



# National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003

## SUMMARY REPORT

Customer Research Strategy - Report 1



## NATIONAL LEARNER SATISFACTION SURVEY FOR WALES 2003

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NOP Research Group is the UK arm of NOP World, the ninth largest research agency in the world.

In the UK, NOP employs around 600 staff and it is split into specialist divisions. The team working on the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 is in the division that specialises in Social Research and there are 20 researchers dedicated to this field. The team has relevant experience of both large-scale social research surveys and of carrying out customer satisfaction research.

## CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD by Sheila Drury



**As ELWa moves forward with its ambitious modernisation agenda for post-16 learning we understand that learners are at the heart of everything we do.**

That is why we are undertaking a massive programme of research through our Customer Research Strategy. I am delighted to introduce this report as the first findings from one of the key strands of our Customer Research Strategy, the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales. The report outlines the views of over 6,000 learners undertaking a range of ELWa funded learning including Further Education, Work Based Learning Programmes and accredited Adult Continuing Education.

We asked the learners for their views about their choice of provision and the quality of the learning they received, as well as their opinions about the advice and guidance they accessed, the quality of facilities and support, and their perceptions of how the learning may benefit them.

The results indicate very high levels of satisfaction with learning provision, and this should be celebrated. The research has also helped to identify areas for further investigation, and where improvements can be made. A programme of activity is being planned to consult further with

learners and the learning sector in order to look more closely at some of these issues and develop ways to share best practices and make improvements.

In planning and implementing the research activity we have consulted with a number of key partners, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their support - in particular the representatives on ELWa's Quality Assurance Expert Committee which acted as an external project steering group. I would also like to thank NOP, which carried out the work.

Most importantly I would like to thank the thousands of learners who participated in the research, contributing their valuable opinions so that we might improve future learning opportunities in order to 'make learning work' for Wales.

**Sheila Drury** – Chairman  
August 2004.

## FURTHER EDUCATION

SEVEN IN TEN FURTHER EDUCATION LEARNERS ARE EXTREMELY OR VERY SATISFIED WITH THEIR LEARNING EXPERIENCE



### Introduction and Background

01 ELWa's customers include all current and potential future learners - this includes all individuals, businesses and communities across Wales. This learner satisfaction research forms part of ELWa's Customer Research Strategy, which is part of the overall drive within ELWa to:

- encourage evidence based policy and demand led planning
- bring the 'customer' centre stage

02 The National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 is the first element of the Customer Research Strategy and its main aims were to:

- obtain measures of learner satisfaction in ELWa-funded provision across Wales;
- establish benchmarks which, when tracked over time, will show trends in learner satisfaction; and,
- highlight priorities for action.

03 This survey consists of over 6,000 telephone interviews carried out with learners in Further Education (FE), Work Based Learning (WBL) and accredited Adult Continuing Education (ACE). School sixth formers are not included in this survey because the methodology was considered inappropriate. Therefore a separate but comparable piece of work has been undertaken which included focus groups in eight schools and a self-completion questionnaire exercise with over 5,700 Year 12 and 13 pupils across Wales.

### Methodology

04 The survey was carried out by means of a telephone interview, lasting 20 minutes on average. Interviewing took place during July and August 2003, before exam results were published. The following numbers of interviews were achieved:

Interviews Achieved	
Further Education	4,707
Work Based Learning	1,000
Accredited Adult Continuing Education	508

05 The topics covered by the National Learner Satisfaction Survey overlap with the School Sixth Form survey. This overlap was designed into the process to ensure that the results would be comparable. However, different methodologies used for the two surveys means that direct comparison should be treated with some caution.

### Further Education (FE)

06 It is a very positive finding that seven in ten (70%) Further Education learners are extremely or very satisfied with their learning experience. This level of satisfaction is higher than that measured in the 2002/03 English Learner Satisfaction survey where 63% of FE learners declared themselves extremely or very satisfied.

07 Where there is dissatisfaction, it is voiced primarily by younger learners (those under 25) and in particular by young male learners. However, even among these groups, few go so far as to say that they are

dissatisfied. Instead they opt for the 'qualified' satisfaction rating: 'fairly satisfied'. In the learners' own assessment, low levels of satisfaction stem mainly from expectations not being met, poor teaching standards and poor organisation on the part of the provider. This is supported by statistical analysis which has been used to identify drivers of satisfaction/dissatisfaction. The process involved tracking the correlation between how learners feel about different elements of the learning experience and how satisfied they are overall.

