

National School Sixth Form Survey for Wales 2004

SUMMARY REPORT

Customer Research Strategy – Report 2



Findings from the National School Sixth Form Survey for Wales 2004

NATIONAL SCHOOL SIXTH FORM SURVEY FOR WALES 2004

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NOP World

United Business Media

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 School Sixth form Survey for Wales 2004 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



ELWa recognises that to implement its ambitious modernisation agenda for post-16 learning, we must continue to understand learners

to ensure that they are at the heart of everything we do. That is why we are undertaking the Customer Research Strategy; this extensive research programme will help to inform our views of learner needs and satisfaction with the learning we fund. The information will be vital in enabling ELWa and its partners to continually enhance the range and quality of provision, as well as widening participation in learning.

The National School Sixth Form Survey for Wales builds upon the results from the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales, which looked at the opinions of learners in Further Education, Work Based Learning Programmes and accredited Adult Continuing Education. This survey is an initial, but significant step towards enhancing our understanding of school sixth formers' perceptions of their learning experience from their point of view. We received a very positive response from school sixth forms wanting to take part in the research and therefore our original plans for the survey had to be revised upwards. As a result, the report is based upon the views of over 5,700 students.

School sixth formers were asked for their views about their prior expectations of sixth form, whether they were studying with their first choice of provider and course, current levels of motivation, any problems that may have been encountered and overall satisfaction with the learning experience.

The survey results showed fairly high levels of satisfaction, but also highlighted areas for development. A programme of activity is being planned to consult further on both these results and the National Learner Satisfaction Survey results, with the learning sector, in order to investigate key issues and develop ways to share best practice and improve satisfaction levels for all learners.

In planning and implementing the research activity we have consulted 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 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 school sixth formers 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
September 2004

OVERALL SATISFACTION

AS A KEY ELEMENT OF THE CUSTOMER RESEARCH STRATEGY, ELW_a COMMISSIONED A RESEARCH PROJECT AMONGST SCHOOL SIXTH FORM STUDENTS TO ASSESS LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH THEIR LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Introduction and Background

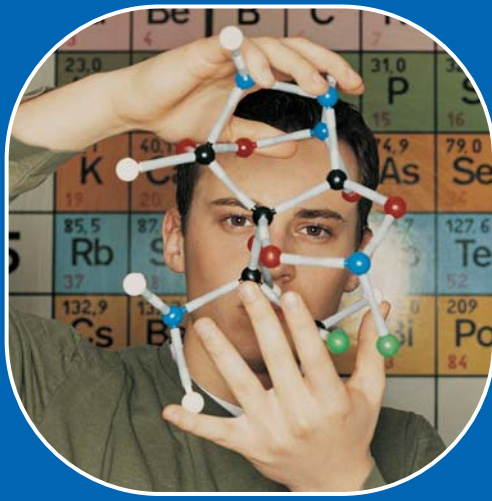
- 01 ELW_a's customers include all current learners and potential future learners – this includes all individuals, businesses, and communities across Wales. This sixth form research forms part of ELW_a's Customer Research Strategy which is part of the overall drive within ELW_a to:
 - encourage evidence based policy and demand led planning
 - bring the “customer” centre stage
- 02 As a key element of the Customer Research Strategy, ELW_a commissioned a research project amongst school sixth form students to assess levels of satisfaction with their learning experiences. This was very much an initial step towards understanding this customer group, and given the positive response amongst schools, it is envisaged that it will be the beginning of a longer term commitment to understanding and responding to sixth formers' views of their learning experiences.
- 03 The survey was designed to build upon the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales (NLSSW) 2003 which interviewed around 6,200 learners in Further Education (FE), accredited Adult Continuing Education (ACE), and Work Based Learning (WBL) programmes. School sixth formers were not included in this initial blanket survey because the telephone survey methodology was considered inappropriate for this learner group.

Methodology

- 04 Headteachers of all school sixth forms in ELW_a funded provision were written to and invited to take part in the research. ELW_a monitored responses, and a list of interested schools was issued to NOP.
- 05 Schools were contacted and recruited to take part in focus groups, ensuring that a broad range of scores from the Index of Multiple Deprivation were covered and that both Welsh and English medium schools were included across the four regions. All schools taking part in the focus groups were asked to distribute a self-completion questionnaire to their Year 12 and Year 13 students. In addition, schools that had shown an interest in being involved in the research, but were not involved in focus groups, were invited to participate in the quantitative self-completion element of the survey.
- 06 The topics covered by the Schools Sixth Form Survey overlap with the NLSSW conducted by NOP in 2003 on behalf of ELW_a. 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.

