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Welsh Assembly Government

Executive Summary - Schools Learner Voice



Research

Research document No: 039/2009

Date of issue: June 2009



ISBN 978 0 7504 5219 9

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CMK-22-07-402

E1220910

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Executive Summary | 2 |
| 1.1 Year 10 and 11 | 3 |
| Choice and Opportunity | 3 |
| Motivation/problems encountered | 5 |
| Future intentions | 6 |
| Satisfaction with teaching | 6 |
| Overall satisfaction with the experience | 7 |
| 14-19 Pathways | 8 |
| 1.2 Year 12 and 13 | 11 |
| Choice and Opportunity | 11 |
| Motivation/problems encountered | 12 |
| Satisfaction with teaching | 13 |
| Overall satisfaction | 14 |
| 14-19 Pathways | 15 |
| Comparisons with 2004 | 16 |
| 1.3 Conclusions | 17 |

Executive Summary

The 2008 Schools Learner Voice Survey was undertaken as part of the DCELLS 2007-2010 Customer Research Programme (CRP). During the inception phase of the programme, many policy leads emphasised the need to take into account the views of learners as part of assessments of school improvement and effectiveness. The aims of this survey were to:

- provide updated learner satisfaction and related measures for students in school sixth forms (Years 12 and 13)
- set a baseline measurement for learner satisfaction and related topics for Year 10 and 11 students, with particular reference to the 14-19 Learning Pathways agenda.

Separate paper self-completion questionnaires were administered to students from Years 10 and 11, and from Years 12 and 13. The broad topic areas covered in both questionnaires were: choice; quality of teaching; learning pathways; satisfaction with teaching and satisfaction with the learning experience. Responses were received from 2,018 students from Years 10 and 11, and 1,783 students from Years 12 and 13.

1.1 Year 10 and 11

The questionnaire for these year groups covered the following aspects of students' learning experience:

- *choice and opportunity*: reasons for the selection of subjects/ qualifications and whether those courses currently studied were the ones that students most wanted to do
- *motivation and problems experienced*: overall levels of motivation and any problems that had been experienced in Year 10 and 11
- *satisfaction with teaching*: satisfaction with aspects of teaching
- *measures to explore overall satisfaction with the learning experience*: agreement with a list of statements relating to safety and security, engaging the learner, nurturing the learner and overall satisfaction with learning in the school.

Choice and Opportunity

Survey responses show that the extent to which the choices and opportunities available to students meet their demands, in terms of the choice of subjects and the qualifications to be acquired, are important in maintaining levels of student motivation and satisfaction with their learning experiences.

Enjoyment of the subjects they were studying was the most frequently cited reason among Year 10 and 11 students for choosing subjects and qualifications - this was mentioned by 85% of respondents. Reasons relating to progression in career or learning beyond Year 10 and 11 were also important, with 43% stating that they needed the subjects or qualifications for the job they wanted to do and 21% needing the subjects to progress to sixth form or college.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Year 10 and 11 respondents studying vocational qualifications were more likely than those taking GCSEs to state that they had chosen their subject/qualification because they needed them for the job they wanted to do in future. For example, more than six in ten of those studying NVQs (64%) or other vocational qualifications (63%) cited these reasons, compared with 43% of those taking GCSEs.

There were differences between respondents from Years 10 and 11, with considerably higher proportions of the former (51%, compared to 36%) stating that they needed their qualifications for the job they wanted and the latter mentioning they needed the qualifications to get into Year 12 (24% compared to 18%).

Students who exhibited higher levels of motivation were also more likely to have chosen their subjects and qualifications based on what they thought they needed for the job they wanted to do. This may be indicative of a more goal-orientated view of their education.

Various influencers were mentioned as reasons for choosing subjects, these were parents (cited by 33% of respondents), teachers (23%) and a Careers Wales Advisor (8%). The fact that advice from these sources had a direct influence on subject choice is important. It highlights the importance of ensuring that parents are well-informed about the options available to their children the implications of the choices made and also the high level of responsibility of teachers and careers advisors at this level. Differences in advice sources used emerged by gender: both males and females were more likely to cite parents' advice than that of teachers or Careers Wales as reasons for choosing their subjects, but females were considerably more likely than males to mention parents (37% compared with 31%) and teachers (26% compared with 20%).

Students whose list of courses included Key Skills, Welsh Baccalaureate and Basic Skills were more likely to have based their decisions on advice received from their teachers (32%, 36% and 46% respectively compared to 23% overall). This suggests that teachers were highly influential in raising awareness and engagement of these options where they considered it to be appropriate.

