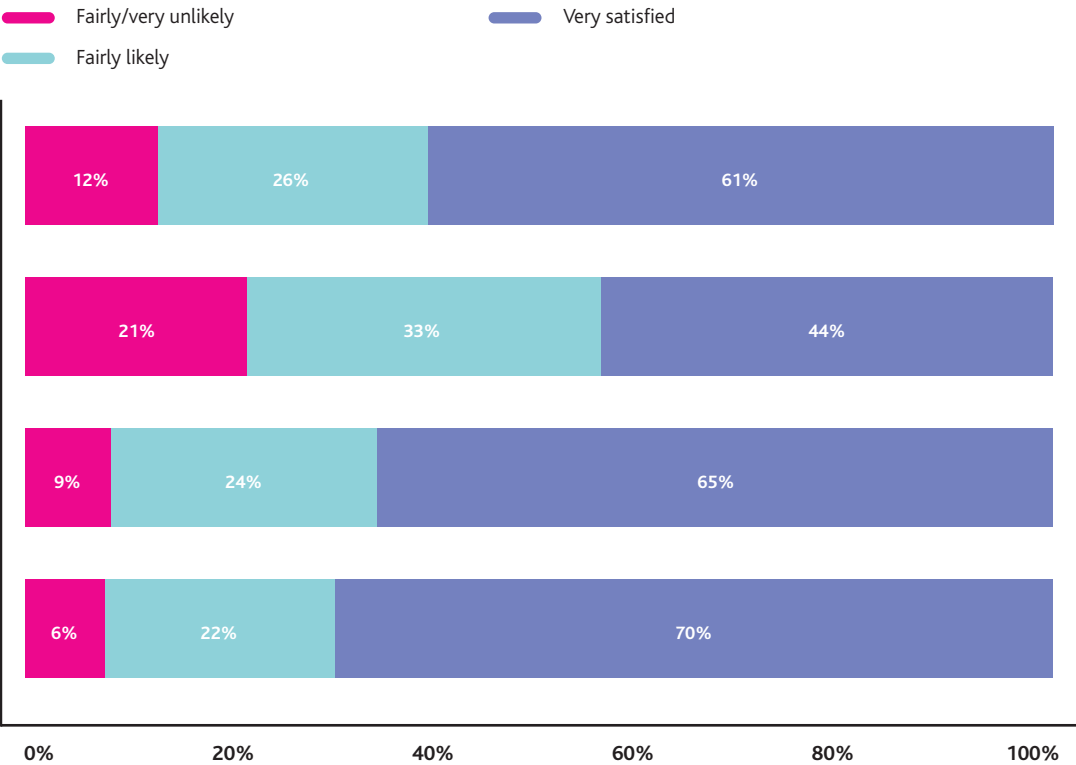


Return to learning

26

Figure 10 shows the likelihood that learners in the survey will continue to learn again within the next three years, shown across all providers. Non-accredited ACL providers, compared with the other providers, have the highest percentage of learners in the survey (70 per cent) who say they are 'very' likely to return to learning within the next three years. Among work based learning providers, 21 per cent of learners said they were 'fairly' or 'very' unlikely to return to learning in the next three years. This was a notably higher percentage than for the other providers.

Figure 10: Likelihood to return to learning in the next three years.



Base: FE 31,786; WBL 6,111; FE by ALP 1,652; non-accredited ACL 3,767

Note: For clarity, 'don't know' answers are not included.

Additional Questions

Pre-entry advice and guidance

Course choice

27

Approximately 90 per cent of all learners in the survey (an increase since 2002/03) say that they chose their course to advance their skills and knowledge. In work based learning, 95 per cent of learners chose their course 'to gain qualifications' and 87 per cent because the course was 'relevant to my job'. In further education delivered by adult learning providers, the most common influence on course choice was 'for my own personal interest'.

28

The convenience of location is still the most important reason for choosing a provider for all learners.

29

Learners in the survey were still most likely to obtain advice about choosing a course from teachers and tutors at the provider. Friends were the second-most cited source of advice. In further education and work based learning provision, Connexions was the source of advice with the greatest increase compared with the previous year's results.

