National Learner Satisfaction Survey 2007: Highlights

July 2008

Of interest to everyone involved in sustaining and improving learning and skills opportunities across England
Further information
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Introduction

Research background

1 This report presents the key findings for the National Learner Satisfaction Survey (NLSS) 2007, which was conducted by the Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute on behalf of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), and included a total of 43,756 interviews with learners.

2 The NLSS is a large tracking survey of LSC-funded learners aged 16 and over. It provides the LSC and its partners with a wealth of data on learners’ satisfaction with their learning experience over time, including detailed information on three key aspects of the learner journey:

- initial choice and information;
- support during learning; and
- benefits of participation.

3 There have been five national surveys since 2001 (annually between 2001 and 2004, and again in 2007). Since 2003, each survey has comprised over 43,000 telephone interviews with learners.

4 The survey is composed of three waves, each dealing with a distinct set of modular questions:

- pre-entry advice and guidance (wave 12);
- support for learners (wave 13); and
- impact of learning (wave 14).

5 There is a set of core questions that are covered in all three waves:

- overall satisfaction with the learning experience;
- overall satisfaction with the quality of teaching and management of learning; and
- how likely the learner is to return to learning in the future.

6 The NLSS covers learners in further education (FE), work-based learning (WBL), on learndirect courses and personal and community development learning (PCDL). The FE category includes general FE colleges, sixth form colleges, other specialist colleges and learning delivered by an adult learning provider (ALP).

7 In 2007, a pilot survey was also conducted with learners in offender institutions, reflecting the LSC’s role in managing, planning, funding and delivering the new integrated Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) across all nine English regions. The findings for these learners are reported separately.

Methodology

8 Interviews for the NLSS were conducted by telephone between 19 February and 26 July 2007. Almost all learners were sampled from the LSC’s individualised learner record (ILR). PCDL learners were sampled directly from local education authorities’ records, due to the lack of a robust national database for them. During fieldwork, a minimum quota of 500 interviews per local LSC was set to enable the analysis of FE learners by local LSC. Data for FE and WBL learners has been weighted using final ILR profiles for the 2006/07 academic year.

Sample profile

9 Table 1 shows the demographic profile of learners. As can be seen, ALP and PCDL learners (and FE learners to a lesser extent) are predominantly female. In contrast, there are more males in WBL.

### Table 1: Demographics of the sample profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FE</th>
<th>WBL</th>
<th>ALP</th>
<th>PCDL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>(31,742)</td>
<td>(5,580)</td>
<td>(1,706)</td>
<td>(3,821)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16–18</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19–24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25+</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BME</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning difficulty</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the base was all respondents; 907 interviews were conducted with learndirect learners (findings for this group are contained in National Learner Satisfaction Survey 2007: Further Education.)
10 ALP and PCDL learners also tend to be older compared with those undertaking WBL – the large majority (80 per cent of ALP learners and 93 per cent of PCDL learners) are aged 25-plus. ALP and PCDL learners are also more likely to report having a learning difficulty and/or disability. The age profile in FE is more evenly distributed, with around half of learners (53 per cent) aged 25-plus. WBL learners are predominantly aged under 25.

11 Around one FE and ALP learner in seven is from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups – twice the proportions in WBL and PCDL.

Multivariate analysis

12 In addition to standard analysis of the data, the following analysis techniques were also used to interrogate the data for FE, ALP and WBL learners (PCDL learners were excluded from this analysis because it is not known how representative they are – there is no population profile data).

- **Multiple regression** (also known as key driver analysis – KDA) was used to examine the relative importance of a range of factors in explaining overall satisfaction with the learning experience.

- **Chi-squared automatic interaction detector** (CHAID) analysis was conducted to segment the learner population according to their propensity to express satisfaction with their learning experience.

13 CHAID uses statistical techniques to select:

- the key determinants or drivers (such as current learning status, gender, age, ethnicity or course level); and

- the groups that are most and least likely to exhibit these characteristics.

14 The advantage the CHAID technique has over standard analysis is that it identifies the relative strength of variables. Variables identified nearer the top of the CHAID tree are more strongly related to the dependent (satisfaction with learning experience) than other variables included in the model (whether they are identified or not).

Presentation of findings

15 It should be remembered that only a sample (and not the entire learner population) of learners has been interviewed. Consequently, all results are subject to sampling tolerances and not all differences are statistically significant. **This report comments only on findings that are statistically significant.**

16 Where percentages do not sum to 100, this is due to computer rounding, the exclusion of ‘don’t know’ categories, or multiple answers. An asterisk (*) denotes values above zero but less than 0.5 per cent.