08 The analysis shows that teaching and management factors have the biggest impact on overall satisfaction among FE learners:

**Table 1: Relative influence of different elements of the learning experience on overall satisfaction in FE**

	%
Teaching	37
Management	31
Counselling/Childcare Facilities	10
Making the Right Choice	8
Learning Facilities	7
Other Facilities	7

Note: Don't know and 'other' responses are not included

### Satisfaction with teaching

09 Given the fact that teaching related factors have the most influence on satisfaction, it is reassuring that over 90% of FE learners state some degree of satisfaction (either fairly, very or extremely satisfied) and only 5% express any level of dissatisfaction. This bears strong testament to the skills and professionalism of teaching staff within the post-16 learning sector.

10 The highest scoring indicators relating to teacher/trainer performance are the core teaching skills of 'ability to explain the subject', 'listening to your needs' and 'making your subject interesting and enjoyable'. The lowest scoring indicators were 'target setting' and 'understanding you and how you like to learn'.

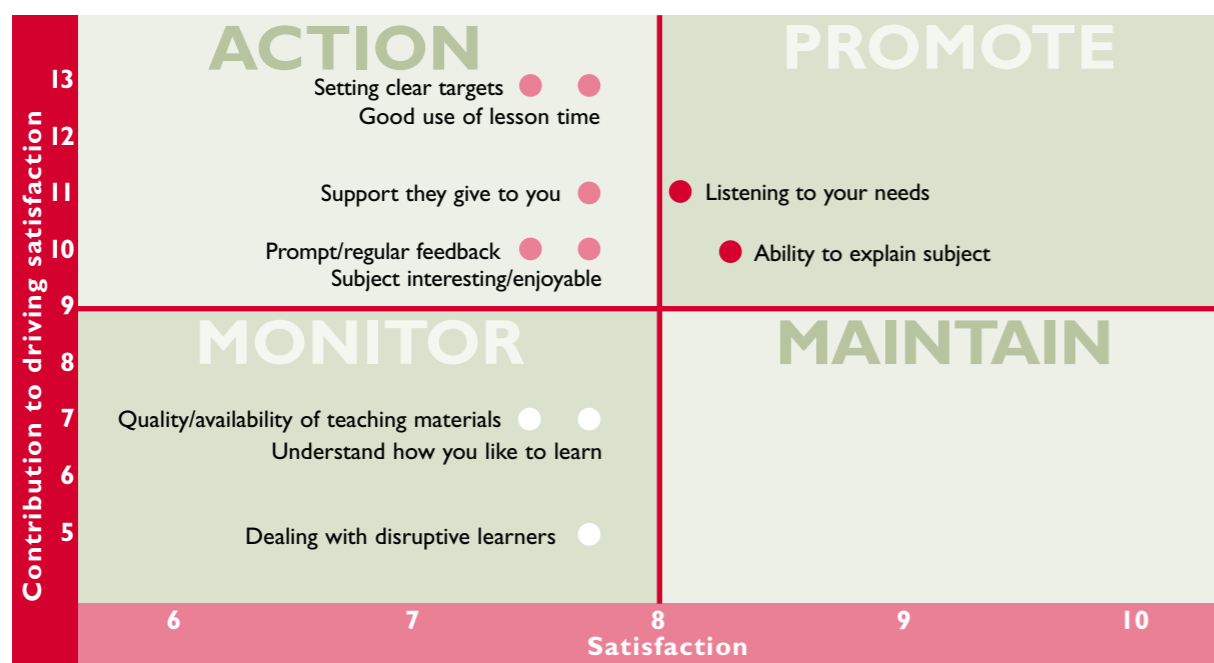
11 The grid overleaf plots the different elements of teaching showing how important they are in driving satisfaction with the quality of teaching and how learners rated performance on each factor. Thus the top left hand quadrant (the action quadrant) shows those factors which are relatively high in importance but rated relatively low on performance.

## FURTHER EDUCATION

THE MAJORITY OF LEARNERS ARE STUDYING AT THEIR FIRST CHOICE OF PROVIDER AND FOLLOWING THEIR FIRST CHOICE COURSE/TRAINING



Chart 1: Priorities for Action - Satisfaction with Quality of Teaching within FE



Note: The axis on the grid is built around the scores given. They do not therefore start at zero. There are no mean satisfaction scores below 7 out of 10 and no mean importance scores below 5.