A large majority of students (82%) were studying their first choice of subjects and qualifications. There is a correlation between following their first choice of course or qualifications and students displaying

greater levels of motivation and satisfaction. Although the analysis cannot prove the causality, we can conclude that satisfaction and motivation is highest in an environment where students are engaged in their first choice learning events.

The main reasons for students not studying their first choice subjects and qualifications were:

- school or local schools did not provide the subjects or qualifications that they wanted (31%)
- first choice subject or qualification was already full (30%)
- could not fit their first choices into their timetables (30%).

Motivation/problems encountered

Almost three quarters (73%) of Year 10 and 11 students were motivated in their studies, with 61% describing themselves as fairly motivated and 12% saying that they were very motivated. A fifth described themselves as not very motivated (20%) and 2% were not at all motivated.

While there were no differences by gender or ethnicity in the proportions stating that they were very or fairly motivated, the more motivated students tended to be those who were:

- satisfied overall with their learning experience (97% who were extremely satisfied with their experience compared with 30% who were dissatisfied)
- studying in Welsh medium schools (83% compared with 71% who were studying elsewhere).
- studying their first choice of course (76% compared with 63% of those who were not)
- without a long-term limiting illness or disability (75% compared with 59% of those who had an illness or disability).

Whilst 22% of students said that they had not experienced any problems since starting their current school year, three most commonly mentioned problems were:

- keeping up with the standard of work required (29%)
- problems of any kind with a member of staff (28%)
- problems of any kind with other students (27%).

There was a clear correlation between whether a student was studying their first choice of subjects and their likelihood to encounter problems. It was also the case that Year 11 students tended to mention experiencing problems in maintaining motivation to a greater extent than did Year 10 students (27% compared with 18%). A significantly higher proportion of those studying NVQs or other vocational qualifications (41% in each case compared to 29% of all respondents) stated that they had problems keeping up with the standard of work required. Unsurprisingly, those who expressed higher levels of dissatisfaction with their learning experience were also more likely to have encountered problems.

Future intentions

Future intentions amongst Year 10 and 11 students broadly reflected trends in post-16 destinations, with the majority stating that they would be going to college (59%) or staying on at school (31%). Just over a fifth (22%) intended to seek part-time work (often in conjunction with further studies). Just over one in ten mentioned a job with a Modern Apprenticeship (13%).

Students exhibiting higher levels of motivation and satisfaction were significantly more likely to be thinking about continuing their learning in college/school sixth form beyond Year 11.

Satisfaction with teaching

Respondents were asked to rate different aspects of teaching using a five point scale which ranged from very good to very poor (with a mid point). High levels of satisfaction were recorded for:

making good use of lesson time; ability to explain the subject; the support provided; and setting clear targets to help the student improve. The three aspects ranked lowest were: listening to the student's needs; making the subject interesting and enjoyable; and understanding the student and how they like to learn.

Overall, 78% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the quality of teaching. Only five per cent were dissatisfied and 11% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Overall satisfaction with the experience

The vast majority of students (84%) were satisfied to some extent with their overall learning experience. Most were very or fairly satisfied (40% and 37% respectively) as opposed to extremely satisfied (7%). Almost one in ten were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (8%) and relatively few were dissatisfied to some degree (4%).

Among the significant variations between sub-groups of students, the following were identified:

- students with a long term limiting disability were less satisfied to some extent (77% compared to 88% of those with no such disability)
- students studying their first choice of subjects were significantly more likely to be satisfied to some extent (88%) than those who were not (74%) or those who considered that they had no choice in their options (72%)
- students studying the Welsh Baccalaureate were most likely to be satisfied with their learning experience (90% compared with an average of 84%). Those studying NVQs were least likely to be satisfied to some extent (76%).

Perhaps unsurprisingly there was a correlation between levels of motivation and overall satisfaction. Ninety six per cent of those who were 'very motivated' were satisfied to some extent, compared to 32% of those who were 'not motivated at all'.

Students were most likely to identify spontaneously the quality of the learning they received and friendships they had formed as the aspects they most liked about their school (36% and 27% respectively). Those aspects they would most like to change related to teachers (17%), quality of learning provision (14%), environment/atmosphere (11%), discipline and canteen/food (9% in each case).

14-19 Pathways

In relation to 14-19 Learning Pathways the paragraphs below reflect on satisfaction and motivation of Year 10 and 11 students in school sixth forms undertaking the Welsh BaccaLaureate Qualification and NVQs and also any variation in the data amongst respondents undertaking some learning at another site (not part of their school) and hence participating in collaborative delivery.