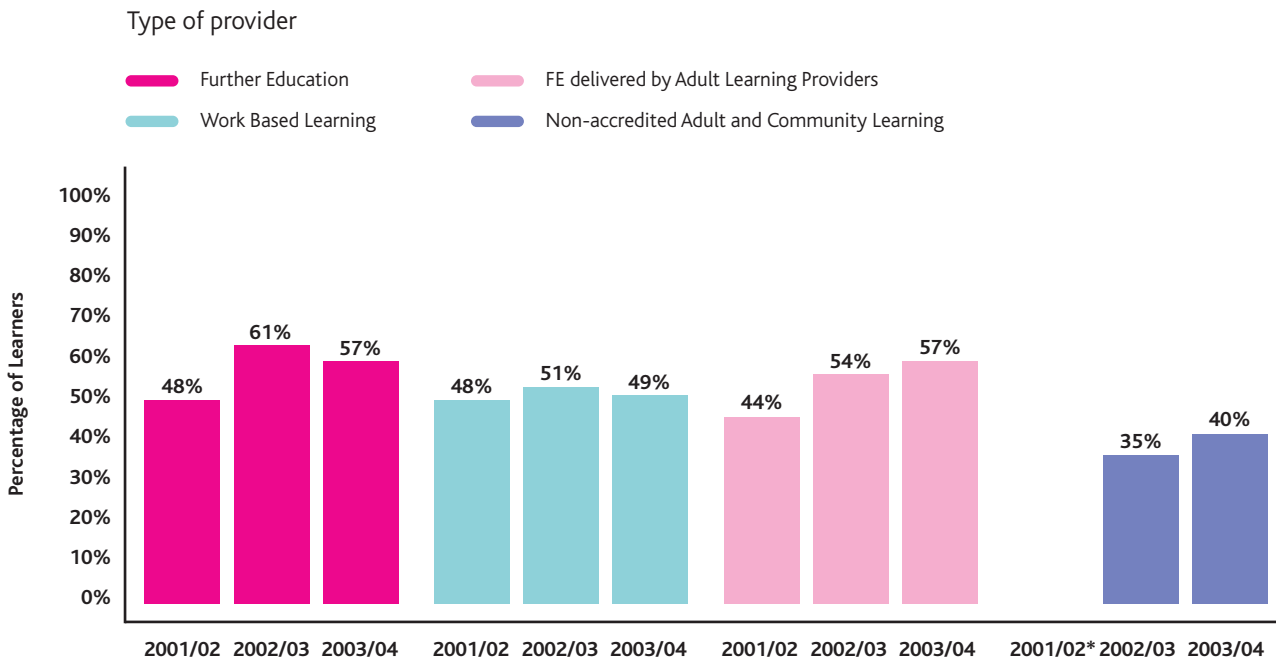
Support for learning

Difficulties encountered

30

Figure 11 shows that the percentage of learners in the survey experiencing problems on their course has increased in non-accredited ACL and further education delivered by adult learning providers since 2002/03. However, the percentage of learners experiencing difficulties in non-accredited ACL is still much lower than in the other types of provision.

Figure 11: Percentage of learners encountering problems since starting their course.



Base: 2003/04: FE 809; WBL 2,028; FE by ALP 519; non-accredited ACL 1,882. 2002/03: FE 19,947; WBL 2,003; FE by ALP 1,203; non-accredited ACL 1,958. 2001/02: FE 10,000; WBL 2,032; FE by ALP 723

***Note:** Non-accredited ACL sample size in 2001/02 is too small to use as comparison against other years.

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Complaints

31

There is little change in the proportion of learners in the survey making complaints compared with 2002/03. In further education, the proportion of learners in the survey saying they made a complaint remained the same at 12 per cent, and the proportion of learners in non-accredited ACL increased by +1 percentage point, to 7 per cent.

32

The majority of learners' complaints were teacher- or trainer-related. Results in this survey reflect complaints as they were described by learners and it should be noted though that complaints were self-defined by learners and will not usually reflect the number of formal complaints made in any of the sectors, at any one time.

33

Table 3 shows that, where learners in the survey knew about the outcome of their complaint, more were satisfied than dissatisfied with the outcome. There is still some cause for concern that more than half of learners in work based learning, and approximately two-fifths of learners in other providers claim that there was no outcome at all to their complaints. This shows no improvement compared with last year's findings.

Table 3: Which of these best describes the outcome of your complaint?

	Outcome that satisfied	Outcome that did not satisfy	No outcome at all	Don't know
Further Education	38%	21%	39%	3%
Work based learning	33%	13%	52%	2%
Non-accredited ACL	29%	22%	43%	6%

Base: FE (8,097); WBL (2,028); non-accredited ACL (1,880)

Note: FE by ALP figures are not included the as base numbers are too small.

Impact of learning

Attitudes to learning and effects of the course

34

Across all providers, about a fifth of learners in the survey had negative feelings about education when they left school. This year there has been an increase (+3 percentage points), compared with 2002/03, in the percentage of work based learners in the survey who had 'generally positive feelings' about education when they left school.

