Executive Summary

Contents

Executive Summary ........................................................................................................................................ ii

A. Introduction............................................................................................................................................. 1
   Background ............................................................................................................................................... 1
   Methods.................................................................................................................................................... 1
   Structure of report ................................................................................................................................... 4

B. Contact, complaints and information provision ............................................................................... 5
   Contact with schools .............................................................................................................................. 5
   Complaints............................................................................................................................................... 9
   Contact with others ............................................................................................................................... 10
   Knowledge of the education system and information provision ......................................................... 12
   Key findings ............................................................................................................................................. 17

C. Perceptions of the current system ........................................................................................................ 19
   The rationale for education ..................................................................................................................... 19
   The curriculum ......................................................................................................................................... 20
   Safety issues ............................................................................................................................................. 22
   Key findings ............................................................................................................................................. 23

D. Parental roles in education .................................................................................................................. 25
   School choice .......................................................................................................................................... 25
   Responsibility and collaboration in education ........................................................................................... 26
   Representation of parents’ views .............................................................................................................. 30
   Key findings ............................................................................................................................................. 31

E. Overall satisfaction and new initiatives ............................................................................................. 33
   Overall satisfaction ................................................................................................................................. 33
   New initiatives .......................................................................................................................................... 35
   Key findings ............................................................................................................................................. 38

F. Summary and conclusions – ‘Could do better?’ ................................................................................. 40

Appendix A – CATI script and tabulations .............................................................................................. 45
Executive Summary

Introduction

- NFO System Three Social Research was commissioned by the Scottish Consumer Council (SCC) to undertake a survey of parents with secondary school age children to gauge parents’ views on their role in the education system in Scotland and on the provision of education services.

- The main aims of the study were to examine levels of satisfaction with educational provision; quantify the extent of problems identified by previous SCC studies; compare perceptions of parents in different kinds of areas; and gauge reactions to a number of possible policy options.

- The survey was carried out using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) and was based on interviews with a nationally representative quota sample of 1,000 parents. Quotas were based on geographic area, stage of child in education and sex of respondent.

Contact, complaints and information provision

- Overall, 94% of respondents (or their partner) had attended a parents’ evening, and almost all of these respondents were satisfied with the information they received. Parents with children in a state school and with no educational qualifications were least likely to have attended a parents’ evenings. Work commitments were the most common reason given for non-attendance.

- The vast majority of respondents were satisfied with the ease of getting in contact with school staff and viewed the staff at their child’s school as approachable and friendly.

- Around a quarter of all respondents had made a complaint to their child’s school at some time in the past, and 2% had complained to their local authority. Parents with higher educational qualifications and parents with children in a private school were most likely to have made a complaint. A sizeable minority (28%) of parents who had complained said that the school had not dealt with the complaint well. Parents with no qualifications were the most likely to be satisfied with how the school dealt with their
complaint. It is apparent, therefore, that parents with high educational attainment are most likely to be critical of their child’s education.

- Around one in ten (12%) parents said that they would not know how to make a complaint. Parents in social group DE were most likely to say this. Additionally, when asked about who they might contact in the future if they felt that their child’s school or the local authority were not dealing effectively with an issue relating to education or events at their child’s school, respondents in social groups C2 and DE and respondents with no qualifications were the most likely to say that they would not know who to contact other than the school or the local authority.

- One in four parents (25%) did not know if their child’s school had been inspected. Parents in social groups C2 and DE, parents with no educational qualifications, and parents who were not members of a school body were most likely to not know if their child’s school had been inspected. Overall, 12% of parents who knew that their child’s school had been inspected, reported receiving no feedback on the inspection.

- Forty-five per cent of parents said they knew only a little or nothing about helping their child with subject choices. Around a quarter (27%) said they knew only a little or nothing about what to do if their child is being bullied, while around a third (32%) said this in relation to what to do if their child was having learning problems. Levels of knowledge about all aspects of education differed by type of school, whether parents were members of a school body, social grouping and parents’ own educational attainment.

**Perceptions of the current system**

- Few parents had a single view of what education should be for. All four rationale for education presented were considered very important by at least three-quarters of all respondents.

- Overall, the majority of parents were satisfied with the curriculum as it currently stands in terms of the subjects on offer, the balance between academic and vocational subjects, the emphasis given to numeracy and literacy, the number of extra-curricula activities on offer, and on the existing opportunities to do music, arts, drama and sport. However, parents with children in state schools were less likely than those with children in private schools to be satisfied with these aspects of the curriculum. Given that schools in rural areas are normally smaller than those in urban areas, and that curriculum options may be more limited in these areas, it is interesting to note that there
Executive Summary

was no significant difference in this respect between parents in urban and rural areas of Scotland.

- Over three-quarters of parents expressed support for the current provision in relation to these aspects of the curriculum. There were, however, a number of areas for concern. The aspect of the current curriculum framework that elicited the least support was the imposed breadth of the curriculum, with 30% of parents agreeing that children are expected to learn too many different subjects. This was seen particularly among parents of pupils in S3 and S4.

- Overall, 14% of parents said they had some concern about their child’s safety. Bullying, travel to and from school, and drugs were the concerns most commonly mentioned.

**Parental roles in education**

- Around a quarter (23%) of parents had considered sending their child to a different school. Parents with children in a private school, members of a school body, and parents with most educational qualifications were the most likely to have considered such a move. Among those who had considered a different school, the most common reasons given for the choice of school were the reputation of the school, the distance to the school, and the belief that it would best cater for their child's needs.

- Most respondents (83%) said that parents and schools should share equally the lead role in ensuring that children receive a good education. Parents with children at a private schools, and parents in social groups AB and C1 were the most likely to say that parents should take the lead role. Thus, while the vast majority of respondents see the responsibility for education being shared between parents and schools, respondents in social groups C2 and DE were less likely to say that parents should have the lead role in the education of their children.

- While 75% of parents said they were involved enough with their child’s school, around one in five (21%) parents said that they would like to be more involved. Parents with children in S1 and S2 were the group most likely to want more involvement. The most commonly desired involvement was through a parents’ association although a wide range of forms of involvement were mentioned.
• One in four parents did not have, or did not know if they had, a written agreement with the school. Over two-thirds (69%) of respondents who do not have an agreement with the school said they would be very or fairly interested in having one.

• While only one in ten (9%) parents were members of some form of school body, very few parents (5%) were dissatisfied with the way school bodies represent their opinions. Again, parents in social groups C2 and DE, parents with no qualifications, and parents with children at a state school were the least likely to be members of some form of school body.

• Parents’ views on representation at a national level were less positive with around half (49%) of respondents saying that their views are not adequately reflected in this way. Parents with higher educational qualifications, parents with children at a private school, and members of a school body were most likely to be critical of the current national representation of their views.

Overall satisfaction and new initiatives

• Over half (53%) of parents surveyed said they were very satisfied with the education their child is receiving at school and a further 43% said they were fairly satisfied. When asked how the education system in Scotland had changed over the past five years, around half (48%) of respondents said that the education system in Scotland has stayed about the same. While around a third (30%) of respondents said that the education system has got better, around 1 in 5 respondents said that it has got worse (18%). Parents with children in private schools, school body members, and parents in social groups AB and C1 were the most likely to be critical the changes in education in the past five years. This reflects the fact that these groups are more likely to take an active interest in their child’s education.

• There was considerable support among parents for proposals on school open days, an informal drop in system in schools, an independent mediation service and an independent information and advice service, independent of schools. While the majority of parents said that they would be likely to use these services, there was slightly more support for the two school based services. Overall, 81% of respondents said that they were likely to use open days at schools once every three months, 69% said that they were likely to use an informal ‘drop in’ system in schools, 65% said they
would use an independent mediation service, and 61% said they would use an independent service offering information and advice.

