# Learner Satisfaction

## PROVIDER WORKSHOP REPORT

Customer Research Strategy - Report 6

# Contents

# 1.    Background to the Satisfaction Workshops

The National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 generated a vast amount of information about individuals' views of their experiences of learning in Work Based Learning (WBL), Further Education (FE) and accredited Adult and Community Education (ACE).  In addition, the National School Sixth Form Survey for Wales 2004 investigated the views of Year 12 and Year 13 students and also generated a large volume of information relating to learners' views about the quality of provision.

ELWa was keen to ensure that the outputs from the surveys were widely disseminated amongst learning providers, and that those involved in the front line delivery of learning were given the chance to debate the results and share best practice.  To this end, a series of workshops was scheduled with providers between February and April 2005.

## 1.1    Aims and objectives

The workshops had two key objectives:

a. *To disseminate the survey findings*
- Explain the purpose of the satisfaction research and how the findings may be used
- Build confidence in, and an understanding of, the research findings

b. *To explore ideas/best practice*
- Enable the key partners to acknowledge and understand the potential use of the research findings to help drive up quality standards in their own services
- Stimulate idea generation
- Share best practice in an environment in which participants are able to discuss openly their ideas and opinions with their peers

In order to meet these objectives, the satisfaction workshops were designed as highly interactive sessions including a presentation of the findings and group discussion sessions around pre-determined themes (the discussion guides for

each provider type are included as an Appendix).   In total, five workshops were arranged and these were restricted to particular types of learning provider, as follows:

- Work Based Learning, St Asaph, North Wales, 8th February,

- School Sixth Forms, Port Talbot, SW Wales, 21st February

- Work Based Learning, Cardiff, SE Wales, 28th February

- School Sixth Forms, Llandudno, North Wales, 8th March

- Further Education and Adult and Community Education, Llandrindod Wells, Mid Wales, 5th April

As well as provider representatives, a range of other interested parties were invited to the workshops, including representatives from Estyn, Careers Wales, Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), Workers' Education Association (WEA) and Fforwm.   In total between 23 and 50 delegates attended each workshop, and details of attendance are provided at Appendix I.

## 1.2    Format

The workshops were hosted by senior ELWa representatives and were facilitated by NOP according to predetermined topic guides.  The workshops concentrated on providing an overview of learner satisfaction and the drivers of satisfaction. This was achieved via a presentation of key survey findings during the morning session, lasting in the region of 40 minutes.  The presentation was followed by a question and answer session, during which delegates were encouraged to both question and comment on the results.

The remainder of the day was devoted mainly to the discussion of key topics relevant to increasing satisfaction and reducing dissatisfaction within breakout groups.  The content of the discussion groups was refined over the series of workshops, but generally focused on:

- pre entry decision making and advice
- marketing

- learner support
- complaints procedure
- quality of teaching/training
- management of learning
- future satisfaction surveys[1]

The content of the breakout sessions varied by provider type, and was guided by a senior NOP executive familiar with the survey results. These sessions were tape recorded (after obtaining agreement from delegates) in order that a report of delegates' views might be compiled. The final element of each day was a plenary session where NOP executives reported back the key issues raised in each discussion, focussing on current problems and solutions. Delegates at this point had the chance to raise further questions before the day was closed by a senior member of the ELWa team.

Quotations within this report are a transcript of comments made by delegates during the workshop sessions.

## 1.3 Evaluation of the Satisfaction Workshops

All delegates were invited to complete an evaluation form to feed back their views on the format and content of the workshop and to register any other comments. The evaluation form also offered participants the chance to say if they wished to be contacted by ELWa in the future regarding the workshops and their subject matter. Appendix II provides a summary of this evaluation exercise, and shows that the objectives of the workshops were met in terms of:

- Over nine in ten (93%) of those who completed evaluation sheets felt better informed about the issues covered and 89% felt the results could inform their day to day work.

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[1] *'future satisfaction surveys' was primarily a feature of the second Sixth Form workshop and the FE/ ACE workshop*

- The nine in ten (93%) of those who completed evaluation sheets felt that the relevance of the break out sessions was good or very good.

## 2.    Summary of discussions

The following sections give an account, in summary, of all the provider workshops that took place. The issues raised have been separated into those that are common across all provider types and secondly, the issues or details which are pertinent or particular to one type of provider. This section serves as a summary, the main discussion and detail is explored in the separate sections that follow. There is a separate section for each type of provision (Work Based Learning, Further Education, Adult and Community Education and School Sixth Forms).

### 2.1    Key themes across all satisfaction workshops

| Issue/Policy Area | Detailed Comments |
|---|---|
| **Parity of esteem/perceptions and advice pre entry**: Most workshops discussed the problem that there is an issue with parity of esteem. It was felt that many young people and parents (other influencers) held the perception that the academic route was best for all and that the vocational route was a poor substitute. It was widely felt by many providers (across all sectors) that advice at the pre entry stage could be more impartial. | Whilst some providers felt that misconceptions about vocational training were being addressed within schools and that the full range of options (academic and vocational) were presented, other providers criticised schools for limiting access to the most able students and offering partial advice. FE providers were experiencing negative perceptions of college amongst parents, teachers and other advisors to school students. <br><br> All providers agreed that parents played a crucial role in terms of influencing the decisions young learners made about their future, however, parents often lacked 'complete' information about post 16 options.  They wanted what was 'best' for their child, and where the child's ability allowed, this was often the academic route via the School Sixth Form.  Therefore, all providers felt that as part of any move to address the parity of esteem debate it was essential to keep parents central. WBL and FE providers wanted to gain access to students and parents at Year 9 or Year 10, and to have access to students at all ability levels, rather than just those traditionally routed into vocational training. <br><br> Solutions to this topic centred around the proposals within the 14-19 Agenda, in which there was a greater emphasis on providing students with advice about all options, vocational and academic.  It was thought in some groups that schools had already embraced this concept but others lagged behind, and providers in FE and WBL were keen to see this imbalance |

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| | addressed.  There was a call for ELWa to champion this requirement by working alongside schools and Careers Wales. ELWa was also seen as having a role to play in marketing post 16 options to school students and addressing the negative perceptions of FE/WBL. For FE providers this would mean facilitating access to schools in order that colleges could gain access to students of all abilities. ELWa was also seen as possibly being able to arrange milk-round type events for colleges to assist access.<br><br>However, all providers agreed that the current system of funding post 16 education was unhelpful. Different providers were often competing for the same students in order to attract and maintain their funding in the future.  Until this fundamental issue was addressed, competition amongst providers as opposed to co-operation would continue to be a feature. |

| Issue/Policy Area | Detailed Comments |
|---|---|
| **Funding**:<br><br>Comments on funding issues were widescale and central to much of the debate, either directly or indirectly. Main areas of discussion across all providers were the following:<br><br>• Remuneration and reward and how this was impacting quality and the ability to provide wider support as well as learning.<br>• Almost all discussion about staff development centred on the need for more funding to enable all teachers/tutors to progress with their role.<br><br>Each sector would then have particular issues relating to their own contracts/budgets/ funding regimes (see comments on the right). | *For WBL other funding issues included:*<br>• More flexible funding: The Maximum Duration of Funding (MDF) model was not working where learners had specific learning needs that could not be achieved when a time restriction was imposed. There was a call for special dispensations.<br>• More funding for piloting best practice initiatives in WBL delivery.<br>• There was a problem with attracting good quality staff given rates of pay and the stressful nature of the job. This was a particular issue in some industries/ sectors where the nature of the work necessitated shift patterns (e.g. Care) or where potential staff could earn more by doing the job themselves (e.g. Plumbing). Possible solutions given were longer contracts, salary review/comparisons to be done on a national scale, continuous professional development, mentoring schemes, reducing administration/bureaucracy.<br>• Some providers thought that more money should be paid to trainees per week whilst training.<br><br>*For Further Education funding issues included:*<br>• Improving the quality of teaching was seen to be dependent on continuing to offer development opportunities for all staff, whether full time or part time. Much was being done in this area, for example, the identification of 'super tutors' who would share best practice with their peer group, and the formation of individual learning plans. However, the issue of part time staff accessing development sessions was an ongoing problem.<br>• Providers felt that arranging mentors for staff was a good means of improving their teaching styles, but there were issues surrounding their ability to fund this level of tutor support.<br><br>*For Adult and Community Education funding issues included:*<br>• A desire to see more input from ELWa in terms of researching the demand for courses in local areas. This proved time consuming and expensive to providers who were already operating within limited budgets, given the financial constraints of keeping |

| | some courses going in rural areas. |
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| | *For School Sixth Forms funding issues included:* |
| | • Representatives from School Sixth Forms pointed out that FE colleges were assigned a budget for advertising and promotion and that they felt unable to compete with this level of marketing. |
| | • It was remarked that the funding structures for post 16 learning needed to be addressed, in order that different providers were not competing for the same students. |
| | • There had been an increase in staff time to deal with one to one support. There was some resistance to moves within schools to pass on the pastoral elements of the teaching role to specialists, as part of the new Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) payments.  Many felt that a pastoral element was integral to the role of all teachers, as often students preferred to speak to someone that knew them.  The implication of TLR payments seemed to be that the pastoral element of teaching would be removed and this was seen by some as a step in the wrong direction. |

| Issue/Policy Area | Detailed Comments |
|---|---|
| **Collaboration:** Collaboration is a key feature of the 14-19 Agenda and ELWa's strategies, and aims to keep the learner centre stage in terms of the options open to them, whilst reducing duplication where it occurs in a local area. | The providers across all workshops reported examples of collaborative working, both in terms of success stories and less positive experiences. There was a feeling amongst some School Sixth Form representatives that perhaps they should focus on academic qualifications rather than diversify.  However, providers in FE and WBL were frustrated by this approach, as in practice it left them with less academically able students. In some areas, there were practical barriers to working in collaboration, most notably location in rural areas.  However, providers were keen to see best practice shared in terms of innovative solutions, such as distance learning, video conferencing, etc. |
| **Welsh language**: Supply and demand of Welsh language provision was discussed and raised as an issue for all provider types. | This was thought to be a particular challenge to students wishing to take a vocational route, where there were only limited courses available and / or limited assessors with Welsh language skills. When discussing if demand was met the picture was not thought to be clear. Some providers reported a lack of demand amongst students due to a genuine lack of interest, whilst others felt that a lack of confidence was at the core of learners' reluctance to use the Welsh language in their post 16 learning /training. It was felt that more research should be conducted into these issues before conclusions be drawn. |
| **Future learner surveys:** Some of the workshops discussed how useful learner surveys were to the individual provider and the sector as a whole. | Providers generally agreed that canvassing views about learning experiences was useful and helped to shape provision.  However, there was also an agreement that comparisons across provider types had to be made with caution, and that publishing results without sufficient accompanying explanation left providers in a vulnerable position in relation to policy makers.  Therefore, providers wished to proceed with caution, and were more in favour of comparisons within sector. Providers gave many and varied suggestions for future satisfaction surveys (see section 2.2 onwards), but one key theme that emerged was the demand for local data to better inform the provider planning processes. |

## 2.2   Key Themes Specific to Work Based Learning

| Issue/Policy Area | Detailed Comments | Conclusions |
|---|---|---|
| **Frameworks:** There have been many changes to frameworks in a very short period of time. A period of 'bedding down' and stability was desirable. Providers were also eager to review the frameworks and/or have more flexibility in terms of what was being offered to learners and employers. They were finding that the inflexibility was a 'turn off' for many employers in particular. Frameworks were seen as devaluing NVQs and as a barrier for older learners. | It was noted that some of the current frameworks were hard to sell to employers, who were interested only in achieving a recognised qualification for their trainees (e.g. an NVQ) in the shortest possible time and with the least disruption to their business. They felt that they needed help informing and selling the concept. Ideas discussed were:<br><br>• Flexibility/content of the frameworks should be evaluated (by ELWa and SSCs in consultation with providers, employers and learners).<br>• Possibility of ELWa to launch a marketing campaign to promote the frameworks amongst learners, employers, and in particular, to inform Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) of the benefits of training.<br>• Providers wanted more lead-in time from ELWa to deal with changes to frameworks. Specifically, they wanted access to advisors at ELWa who were fully informed about the frameworks and who did not need to signpost the provider elsewhere for answers. Currently, however, it is the responsibility of each SSC to update providers about framework changes. | Providers were unanimous that some means of integrating the frameworks was required so that they best met the needs of the learner and the employer. This might mean introducing flexibility in terms of the number of elements required for completion of the framework in some sectors, and offering more of a roll on/ roll off system to facilitate the training process. |
| **Role of assessor:** It was mentioned by most providers that the role of assessor had changed over the years. The administration had become over burdensome. | It was felt that the assessor or trainers simply did not have the time to do what they do best. This, amongst other issues such as remuneration, was leading to disenchantment with their role and many leaving the profession. Providers were not critical of paperwork, in fact, they respected the need for it but they felt that a line should be drawn and that perhaps the current level of bureaucracy | The amount of paperwork and administration should be reviewed. If the level of administration could be reduced then perhaps providers needed to think of ways in which some tasks |

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|  | had overstepped that mark. | could be reallocated to allow the assessor more contact time with the trainee. |
| **Young learners:** Providers found that they were spending far more time dealing with the social and behavioural problems of this group rather than progressing their training. | Young learners aged 16 to 18 were a particular problem for providers, as they were often directed towards WBL programmes in order that they would remain eligible for Job Seekers Allowance.  Providers felt that current benefits systems only compounded the problem. Young male learners were deemed to be a particular problem by some providers.  This was deemed to be a reflection of their home and educational backgrounds, as well as reflecting a wider cultural trend in which this group appeared less engaged with learning. | There were few solutions offered by providers. However, they believed that better advice to young, male learners at an earlier age about options would be useful. Expectations needed to be clear. |
| **Careers Wales:** Feedback from some providers suggested that not all advisors were fully up to date, nor did they fully understand what WBL entailed. | Many providers were working with Careers Wales to update advisors on the content of frameworks and to enable them to advise potential learners appropriately.  Another issue for providers was the perception of a high turnover of staff in Careers Wales, thus making the process of information sharing more difficult. | Providers wanted Careers Wales to ensure that advisors were up to date with changes to the frameworks and that they fully understood all the options available to learners. |

| Issue/Policy Area | Detailed Comments | Conclusions |
|---|---|---|
| **Inspection and assessment**: Providers felt that there was little recognition of the specific challenges they faced with their client group, not least the fact that they were dealing with employers as well as learners. | The current inspections system made comparisons across all post 16 provision without acknowledging the different nature of the provision, namely: <br><br> • Reasons for early leavers were generally beyond the control of the provider (personal and employment related). <br> • The profile of the client group – traditionally lower achievers needing much greater support. <br> • The greater length of time with which a typical learner was engaged with a provider. <br> • The fact that a 'completion' relied on **all** parts of a framework being achieved. <br> • Generally there was a call for more recognition of the 'distance travelled' as opposed to rigid assessment based on framework completion. | Providers requested a system of assessment that acknowledged the differences between post 16 providers: <br> • Review the inclusion of early leavers in target calculations. <br> • Review what denotes a 'completion' across sectors/ levels; allow a measure of 'distance travelled' rather than full framework completion. |
| **Maximum duration of funding:** Some providers felt that this system of funding was proving detrimental, particularly in the case of learners that needed extra support. | In some cases the Maximum Duration of Funding model had been a barrier to success for learners, as all the elements of a framework had to be completed within a specified time in order to be funded by ELWa.  There were calls for special dispensations in the cases of learners who, with additional time and support, would be able to complete their learning. | Providers requested a system whereby there was sufficient flexibility in the funding model to enable them to deliver a better quality of service to those learners most in need of support. |