35

The proportion of all learners in the survey saying they get a 'buzz' from learning has also increased. Female learners are more

likely to agree with this statement than male learners. The proportion of learners saying they get a 'buzz' from learning also increases with the age group of the learner. For example in work based learning, 52 per cent of 16 – 18 year olds, compared with 78 per cent of those aged over 25, say they get a 'buzz' from learning.

36

There is an increase in the proportion of learners across all types of provision saying that they enjoy learning mostly for the social aspects. This is shown in Figure 12.

37

Over 80 per cent of all learners who were in further education and work based learning providers say they have a greater

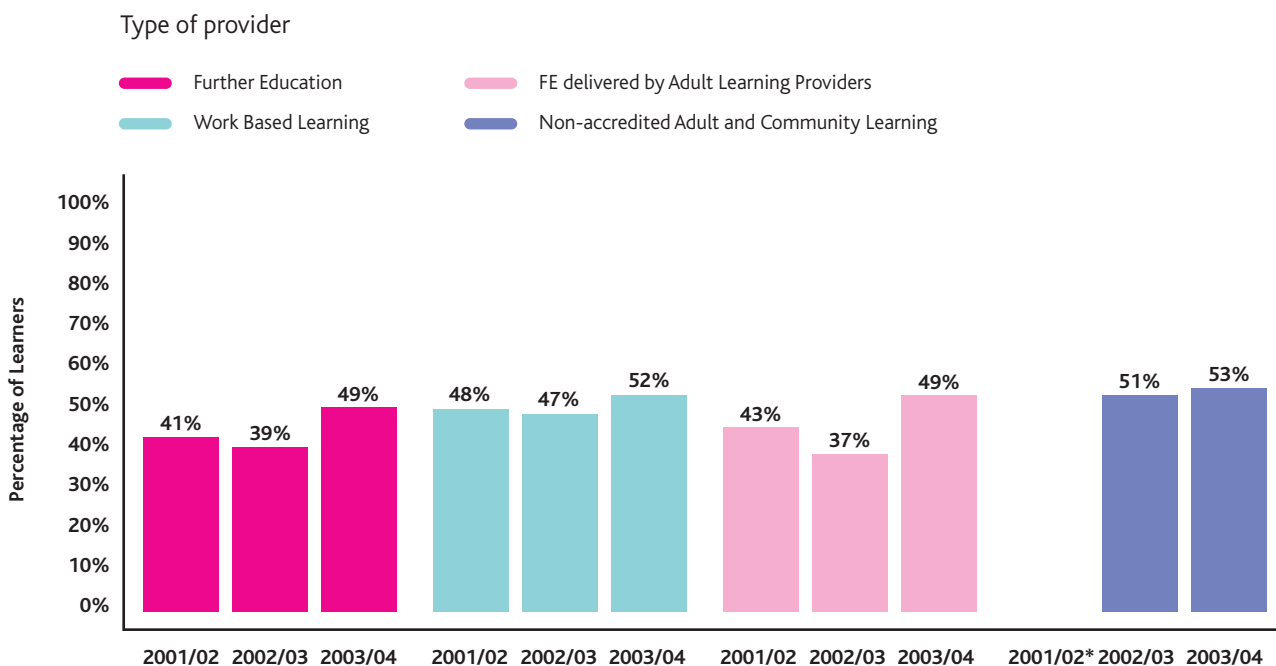
enthusiasm for their subject. Over 80 per cent say they have developed skills they can use for their job. Other wider benefits reported by over 50 per cent of learners in the survey include feeling:

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

38

Generally, female learners are more likely to report positive impacts from learning than male learners. Younger learners are also more likely to claim positive aspects of learning than older learners.

Figure 12: Proportion of learners saying that they enjoy learning mostly for social aspects



Base: 2003/04: FE10,564;WBL 2,037; FE by ALP 567; non-accredited ACL 1,880. 2002/03: FE 19,947;WBL 2,003; FE by ALP 1,203; non-accredited ACL 1958. 2001/02: FE 10,000;WBL 2,032; FE by ALP 723

*Note: Non-accredited ACL sample size in 2001/02 is too small to use as comparison against other years.

Equality and Diversity Messages

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39

The three years of the survey show that, although satisfaction levels among learners are high in all types of provision, there are some variations in satisfaction among certain groups. Common trends include:

- female learners in the survey are slightly more likely to say they are 'extremely satisfied' with their overall learning experience than male learners, and this occurs across all providers
- across all providers, older learners in the survey are more likely to be satisfied with their overall learning experience than younger learners
- white learners in the survey are much more likely to be 'extremely' satisfied with the whole learning experience than minority ethnic learners
- learners in the survey with disabilities are more likely to give a top rating of 'extremely' satisfied for their overall learning experience than learners without disabilities.