- Parents with children in state schools were more likely than those with children in private schools to say that they would use such services. Additionally, with the exception of school open days, there was more interest in these services from parents in social groups C2 and DE than those in social groups AB and C1.

- Around a quarter (23%) parents said that they would be very or fairly interested in teaching their child at home for part of the time if the government offered money incentives or tax credits. There was more interest in this proposal from parents with children in state schools, and with parents in social groups C2 and DE.

- Over half (56%) of parents also expressed interest in sending their child to a school specialising in a particular subject area. Again, there was more interest in this proposal from parents with children in state schools, and with parents in social groups C2 and DE.

Conclusions

- Overall, parents tend to hold positive views of the education system in Scotland and of their role within it.

- There are, however, areas where the current education system could clearly do better. These include the extent to which parents feel their views are represented at a national level; concern that the range of the curriculum is too wide (especially in the state sector); dissatisfaction with the outcome of complaints and some lack of awareness of how to complain in the first place; and lack of knowledge or understanding about the inspection process and about how to help their child with subject choice, or with issues relating to bullying or learning problems.

- There was broad support for the four policy proposals suggested to respondents, especially among parents in social groups C2 and DE.

- Overall, parents’ views of the education system are very strongly correlated with their own level of educational attainment and with social class, rather than with other factors, such as degree of rurality.
Commitment to empowering parents as a consumers of education, therefore, needs to increase empowerment generally, but also reduce the correlation between lower levels of involvement and social/educational disadvantage. Initiatives aimed at increasing levels of parental interest and enthusiasm among such groups will, therefore, have a particularly important role to play.
A. Introduction

Background
NFO System Three Social Research was commissioned by the Scottish Consumer Council (SCC) to undertake a survey of parents with secondary school age children to gauge parents’ views on their role in the education system in Scotland and on the provision of education services. This involved interviews with over 1,000 parents across Scotland. The research builds on previous research carried out by the SCC, and in particular, complements the findings from the qualitative research carried out as part of the Scottish Consumer Council’s contribution to the National Debate on Education in Scotland.

The Scottish Consumer Council is the leading consumer organisation in Scotland with a specific remit to represent the interests of Scottish consumers, particularly those least able to make their voices heard as a result of some form of exclusion. Within the sphere of education, consumers are defined by SCC as those who have to make decisions about their own or their children’s education.

This study focuses on the role of parents as consumers in the education system. The main aims of the research are as follows:

· to measure current levels of satisfaction with the provision of education
· to quantify the extent of key problems identified by previous SCC research studies
· to compare perceptions of parents living in urban and rural areas
· to gauge opinions in relation to some policy solutions to the problems highlighted in research undertaken to date by the SCC.

Methods
The method of telephone interviewing was selected as the most cost-effective approach to obtaining information from a representative sample of parents in a fast and efficient manner. The use of telephone interviewing for the study has significant advantages over

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1 Parents’ Views of and Involvement with the Scottish Education System. A research report prepared by Carole Millar Research on behalf of the Scottish Consumer Council and the Scottish Parenting Forum, August 2002
both face-to-face and postal methods. In relation to the first, it allowed easier and faster data collection over a geographically dispersed area, and allowed multiple call-backs to be made to ‘hard to reach’ sections of the population. The advantages over postal interviewing are more numerous and include the fact that a much higher response rate is achievable and that data quality can be improved while using a more complex questionnaire.

The fieldwork was conducted using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). CATI is one of the most advanced methods of conducting telephone research with the CATI system directing interviewers to each relevant question, only allowing them to proceed once the appropriate questions have been answered.

The questionnaire design was a collaborative process between the research team and the Scottish Consumer Council. An edited copy of the CATI script can be found in Appendix A. Within the questionnaire, separate questions were designed for parents with children who are home-educated. Given the relatively small proportion of parents who home educate their children, it is not surprising that only one interview was actually achieved with a home-educating parent. The results of this interview are not, therefore, reported separately.

**Sampling**

In order to provide a representative and robust sample of parents in Scotland that would allow for analysis of differences by sub-groups, a target of 1,000 interviews overall was set. Quotas were set on region (North, East and West), stage of child in education (S1-S2, S3-S4, S5-S6) and sex of respondent. The quota variables were independent of each other. We did not specify that these variables should be interlocked, for example, by setting a different target for the proportion of women in each of the three regions. A target of around 333 interviewers was set for each region, and for each age group. Obviously, in a large proportion of households, there is more than one child of secondary school age. This quota variable was included to ensure a spread of different age groups.

With regard to sex of respondent, a target was set to achieve 60% of interviews with women and 40% with men, as previous experience suggested that men are less likely to be willing to be interviewed and, indeed, are less likely to be carers (because of the number of single female parent households).
Table A-1 below shows the number of interviews by key descriptors. Overall, 1,007 interviews were conducted. Fieldwork took place in October and November 2002. A copy of the data tabulations can be found in Appendix A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achieved sample by selected characteristics.</th>
<th>Achieved sample</th>
<th>Weighted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>322 (32%)</td>
<td>232 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>335 (33%)</td>
<td>473 (47%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>350 (35%)</td>
<td>302 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage of quota child</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1 or S2</td>
<td>335 (33%)</td>
<td>327 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3 or S4</td>
<td>335 (33%)</td>
<td>326 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5 or S6</td>
<td>337 (33%)</td>
<td>354 (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex of respondent</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>376 (37%)</td>
<td>386 (38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>631 (63%)</td>
<td>621 (62%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Membership of school body</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>87 (9%)</td>
<td>90 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>920 (91%)</td>
<td>917 (91%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of School</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>925 (92%)</td>
<td>927 (92%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>45 (4%)</td>
<td>42 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>37 (4%)</td>
<td>37 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest qualification passed</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>329 (33%)</td>
<td>329 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced academic</td>
<td>98 (10%)</td>
<td>100 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced vocational</td>
<td>199 (20%)</td>
<td>197 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘O’ Grade or equivalent</td>
<td>251 (25%)</td>
<td>245 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>130 (13%)</td>
<td>135 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Class</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>139 (14%)</td>
<td>142 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>432 (43%)</td>
<td>434 (43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>235 (23%)</td>
<td>231 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>175 (17%)</td>
<td>173 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1007 (100%)</td>
<td>1007 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Structure of report

The report is structured as follows:

- Section B focuses on contact between parents and schools and on parents’ perceptions of information provision. It reports on parents’ contact with schools, local authorities and other relevant bodies, on their experiences of the complaints systems, and on information provision and the level of parents’ knowledge of the present education system.

- Section C examines perceptions of the current education system. It particular, parents’ views on the rationale for education, their views on the curriculum in secondary schools, and their concerns about safety are analysed.

- Section D reports on parental choice in school selection for their children, on views on the relationship between, and responsibilities of, parents and schools, and on satisfaction with how well their views are represented locally and nationally.

- Parents’ overall satisfaction with the current education system in Scotland and their views on four new proposed initiatives is examined in Section E.

- Section F presents a general summary of the study, drawing out conclusions and recommendations arising from the research.
B. Contact, complaints and information provision

The Scottish Consumer Council has stressed the need for schools to be accessible places for parents in order to enable parents to support and be involved in their child’s learning, and has emphasised the fundamental role of clearly defined complaints procedures.

This chapter focuses on contact between parents and schools and on information provision to parents. It reports on parents’ contact with schools, local authorities and other relevant bodies, and on experiences of the current complaints systems. Information and advice provision and parents’ own knowledge of the present education system are also discussed.