## 2.3    Key Themes Specific to Further Education

| Issue/Policy Area | Detailed Comments | Conclusions |
|---|---|---|
| **Induction**:<br>In FE the learner had often spent a great deal of time out of the learning environment. A phase of re-adjustment was needed and much valued. | Providers in FE felt that induction procedures were generally sound.  However, there were sometimes issues with older, part time learners who didn't see the value in preparation sessions.  These learners were often holding down jobs, as well as having responsibilities outside of work. | Delegates felt that it was essential that these people were prepared for their learning, in order to improve retention rates and to make sure that their choice of learning was right for them. Induction and clarity of advice were key to ensure learners understood all possible routes open to them when making decisions. Clarity of advice was seen as key for all age groups (not just the younger learner). |
| **Supporting the learner:**<br>There were systems of support in place for learners, but these relied heavily on the abilities and skills of their tutor. It was acknowledged that these varied across tutors and not all were equipped with the confidence or skills to deal with learners with behavioural or social problems. | Access to funding for staff development varied.  For example, part time tutors in FE were not paid to attend development sessions outside their teaching hours.  However, these tutors tended to be dealing with groups often in need of additional support (i.e. part time adult learners) to encourage them to continue with their learning or to build their confidence.<br>Young learners aged 16 to 18 were a particular issue for FE providers, as they were often in college as a result of low achievement in school and few employment options in their local area.  This was deemed to be an increasing problem and providers found that they were spending far more time dealing with the social and behavioural problems of this group than progressing their learning. | Staff development is key and it should be more widely recognised by ELWa and Estyn that extra pastoral support, particularly for the younger learners, should be targeted and professional. Training the trainer was thought to be critical for increasing satisfaction and retention levels amongst learners and job satisfaction amongst teachers/tutors. |

| Issue/Policy Area | Detailed Comments | Conclusions |
|---|---|---|
| **Future learner surveys**: Question areas that would be useful in such surveys were discussed. | Providers had a variety of suggestions for and queries about future surveys, as follows:<br><br>• Including a question about recommendation, e.g. 'would you recommend this college/ course to your friends?'<br>• Covering the subject of facilities.<br>• Taking into account learner priorities when assessing the gap between their expectations and their actual experiences – which expectation was it most important to meet?<br>• Including questions relating to health and safety, although these tended to be covered by in-house surveys including the question could cause problems if policies varied across providers.<br>• Equal opportunities – making the survey sufficiently large to be able to consider whether different learner groups have different experiences. Some providers stated that this was indicated in their in-house learner surveys.<br>• Larger sample sizes to draw out findings from the survey for specific groups of students that providers know have problems, for example, retention rates on courses such as construction.<br>• Including under 16s in the survey, given the 14 – 19 Agenda.<br>• Aspirations, what do learners want to do after their learning event? | ELWa should disseminate these thoughts to providers who are/may be undertaking their own surveys. ELWa should also consider these areas for inclusion in any learner related survey undertaken in the future. |

|  | • Verbatim comment was felt to be particularly powerful and important in conveying the complex issues to some policy makers who were remote from the learner. |  |
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## 2.4    Key Themes Specific to Adult and Community Education

| Issue/Policy Area | Detailed Comments | Conclusions |
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| **Engaging potential learners**: A key issue was how providers engaged with their potential client group. Learners tended to be older adults, lacking confidence or qualifications. | Engaging potential learners required a variety of approaches, but only limited funds were available for this purpose. In addition, in rural areas, there was the challenge of finding 9 or 10 learners to make running a course financially viable. Local information relating to demand was key. | Assistance from ELWa was deemed useful in terms of funding marketing initiatives and assisting in the process of ascertaining the demand for different courses. It was also thought that additional funding/subsidies from ELWa was the only solution for putting on courses with low numbers of applicants. |
| **Supporting the Learner**: There were systems of support in place for learners, but these relied heavily on the abilities and skills of their tutor. Some tutors were more skilled in this area than others and access to staff development varied. | These tutors tended to be dealing with groups often in need of additional support (i.e. part time adult learners) to encourage them to continue with their learning or to build their confidence. However, ACE tutors were not generally paid to attend development sessions outside their teaching hours. | Addressing this issue was seen as key in promoting better quality learner engagement, particularly for part time learners in accredited ACE. |
| **Quality of teaching:** Within ACE, there were concerns that learners did not recognise when they were being given feedback and that this might have impacted on their satisfaction score. | There had been less progress than in the FE sector with individual learning plans (due to time and therefore funding issues). Indeed, it was reported that there was a degree of 'tutor resistance' to formalising procedures in this way and that introducing this approach would require careful positioning with some tutors (as well as additional funding). | As already mentioned, tutor development was seen as important in ensuring that learners were adequately supported and to ensure that tutors were kept up to date in terms of developments in learning styles, etc. This was another request for more input/budget/allowance for 'training the trainer'. |

| Issue/Policy Area | Detailed Comments | Conclusions |
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| **Future learner surveys**: Question areas that would be useful in such surveys were discussed. | Providers had a variety of suggestions for and queries about future surveys, as follows:<br>• Questions about the structure of courses and what structures would suit learners best (in terms of timing, frequency etc).<br>• Identifying the length of time between thinking about doing the course and actually doing it and investigating the final trigger for learning (it was thought this would help in terms of marketing).<br>• Including a measure of value for money.<br>• What courses were desired at a local level?  It was acknowledged however that this could be difficult using survey methods and it was more sensible to use other information gathering techniques e.g. outreach work/feedback community workers. | ELWa should disseminate these thoughts to providers who are/may be undertaking their own surveys. ELWa should also consider these areas for inclusion in any learner related survey undertaken in the future. |

## 2.5    Key Themes Specific to School Sixth Forms

| Issue/Policy Area | Detailed Comments | Conclusions |
|---|---|---|
| **Induction**: Schools offered a variety of induction programmes, including taster sessions and interviews. | There were efforts to involve parents at this stage in order that students had additional support at a time of choice and change.  Many initiatives were time intensive and took up curriculum time; whilst providers supported the methods, a number felt they could no longer afford to resource this time in the future. | There was a request for best practice to be shared. |
| **Vocational learning and collaboration:** There were discussions about whether it was viable for schools to provide more vocational routes and the associated need for additional facilities this would entail. | Some felt that School Sixth Forms should remain focused on an academic route, rather than diversify and others were keen on more collaboration. There was a feeling that more schools were embracing a collaborative approach (although the logistical issues remained). | There was a demand for better sharing of best practice between and within provider groups in terms of creative solutions for collaboration. |
| **Supporting the learner**: Providers were generally very proud of the systems they had in place for supporting the learner. However, there were many comments relating to how much work teachers were doing in supporting learners with problems outside school. Providers cited | The continuity of contact between the learner and the school was positive and aided the feeling of belonging.  This also assisted in terms of achievement - examples were given where the support offered in a small sixth form environment positively influenced students' levels of achievement. Support structures were in place (e.g. Personal and Social Education (PSE)) and these were compulsory but were not investigated in the survey.  It was felt that these had a big impact on learners and that these were very positive aspects | There needs to be a review of resources and funding so that learners' needs in terms of support can be achieved.

In addition, more sharing of best practice amongst schools in relation to maximising learner support (e.g. how best to deal with mental health issues) may provide new models for dealing with what is seen as an |

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| various examples of the problems that were experienced by students, including a lack of parental support regarding their decision to stay on, money pressures and having to work to support learning etc. | of the sixth form.<br><br>Providers were committed to helping students and worked on the basis of using their established relationship with learners to identify problems early. However, problems such as a lack of parental support and mental health problems were becoming more prevalent amongst students, requiring more staff time, without any additional funding to meet this need.  Some teachers mentioned the proposed changes to teachers' pay (Teaching and Learning Responsibility payments) which they interpreted as impacting on the pastoral element of a teachers' role. This met with resistance, as many felt that pastoral support was an essential part of teaching and could not be handed over wholesale to specialists. | ever-growing challenge. |
| **Future learner surveys:** Question areas that would be useful in such surveys were discussed. | There were strong feelings that different types of post 16 provision should not be compared to each other. It was felt that not all interested parties would understand their context or appreciate the differences between the types of provision.  ELWa was criticised for the manner in which the results had been made public. There was a suspicion that ELWa wished to use the results to criticise sixth form provision.<br><br>Putting these reservations to one side, providers generally supported learner surveys. Suggestions for future surveys were many and included: | Providers were embracing customer research but were unhappy about comparisons being made between different types of provider and criticised ELWa for their dissemination of the results of the survey.  In addition, amongst a variety of ideas regarding the content of the survey, providers suggested that it would be appropriate to survey parents and to follow up early leavers in future surveys. |

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| | • Amending the wording of one of the measures. It was felt that 'making the subject interesting and enjoyable for you' was not a useful measure, as providers felt that 'enjoyable' was too strong a description that would result in lower ratings.<br>• Investigate interest in classes delivered outside of school hours in minority subjects such as French and Music.<br>• Collaboration – explore to what extent students' choices about attending the sixth form would have been affected if more subject options were offered via collaborative arrangements.<br>• More generally, to what extent the subject choice on offer influenced the decision to choose the sixth form; what other factors might have affected that choice?<br>• Explore availability and waiting times for careers advice as well as quality.<br>• Seek students' views on the support structures in place within school.<br>• Investigate the students' views about the quality of facilities.<br>• Questions relating to mental health; the extent to which students felt under pressure/stressed.<br>   • Providers were keen that future surveys should provide results by level of learning, i.e. foundation, advanced, etc. | |

# 3. Work Based Learning

## 3.1 Overview

Work Based Learning includes provision from privately run training providers and courses offered by Further Education colleges. The triangular relationship between the provider, the learner and the employer, presented WBL providers with some specific challenges that differed to those of other post 16 providers. The intricacy of managing the learning experience for all parties involved was not always recognised. All providers felt that more often than not, they were dealing with a low achievement group in terms of academic ability and low motivation due to social problems.

Indeed, one delegate brought along a selection of pen portraits to describe typical learners in this group, all of whom were contending with varying degrees of social problems (some very severe), which were interfering with their ability to achieve.

Nevertheless, there was an incredibly strong commitment amongst providers to ensure that learners gained as much benefit as possible from the opportunities available and to see progress amongst all those with whom they engaged. Indeed, where learners were not succeeding in WBL, efforts were made to direct them to basic skills support in order that they remained engaged with the learning process.

The main issues for providers in this sector revolved around parity of esteem, bureaucracy and monitoring, funding and a belief that whilst the frameworks are good, there needs to be more flexibility.

## 3.2 Pre Entry

### 3.2.1 Marketing, Advice and Guidance

Providers were presented with the results from the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 that were relevant to WBL. Thus, when considering the topics of marketing, advice and guidance, delegates were reminded of the sources of advice used by WBL learners and how these influenced decisions.

For reference, for WBL the main sources of advice and their perceived usefulness scores were:

| Sources of advice<br>Base: All WBL respondents (1000) | % | Mean quality score<br>(out of 4) |
|---|---|---|
| Employer | 55 | 3.5 |
| Careers Wales | 43 | 3.4 |
| Parents or family | 39 | 3.3 |
| Friends | 37 | 3.4 |
| Tutors at provider | 36 | 3.6 |
| School careers advisor | 33 | 3.4 |

Multiple responses allowed. Quality scores relate to the usefulness of each advice source where 1 is 'not at all useful' and 4 is ' very useful'.

Advice sources were just one element of the discussion; delegates also debated the wider role of parents and schools in decision making, the influence of Careers Wales and the ways in which employers were engaged at the pre entry stage. Where possible, solutions to any perceived problems were sought, and these are noted throughout the following sections.

### 3.2.1.1 Schools and Parents

Discussions tended to focus on the issue of attracting young learners into work based programmes. The profile of WBL in schools was deemed to be low and there was much discussion about the ability to influence younger learners (and their parents) whilst they were in the school system. Providers felt that the lack of a parity of esteem between the different options for learners at age 16 meant that they were at a disadvantage in terms of attracting more academically able learners into WBL. Providers felt that there was an underlying assumption amongst teachers, Careers Wales and parents that doing an apprenticeship meant that someone was an 'under-achiever'. Addressing these attitudes was seen as critical in terms of raising the profile of the vocational route for young people.

There was a feeling that the low profile of WBL related to the routes that parents and teachers had taken through education and training; many of them would only be familiar with their own personal, academic experience.

*'Schools, I think, are biased - they tend to push the least able people towards work based training and that's wrong.'*

*'They come out of… university, they've done their degree and go straight back into teaching.'*

*'They haven't got a clue.'*

*'The reality is parents have got their own history of learning. If parents themselves have gone through a more academic route, they're quite closed off and I think there's an issue here to actually help parents at an early stage.'*

However, funding issues also muddied the picture, with providers believing that current funding mechanisms meant that it was in the interests of the school to keep students on in the sixth form, even when this may not be the best route for the student:

*'I think the problem area… is the fact that a hell of lot of school teachers are giving advice initially and especially if you've got a sixth form and then it's a bums on seats situation… (*Providers*) very rarely see the young people that may go on to do A Levels and university and yet those are the people certainly in engineering we're looking for so that's a negative rather than a positive in some respects. It'd be a very dedicated teacher to say "yes, don't stay in my sixth form where we're going to get more money for bums on seats, but you go into engineering" or whatever it is.'*

*'I think it's coming from the government actually isn't it, because they've a big push on increasing staying on rates at school, A Levels, going to university; (*this*) is high on their agenda. I think WBL has got left behind. I think in the Assembly you know we heard a lot from the minister about School Sixth Forms and … very, very rarely hear them saying anything about WBL.'*

Some providers felt that school children at Year 9 should be presented with all the options open to them, with a fair assessment of the best routes into certain occupations. For some, this would mean work based learning as opposed to the traditionally academic route of sixth form followed by university. In some cases, providers felt that the very real advantages of WBL as a cheaper option for the individual to undertake further education were not being sufficiently emphasised:

*'That's an area that's very much undersold you know and particularly in these days of fees and … the fact that they're getting paid when they do their training, they can still go on to higher education and not be liable for tuition fees.'*

*'We use a case study … had a young person came to us at 16, Modern Apprenticeship (*MA*)…so at the age of 20 this person as in employment, obviously getting paid a good salary as an engineer and getting HNC on a Modern Apprenticeship.  The company then sponsored him two years to go to college on a day release basis to get his degree to top it up, so by the age of 22 he had a degree; his friends who'd gone to university in comparison were £12,000 in debt and they were looking for jobs.'*

A number of areas for action were identified, including access to schools and influencing the advice provided within schools and to parents (a much wider challenge). It was acknowledged that the 14-19 Pathways initiative would be important in this process, involving teachers, Careers Wales and learning coaches.  Overall, providers felt that an environment of collaboration with schools rather than competition for young people should be encouraged, and indeed, in some areas this was already taking place:

*'There is competition for the pupil and I think what we have to do is find an environment where…(*the school is*) collaborating with us as opposed to competing...at the end of the day it's all based on funding so we need to be able to collaborate so that nobody is out of pocket….'*

*'I know a lot of advice has been given where the youngster is secondary and that can't be right, that can't be right at all, no way.  I mean we've got a thing now … it is a booklet called "A Parity of Esteem" and lots of it in there is very, very sound but I don't think it's gone as far as it should have…obviously not, because there'd be people jumping at WBL otherwise.'*

*'In my college …I've got a school liaison administrator that will try and talk to get time with teachers and work with Year 10 people to try and give them lots of advice and guidance, offer taster sessions, offer workshops and placements of employers to really give them a feel of what they're going into and try to bring up the parity between the academic and the vocational so that you've got a time with them to educate them.'*

*'We're finding now that we are asked far more into schools; there was a stage when we were all fighting for the same 16-18 year olds … but that does seem to be changing with the help of the careers service and… there seems to be far more incidents now when I'm talking to providers (*who are*) actually going in and delivering within the pre 16 contacts and working in partnership in schools which is getting the youngsters younger and showing them what vocational options mean and breaking down some of the barriers and negative imagery that may be around.'*

*'We also deal with engineering apprentices and …we invite …maybe 30 Careers*

*advisors and bring them in for a seminar and give them information about what we do with regards to recruitment. And we try to get into schools through using EBP the Education Business Partnership through mock interviews and doing presentations. But… we need to raise the awareness of teachers in the school of the benefits of WBL because there's definitely an imbalance… the young people that we get access to are … not the A Level calibre which we want and we need, they're the people that are marginal Cs, Ds in that situation. We need to come together with ELWa, and come up with one approach.'*

Some providers had found that the process of introducing students in Year 10 to work experience had been very productive for both employers and young people.

*'We're finding that extended work experience is very good, the number of employers that will have somebody for say two weeks extra, Year 10 in school and we're getting the feedback they were really good, can we have them for another fortnight or whatever. And then they say this person's excellent, can we take them on?...So that's proving good, it's generating enough places and actually promoting individuals.'*

*'The area we work in there's a huge amount of one man band businesses … and the thing that strikes me is that they feel they can't run their business and teach someone at the same time or spend the time - if that person came to them with some pre-experience, could bend a pipe or something useful, they might think twice about giving them a training placement.'*

However, some providers recalled less positive experiences of working with schools:

*'15 started, 3 left, because the ones that were chosen to come were the less able, the less likely to actually get to sit a GCSE and it's really disappointing and I often think if you ask the other kids in that year, they would have liked to have been given the opportunity to have experienced WBL. Whether (*the school*) feel those kids have been naughty, they almost get rewarded with a day off a week to go and do some different practical work, theory work, adult training environment, and if they were the right sort of kids who would say, yeah, this could be a viable option for me, talk to their parents about it, you know it could be a way to really engage the parents to what WBL is all about.'*

*'We had a careers evening quite recently and I'm still very, very worried about the number of young people in schools that don't know what NVQ is; I can assure you, this was just the other day – "What are NVQs?", and… I thought everybody would've known about NVQs.'*

Some providers raised the issue of a further barrier to their marketing campaigns: the current benefits system. For some families on low income, they stood to gain more if their child stayed in full time education rather than joining a WBL programme. This was deemed to be a difficult issue to address under current systems, but was a particular problem in some areas of Wales (this issue was specifically raised in the workshop run in Cardiff).