Almost all Year 10 and 11 students were undertaking at least one GCSE (97%) and after weighting the data:

- 4% of the total (89 students) were undertaking a Welsh BaccaLaureate Qualification (of which 70% said that all classes were taught in their school).
- 5% of the total (110 students) were studying NVQs (of which 70% said all classes were taught on site).
- 5% (107 students) mentioned either the vocational diploma, certificate and/or the vocational award (of which 74% said that all classes were taught at their school).
- a total of 173 learners said that at least some of their lessons were taught at another site or provider.

Of those undertaking the courses or training mentioned above:

- overall satisfaction with teaching at the 'all satisfied' level was slightly but not significantly lower for those undertaking NVQs and other vocational courses (diploma, certificate and award). For those undertaking the Welsh BaccaLaureate satisfaction levels were very similar to the overall average

- students undertaking the Welsh Baccalaureate were significantly more likely to be very motivated than those undertaking NVQs and those undertaking GCSEs (20% compared to 8% and 12% respectively) and over eight in ten (81%) were motivated to some level (compared with 73% overall)
- satisfaction with the experience overall was high for those undertaking the Welsh Baccalaureate (90% satisfied to some extent compared to 84% overall). Satisfaction was significantly lower for those who mentioned NVQs as part of their course (77% all satisfied compared to 90% studying the Welsh Baccalaureate and 85% studying GCSEs).

With regards to those experiencing collaborative delivery:

- similar proportions recognised that they were studying their first choice of subjects or qualifications (80% said they had got their first choice compared to 84% whose lessons were all at one site)
- students experiencing collaborative delivery gave similar levels of overall satisfaction with teaching (76% were satisfied to some extent compared to 80% of students whose lessons were all at one site)
- there were no significant differences in relation to problems experienced and levels of motivation
- a similar response was given to all statements describing the school, its environment and support with only one aspect that showed a significant difference: students accessing their learning across more than one site were significantly less likely to agree that 'I have opportunities to take part in activities organised by the school' (56% compared to 67% who only attended a single site)
- levels of overall satisfaction were not significantly different at 'all satisfied' level (79% were satisfied compared to 86% studying at a single site), however, Year 10 and 11 students taking some lessons at a different site were less likely to state they were very satisfied (25% compared to 43%) and more likely to say they were fairly satisfied (44% compared to 25%) than their peers who were undertaking all lessons at one site.

- in terms of future intentions, students receiving some lessons outside their school were significantly less likely to want to enter year 12 at that school (11% compared to 33% of students who had all lessons at one site). A significantly higher proportion of Year 10 and 11 students in receipt of collaborative delivery were hoping to study towards a Modern Apprenticeship (25% compared to 11% of those who were not) and/or a wanting a full time job without a Modern Apprenticeship (9% compared to 4%).

1.2 Year 12 and 13

Choice and Opportunity

For Year 12 and 13 students continuity of environment and social relationships were the key factors behind their decisions to continue studying at the school they had attended in Year 11. The main reasons given for choice of school were:

- attending the same school prior to Year 12 and 13 (85%)
- maintaining social ties (52%)
- the school offered the course they wanted and/or was a convenient location (51% in each case).

Overall, almost four out of five students (78%) were studying their first choice subjects and qualifications. A total of 16% were not studying their first choices.

As with Year 10 and 11 students, there was a strong correlation between the ability to access the first choice of school and levels of motivation and satisfaction. A similar correlation was found with respect to studying their first choice subjects or qualifications and sustaining their engagement. Students who had thought about leaving school were less likely to be studying their first choice subjects and qualifications (70%) than were those who had not thought about leaving school (85%). This underlines the importance of ensuring that students consciously engage with the whole concept of choice and opportunity and that, where possible, the subjects or qualifications studied meets their needs, learning style, abilities and/or interest.

Just over half (53%) of the students in Year 12 and 13 who were unable to study their first choice subjects and qualifications stated that it was because they could not fit them into their timetables. This situation was more pronounced amongst Year 13 than amongst their Year 12 counterparts (67% unable to fit them into their timetables versus 47% respectively). While a quarter of students were unable to study their first choice courses because their school or other local schools did not provide the qualifications or subjects they wanted (26%), this was more of a problem for females

(32%) than for males (17%). Males were more likely than females to have been advised not to pursue their preference by teachers (20% versus 8%).