Contact with schools

Attendance at parents’ evenings

The most regular form of contact with schools, for most parents, is at parents’ evenings. Overall, 89% of respondents (or their partner) had attended a parents’ evening at their child’s school at some time in the past. There was, however, considerable variation in attendance levels by stage of child, by type of school attended, and by the highest educational qualification achieved by the parent themselves.

- While 94% of parents of children in S3 to S6 had attended a parents evening, only 71% of parents of children in S1 or S2 had.
- Parents with children in private schools were more likely to have attended a parents’ evening than those with children in a state school (96% and 86% respectively).
- Parents with no educational qualifications were less likely that those with any qualifications to have attended a parents’ evening, with only 75% having attended a parents’ evening.

Parents who had not attended a parents’ evening were asked whether there was any particular reason for this. The most common reason mentioned for non-attendance was simply that there had not yet been a parents’ evening. This was mention by around half (51%) of parents who had not attended a parents’ evening and partially explains the considerable variation in attendance between parents of children in S1 or S2 and those with children in S3 to S6. The main reasons given for non-attendance by those who had the
opportunity to attend were work commitments (42% of those who had not attended a parents’ evening) and because their child was doing fine at school (7%). Additionally, 31% of respondents who had had the opportunity to attend a parents’ evening said this was for no particular reason for their non-attendance. Men were more likely than women to say that they had not attended a parents’ evening because of work commitments (55% compared with 28% of these who had had the opportunity).

Respondents who had attended a parents’ evening were asked how satisfied they were with the information obtained about their children at these events. Almost all parents were either very satisfied (61%) or fairly satisfied (36%) with the information they received. Only 2% were fairly or very dissatisfied.

Other contact with school
The majority of respondents or their spouse/partner (71%) had been in contact with the school in the last 12 months for some reason other than parents’ evenings. Of this group, 41% of respondents had contacted the school, 28% had been contacted by the school, and 30% had both contacted and been contacted by the school.
Respondents gave a wide variety of reasons for contacting the school (Figure B-1). The most common related to a child’s absence due to illness. A fifth (20%) of parents who had contacted the school had done so to explain that their child was ill, while 9% of parents had done so to give information about absence. The other reasons most commonly given for contacting the school were to get general information (14%) in relation to their child’s individual needs (10%), because their child was being bullied (10%) and because their child was experiencing difficulties with school work (9%). A variety of other reasons for contacting the school were also given by a small proportion of parents, such as to make a complaint (5%) and in relation to truancy (4%).
There were also a variety of reasons given for schools contacting respondents (Figure B-2). The most common related to the provision of general information or school’s newsletter. This was mentioned by 44% of respondents who had been contacted by their child’s school. Other reasons mentioned by considerably fewer respondents, were because their child was being taken ill or injured (13%), because of problems with child’s behaviour (10%), or because their child was experiencing problems with school work (8%). Again, a variety of other reasons were given by a small proportion of parents, such as in relation to school trips (4%), in relation to truancy (4%), and because of their child’s medical condition (3%).

The majority of respondents who had had contact with the school in the last twelve months apart from at parents’ evenings were either very satisfied (60%) or fairly satisfied (32%) with the outcome of this contact. Only a small proportion of respondents were either fairly dissatisfied (5%) or very dissatisfied (2%) with the outcome of their contact with their child’s school.
General views of the approachability of school staff

Respondents were invited to give their views on how easy it is to get in contact with a member of staff at school and whether they found the school staff approachable and friendly.

The vast majority were satisfied with the ease of getting in contact with school staff. Overall, 90% of respondents who had been in contact with the school in the last 12 months (for some reason apart from parents evenings) said that it was very easy or fairly easy to get in touch with a member of staff. Only 6% said that it was fairly difficult, and 2% that it was very difficult to do so. These respondents all had children at a state school: no parents sending children to a private school said that it was difficult to get in contact with school staff.

Respondents also tended to view the staff at their child’s school as approachable and friendly. Overall, 93% of respondents thought that the staff at their child’s school were approachable and friendly, while 3% disagreed and 4% did not have a view.

Complaints

The Scottish Consumer Council, in its response to the National Debate on the Future of Education, stated that the education system in Scotland “must incorporate a fitting and responsive complaints system”. The survey examined both previous experience of the complaints system and parents’ knowledge of how to make a complaint.

Parents were asked whether they had ever made a complaint to the school for any reason, and whether they had ever made a complaint to their local authority about their child’s secondary school education. Not surprisingly, parents were much more likely to have complained to their child’s school than to their local authority. While around a quarter (24%) of all respondents or their partners had made a complaint to their child’s school at some time in the past, only 2% of respondents had complained to their local authority.

The likelihood of making a complaint to schools varied with the educational achievement of parents. Parents who held a degree were more like to have complained to their child’s school (31%) than were those who only had ‘O’ Grade qualifications or equivalent (19%) and those who held no qualifications (11%). Additionally, parents who send their children to private school were more likely to have complained than were those who send their children to a state school (36% compared with 22%). Obviously, this pattern is likely to reflect different levels of involvement or interest in their children’s education, rather than different
standards of their children’s schooling. It is also likely to reflect differences in levels of educational achievement between parents in the different sectors.

Respondents who had complained were asked for their views on how well the school and local authority had dealt with their complaint. With regard to complaints to schools, while the majority of respondents said that the school had dealt very or fairly well (69%) with the complaint, a sizeable minority said that the school had dealt with the complaint ‘not very well’ (18%) or ‘not at all well’ (10%). Parents with no qualifications were the most likely to say that the school had dealt with their complaint very or fairly well (86%).

Generally, respondents who had complained to their local authority were less satisfied with how their complaint was dealt with than were those who had complained to their child’s school. (It is worth noting that the nature of complaints to local authority is likely to differ from those to schools.) Of the 23 respondents who had complained to their local authority, the majority (n=13) said that the local authority had dealt with their complaint not very well or not at all well, while 9 respondents said their complaint had been dealt with very or fairly well.

Additionally, all respondents were asked about their knowledge of how to make a complaint. The vast majority (86%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I would know how to make a complaint about my child’s school should I need to”. Only 12% either disagreed or disagreed strongly with this statement. Parents in social group AB were more likely than those in social group DE to agree with this statement (93% compared with 81%).

Contact with others
All respondents were asked if they had ever contacted anyone other than their child’s school or local authority to discuss their child’s secondary education. Overall, only 6% of respondents had done so.

Those who had done so had contacted a wide range of different types of people and organisations (Figure B-3). Apart from schools and local authorities, health service professionals were the most common type of person to be contacted by respondents. Of the 63 respondents, 11 had contacted a doctor or a health service, and 10 had contacted an educational psychologist. Other people who had been contacted by respondents to discuss their child’s education were family or friends (n=7), members of the school board or
parents’ group (n=7), social workers (n=5), MPs or other elected officials (n=4), councillors (n=4), lawyers (n=4), the police (n=3), Local Government Ombudsmen (n=2) and the Scottish Executive (n=1).

Additionally, parents were asked about who they might contact in the future if they felt that their child’s school or the local authority were not dealing effectively with an issue relating to education or events at their child’s school. A quarter (25%) of respondents said that they would contact their MP or another elected representative, while just under a quarter (23%) said that they would contact a member of the school board or parents’ group. Other possible contacts that were commonly mentioned were councillors (12%), the council’s education department (10%), headteachers, guidance teachers or other school staff (5%), the Local Government Ombudsman (5%), and the Scottish Executive (5%). More than one in five (22%) said that they did not know who, other than the school or the local authority, they would contact.