Overall Satisfaction

- 07 It is very encouraging that 85% of school sixth form students expressed some degree of satisfaction with their overall learning



experience. Indeed, almost half of students (45%) were extremely or very satisfied overall. Only a very small minority of students (6%) expressed dissatisfaction.

- 08** Comparison with the NLSSW showed that levels of satisfaction with the learning experience were lower amongst school sixth form students than amongst 16 to 18 year olds in FE or WBL (where around seven in ten in each group described themselves as extremely or very satisfied).
- 09** Satisfaction varied by location and by the language in which students were taught. Thus, 40% of sixth form students in South East Wales were extremely or very satisfied compared with 46% or more in other regions. Students at Welsh medium schools were more likely than their counterparts in English medium schools to describe themselves as extremely or very satisfied (51% versus 43% respectively).
- 10** Judging from the qualitative research, the main areas of dissatisfaction related to false expectations regarding the amount of freedom students would have, the amount of work they would have to do and the way their courses would be taught.
- 11** Whilst the majority of students (just under 90%) appeared to have had accurate expectations regarding the standard of work and the amount of work they would need to do, a small but significant minority did not.

Their main problems lay with adjusting to a higher level of work required and juggling coinciding deadlines. A quarter of students did not have their expectations met regarding teaching styles. Where experiences had not met expectations this appeared to be largely due to the difficult balance between expecting students to take responsibility for themselves and also maintaining a good support structure.

Making the Decision

- 12** Whether a student accessed their first choice of learning provider and course had an impact on overall satisfaction with the learning experience. So it is a positive finding that 73% of students were studying at their first choice of learning provider, whilst 77% were studying their preferred courses (i.e. subject and qualification). In the case of provider choice, a substantial minority of sixth form students had not considered another option, and this was more likely to be the case among school sixth form students than among 16 to 18 year old FE learners (18% versus 3%). This reflects the fact that familiarity was important when choosing which sixth form to attend. 85% of students said that a reason for choosing their sixth form was that they were already attending the school.
- 13** Year group, size of sixth form and region were influential in choice. Year 12 students were slightly more likely than those in Year 13 to say they were attending their first choice provider.

QUALITY OF TEACHING

OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH TEACHING WAS REASONABLY HIGH, WITH 50% OF THE STUDENTS SAYING THEY WERE EITHER EXTREMELY OR VERY SATISFIED.

Students at larger schools were also more likely to be studying at their first choice of provider. Students in Mid Wales were less likely than other students to have achieved their first choice provider or subjects.

- 14 The main reasons for not studying first choice of courses related to timetable clashes (45%), schools not providing preferred courses (34%) and advice from teachers not to follow first choices (13%).
- 15 Students were more likely to have sought advice about what to study (58%) than about where to study (34%), although 27% of students had not sought advice on either issue. The key sources of advice were teachers at school (70%), Careers Wales advisors in or out of school (69%) and parents/other family members (65%).
- 16 The general picture emerging from the qualitative research was that for many students, their choices at the end of Year 11 regarding where to study had been fairly automatic given most stayed on at the same school. This meant that they possibly did less research into their decision than they would have done if considering a change of provider. Choice of course was more likely to be influenced by the subject teachers' reputation.
- 17 A number of the students who sought advice from advisors found that it was not sufficiently tailored to them as individuals and felt that they were just being given the standard 'line' or

worse still, biased advice. This was disappointing for those who needed active help in order to develop their own thinking regarding course choices after Year 11 and career choices following completion of Year 13.

Quality of Teaching

- 18 School size and location were the main factors that influenced satisfaction with teaching: results were higher for schools in the South West, in rural areas and for Welsh medium schools. There was clearly some overlap between each of these variables.
- 19 Overall satisfaction with teaching was reasonably high, with half the students saying they were either extremely or very satisfied and a further 36% describing themselves as fairly satisfied.
- 20 Looking at aspects of satisfaction in more detail, the highest rated factors were:
 - ability to explain the subject (90% rating very/ fairly good)
 - making good use of lesson time (76% rating very/ fairly good)
 - the quality and availability of teaching materials (74% rating very/fairly good)
- 21 Amongst some of the lower rated factors were those which related to the more individual aspects of teaching, in particular 'understanding you and how you like to learn' which was rated very/fairly good by 61%, and factors relating to individual support and feedback (68% and 69% respectively).



