

RESEARCH

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National Learner Satisfaction
Survey: Further Education Research
Study Report

FEBRUARY 2011

Acknowledgements

The National Learner Satisfaction Survey (NLSS) 2009 was conducted by Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute on behalf of the Learning and Skills Council and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. We are grateful to all of the respondents who gave up their time to take part in the survey.

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Note about the data

To protect BIS's interests, advance approval will need to be granted by Ipsos MORI before any of the data in this report can be published elsewhere. Such approval will only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misrepresentation.

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Introduction

Research background

This report presents the findings of the 2009 National Learner Satisfaction Survey (NLSS) among learners in Further Education (FE). This strand of the survey comprises telephone interviews among 15,724 learners in FE. In total, 25,084 then LSC-funded learners took part in the NLSS – the findings from the other learner groups (listed in paragraph six below) are covered in separate reports. Since the field work was undertaken, the LSC has been superseded by the Skills Funding Agency and the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA). The research function of the LSC has transferred to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).

The NLSS is a large tracking survey of then LSC-funded learners aged 16 and over. It provides 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
- The benefits of participation.

There have been six NLSS studies since 2001 – in 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2007 and 2009. The 2009 survey comprises three waves, each dealing with a distinct set of modular questions:

- Pre-entry advice and guidance (wave 15);
- Support for learners (wave 16); and
- Impact of learning (wave 17).

There is a set of core questions that are also 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.

The NLSS covers learners in FE, Apprenticeships, other Learner Responsive (LR) (learners at providers who are charities, local authorities or business organisations, for example), non-accredited personal and community development learning (PCDL), Skills for Jobs (SFJ) and Employability Skills Programme (ESP). FE includes general FE colleges, sixth form colleges, and specialist or other further education institutions.

Methodology

Interviews for the NLSS were conducted by telephone between 17 February and 31 July 2009. Data for the FE system has been weighted by the nine English regions and by status (full-time or part-time), using the known profile from individualised learner records (ILR) from September 2009. Further details can be found in the technical report.

Sample profile

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the FE learner sample (based on weighted data obtained from the survey).

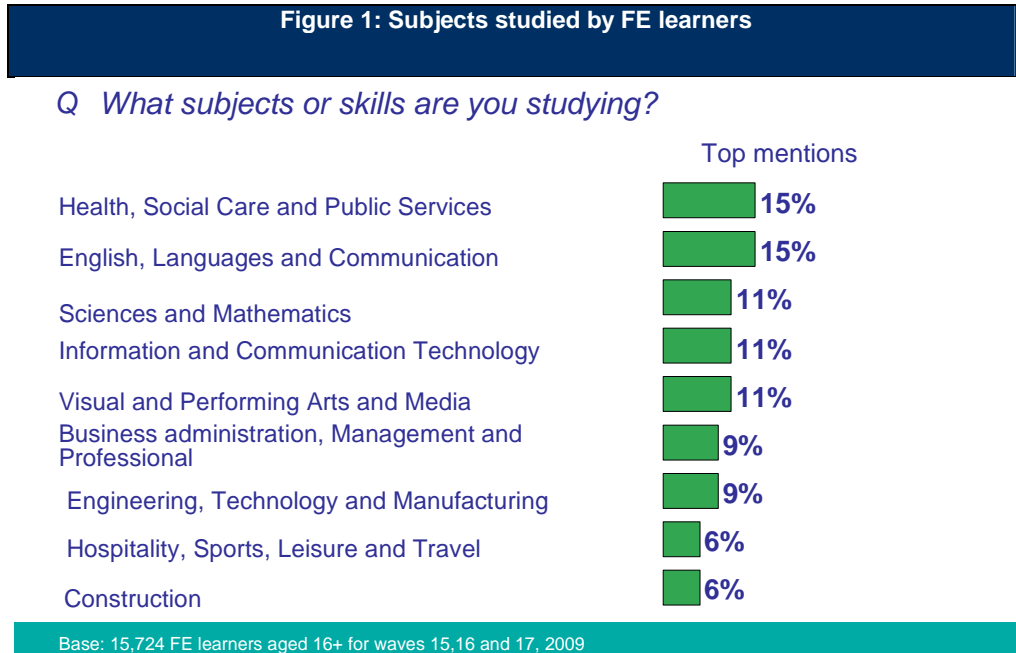
Table 1: Demographics of the sample profile	
Age	Percentage of respondents
16–18	36
19-24	15
25+	49
Gender	
Male	46
Female	54
Ethnicity	
Asian	8
Black	5
Mixed	2
White	83
Other	1
Refused to respond	*
Disability	
No	91
Yes	9
Refused to respond	*
Learning difficulties and/or disabilities	
No	86
Yes	14
Don't know/refused to respond	*

Note: the base was all FE learners (15,724). An asterisk denotes values that are above zero but less than half a per cent.

The large majority of respondents (85 per cent) are studying at an FE college. One in eleven (9 per cent) is at a sixth form college, and the remaining 6 per cent are at a specialist or other provider.

FE learners are most likely to be studying for a Level 3 qualification (39 per cent). Seven per cent were studying for a qualification above Level 3, while 22 per cent were studying at Level 1 or Entry Level, and 29 per cent at Level 2.

Figure 1 shows the range of subjects studied by FE learners. The two most common subject areas are health, social care and public services; and English, languages and communication (both 15 per cent).



Multivariate analysis

In addition to standard analysis of the data, **multiple regression** (also known as key driver analysis) was used to examine the relative importance of a range of factors in explaining overall satisfaction with the learning experience. The findings from the key driver analysis are discussed in chapter entitled ‘Overall Satisfaction’ and more details about the analysis can be found in the technical report.

Presentation of Findings

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

Where percentages do not sum to 100, this is due to computer rounding, the exclusion of ‘don’t know’ categories or multiple answers. Reference is sometimes 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.

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.

The report 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 calculated by adding the scores provided by all learners and dividing this figure by the number of learners answering the question.

Report structure

This introduction is followed by a ‘Summary and implications’ section, which highlights the key findings. The report then provides a detailed commentary on the findings.

- The ‘**Overall satisfaction**’ section looks at learners’ overall satisfaction with their learning experience, including an assessment of what drives satisfaction.
- The ‘**Performance on key drivers**’ section looks at learners’ attitudes on the key measures identified as most strongly influencing overall satisfaction. Specifically:
 - The ‘**Satisfaction with teaching and the provider**’ section covers attitudes to teaching or training, as well as specific aspects of teaching. It also looks at key elements of the service offered by learning providers.
 - The ‘**Needs and expectations**’ section examines how learners’ experience of the course has reflected their expectations, and how well the course has met their needs.
 - The ‘**Information, advice and support**’ section looks at these issues for the course as a whole, as well as at specific times (before starting the course and after enrolment). It also looks at support for learners with particular needs.
 - The ‘**Personalisation, learner involvement and provider responsiveness**’ section covers the extent to which staff treat learners with respect and relate to them, and how well providers listen to and act on learners’ views.
- The ‘**Attitudes to learning and the benefits of learning**’ section deals with how respondents feel about learning in general and about how their course has helped them. It also looks at learners’ expectations for undertaking further learning.
- The ‘**Early leavers**’ section focuses on this group of learners: their profile, their reasons for leaving the course early, and whether they sought or received support.

Throughout the report, comparisons are made with findings from NLSS studies from previous years.

Summary and Implications

Summary

Satisfaction with the learning experience

Overall, nine learners in ten (91 per cent) are satisfied with their learning experience, including 19 per cent who are extremely satisfied. Just 6 per cent are dissatisfied. Satisfaction levels are similar to those obtained in 2007, although the number who are extremely satisfied has fallen (from 27 per cent to 19 per cent), reversing a steady increase since 2001/02. Satisfaction among FE learners is in line with Apprentice, Other LR and PCDL learners' levels.

Three learners in four (74 per cent) say that they would speak highly of their learning provider, while just 6 per cent say that they would be critical. This proportion is in line with Apprenticeships, but is slightly lower than Other LR and PCDL learners.

As in previous NLSS, learner satisfaction is closely linked to the quality of teaching. The survey identified this as a key driver of both overall satisfaction and advocacy of the provider; specifically, in making the subject interesting and understanding how learners like to learn. Other key drivers are the help and support provided (overall and in the first few weeks of the course), and the personal relationship with learners (listening to views, showing respect and relating to learners).

When learners are asked directly why they are satisfied or dissatisfied overall, reasons for satisfaction most frequently relate to the tutors (their teaching style and the level of support they provide to learners), or the course itself (being interesting, well managed and meeting their expectations). Dissatisfaction is, therefore, most commonly linked to tutors' poor attitudes, poor organisation or lack of support.

Satisfaction with the teaching and the provider

The vast majority of learners (89 per cent) are satisfied with the quality of teaching or training – just 7 per cent are dissatisfied. These figures are very similar to those observed in 2007 and in previous years of the survey, and are also similar to satisfaction levels among Apprentice and other LR learners. Learners are also positive about specific aspects of teaching – in particular, teaching staff's ability to make the subject interesting and enjoyable, and understanding how learners like to learn. This is positive finding as these aspects are highly correlated to overall satisfaction with the learning experience.

Needs and expectations

Most learners feel that their learning experience has at least met their expectations, and one in three (35 per cent) say it has exceeded their expectations. However, one in five learners (21 per cent) says they did not know what to expect.

Nine learners in ten (90 per cent) agree that the course has met their needs, a similar figure to the 2007 survey.

Information, advice and support

The vast majority of learners (87 per cent) feel the support they receive on their course or learning programme is good, and half (52 per cent) describe it as very good. Similarly, most learners (90 per cent) say that the support they received in the first few weeks of their learning programme was good.

The support for learners with particular needs (including those with learning difficulties or disabilities, and those with needs relating to religion, faith or beliefs) is also perceived positively. Overall, 44 per cent of learners say they have experienced at least one type of problem, such as keeping up with work, problems with motivation, travel and money pressure, or dealing with other external pressures.

The main types of support that learners say would have helped them with their course or training (but that they did not get) are greater support from, or more time with, a tutor, and financial support.

Most learners (87 per cent) feel that they received good information when they were choosing their course. When they signed up for the course, information about the course itself was viewed positively, although learners say they were less well informed about issues such as the overall pass or success rates for learners at their provider, or access to financial support. After induction, 93 per cent of learners say they felt well informed about the course content, and this has risen by 4 per cent since 2007.