17 In the report, reference is made to ‘combined scores’. This is where we have combined ‘extremely’, ‘very’ and ‘fairly’, or ‘strongly’ and ‘tend to’ scores. The report also makes reference to ‘net’ figures, which represent the balance of opinion on attitudinal questions. ‘Net satisfaction’ figures represent the percentage of respondents who were satisfied with a particular issue, less the percentage who were dissatisfied. For example, if the figures for one aspect of learning show 40 per cent satisfied and 25 per cent dissatisfied, the ‘net satisfaction’ figure is +15 points.

18 Combined and net scores are calculated using the true value of the scores before they are rounded. This occasionally results in a small discrepancy (usually one percentage point) between the combined score and the sum of the rounded scores that it relates to.

19 The report also makes reference to ‘mean’ scores for questions where learners were asked to rank an aspect of their course or provider on a scale of 1 to 10. The mean score is compiled by adding the scores provided by all learners and dividing this figure by the number of learners answering the question.

Report structure

20 This report is organised into five main sections:

- Summary and Implications;
- Learner Satisfaction;
- Perception of the Provider;
- Benefits of Learning; and
- Early Leavers and Non-achievers.

21 More detailed findings are contained in separate reports for FE, WBL and PCDL. Separate reports have also been produced for FE learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, along with a detailed technical report.
Summary

Satisfaction with the learning experience remains exceptionally high

22 Almost all (over nine in ten) learners are satisfied, including a significant minority who are extremely satisfied (ranging between 27 per cent of FE learners and 37 per cent of PCDL learners). Just one learner in twenty expressed dissatisfaction. In addition, around three-quarters of learners say they would speak highly of their learning provider, while just one in twenty would be critical.

23 Overall satisfaction levels have been high and relatively stable since 2001. There has, however, been a gradual increase in the proportion of learners who are extremely satisfied.

Learners’ satisfaction with their learning experience continues to be closely linked to their views on the quality of teaching

24 The key drivers of learners’ satisfaction with their learning experience are teachers making the subject interesting and enjoyable; the support given by teachers or tutors; the planning and organisation of lessons; and prompt and regular feedback from tutors. Other key factors include being treated fairly and/or with respect by staff, and being consulted about the quality of the learning programme.

Providers’ performance on key drivers of learner satisfaction is rated highly by learners

25 The vast majority of learners (nine in ten) are satisfied with the quality of teaching, and almost all agree they are treated fairly and/or with respect by their learning provider. Seven learners in ten report that their provider asks for their views on the quality of the learning programme.

The characteristic that most distinguishes learners in terms of satisfaction levels is their course stage

26 Learners who left their course early or failed are most dissatisfied. Those still studying are slightly more satisfied than those who have completed. Early leavers and those who have failed are more likely than average to have been undertaking an Entry Level or Level 1 qualification and/or to have a disability and/or learning difficulty.

27 The most common reasons given for leaving the course early are that it was the wrong choice; the teaching was of poor quality; the learner found it difficult combining study with work and family commitments; health-related reasons; and personal issues such as illness of a family member. Learners who failed or left their course early also tend to be less positive than others about the information they received about their course at enrolment, as well as about the support they received while studying.

The vast majority of learners are positive about the impact of their course

28 Almost all (four learners in five) FE and WBL learners agree that their course has given them skills they can use for a job and/or skills that will help them progress in their career. The proportion of learners who say they would undertake further learning in the next three years remains high, ranging from 77 per cent of WBL learners to 89 per cent of PCDL learners.

Implications

29 Learners’ overall satisfaction with their learning experience is high and at similar levels to previous years. However, the survey shows that early leavers are much less positive – both overall and in relation to specific aspects of the course – as well as being less likely to report positive benefits. As a result, minimising the number of early leavers will be the most effective means of improving satisfaction among learners overall.

30 The survey identified the importance of pre-entry advice: the main reason for learners leaving early is that the course was not appropriate to them. However, the range of difficulties reported by early leavers indicates that advice needs to be broad-ranging, covering not just the course itself but information that can try to preempt wider problems (such as with managing conflicting commitments). Previous research (Reasons for Early Leaving from FE and Work-Based Learning Courses, Research Report RR849, published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families in June 2007) also highlighted the importance of information and guidance on a wide range of issues, including options for deferring the course (rather than dropping out altogether). The type of advice required by learners is relevant to current government planning: the Government has recently announced its intention to introduce a new joined-up advice service to help people move into work and learning (Opportunity, Employment and Progression: making skills work, published by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and the Department for Work and Pensions in November 2007).