- 22** These issues also emerged in the qualitative research, in which students affirmed that the best teachers:
- established a relationship with their sixth form students, built on mutual respect
 - used this relationship to understand students needs and vary teaching styles accordingly offering, for example more opportunities for discussion and class participation and providing information in a variety of forms e.g. diagrammatic forms rather than just notes
 - showed a real interest in their subject and showed that they cared about how the students do
 - recognised that some students needed support and positive encouragement (some teachers were considered to be too ready to fall back on sarcasm and humiliation when some students were struggling)
- 23** Students were able to cite many examples of good teaching, mostly relating to teachers who were putting energy into communicating their subject and giving them a lot of positive encouragement. The key for them seemed to lie in teachers taking advantage of the opportunities that sixth form offered in terms of having a more relaxed teaching environment and smaller classes to establish a rapport and be a bit more flexible than was possible in the lower school. That said, they were keenly aware that there needed to be a safety net for those who were struggling with the style of learning in sixth form and felt that the solution to this lay in more one-to-one help for those individuals.

- 24** In several of the groups, it was felt that younger teachers were better at varying their teaching styles than older ones.
- 25** The grid over the page 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 us those factors that are relatively high in importance but rated relatively low on performance.

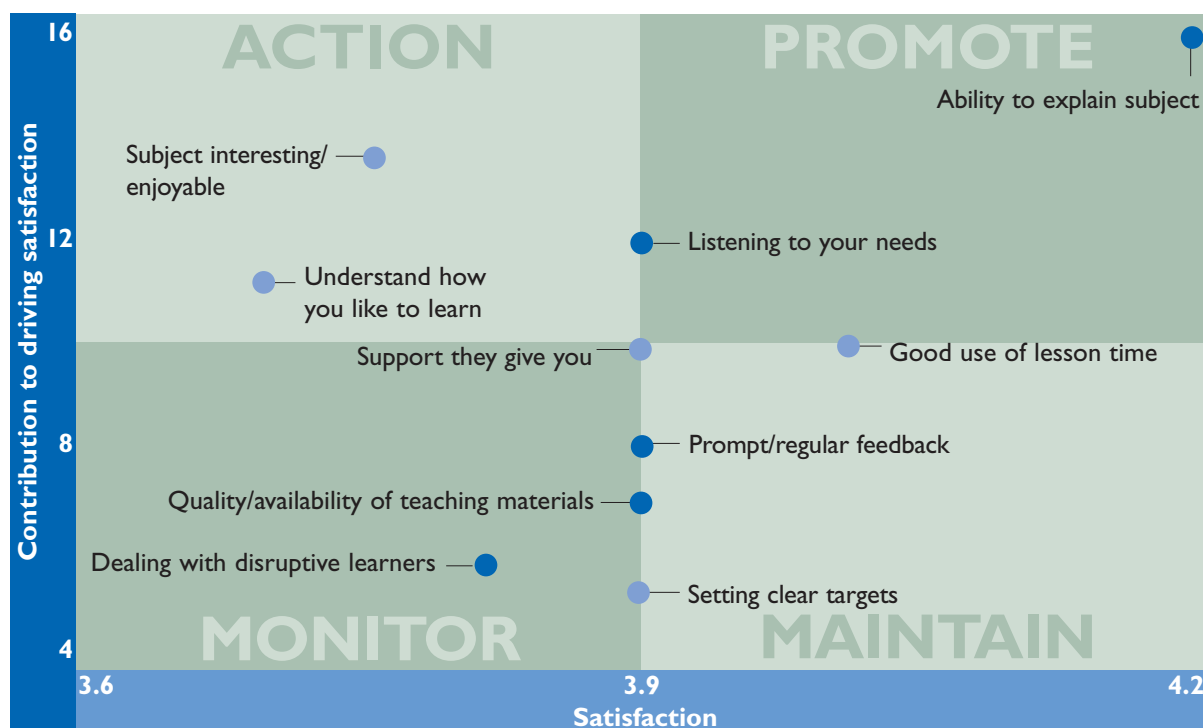
Problems and Motivation

- 26** Around 8 in 10 students experienced problems. The biggest single problem mentioned by 57% of those experiencing problems was maintaining motivation. The next most common problem was dealing with the standard of work, mentioned by 37%. This was largely to do with what some perceive as the 'leap' between GCSE and A levels.
- 27** Just over a quarter of students described themselves as 'not very' or 'not at all' motivated. Male students were less motivated than female students (29% versus 23%) and around a third of those who failed to get their first choice provider or course described themselves as not motivated. Motivation levels were marginally higher in Welsh medium schools than in English medium schools (just 22% not motivated versus 27% respectively).

PROBLEMS AND MOTIVATION

THE BIGGEST SINGLE PROBLEM MENTIONED BY 57% OF THOSE EXPERIENCING PROBLEMS WAS MAINTAINING MOTIVATION.

Chart I Priorities for Action – Satisfaction with Quality of Teaching within Sixth Forms



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 3.6 out of 10 and no mean importance scores below 4.

Targets for action

The factors falling in or on the cusp of the action quadrant are targets for action and include:

- making subjects interesting and enjoyable
- understanding you and how you like to learn
- listening to your needs
- support they give to you

Targets for action

Targeting action to drive up the satisfaction in these areas should help to raise students' overall levels of satisfaction with the quality of teaching.

The aspect of teaching that would benefit from continued promotion is (top right hand quadrant):

- ability to explain the subject