Personalisation, learner involvement and provider responsiveness

The vast majority (93 per cent) of learners say that staff are very good at showing them respect, and also rate tutors or teachers highly at relating to them as a person (34 per cent give a rating of 10 out of 10 on this).

Three in four learners (76 per cent) say that their learning provider is good at listening to their views, while a slightly lower proportion (67 per cent) say they are good at acting on those views.

Attitudes to learning and the benefits of learning

Learners are most likely to say that their learning experience had brought them the following benefits:

- More confidence in their ability to learn (cited by 87 per cent);
- New job-related skills (86 per cent);
- A more positive attitude to learning than when they started (80 per cent); and
- Help moving forward in their career (80 per cent).

Three learners in five (62 per cent) say it is very likely that they will undertake further learning in the next three years or so – a similar proportion to the 2007 survey. FE learners are just as likely to say they are likely to undertake further learning as other LR and PCDL learners and are more likely compared to Apprentices.

Which learners are more satisfied, and which are less satisfied?

Learners undertaking Entry Level or Level 1 qualifications generally express higher satisfaction. Older learners (aged 25 or over) also tend to be more positive about their learning experience, and satisfaction is higher among white learners than among those from other ethnic groups.

However, older learners (aged 25 and over) are less likely to say they received good information when choosing the course, and at the time of enrolment.

Respondents with a Skills Account or Adult Learner Account are more positive than other learners towards a number of aspects of their learning experience. They are more likely to say the course has exceeded their expectations, to feel better informed – both when choosing the course and at the time of enrolment, and to feel that their provider listens to and acts on their views.

Learners receiving various types of support such as EMA or Care to Learn (comprising 26 per cent of FE learners) tend to be more positive than other learners towards the information provided at the start of the course, and towards the extent to which staff listen to and act on their views. These learners (particularly those receiving residential support which comprises one per cent of FE learners) are also often more satisfied with the learning experience and the quality of teaching. However, those receiving EMA have slightly less positive views of their learning provider, and are more likely than other learners to have experienced problems during their course (including travel to the college or provider).

Learners who pay course fees (comprising 48 per cent of FE learners) are more positive than other learners towards their provider in terms of advocacy and the quality of teaching. However, those paying fees are less likely to have felt well informed at the time of enrolment, and are less likely to say staff listen to and act on their views.

It should be noted that the differences described above are small. Satisfaction is high across all demographic groups.

Early leavers

The profile of early leavers is broadly similar to FE learners as a whole, indicating that there is no single group of learners that is particularly likely to leave their course early. However, the sample of early leavers contains a slightly higher proportion of learners studying at Entry Level or Level 1.

Learners who left their course early can be divided into two groups. The first group left for reasons related to the course itself – either because they felt the course was not as expected or was not right for them, or because they were unimpressed with the teaching. The second group left early because of external factors – family, work, health or other personal issues. Overall, the most common reason for leaving the course early is the feeling that it was the wrong choice of course.

Two in five early leavers (40 per cent) say that they looked for support from teachers or tutors to help them stay on the course, postpone it or change to another course, while a similar proportion (44 per cent) say that teachers or tutors offered this type of support.

Implications

Learners' overall satisfaction with their learning experience is very high, and at a similar level to previous years of the survey. However, the number of learners who are extremely satisfied has decreased since 2007, after a gradual increase in recent years. Learners' overall assessment of their course, and their rating of individual aspects, remain very positive, so there are no clear reasons for this change. In addition, this decrease is consistent across different sub-groups of learners, so does not appear to be limited to particular learners or areas of learning.

However, the relatively low number of learners who are extremely satisfied may be linked to expectations: many learners feel that the course has met (rather than exceeded) their expectations, or did not know what to expect. Finding ways to manage – and where possible exceed - expectations may help to increase the group of learners who are extremely satisfied. Further research and investigation will also be useful in helping to understand what makes learners extremely satisfied, rather than very or fairly satisfied, and what has contributed to the change since 2007.

As in previous years, early leavers are much more likely than other learners to be dissatisfied with the course. The proportion of early leavers, and reasons for leaving, have remained very similar to the last survey (in 2007). This suggests that there is still work to be done to reduce the number of early leavers, and thereby increase satisfaction amongst learners as a whole.

The quality of teaching continues to be an important driver of satisfaction, and is often given as the main reason for satisfaction or dissatisfaction. In addition, the main types of support that

learners say would have helped them with their course or training include greater support from, or more time with, a tutor.

Another key driver of satisfaction is the ability of staff to show respect to and relate to learners. This indicates that staff need to have a range of skills to ensure a favourable impression with learners. Help and support, and listening to learners' views, are also important drivers. Overall, this suggests that providers need to engage fully with learners on a personal level throughout the learning programme.

Learners undertaking Entry and Level 1 qualifications are generally (slightly) more satisfied with their course and learning experience compared with those aiming for Level 2 and above. Other than this, differences in levels of satisfaction between different groups (in terms of both demographics and the type of course) are small which is to be expected given consistently high satisfaction levels).

The 2009 survey looked specifically at learners with a Skills Account or Adult Learner Account. It is encouraging that these learners are very positive towards their learning experience (often more so than other learners), and that in particular they value the information and advice they receive. A key element of the Skills account and Adult Learner Account is the information and advice provided, particularly in choosing a course, and there may be lessons here that can be replicated more widely for all learners.

Similarly, learners receiving financial or other types of support with their course are also very positive, both overall and in relation to information and advice. At the same time, those receiving EMA are more likely than other learners to have experienced problems during their course, such as travel to the college or provider. This suggests that this type of financial support can help people to participate in learning, but may not necessarily remove all of the barriers they face.

Learners report a range of benefits and positive outcomes from their course, both career-related and in helping their personal development. In addition, the majority of learners say it is very likely that they will undertake further learning in the next three years or so. This indicates that FE learning is continuing to play an important, long-term role in people's lives.

Overall Satisfaction

This section examines learners' attitudes towards their overall learning experience, as well as advocacy (how learners would speak of their provider). It also examines the key drivers of both satisfaction and advocacy.

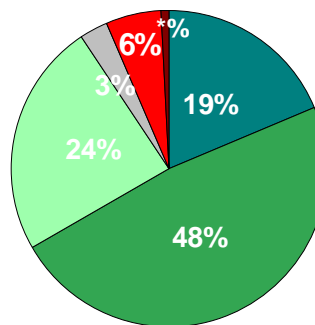
Satisfaction with the learning experience

Learners express high levels of satisfaction with their learning experience. Overall, around nine learners in ten (91 per cent) are satisfied with their current learning experience, including 19 per cent who are extremely satisfied. Just 6 per cent are dissatisfied (see Figure 2). This level of satisfaction is similar to findings among Apprentices, Other LR and PCDL learners.

Figure 2: Satisfaction with the current learning experience

Q *And now taking all the issues we have discussed into account, how satisfied are you with your current learning experience at . . . (college/provider)?*

- % Extremely satisfied
- % Very satisfied
- % Fairly satisfied
- % Neither/nor
- % Extremely/very/fairly dissatisfied
- % Don't know



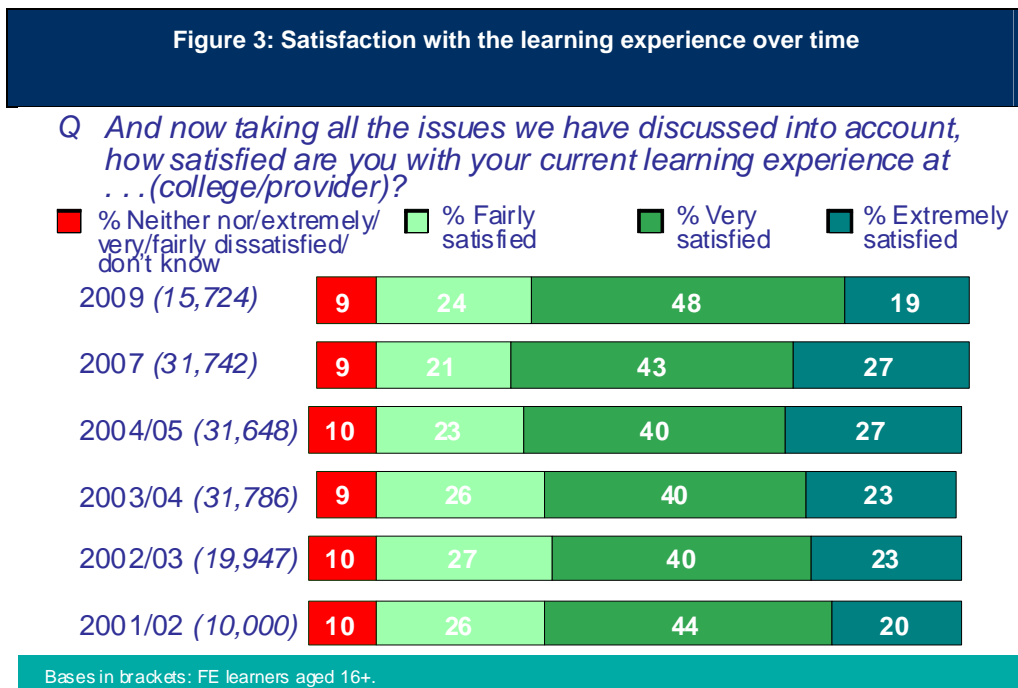
Base: 15,724 FE learners aged 16+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009

Overall satisfaction is at the same level as in 2007, although there has been a decrease since 2007 in the number of learners who are 'extremely satisfied', from 27 per cent to 19 per cent (see Figure 3). This decrease is generally consistent across different learner groups, so does not appear to be limited to particular learners or areas of learning. Learners' overall assessment of their course, and their rating of individual aspects, also remain very positive, so there are no clear reasons for this change.

However, analysis of learners' expectations sheds some light on the relatively low number of learners who are extremely satisfied: many learners feel that the course has met (rather than exceeded) their expectations despite rating their course highly on a number of measures¹. This

¹ A question on learner expectations was included in NLSS for the first time this year.

indicated that finding ways to manage – and where possible exceed – expectations may help to increase the number of learners who are extremely satisfied.



Longer-term trends indicate that the proportions extremely satisfied with the overall learning experience increased steadily between 2001 and 2007 (from 20 per cent in 2001 to 27 per cent in 2007). The 2009 figures therefore represent a reversing of this trend and a return to the levels of previous years.