31 The survey also identified aspects of the learning experience that had a high impact on overall satisfaction, in particular aspects of teaching such as making the subject interesting and enjoyable, the planning and organisng of lessons, and the provision of support to learners. This last element ties in with a more general finding on the importance of advice and support during the course (in addition to pre-entry advice): a significant minority of learners say they were not consulted about aspects of their course.

32 Satisfaction with the course tended to be higher among those studying at lower levels. However, differences between sub-groups (in terms of both demographics and type of course) are small, and suggest that there are no groups of learners whose experiences are particularly better or worse than those of others.
Learner Satisfaction

Satisfaction with the learning experience

33 The vast majority of learners (over nine learners in ten) – are satisfied with their learning experience, including a significant minority who are extremely satisfied (see Figure 1). ALP and PCDL learners are most likely to be extremely satisfied. Just one learner in twenty is dissatisfied.

34 There has been little change in satisfaction levels compared with those reported in the 2004 survey (see Figure 2). Overall satisfaction among WBL learners has increased by one percentage point – from 90 to 91 per cent. In contrast, there has been a one percentage point decline in overall satisfaction among PCDL learners – from 94 to 93 per cent. The change in satisfaction recorded among ALP learners is not statistically significant.

35 Overall satisfaction with the learning experience has remained relatively stable since the first NLSS in 2001. However, the proportion of FE and WBL learners who are extremely satisfied has steadily increased from 20 per cent in 2001 to 27 per cent in 2007 (for FE learners) and from 17 per cent to 26 per cent (for WBL learners). As discussed later, this is consistent with the high levels of learner satisfaction with the quality of teaching.

Figure 1: Satisfaction with the current learning experience

How satisfied are you with your current learning experience at your college/training provider?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Dissatisfied</th>
<th>% Satisfied</th>
<th>% Extremely satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FE (31,742)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBL (5,580)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALP (1,706)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCDL (3,821)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the base was 42,849 learners.

Figure 2: Trends in satisfaction with the learning experience over time

Note: the base was 42,849 learners.
Satisfaction with the quality of teaching/training

36 Learners’ satisfaction with the quality of teaching has followed a similar pattern to that observed for overall satisfaction, which is to be expected given the close link between these two measures. As can be seen in Figure 3, the vast majority of learners (around nine learners in ten) are satisfied with the quality of teaching or training on their course. Again, PCDL and ALP learners are more likely than those in FE or WBL to be extremely satisfied. Just one learner in twenty is dissatisfied.

37 Trends in satisfaction with the quality of teaching have also remained relatively unchanged since 2001 (see Figure 4). There has, however, been a very small decline (between one and two percentage points) since 2004 among FE, ALP and PCDL learners. Again, it should be noted that these changes are very small and that satisfaction remains high across all groups of learners. In addition, the proportion of FE and WBL learners who are extremely satisfied has steadily increased since 2001, as shown in Table 2.

Figure 3: Satisfaction with the quality of teaching/training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Dissatisfied</th>
<th>% Satisfied</th>
<th>% Extremely satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FE (31,742)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBL (5,580)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALP (1,706)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCDL (3,821)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the base was 42,849 learners.

Figure 4: Trends in satisfaction with the quality of teaching/training over time

Note: the base was 42,849 learners.
Table 2: Percentages of FE and WBL learners who were extremely satisfied with the quality of teaching over time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>FE</th>
<th>WBL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>(10,000)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>(19,947)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>(31,786)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>(31,648)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>(31,742)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the base for each year is shown in brackets.

What drives satisfaction with the learning experience?

A KDA was conducted to determine the key drivers of learner satisfaction with the learning experience. Figures 5, 6 and 7 present the results of the multivariate analysis for FE, WBL and ALP respectively, showing the relative importance of various aspects. All of the factors apart from 'Lessons being badly planned/disorganised' have a positive relationship with learner satisfaction. The models demonstrate a ‘fit’ (R² value) of 53 per cent, 47 per cent and 51 per cent respectively – that is, between 47 per cent and 53 per cent of the variation in levels of satisfaction with the learning experience can be ‘explained’ by the included factors. (It is not possible to identify causal relationships using this type of model, however – only correlations.) Statistically, this is seen to be a good ‘fit’ model.