Respondents in social groups C2 and DE were more likely than those in social groups AB and C1 to say that they would not know who to contact, other than the school or the local authority. For example, 32% of respondents in social group DE said that they would not
Parents as consumers of education

know who to contact, compared with just 14% of respondents in social group AB. Similarly, parents who held degrees were less likely than those with no qualifications to not know who to contact apart from the school or the local authority (16% compared to 27% of those without).

Figure B-4: Who parent might contact if felt that child’s school or the local authority were not dealing effectively with an issue relating to education or events at child’s school (%; n=1007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MP, or other elected representative</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of school board</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Councillor</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council’s education department</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headteacher, guidance teacher, other school staff</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Government Ombudsman</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Executive</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nobody</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend or family member</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The police</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen’s Advice Bureau</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Knowledge of the education system and information provision

Parents knowledge of school inspections

Respondents were asked whether their child’s school had been inspected and if so, what form of feedback they had received about the inspection.

Overall, 62% of respondents said that the school had been inspected since their child began attending it, 13% said that it had not been inspected, and 25% did not know if it had been inspected. Not surprisingly, parents with children in S1 or S2 were less likely to say that the school had been inspected (42%) than were respondents with children in S3 or S4 (66%) or S5 or S6 (76%). Parents who were members of a school body, such as the school board or Parent Teachers’ Association, were less likely to not know if the school had been
inspected than those who were not members (8% and 27% respectively). Knowledge of school inspections was also related to parental qualifications: while almost a third (31%) of parents with no qualifications were not aware if their child’s school had been inspected, less than a one in five (18%) parents with a degree said this. It follows that knowledge of school inspections was related to social class, with respondents in social groups AB and C1 being less likely than those in social groups C2 and DE not to know if there had been an inspection (17%, 25%, 29% and 27% respectively).

**Information on school inspections**

Respondents who reported that their child’s school had been inspected were asked if they had received any information or feedback on the inspection. It is worth pointing out that it is standard practice to send all parents a copy of the inspection report after each school inspection. However, the survey found that only around half (50%) of parents said that they had received a report on the inspection, while around a third (33%) of parents had received a letter informing them that the inspection was taking place (Figure B-5). Less common forms of feedback mentioned were the school newsletter/magazine (5%), verbally or at a school meeting (4%), in the press (2%), and through a questionnaire for parents to complete (1%). Overall, 12% of parents who knew that their child’s school had been inspected, said they had received no feedback on the inspection, while 4% did not know if they had received any information or feedback.
Parents as consumers of education

Information about child’s progress

Parents were asked if they agreed with the statement, “The school gives me clear information about how my child is getting on”. Almost all parents (93%) agreed or agreed strongly that the school gives them clear information on their child’s progress. Only 6% of respondents disagreed or disagreed strongly.

Parents’ knowledge of the current system

To determine to what extent parents felt informed about the current system, the survey asked respondents to indicate their level of knowledge about a variety of different aspects of the current education system (Figure B-6).
Over two-thirds of parents said they knew a great deal about what to do if their child is being bullied (72%) and what to do if their child is having problems learning (67%). Less than 5% said they knew nothing at all about what to do in these circumstances (2% and 3% respectively).

Only around half (54%) said they knew a great deal about helping their child with subject choices. A further 40% said they knew a little about this while 5% said they knew nothing at all about subject choices. More parents with children in S1 and S2 than those with children in S3 through S6 said they knew little or nothing about subject choices (55% compared with 41%). The limited knowledge of parents with regard to subject choices suggests that information provision in this area could be improved.

Fewer respondents felt they knew a great deal about the examination system or how to switch schools. While around a third (35%) of respondents said they knew a great deal about the examination system, over half (55%) said they knew only a little about this and 9% said they knew nothing at all about it. Less than a quarter (23%) said they knew a great deal about how to switch school, while 45% said they knew a little about this, and around a third (31%) said they knew nothing at all about it.

While the lower level of knowledge in relation to switching schools may reflect a disinclination to move their child to a different school (see page 25), it is clear that a
substantial proportion of parents feel less than fully informed on how to do this should they wish to. Other aspects of education where a substantial proportion of parents also felt less than fully informed were the examination system and helping their child with subject choices.

Table B-1: Proportion of parents saying they knew a great deal about different aspects of child's school by selected characteristics. (% of parents knowing “a great deal”, n = 1007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Membership of school body</th>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th>Highest qualification passed</th>
<th>Social Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How to switch school</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>Yes 34%</td>
<td>State 22%</td>
<td>Degree 32%</td>
<td>AB 36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No 22%</td>
<td>Private 39%</td>
<td>Advanced academic 18%</td>
<td>C1 26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examination system</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced vocational 21%</td>
<td>C2 17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘O’ Grade or equivalent 17%</td>
<td>DE 14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject choices</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>None of these 18%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What to do if your child is being bullied</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What to do if your child is having problems learning</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Levels of knowledge on all aspects of education differed by type of school, whether parents were members of a school body, social class, and parents’ own level of educational attainment. Table B-1 shows the proportion of parents who said that they knew a great deal about the different aspects of their child’s schooling by these four characteristics. For all five aspects of education asked about, parents with children at private schools felt more informed than parents with children at state schools. Parents who were members of a school body felt more informed than did parents who were not members of a school body. Parents in social groups AB and C1 felt more informed than parents in social groups C2.
and DE. Additionally, the level of knowledge of parents on all aspects of education was positively correlated with their own educational attainment.

**Key findings**

Overall, 94% of respondents (or their partner) had attended a parents’ evening, and almost all of these respondents were satisfied with the information they received. Parents with children in a state school and with no educational qualifications were least likely to have attended a parents’ evenings. Work commitments were the most common reason given for non-attendance.

The vast majority of respondents were satisfied with the ease of getting in contact with school staff and viewed the staff at their child’s school as approachable and friendly.

Around a quarter of all respondents had made a complaint to their child’s school at some time in the past, and 2% had complained to their local authority. Parents with higher educational qualifications and parents with children in a private school were most likely to have made a complaint. A sizeable minority (28%) of parents who had complained said that the school had not dealt with the complaint well. Parents with no qualifications were the most likely to be satisfied with how the school dealt with their complaint. It is apparent, therefore, that parents with high educational attainment are most likely to be critical of their child’s education.

Around one in ten (12%) parents said that they would not know how to make a complaint. Parents in social group DE were most likely to say this. Additionally, when asked about who they might contact in the future if they felt that their child’s school or the local authority were not dealing effectively with an issue relating to education or events at their child’s school, respondents in social groups C2 and DE and respondents with no qualifications were the most likely to say that they would not know who to contact other than the school or the local authority.

One in four parents (25%) did not know if their child’s school had been inspected. Parents in social groups C2 and DE, parents with no educational qualifications, and parents who were not members of a school body were most likely to not know if their child’s school had been inspected. Overall, 12% of parents who knew that their child’s school had been inspected, reported receiving no feedback on the inspection.
Forty-five per cent of parents said they knew only a little or nothing about helping their child with subject choices. Around a quarter (27%) said they knew only a little or nothing about what to do if their child is being bullied, while around a third (32%) said this in relation to what to do if their child was having learning problems. Levels of knowledge about all aspects of education differed by type of school, whether parents were members of a school body, social grouping and parents' own educational attainment.
C. Perceptions of the current system

This chapter examines parents’ perceptions of the current education system. In particular, parents’ views on the rationale for education, their views on the curriculum in secondary schools and their concerns about safety are analysed.

The rationale for education

An obvious starting point for any consideration of the education system is to ask the question, ‘What is education for?’ In order to determine what the key characteristics of the school system should be, we need to consider what it should be trying to achieve.