However, these findings need to be seen in the context of the high levels of satisfaction overall, and in the stable trends in the proportion who are satisfied (i.e. combining those extremely, very and fairly satisfied).

What differentiates learners' views?

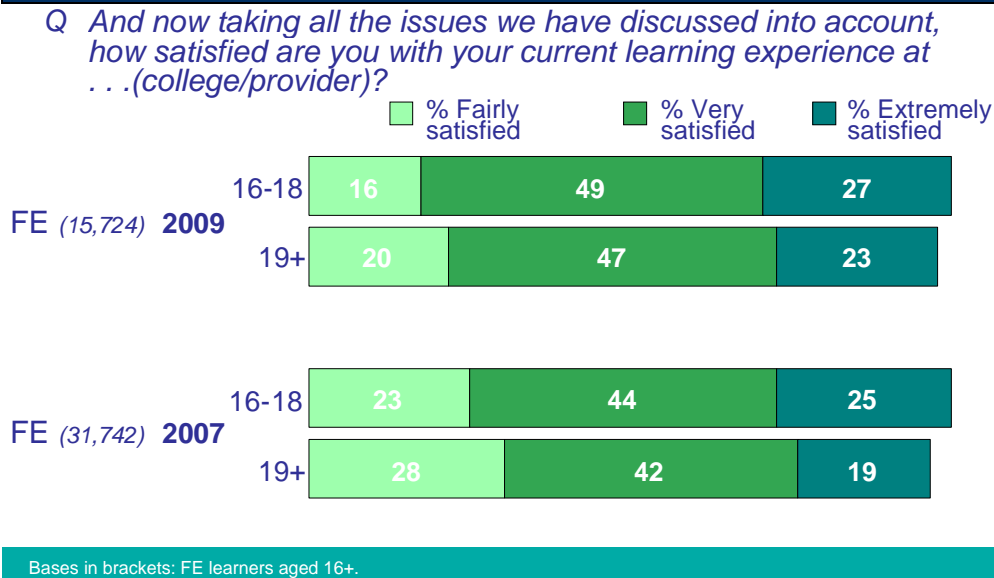
There is some variation in satisfaction by age and qualification level. As can be seen in Figure 4, learners aged 16-18 are slightly more satisfied than those aged 19 or over (92 per cent compared with 90 per cent). Older learners, aged 25 plus, undertaking a Level 4 qualification or higher are *least* satisfied (55 per cent satisfied compared with 87 per cent among all Level 4 or higher).

By contrast, older learners undertaking Entry or Level 1 qualifications are more positive compared with their young counterparts: 73 per cent of those aged 25 plus and 69 per cent of those aged 19-24 are "extremely or very satisfied" with their learning experience compared with 66 per cent of 16-18 year olds undertaking an Entry or Level 1 qualification.

In terms of learner support, those receiving Career Development Loans are most positive towards their learning experience (96 per cent satisfied). Meanwhile those in receipt of EMA are

less likely than average to be extremely satisfied (16 per cent compared with 19 per cent) which is again likely to be linked to age as only those aged 16-18 are eligible for this allowance. Satisfaction does not vary according to whether the learner has paid course fees.

Figure 4: Satisfaction with the current learning experience, by age



Reasons for satisfaction and dissatisfaction

- When learners are asked (unprompted) the main reason(s) why they are satisfied with their learning experience, four key themes emerge:
- **The tutors:** 46 per cent of learners say that the tutors are good, that they have made the course easy or interesting, or that they have helped them.
- **The course itself:** 34 per cent of learners say that their course is good, that it has met their expectations or that they have learnt a lot. A further 6 per cent say that their course is well run, and 9 per cent say that they have enjoyed the subject.
- **The learning provider:** 24 per cent of learners say that the staff are helpful, and in addition 8 per cent say that they are friendly and 6 per cent that the staff treat them well. In addition, 10 per cent like the college or location, and 7 per cent say that the course provider offers good facilities or resources.
- **The learner's progress:** 19 per cent of learners say that their course will give them the experience or qualification that they need, and 8 per cent are pleased with their progress.

Figure 5: Reasons for satisfaction

Q You said you were extremely/very/fairly satisfied, what is the main reason for this?



Base: 14,317 FE learners aged 16+ who are satisfied with their learning experience for waves 15,16 and 17, 2009

Learners who are dissatisfied with the course are most likely to give the following reasons:

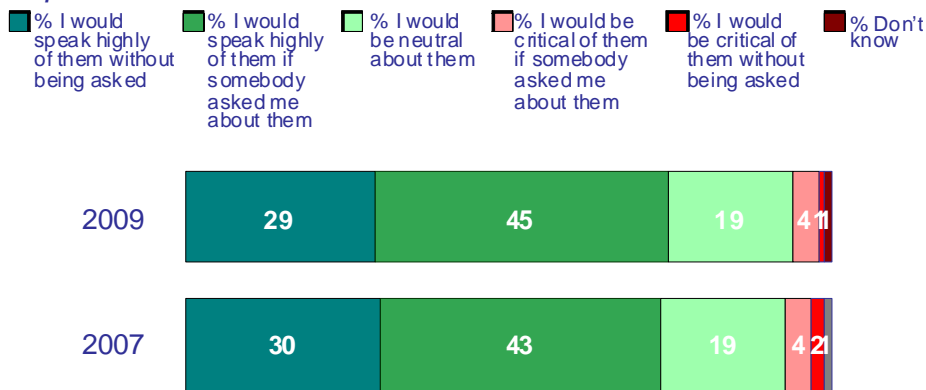
- They perceive their tutors to have a poor attitude (33 per cent);
- They think it is badly organised or run (29 per cent);
- They have not received the support they need (25 per cent);
- They are generally disappointed (23 per cent);
- They feel that communication is poor (19 per cent); and/or
- They feel that there are not enough staff or that there are too many staff changes (14 per cent).

Advocating the provider

As is shown in Figure 6, the majority of learners say that they would speak highly of their learning provider, either without being asked (29 per cent) or if somebody asked them (45 per cent). Just 6 per cent say that they would be critical of their provider. This picture is very similar to 2007. Advocacy is in line with Apprenticeships, but is lower than advocacy among other LR and PCDL learners.

Figure 6: Advocating the provider

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



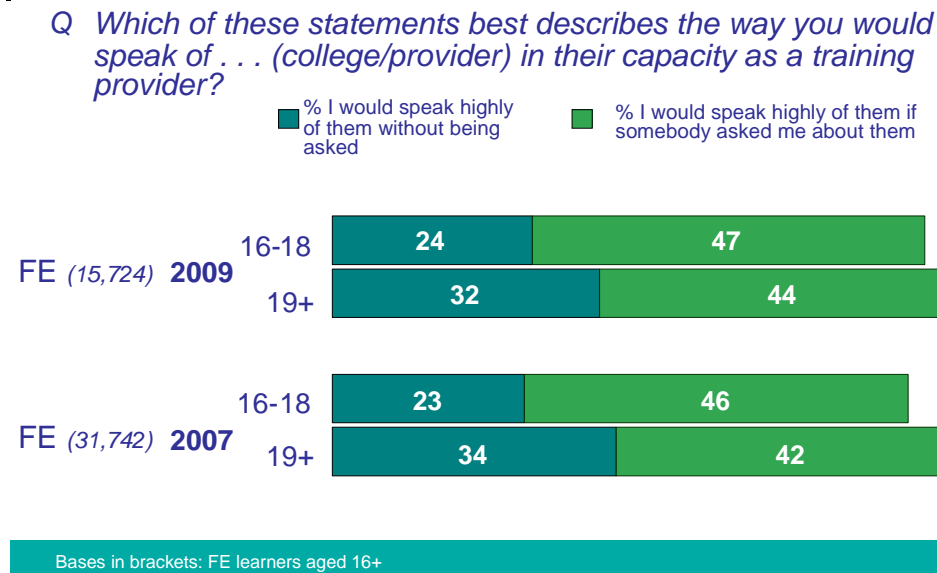
Base: 15,724 FE learners aged 16+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009

Older learners, aged 19 plus, undertaking Entry or Level 1 qualifications are most likely to speak highly of their provider (78 per cent) compared with 70 per cent of 16-18 year olds undertaking Entry or Level 1 and 74 per cent of learners overall). The same age pattern was observed in 2007, and reflects the finding that this age group are more likely to be “very or extremely” satisfied.

Those who have paid fees (more likely to be aged 25 plus²) are more likely to say they would speak highly of their provider (76 per cent), while those receiving EMA (who must be aged 16-18) are less likely to do so (71 per cent).

² 37 per cent of those aged 25 and over paid all of their fees compared with 23 per cent of those aged 19-24

Figure 7: Advocating the provider, by age



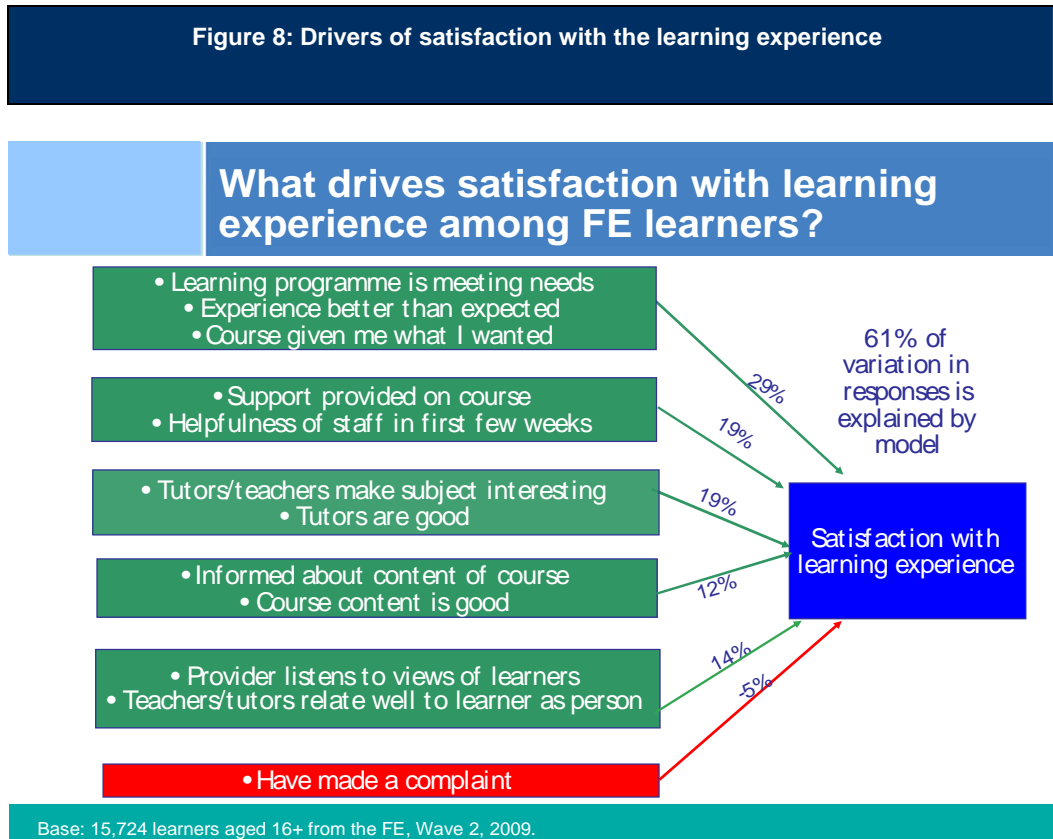
What drives satisfaction with the learning experience?