FE learners

As can be seen in Figure 5, FE learners’ satisfaction with their learning experience is most positively linked to teaching staff making the subject interesting and enjoyable, and the support they give to learners; poorly planned lessons have the reverse effect.

Other aspects that have a positive impact on learner satisfaction are having help and assistance available when needed; receiving prompt and regular feedback from teaching staff; teachers’ management of learners during lessons; learners having the opportunity to express their views on the quality of the learning programme; and being treated with respect by staff.

As can also be seen in Figure 5, providers are rated highly on a number of these key drivers, with many aspects receiving a mean rating of 8 out of 10. In addition, 92 per cent of learners say there is help and support available to them when needed and almost all (96 per cent) say they are treated with respect by staff. Slightly fewer, although still a majority (69 per cent), agree that their provider asks for their views on the quality of the learning programme, and this is fairly consistent across all FE categories, WBL and PCDL.

Additional KDA models were conducted to determine which key aspects of the learner journey also have an impact on satisfaction with the learning experience. Among FE learners, there is a positive link between how informed learners feel about the content of their course post-induction and their overall satisfaction. Reports of positive outcomes from the learning were also found to be linked with higher satisfaction levels – learners who say they now feel more positive about learning, and have a greater enthusiasm for the subject as a result, are more likely than others to be satisfied with their learning experience.

Figure 5: Key drivers of satisfaction with the learning experience in FE learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Key drivers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean score 8.0</td>
<td>Teaching staff make the subject interesting and enjoyable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score 7.9</td>
<td>Staff provide support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14% mention</td>
<td>Lessons are badly planned/disorganised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92% mention</td>
<td>Help and assistance are available when needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score 7.8</td>
<td>Prompt and regular feedback is given by teaching staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score 8.0</td>
<td>How well teaching staff manage learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69% agree, 25% disagree</td>
<td>The provider asks for learners’ views on the quality of the learning programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96% agree, 3% disagree</td>
<td>Learners are treated with respect by staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the base was 31,742 FE learners.
WBL learners

43 Key drivers for satisfaction with the learning experience among WBL learners are broadly similar to those observed in FE, although there are some differences in the relative importance of the drivers (see Figure 6). For example, the aspect that has the greatest impact on WBL learners’ satisfaction is receiving prompt and regular feedback from teaching staff. This is consistent with the less frequent interaction between teaching staff and WBL learners compared with those in FE. Conversely, poorly planned lessons have a negative impact on learner satisfaction – this was also observed in the FE model.

44 Other positive drivers that are similar to the FE model include teaching staff making the subject interesting and enjoyable; the support they give to learners; and learners having the opportunity to express their views on the quality of the learning programme. There are also some key drivers that were not observed in the FE model: the setting of clear targets or learning goals by teaching staff; how teaching staff relate to the learner as a person; and being treated fairly by staff.

45 Learners in WBL are also positive about how training providers perform against these aspects, with the majority of key drivers receiving a mean rating of 8 out of 10. Four-fifths of learners (79 per cent) agree that their provider asks for their views on the quality of the learning programme (10 percentage points higher than in FE) and 95 per cent of WBL learners say they are treated fairly by staff.

46 Again, additional KDA models were conducted to determine which key aspects of the learner journey also have an impact on satisfaction with the learning experience. The findings from these analyses show that information and support during learning are especially important to WBL learners. Satisfaction with the learning experience is positively linked to learners feeling:

- informed at enrolment about the course content;
- informed post-induction about how the course or training would help them gain skills to use in a job; and
- confident that support will be offered if they encounter problems.

47 In contrast, when learners did not receive extra help that had been promised, this had a negative impact on satisfaction with the learning experience.

ALP learners

48 Key drivers for satisfaction with the learning experience among ALP learners are similar to those observed in FE and WBL. Again, though, there are some minor differences in the relative importance of the drivers (see Figure 7).

49 Among ALP learners, the aspects that have the greatest impact on learner satisfaction are poorly planned lessons (a negative driver) and the setting of clear targets or learning goals (a positive driver).

50 Other positive key drivers include receiving prompt and regular feedback from teaching staff; teaching staff making the subject interesting and enjoyable; being treated with respect by staff; how teaching staff relate to the learner as a person; help and assistance being available when needed; and how well teaching staff manage learners during lessons. In contrast to the FE and WBL models, learners having the opportunity to express their views on the quality of the learning programme did not feature as a key driver in ALP.