*'There are youngsters getting paid £30 a week to stay in school…you know you've still got youngsters being asked to do 5 days a week (*in WBL*) for £45; there's an awful lot of parents out there who will lose…benefits if youngsters go on this and stand to lose more than they would gain. Now they're even saying you've actually got families that will be affected detrimentally by (their children) going on training and those are the sort of youngsters that are the hard core that we're dealing with all the time.'*

*3.2.1.2        Careers Wales*

Some of the criticisms aimed at schools were also raised about Careers Wales, particularly in terms of the educational backgrounds of advisors and therefore their perceptions of WBL:

*'It would be interesting perhaps to look at the background at the sort of people who do work in Careers Wales … one of the biggest issues I think WBL has got to face is that most of the people that go through and deal with young people have not come through that route, they've come through more traditional academic and therefore don't have the background and the real feel for how good it could be, what the alternatives are.'*

There were several providers that were critical of Careers Wales in terms of the advice they had given learners and their understanding of the frameworks. Some students aged 16-18 had been taken on by providers because they had been told by Careers Wales that they held a Level 1 qualification, but in reality they had only achieved part of that qualification (this again, was attributed to Careers Wales not understanding the systems in place).

*'I just wonder whether the bodies, like ELWa or Careers Wales, are really aware of what this technical certificate is really, the content of it… If you're delivering a good qualification then the standard of your qualification should be set so it's worthy of a Level 2 or worthy of a Level 3; if you're going to have people on board that are really struggling with numeracy and literacy it's not something you can sit with them on a one-to-one basis, you just haven't got the staffing levels to be able to do that or the time.'*

*'Although I've got a great respect for Careers (Wales) I just wonder sometimes from interviewing the youngsters …they feel very often that they have been directed (one way); they might have mentioned that they like a particular course, they might say I like children so they are sort of forcefully guided towards that and I think … there's a problem of them having the real understanding of what is involved in that course, particularly now I've had a discussion with Careers (Wales) and they didn't really understand this whole framework, which includes technical certificates at Level 2 which is quite hard.'*

*'Each year we deal very closely with Careers, but we have to specify that if you go into engineering it's advisable to have up to 5 good GCSEs so they can follow their course work etc … and some of the careers advisors don't comprehend that and will send little Johnny along and it's wrong really because they should know upfront the calibre of person that we need to put on our course.'*

For some providers the turnover of staff in Careers Wales was deemed to be high and this had affected the quality of information provision:

*'We find with the Careers offices in our area is that the staff … change so rapidly there.'*

*'What we have to do is invite the Careers (Wales) staff … over to us and do a presentation every few months because they're changing so rapidly.'*

### 3.2.1.3 Employers

Another challenge in marketing of WBL programmes was persuading employers of the advantages to their businesses of taking on a Work Based Learner. It was felt that employers were often very negative and unwilling to explore the advantages.

*'The second aspect is raising the employer's awareness of the advantages of training - it's a two pronged attack isn't it? You have to convince the employers of the advantages of training and that you have the providers who can provide that quality of training, and you've also got to get the youngsters convinced that work based training is as good as academia.  So, you know, there's a big marketing issue there.'*

*'I think you also need to explain to the employer that in terms of Investors in People (IiP) … it can be a fantastic opportunity to become highly skilled and a development tool for them so I think you could be encouraging them to develop as a company via the management, the leadership, the development linked IiP, linked with the skill in the workforce and all that.  But ..the responsibility that they must have is to be committed to us and I think if you've got an employer who isn't then you shouldn't be engaging with them.'*

There were also financial considerations for employers; they wanted their employees to gain a relevant qualification in the shortest period of time. This was more of an issue with SMEs.

*'We did a bit of a survey with our employers and why they choose different providers to do different training … it was the ones that did the most cost-effective (*job*) and in the least time, that's the provider that they chose.'*

*'Yes, two questions they always ask is how long does it take and how much a week – the two questions they want to know.'*

*'Some larger organisations would jump at the opportunity to do it where smaller SME type organisations would see it as a threat because they're going to lose their staff once they're qualified and they're going to leave for more money'*

*'It's difficult for a guy with five people to say "yeah I'm quite happy to lose one fifth of that"…it is a commitment and therefore we've got to explain it very carefully beforehand; we've got a different approach to the large boys every time.'*

Furthermore, it was felt that some SMEs simply lacked awareness of the types of training on offer, and that initial meetings with these employers were often revelatory:

*'When we tell them we can provide free training on site for people they're astounded; you know please come down and talk to us like and that's one thing I think that maybe ELWa or somebody should be doing is getting in touch with all these kinds of people and saying this is available to you.'*

However, for most providers, the system had proved problematic in terms of persuading employers that all parts of the framework were relevant to their business:

*'We meet with them and we explain it all but I don't think they really understand the quality, the training that's involved now with the Foundation Modern Apprenticeships (FMAs), they still see it as the old NVQ… I don't think they understand how much work the youngsters need to put in themselves now with their own time; … it is a lot harder to achieve now than it was when NVQs were first introduced.'*

*3.2.1.4 Marketing solutions*

Providers felt it was hard to define the 'best' approach to marketing: *'there's no "one size fits all'"*.  However, the general opinion seemed to be that face to face contact had more impact than written material or press releases (which had been good for raising awareness but not for raising the understanding and breaking down myths about the quality of vocational training).  Employers were often unaware of the funding for WBL or the routes through programmes, and face to face contact provided the opportunity to explain all these elements.

To summarise, a variety of marketing approaches were being used by providers, as follows:

- Cold calling - lots of employers were too busy and wouldn't attend shows. Cold calling enabled providers to reach the right person and to explain Modern Apprenticeships, etc. and the benefits of the programmes.
- Attending major shows, e.g. Anglesey Show
- Holding exhibition days
- Organising open days at schools / providing PowerPoint presentations to schools and colleges
- Making a range of literature available
- Carrying out mail shots with telephone follow-ups

A further idea raised by one provider was the use of local press to run 'success stories', whereby the success of local young people in work based learning could be showcased.  This would raise the profile of WBL and could help to dispel negative associations amongst young people and parents about opting for a vocational route.

There was a strong desire to see a marketing campaign driven by ELWa to redress current imbalances in the choices presented to young learners.  Key for all delegates at the workshops was that learners and parents should have access to impartial advice and that the learner should remain centre stage at all times.

*'I think ELWa has a role to ensure there is parity of esteem and that the learner gets the best opportunity for them individually whether it is academic or*

*vocational or whatever but ELWa has that responsibility to ensure that that happens.'*

*'There has to be a whole marketing drive addressing the fact that there is a whole host of ways of getting through to a particular type of employment. So educate the parents; it's not all about going to university, if you want be an architect for instance…. A family came along ..and they were disappointed that their son didn't quite get the grades he wanted and thought he wanted to be an architect, thought he wouldn't be able to get there and I said 'don't be silly he can go through vocational route' and they said 'well, what's that?' so there's that kind of thing; I think that's another fundamental one, where ELWa I think has to help.'*

*'We are all putting ourselves first at the moment, what's right for us, what is right for the school. The youngster <u>must</u> come first, it's very difficult when you're running a business or whatever it is and I understand it with schools as well, I really do, but it doesn't make it right, far from it.'*

### 3.2.2  Frameworks

Key topics of discussion about frameworks related to keeping up with change, the flexibility of the qualifications (involving more discussion with employers), and assessments.

There had at times been a rapid rate of change in the content of learning programmes and this had been unhelpful; providers wanted stability and time for programmes to 'bed down' before further review. Having said that, there was a strong desire for more flexibility within the frameworks, and it was felt that this would have a positive impact on the quality of training.

*'If you think of all the learners out there and all the paperwork and everything you've got to change every time (*the frameworks*) change.'*

*'They don't inform you; it's your responsibility (*to keep up to date*) with the framework we've got big Lever Arch files full of framework; we've got about 3 or 4 Lever Arch files full of frameworks.'*

*'I think sometimes we don't just have enough notice timescale wise from ELWa; if we're told earlier that this is coming out then we could prepare learners … a week or so is the usual amount.'*

In response to this last comment, it should be noted that at the time of writing, SSCs were responsible for updating providers on any changes to the frameworks.

There was a demand for more of a roll-on/roll-off system for all parts of the framework, i.e. a system that permits flexible start dates so that the demands of employers and learners could be met at all times of year.

*'If we're talking about lifelong learning and we're still at linear courses, should there be a change from the traditional linear delivery September-June to … flexible modular approaches?…We should be talking about modernising our system shouldn't we, instead of trying to make it match or fit in with what exists.'*

*'It'd be nice if everything was much more flexible and everybody appreciated the roll-on, roll-off aspects of WBL and the awarding bodies or the Sector Skills Council could look at technical certificates that were more modular so that people could join as and when they wanted to so they have the choice.'*

As already mentioned, there were problems associated with trying to 'sell' a package to employers and learners that neither party really wanted; many just wanted the NVQ, and the additional elements of the frameworks (e.g. the technical certificate) were deemed less important.  Therefore, getting employers to 'buy-in' was in some cases proving problematic and was ultimately affecting success rates.

*'I think the critical word here is that word choice, isn't it?  First choice leads to higher satisfaction, now inevitably in these training programmes where there are frameworks there are going to be some bits which they don't probably, you know, they wouldn't choose to do unless they were sort of requirement to do it'*

*'They want to learn the skills of the job and they feel the NVQ is the qualification that will reflect that and not necessarily other qualifications within that framework. But flexibility is not there for us.  It's all or nothing'*

*'The employer doesn't necessarily see the tech cert and the key skills as anything that's worthwhile.'*

*'I've had phone calls from employers specifically stating that they were unhappy when all of a sudden they found the learner doing the key skills…the provider's gone in, sold an NVQ and signed them up to a framework and then the employer phones us up irate saying …"I don't want them doing key skills, I never said" - because it was the misapprehension at the beginning when I suppose it's easier to sell to the employer just the NVQ.'*

There was some feeling that the frameworks were devaluing the NVQ, as the emphasis was now much more on exams and off-the-job learning, as opposed to the traditional, vocational on-the-job training. To some extent this was putting off learners: an example was given of older learners in some sectors where qualifications were now compulsory (e.g. Care), and whilst their experience to date made them eligible for the NVQ, they lacked the academic ability to meet the other requirements of the frameworks at that level.

The 'integration of frameworks' was a phrase that came forward during some discussions. Providers called for all parties (training providers, employers, SSCs, Careers Wales) to work collectively within occupational areas to make the frameworks work better for employers and learners. It was felt that in most cases SSCs consulted with providers, but this consultation was by no means consistent. However, they conceded that this was a complex process, requiring the investment of both time and money.

*'There are employers that are used to Modern Apprenticeship's and they generally are engaged very well; then you've got employers out there who are not and it's really very difficult to persuade those; … again this is where perhaps the new Sector Skills Council has come into being really and they can really start to push the standards up…and say "well look we expect people in this industry to have a minimum standard of' and maybe then that'll engage employers".'*

*'If you take the automotive skills for instance, ELWa have given 1¾ years for the MDF and yet the technical certificate takes 2 years; now if they fail and they've got to do a re-sit which is twice a year that adds another 6 months on, so what you're looking at really is 2½ years and that affects the youngster's confidence, it affects the whole framework; now the Sector Skills Council surely to God should be talking to ELWa about this, so where are they?'*

### 3.2.3  Support from ELWa

A number of providers stated that they had become confused at some points with the forms that needed completing and the definitions used in some parts of the frameworks. Some had spoken to ELWa in the past but had received conflicting advice or no help at all; again the fact that some of the qualifications/ procedures/assessments were changing so fast only compounded this problem.

There was a call for ELWa to ensure that all their advisors understood the definitions and parameters of the frameworks so that they could explain these to

providers. There should be a service of 'one stop' advice given to providers to lessen the need for signposting and to reduce delays. One example had been the confusion about the completion status of learners transferring programmes or providers.

*'Now you can't get an answer. So you go to questions and answers on the website. How many months does it take to get a response?'*

*'Nobody supports people who support the learner.'*

There was also a desire for ELWa to provide more financial support for providers who were piloting best practice initiatives within frameworks, for example, the pilot of evidence portfolios based on video and discussion, which reduce the paperwork burden and are felt to have a positive impact on retention.

### 3.2.4  Induction to Training/ Preparedness

This part of the discussion covered induction procedures and learners' expectations of their course. Findings from the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 suggested that at least 75% of WBL learners had their expectations met, particularly in terms of the standard of work expected (88%). Other aspects scored less highly, particularly those related to the amount of responsibility they would have to take (80%) and deadlines they would have to meet (80%).

| **Expectation**<br>Base: All WBL respondents (1000) | **% saying expectation met** |
|---|---|
| Standard of work expected | 88 |
| Amount of work | 82 |
| Structure of training | 82 |
| Training content | 82 |
| Amount of responsibility I would have | 80 |
| Amount of deadlines to meet | 80 |
| Teaching styles, methods used | 80 |
| Types of people on the training | 75 |

Induction procedures were felt to be appropriate, both in terms of screening individuals and employers, and then preparing both parties at the outset of the

learning programme on what to expect.  The discussion moved on to share best practice in terms of induction procedures.

*'There's a culture in WBL that goes back many years where you know you've got to get it right from day one in terms of your original strategy, because there are contractual issues that you face.  And that's probably more relevant and prevalent in WBL than … in other sectors in post 16.'*

Generally, training providers followed a set procedure prior to embarking upon a training programme with an employer/ learner that could be summarised as:

- 'Vet' the employer to check their commitment to the course
- Conduct Health and Safety check
- Visit learner and talk to them about their expectations (following a set questionnaire) with the aim of reducing early drop out from training. Inform them about the framework process
- Send in assessor

Once the programme had started, there would be regular contact between the assessor and the employer and learner.  As standard, there would be a 2 monthly review at which the learner would feedback their views on their training and the employer would also have an opportunity to comment.

There was increasing pressure on providers to hit targets in terms of retention, and for this reason, there had been much effort to ensure that the screening and induction processes worked. This was particularly in relation to raising awareness amongst employers' and individuals' of the requirements of the frameworks and ensuring their commitment to it.

One provider shared best practice surrounding the use of 'fluid intelligence' tests as a means of assessing learner aptitude, regardless of educational attainment. These are currently used by the armed forces and the provider shared the details of one system on offer.

Providers in general felt that they were working hard to make the system 'work' and that this demanded an ongoing monitoring of progress.  This was especially the case with employers new to WBL:

*'The client has to be inducted as well as the trainee, its no good doing one half of the equation - the employer has to know what their position is and we need to provide them with a handbook.  …They're reviewed every eight weeks anyway, so … you can see the employer and the employee / trainee in the workplace and that's an induction in itself, the reviewing process goes on, it's constant, isn't it? It's constant monitoring (*and*) review.'*

*'From the point of view of a new company coming into the fore, you (*must*) explain to them what all these needs are, because if you don't before they start then sure as eggs are eggs they're going to be dropping out…It's in our interests to make sure that everybody does understand the system, does understand that they're going to do key skills, does understand …that they've got to do further education which is sometimes a bug bear for the small company.'*

## 3.3    Support whilst Learning

### *3.3.1  Problems*

The National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 raised a number of key problems faced by WBL learners.  In particular, WBL learners reported problems with:

- fitting the course in with work commitments (mentioned by 17%)
- keeping up with the standard of work (16%)
- dealing with money pressures (15%)
- maintaining personal motivation (13%)
- fitting the course in with home commitments (12%)

The providers agreed that problems were many and varied, and there was no one solution; problems had to be dealt with on an individual basis.  However, assessors would identify learners with problems and the forging of a close relationship between the learner and assessor often meant that problems could be detected early and a solution found.  Thus, assessors were seen as key to a successful outcome.

*'It's really something the assessor should know… because if you're doing your job properly the assessor can read the youngster and if there's a problem pick up on it straightaway.'*

*'I agree with that because it should be the assessor's responsibility to get their learner through their framework successfully.'*

*'I think… that most (*assessors*) have been there so that they have a better understanding of what these youngsters are going through, whereas in education they haven't necessarily got that understanding….We've been on the shop floor, we've been in engineering, (*we've*) come up against these issues.'*

*'And because we're a small company … when our assessors come back we'll invariably talk about work and if there's a worry about an individual it's talked about openly amongst all the staff (*to see*) if there's anything else we can do to help that youngster.'*

Providers were eager to point out that their learner group was the only one where learners were generally in employment and that this presented unique challenges that providers in FE and School Sixth Forms did not have to contend with on the same scale. Thus, learners were not only dealing with studying for qualifications, they also had the additional demands of the framework (e.g. key skills, technical certificate) and, at the same time, were expected to hold down a job, look after a family, etc.

*'It's different when you look at FE; FE is linear, so they start in September, they finish in May and they go away with probably one or maybe two or maybe three qualifications of their own but they're with us from 16-20 or 18-22. Or they come as young people, at the start of their careers and leave it sort of … more mature and we have to keep them interested, we have to keep them motivated for four years in engineering and construction, it's a long time; … they quarrel with their employer, they row, and they don't go to work and all those problems. So I think in WBL we do a damn good job really!'*

In addition, providers felt that it was harder to achieve the framework in some sectors than in others. For example, Care was a sector where there are problems with retention of learners. This was due to a variety of factors, including the gender/age profile of learners, the movement of workers between jobs, etc. Achieving the full framework was often a challenge, but these learners were not legally allowed to work without recognised qualifications (NVQs).