As described above, learners' attitudes to their course and tutors feature prominently as reasons for both satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the learning experience. This supports past research in emphasising the importance of the course tutor in influencing satisfaction, and regression analysis has been carried out as part of previous NLSS studies, showing a very strong relationship between the quality of teaching and overall satisfaction levels among learners.

A key driver analysis (KDA) was also conducted this year to determine the key drivers of learner satisfaction with the learning experience, and of learner advocacy towards providers. Figures 8 and 9 present the results of this analysis, showing the relative importance of various aspects. The factors highlighted in green are those that have a positive relationship with learner satisfaction; factors in red signify a negative relationship. The model for overall satisfaction demonstrates a 'fit' (R^2 value) of 61 per cent – this is the percentage of the variation in levels of satisfaction with the learning experience that 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. The 'fit' for advocacy is much lower (33 per cent), indicating that it is less easy to explain variations in attitudes towards advocacy than it is in overall satisfaction.

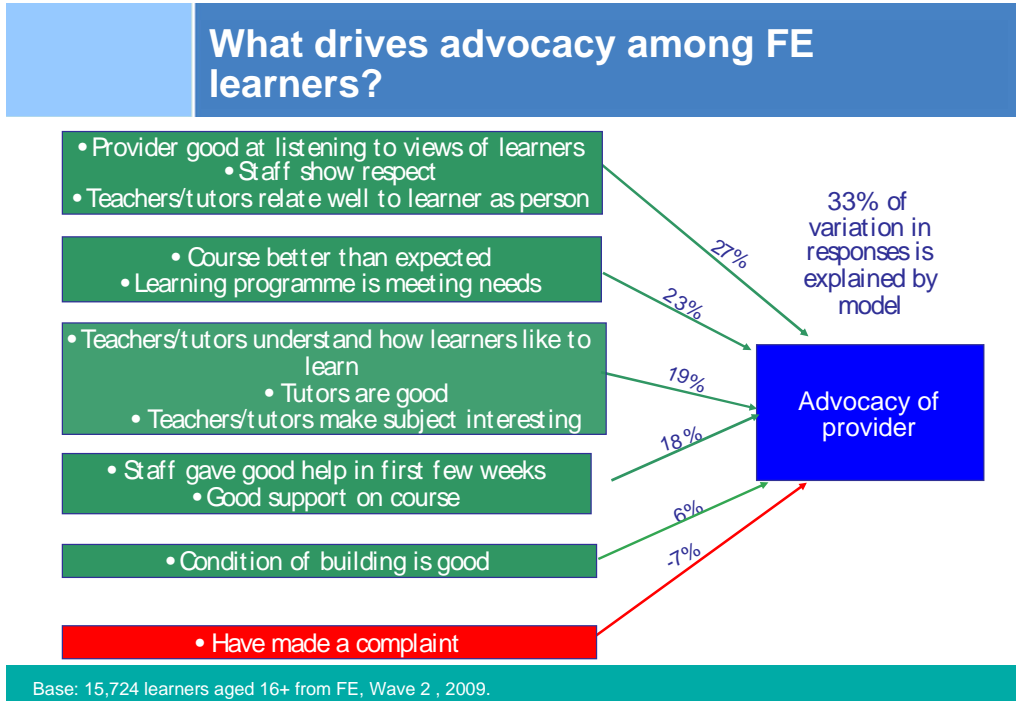
As can be seen in Figure 8, FE learners' satisfaction with their learning experience is most positively linked to other questions assessing their overall experience (the learning programme meeting their needs, having a better experience than expected, and getting what they wanted

from the course). The more specific factors that impact positively on learner satisfaction relate to help and support (the support provided in the course and the helpfulness of staff in the first few weeks) and the quality of tutors or teachers (being generally good and making the subject interesting).



As noted above, the Key Driver analysis model for advocacy has a weaker fit than the model for overall satisfaction. However, it is clear that the personal relationship with provider staff has a strong impact. This relates specifically to the provider being good at listening to learners' views, staff showing respect, and tutors or teachers relating well to learners (Figure 9). The quality of teachers (in being good generally, in understanding how learners like to learn and in making the subject interesting) is also an important factor, as is the level of help and support (good support on the course and staff providing good help in the first few weeks).

Figure 9: Drivers of advocacy



Performance on Key Drivers

This section looks at learners' views on the key drivers that were identified in the previous section: teaching and the learning provider; needs and expectations; information, advice and support; and personalisation, learner involvement and provider responsiveness.

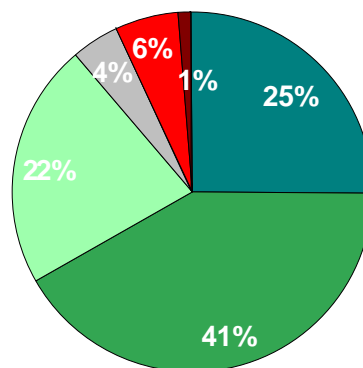
Satisfaction with teaching and the provider

Figure 10 shows learners' attitudes to the quality of teaching or training on their course. Views are generally very positive, with 89 per cent satisfied, including 25 per cent who are extremely satisfied. Just 7 per cent are dissatisfied. These proportions are similar to proportions among Apprentices and other LR learners.

Figure 10: Satisfaction with the quality of teaching/training

Q Overall, how satisfied are you with the quality of the teaching/training at . . . ?

- % Extremely satisfied
- % Very satisfied
- % Fairly satisfied
- % Neither/nor
- % Extremely/very/fairly dissatisfied
- % Don't know

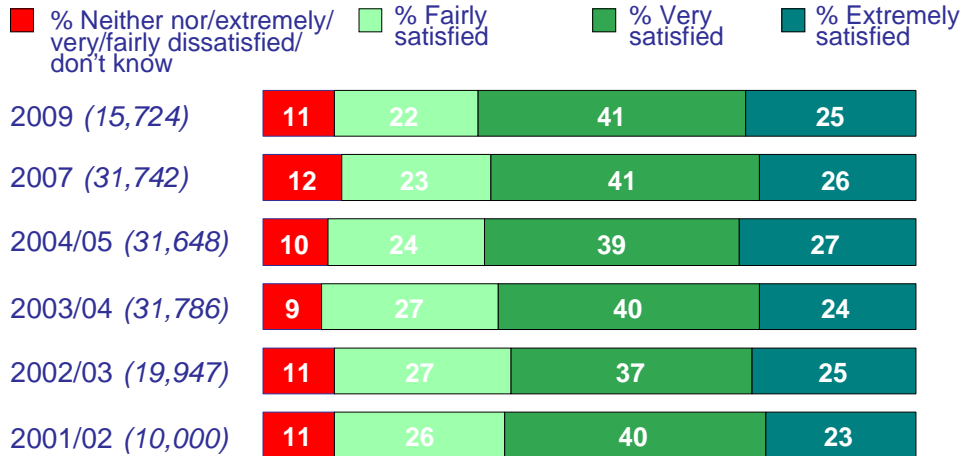


Base: 15,724 FE learners aged 16+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009.

These findings are very similar to those obtained in 2007 and in previous years, as Figure 11 shows.

Figure 11: Satisfaction with quality of teaching/training over time

Q Overall, how satisfied are you with the quality of the teaching/training at . . . ?



Base: FE learners aged 16+. Bases in brackets.

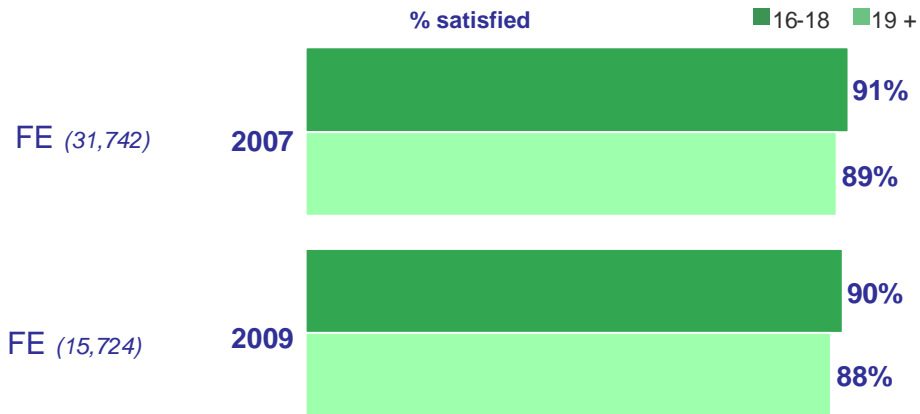
Learners aged 16-18 are slightly more satisfied than those aged 19 or over with the quality of teaching or training on their course, as shown in Figure 12; the pattern is the same as in 2007. However, as with overall satisfaction, older learners are more likely to be extremely satisfied (29 per cent of those aged 25 or over, compared with 24 per cent of those aged 19-24 and 20 per cent of those aged 16-18).

As with more general attitudes towards the learning experience, satisfaction is slightly higher amongst those studying at Entry Level or Level 1 (91 per cent), those at specialist or other providers (37 per cent **extremely** satisfied) and White respondents (26 per cent **extremely** satisfied).

Learners paying fees are more likely to be extremely satisfied with the quality of teaching or training (29 per cent), as are those receiving hardship payment (34 per cent) and residential support (35 per cent).