### Targets for action

The factors appearing in the action quadrant are mainly connected with the management of the learning process:

- Support
- Feedback
- Target setting
- Subject interesting/enjoyable

These, together with 'good use of lesson time', are features which appear to be downrated - in particular by the younger male learners. Targeting these areas by providing more rigorous input to these learners should help raise their satisfaction.

### Management factors

- 12** On management and administration factors, FE learners give lower performance ratings for organisational and resourcing factors such as accessibility of teachers and timetabling. Provision of induction and ongoing support receive higher ratings.
- 13** It is clear from learner comment that turning up at a lesson that has been cancelled or moved is frustrating and in some cases is taken as a signal of disrespect on the part of the tutor or college. Again younger learners are generally more critical on this front, which either indicates that they are

more commonly exposed to poor resourcing or communication or that older learners are more tolerant of such difficulties.

### Targets for action

- Managing timetables so that they suit the learner
- Communicating changes to lesson times
- Ensuring that enough teachers/tutors are available

### Making the right choice

- 14** The majority of learners are studying at their first choice of provider and following their first choice of course/ training. Achieving one's first choice of provider or course influences overall satisfaction with the learning experience. As the proportion of learners saying they are studying at their first choice of college decreases, satisfaction also deteriorates. Amongst FE learners the groups who are least likely to have obtained their first choice are:
- those living in North Wales;
  - males aged 19-24; and
  - those doing engineering/manufacturing or business studies courses.
- 15** Convenience of location is a key driver in choosing a provider. Offering the training required is the second factor but only a minority of learners mention issues such as reputation and

quality, thus confirming that proximity generally overrides such factors.

- 16** Advice seeking patterns vary by age: the 16-18 year old FE learners are more likely to receive advice than older learners and to consult a range of sources. As one would expect the younger learners are active users of school or Careers Wales staff. Whilst these are considered useful, there is tendency to attach more value to the advice received from the point of destination i.e. staff at the provider they are now attending or the employer they are working for. This is possibly because they are able to offer more detailed information about what the course/training involves.
- 17** Generally most FE learners appear to have known what to expect from their course. The aspects about which there is most uncertainty relate to the amount of deadlines, the amount of responsibility learners have to take and the type of people who will be on the course. The first two of these rank among the factors which are most likely to cause people difficulties during their course or training. It may therefore be worth seeking to address this at the information and advice stage by using an approach along the lines of 'a week in the life of...' highlighting some of the clashes that can arise between course, home and work commitments.

## WORK BASED LEARNING

SEVEN IN TEN WORK BASED LEARNERS ARE EXTREMELY OR VERY SATISFIED WITH THEIR LEARNING EXPERIENCE



### Targets for action

The target for action is improving the value of advice received. Given that generally colleges and providers are highly rated, the main focus of such action should be to encourage learners to obtain more specific details of course content and structure directly from these bodies.

### Learning through the medium of Welsh

- 18 Around 1 in 10 of the FE learners interviewed said they were fluent in spoken Welsh and confident dealing with written Welsh.
- 19 Just under a third of all learners say they were given the opportunity to undertake any of their learning in Welsh. However, the desire to learn through the Welsh medium is limited to a small minority (less than 1 in 10). Around a quarter of FE learners had at least some Welsh medium element in their course.

### Targets for action

The target for action is for ELW and key partners in the learning and skills sector to feed the findings from this research into their future plans for developing and promoting the supply of Welsh language provision.

### Facilities

- 20 Generally the ratings of facilities are lower than the ratings received for teaching standards. Core learning related facilities such as IT facilities, libraries and learning support services are the highest rated facilities for FE. The lowest rated facilities are the canteen and facilities for socialising. Whilst these are arguably peripheral to the actual process of learning, the social benefits of learning are important to learners so this is potentially an area which needs review.

### Targets for action

- Facilities provided for socialising with other learners
- Canteen/café
- Sports facilities/equipment
- Other specialist facilities/equipment related to your course

### Work Based Learning (WBL)

- 21 WBL learners express similar levels of satisfaction with their learning experience to FE learners with seven in ten extremely or very satisfied.