Parents were asked how important educating young people is as a preparation for work, as a preparation for college or university, to ensure that children realise their full potential, and to create good citizens in a changing world (Figure C-1).

Figure C-1: “How important do you think educating young people is…” (%, n=1007)

![Graph showing parents' perceptions of education]

It should be noted that few parents had a single view of what education should be for. All four rationale for education presented were considered very important by at least three-
quarters of all respondents while three of the four rationale were considered either very or fairly important by 99% of respondents. Slightly fewer respondents rated education “to create good citizens in a changing world” as very important. However, it is worth emphasising that 97% respondents still considered this rationale to be either very or fairly important.

The curriculum

Range of subjects on offer

Most respondents agreed that the range of subjects on offer to their children was either very good (50%) or fairly good (40%). Only 3% said that the range on offer was fairly poor or very poor. The remaining 7% of parents said they had no strong feelings about the range of subjects on offer. Parents who had children in private schools were more likely than parents with children in state schools to say that the range of subjects on offer were very good (73% and 49% respectively). There were not, however, any significant differences between parents living in urban and rural settings with regard to views on the range of subjects on offer to children.

Balance between vocational and academic subjects

Most respondents (81%) also said that the balance between academic and vocational subjects on offer at their child’s school was about right. More respondents said that there is too much focus on academic subjects (12%) than said there is too much focus on vocational subjects (4%). The remaining 4% of respondents did not know or expressed no opinion. Parents with fewer educational qualifications and parents of children in private schools were more likely to be satisfied with the current balance. For example, while 88% of parents with no educational qualifications said that the current balance is about right, the corresponding figure for parents with a degree was 74%. While 96% of parents with children at private school said that the current balance is about right, only 80% of parents with children at state school said likewise.

Emphasis given to reading and writing

Most respondents (85%) agreed that the emphasis given to teaching numeracy and literacy in the curriculum is about right. However, one in ten (10%) disagreed and 2% disagreed strongly. Views on the emphasis given to reading and writing differed by the type of school the respondents’ children were attending. While 13% of respondents with children in state
schools disagreed or disagreed strongly that the emphasis was about right, no respondents with children in private schools did.

*Range of extra-curricula activities on offer*

Over three-quarters (79%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their child’s school offers a wide range of extra-curricula activities. Overall, 15% disagreed and 3% disagreed strongly. Views on the range of extra-curricula activities on offer differed by parents’ highest qualification. While 24% of parents with a degree disagreed or disagreed strongly that the school offers a wide range of extra-curricula activities, only 10% of parents with no qualifications said likewise. Views on the range of extra-curricula activities on offer, however, did not differ significantly between parents living in rural and urban areas or between parents with children in private schools and those with children in state schools.

*Range of subjects that children are expected to learn*

Over two-thirds (70%) of parents said that they did not think that children are expected to learn too many different subjects at school. However, a sizeable minority (30%) of parents agreed or strongly agreed that children are expected to learn too many different subjects. Parents with pupils in S3 and S4 were more likely than those with children in S1 and S2, or S5 and S6 to agree that the range of subjects that children are expect to learn is too broad (37%, 24% and 28% respectively). Parents with no qualifications were more likely than parents with degrees to say that this is the case (42% and 23% respectively).

*Opportunities to do music, arts, drama and sport*

Parents were asked whether they thought there were not enough opportunities for their child to do music, arts or drama in their school. Overall, under a quarter (22%) of respondents agreed that there were not enough opportunities to do these courses, while 76% disagreed.

Parents were also asked whether they thought there were not enough opportunities for their child to do sport in their school. Again, under a quarter (22%) of respondents agreed that there were not enough opportunities to do sport at school, while 76% disagreed. There were no significant differences in responses between parents with children at private school and those with children in state school with regard to either opportunities for their child to do music, arts, and drama or opportunities to do sport.
Safety issues

Safety is one of the key consumer principles of the Scottish Consumer Council. Parents were asked if they had any concerns about their child’s safety at school. Overall, 14% of parents said they had some concern about their child’s safety. Parents who were members of a school body were less likely to have concerns about safety than those who were not members (9% and 14% expressed concern respectively). Although there was no significant difference by rurality, it is interesting to note that 24% of parents in remote rural areas had concerns about their child’s safety at school.

The concerns that parents most commonly expressed related to bullying, travel to and from school, and to drugs (Figure C-2). Bullying at school was mentioned by over half (52%) of parents who were concerned about their child’s safety at school. Concerns about children’s safety travelling to and from school related to both traffic issues, and to the safety of the area in which the school was located. In total, around a quarter (25%) of parents who were concerned mentioned safety related to travel to school. Additionally, around a fifth of parents (21%) who were concerned about safety made some mention of drugs.

A number of other concerns were raised by a smaller number of respondents - among them the lack of security at schools (11%), the state of the school building or the size of the school building (7%), and a lack of, or poor quality of, the first aid equipment (2%).
Parents as consumers of education

Key findings
Few parents had a single view of what education should be for. All four rationale for education presented were considered very important by at least three-quarters of all respondents.

Overall, the majority of parents were satisfied with the curriculum as it currently stands in terms of the subjects on offer, the balance between academic and vocational subjects, the emphasis given to numeracy and literacy, the number of extra-curricula activities on offer, and on the existing opportunities to do music, arts, drama and sport. However, parents with children in state schools were less likely than those with children in private schools to be satisfied with these aspects of the curriculum. Given that schools in rural areas are normally smaller than those in urban areas, and that curriculum options may be more limited in these areas, it is interesting to note that there was no significant difference in this respect between parents in urban and rural areas of Scotland.

Over three-quarters of parents expressed support for the current provision in relation to these aspects of the curriculum. There were, however, a number of areas for concern. The
aspect of the current curriculum framework that elicited the least support was the imposed breadth of the curriculum, with 30% of parents agreeing that children are expected to learn too many different subjects. This was seen particularly among parents of pupils in S3 and S4.

Overall, 14% of parents said they had some concern about their child’s safety. Bullying, travel to and from school, and drugs were the concerns most commonly mentioned.
D. Parental roles in education

The Scottish Consumer Council has long expressed reservations about the extent to which there is real choice for parents within the current system, and has suggested that parents do not feel they are equal partners in the education process. This chapter reports on

- parental choice in selection of their children’s school
- parents’ views of the relationship between, and responsibilities of, parents and schools
- overall satisfaction with how well parents’ views are represented locally and nationally.

School choice

Part of the Scottish Consumer Council’s remit is to assess whether consumers can affect the way services are provided through their own choice. In the field of education, choice of school is a key element in empowering parents. With regard to school choice, the survey asked parents if they had ever considered sending their child to a different school, why they chose to send them to their current school, whether they would be interested in home teaching their child for part of the time, and whether they would be interested in sending their child to a school specialising in a particular subject.

Overall, around a quarter (23%) of parents had considered sending their child to a different school. Not surprisingly, parents with pupils at a private school were more than twice as likely as those with pupils at a state school to have considered a different school (58% and 21% respectively). Parents who were members of a school body were more likely than non-members to have considered a different school for their child (32% compared with 22%). Higher qualified parents were also more likely to have considered different schools, with 29% of parents with degrees having done so compared with 17% of parents with no qualifications.

Parents who had considered sending their child to a different school were asked why they had chosen their child’s current school. A range of reasons was given in response (Figure D-1). The most common, given by over a third (36%) of the parents who considered an alternative school, was that it had a better reputation. Other reasons given were because the school was nearer (27%), because it would best cater for their child’s needs (21%), in
order to receive a good education (19%), because the child’s siblings went to the school (14%), and because they had no choice or were unable to get into their alternative choice (6%).