Figure 12: Satisfaction with quality of teaching/training, by age

Q Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the quality of the teaching/ training at...?



Base: 15,724 FE learners aged 16+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009. Bases for each in brackets

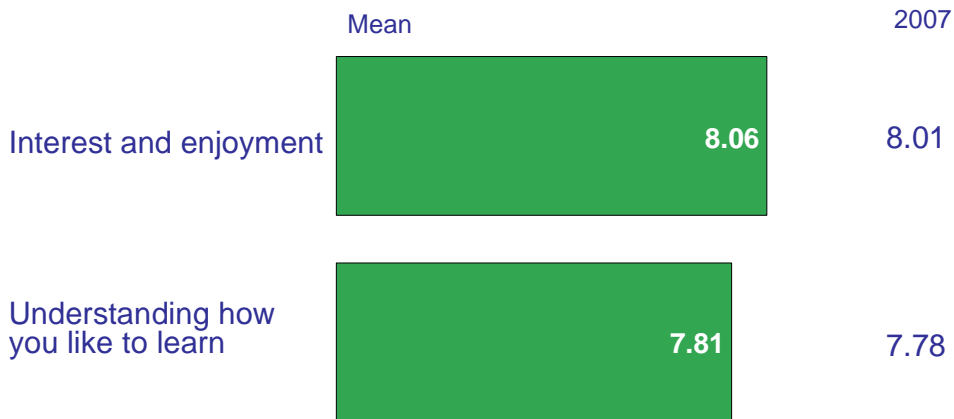
Figure 13 summarises the findings for two important elements of teaching: making the subject interesting and enjoyable, and understanding how learners like to learn. Asked to give a rating between 1 (very poor) and 10 (excellent), FE learners generally give high ratings. The mean score is slightly higher for making the subject interesting and enjoyable (8.06) than for understanding how learners like to learn (7.81). These ratings are similar to those obtained in 2007.

Reflecting the findings for the overall quality of teaching or training, ratings are highest amongst learners aged 25 or over and those at specialist or other providers, as well as those studying at Entry Level or Level 1 (though as noted, the two are related). In particular, those on Key Skills, Skills for Life or Basic Skills courses are very positive. The mean scores on these two questions are also higher than average amongst female learners.

On both questions, ratings are higher amongst those with a Skills Account or Adult Learner Account. Learners receiving residential support or a Training Allowance from Jobcentre Plus are also more positive than other learners, while those receiving EMA are less positive.

Figure 13: Rating of teachers/tutors

Q *How would you rate the teachers or tutors/ assessor and trainers on...?*



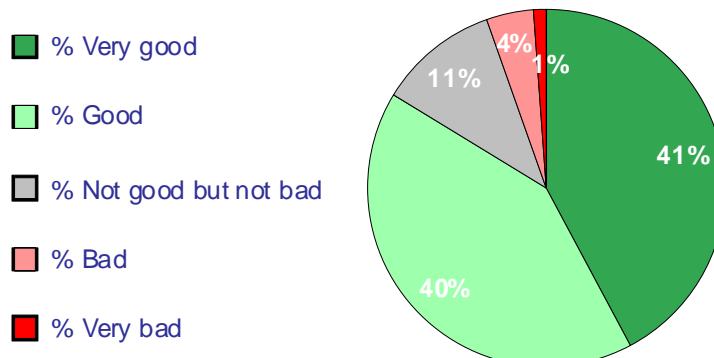
Base: 15,724 FE learners aged 16+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009

A key driver of advocacy towards the learning provider is the perceived condition of the buildings in which respondents learn. Figure 14 shows that four in five learners (81 per cent) rate this as good, including 41 per cent who say it is very good. Just 5 per cent say it is bad.

Learners studying in sixth form colleges are more positive than other respondents towards the condition of buildings (89 per cent good). Views are also very positive amongst those holding a Skills Account (88 per cent good), and those receiving an EMA (85 per cent) or Training Allowance from Jobcentre Plus (91 per cent).

Figure 14: Rating of building conditions

Q *Please tell me how good or bad: how good is the condition of the buildings in which you learn.*



Base: 5,185 FE learners aged 16+ all in wave 16, 2009

Needs and expectations

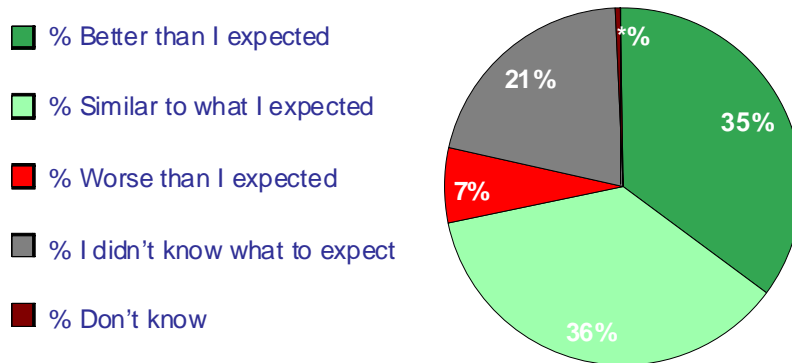
A new question was asked in the 2009 survey about meeting learners' expectations. Overall, most learners feel that their expectations have at least been met, with around one in three (35 per cent) saying their experience of the course has exceeded their expectations. However, around one in five learners (21 per cent) did not know what to expect. Figure 15 shows learners' views of how their course matched their expectations.

Learners studying at Entry Level or Level 1 are most likely to say their experience has been better than expected (39 per cent). By contrast, those studying at Level 4 or above are more likely than other respondents to say the experience has been worse than expected (11 per cent).

Learners with a Skills Account or Adult Learner Account are more likely to say their experience has been better than expected (42 per cent and 43 per cent respectively), as are those receiving some type of support during their course (those on all of the various types of support are more likely to say this than those without any support).

Figure 15: Learner expectations

Q Overall, would you say that your experience with your course/ training is better than you expected, similar to what you expected, worse than you expected, or did you not know what to expect?



Base: 15,724 FE learners aged 16+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009

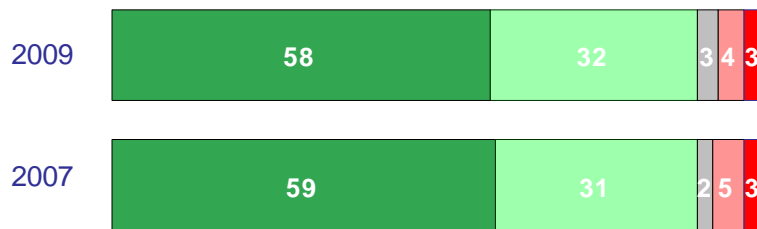
Figure 16 shows the extent to which learners feel that their course has met their needs. Nine in ten (90 per cent) agree that the course had met their needs, while 6 per cent disagree. These findings are very consistent with the 2007 survey, as Figure 16 indicates.

Learners aged 25 or over are more likely to agree strongly that the course has met their needs (61 per cent), as are those studying at Entry Level or Level 1 (60 per cent), and those at specialist or other providers (66 per cent). White respondents (59 per cent) are more likely to agree strongly than those from other ethnic groups.

Figure 16: Meeting learners' needs

Q Can you tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement: my learning programme is meeting my needs.

■ % Strongly agree ■ % Tend to agree ■ % Neither/nor ■ % Tend to disagree ■ % Strongly disagree



Base: 15,724 FE learners aged 16+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009; 31,742 in 2007

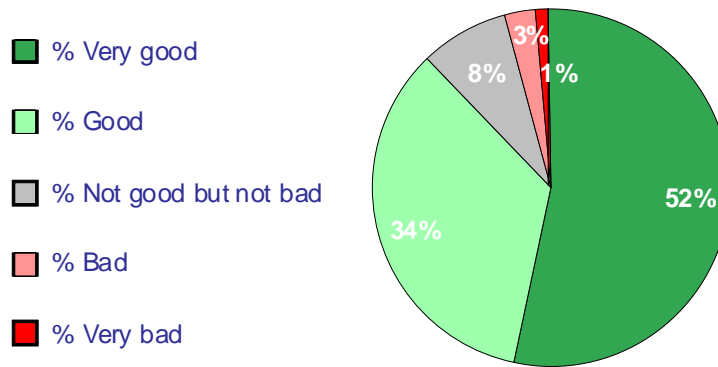
Information, advice and support

The level of support provided to learners was identified as one of the key drivers of overall satisfaction and of learner advocacy. It is therefore encouraging that 87 per cent of learners say the support they receive is good, including 52 per cent who describe it as very good. Just 4 per cent feel the support they receive is bad (see Figure 17).

The main sub-group differences are by age and level studied, which are linked. Learners aged 25 or over are more likely than other learners to say the support is very good (57 per cent), while those studying at Entry Level or Level 1 (57 per cent) or Level 2 (55 per cent) are more likely to say this than those studying at Level 3 or above (47 per cent).

Figure 17: Learner support

Q Please tell me how good or bad: how good is the support you get on this course/learning programme/training programme?

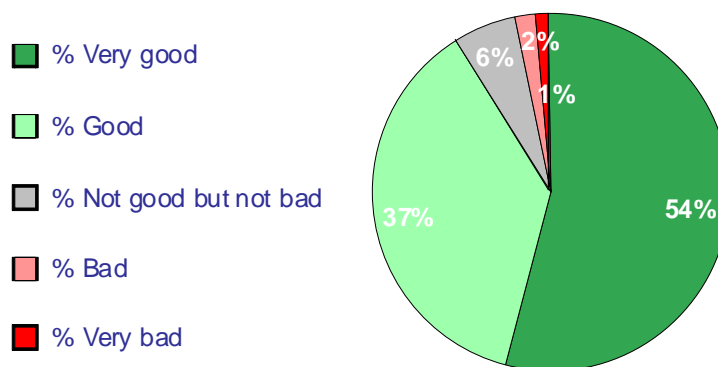


Base: 5,185 FE learners aged 16+ all in wave 17 2009

Learners also say that the support they received in the first few weeks of their learning programme was good (90 per cent, including 54 per cent who say it was very good). These figures are very similar to ratings of the support overall. Learners studying at Entry Level or Level 1 are most likely to say the support at that stage was very good (60 per cent).