Figure 6: Key drivers of satisfaction with the learning experience in WBL learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Key drivers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean score 7.9</td>
<td>Prompt and regular feedback is given by teaching staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16% mention</td>
<td>Lessons are badly planned/disorganised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score 7.9</td>
<td>Teaching staff make the subject interesting and enjoyable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79% agree, 17% disagree</td>
<td>The provider asks for learners’ views on the quality of the learning programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score 8.0</td>
<td>Staff provide support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95% agree, 4% disagree</td>
<td>Learners are treated fairly by staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score 8.1</td>
<td>Teaching staff set clear targets or learning goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score 8.5</td>
<td>How teaching staff relate to the learner as a person</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

47% of variation in responses is explained by model

Note: the base was 5,580 WBL learners.
Figure 7: Key drivers of satisfaction with the learning experience in ALP learners

- Lessons are badly planned/disorganised: 9% mention (Mean score 8.0)
- Teaching staff set clear targets or learning goals: 16% (Mean score 8.1)
- Prompt and regular feedback is given by teaching staff: 14% (Mean score 8.4)
- Teaching staff make the subject interesting and enjoyable: 13% (Mean score 8.4)
- Learners are treated with respect by staff: 12% (97% agree, 2% disagree)
- Help and assistance are available when needed: 10% (Mean score 8.4)
- How well teaching staff manage learners: 10% (Mean score 8.5)
- How teaching staff relate to the learner as a person: 9% (Mean score 8.5)

51% of variation in responses is explained by model

Note: the base was 1,706 ALP learners.

51 ALP learners are similarly positive about their providers’ performance on these key aspects of the learner experience. As can be seen in Figure 7, the minimum mean rating is 8 out of 10. In addition, nine learners in ten say that help and assistance are available when needed and almost all (97 per cent) say they are treated with respect by staff. Just 9 per cent reported lessons being badly planned/disorganised – significantly lower than for FE and WBL (14 per cent and 16 per cent respectively).

52 Again, additional KDA models were conducted to determine which key aspects of the learner journey also have an impact on satisfaction with the learning experience. The findings from these analyses show that ALP learners place particular value on pre-entry information and personal support; this is consistent with the older age profile of these learners – they have less recent experience of engagement with learning. The specific key drivers are:

- feeling informed at enrolment about the content of the course and how it will be taught; and
- having teaching staff who are good at helping new people to settle.

53 In contrast, problems with maintaining personal motivation was found to be a negative driver. This reinforces the importance of providing ALP learners with the right support during their learning in order to minimise the risk of non-completion and non-achievement.

What differentiates learners’ views?

54 A CHAID analysis (see paragraphs 12 to 14) was conducted among FE, WBL and ALP learners respectively to establish key discriminators in explaining learner satisfaction with their learning experience. The results are presented in Figures 8, 9 and 10.

55 The responses on satisfaction with the learning experience were given a numeric value of between 1 and 7, where a score of 7 is ‘extremely satisfied’ and 1 is ‘extremely dissatisfied’. The mean score is 5.7 for both FE and WBL but is slightly higher (5.9) for ALP.
FE learners

57 As can be seen from Figure 8, the strongest discriminator is current course status: learners who successfully completed their courses are most satisfied, while early leavers and learners who have failed (non-achievers) are least satisfied. Those still studying are in between the two extremes.

58 Among successful completers, white learners are more satisfied than their BME counterparts.

59 The early leavers and non-achievers segment is the one that requires the most focus. Within this group, satisfaction is higher among those engaged in lower-level courses. A possible explanation for this is that learners on higher-level courses may have had higher expectations about their course. As can also be seen, within this segment learners undertaking non full-time Entry Level or Level 1 courses are least dissatisfied, while male learners undertaking Level 4 courses and above are most dissatisfied.

60 Current course level also features as a second discriminator among learners who are still studying. Again, there is an inverse relationship between satisfaction and course level. Among this segment, white British and Irish learners undertaking Entry Level or Level 1 courses are most satisfied, while Level 3 learners aged 21 to 40 years are least satisfied.

Figure 8: CHAID analysis of learner satisfaction among FE learners

Note: the base was 31,692 FE learners.
WBL learners

As with the FE model, current course status is also the strongest discriminator of satisfaction among WBL learners (see Figure 9). However, in contrast to the FE model, learners still studying are more satisfied than successful completers. Early leavers and non-achievers remain the most dissatisfied.