Several providers were surprised about the survey results relating to problems, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy; they had expected the proportions of learners experiencing these problems to be much higher. This sparked a debate about whether learners actually recognised their problems and/ or whether they were prepared to admit to having a 'problem'.

*'They'd say "no I haven't got a problem"'*

*'Which is different to be recognised as having a basic skills need…'*

*'They've had years of practice in coping with it.'*

*'We ask colleges how many have been identified in a year group as needing basic skills support, how many actually take it up, the second tends to be very low because it's optional …you can't force them.'*

In addition to the communication between the learner and the assessor, there were systems in place both for learners to alert providers to their problems and for providers to identify problems themselves. Systems varied but generally included the following:

a. *Communicating with the Employer*
   If a learner was consistently not turning up to college, for example, providers would contact the employer to investigate whether a lack of attendance was work related. In this way, the employer would remain fully involved and be a part of any solution that needed to be developed.

b. *Suspension of Learning*
   Learners who had certain problems (e.g. those having financial difficulties, or those who could not get onto a technical certificate course at a certain point) could have their learning suspended for a period of time. Following agreed review dates, the learner could return to their programme at a later date. However, there was a feeling that the jargon used in these cases (i.e. 'suspending' a learner) was unhelpful, because it had negative connotations and perhaps more positive phrases should be developed.

c. *Complaints Procedure*
   All providers had sound complaints procedures in place and these were widely accessible through a variety of formats to their learners in addition to the employers. For example, these were explained at induction as well as in literature provided to both parties. There was the feeling that learners and employers would use these channels when necessary. Complaints were followed up and wherever possible providers would implement change if this could improve service and was feasible within their environment.

### 3.3.2  Learner Support

Providers in WBL were committed to meeting the needs of their client group and gaining success for their learners.  They had worked hard to ensure that support systems were in place, but some delegates at the workshops pointed out that support needs varied according to the needs of individual learners, thereby presenting different (and often increasing) challenges for some providers.  For example, some of the most difficult groups to manage were those from a background of unemployment undertaking learning in order to fulfil benefits requirements; many of these individuals had social problems that needed specific management strategies.

The Pacific Institute Programme was one mechanism that had proved successful with this group.  The extended and staged induction was designed to build self-esteem and confidence thereby increasing learners' commitment to their programme.

*'What we deliver is the Pacific Institute steps programmes which is an Americanised programme, we've been delivering for many, many years now; unemployed people come into us - first week is induction, second week is the Pacific Institute course… it's very, very good.  It's a course usually delivered to a group of around 8 people; it's great for raising self-esteem, confidence, motivation but what it does bring is everything out of the woodwork with regards to an individual's barriers… (*Thinking about*) barriers to learning with unemployed people … I think this is a huge group for the future…and we just haven't got the resources to address it.'*

Again the relationship between learners and trainers/assessors was seen as key.  Close links were often formed, and frequently these learners relied on their assessor for support and encouragement; it was felt that there was more one to one input and review for these learners than provided in FE.   However, funding tended to dominate any discussions about improving support.  Many providers wanted ELWa to reinstate a funded extended initial assessment (13 weeks), with no backlash on providers if learners withdrew during this period.

Mentors in the workplace were also seen as useful, and many providers tried to identify an individual that could take on this role for a new learner.

*'A learner is given a mentor at the very, very beginning like it's a cradle to grave approach you know, they've got a person that … supports them right through.'*

Whilst most providers felt that it was not their role to provide counselling to learners, many conceded that this did happen to varying degrees, and it was often the interim period between identifying a problem and finding professional support that was the most challenging.

*'Certainly my staff are counsellors as well as tutors because if they have other problems as well you spend an awful lot of time doing some counselling.'*

*'I've got a youngster now who's come in and she's had a few problems with drugs and all the rest of it, we point those in the right direction to the person that they need to go to, the qualified ones, but I'm talking about in the interim period … it's very much that you might contact that qualified person, the professionals, and it takes weeks for them to come in, so you've got that interim period.'*

*'It is quite frightening what you do get told sometimes.'*

Colleges generally had access to centralised support services but these were not so accessible for the private training providers.   Discussions about changes in the 14-19 Agenda and the provision of learning coaches revealed that some providers were unclear how they would gain access to these individuals:

*'Where do you go for that learning coach?  We need to have that information to draw upon.'*

One provider described how they made sure that every learner was aware of who to contact if they had a problem.  On a questionnaire sent to all learners three weeks into their programme, there was a specific question about who they would go to if they needed support.  On the basis of the response to the survey, the provider was able to make sure that key personnel were aware of how to deal with problems.  Additionally, where learners were unable to identify someone to approach, the provider would specifically identify someone for them, so that a process was clear for all learners.

*'It stops them from just dropping off the programme so it helps us with our fall-out rates and so we find that if there is somebody that puts (sic) a questionnaire back to us which hasn't been completed … then we agree who they have to contact if they have a problem with time off or have issues with training; we find that quite effective…So we don't mind if it's a work based supervisor or what we call our*

*ELOs, employer liaison officers, as long as they know and recognise that there is someone that they can go to talk to if they have a problem.'*

Another issue relating to support was the opportunity for peer review. Learners benefit from chances to meet other learners and share their experiences. With smaller employers and in particular sectors (e.g. business administration) there were limited opportunities, as most of learners' training time was spent in the workplace. It was suggested that building this into the learning experience would be beneficial to all trainees.

There was also the recurring issue of maintaining contact with the learner and keeping the employer in the loop. Most providers were using a diary system with employers and aimed to be as flexible as possible, but inevitably there were sometimes problems with employers' availability changing at the last minute. Again, communication was key.

*'It's a communication issue with the employer and individual; we set up a diary at the offset and obviously try and stick as close to that as possible but if there are changes, restructure and reorganise to suit and if the employer doesn't want that, they tell you… it's a communication thing.'*

*'When we set up the NVQ … we give a full diary and we always contact the employer two days before to say 'look is this OK to come down and are there any problems like stocktaking, will it be OK to release the people if we do' or if it's a situation where they're on shifts...we'll arrange for our assessor to go in on a nightshift or whatever… We're very flexible and one of the key things is that we work very, very closely with the employer on these issues.'*

*'That's where the importance of the mentor (comes in)…because if I ring up a couple of days before although I've already made that appointment way in advance and say 'please make sure all these youngsters have their logbooks and they've got their cross-references sorted', so my employer knows as well what's important and he knows who's not turned up or otherwise, it's a win/win there; it's covering everybody.'*

### 3.3.3 Early Leavers

The results of the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 indicated that 21% of WBL learners had seriously considered leaving their course. There was a consensus amongst all providers that they were working hard to retain learners; this directly affected their performance measures.

*'You've got to get it right from day one.'*

*'You've got to have a really robust initial assessment procedure.'*

There was agreement that, on the whole, learners and employers were thoroughly vetted. Problems tended to arise once employers had signed up to a programme because, as already discussed, they were actually interested in just a part of the framework (e.g. the NVQ) and this could lead to problems in completion for some learners. This was judged to be more of a problem with smaller employers and those new to WBL programmes.

Some providers felt that the documentation/administration burden on employers could also contribute to drop out rate. The initial 'sign up' might take between 4 hours and a day, but employers would not always commit to this time (*'time is money'*). For the same reason, access to learners could be difficult if employers were unwilling to release their workforce for assessment.

However, there was also a general consensus that learners who leave their programmes generally did so for reasons outside the influence of the provider. The following reasons were cited:

- Learner moves out of the area
- Learner move to another job (common in sectors such as hospitality)
- Personal reasons e.g. pregnancy

*'We have no control over (*redundancy*), I mean we do try and find alternative employment but again we're dealing with manufacturing; it's one of the poorest sectors.'*

*'But you're never going to get it exactly right.. This youngster was smack on with all his academic abilities, his attitude appeared to be right, his questions were right, his enthusiasm seemed to be right and six months down the line he's come to us and said "look now I don't want to do it, I only did it because my mum and dad wanted me to do I"'. You know you can't legislate for that.'*

Providers felt that they were doing everything in their power to track early leavers (*'we practically stalk them!'*), and where possible to transfer their learning to a different employer.

*'I think at the end of the day you're there for them; the main reason for people finishing early … redundancy or a change in employment; if there's a change in employment then we would trace them and we have had quite a bit of success in actually completing NVQs in a different employment, in a similar sort of industry or a different company and another result of that is that we've had further opportunities to take more trainees on.'*

Early leavers were a particular problem for WBL providers in terms of achieving their targets. The fact that the reasons for leaving early were often beyond their control, and that they were dealing with a group of learners that often had different pressures to those in FE or Schools Sixth Forms, meant that many providers thought that the current system of counting early leavers against their target was unfair.

*'We signed 12 up in a company … and then the company caught on fire; …we had them on contract … couldn't continue the training, they were then suspended from employment until the factory went back, but they were passed as early leavers, what am I to do?'*

### 3.3.4  Young Learners

As a general group, 16 – 18 year olds were more likely than their older counterparts to have had specific problems relating to drug abuse and homelessness. They were too young for unemployment benefit but many were following WBL in order to be eligible for other benefits. In dealing with this group, staff were spending a lot of time dealing with social or behavioural problems rather than learning. Staff needed support when dealing with these learners, and this was generally provided by their colleagues.

16 – 18 year old males emerged as a particular problem group for some providers during the discussion groups. It was acknowledged by many that it was harder to engage this group than girls of the same age. Few specific initiatives were in place, other than trying to build strong relationships, confidence and trust (showing the importance of the assessor/ learner relationship), but several providers mentioned the importance of finding the 'right' employer for placements. These tended to be employers that were willing to persevere with and encourage the learner, and therefore it was the characteristics of employers that were important and their ability to act as a role model or to fulfil a paternal role for that learner.

It was felt that problems for this group generally related to their experiences at home and school and within their peer groups.  Many learners in this age group were third generation unemployed individuals, and therefore had few positive role models. Despite their dedication and commitment, some providers did highlight their struggle in dealing with some of the problems experienced by these youngsters.

It was the experience of some providers that young males were less constructive in terms of providing feedback compared to their female counterparts, and that this made dealing with their specific issues more challenging:

*'(Females') feedback is always constructive in the main, whereas the males will throw a problem up and say " you just fix it or whatever"; at least the girls will come up with a problem but they say "why don't we do it this way?"'*

Disruptive learners was a topic that was raised in a few groups, and it often related to the young, male learners, who had wider social problems.  Sometimes these learners had been excluded from school:

*'The training providers are looking after the 14,15,16 year olds who have been excluded from school but there's nowhere for the training provider to exclude them from.  It seems to be that's where they end up.'*

The problems faced by the young, male learner were seen as something that needed much wider discussion, best practice guidelines was an area that some providers dealing with younger learners would benefit from.

### 3.4    Quality of Training

The overall satisfaction scores from the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 for WBL were extremely positive.  Over a fifth (22%) were extremely satisfied with the quality of teaching and 92% were satisfied overall.  Providers felt that this may be  related to a definite choice being made by some learners:

*'They're going to School Sixth Form because their parents told them "you're going".  So once they've gone in they find down the line they can't stand it but with WBL they go in their eyes open.'*

In general, there was little surprise when the results were presented. Indeed, some providers felt that the findings correlated well with their own internal surveys of learners. For example, providers believed that the initial assessment process meant that they performed relatively strongly in terms of understanding the learner, how they liked to learn, and their preferred pace of learning.

*'We've got an initial assessment process, we've got a learning style questionnaire and we analyse this to see how they like to learn best and we talk that through with the learner.'*

Finding solutions to the issues surrounding the recruitment and retention of trainers and assessors was deemed to be key in improving levels of satisfaction in the future. However, as with many of the topics under discussion, the question of funding underpinned further progress.

In addition, it was felt that learners' experiences were sometimes adversely affected by the waning commitment of their employer. For example, some employers, faced by the pressures of their business, were unwilling to release their workforce for assessment or training, thereby hampering their ability to progress.

*'If (*our assessors*) go in to doing work based (*assessment*), even if it's booked, it something goes wrong the employer sends them away; don't keep them there if there's a crisis happening; send them away and re-book because it'd only be detrimental to the outcome really; observation is key…And it's more critical now, now there's the maximum duration … we can't afford to wait around.'*

On a similar issue, some providers complained that the time needed for tests could cause problems with employers. Learners had a contractual right to time off for study and for exams, but this could be difficult to manage where learners were working shifts. The question was raised about whose responsibility it was to negotiate this time with the employer – the learner or the provider? The experience of some providers was that although employers had signed up to this commitment, when the time came for study leave, they were unwilling to release their trainees. If this process was not managed sensitively, providers risked losing an employer for future training contracts or even jeopardising learners' employment status.

Therefore, in taking things forward, it was deemed important that employers were part of the process, so that they could understand the needs of the learner.

The statistical technique of regression was used to identify areas from the survey that could positively impact on future levels of learner satisfaction.

The technique highlighted the different aspects of teaching and their importance in relation to the overall satisfaction score. Plotting these different elements against the performance scores for each element of teaching (i.e. as rated by learners) enabled the identification of those areas that would have the most impact on learners' satisfaction in the future.

The priority areas for action are listed below and these formed the basis of a discussion about how to improve satisfaction ratings in the future:

- Setting clear targets
- Making good use of session time
- The support they give you
- Prompt and regular feedback
- Making the subject interesting and enjoyable

On the issue of feedback, there was a feeling that although efforts were made by assessors to ensure that learners were aware of their own progress, some learners (particularly those of lower ability) may not have been recognising this as 'feedback' per se.

*'I would think Level 3 apprentice would understand if he's having feedback; but if you spoke to somebody on feedback on Level 1 they may not understand you're actually giving them feedback.'*

*'I mean I've been in when we've done quality or auditing, the assessor went in before me and said I'm just going to do a review process (to the) candidate. I went in after and I asked them "are you reviewed?","No", "I've just watched you being reviewed", "No, I've never had a review". And they signed the record of review and said they'd been reviewed and … they just didn't grasp it at all.'*

*'The very nature of NVQs gives them feedback concept… It's just that they may not realise it for the survey.'*

Some providers, however, conceded that assessors, in some cases, could do more to provide prompt feedback.

*'In some cases the assessors would carry out an assessment but not necessarily give any feedback to the learner until they've actually written up that assessment… perhaps we appreciate that (*assessors have*) got to go back and write up assessment documentation but (*that they should*) just give them enough feedback  (*straight away*), and that's maybe one of the reasons it came out strongly in terms of feedback on the survey.'*

In relation to setting targets, providers shared best practice about how they managed this process.  It was generally agreed that setting 'short, sharp' targets was a good means of ensuring that learners were able to track their own progress, and that this also made the process easier to manage for the assessor. However, the process was two-way and both sides needed to take responsibility:

*'(*With*) the NVQ you've got to have competency three times along the way… a good assessor will try and translate that into short, sharp targets so they know where they're at all the time…It's really important I think for learners; if they're committing four years of their life to training, they do deserve to know exactly how they're doing and where they are at any given time.'*

*'As long as the assessor tells them exactly what is expected of them by a certain time, setting them small action plans to do and then visiting them regularly, showing them they're achieving and if they're not achieving asking them why and asking the employer why they don't think it's possible to achieve this…It's reviewing and monitoring the progress.'*

*'Part of my role (*as a contracts manager*) is to make sure that everybody is tracked …but administration tools aren't enough … the assessor needs to be totally responsible and in charge and take ownership of their caseload of learners.'*

*'I think that's got to be a two-way thing; … the youngster (*has*) got to be looking to drive it as well.'*

A key part of this process, however, was ensuring that the learners and employers understood how the different parts of the framework fitted together.

*'What's become more important … particularly since technical certificate has come in, is that the learner and the employer understand the link - why they do the technical certificate, how does it impact on the NVQ…They come to college for this class, they do the BTEC or whatever and they say 'what the hell am I*

*doing here I'd rather be back at the workplace doing what I do' – but really it's important that … the assessor makes sure that the employer and the learner understand the link between on and off-the-job training and I think it's something that Estyn has found out that as providers we're very good at doing that.'*

Considering the issue of support, as already discussed, providers felt that they supplied a great deal of support within their current financial limitations. However, it was suggested that some learners simply might not recognise the concept of support, even when it was widely available to them:

*'If …someone's not achieving or as you say not being told that they're achieving, they don't come up and say "no, I've not got much support"…. If they're not achieving they maybe be struggling like hell, you know you've got to be looking out for it.'*

## 3.5    Management of Training

This part of the discussion covered management issues associated with training. The ratings for the management of training for WBL learners in the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 are summarised below. These formed the basis of the discussion.

| Aspect of management<br>Base: All WBL respondents (1000) | % of learners rating 9 or 10 out of 10 |
|---|---|
| Seeing the same assessor throughout | 55 |
| Assessors turning up as planned | 51 |
| Helping people settle in | 45 |
| Enough trainers/ assessors available | 44 |
| Providing support for problems | 43 |
| Managing timetables | 41 |
| Communicating changes | 34 |

### 3.5.1  Recognition and Reward for Assessors

A lack of resources, particularly in the form of staff, impacts on the quality of training and continuity of training/ assessing.  Some providers complained that contracts were too short. The fact that they could only offer short term contracts to their own staff meant that they were losing good people to jobs that offered more security.