Figure 18: Support in early weeks

Q How good was the help staff gave you in the first few weeks at the college/of your learning programme/of your training programme



Base: 5,185 FE learners aged 16+ all in wave 16, 2009

Overall, 44 per cent of learners say that they experienced at least one of the problems read out to them (the most common of which are shown in Figure 19). The problems cover a range of issues related both to the course itself and to external pressures that cause learners difficulty.

Learners were less likely to report the various problems this year than in 2007 (overall 60 per cent reported a problem in 2007, compared with 44 per cent this year).

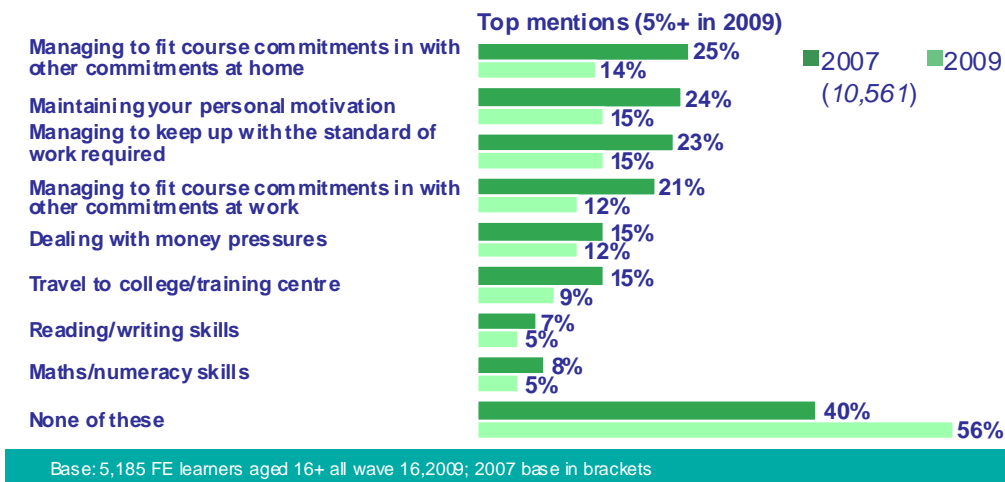
Women and older learners are more likely to have experienced difficulties managing to fit course commitments in with work or family commitments, as are those studying at Level 4 or above (though the three overlap: 60 per cent of 19+ learners are female while nearly all Level 4 or higher learners are aged 19+). Those studying at Level 4 or above are also more likely to report problems with maintaining motivation. Learners aged 16-19, particularly those at sixth from college, are most likely to report problems keeping up with the standard of work required.

Learners receiving EMA are more likely than other respondents to report a number of the problems, particularly travel to the college or training centre (16 per cent).

Learners with both disabilities and learning difficulties are much more likely than other respondents to say that they have experienced discrimination from other students (10 per cent, compared with two per cent across the sample as a whole).

Figure 19: Problems encountered during the course over time

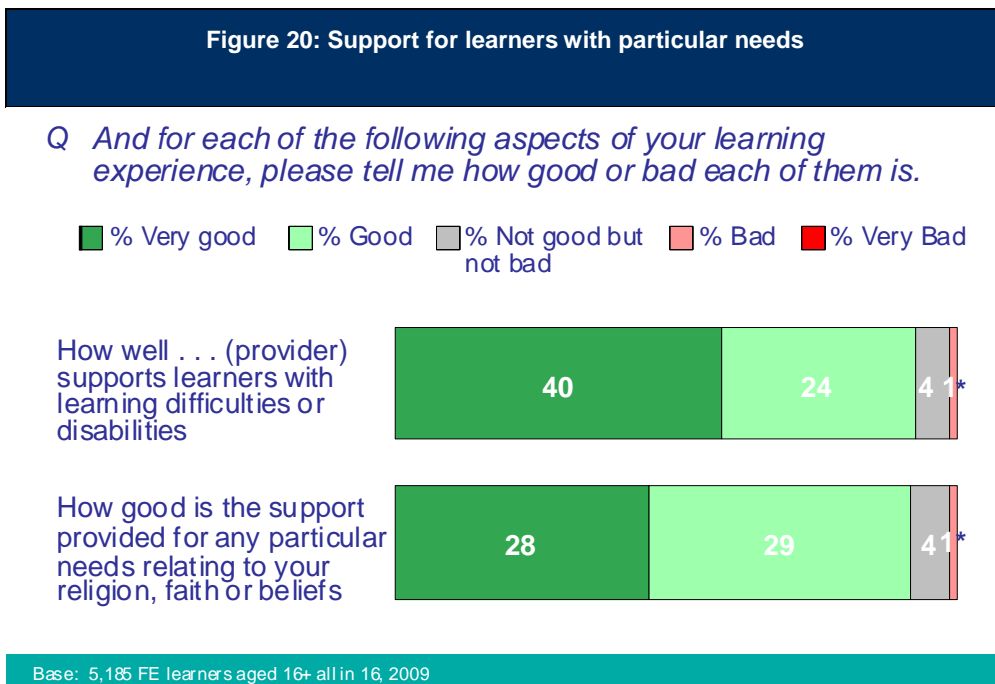
Q Since you started the course have you had any problems with any of the following?



The survey also examines the support given to learners with particular needs: those with learning difficulties and disabilities, and those with needs relating to religion, faith or beliefs. Figure 20 summarises the findings, and this shows that where respondents have an opinion, they are likely to think this support is very good or good. However, a substantial proportion say that this does not apply to them or that they do not know (31 per cent for support for those with learning difficulties and disabilities, and 38 per cent for those with needs relating to religion, faith or beliefs).

Amongst respondents with learning difficulties or disabilities, 78 per cent say the support given to them is good (including 50 per cent who say it is very good) and just 4 per cent say it is bad. Those with learning difficulties only are most positive (86 per cent say support is good, compared with 68 per cent of those with disabilities only).

Pakistani and Bangladeshi respondents are most likely to have an opinion about support for needs relating to religion, faith or beliefs, and they are mostly positive: 80 per cent say support is good, and 8 per cent bad.

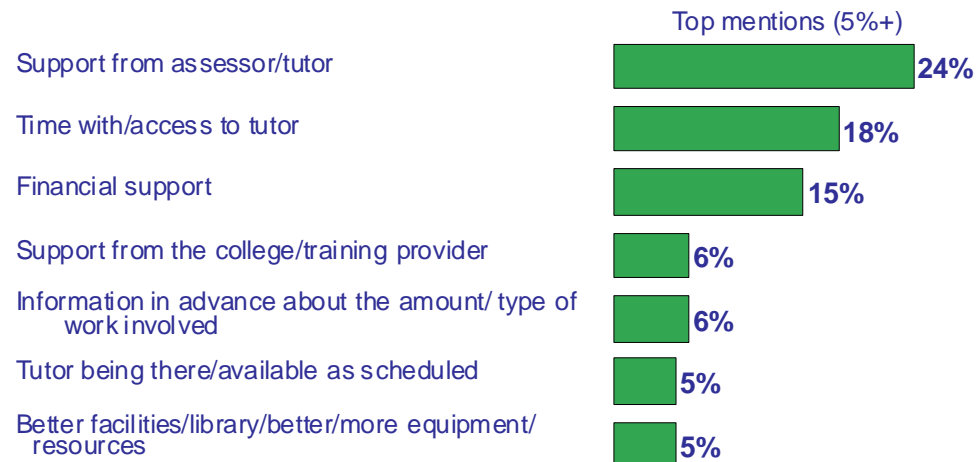


In total, 15 per cent of learners say that there was some kind of support that would have helped them with their course or training that they did not get (early leavers were excluded from this question, as issues for leaving early were examined separately). This is highest amongst those studying at Level 4 or above (24 per cent) and Black learners (25 per cent).

The main types of support that would have helped learners are greater support from, or more time with, a tutor, and financial support (details are shown in Figure 21). Those paying fees are more likely than other learners to say they would have liked some kind of support, and 21 per cent of these respondents specify financial support.

Figure 21: Support that would have helped

Q What support would help/have helped you?



Base: 2,129 FE learners aged 16+ who say more support would have helped them except early leavers for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009

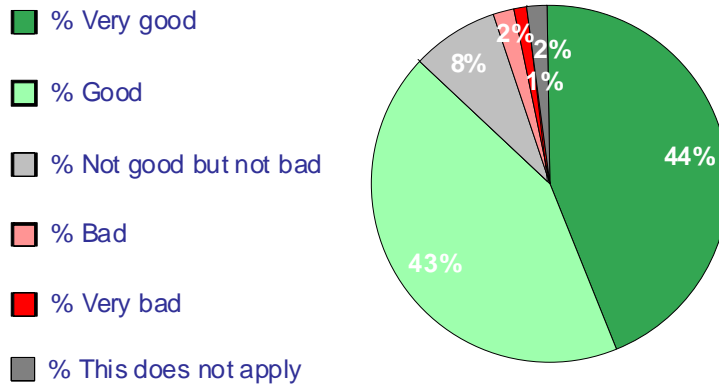
Most learners (87 per cent) say they received good information when they were choosing their course, including 44 per cent who say it was very good. Only 3 per cent describe the information as bad (see Figure 22).

Learners with a Skills Account or Adult Learner Account are more likely than other learners to say they received good information (93 per cent and 91 per cent respectively), as are those receiving some kind of support, specifically EMA (91 per cent), Care to Learn (96 per cent) and residential support (96 per cent).

Older learners (aged 25 or over) are less likely to say they received good information (83 per cent).

Figure 22: Information when choosing the course

Q How good was the information you were given when you were choosing your course/learning/training programme? Was it...