- 22 'Extreme' satisfaction is more likely amongst females, but age also has an impact. Females in the 19+ age group are most likely to be extremely or very satisfied, whilst males in the same group are the least likely to express this degree of satisfaction.
- 23 Reasons for dissatisfaction primarily relate to the experience not being what the respondent expected.
- 24 WBL learners feel their learning has played a substantial role in helping them to achieve their work/career related goals.
- 25 WBL learners who were employed at the time of their interview were asked about the relevance of their training and the usefulness of that training in terms of their current job. The majority feel that their training is directly related to their job (87%), whilst 66% feel that their training is very useful and 29% feel it is quite useful.
- 26 The satisfaction drivers for WBL learners are similar to those for FE learners in that teaching and management factors are paramount. Where WBL learners are studying at a college or training provider social facilities take on more importance:

**Table 2: Relative influence of different elements of the learning experience on overall satisfaction in WBL**

	%
Teaching/training	41
Management	29
Counselling/Childcare Facilities	10
Other Facilities	3
Social Facilities	12
IT Facilities	6

Note: Don't know and 'other' responses are not included

### Satisfaction with teaching

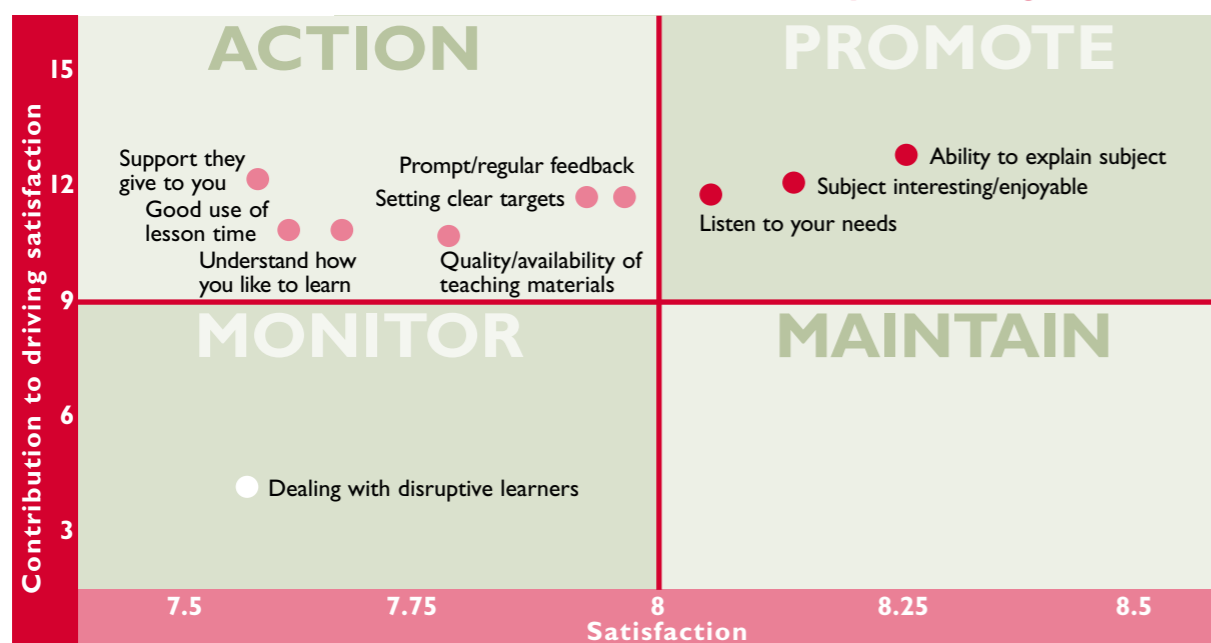
- 27 Overall satisfaction is high with trainers/assessors. However, males are less inclined to be satisfied (particularly the 19+ males). As a group the females rate trainers/assessors higher but the 19+ females are slightly less satisfied than the 16-18 females.

## WORK BASED LEARNING

WORK BASED LEARNERS ARE LESS LIKELY TO PERCEIVE THAT THEY HAD A CHOICE OF PROVIDER OR TRAINING PROGRAMME THAN LEARNERS IN OTHER PROVISION TYPES



Chart 2: Priorities for Action - Satisfaction with Quality of Teaching within WBL



Note: The axis on the grid is built around the scores given. They do not therefore start at zero. There are no mean satisfaction scores below 7 out of 10 and no mean importance scores below 5

### Targets for action

The factors appearing in the action quadrant are mainly connected with the management of the learning process:

- Support
- Good use of session time
- Feedback
- Target setting

Understanding you and how you like to learn  
Support and feedback are particular issues for male learners aged 19+.

**28** The grid above plots the different elements of teaching showing how important they are in driving satisfaction with the quality of teaching and how learners rated performance on each factor.