Motivation/problems encountered

The following groups were found to have higher levels of motivation:

- students satisfied with their learning experience (92% of those extremely satisfied compared with 33% who were dissatisfied).
- those attending their first choice of school (75%, compared with 43% who were not)
- students accessing extra support (74% compared to 58% of students without extra support)
- those studying their first choice of course (72%, compared with 55% who were not)
- white respondents (70% said they were fairly or very motivated, compared with 58% of those from ethnic minority backgrounds)
- students who had no learning disability (70% compared with 58% of those with a learning disability)

The three most common problems faced by students in Year 12 and 13 were: maintaining personal motivation (48%); keeping up with the standard of work required (33%); and problems of any kind with a member of staff (20%).

The data indicates a link between students' experience of problems and their levels of motivation. Those who said that they were not very motivated or not at all motivated in their studies were more likely to indicate that they had experienced problems, notably relating to:

- keeping up with the standard of work required of them (61% of those who were not at all motivated compared with 16% of those who were very motivated and 47% of those who were fairly motivated)
- experiencing problems of any kind with a member of staff (33% of those not motivated compared with 18% who were very motivated and 18% who were fairly motivated).

Almost a third (32%) had seriously thought about leaving school since starting in Year 12. There were no differences by gender, school year or ethnicity, but over a half (56%) of those with a learning disability had considered this option. A difference also emerged between those studying for A levels and those studying for GCSEs and vocational qualifications (31%, 47% and 56% respectively had thought about leaving). While it may be expected that those not undertaking A level courses would be likely to consider leaving in order to pursue job opportunities, it is somewhat surprising that almost a third of those taking A levels, and who may have been thought to be aspiring to a place in higher education, were contemplating withdrawing. The data suggests that a degree of re evaluation is inevitable and there will always be a number of students who contemplate alternative options. Perhaps the important issue demonstrated is that no course type is immune from disenchantment and support systems need to be in place to capture vulnerable students.

Those considering leaving school were more likely to be: not studying at their first choice of school; not studying their first choice of subject; and exhibiting lower levels of motivation and overall satisfaction.

Satisfaction with teaching

High levels of satisfaction were recorded across a number of aspects of teaching. The vast majority of Year 12 and 13 students (86%) were satisfied to some degree with the overall quality of teaching. At least seven in ten rated teachers as fairly or very good for the support they gave, the quality and availability of teaching materials they used, the fact that they listened to students' needs, the good use of lesson time and the ability to explain the subject.

At least two thirds of students rated teachers as fairly or very good for prompt and regular feedback on progress (66%), making the subject interesting and enjoyable (68%) and setting clear targets to help students improve (67%).

Ratings were lowest for understanding the student and how they like to learn (60%) and dealing with disruptive learners (63%).

Students from ethnic minority groups were consistently less positive about teachers' performance. In contrast females and those receiving extra support were consistently more likely to rate aspects of teaching as very good or quite good.

Overall satisfaction

In terms of the course meeting expectations on various levels, respondents were most positive about 'the standard of work expected' and 'the amount of work you would have to do'. Responses were least positive for 'teaching styles and methods used in lessons' where there was a higher likelihood of having no expectations at all and hence the proportion of those whose expectations had been met was relatively low (52%).

In terms of overall satisfaction with their learning experience, just over one in twenty (6%) said that they were extremely satisfied and another third (32%) said that they were very satisfied. Almost half said that they were fairly satisfied (46%). Thus, the vast majority of students (83%) were satisfied to some extent with their experience overall. Much smaller percentages stated that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (9%) or that they were dissatisfied to some degree (5%).

The following groups were significantly more likely to be satisfied with their overall learning experience:

- those who were studying their first choice of subject/qualification (88% reported some degree of satisfaction compared with 71% who were not)
- those who were attending their first choice of school (88% reported some degree of satisfaction compared with 74% who were not and 65% who had no choice)
- students without learning difficulties compared to those with (86% stated some level of satisfaction compared without 75%)
- Year 13 students were significantly more likely to be 'extremely satisfied' (11% compared with 5% in Year 12).

As was to be expected, there was a correlation between levels of motivation, ratings of teaching quality and the likelihood of having considered leaving.

14-19 Pathways

In relation to 14-19 Learning Pathways, the paragraphs below explore Year 12 and 13 students in school sixth forms undertaking the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification and we also review any differences in views amongst respondents experiencing collaborative delivery and those who were not undertaking some learning outside their Sixth Form.

After weighting the data, amongst Year 12 and 13 students, the vast majority were undertaking A Levels and/or AS Levels (85% were undertaking A Levels and 46% AS Levels), with direct relevance to the 14-19 Pathways agenda:

- 5% of the total (91 students) were undertaking an Advanced Level Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification (of which 93% said that all classes were taught within their school sixth form)
- a total of 173 learners (weighted total) said that at least some of their lessons were taught at another site or provider.
- Overall satisfaction with teaching and motivation were not significantly higher or lower for those who were studying the Advanced Level Welsh Baccalaureate, however, levels of dissatisfaction with the experience overall were significantly higher for those undertaking the Advanced Level Welsh Baccalaureate (11% dissatisfied to some extent compared to 5% overall).