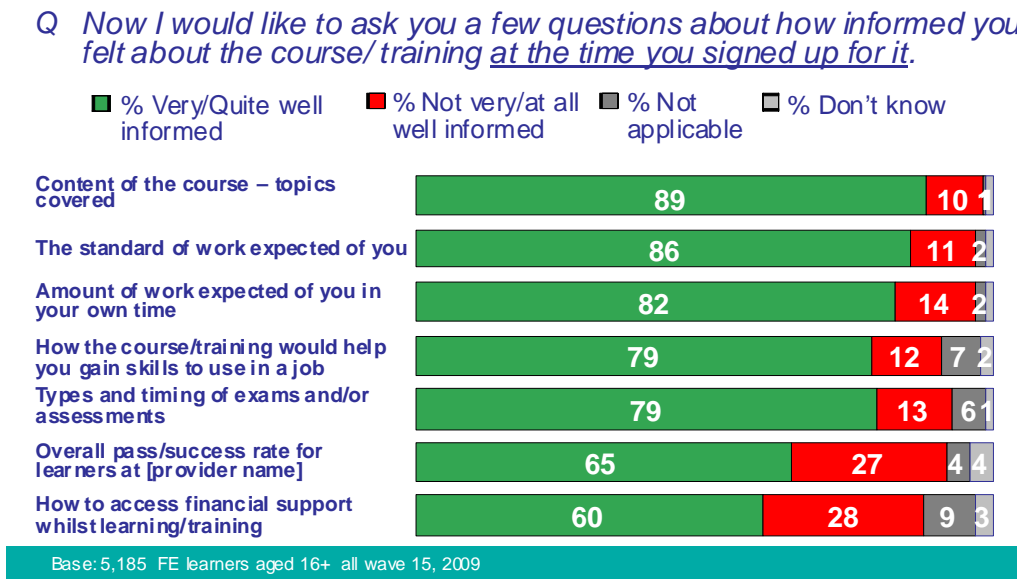
Base: 5,352 FE learners aged 16+ all in wave 1 except learners on ESP or Skills for Jobs courses at waves 15, 16 and 17 2009

Learners were asked about the information they received at the time they **signed up** for the course. As shown in Figure 24, the majority of learners say they were very or quite well informed about various subjects, with the highest ratings for the course content, the standard of work expected and the amount of work expected in learners' own time. However, they are less likely to say they were well informed about the overall pass or success rate for learners at the provider where the course is based (65 per cent) and how they could access financial support (60 per cent); in each case, more than one in four say they were not very or not at all well informed about these issues.

Men tend to feel better informed than women about the various issues, and learners aged 25 or over feel less well informed than other learners. Learners studying at higher levels (Level 3 or above) also tend to feel better informed than those studying below Level 3.

Learners that pay fees feel consistently less well informed about the various issues than those that do not pay fees. In addition, those with a Skills Account and (to a lesser extent) an Adult Learner Account feel better informed than other learners on the various issues. Learners receiving EMA, as well as other types of support, also feel better informed than other respondents.

Figure 23: Information at the time of enrolment



Most learners (63 per cent) say they felt very well informed about the content of the course **after induction**, and a further 30 per cent felt fairly well informed. Only 6 per cent did not feel well informed about the course content.

The numbers who feel very well informed is higher than in 2007, as shown in Figure 24. There has also been a decrease in the numbers who do not feel well informed (from 10 per cent to 6 per cent). Note that there has been a minor change in wording since 2007, as indicated in Figure 24.

White learners are more likely to feel very well informed than those in other ethnic groups (65 per cent of White learners say this), while those at specialist or other providers are more likely to say they felt very well informed than other respondents (70 per cent).

Figure 24: Information about the course after induction

Q Please say whether you felt very well informed, quite well informed, not very well informed or not at all informed after induction?

■ % Very well informed ■ % Quite well informed ■ % Not very well informed ■ % Not at all well informed

The content of the course, what subjects you would cover



The content of the course – the topics and subjects you would cover



Base: 5,185 FE learners aged 16+ all wave 16, 2009; 10,593 in 2007

Personalisation, learner involvement and provider responsiveness

The most important drivers of learner advocacy towards their provider relate to the way providers listen to learners and how staff treat learners and relate to them.

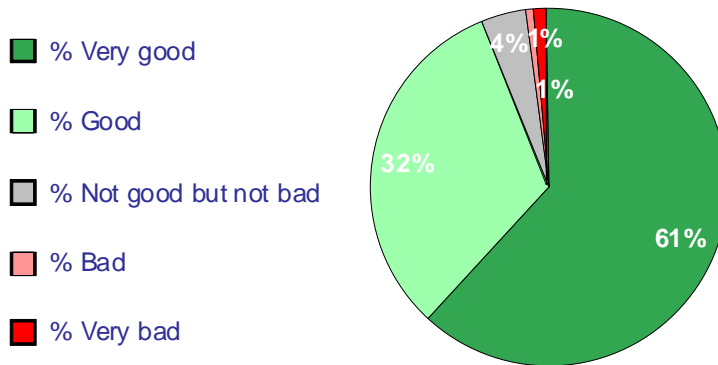
Figure 25 shows that the majority (61 per cent) of respondents rate staff as very good at showing them respect, while most other respondents say this is 'good' (32 per cent).

Learners aged 25 or over and those studying at Entry Level or Level 1 (68 per cent and 66 per cent respectively) are most likely to rate staff as very good at showing them respect, as are those at specialist or other providers (73 per cent). The figure is also higher for White respondents (63 per cent) than for those from other ethnic groups.

Learners who pay fees are more likely to say staff are very good (69 per cent), while those receiving EMA are less likely to say this (53 per cent).

Figure 25: Respect shown by staff

Q Please tell me how good or bad is the respect staff show to you/respect training staff show to you.



Base: 15,724 FE learners aged 16+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009

Most learners are positive towards the way their teachers or tutors relate to them as a person. When rating them between 1 (very poor) and 10 (excellent), one in three (34 per cent) give a rating of 10, and the mean score is 8.26. This is slightly lower than the mean score in 2007 – 8.36.

Sub-group patterns are similar to those noted above for showing respect to learners, with ratings higher than average for those aged 25 or over, those studying at Entry Level or Level 1 and those at specialist or other providers, as well as White respondents. Ratings are lower for learners receiving EMA.

As shown in Figure 26, the majority of learners say that providers are good or very good at listening to and acting on their views. Comparing the two issues, learners are less likely to say that providers are good at acting on learners' views than listening to them in the first place, and in particular they are less likely to say they are very good (26 per cent for "acting" compared with 36 per cent for "listening"). Very few learners say their provider is bad or very bad at either listening to or acting on their views (5 per cent and 7 per cent respectively).

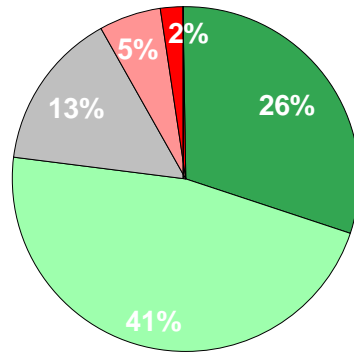
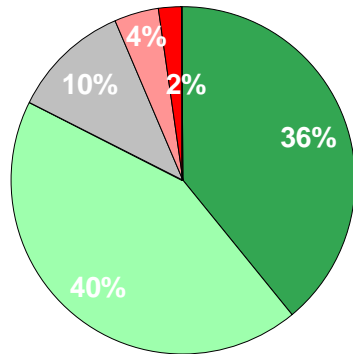
On both listening to and acting on views, learners are more likely to say their provider is good if they are studying at Entry Level or Level 1, do not pay fees, have a Skills Account or Adult Learner Account, or receive support (specifically Care to Learn, residential support, Career Development Loan or Training Allowance from Jobcentre Plus).

Figure 26: Listening to and acting on learners' views

Q How good is the college/learning provider at listening to the views of learners?

Q How good is the college/learning provider at acting on those views?

■ % Very good ■ % Good ■ % Not good but not bad ■ % Bad ■ % Very Bad



Base: 15,724 FE learners aged 16+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009

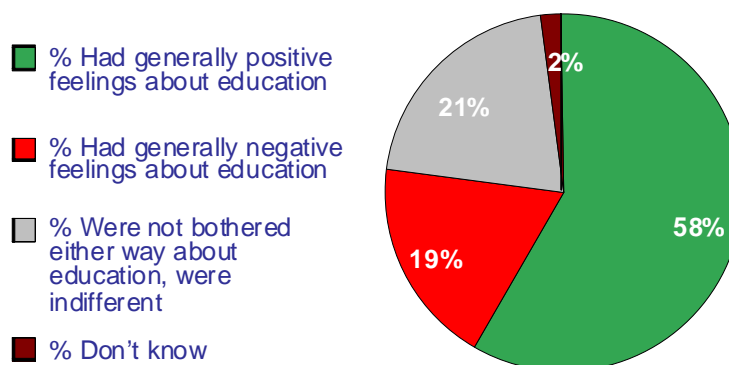
Attitudes to learning and benefits of learning

This section looks at learners' attitudes to learning and education, as well as the perceived usefulness of their course to their future career. It also examines the likelihood of undertaking further learning.

Approaching three in five learners say they had generally positive feelings about education when they left school (58 per cent), while one in five (19 per cent) say they had negative feelings. Details are shown in Figure 27.

Figure 27: Feelings about education on leaving school

Q Thinking back to when you left school would you say that you . . . ?



Base: 5,187 FE learners aged 16+ all wave 17, 2009

Learners agree that they have gained a number of benefits from their course, with four in five respondents or more agreeing that they feel more confident in their ability to learn, that they feel more positive about learning than when they started, that the course had given them skills they can use in a job, and that the course will help them move forward in their career.

Learners undertaking vocational courses are more likely to cite work-related benefits. Additionally, learners on vocational³ courses have had a positive shift⁴ when it comes to attitudes about learning compared to learners on non-vocational courses (13 per cent of vocational learners have had a positive shift compared to ten per cent of non-vocational

³ Vocational courses are defined as those working towards NVQ, BTEC, City and Guilds, RSA/OCR, ECDL or CLAIT qualifications.

⁴ A positive shift is defined as being negative or apathetic about learning when leaving school and now reporting feeling positive towards learning.

learners). Though this finding is statistically significant, it is a small difference. On the issues relating to personal development, younger learners, those from non-white ethnic groups, and those with learning difficulties are more likely to agree that they have benefited in various ways, as are learners receiving some kind of financial assistance⁵.

Figure 28: Benefits of participation

Q I am going to read out a few statements about what effect the course may have had on you personally. Could you tell me whether you agree or disagree with each?