**Figure D-1: Reasons why parents sent their child to current school (% n=232)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Because it had a better reputation</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because it was nearer</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because it would best cater for child’s needs</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To receive a good education</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because their siblings went to this school</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No choice/unable to get into other school</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Responsibility and collaboration in education**

The survey asked parents a number of questions relating to the balance in responsibilities between parents and schools, the level of involvement parents should have in different aspects of their child’s education, and levels of interest in having a written agreement between parents and schools.

**Responsibility for education**

When asked who is primarily responsible for providing children with an efficient education, schools and parents were most commonly mentioned by respondents (Figure D-2). Slightly more respondents mentioned schools (43%) than parents (36%) although it should be stressed that this difference is not great. Other people mentioned as being primarily responsible for provide children with an efficient education were education authorities (21%), the Scottish Executive or government (16%), teachers (12%), councils (4%), and children themselves (1%). Parents of children at state schools were more likely than
parents of children at private schools to say that schools are primarily responsible (44% compared to 27%), and less likely to say that parents are primarily responsible (35% compared with 51%). Not surprisingly, parents who are member of a school body were more likely than parents who are not members to say that parents are primarily responsible for children's education (45% compared to 35%) and less likely to say that school are primarily responsible (37% compared to 44%).

Figure D-2: Who is primarily responsible for providing children with an efficient education? (%, n=1007)

Respondents were also asked whether it should be mainly parents, mainly schools, or parents and schools equally who take the lead role in ensuring that children receive a good education. The vast majority (83%) of respondents said that it should be parents and schools equally who take the lead role, with the remaining respondents equally split between saying that it should be mainly parents (9%) and mainly schools (8%). Parents of pupils at private schools were again more likely than parents of pupils at state schools to say that it should be mainly parents who take the lead role (20% compared with 8%). Similarly, parents in social groups AB and C1 were more likely than those in social group C2 ad DE to say that it should be mainly parents who take the lead role (14%, 9%, 7% and 8% respectively).

It is clear from these results that a large majority of respondents see the responsibility for education being shared between parents and schools.
Parents as consumers of education

Parental involvement in education

Three-quarters (75%) of parents said that they were involved enough with their child’s school, while 21% said that they would like to be more involved and only 2% that they would like to be less involved. Parents with children in S1 and S2 were more likely than parents with children in S3/S4, or S5/S6 to want more involvement with their child’s school (28%, 19% and 15% respectively).

Parents who would like to be more involved were asked about the nature of this involvement. Responses were unprompted and, therefore, parents were free to mention any form of desired involvement. Figure D-3 shows that the most common way in which parents would like to be more involved is through the parents’ association, Parent Teacher Association, or the School Board. Overall, 6% of all parents mentioned this type of involvement. Several parents also expressed a desire for increased communication in a number of forms. Better information about the school curriculum, activities and exams (5%), general communication between teachers and parents (4%), better information about their child’s progress (3%), helping with extra-curricular activities or school trips (3%) and fundraising (1%) were also mentioned.

Figure D-3: Ways in which parents would like to be more involved with schools (%, n=1007)
No clear pattern emerged from the 19 respondents who said that they would like to be less involved with their child’s school. While practical issues such as work commitments, difficulties getting childcare, and travelling to meetings were mentioned by some respondents, others expressed a disinclination to be involved because of antipathy towards the school or simply because they thought that there was no need for such involvement.

The survey also asked parents about their preferred level of involvement in three particular aspects of schooling – helping with homework, dealing with bad behaviour at school, and assisting if their child has problems with school work or other aspects of school life. Almost all parents said that they would like to be either very or fairly involved in all these aspects of their child’s education (Figure D-4). Parents were, however, less likely to say that they would like to be very involved in helping their children with homework (46%), than with dealing with bad behaviour at school (93%) or assisting if their child is having problems with school work or other aspects of school-life (91%).

**Figure D-4: How involved parents should be in different aspects of child’s education (% n=1007)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very involved</th>
<th>Fairly involved</th>
<th>Not very involved</th>
<th>Not at all involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helping their children with homework</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with child’s bad behaviour at school</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If child has problems with school work or other aspects of school-life</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Written agreements**

Overall, three-quarters of parents (75%) had a written agreement with the school setting out what they can expect of the school and what the school could expect of them, 10% did not have such an agreement, and 15% did not know if they had a written agreement. Parents who were members of a school body were more likely that parents who were not members
to say they had a written agreement with the school (81% and 74% respectively). Additionally, parents with children in a private school were more likely that those with children in a state school to say they had such an agreement (87% and 75% respectively).

The majority of respondents who did not have a written agreement with the school said they would be interested in having such an agreement. Over two-thirds (69%) of respondents who do not have an agreement with the school said they would be very or fairly interested in having one, while 17% said they would be not very interested and 13% said that they would be not at all interested in this.

**Representation of parents’ views**

The Scottish Consumer Council has previously produced a discussion paper about how the interests of parents can be better represented in education policy making in Scotland at a national level.² In relation to parents’ representation, the survey asked respondents if they were members of a school body, their level of satisfaction with how opinions or parents are represented at school level, and whether parents’ views are adequately reflected at a national level.

Overall, around 9% of parents were members of some form of school body. Around 5% were members of a Parent/Teachers’ Association, 2% were members of a school board or Board of Governors, and 2% were members of a parents’ association. Parents with children in a private school were more likely than parents with children in a state school to be member of some form of school body (21% and 8% respectively). Membership of a school body was also related to parental qualifications. For example, while 16% of parents with a degree were a member of a school body, only 3% of parents with no educational qualifications were. Additionally, parents in social group AB were more likely than parents in social groups C1, C2, and DE to be a member of a school body (17% compared to 9%, 6% and 6% respectively).

Most respondents were either very satisfied (28%) or fairly satisfied (57%) with the way school bodies represent the opinions of parents. While only 5% of parents were either fairly or very dissatisfied with this, 10% of respondents did not know how satisfied they were with

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school body representation. As might be expected, parents who were members of a school body were more likely than parents who were not members to be either very or fairly satisfied with the way these bodies represent the opinions of parents (98% compared with 83%). Additionally, parents of pupils in private schools were more likely to be very or fairly satisfied than parents of pupils in state schools with this representation (98% compared with 85%).

Parents’ views on representation at a national level were less positive. While 37% of parents agreed that parents’ views are adequately reflected at a national level, 49% disagreed with this, and 14% of parents did not know. Parental attainment levels were negatively correlated to views on national representation – while 57% of parents with no qualifications agreed that parents’ views are adequately reflected at a national level, only 31% of parents who held degrees thought the same. Parents with children at a private school were more likely than parents with children in a state school to say that parents’ views are not adequately reflected at a national level (66% compared with 49%). Similarly, members of a school body were less positive than non-school body members with regard to national representation. While around half (48%) of non-school body members did not think that parents’ views are adequately reflected at a national level, almost two-thirds (63%) of school body members thought likewise.

**Key findings**

Around a quarter (23%) of parents had considered sending their child to a different school. Parents with children in a private school, members of a school body, and parents with most educational qualifications were the most likely to have considered such a move. Among those who had considered a different school, the most common reasons given for the choice of school were the reputation of the school, the distance to the school, and the belief that it would best cater for their child’s needs.

Most respondents (83%) said that parents and schools should share equally the lead role in ensuring that children receive a good education. Parents with children at a private schools, and parents in social groups AB and C1 were the most likely to say that parents should take the lead role. Thus, while the vast majority of respondents see the responsibility for education being shared between parents and schools, respondents in social groups C2 and DE were less likely to say that parents should have the lead role in the education of their children.
While 75% of parents said they were involved enough with their child’s school, around one in five (21%) parents said that they would like to be more involved. Parents with children in S1 and S2 were the group most likely to want more involvement. The most commonly desired involvement was through a parents’ association although a wide range of forms of involvement were mentioned.