28 Motivated students attributed this to their strong desire to do well either generally or with a specific aim in mind, such as university (the latter was mentioned more by those in Year 13 (21%) than by those in Year 12 (6%)). Motivation also stemmed from those around them, both people who they perceived to be doing well and those who were perceived to be doing badly. From the qualitative work, it would appear that motivation to keep up with work stemmed in part from the encouragement they received and in part from fear of failure. Loss of motivation could stem from poor grades and from the unexpected pressure and intensity of sixth form study.

Learning in the Welsh Medium

- 29** 4% of students said that all their learning was in the Welsh medium, whilst a further tenth (8%) said that over half was in Welsh. The vast majority of students (75%), however, reported that none of their learning was in the Welsh medium.
- 30** Students were more likely to be learning in the Welsh medium in smaller schools and in North Wales.
- 31** Similar proportions of male and female students stated a preference for all or more of their learning to be in the Welsh medium (around 10%). Students in the most rural locations were more likely to state a preference for all or more learning in the Welsh medium (17% versus 10%).

32 Of those students who stated that 'all' of their lessons were taught in the Welsh medium, four in ten (38%) were happy with the balance of their teaching, but just under half (47%) stated a preference for all or more Welsh learning, whilst 12% wanted all or more English. As the proportion of lessons taught in Welsh decreased, so did the proportion of students stating a preference for all or more Welsh learning.

Conclusions

- 33** Many of the themes emerging from this research hinge on the fact that this group of 16 to 18 year olds are in the throes of making a transition and there are tensions between providing the independence and individual respect which they seek and providing the support and the encouragement which they need. The picture emerging is generally positive.
- 34** Where provision falls down, however, this is generally felt to be due to not recognising an individual's needs, for example when providing advice or dealing with someone who is struggling to keep up with the standard of work. This also carried through into teaching styles where students become impatient with teachers who only use the 'chalk and talk' method and fail to offer opportunities for participation.

CONCLUSIONS

‘ THERE ARE TENSIONS BETWEEN PROVIDING THE INDEPENDENCE AND INDIVIDUAL RESPECT WHICH STUDENTS SEEK AND PROVIDING THE SUPPORT AND THE ENCOURAGEMENT WHICH THEY NEED. ’

35 At one level students emerge as seeking the opportunity to demonstrate their greater maturity and interest in the subject. At another level, they require a good deal of direction and positive feedback in order to maintain their levels of motivation, reflecting the transition they are making between schoolchild and adult.

This report is an element of ELWa’s Customer Research Strategy. Future reports from the Strategy will include:

- **National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales** – a comprehensive survey of post 16 learners’ satisfaction with their learning experiences, covering individuals in Further Education, Work Based Learning programmes and accredited Adult Continuing Education.
- **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.