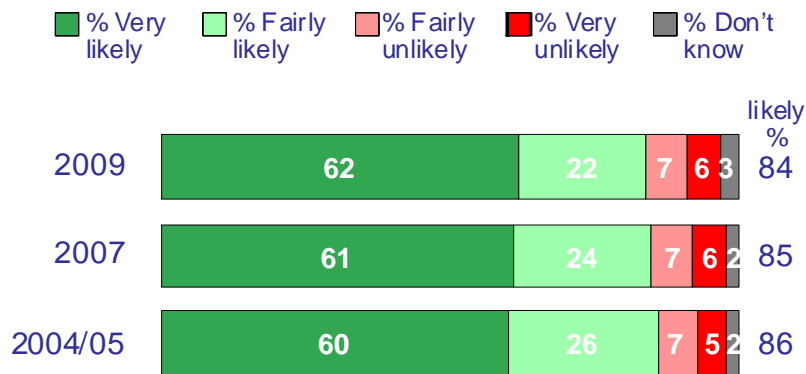
Base: 5,187 FE learners aged 16+ all wave 17, 2009

Just over three in five learners (62 per cent) say they are very likely to undertake further learning in the future (e.g. in the next three years), and overall 84 per cent say they are likely to do so. These findings have remained stable in recent years, and are very similar to what was reported in 2007. FE learners are more likely than Apprentices to say they will undertake further learning, but are similar to other LR and PCDL learners.

⁵ Financial assistance includes a Skills Account, and Adult Learner Account or EMA.

Figure 29: Likelihood of undertaking further learning

Q How likely will you be to undertake further learning in the next three years?



Base: 15,724 FE learners aged 16+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009

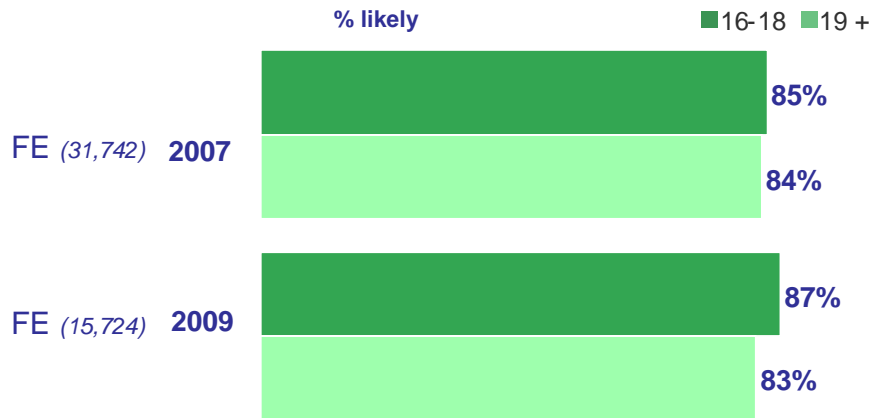
Learners aged 16-18 are more inclined than older learners to say they are likely to undertake further learning, as shown in Figure 30. This age difference has grown since 2007.

Black (91 per cent) and Asian (87 per cent) respondents are also more likely than White learners to say they will carry out further learning. Those studying at Level 4 or above are less likely to say they will do more learning in the future (76 per cent).

Those paying fees (72 per cent) are more likely than those not paying fees to say they will do further learning, while those receiving EMA are also more likely to say this (76 per cent); a high proportion of those on Care to Learn say they are very likely to undertake further learning (69 per cent).

Figure 30: Likelihood of undertaking further learning, by age

Q *How likely will you be to undertake further learning in the next three years?*



Base: 15,724 FE learners aged 16+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009

Early leavers

We have already seen that overall satisfaction is strongly linked to an individual's learning status, with lower levels of satisfaction among early leavers. It is therefore important to examine early leavers in more detail.

Profile of early leavers

In total, 7 per cent of learners had left their course early at the time of the interview. Most respondents were still on the course at the time of the interview (72 per cent overall), so the survey does not aim to collect data on completion rates; these are monitored by the LSC's own analysis of the individualised learner record (ILR) database.

The proportion of early leavers is similar to the 2007 survey, as shown in Figure 31.

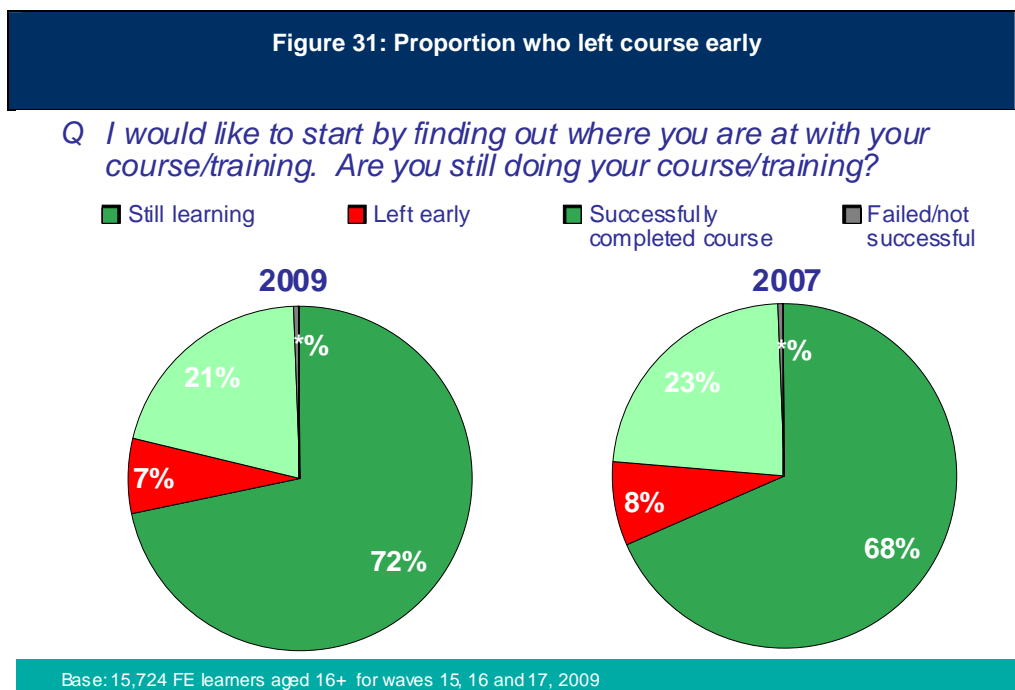


Table 2 examines the profile of early leavers. This profile is broadly similar to that of the population of FE learners (shown in Table 1), indicating that the proportion of early leavers is mainly consistent across demographic sub-groups. However, the sample of early leavers contains a disproportionately higher percentage of women (57 per cent compared with 54 per cent for all FE learners).

In addition, the sample of early leavers contains a relatively high proportion of learners studying at Level 1 or Entry Level (32 per cent).

Table 2: Demographic profile of early leavers compared to all FE learners

<i>(Base in brackets: early leavers and all FE learners)</i>	<i>(976) %</i>	<i>(15,724) %</i>
Gender		
Male	43	46
Female	57	54
Age		
16–18	35	36
19+	65	64
Refused	0	*
Ethnicity		
White	83	83
BME	17	16
Refused	0	*
Disability		
Learning difficulty	11	9

Reasons for leaving early

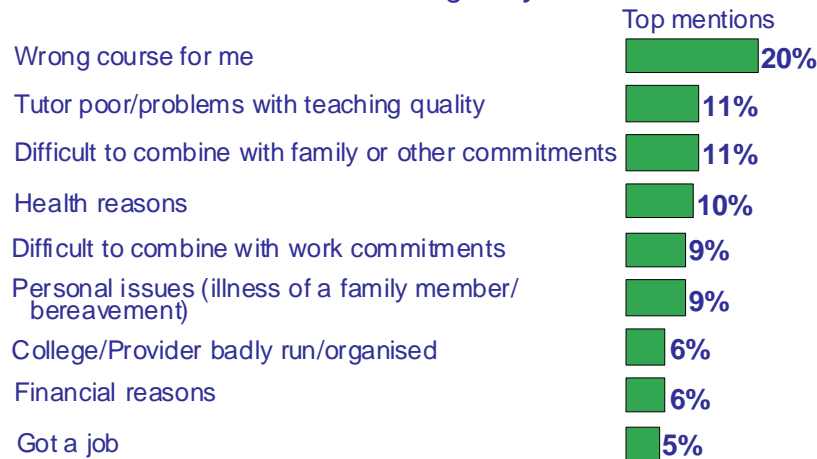
The reasons given for leaving courses early are shown in Figure 32. Learners who left their course early can be divided into two groups. The first group left for reasons related to the course itself – either because they felt the course was not as expected or was not right for them, or because they had problems with the tutor or teaching. The second group left early because of external factors – family, work, health or other personal issues.

The main reason given by learners for leaving early is that it was the wrong choice of course. Although the majority of early leavers rate the information they received when choosing a new

course as good (75 per cent), they are less likely than other learners to say it was very good (26 per cent compared with 44 per cent).

Figure 32: Reasons for leaving the course early

Q You said that you have left the course early. What do you consider were the main reasons for leaving early?



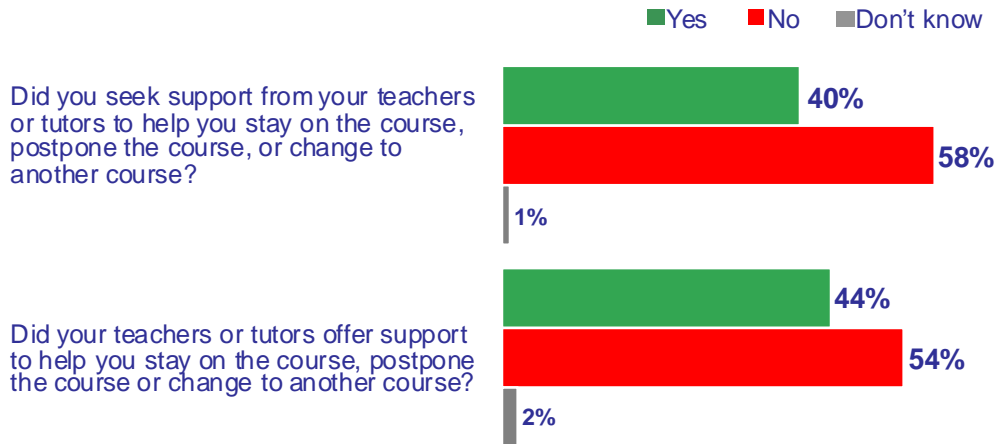
Base: 976 FE learners aged 16+ all early leavers for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009

Support for learners thinking of leaving early

Two in five early leavers (40 per cent) say that they did seek support from teachers or tutors, to help them stay on the course, postpone it or change to another course. A slightly higher number (44 per cent) say that teachers or tutors offered this type of support. However, 42 per cent neither sought nor was offered support suggesting that there is more that providers can do to identify and help learners who are at risk of leaving prior to completion.

Figure 33: Support when thinking of leaving early

Q *And when you were thinking about leaving the course...*



Base: 976 FE learners who left early for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009

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