One in four parents did not have, or did not know if they had, a written agreement with the school. Over two-thirds (69%) of respondents who do not have an agreement with the school said they would be very or fairly interested in having one.

While only one in ten (9%) parents were members of some form of school body, very few parents (5%) were dissatisfied with the way school bodies represent their opinions. Again, parents in social groups C2 and DE, parents with no qualifications, and parents with children at a state school were the least likely to be members of some form of school body.

Parents’ views on representation at a national level were less positive with around half (49%) of respondents saying that their views are not adequately reflected in this way. Parents with higher educational qualifications, parents with children at a private school, and members of a school body were most likely to be critical of the current national representation of their views.
E. Overall satisfaction and new initiatives

Two key aims of this study are to test out levels of satisfaction with the current provision of education, and to test opinion on a number of policy proposals. This chapter provides evidence of parents overall satisfaction with the current educational system in Scotland and their views on four new proposed initiatives.

Overall satisfaction

Figure E-1: Satisfaction with child’s education at current school and at their primary school (% , n=1007)

Generally, there is a high level of satisfaction with schools among parents. Over half (53%) of the parents surveyed said they were very satisfied with the education their child is receiving and a further 43% said they were fairly satisfied (Figure E-1). Only 3% of parents said they were either fairly or very dissatisfied. Slightly more parents were dissatisfied with the education their child received at primary school. While 90% of parents were either very or fairly satisfied with this, 9% were fairly or very dissatisfied. Parents with children in private schools were more likely than parents with children in state schools to say that they were very satisfied with their child’s education (75% compared to 53%).
Parents as consumers of education

The 34 respondents who were dissatisfied with the education their child was receiving at their current school gave a wide variety of reasons for this dissatisfaction. Among the reasons mentioned were class sizes, poor quality of teaching, the transition between primary and secondary school, and current inclusion policies. The following quotes from the open question responses illustrate these points –

“There are too many pupils in the class. If the child is not bright they are left behind.”

“Teachers attitudes towards pupils, because they do not communicate and they have got a lack of patience, probably brought on by over-commitment.”

“My other dissatisfaction is that during the transition between primary and secondary school, there is no progression in pupils’ attainment – it’s not built on. The more able pupils’ needs are not being appropriately challenged.”

“I am dissatisfied because he is in the worst class and there are a lot of distractions. I have complained and then the kids give him a hard time for complaining.”

Parents were also asked whether they thought that the education system in Scotland has got better, got worse, or stayed the same over the past five years. (It is worth noting that this time period has seen a number of radical changes to the education system such as the implementation of the Higher Still curriculum framework). Around half (48%) of respondents said that they education system in Scotland has stayed about the same. More respondents said that the education system has got better (30%) than said that it has got worse (18%).

Views on the progress of the education system in Scotland differed by type of school attended, membership of school bodies, social grouping and parental qualifications. Parents with children attending a private school were more likely than those with children attending a state school to say that education in Scotland has got worse over the last five years (25% compared with 17%). Parents who were members of a school body were more likely than those who were not members to say that the education system has got worse (26% compared with 17%). Parents in social groups AB and C1 were more likely than those in social groups C2 and DE to say that the education system has got worse in the past five
years (24%, 19%, 13% and 15% respectively). Additionally, the higher the qualification level of parents, the more likely they were to be critical of the direction of Scottish education. For example, while 25% of parents with degrees said that the education system in Scotland has got worse in the past five years, only 8% of those with no qualifications did.

New initiatives

One of the challenges for the Scottish Consumer Council is to determine new ways of making the provision of education services more consumer-orientated. The survey asked parents about the likelihood that they would use four proposed new educational initiatives:

- open days at schools held from 8am to 8pm once every three months
- an informal “drop in” system where you could go into school and speak to teachers on one day a week if you wanted to
- an independent mediation service to help parents resolve complaints
- a service independent of the school and local authority offering information and advice.

Figure E-2: Likelihood of using proposed new services (% n=1007)
Overall, there was considerable support for all four proposals, with the majority of parents saying that they would be either very likely or fairly likely to use these proposed services (Figure E-2).

The proposal to have open days at schools held from 8am to 8pm once every three months attracted the most support from parents, with 81% of respondents saying that they would be very or fairly likely to use this service if it was available. Parents with children at state schools were more likely than those with children at private schools to say that they would use such a service (83% compared with 66%).

There was also considerable support for an informal “drop-in” system where parents could go into school and speak to teachers on one day a week if they wanted to. More than two-thirds of respondents (69%) said that they would be either very or fairly likely to use such a system. Again, more parents of children at state school than parents of children at private schools said that they would be likely to use such a system (70% compared with 53%). Similarly, more parents in social groups DE and C2 than those in groups C1 and AB said their would be likely to use such a system (80% and 73% compared with 65% and 63%).

There was less support overall for the two proposed services independent of schools offering mediation or information and advice. However, the majority of respondents still said they would be very or fairly likely to use these services if available. Around two-thirds (65%) of respondents said they would be likely to use an independent mediation service to help parents resolve complaints, and 61% said they would be likely to use a service independent of schools and local authorities offering information and advice on education. Although it is likely that fewer parents’ would use the proposed services should they exist than the above figures suggest, they do suggest that there is considerable demand from parents for these services.

Support for these two proposed independent services differed by type of school, membership of school bodies, social grouping and parental qualifications: parents with children in state schools were more likely than parents with children in private schools to say that they would use these services; parents who were members of school bodies were less likely than those who were not members of school bodies to use these services; parents in social groups AB and C1 were less likely than those in social groups C2 and DE to say they would use these services; and parents with fewer qualifications were more likely to say they would use these services. Additionally, parents who were dissatisfied with how
well the school had dealt with a complaint, and parents who were dissatisfied with their child's education in general, were more likely than those who expressed satisfaction to say that they would use these services.

*Interest in home education and specialist schools*

All parents were also asked about their level of interest in teaching their child at home for part of the time if the government offered money incentives or tax credits. Overall, 9% of parents said they would be very interested and a further 14% of parents said they would be fairly interested in this (Figure E-3). One in five (21%) parents said they would not be very interested, while over half (56%) said they would not be at all interested in this suggestion. Parents with children at state schools were more likely to say that they would be very or fairly interested in this suggestion than were parents with children at private school (23% and 14% respectively). Similarly, parents in social groups AB and C1 were less likely than those in social groups C2 and DE to express interest in home-schooling their children (18%, 21%, 25% and 27% respectively).

**Figure E-3: Interest in different forms of schooling (%,$n=1007$)**

Respondents expressed more interest in the possibility of sending their child to a school specialising in a particular subject area. Overall, 25% of parents said they would be very interested and a further 31% said they would be fairly interested in this (Figure E-3). Less than half (42%) of the respondents said they would not be very interested or at all interested in this suggestion. Again, parents with children at state schools were more likely
to say that they would be very or fairly interested in this suggestion than parents with children at private schools (58% and 50% respectively), and parents in social groups AB and C1 were less likely to express interest than those in social groups C2 and DE (44%, 57%, 62% and 61% respectively).

**Key findings**

Over half (53%) of parents surveyed said they were very satisfied with the education their child is receiving at school and a further 43% said they were fairly satisfied. When asked how the education system in Scotland had changed over the past five years, around half (48%) of respondents said that the education system in Scotland has stayed about the same. While around a third (30%) of respondents said that the education system has got better, around 1 in 5 respondents said that it has got worse (18%). Parents with children in private schools, school body members, and parents in social groups AB and C1 were the most likely to be critical the changes in education in the past five years. This reflects the findings that these groups are more likely to take a more active formal interest in their child’s education.