Among those still studying, white learners undertaking qualifications at Level 2 or lower are most satisfied, while male learners on Level 3 courses or higher are least satisfied.

Gender is the second discriminator among early leavers, non-achievers and successful completers, with female learners being more satisfied than males. These differences can be related to some extent to course subject: male learners are predominantly undertaking engineering, technology, manufacturing and construction-type courses, while female learners are over-represented in health, social care, public services, business administration, management, and hairdressing and beauty therapy.

Figure 9: CHAID analysis of satisfaction among WBL learners

Note: the base was 5,580 WBL learners.
ALP learners

As with the FE and WBL models, current course status is also the strongest discriminator of satisfaction among ALP learners (see Figure 10). Similarly to the WBL model, those still studying are most satisfied. However, the ALP model differs from the FE and WBL models on some key variables.

• First, among early leavers, non-achievers and those still studying, female learners are less satisfied than males (73 per cent of ALP learners are female, which is a significantly higher proportion than in FE or WBL).

• Second, among successful completers, those who were doing a Level 3 course or above are more satisfied than those on lower-level courses. This is the reverse of what is found in the FE and WBL models and may again be explained by differences in expectations – ALP learners are significantly less likely to say that the learning is essential for their job and/or that it will help with their career progression.

In summary, these models show that the learners that require the most focus are the early leavers and non-achievers. Minimising the number of these learners will be the most effective means of improving the findings for learners overall. The final section of this document, ‘Early Leavers and Non-achievers’, looks at these groups in further detail.

Figure 10: CHAID analysis of satisfaction among ALP learners

Note: the base was 1,706 ALP learners.
Perception of the Provider

Reasons for choosing a provider

66 FE and ALP learners are most likely to have chosen their provider for its location (this was mentioned by 57 per cent each of FE and ALP learners). This factor is less commonly cited by WBL learners (26 per cent). Instead, three WBL learners in ten (30 per cent) say they had no choice and that their employer chose the provider for them.

67 Around one FE learner in six and one ALP learner in six say they chose their provider because it offered the course they wanted (16 per cent of FE and 18 per cent of ALP learners), falling to 13 per cent of WBL learners. FE learners are more likely than their ALP and WBL counterparts to take into account the provider’s reputation in making their choice (this was mentioned by 16 per cent of FE compared with 6 per cent each of ALP and WBL learners).

Information about the course at enrolment

68 Learners mostly say that they were well informed about various aspects of their course before they enrolled (see Table 3). Overall, WBL learners are more informed about all aspects of their course. FE and ALP learners are most informed about the content of the course but are less well informed about other aspects (although the majority remain well informed).

Consultation with learners

69 The majority of learners agree that their provider asks for their views on the quality of their learning programme (see Figure 11). As can be seen, WBL learners are most likely to agree.

70 Learners who agreed that they were consulted were then asked whether they agreed or disagreed that the provider responded to their views (see Figure 12). Again, the majority agree and again, WBL learners are the most positive.

Table 3: Information about the course at enrolment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information available</th>
<th>FE</th>
<th>WBL</th>
<th>ALP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>(10,593)</td>
<td>(1,831)</td>
<td>(585)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net agree score (+/-)</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information available about the content of the course</td>
<td>+79</td>
<td>+84</td>
<td>+80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information available about the standard of work expected</td>
<td>+76</td>
<td>+87</td>
<td>+71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information available about the amount of work expected of learners in their own time</td>
<td>+67</td>
<td>+76</td>
<td>+72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information available about the type of assessments that learners would be given</td>
<td>+67</td>
<td>+80</td>
<td>+67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information available about how the teacher/trainer would teach the course (e.g. group work or lectures)</td>
<td>+64</td>
<td>+76</td>
<td>+69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information available about how the course/training would help learners to gain skills to use a job</td>
<td>+63</td>
<td>+90</td>
<td>+56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information available about the timing of assessments</td>
<td>+57</td>
<td>+71</td>
<td>+57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the base figures are shown in brackets. They are for all wave 12 respondents.
Figure 12: Extent to which providers are seen to respond to learners’ views

Do you agree or disagree that your college/provider responds to these views?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FE (25,907)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBL (4,942)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALP (1,348)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCDL (3,038)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the base was 35,235 learners who agreed that their provider asks for their views.

Meeting learners’ needs

The vast majority of learners agree that their learning programme is meeting their needs. The figures (see Figure 13) are similar to those for overall satisfaction.