*'Obviously we strive to have the best resources and the best experts in this field and it is difficult with regards the contracting process which is on a yearly basis as well, even less than that at times when people want four month contracts. It is extremely difficult for managers to plan ahead and to build those resources.'*

Currently there is no parity of funding, particularly in relation to the training and development for staff. The FE sector is provided with a separate funding stream for staff development, to which private WBL providers do not have access (their funding is via learner grants). In addition, providers wanted to know to what level they were expected to train their staff, and asked for guidance from ELWa and SSCs.

*'The qualification standards required are excessive. For example now all teachers should have a teaching qualification and … that's driving the cost up both for FE and for WBL. The cost of paying a premium for bilingual tutors for … these are the day-to-day issues that will affect the… recruiting of staff of a higher calibre.'*

It was felt that trainers and assessors were poorly paid and held stressful jobs. This it was thought was having an impact on recruitment and retention. Indeed, in some sectors (e.g. plumbing), assessors could make more money by doing the job itself. It was felt that better access to training and development could attract potential staff. Generally providers agreed that their staff were under a lot of pressure, both in terms of meeting targets and dealing with a learner group that often had the need for pastoral support in a way that other learner groups did not.

*'We need a support group!'*

Delegates at the workshops believed that a combination of the following solutions was required:

- Salary review/comparisons to be done on a national scale
- Continuous professional development should be offered
- Mentoring schemes are good means of encouraging staff
- The level of administration/bureaucracy needs to be reduced so that trainers/assessors could spend more time with the learner

*'Assessors …now spend less time assessing and more time on administration than they did three years ago.'*

*'Where an individual is going to suffer, where you get the lack of progress and so on, it's obviously one of the key areas in making sure that learners don't drop out and actually achieve their awards and through a proper pace … As for ourselves we have a number of scenarios, we have liaison officers who are also doubling up as mentors…we also have support in terms of … assessors which go into the workplace to pick up … the evidence and also doing the key skills in the same way.'*

### 3.5.2 Inspection and Assessment

There were strong feelings that current systems of inspection and assessment of providers in WBL were harsh. Success rates were based on framework completion, with early leavers having a negative impact on the figures. As already highlighted, providers felt that many of the reasons that learners left programmes were beyond the sphere of influence of the training providers. Therefore, allowing the statistics for early leavers to be included in any measure of success was deemed unjust.

It was felt that the Maximum Duration of Funding system established by ELWa was proving detrimental in some cases and affecting the quality of service delivery. This was particularly the case with learners that needed additional support. In limiting the funding timeframe, it was harder to achieve success with these learners, thereby leading providers to question whether the system was allowing them to deliver the best possible service. There was a call for a system whereby special dispensations would be allowed:

*'This is where I think there should be special dispensation; …I mean I've got a boy now that's got dyslexia and the manager of the employer was going to get rid of him but he isn't now, he's going to work with him no matter what to get him through his apprenticeship. Now that boy will take longer than the maximum duration but we will work with him at the end of the day and this is where we should be allowed to put a special case forward.'*
*'Up until July last year we had that facility with our managers from ELWa; we could phone them up and say there's a case and we can discuss it, they would come up or we'd go down and discuss it and they could interview the trainee if necessary; the rules set now are set in concrete, there's no bending of the rules at all; if we send a question to ELWa, the answer comes back, look at section so-and-so, that's the answer.'*

*'I had a boy last year who – he won the Modern Apprenticeship of the year award, totally dyslexic but it took me six years to get him through his Level 3, now with the system we've got now he wouldn't have stood a chance.'*

In addition, given the current profile of work based learners, providers thought it was crucial that assessments of their service took into account 'distance travelled' by learners, rather than being solely measured on framework completion. There were clearly overwhelming efforts being made by this group of providers to meet the needs of and support their learners, but many felt that this received little recognition.

Discussing the case of a learner with special needs: *'You've got .. somebody who's totally withdrawn and gradually you see them coming out of themselves, being drawn out in the workplace. That's progress to us and the fact that they can now catch a bus instead of being taken to work, that's progress but is it progress as far as ELWa is concerned?'*

Another issue in terms of making a fair assessment of provision was the fact that these providers not only interacted with learners (and parents in certain age groups), but also with employers. Therefore they effectively had two client groups and this set them apart from School Sixth Forms and FE colleges mainstream provision. Furthermore, the success of learners in FE and Sixth Forms was based on their achievement of qualifications rather than the completion of a many-stranded framework, and that this meant there could not be like for like comparison across the different provider types.

*'That gives you another issue actually with the difference between WBL providers and colleges where somebody who's in college and attending college and, as long as they're there, that's seen to be progress whereas with the main provider we've got to provide evidence of them making progress, it's not good enough just to be attending .'*

*'In WBL if you don't get the key skills, you don't get your break… you can't fail anything so the demands are a great deal aren't they really?'*
In some sectors, notably construction, providers felt that current frameworks were not designed in the best way, and that they were coming in for unfair criticism by Estyn:

*'Where you've got some routes, again the highly skilled routes such as construction, where people literally have to start on a Level 1 because they need to gather the skills that are necessary in the industry and again we get criticised … for perhaps having somebody win an award which has been below their standards or capabilities and they question whether you put them in for the right award, you get lots of unsettling things around that area and particularly where*

*the pace of the learning isn't quick enough and the individual themselves can actually become bored… There are a couple of issues which really need to be looked at again … I think in helping Estyn understand quite particularly that people have to go through that route to be able to gather the necessary skills in the industry itself.'*

A system of assessment that acknowledged all these differences was called for.

Another topic raised relating to assessment was the fact that ELWa take little interest in the verification of learning that is undertaken by independent external verifiers. In assessing quality, it was felt that these checking systems should be incorporated, rather than creating new systems that would mean additional paperwork for providers.

## 4.    Further Education (FE) and Accredited Adult and Community Education (ACE)

### 4.1    Overview

During the FE/ACE workshop, there were three breakout groups – two for FE and one for ACE.  Whilst the latter was dedicated solely to providers of Adult and Community Education programmes, the FE breakout groups contained a mix of college representatives with experience of both 'traditional' FE courses and work based learning programmes.  To assist with understanding, this section provides a summary of issues relating to the providers of traditional FE and ACE courses, but should be read in conjunction with the section relating to WBL in order to appreciate the wider debate.

It should be noted that the definition of accredited ACE covered in the research was:

*Provision delivered by FE colleges … some of which was franchised out to other providers … in which case learners rated the provider not the college.*

### 4.2    Pre Entry

#### 4.2.1    Marketing, Advice and Guidance

##### 4.2.1.1        Further Education

A key element in the debate about pre entry issues was the advice sources used by learners.  Providers were reminded of the results from the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 regarding the advice sources cited by learners (presented below for reference), and asked to comment on these as part of the wider discussion.

| Sources of advice<br>Base: All FE respondents (4707) | % citing |
|---|---|
| Tutors at college | 40 |
| Friends | 36 |
| College admissions | 27 |
| Parents or family | 25 |
| Employer | 24 |
| Teachers at school | 22 |
| Careers Wales | 21 |
| School careers advisor | 20 |
| Learndirect service | 7 |
| Learndirect website | 4 |

Providers were keen to make a distinction between the different experiences of learners of different ages on different types of courses. For example, younger learners were moving through a system whereas the older learners are returning to education; full time learners tended to be qualifications driven, whereas part time learners were less so.

For the younger age group, there was a feeling that they just move through the educational system with their peer group; they often felt that there wasn't anything else for them to do, or their parents wanted them to stay in education so that they could continue receiving child benefit:

*'If you talk about school leavers, 16 years old, it's very different from a 30 year old or a 50 year old…with a 16 year old or 18 year old (*there's*) progression to them getting a Modern Apprenticeship progression to university, that's a big motivator …(*in some cases they feel*) there's nothing else for them to do or mum or dad want child benefit.'*

*'Everybody needs qualifications now where years ago they didn't need them quite so badly but it's not that way now.'*

The advice provided to students in school, however, prompted much debate regarding whether there is a parity of esteem between the various post 16 options for learning. It was acknowledged that there were many barriers, not least an ingrained perception that an academic route is better - particularly given

the emphasis placed upon this by the government through targets for students going through university, parents and the media.

Some providers were unsure about the advice provided by Careers Wales (in or out of school) and whether this was sufficiently balanced.  Were students being provided with advice about all possible routes open to them, or advice about only those routes that fitted with their vague perceptions about what they wanted in the future?   Providers wanted more access to school students and to have access to all students (not just those that were disruptive or less able students), in order that the full range of options could be presented to them in an unbiased fashion.

*'(We want) direct access…lists or something like that because we realise that it's biased at the school, it's not the right environment, you get careers teachers looking over their shoulders when they're advising people and everything else, because of the pressure on staff etc. and often they're long term, they're there long term in one particular school; a lot of them are scared to say anything about college, if they're Level 3.  The Level 1 and Level 2, if they cause trouble in schools, no problem "please get rid of them", but Level 3…'*

*'I know there's a lot of sources of information but whether the sources are accurately representing FE is a different question.'*

*'A Level choice is often wider in FE.'*

There was a feeling that School Sixth Forms were often seen as a better choice by parents for reasons to do with pastoral care, discipline, etc.   However, for some delegates this raised the question of why it was the less academically able (and therefore those needing the most support) that tended to end up in FE. Dispelling the myth that sixth forms were 'better' was a challenge at both a national and local level.   It was agreed that the collaborative 14 – 19 Agenda would have an impact and would leave students and parents better informed:

*'Increasingly I suspect the collaborative agenda 14-19 and funding issues will start coming together on this.'*

*'That's where the whole collaboration aspect comes in, where a child could be pursuing maybe two A Levels in a school and one in a college or maybe two in a college, but that's the issue … I think that they are aware of the choices available and perhaps the concern at the moment is that they actually are, and parents actually aren't.'*

Some providers, however, had already begun this process and found that making college accessible to students whilst at school was having a positive impact.

*'With some schools we have a very good relationship that we've set up; when they come in one-day a week for a year or so or they go to taster courses for a week or two towards the end of school year; that can make a huge difference because the students get a feel for college.'*

*'I think you have to work with the schools in your area … it's easier said than done, I know, but if you can build relationships and if you are non-competitive I think that's the only answer.'*

Providers also conceded that sixth forms were better for some students and FE more suited to others. In other words, keeping the learners' needs central to any decisions was crucial. In addition, they acknowledged that for some students choosing to go to college was a big step that meant leaving behind a familiar setting, although for many this was good preparation for the future:

*'I forget how insecure 16 and 15 year olds are, to actually leave the convenience of the school at the end of your street to go 5 miles down the road to your FE college is a very big step, lots of people you don't know, lots of teachers you don't know.'*

*'I have to say it does prepare them well as well for going to university because they do become independent and confident by taking that step earlier on at 16, so that when they get to 18 and move away from home, it's an easier step for them,'*

In discussing the usefulness of the various other advice sources, many providers mentioned open days as a useful means of meeting youngsters and parents, and dispelling the myths about FE being suited only to the less academically able:

*'They can come along with parents and/or friends and have a look at the place and facilities and the resources that are there and feel comfortable in that environment and then want to go further into what sort of courses are available; sometimes they don't know what course they want, the qualifications. They are looking to see what's available.'*

*'I think the importance of the open days is that … they act as a check as well to make sure that it's right for them and also to perhaps explore other areas to make sure the information is right for youngsters; so I think they are important…particularly for parents.'*

*'Once (*parents*) come to the college their expectations certainly go up about college and their perceptions about college particularly because they knew college as a "tech" 20 years ago or whatever, so it's getting them there'*

One provider, however, held a different view:

*'I've found that youngsters have already had advice from the careers teachers, sixth form, parents … and they do tend to come in …with a pretty fixed idea of what they want…. For the older students I'd agree open days are useful and we tend to get through a lot more advice because they haven't had access perhaps to careers officers and in fact we probably refer quite a lot back to the professional advisors from open days.'*

Providers felt that ELWa had a useful role in addressing the parity of esteem issues. They suggested that Community Consortia for Education and Training (CCET) areas should provide all 15 year olds with packs that describe the options available in their area.  In addition, they felt that there was a need for a marketing drive for FE amongst parents, pointing out that performance was often as good in FE colleges as in local sixth forms (despite the fact that they tended to attract lower ability students).  This could also reassure parents with respect to their concerns about the management of learning in colleges, for example, levels of freedom, structure of learning, discipline, pastoral care.

It was also suggested that ELWa could help to facilitate milk round opportunities for colleges, particularly where their performance was similar to that of the local school.  Overall, providers wanted learners to remain centre stage and for more one to one information sessions to be facilitated for learners.

### 4.2.1.2      Adult and Community Education

ACE providers were reminded of the advice sources cited by learners in the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003, as follows:

| Sources of advice<br>Base: All ACE respondents (508) | %<br>citing |
|---|---|
| Friends | 31 |
| Tutors at college | 22 |
| Parents or family | 14 |
| College admissions | 13 |
| Teachers at school | 7 |
| Employer | 6 |
| Careers Wales | 6 |
| School careers advisor | 2 |
| Learndirect service | 5 |
| Learndirect website | 2 |

Providers were invited to comment upon these results as part of the wider debate about pre entry issues. The discussion itself, however, largely focussed on the issue of reaching and engaging with potential ACE learners

In the ACE sector the main problem was informing people about what was available, particularly reaching those groups who were known to really benefit from this type of learning, i.e. those with least confidence and fewest qualifications. However the resources for marketing/providing information about ACE were very limited.  Careers Wales online was mentioned as a useful reference source for tutors, for example, who were playing an advisory role and for learners who had access to a computer. It did not help however with reaching the disadvantaged and unconverted.

As a response to this problem Cardiff Council used to leaflet every household but they had stopped the practice, partly because of funds, and partly because there were concerns about how effective it was. A concern, for example, was whether the leaflets reached people at the right time (i.e. when they were considering learning and so was the message more relevant to them)?

Reaching the rural areas was cited as a particular problem, not just in generating interest but also in generating sufficient interest to make a class viable. There were often difficulties finding 9 or 10 people for a class.   This was evident where one provider was being inspected and the inspector remarked that there seemed to be the same people attending classes each year.  The provider pointed out

that there were only 300 people in the catchment area so there was a likelihood of some re-cycling and this would be more noticeable in their area than in a city.

Taster sessions were thought to be a good way of generating interest both in urban and rural areas. It was pointed out however that taster sessions were often staged during the May Adult Learners Week and the timing of this was questioned, as anyone who had their interest stimulated would have to wait until September before they could enrol.

All providers in this session stressed the importance of getting guidance from the individual communities on what courses were needed.

There were some good outreach schemes, for example, the scheme run by the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) who had volunteers acting as advocates out in the community. This was a highly sustainable model - as advocates moved on they found someone to take their place and they provided useful intelligence regarding community needs. Learner forums were not seen to be as useful because these involved learners giving quite a lot of time, on top of the time they were giving to their courses, to come and discuss issues/learning needs in the community. The learner forums were also deemed to be unrepresentative, i.e. they represented the converted but could not help much in terms of accessing the hard to reach.

The Carmarthenshire Learning Network was mentioned as an example of good practice, because providers went out into the community to gather information about learning needs and to respond to these. This was only made possible because they joined forces and combined resources.

The value of project related learning as opposed to following a set framework was also pointed out i.e. building a variety of learning into a project that did not necessarily have a traditional learning aim. For example, the Gwent Young People's Theatre where participants received tuition from WEA tutors and gained qualifications in areas such as stage management and skills in sound/lighting. The Young Farmers were also mentioned; they had wanted to gain skills in running their committees properly and this opened the door to providing a range of learning from IT skills to inter-personal skills.

### 4.2.2  Induction to Training/ Preparedness

*4.2.2.1        Further Education and Adult and Community Education*

The National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 showed that high proportions of learners in FE and ACE had their expectations met regarding their learning, which gave an indication of how well they were prepared prior to starting their courses.   This prompted a discussion regarding induction procedures for learners and whether there was scope for improvement in this area.

| Expectation | % saying expectation met Base: All FE respondents (4707) | % saying expectation met Base: All ACE respondents (508) |
|---|---|---|
| Standard of work expected | 86 | 87 |
| Amount of work | 79 | 84 |
| Structure of the course | 79 | 82 |
| Course content | 84 | 85 |
| Amount of responsibility I would have | 72 | 65 |
| Amount of deadlines to meet | 73 | 65 |
| Teaching styles, methods used | 79 | 85 |
| Types of people on the training | 70 | 74 |

Providers agreed that, in general, learners in FE were well prepared for their courses. There was a process of talking to students before they arrived as well as a formal induction process on arrival. These procedures were seen as critical in terms of retaining students on courses as they reduced the likelihood of learners holding unrealistic expectations.