There was considerable support among parents for proposals on school open days, an informal drop in system in schools, an independent mediation service and an independent information and advice service, independent of schools. While the majority of parents said that they would be likely to use these services, there was slightly more support for the two school based services. Overall, 81% of respondents said that is was likely they would use open days at schools once every three months, 69% said that is was likely that they would use an informal ‘drop in’ system in schools, 65% said they would use a independent mediation service, and 61% said they would use an independent service offering information and advice.

Parents with children in state schools were more likely than those with children in private schools to say that they would use such services. Additionally, with the exception of school open days, there was more interest in these services from parents in social groups C2 and DE than those in social groups AB and C1.

Around a quarter (23%) parents said that they would be very or fairly interested in teaching their child at home for part of the time if the government offered money incentives or tax credits. There was more interest in this proposal from parents with children in state schools, and with parents in social groups C2 and DE.
Over half (56%) of parents also expressed interest in sending their child to a school specialising in a particular subject area. Again, there was more interest in this proposal from parents with children in state schools, and with parents in social groups C2 and DE.
F. Summary and conclusions – ‘Could do better?’

Overall, the findings show that most parents in Scotland hold positive views towards the current education system and their role within it.

- Generally there is a high level of satisfaction with schools among parents. Only 3% of parents said they were dissatisfied with the education their child is receiving at school.

- Almost all respondents or their partner (94%) had attended a parents’ evening, and almost all of these respondents were satisfied with the information they received.

- The vast majority of parents were also satisfied with the curriculum as it currently stands. Only 3% of parents said that the range of subjects on offer at the school was poor. Most parents (81%) said that the balance between academic and vocational subjects on offer at their child’s school was about right. Most parents (85%) said that the emphasis given to teaching numeracy and literacy in the curriculum is about right.

- Most parents were also satisfied with the number of extra-curricula activities on offer, and on the existing opportunities to do music, arts, drama and sport.

- Most parents were content with the current balance of responsibility between schools and parents. The vast majority of respondents saw the responsibility for education being shared between parents and schools.

- The level of information provided by schools with regard to pupils’ progress was also viewed positively by most parents. For example, only 6% of parents disagreed that their child’s school gives them clear information on how their child is getting on.

Despite these encouraging results, there is no room for complacency. For example, while only 3% of parents said they were very dissatisfied with the education their child is receiving, a further 43% said they were fairly satisfied. This would suggest that there are a significant number of parents that, while not overtly dissatisfied with their child’s schooling, would still consider that there is room for improvement. This is also reflected in the finding that, despite the recent innovations introduced over the last 5 years such as the introduction of the Higher Still curriculum framework, 48% of parents believed that the education system has stayed the same and 18% of parents believe that it has got worse.

The study indicated a number of areas where the current educational system ‘could do better’.
**Representation**

- While most parents were content with the way school bodies represent their opinions, almost half did not believe that their views were adequately reflected at a national level.

- Only one in ten (9%) of parents were members of some form of school body (although most parents were satisfied with representation at a school level).

**Curriculum**

- With regard to the curriculum, a substantial number of parents said that the range of subjects that pupils are required to take was too wide. In particular, parents of S3 and S4 pupils were most likely to support a narrowing of the curriculum.

- Parents with children in state school were less likely than those with children in private schools to be satisfied with the current curriculum.

- There were no significant differences between the views of parents in urban and rural areas of Scotland on the curriculum.

**Making complaints**

- Around a quarter of all respondents had made a complaint to their child’s school at some time in the past. Only 2% of respondents had complained to their local authority.

- While the majority of respondents who had made a complaint to their child’s school said that it had been dealt with well, a sizeable minority (28%) were not satisfied with the outcome. Moreover, while far fewer parents had made a complaint to the local authority than to their child’s school, they were less likely to be satisfied with the outcome of the complaint.

- Around one in ten (12%) of parents said that they would not know how to make a complaint about their child’s education.

**Information and involvement**

- A quarter of parents did not know if their child’s school had been inspected. Overall 12% of parents, who knew that their child’s school had been inspected, reported receiving no feedback on the inspection.
Almost half (45%) of all parents said they knew only a little or nothing at all about helping their children with subject choices. Around a quarter (27%) of parents said they knew only a little or nothing at all about what to do if their child is being bullied. Additionally, around a third (32%) of parents said they knew only a little or nothing about what to do if their child was having learning problems.

Around one in five (21%) parents said that they would like to be more involved with their child’s school.

A quarter of parents did not have, or did not know if they had, a written agreement with the school. The majority of these parents said they would be very of fairly interested in having one.

Safety

Safety continues to be a concern to a significant proportion of parents. Overall, 14% of parents said they had some concern about their child’s safety. In particular, bullying, issues relating to travel to and from school and drugs were commonly mentioned.

New initiatives

Most parents welcomed the policy proposals presented to respondents. Overall, 81% of respondents said that is was likely they would use open days at schools once every three months, 69% said that is was likely that they would use an informal ‘drop in’ system in schools, 65% said they would use a independent mediation service, and 61% said they would use an independent service offering information and advice.

Interest in these services was greatest among parents in social groups C2 and DE.

Around a quarter of parents said that they would be interested in home educating their child for part of the time in exchange for money incentives or tax credits. Over half of parents expressed interest in sending their child to a school specialising in a particular subject area.
These findings broadly echo the views that parents’ expressed in the focus group research\(^3\). It should also be noted, however, that there is significant variation between different sub-groups. Perhaps the most striking theme to emerge from the survey results is that attitudes of parents to the current education system are closely linked to the parents’ educational attainment and to their social class, and not to rurality. For example, parents with low educational attainment and parents in social class DE were less likely than those with higher prior educational attainment and those in social class AB to -

- say that parents should take the lead role in ensuring that children receive a good education
- have attended a parents’ evening
- be a member of a school body
- feel informed about the education system
- have complained to schools about their child’s education
- know if their child’s school had been inspected.

A commitment to ensuring that parents are empowered as consumers of education must therefore have a double aim: to increase empowerment overall, and also to reduce the correlation between lower levels of involvement and social or educational disadvantage.

Increasing levels of interest and enthusiasm is a particular challenge. The results suggest that those with lower educational attainment and those in social groups C2 and DE are less critical of their child’s education and more satisfied with the education their child is receiving. This is likely to reflect their relative lack of interest in their child’s education – witnessed in their views as to who should take the lead role in education - rather than because their children actually receive a better education. It is possible that lack of interest and enthusiasm in involvement in their children’s education sometimes stems from parents’ own school experience. Lack of awareness of the available opportunities to engage in their child’s learning experience may also compound this lack of interest. Targeting action towards the most socially disadvantaged parents to raise their awareness of these opportunities and their potential benefits could be a potentially useful way forward.

\(^3\) Parents’ Views of and Involvement with the Scottish Education System. A research report prepared by Carole Millar Research on behalf of the Scottish Consumer Council and the Scottish Parenting Forum, August 2002
The policy initiatives presented to parents – school open days, a drop in service, an independent mediation service, and an independent service offering advice and information - may assist in achieving these goals. Not only did the majority of all parents say that they are likely to use such services, but parents in social groups C2 and DE were more likely than those in social groups AB and C1 to say they would use these services. If this reflects a real demand, rather than aspirational hopes, these initiatives could provide valuable services to the most socially and educationally disadvantaged parents in particular.
Appendix A – CATI script and tabulations
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