Figure 13: Extent to which learners’ needs are seen to be met

Do you agree or disagree that your learning programme is meeting your needs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FE (31,742)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBL (5,580)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALP (1,706)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCDL (3,821)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the base was 42,849 learners.
Advocating the provider

Learners’ advocacy towards their provider is high, with at least seven learners in ten saying they would speak highly of their provider (see Figure 14). A significant minority of these learners would speak highly of their learning provider without being asked.

Figure 14: Advocating the provider – how learners would speak of it

Which of these statements best describes the way you would speak of your college/provider in their capacity as a training provider?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Critical</th>
<th>% Speak highly</th>
<th>% Speak highly without being asked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FE (31,742)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBL (5,580)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALP (1,706)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCDL (3,821)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the base was 42,849 learners.
The Benefits of Learning

Impact on skills and career progression

73 The majority of WBL, FE and ALP learners are positive about the benefits of their learning to acquiring skills for employment (see Figure 15). Almost all WBL learners (94 per cent) agree that their learning has given them skills they can use for a job; the corresponding figures for FE and ALP are slightly lower but still constitute the majority – 86 per cent and 75 per cent respectively. The figure is significantly lower among PCDL learners, at 45 per cent, but this is consistent with learners’ motivations for doing these types of courses, which are less focused on job considerations.

74 These patterns are consistent with the reasons given by learners for their choice of course, as well as their assessment of the relevance of the learning to their current job. For example, WBL learners are more likely than others to have chosen their course in order to help them get a (better or different) job and/or to progress at work. Overall, 44 per cent of WBL learners mentioned this compared with 36 per cent of FE learners and 33 per cent of ALP learners, although this remains the top reason across all three learner groups. WBL learners are also more likely than others to have chosen their course because it was relevant to their job (23 per cent of WBL learners compared with 12 per cent and 7 per cent of FE and ALP learners respectively).

75 Consequently, WBL learners are most likely to report that their learning is essential for their current job (71 per cent), or that it will help them in their current job (27 per cent). In FE and ALP, the learning is perceived to be comparatively less essential for the learners’ current jobs, although significant minorities still believe that their learning will help them in their work (see Figure 16).

76 In line with these findings, almost all WBL learners (94 per cent) and four-fifths of FE learners (80 per cent) agree that taking part in the learning will help their career progression. The corresponding figure for ALP learners is slightly lower (66 per cent) and it is significantly lower among PCDL learners – both are consistent with these learners’ motivations for doing their course, which are less driven by job considerations.

Figure 15: Extent to which learning is seen to have given learners skills they can use in a job

Would you agree or disagree that your learning programme has given you the skills you can use in a job?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FE (10,588)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBL (1,874)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALP (585)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCDL (1,914)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the base was 14,961 learners for wave 14.

Figure 16: Impact of learning on learner’s current job

What would you say about your course and your current job?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Essential for learner’s current job</th>
<th>% Not essential but will help in current job</th>
<th>% Will not help in learner’s current job</th>
<th>% Irrelevant – learner not working/intend to work</th>
<th>% Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FE (10,593)</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBL (1,831)</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALP (585)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the base was 13,009 learners for wave 12.
Figure 17: Extent to which learners see their course as having a positive impact on skills for employment

Would you agree or disagree that taking part in your course will help you move forward in your career?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Disagree</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FE (10,588)</strong></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WBL (1,874)</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ALP (585)</strong></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PCDL (1,914)</strong></td>
<td>63</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the base was 14,961 learners for wave 14.

77 Other key benefits reported by learners include the following.

- **Feeling more confident in their ability to learn**: WBL learners are most likely to report this benefit (92 per cent compared with 85 per cent of FE learners, 84 per cent of ALP learners and 77 per cent of PCDL learners).

- **Feeling more creative and prepared to try new things**: again, WBL learners are more likely than other learners to report this benefit (88 per cent compared with 83 per cent of FE learners, 84 per cent of ALP and 79 per cent of PCDL learners).

- **Having greater enthusiasm for the subject**: this is equally high across all learner groups (87 per cent of WBL learners, 87 per cent of FE learners, 89 per cent of ALP learners and 90 per cent of PCDL learners).

- **Feeling more positive about learning than when they started**: WBL learners are also more likely than others to report this benefit (81 per cent compared with 75 per cent of FE learners, 77 per cent of ALP learners and 68 per cent of PCDL learners).