### Management factors

**29** Colleges receive lower ratings for management of WBL programmes than training providers or workplace provision. Timetabling and communication of changes to lesson timings are a particular weakness for colleges. Again male learners aged 19+ are the most critical group.

### Targets for action

- Managing timetables so that they suit the learner
- Communicating changes to lesson times
- Ensuring that enough teachers/tutors are available

### Making the right choice

**30** WBL learners are less likely to perceive that they had a choice of provider or training programme than learners in other provision types. They are far more likely than other learners to have sought advice from employers and from Careers Wales and to this extent some feel that their employers chose for them. WBL learners appear to have had the clearest expectations regarding what to expect from their learning programme.

### Targets for action

Given that WBL learners are heavily influenced, and to some extent restricted in their choices, by their employer, the target for action is for ELWVa and key partners to engage employers in a discussion regarding:

- The appropriateness of courses on offer to learners' needs
- Best practice in managing learners' expectations of what a course can offer

### Learning through the medium of Welsh

**31** WBL learners were the most likely to have been offered the opportunity to undertake some of their learning in Welsh (35%, rising to 53% in North Wales) and 37% have at least some Welsh medium element in their course. Just under 1 in 10 WBL learners (8%) express a preference for Welsh language tuition.

### Targets for action

The target for action is for ELWVa and key partners in the learning and skills sector to feed the findings from this research into their future plans for developing and promoting the supply of Welsh language provision.

### Facilities

**32** WBL learners only rated facilities if they were based at a college or provider. They are the least positive of any learner group about facilities.

### Targets for action

- Canteen/café
- Facilities provided for socialising with other learners
- Childcare facilities
- Other support services e.g. counselling advice on housing or financial support
- Sports facilities/equipment

## ADULT CONTINUING EDUCATION

### ACE LEARNERS EXPRESS THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF SATISFACTION



#### Accredited Adult Continuing Education (ACE)

- 33** ACE learners express the highest level of satisfaction of any learner group. Almost eight in ten (78%) declare themselves to be extremely or very satisfied with their overall learning experience. Levels of satisfaction are generally consistent across age bands but females are more likely to be satisfied than males.
- 34** Whilst teaching and management factors are the most important drivers of satisfaction (in line with the other provision types), learning and social facilities play a stronger role than is the case with other learner groups.

**Table 3: Relative influence of different elements of the learning experience on overall satisfaction in ACE**

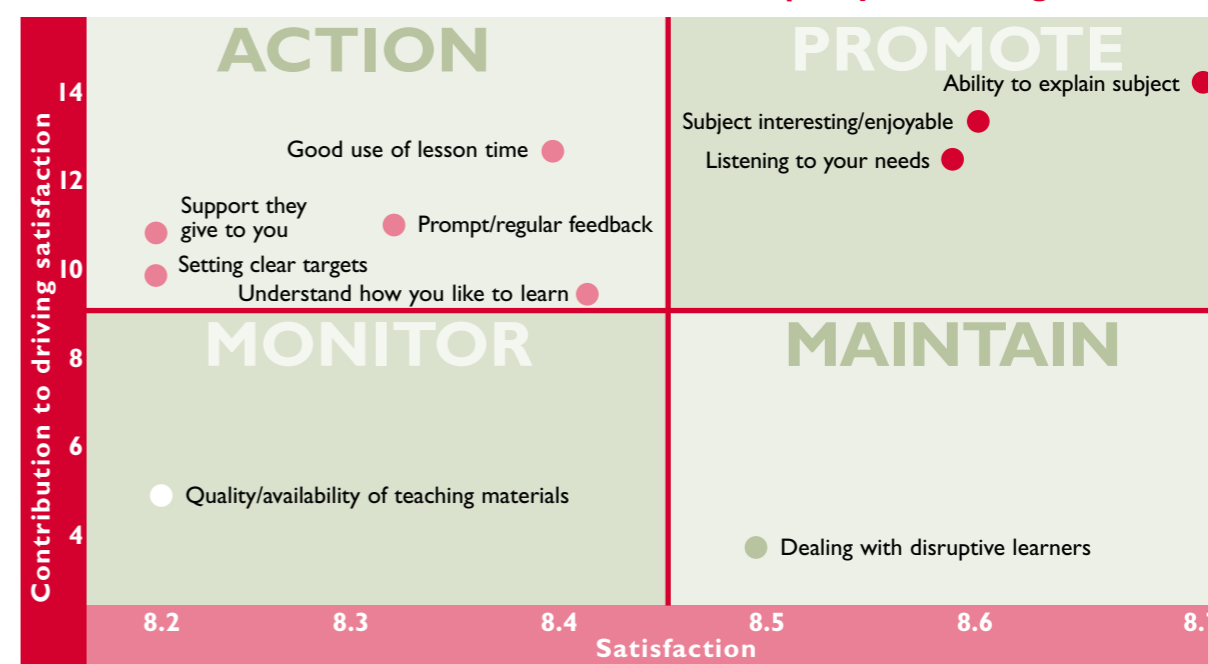
	%
Teaching	36
Management	34
Counselling/Childcare Facilities	6
Making the Right Choice	3
Social Facilities	10
Learning Facilities	11