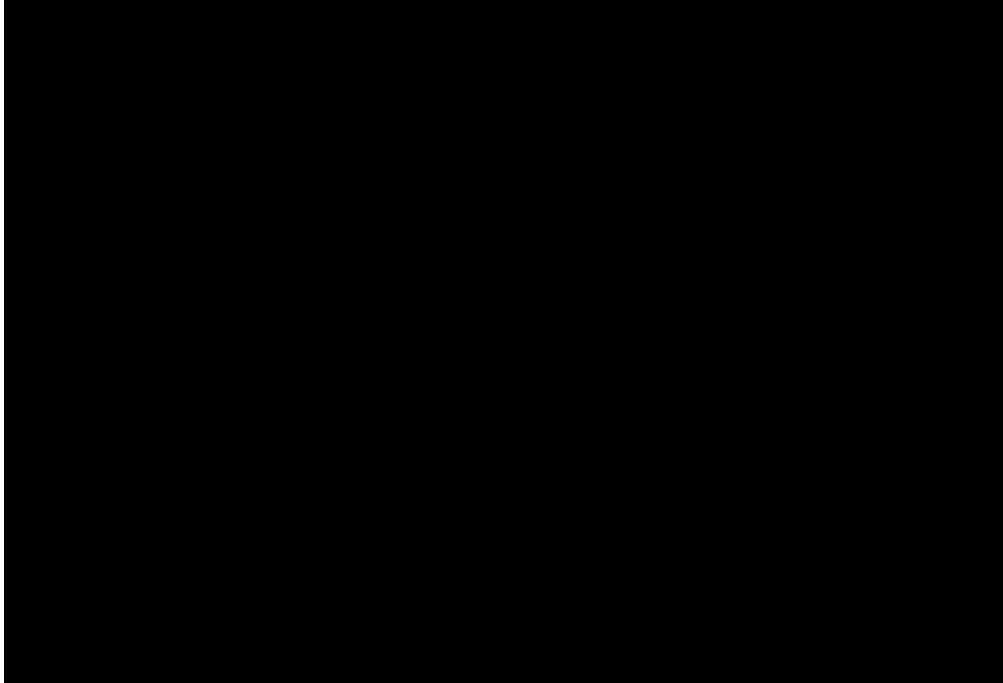
Conclusion and Further Developments

40

We conclude with the following observations:

- the 2003/04 National Learner Satisfaction Survey provides the LSC with three years of detailed information to examine education and training provision from the viewpoint of learners. Time-series data show that high levels of satisfaction among learners in the learning and skills sector is relatively consistent over three years
- detailed analysis of the different sectors will be available in three sector reports in spring 2005
- there are a number of messages about key aspects of learners' experience that are important to learners, and where colleges and providers can work to bring about improvements. The LSC has consulted with providers through a series of workshops to 'unpack' areas for action which can improve the experience of the learner
- the LSC is aware that many providers already collect learners' feedback and respond to the issues they raise. The LSC encourages colleges and providers to adopt the core methodology of the NLSS in order to improve the robustness of their own systems, and benchmark their performance against national data
- as part of New Measures of Success, the LSC will be developing a range of support materials which will help providers adopt the core questions and methodology and to benchmark their performance against the national picture.

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Other Key Publications

41

Full technical reports and summary reports from the 2001/02 and 2002/03 surveys can be found on the LSC website (www.lsc.gov.uk). Guidance on using the methodology and conducting local surveys as well as each of the questionnaires used in the survey can also be found on the LSC website.

42

Three reports for further education, work based learning and adult and community learning will be available on the LSC website in spring 2005. Hard copies of summary reports will also be available in spring 2005. Technical data from the survey will be available via a new research tools website which will allow users to analyse data for themselves. This website will also include a benchmarking facility whereby providers can input findings from local surveys and compare local findings with the national picture.

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For further information on the NLSS contact the LSC research team by email (learnersurvey@lsc.gov.uk).

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Related Publications

*National Learner Satisfaction Survey:
Core Methodology and Guidance*
Publication reference: LSC-P-NAT-050168

*National Learner Satisfaction Survey:
Further Education Report 2003/04*
Publication reference: LSC-P-NAT-050169

*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

Further Information

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This publication was produced in partnership with



NOP World
United Business Media

©LSC March 2005

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Publication reference: LSC-P-NAT-050167