*'It's counter productive NOT to provide advice before a course starts.'*

*'We offer study skills sessions,  IT sessions -  these are free so you actually can do almost like a summer school before you arrive if you're an adult returner and particularly in higher education courses and they're very well coached…. it helps with our retention figures.'*

*'And meeting with the existing students which is a really good way of (*seeing*) what it is like.'*

There were, however, some weaknesses in the system, and this was particularly the case if a student did not see the value of the preparation sessions. The example given was that of a part time, older learner who just wanted to do their course, rather than interact with the system:

*'They will opt out of coming for the advice, they know exactly what they want and they come and get it…whether or not it's the right thing for them to do. So sometimes it will be hard for the part-time students… they've got a working life, they've got a social life, they just want to join the course and then they get there and then they find they've got the problems.'*

The importance of age and how this affected learning was again raised as an issue for both FE and ACE. In many ways, some older learners are in greater need of support; they have either been out of education for a long period of time, and are less used to seeking advice or support, or the nature of their course means that they are learning at times of the day when they do not benefit from interacting with other students:

*'The age group thing is quite hard because actually there are more market segments in the older age brackets … you could be a work-based learning professional or you could be a full-time HNC student…I think for the older learner who is retraining and is holding down a job and a family that kind of almost constant support and advice is very, very important, particularly if they're doing work-placement when they're arriving at 4 pm and they're working till 9 pm and college has gone all quiet, they don't get access to that walk-in, open door support that the other students might.'*

*'We talk about the nervousness of a 16 year old but a 38 year old is more nervous, just in a different way.'*

*'The older students, some of them just haven't had access to any advice for such a long time… some will take it up with two hands; the older females are more willing to do that, the older male is a different animal altogether, you've got to drag him through the door for any sort of advice.'*

In terms of the best practice approach for older learner groups, providers felt that it was a case of providing advice which they would not find daunting, usually via the tutor. Taking advice to the learner, rather than expecting them to seek it themselves, was seen as one solution.

*'If they won't come to see the careers officer … you have to build that into the course somewhere, they see the value of the course and then build off that.'*

*'Take the advice into the class.'*

*'I think most tutors are passionate about getting these types of students through the course and on to better things; that's what they're there for; they do a lot to help them.'*

However, given that the influence of the tutor could sometimes mean people either would not make measurable progress or would not choose a course best suited to them, the need for impartial advice was stressed. This already existed in the form of the Adult Guidance Service providing advice over the telephone, but there was only one worker per county. The down side of this approach was that it was yet another source of information that the learner needed to engage with, thereby making engagement potentially less likely for some.

## 4.3    Support whilst Learning

### 4.3.1  Further Education

The National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 showed that FE learners faced a number of problems, as follows:

- keeping up with the standard of work (mentioned by 18%)
- fitting the course in with work commitments (16%)
- maintaining personal motivation (16%)
- fitting the course in with home commitments (15%)
- dealing with money pressures (11%)

In addition, almost one in five learners (18%) had seriously thought about leaving their course.

These results generated much debate amongst providers at the workshop about how support should best be provided to learners, in order to both recognise and deal with problems encountered whilst learning.

Providers agreed that great efforts were made to ensure that learners were suitably advised and supported in order that they did not leave their courses – if that happened, providers felt that it was usually too late to help them.

Again, more mature learners presented unique challenges, namely fitting in their learning with other commitments, and this could have a great impact on their attendance:

*'Sometimes with the more mature learners, particularly if they're on a part-time basis, they may well have other commitments which come up and they miss a week, one session, and that's enough for them to think "I've fallen behind, I can't go back" and if it's two weeks that's even harder and that's where the contact's really, really important for the tutor to reassure them that they can catch up, they can do this.'*

All full time students were assigned a personal tutor with whom they could discuss progress. Typically, the learner and tutor would complete a series of forms relating to targets, student needs, problems experienced and so on. All students, whether full or part time, also received a 6-week review meeting.

Learner support and engagement therefore rested heavily on the shoulders of the tutor. However the strength of the learner/tutor relationship depended not only on how long the student had been on their course but also upon the innate skills of tutors themselves. Indeed, it was acknowledged that the quality of tutorials varied across and within colleges. The fact that so much rested on the success of the tutor/learner relationship meant that many providers felt that best practice sharing and tutor support was essential.

*'The tutors have their own targets to meet as regards to retention and they always set triggers so that if it's a lower trigger what are the issues; are there problems here that can be rectified? And if they're higher triggers, then what they're doing is good practice that they can share across the college … I think that's something that we don't do particularly well, sharing good practice across Wales.'*

*'This is where it gets more complicated, some tutors are better in dealing with that sort of interaction with learners than others, and some of that can be addressed through staff development and some of it is more difficult issues.'*

Providers conceded that whilst full time tutors were usually assigned teaching mentors within the college to assist in their skills development and meet Estyn standards, there were sometimes skills gaps with new lecturers. It was also the case that adult part time learners were often tutored by part time staff, but these staff were not always in the loop in terms of developing their teaching skills.

There was discussion as to whether tutors, as frontline staff, should be more involved in networks in order that more best practice ideas may be shared. Some providers thought this would be very beneficial and were keen for more ideas sharing across Wales. Others, however, questioned whether it was practicable to release tutors for networking events, as that would mean time away from teaching and would be costly. They pointed out that there are many networks in existence that college principals attend and that these serve as forums for sharing best practice, which can then be fed back to frontline staff, typically in the form of tutor guidance packs.

*'I would say that most colleges have packs of tutor guidance and offer some staff development.'*

Another initiative was the identification of 'super tutors' or 'star tutors', who were seen as being particularly well skilled in the areas of teaching and support. Several providers shared their experiences of this approach. Some had taken the approach of a voluntary application procedure for tutors, whilst others had identified talented individuals via observation.

Whilst providers generally had systems in place for picking up learners' problems, many felt that problems usually related to the socio economic background of the individual, and were therefore hard to influence. There was some discussion about learners' responses to the problems they were experiencing in relation to literacy and numeracy. The percentages of students reporting problems in these areas were deemed to be low and there was some debate about whether that was a true reflection of the situation or merely showing a reluctance amongst students to admit to these problems. On the other hand, some felt it could show that whilst learners might be labelled as having problems, the colleges were providing support in such a way as to reduce these barriers to learning.

*'It could be that they think they don't have problems but it could also be that the colleges are dealing with their needs so well that it's not a problem for them, i.e. they've got a learning difficulty there, they have got certain difficulties with literacy and numeracy but the screening and support offered by colleges is so good that they feel they're able to manage … which is heartening.'*
Providers were quick to point out that a whole host of issues fed into and impacted upon retention. Thus, whilst individual tutors would monitor attendance

patterns amongst their learners, they needed to be sensitive to other clues as well.

*'(Retention) is a huge area – not only is it to do with the quality of pre entry and guidance and making sure people are on the right course, it's to do with support systems. Mostly it's to do with advice on finance and welfare, it's to do with support of literacy and numeracy and it's to do with the quality of the teaching…It's making sure that it's to do with the engagement of the learner…the relevance of what is being done, the advantages of completing the course, the potential for progression into employment.'*

*'To get retention right you have to get the whole experience right and then on top of that you have to have actual procedures for keeping up on patterns of non-attendance at an early stage so that it's flagged up, followed up with the learner and parents, depending on the age of the learner, and that reasons for that are addressed long before you get to the stage of early leavers because you've lost them by then.'*

If students do leave their courses, colleges usually follow up these learners by telephone within 2 weeks. This is viewed as a successful means of follow up, and wherever possible they use a member of staff who is impartial to make the call (i.e. not the course tutor, in case there were problems relating to that relationship). The reasons people left early were numerous but generally differed by age:

*'Basically it's for various reasons, it's about family, finance, it depends on the age really; sometimes it's because they came to us pretty late or perhaps didn't fit…the second induction is quite difficult for late comers.'*

### 4.3.2  Adult and Community Education

In the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003, the key areas cited by learners as problems were:

- keeping up with the standard of work (mentioned by 13%)
- maintaining personal motivation (13%)
- fitting the course in with home commitments (12%)
- fitting the course in with work commitments (mentioned by 9%)

In addition, 16% of ACE learners said that they had seriously thought about leaving their course.

In discussing these results, ACE providers felt that, from their point of view, the main problem was getting people to acknowledge that they needed support and , as previously found, this was very much dependent on the skill of the individual tutor and how approachable they were.

There was a discussion regarding support in the literacy and numeracy field. New diagnostic tests have been issued but they were regarded as too heavy handed; many of the people who needed help would shy away from paper tests and in these cases it would be better to obtain evidence indirectly or rely on tutor judgement.  The situation of those with literacy and numeracy problems also needed to be borne in mind when designing the forms that were involved in this type of learning. One provider mentioned that they had sought assistance from the Plain English Council, and with their help they were able to make forms much simpler and shorter.

Form filling was a general concern that cropped up repeatedly during the sessions. The worry was that it was driving learners away and occasionally tutors.  For learners, they arrived to start a course and were keen to get going, but found that in their first session they did nothing but fill in paperwork, which could be off putting.  For this reason, some providers had postponed the form filling to slightly later in the learning process.

## 4.4    Complaints

All providers agreed that they had a set procedure for students to follow if they wished to make a formal complaint, and that this was usually accessible in a variety of formats, including the student handbook and the intranet.  This procedure was covered as part of the induction process.

*'The main thing is to make sure that they're clear and that students know how to access them and that's something we should provide at induction, it's in the student diary.'*

However, all providers agreed that they preferred to resolve issues before it reached a formal complaints stage. Again, this translated into providing enough support to the learner and aiming to build a strong learner/tutor relationship. There was a feeling that informal complaints might be missed, despite the variety

of options given to students to register their dissatisfaction, such as student surveys, suggestion boxes, student forums and so forth.

*'I think a lot of it is cultural as well; as a nation we're not very good at complaining…a lot of the informal complaints aren't picked up so they all add up because people … don't want to get somebody into trouble and really it should be (*about*) helping the college improve things.'*

Colleges tried to plug this gap by using team meetings as a forum in which to raise issues that may have been brought up informally by students. Sometimes students new to their course would complain to the Admissions or to the Student Services departments rather than their tutor because this was where they felt they had a stronger relationship – so it was necessary to have a mechanism to pick up on this type of feedback. Indeed, the importance of acting upon informal feedback was seen as crucial in order to impact on learner satisfaction.

*'I think it's very frustrating when you see similar feedback coming through and the institution hasn't quite got this mechanism in place to stop it happening again because we're talking about individual learners who we might lose … very, very strong and quick quality systems needs to be in place to stop ourselves from repeating the mistakes…We also know there's some huge customer care gaps as well; in a lot of ways we are a business aren't we? If we ran a business like this we'd lose a few customers but simple customer care issues like sending out prospectus on time, phoning the customer if a course is cancelled, those kind of things we slip up on in colleges because we're so big.'*

*'I think that's what very important to do is to feedback .. (*those students*) might not be here the next year but of course they tell their friends about the college.'*

There was some consensus that age influenced learners' behaviour in relation to complaints. Thus, younger students tended to complain via their parents, or used less formal means (e.g. via student representatives). Older adults, however, tended to complain directly and use formal means – providers questioned whether this was because they expected a higher standard from their provider.

## 4.5   Quality and Management of Training

The overall satisfaction scores from the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 relating to FE and ACE were extremely positive. 3 in 10 FE learners (30%) and almost 4 in 10 ACE learners (39%) were extremely satisfied with the

quality of teaching. Overall levels of satisfaction with teaching stood at 90% for FE and 94% for ACE.

The statistical technique of regression was used to identify areas from the survey that could positively impact on future levels of learner satisfaction.

The technique highlighted the different aspects of teaching and their importance in relation to the overall satisfaction score. Plotting these different elements against the performance scores for each element of teaching (i.e. as rated by learners) enabled the identification of those areas that would have the most impact on learners' satisfaction in the future.

The priority areas for action within FE and ACE are listed below and these formed the basis of a discussion about how to improve satisfaction ratings in the future:

- Setting clear targets
- Making good use of session time
- The support they give you
- Prompt and regular feedback
- Making the subject interesting and enjoyable
- Understanding you and how you like to learn

Delegates felt that the results re-emphasized what they were aware of, and felt that efforts were being made to address many of the issues raised:

'*I don't think (*the results*) surprise us really; I think it's what we know that learners want, that's what keeps them on a course.'*

'*I would think that most colleges are probably working on those sort of things all of the time and raising staff awareness and providing self development'*

This is not to say, however, that providers were in any way complacent about the need to continue to improve systems and to look at customer satisfaction more widely.

*'Our customers are used to 24/7 service aren't they? They can buy online, they can do this, they can do that, but are also paying for their education as well and they expect a high level of good service and a high level of customer service and I think we all perhaps could tighten that up a little bit because we're running so fast and we're such complicated institutions and sometimes we don't nail that one down.'*

### 4.5.1 Further Education

Colleges were already making use of in-house performance indicators for training, for example, the process of identifying exceptional teachers within programme areas to share best practice amongst their peer group.

*'Through observations we've identified exceptional teachers and then they ….can disseminate to their own programme area and play about with good practice…Sometimes it's just simple hints and tips and sometimes it's much more than that but that's worked very, very well.'*

In addition, there were groups setting and monitoring standards relating to customer care, complaints, etc. One area of one college had recently set personal objectives relating to how they could personally impact on the learner experience in a positive way.

#### 4.5.1.1    Setting clear targets

Providers reported that individual learning plans were in their infancy when the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 was conducted, so there had been great improvements in this area.

All full time tutors met to discuss special needs, assess student progress and discuss the structure of courses, thereby improving the learning experience. However it was felt that part time tutors usually fell outside of these sessions; they were not paid to attend such meetings but accounted for approximately 25% of staff and tended to interact with part time students. They were also unusual in that they tended to be working elsewhere, with teaching as a sideline in their working lives.

### 4.5.1.2    *Making good use of lesson/session time*

The problems in this area were again thought to relate to the fact that part time teaching staff didn't necessarily hold teaching qualifications, and that this resulted in variable quality.  However, as already outlined, up skilling these individuals was often difficult because of the nature of their working hours/ contracts.  It was an area that providers wanted to address, using mentoring, for example, but there were financial constraints.

### 4.5.1.3    *Understanding the learner*

Providers felt that tutors did try to alter their delivery of lessons to suit students, but this relied on the experience of individual tutors.   Some colleges ran training sessions relating to styles of learning and emotional intelligence, but again, not all teaching staff would access these.  Some colleges lacked up to date facilities that would promote the use of a variety of learning approaches, for example, white boards, DVDs.

Most courses in FE were dominated by younger students, but they had different expectations and needs compared with the older learner and this created challenges.

### 4.5.1.4    *Managing the group*

Disruptive learners were a problem for FE, particularly the younger learners that tended to be disruptive in school and were therefore lower achievers. Increasingly, time was spent managing these learners - keeping them in college, for example - rather than teaching them.

### 4.5.2  **Adult and Community Education**

Given the action areas identified during the survey, providers debated whether in fact learners understood when they were being set targets, and whether they recognised feedback when they received it.  For example, a learner may have looked at a tutor's comments on a written assignment but not recognised this as feedback.  However, it was agreed that some tutors could improve in terms of delivering feedback and helping to set targets.  It was pointed out that this differed with the type of course; on practical courses such as woodwork, goals

and progress were clearly marked because learners were actually producing something. Thus, on non-practical courses, targets and feedback may need to be more explicit.

Currently in ACE, learners did not have Individual Learning Plans; to produce these required time and therefore funding which was not available. There was also tutor resistance to formalising procedures in this way. Some of this was put down to people being set in their ways and not recognising that there were certain aspects of their performance in which they could improve. Many would also feel that they had the learners' goals in their heads and could monitor this as they went along giving informal feedback. There was also deemed to be a certain level of impatience amongst tutors with what was seen as jargon, and phrases like 'target setting', 'learner goals' and 'learning objectives' had been known to elicit an exasperated response from tutors. Therefore, progress in this area would need to be adopted in a tutor friendly way.

However, on a positive note, providers recognised that many tutors valued the opportunities available for training and sharing best practice. It was important that their training hours were paid for because they were already at a disadvantage compared to their FE colleagues in terms of their rate of pay, and it was felt that they were not paid enough to expect them to give up more of their own time. Timing of training was also very important; the best time was to run training between terms, but many staff resented courses being held in their holidays. The verdict was that the priority should be to focus on investing in the tutors who were open- minded and willing to receive training.

Despite the funding issues and potential barriers amongst staff relating to Individual Learning Plans, it was agreed that it would be useful for each learner to have a session with someone at the end of their course, or at the end of the summer term, to see what they might want to do next and to explain their options. Getting individuals' expectations right was also deemed important, and it was acknowledged that there had been moves in ACE to introduce learning agreements so that the learners would know what was expected of themselves and what they could expect from their tutors.

Other ACE specific issues related to the management of learner progress. Several providers had problems with learners taking the accredited route, as they were resistant to the exam process. Progression routes for the learners, therefore, needed careful consideration. It was acknowledged that in rural areas there were neither the numbers of learners nor resources to provide accredited learning at higher levels. A good way round this was to set up links with a college and feed people into the college from the rural schemes. To ensure the success of this approach, however, it was considered vital to establish a personal link for the students, for example via tutors from the college coming to meet them before the transition. Students otherwise had a tendency to stick with what they knew and avoid progression. Also important was identifying the profile of a learner so that they would fit in with a college course. An example mentioned of this occurring was of someone who transferred to a college but had difficulties because everyone was so much younger.