Note: Don't know and 'other' responses are not included

#### Satisfaction with teaching

- 35** ACE learners gave extremely high scores for the quality of teaching: the proportion giving top ratings of 9 or 10 out of 10 is at least 10% higher than for the other provision types. The groups which give the highest ratings are older females (55+), those who left school early, are not working, and those who have a disability or learning difficulty. The lowest ratings were given by younger males (under 55) but even the ratings from this group were very positive.
- 36** The action grid opposite shows that the relative areas of weakness are broadly the same as those for FE and WBL - but given the fact that no mean performance scores are below 8.2 out of 10, it would be inaccurate to say that these require any remedial action. Perhaps it is important to point out the strength of this provision type as shown in the top right hand quadrant: the fact that learners find this form of learning interesting and empathetic.

**Chart 3: Priorities for Action - Satisfaction with quality of Teaching within ACE**



Note: The axis on the grid is built around the scores given. They do not therefore start at zero. There are no mean satisfaction scores below 7 out of 10 and no mean importance scores below 5

#### Targets for action

- Promote strengths

#### Management factors

- 37** All indicators received top ratings from approximately six in ten ACE learners. Again, younger male learners give slightly lower ratings for some factors - particularly those relating to timetabling.

#### Targets for action

- Managing timetables so that they suit the (younger) learner

#### Making the right choice

- 38** The vast majority of ACE learners are studying at their first choice of provider (79%) and following their first choice of course (92%). The proportion accessing their first choice provider is influenced by course timing - those studying in the evening are slightly more likely to be attending their first choice provider than daytime learners (81% vs 76%). Evening learners are more likely to cite 'convenience of location' as a key driver in choosing a provider.

## ADULT CONTINUING EDUCATION

ACE LEARNERS ARE MOST LIKELY TO EXPRESS A PREFERENCE FOR LEARNING IN WELSH

**39** ACE learners tend to rely on friends for advice - 31% cite this source. Possibly as a consequence of this they tend to have slightly fewer expectations of what the course will involve than learners in other provision types.

### Targets for action

- Make learners aware of any specialist advice available

### Learning through the medium of Welsh

**40** ACE learners are the most likely to express a preference for learning in Welsh (13% compared to 6% of FE learners and 8% of WBL learners). The preference was stronger among under 55 males (23%) and learners undertaking evening courses (18%). These groups are also the most likely to have been offered Welsh medium tuition.

**41** Around two in ten learners are receiving some of their learning in Welsh.

### Targets for action

The target for action is for ELWVa and key partners in the learning and skills sector to feed the findings from this research into their future plans for developing and promoting the supply of Welsh language provision.

### Facilities

**42** The majority of ACE learners are not able to rate facilities because they have not used or had access to them. Where they do give a rating, over half

give a top rating of 9 or 10 out of 10 for most facilities. However, provision of facilities was the only aspect on which some factors received a mean performance score below 8 out of 10. The facilities in question are listed below under targets for action.

### Targets for action

- Canteen/café
- Facilities for people with disabilities
- Library and learning centre
- Other specialist facilities/equipment relating to the course

### This report is an element of ELWVa's Customer Research Strategy. Future reports from the Strategy will include;

- School Sixth Form Survey - an examination of school sixth formers' views and satisfaction with their learning experience
- Employer Case Studies - an analysis of employers' views and attitudes to learning within the work place
- Individuals Panel - an investigation of attitudes to learning. The results will be used to produce a segmentation of individuals across Wales in relation to their attitudes and actions regarding learning
- Work Based Learners Leavers Survey (Pilot) - an exploration of the views of Work Based Learners who have left or completed a WBL programme in the last 3-6 months