With regards to those experiencing collaborative delivery:

- students involved in collaborative delivery gave similar levels of overall satisfaction with teaching (85% were satisfied to some extent compared to 88% of students whose lessons were all taught at one site)
- there were no significant differences in relation to problems experienced and levels of motivation

- levels of overall satisfaction were not significantly different at an 'all satisfied' level (79% were satisfied compared to 85% studying solely at their school sixth form).

Comparisons with 2004

There are a number of significant differences in the 2008 data compared to the 2004 data for Year 12 and 13 students, namely:

Reasons for attending: fewer learners cited reputation of the school sixth form in 2008 (-4% points) and also the prospect of the best courses/subjects (-3% points) but the fact that friends were attending the school had become more influential (+1.6% points)

- Choice of school and subjects: compared to 2004, more learners in the recent survey considered that they had no choice of school/provider (+1.2% points) however there was a decrease in the percentage of learners who did not get their first choice of subjects (-2.7% points).
- Level of motivation and problems encountered: motivation had significantly decreased since 2004 (the percentage who were very/fairly motivated had decreased by -3.5% points). The extent of various problems experienced had also declined which would indicate that this is not the reason behind a 'dip' in motivation.
- Overall satisfaction with teaching and experience: performance on one of these two measures has increased over time - the percentage of learners who were dissatisfied with teaching to some extent had significantly decreased (-1.5% points); the ratings for overall satisfaction have remained stable over time.

1.3 Conclusions

Over both year groupings, the findings identified relatively high levels of both overall satisfaction with the learning experience, including the teaching received, and student motivation. Having said this there were some interesting correlations and significant differences for some groups that should be explored further in order to ensure the best possible experience for all students.

However, over a third of Year 12 and 13 students expressed a lack of motivation and there had been a slight fall in the levels of motivation in comparison to 2004. Furthermore, a third of Year 12 and 13 students said they had seriously thought about leaving school since they started Year 12. There were indications that some of those staying on post-16 had done so without clearly thought out, positive reasons for doing so, and/or their experience had not matched up to their expectations and aspirations. This highlights the need for informed, accurate and realistic information, advice and guidance.

Furthermore, where students were considering leaving because of their course not matching their expectations, attention should be given to the quality of provision, and to the level of support offered to students who may initially struggle to come to terms with a new set of demands.

The findings also highlight the key role which parents have in providing advice to their children about the choices available to them. Thus, the parental engagement agenda is of great importance (see policy considerations below).

In general, students who were more motivated, more satisfied and less likely to have considered leaving school or have had problems were also more likely to be studying at their first choice school and their first choice of course. The data does not identify the causality but the link between choices gained and more positive reflections on the experience is evident.

Areas identified for consideration in terms of policy were:

A need to ensure that a wide range of options are made available to students

- Levels of motivation and satisfaction seemed to be related to whether the student was studying their first choice of subjects,

as was the likelihood of experiencing problems during their current school year. In the light of the evidence of these relationships, particular attention should be given to the higher proportions of students from ethnic minority groups, and those studying at small and/or rural schools who were not able to access their first choice of subject/course.

A process of conscious choice should continue to be promoted

- Engaging parents at an early stage in their children's education is vital, in order to ensure that, as far as possible, they are knowledgeable about the course options available to students, and they can offer informed assessments of the appropriateness of those options for their children's future careers.
- The role of Careers Wales and of teachers offering advice on choice of course and careers is crucial if the ill-effects on students' career trajectories and self-confidence (caused by inappropriate or misinformed decisions) are to be alleviated. Emphasis should be placed on creating awareness among students and their parents of the expertise, credibility and impartiality of Careers Wales and teachers. This should be initiated well before crucial decisions in the 14-19 phase are taken.
- Given that over a quarter of students in Year 12 and 13 were not very or not at all motivated, more attention should be directed at ensuring that those choosing to stay on in education beyond the age of 16 are fully aware of a) the different demands which will be made on them academically; b) the content of the courses undertaken, and c) the opportunities and routes which are available and are most appropriate to them.

Targeted support - in relation to advice/guidance/study etc

- The findings point to a need for targeted support for groups of students whose schools were less likely to have provided their first choice subjects and qualifications (both in terms of the decision-making process and once students have embarked on their chosen course).