Again tutors played a key role in this whole process as it was deemed important for them to keep the numbers up on their courses in order to secure future funding. However, there was also a danger that by not moving people on to a progressive route, places were not made free for new students. This was found to be more of a problem in towns than in the rural areas.

## 4.6    Future Surveys

Some of the delegates at the workshop had seen the summary document of the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003, but had found that this was too broad to be useful to them in their college, i.e. at a local level:

*'The summaries weren't very easy to work with because …the results were so good you just kind of haven't got anything to get your teeth into, it wasn't detailed enough to actually develop an action plan.'*

Most providers in FE and ACE were involved in some form of evaluation work. One provider in ACE was carrying out a staged survey at 2 weeks, 7 weeks and 15 weeks after enrolment – they wanted to do more but were concerned about survey and paperwork fatigue.

There was a definite interest in the ability to link the results from the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 with surveys colleges carry out internally or via out-sourced contracts, in order that a more local picture may be generated.  Already efforts were underway to agree a core set of questions for all colleges to use in conjunction with their existing methods (e.g. relating to general learner satisfaction, issues around transport), although there was some debate about whether all relevant parties had been invited to be a part of this process.

*'We need to link up the local with the national; we need to be able to benchmark.'*

*'If you want to set targets and everyone wants to use benchmarks then you've got to have people signed up across Wales doing that and then it's got to have a national and local relevance.'*

*'That's right, everybody was invited to that meeting and obviously not everybody could attend, probably about 10 people in attendance, 10 or 12 including ELWa…After a lot of discussion, believe me a lot of discussion of how to phrase questions and which questions would be useful … for us all to use, and those would then be agreed by us (*and we'll*)  be taking that to the quality managers network for a wider audience to agree.'*

Beyond making the survey more relevant at local level, providers had a number of suggestions for taking the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 forward, as follows:

For FE:
- including a question about recommendation, e.g. 'would you recommend this college/course to your friends?'
- covering the subject of facilities in more detail
- further investigation into the gap between their expectations and their actual experiences
- addressing Health and Safety.  This tended, however, to be covered by in-house surveys and inclusion could cause problems if policies vary across different types of provider
- examining equal opportunities by making the survey sufficiently large to be able to consider whether different groups have different experiences (as indicated by in-house surveys)
- including under 16s in the survey, given the 14 –19 Agenda.  Currently under 16s are not part of ELWa's remit, but should they be in the future?

- following up learners in terms of what they go on to do next
- investigating whether it would be possible to correlate the findings from the survey against groups of students that have known problems, such as retention rates (e.g. learners in Construction)
- making sure that in designing future surveys, all relevant parties were included: quality, marketing and curriculum planners

*'What would be interesting…would be to correlate the findings from particular groups of students with the indicators like poor retention and poor completion rates … look at that group and say whether there are particular issues there that students' perceptions are identifying.'*

For ACE:
- including a question on the structure of the course and what structure would suit learners best in terms of timing, frequency, and so forth
- identifying the length of time between thinking about doing the course and actually doing it as well as the final trigger for learning - it was thought this would help in terms of marketing
- including a measure for value for money where people were contributing to the cost of their course
- identifying what courses were desired at a local level - it was acknowledged however that this could be difficult using survey methods and it was more sensible to use other information gathering techniques e.g. those used in outreach work where people on the ground/based in that community provided feedback
- verbatim comment was felt to be particularly powerful and important in conveying the complex issues to some of the policy makers who were remote from the learner - the role and possible reaction of policy makers to research like the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 was a concern i.e. they could misuse the figures, misunderstand the figures

# 5.    School Sixth Forms

## 5.1    Overview

This particular group of providers was dealing only with the youngest end of the age range in terms of post 16 learners.  With their long relationships with most of the students in their schools as school children, they were now faced with the delicate task of facilitating students' transition to young adults.  This was a fine line to tread - some students still needed and expected the level of support provided lower down the school.   This aspect of managing the learning environment could be at odds with what learners themselves thought they wanted; too much support and they were being treated 'like kids', too little and they were left feeling out of their depth.  It was acknowledged that managing this ongoing tension demanded great skill and sensitivity on the part of the teachers working with Year 11 and 12 students.

## 5.2    Pre Entry

### 5.2.1  Choice, Advice and Guidance

Choice and advice were two areas of questioning included in the National School Sixth Form Survey for Wales 2004.  The results showed that the overwhelming majority of sixth form students were at their first choice of provider (73%) and following their first choice of courses (77%). However, it was also the case that almost a fifth of students (18%) had not actively considered another option when choosing where to study, and 85% cited 'already attending this school' as a reason for choosing their provider.

In terms of advice, the proportions of students citing various sources were also discussed as part of this session.  For reference, the results from the National School Sixth Form Survey for Wales 2004 were:

| Sources of advice<br>Base: All respondents who obtained advice (3,939) | % |
|---|---|
| Teachers at school | 70 |
| Careers Wales | 69 |
| Parents or family | 65 |
| Friends | 35 |
| Sixth form admissions | 20 |
| Learn direct service | 1 |

Multiple responses allowed.

Providers conceded that familiarity was deemed to be a strong pull on students and many wanted to stay on in the sixth form with their friends, where teachers knew them. There were perceptions amongst students (and parents) that colleges were impersonal and less supportive than the school environment. In addition, location was important; going to college meant that students would often need to travel longer distances outside of their immediate community.

It was also accepted that the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) had some positive influence on students' choice to stay on in school rather than choose other types of provision, as they were effectively being paid to learn. Some providers, however, thought it was too soon to judge the overall effect:

*'I find (*the EMA*) has made a slight difference with my interviews with current Year 11's considering 16+ options at the moment but not with many. Just a handful just can't afford it and when I mention it they say that maybe they could. We'll have to wait another year before we can say.'*

Providers conceded that a key influence on students was parents, and that parents' views of the different options on offer post 16 had a huge bearing on students' choices. Parents wanted what was 'best' for their children, and this could mean following a similar academic route as themselves, or taking advantage of opportunities that they had not had. Whilst sometimes this was a positive intervention, at other times there could be a negative impact.

*'We have to do better for our kids than we did, and that's the perception these parents have.'*

*'(*Parents'*) assumption is you do your GCSEs, you go on to do A Levels and you go to university.  That's the benchmark.  And anything less than that is not good enough.'*

*'The biggest influence are the parents and the grandparents who say, "I went to that school, that's the best place for you, right, because it's had a 100% pass rate for the last couple of years".'*

*'In my experience parents sort of know about GCSEs, they know about A Levels, but basically they know very, very little about the other factors, the other areas that are out there for students to go into.  And often in my experience…a mum would come in and say he wants to be a doctor, this is what he wants to do.  And, you know, the boy is very like mmm… and by Christmas he's dropped out.'*

The outcomes of Estyn inspections and assessments were cited as proof of the high quality of teaching of academic subjects in School Sixth Forms and this in itself was a strong pull for parents:

*'They look comparatively at the data, they see that the sixth form delivers and has done consistently and they judge the quality, relative quality of the outcome measure.'*

Another positive was that schools were able to offer extra curricular activities, such as the Duke of Edinburgh awards, setting them apart from other provider types.  Given the increasing emphasis on such activities in terms of widening students' appeal when making applications for higher education and employment, this distinction was deemed very important by providers.

*'It is not just about getting A Level grades, its about getting experience through Duke of Edinburgh, work experience…(a) very extensive portfolio is needed simply to get… an interview.  If you haven't got that sort of back up it's very unlikely (*you'd*) be interviewed for the very difficult courses.'*

The ability to progress into Year 12 using the Welsh language was also seen as a key influence for some, as many FE colleges were unable to provide continuity for students who had studied in Welsh up to Year 11.  On the other hand, some courses were provided by FE colleges and not by schools, particularly vocational courses, but these were not available in Welsh.

*'As regards the Welsh sector, the choice isn't there, because the Further Education sector isn't able to offer courses through the medium of Welsh.  But there are courses that are unavailable in schools, that area only available in the*

*further education sector and those are not available in Welsh either – and as a result there is a number of people who would perhaps do better through the medium of Welsh, who have more trouble with their English medium courses.'*

The issue of the parity of esteem between the different types of provider of post 16 learning came up in all the discussion groups. Parents often thought that the sixth form was 'best' because it offered an academic route that would lead their children onto university. Given government drives to increase the numbers of students accessing university, there was little surprise that parents held this view. Nevertheless, many providers felt that they presented students with the full range of choices regarding their options after Year 10, and that this provision of advice had improved in recent years.

*'We have a duty to explain the options'.*

*'(*Students*)…were given access to the FE, training providers, the Forces, Careers Wales, where they could actually go and ask questions, every single one, in the hall and they went round and they talked to everybody.'*

There was a belief amongst some delegates that they were at a disadvantage in the post 16 training arena, because unlike the FE sector they did not have access to a marketing budget. There was a feeling that some colleges were able to advertise themselves in a sophisticated manner, and could afford to have large stands at conferences and conventions. Some providers were resistant to this approach:

*'(*Colleges*) are doing a major marketing and advertising drive, its very difficult for schools to compete with. We don't have the budget to market ourselves on that scale.'*

*'That's right, there is no way we can compete'*

*'They've got the funding there to do it which we can't do. Our local paper in August, there will be mail shots in there – come to college, do this, do that.'*

Some providers were using fresh approaches to address the issue of parity of esteem amongst parents – they were sitting down with students and their parents and giving more time to examine the options open to that individual student, thereby putting the learner and their needs centre stage. However, it was acknowledged that this approach was time intensive and that if parents were not

interested in their child's progress they would not attend such an interview. Further, if this approach wasn't widely accepted amongst schools, it lessened the positive impact.

*'We're looking at…getting away from the traditional sort of, you know, once a year, five minutes for each subject sort of thing, to a more holistic approach whereby you sit down with the parent, with the child and you talk openly and honestly about the options and aspirations that should be open to them.  And be a bit more creative that way, but I am very worried…(that) if there is a perception that this isn't being done fairly amidst the decision makers then that undermines the whole principle under which we're working.'*

One delegate referred to the balance of advice that he had witnessed being delivered within sixth forms, and pointed out how important it was to put the learners' interests centre stage:

*'It's very encouraging to see Head teachers (give a) very balanced approach of the options that were out there…  I've now been to four out of the six information evenings across the consortium and that was very good.  I thought it was excellent because I think if you signpost people openly and clearly … then it's got to come down to the individual level after that, to say you know what really is best for you…I'm a very firm believer that if you signpost a person in the right direction, even if its not in your direction, they will come to appreciate you have got their interests at heart and they don't forget that.*

Other providers, however, had mixed feelings about whether schools offered truly unbiased advice and how this could impact on crucial decision making:

*'Some schools, believe me, will discriminate against youngsters having advice about FE colleges.'*

*'I think one of the experiences I've had was the difference between the independent and teacher based advice … some of the baggage that the students may be carrying or the teachers themselves…. Where a student may have the potential to move on to certain subjects and they're getting plenty of advice to do that, but because of their relationship with a member of staff, how they feel about the particular subject, they don't want to do that and they may choose to go to college instead.'*

*'A distinct advantage most colleges have with student support is that (students) feel that they've got an independent person to go and speak to without prejudice … will listen…  And I suppose that is something that… students in sixth forms probably would feel they don't have…But equally… even in colleges you still get*

*that advice … given to students which is not really in the best interests of the students.'*

*'But I think that, to think positive for the colleges, they do have that independent person that students can go and talk to and chat about something, I think that is a distinct advantage as you say.  Hopefully, it will come – the learning coach.'*

These differing points of view generated debate about the changes that would be instigated by the 14 – 19 Agenda, particularly in relation to the role of the 'learning coach' who is expected to provide impartial advice.  Some providers, under the assumption that the learning coach would be someone from outside the school, questioned whether this was the correct approach given that teachers in school know pupils very well already and that there are systems for advice giving already in place:

*'I mean the best learning coaches that currently exist are the tutors of the kids, who know them best and have forged a relationship with them for four years before they get to 14.  They know all about their attitudes, they know all about the learning styles, they know all the social issues to do with the family because they've tracked them through the school….I'm a bit worried about this… assumption that the learning coaches will be someone from outside of the school… because perhaps somebody doesn't trust the school to do it fairly.'*

*'I'm not criticising it, but then you've got Careers* (Wales) *with all their expertise and all their contacts and all their networks and long track record of success and clearly working well, and then you've got the group of tutors who are aware of all the pastoral support – these structures seem to exist and I feel it's just throwing money at another initiative which is just going to duplicate what already exists.'*

Some providers discussed the best way to deal with students who were 'borderline' in terms of their potential to achieve in the sixth form environment. A variety of approaches were used in such a situation, for example identifying with the student where they see themselves in a few year's time and mentoring them during Year 11 to improve their motivation:

*'If it's just motivation that's something that can be dealt with and dealt with quite simply through Year 11 mentoring.  What you can do then is put on a regime of one to one mentoring and staff intervention or even peer intervention and the student can actually pull themselves up.  What we do then is goal setting type exercises, "where do you want to be in 5 years, do you need these A Levels, why do you need them, where are they going to take you?"'*

For some students, however, it was not a question of motivation but of ability.

*'If it's ability, then that is completely different. You know, you've got to sit down and have a reality talk with them and say, this is your actual potential, you're perceived potential you think is up there, unfortunately at the moment you are not aiming towards that, you've got to look at other options.'*

*'We do have to draw the line with some people – if they're not going to pass, they're not going to pass. But I mean, we also do encourage them to trial something for a couple of weeks because quite often that's what its about …, they realise it is going to be beyond them.'*

Ultimately, providers felt that they were making great efforts to provide advice, but that it was down to the individual to decide whether or not to make use of that advice. The feature of high retention rates in sixth forms, however, was cited as evidence that providers were generally 'getting it right'.

*'Everybody's got the opportunity to get impartial good advice through to themselves, the only people who wouldn't get it are the people who choose not to come to interviews, not to come to the open evenings, not to attend arranged interviews with careers staff and so on.'*

*'In schools the retention rate between Year 12 and 13 is very high, therefore I think we can take some satisfaction that the advice we are giving our students is the correct advice because they do maintain the course. They are obviously motivated to complete it into Year 13.'*

### 5.2.2 Induction

In addition to providing advice to students and parents about the different options on offer at Year 12, schools were also active in terms of offering taster sessions and induction periods for students. In many cases, however, these initiatives took place during school time and therefore ate into curriculum time in Year 11. A number of providers, whilst supporting a varied approach to induction, felt that the resources necessary to support these schemes were no longer available within their schools.

*'We ran this sort of induction day for Year 11 where they go in and they sit in on taster A Level lessons so they can see the difference in the teaching style and the nature of the courses and they actually speak to sixth formers in Year 12 and Year 13 who can explain to them the work load, because … the jump is phenomenal to take 4 AS's, and they speak to the students already in school, and that has quite an influence on their decisions. It's a whole day off timetable.'*

*'What we tend to do is we have a Year 11 day where you are taken through everything, especially the subjects that aren't down in key stage 3, 4…for example law, so they have had some experience of these other options that they don't know anything about.'*

*The class was timetabled for two days, get them to go to sixth form lessons and stuff…you can't do that anymore.  We haven't got the money to do it, its just a waste of teaching time basically.'*

Some schools offered interviews to both students and parents before admitting the student to the sixth form; these were felt to be incredibly beneficial in terms of getting parents on board and offering students additional support during a decision making period.

*'We also interview our children and their parents…to show them "well this is what you want to do, however, have you considered this?"…Because it's a new experience for some parents…and parents are so keen that their children get the next step right therefore we feel if the parents are involved in this child's decision it reinforces everything that we are trying to do with them as well.'*

*'We do something similar over a period of evenings where everybody is offered an interview and we are supported by the Careers Service on that one.  Because quite often they come in with one idea that is far too high powered for what they are realistically going to achieve and at that stage they can go back in and have a chat with Careers (Wales)and then come back in for another interview.  And we work together on that one.'*

*'Where parents are involved in induction that has a distinct advantage because, yes, their parents have a tremendous influence on what they decide to do'*

*'Kids perhaps today can be more confused, more frightened about the choices they've got to make, because there are more choices to make out there than when we were young. And so I think having their parents involved – it reinforces that.  Gives them more confidence.  Yes, I think you are going in the right direction, I'll back you up.  I think that is a great help to have parents involved in that decision making process. And the kids appreciate it as well.'*

A few delegates referred to trial schemes that remained in place during the first weeks of term in Year 12, whereby students were given longer to make up their mind about a subject or course.   There were deemed to be pros and cons associated with this approach, although all providers conceded that it was inevitable that there would be some students that would change their mind about the choices they had made on entering the sixth form:

*'I've heard of some places where they do effectively like a two week trial and at the end of the two weeks people can change their minds and so they try and draw a line.'*

*'It can be quite negative that way as well because they are really keen when they come up.  You've got students at a high pitch and ready to really start on their sociology or whatever they want to do, and the two week taster session, where people perhaps are drifting in and out of things can be very negative.  They really want to get started.'*


## 5.3 Vocational Learning and Working in Collaboration

There were mixed views regarding whether there was a genuine interest in vocational learning being delivered in school sixth forms.  Where members of the group had examples of testing out this type of provision, for instance with pre 16 vocational GCSEs, interest was 'patchy'.  Where this example was given it was stated that the learners preferred to do GCSE Business Studies even though the school felt the vocational course was a really good vehicle.  The school in question thought that the lack of uptake might have been down to compromises in options having to be made elsewhere.