Likelihood of undertaking further learning

78 A large majority of learners in FE, ALP and PCDL say they are likely to undertake further learning in the future, including at least three-fifths who say they would be very likely to do so (see Figure 18). WBL learners are less likely to say they would undertake further learning, which is to be expected given that their choice of learning is more likely to be driven by employment considerations and they will tend to see their current learning as already meeting these needs. Despite this, a healthy majority of WBL learners (77 per cent) say they are likely to undertake further learning.

79 As would be expected, there are similarities between learners who are dissatisfied with their learning experience and those who are least likely to undertake further learning. These tend to be male learners, learners aged 19 to 24, and early leavers and non-achievers.

Figure 18: Likelihood of undertaking further learning

How likely are you to undertake further learning in the future (say, in the next three years)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Very unlikely</th>
<th>% Fairly unlikely</th>
<th>% Fairly likely</th>
<th>% Very likely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FE (31,742)</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WBL (5,580)</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ALP (1,706)</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PCDL (3,821)</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the base was 42,849 learners.
There has been a slight decline since 2004 in learners’ likelihood of undertaking further learning, which may be partly due to changing motivations for learning (see Figure 19). For example, other research (‘The Value of Learning’, undertaken by Ipsos MORI on behalf of the LSC) has shown that, over this same period, learners have placed a greater emphasis on learning that will enhance their job prospects.

**Figure 19: Trends in further learning over time**

Note: the base was 42,849 learners.
Early Leavers and Non-achievers

81 Although overall satisfaction with the learning experience is high among learners, the survey shows that early leavers and non-achievers are much less positive – both overall and in relation to specific aspects of the course – as well as being less likely to report positive outcomes.

82 Between 6 per cent and 8 per cent of learners surveyed say they left their course early, and an additional 1 per cent say they failed. This survey is not designed to provide data on completion rates; these are monitored by the LSC’s own analysis of the ILR database.

83 Early leavers and non-achievers are more likely than other learners to have no prior qualifications and to be on Entry Level or Level 1 courses. They are also more likely to report having a disability and/or learning difficulty. Taken together, this group comprises learners who are most likely to require information, advice and guidance at all stages of the learning journey.

84 The most commonly cited reason for leaving early is that the learner had made the wrong choice of course, followed by the fact that the teaching and/or tutor were poor. Other reasons mentioned include the difficulty of combining studying with work or family commitments; health problems; and other personal issues such as illness of a family member. Elsewhere, early leavers and non-achievers report different experiences to other learners in a number of areas.

85 These findings indicate a need to focus on:

- **pre-entry advice and guidance** to help learners make the right course choice;
- **advice and support during the course** to pre-empt as well as overcome problems encountered by learners; and
- **consultation with employers** (for WBL learners) to explore what help and support can be provided to those who report difficulties combining the course with work commitments (information aimed at employers, and greater discussion between providers and employers, may help to alleviate these difficulties).

- They are less positive about the support given by their provider during the learning programme.
- They are less likely to undertake further learning in the future.

83 Early leavers and non-achievers are more likely than other learners to have no prior qualifications and to be on Entry Level or Level 1 courses. They are also more likely to report having a disability and/or learning difficulty. Taken together, this group comprises learners who are most likely to require information, advice and guidance at all stages of the learning journey.

84 The most commonly cited reason for leaving early is that the learner had made the wrong choice of course, followed by the fact that the teaching and/or tutor were poor. Other reasons mentioned include the difficulty of combining studying with work or family commitments; health problems; and other personal issues such as illness of a family member. Elsewhere, early leavers and non-achievers report different experiences to other learners in a number of areas.

- At enrolment this group tends to feel less informed about various aspects of their course.
- They are more likely to say they have encountered problems during their course.
Annex

Further Information

The data for NLSS 2007 is available on the research tools website http://researchtools.lsc.gov.uk.

Three reports containing further analysis of the results are also available.

• National Learner Satisfaction Survey 2007: Further Education.
• National Learner Satisfaction Survey 2007: Personal and Community Development Learning and Further Education Delivered by Adult Learning Providers.

A supporting document, National Learner Satisfaction Survey: Technical Report, will also be available from the research tools website. This document contains information about the sample, the methodology used and the questionnaire.

All questionnaires used in the NLSS over time are available from the research tools website. Longitudinal findings on learner satisfaction within LSC-funded provision over the five surveys to date are also available. The next NLSS will take place in 2009.

Information and guidance about health and safety for both learners and providers is available at www.safelearner.info.

We welcome your comments and any feedback about the NLSS. For further information, please email the research team at the LSC National Office: learnersurvey@lsc.gov.uk.