*'It was an excellent course and we really felt confident that it would be a runner, but it wasn't.'*

Another provider agreed that the spread of options is what makes the academic route the one that is favoured by many:

*'I think that's part of the problem with some of the vocational subjects on offer … that it's asking students to specialise in a particular vocational area too early. And they really don't know … even though they may say they do … most kids want to hedge their bets.'*

Where there was an interest amongst Heads of Sixth Forms in increasing the choice provided to students at 16, they conceded that there were often problems with delivery in terms of location (providing work based experience and finding suitable partners) and facilities (depending on the nature of the course). Furthermore, the general level of interest in vocational learning in the sixth form was currently felt to be low, raising issues associated with the financial viability of offering a wider range of courses to just a few students.

Some providers were of the opinion that different providers should stick with what they know and do best, rather than trying to offer everything which could ultimately affect quality.

*'This idea of everybody doing everything doesn't really work and it's getting the learning providers, schools, colleges and WBL providers to think about what they do best rather than spreading themselves so thinly.'*

*'Let colleges stick to what they do best: I think the colleges have provided much more A Level provision recently, whereas traditionally they did the vocational courses – the hairdressing and the plumbing – and now if you look at the prospectus they are also offering all the AS and A Levels.  You know, so they've been allowed to expand their provision, which again only makes it more difficult for us.'*

Providers from all areas cited examples of collaborative approaches between schools and colleges which sought address the demand for vocational learning where it existed, but the picture was inconsistent and issues associated with location, and therefore travel, were seen as a barrier to greater collaboration for some.  This prompted one provider to raise the issue of need to look for more creative solutions for collaboration rather than simply moving students between locations:

*'At (*name of Welsh medium school*) they had a superb video conferencing suite which was funded centrally.. the Head…teaches a shared class with half of them being goodness knows where, all over the country, and it's superb.  We haven't got a cat in hells chance of affording something like that.  It was £40,000, £60,000 to set up, something like that …But the quality is very, very impressive and you can't help but wonder whether, rather than throw money at some sort of taxi system to ferry kids around, a more creative solution might be in that area.'*

The current system of funding within School Sixth Forms and FE was raised as a very real barrier to collaborative working, because providers would end up chasing the same students.  However, there was agreement that if this element of competition could be removed, providers were generally supportive of the notion of collaboration but that it was necessary to devote time to the issue to make sure that it was delivered effectively.

*'If (*funding*) was less of a contentious issue, the whole collaborative working which we both want really, to both side's mutual benefit, wouldn't be so contentious.  But it's this having time to sit down and talk.'*

*'You do start to fear that the child is stuck in the middle of a system which is becoming increasingly constrained by economics.'*

There was, however, a general call for better sharing of best practice across sectors and within sectors in terms of creative solutions for collaboration, in order that providers may learn what works best in different areas or in different learning environments.

## 5.4 Support Whilst Learning

### 5.4.1 Learner Support

Providers felt that one of the great positives of learning within a School Sixth Form environment was that it was generally smaller than a college and could offer more support to the learner. As most learners stayed on from Year 10, teachers knew them and this meant that the school had a feel for that student's level of ability and potential for achievement, and their life outside of school. One example was given of a learner who was enrolled into the sixth form to study a basic IT course, but ended up achieving an advanced certificate due to the individual support that could be provided to that student. It was felt that this may not have been the outcome in a large FE college. As one delegate pointed out, the school system enables 'blips' in a student's performance to be picked up on:

*'If on the day things go wrong in a particular subject, I've found that teachers are very sympathetic to that and they can take that perhaps more into account than let's say if the student leaves and goes to college, and it is purely cold and so a decision is very often made on the results that they get in that particular subject. But that is something that the teachers can say, well, OK, and maybe address that and they can overcome that particular problem.'*

Providers were keen to emphasise that the Personal and Social Education (PSE) structures in schools greatly contributed to learner achievement and that this support was provided from Year 7, thereby having a cumulative impact on the student. However, this aspect of the School Sixth Forms was not covered by the National School Sixth Form Survey for Wales 2004.

Another form of support offered to students new to some schools was a 'buddy', who would be identified by teachers as a student suitably mature to assist with a new students' settling down period in a new school.

### 5.4.2  Problems

The National School Sixth Form Survey for Wales 2004 highlighted the types of problems faced by students.  In particular, these learners cited problems with:

- maintaining personal motivation (mentioned by 57%)
- keeping up with the standard of work (37%)
- other students ( 15%)

These were discussed by providers in the wider context of why these issues might arise.  In many areas of Wales, issues of social deprivation were deemed important. Sometimes these students were the first generation of a family to 'stay on' in the sixth form and parental support was sometimes, but not always, lacking.  Indeed, parents' perceptions of the sixth form tended towards each extreme (i.e. from staying on in the sixth form being desirable and the 'best' route, to those parents who thought that staying on in school was a 'waste of time').

A number of providers raised concerns about the mental health of their students and how this impacted upon their performance.  Some providers believed that young people were under much more pressure to conform, and that in some cases this compounded other problems in their lives, leading to mental health issues.  It was an issue that some felt was worth pursuing in future surveys of sixth form students:

*'I've got a genuine concern about the mental health of a significant number of 16 year olds.'*

*'It's also manifesting itself in an increased drop out rate as a result of depression, and as a result of stress related illness.'*

*'There is much more pressure on them to conform to certain things… You look at the psychoses and neuroses in teenagers and it's phenomenal.  And there has got to be an explanation for that – you know, why you've got teenagers who have*

*got anorexia, bulimia, depression, growing so much and why are there increasingly problems with families?…And sometimes you don't know there is an issue…this kid's going round school with a smile on their face and you say, "you missed three lessons last week, what happened?" and bang, tears start, and you think, "what's happened here?".  You know, you are there then for the rest of the day with that student.'*

Providers felt that they dealt with problems as best they could, and as far as possible tried to spot problems early based on the relationship that they had held with a student over a number of years prior to the sixth form.  However, such issues were becoming more prevalent whilst the resources to deal with them were not increasing.

*'I think, as it always has been, its 'early spotting' isn't it?  There is a need to intervene and help and pick them up and try to address the problems.  Early spotting, that's a question again of resources, of time, and of the mechanisms that are in place to do it and it is getting more fraught with more and more being required, with less and less funding and resources coming in.'*

*'I think it would come out through something unusual happening – their work going downhill, lack of attendance.  We don't know what the problem is but something would set the alarm bells ringing.  And that is one of the advantages with the school in that we do have five year's background knowledge.'*

*'And some of it is ongoing, I mean, if you've got a depressed student you can be looking at 20 minutes a day with that student just to keep them going.  And you've got maybe 200 students to look at in the sixth form.'*

It was felt that the importance of the teacher/pupil relationship could not be underestimated in terms of spotting problems and offering support to vulnerable students. However, developments in teaching contracts meant that there were moves to separate the pastoral element from teachers' role.  Whilst providers saw the benefits of involving specialists in the delivery of support, they did not think it possible or desirable to wholly remove the pastoral element from the teacher's remit.

*'You need to be able to draw on specialists but you can't remove it to specialists.'*

*'No, its an integrated…well, its integral to the role of the teacher or tutor, isn't it?'*

*'And pupils don't always want them.  If they've chosen you as the person they want to talk to, its you.'*

Again, the learning coach role was raised as another possible strand in the provision of support when learners encounter problems:

*'But that will be the beauty of the learning coach model won't it? Because I know colleges have had these lovely student services … so, if there is an issue, there is a trained counsellor, they've got all this welfare support and advice, they've got the tutor, … but I know that lecturers and teachers are so hard pressed to get on with the actual teaching of it all … it is an issue … so hopefully this 14 – 19 learning coach, you know with the motivational stuff and everything else that it brings, will help.'*

One delegate felt that it would be beneficial for sixth forms to invite outside agencies into schools to highlight the professional support services on offer to sixth form students outside of school. Although this would take time out of the curriculum, it may result in longer term benefits:

*'I think as well that sometimes sixth forms are getting organisations in that maybe would come to speak and that would actually put in place, would highlight, the things…debt problems or sexual issues, things like that, that might worry them… But …it means giving time off the curriculum to do that … but it can have dividends … and can build up a greater respect for the school as an institution that is interested in members as individuals.'*

Another problem commonly cited by delegates related to students having part time jobs whilst studying and that this sometimes affected their performance by distracting them from studying. Indeed, in some cases, the income derived from part time work was relied upon by the students' family. Students were particularly likely to be working shifts in retailers, such as supermarkets, and whilst schools in some areas had liaised with local retailers and requested that they did not offer shifts that coincided with school hours, this had had little effect; in some cases students had reported losing their part time work when they had refused certain shifts that clashed with their lessons.

One delegate cited a study which showed the effects of varying hours of part time work on students' performance:

*'There was a study done by Wolverhampton a few years back …it actually says that if school pupils or sixth form pupils work between six and eight hours a week it's actually beneficial because it gives them responsibility and they mature earlier. Eight hours to about fifteen has a mitigating affect against to some*

*extent. But beyond that, fifteen and above, it really is very detrimental to their studies.'*

### 5.4.3 Early Leavers

30% of students in the National Sixth Form Survey for Wales 2004 said that they had seriously considered leaving their sixth form, although this action had clearly not materialised for the group surveyed.

Providers felt that there were a variety of reasons why students left the sixth form early; some students decided that the school environment was not for them, whilst for others the reasons for leaving related to the courses that they had chosen not being what they expected. Providers, however, did not feel that they had much influence on levels of early leavers and that early leavers would always be a problem. They viewed dealing with early leavers as part and parcel of the ongoing support provided to students and that all efforts were made to ensure that leavers were making the right choice. Wherever possible, providers would involve parents in any discussions relating to students' choices.

*'Yeah, we would interview anybody and Careers (*Wales*) would interview them. If they just disappeared, which occasionally does happen, then they would be followed up by the Careers (*Wales*) service.'*

There was some discussion relating to the statistic from the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 that 30% of sixth form students had seriously *considered* leaving their sixth form. Many delegates were surprised that this figure was so high and felt that it was important to put this figure into context, for example with the actual proportion who leave early (which was deemed to be low compared to other types of provision).

*'…Because you can see the spin: "30% of youngsters in sixth form have thought about leaving". I mean, you can see the headlines. That needs to be qualified. You need to identify how serious was that thinking, what were the factors that led to it and what made them stay on.'*

*'We are well versed in interpreting this data. But once it goes out into the public domain, there are serious dangers there in terms of misinterpretation, spins and so on and so forth. And I think we need to be very much aware of that and we need to refine the process so that we take that consideration on board.'*

## 5.5    Quality and Management of Training

The National School Sixth Form Survey for Wales 2004 showed that 10% of students were extremely satisfied with the quality of teaching in their sixth form, and that overall, 86% expressed some degree of satisfaction.  However, these results contrasted with those delivered by Estyn, in which School Sixth Forms were consistently deemed to provide a higher quality of teaching than other learning providers.  NOP suggested that the disparity in the results between School Sixth Forms and other provider types might be related to the different choice making process.  Learners in School Sixth Forms may not have felt that they had made a positive choice to study in the school environment; it was just the next step and a continuation of what had gone before. In contrast, those who had changed provider would have made a conscious decision to leave school and learn in a different environment altogether, denoting a 'fresh start'.

The general feeling amongst providers, however, was that the results of Estyn inspections spoke for themselves; School Sixth Forms consistently achieved excellent results in terms of the quality of teaching.  Therefore, some providers found it difficult to accept comparisons made in the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 that showed sixth forms to perform relatively less well than FE and WBL on key measures in the eyes of learners. Some providers questioned the results, suspecting that ELWa had a hidden agenda relating to the future funding for School Sixth Forms.

There was a general feeling that it was dangerous to make comparisons across the three provider types due to the inherent differences between them.  It was acknowledged that direct comparisons of survey results were restricted by the differences in the methodologies used to collect opinions (although NOP stated that the scale of the differences could not wholly be accounted for by the different data collection methods).  Whilst providers liked the ability to benchmark, they argued that for comparisons to be meaningful, these should be restricted 'to within' sector comparisons:

*'Otherwise you are not measuring like with like, are you?'*

It was also deemed important that the results should take into account the diversity of Welsh schools and the types of courses offered by different schools.

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Providers were particularly keen to point out that the dissemination of survey results should be handled with utmost care – in the wrong hands, the results could be used unfairly against them. This applied both within the public domain and within schools, where a small number of teachers and/or subjects could result in teachers being identified.

On this latter point, it should be noted that the results from the National School Sixth Form Survey for Wales 2004 were completely confidential. Each school received its own report, showing the school benchmarked against the national average. These reports were graphical and did not contain any references to individual members of the teaching staff. Where schools had a low level of response (such that analysis of results or comparison with the national average was unreliable), no report was delivered.

In delivering the results to ELWa, all student responses were aggregated so that no one school could be identified. Furthermore, ELWa was not informed by NOP as to which schools had participated in the questionnaire survey.

*'It's hard not to over-emphasise how disappointing it was to find the results of this survey … used in the public forum in a way which was not helpful. It's so important that that doesn't happen, because it undermines all the work that's gone into it, and all the funding that's gone into it, and so on.'*

Nonetheless, some providers accepted that there was room for improvement on those measures rated relatively less favourably by learners. As with other types of provider, however, they felt that improvements were to some extent limited by the funding available to a school. Heads of School Sixth Forms were keen to point out that they always strived to put together the best team to manage Years 11 and 12, i.e. those best suited to manage students in the throes of transition from school child to young adult.

## 5.6    Future Surveys

There was evidence amongst providers that learner satisfaction was of growing importance. They liked the idea of obtaining the views of learners within their school, as this could feed into performance at an individual and departmental level.

*'I think we are much more alive now to the idea of consumer satisfaction.'*

*'Estyn now report post 16 separately in their reports and so there is an external pressure for quality assurance in post 16 built into the inspection framework anyway.  The other point is that there is significant emphasis these days on student voice, 'listening to learners' and student councils and such like.  And interestingly, I've been under some pressure from the Year 11 council this year banging the drum about A Level RE.  Usually they want to tell you about the toilets, uniform and this sort of thing, but there is a strong vocal minority who are using the school council structure to (*provide feedback*) on the curriculum issue. It's amazing, very impressive.'*

Some schools were consulting their students using a variety of formats, ranging from informal reviews to self-completion surveys.  In some schools, there was more extensive consultation involving parents and the wider community.   One provider shared the experiences of comparing the views of parents and students following a survey of both:

*'There was a strong correlation between them.  The one bit that was at odds was that the parents thought the kids really enjoyed school and loved it all, and the kids basically said they hated it!  But apart from that, there was a lot of overlap between them.'*

Some delegates represented schools that had taken part in the National School Sixth Form Survey for Wales 2004 and had had a positive experience.

*'It's something we may not have had the time to do, possibly, and so it was a very useful reflection of what's happening that we can use.'*

Some had used the findings as a basis to explore some issues in more depth:

*'As a follow on to this I actually did a pupil survey of the current sixth form to try and find out from them about students who haven't stayed on and why they felt that was.  And asking them as well what sort of subjects should be offered in the future to try and attract more sixth formers to stay on at the school, basically. And also looking again at how they were satisfied because this was in fact the sixth form who have just left plus the current upper sixth.'*

There were some aspects of the current survey format that providers wanted to change, and also some suggestions for how the survey could be usefully expanded:

- Amending the wording of one of the measures. It was felt that 'making the subject interesting and enjoyable for you' was not a useful measure, as providers felt that 'enjoyable' was too strong a description that would result in lower ratings.
- Some providers wanted to investigate interest levels for classes delivered outside of school hours in minority subjects such as French and Music.
- Collaboration - assessing to what extent students' choices about attending the School Sixth Form would have been affected if there were more subject options on offer via collaborative arrangements.
- More generally, questioning the extent to which the subject choice on offer influenced the decision to choose the School Sixth Form; what might have affected that choice; is there too much choice?
- Availability and waiting times for careers advice, not just quality.
- Students' views on the support structures in place within schools.
- Asking students what they would like to see covered in the survey.

*'I think the natural progression from that is to actually ask the students what would make it better for them because I think this has been asking them about how they feel about how things are for them now, but I don't think there's been a question on how could it be improved.'*

- Including more questions relating to facilities – an important issue for many students, but not covered in detail in the survey.
- Questions relating to mental health; the extent to which students felt under pressure.
- Questions relating to time management but using wording that really addresses the issue of fitting in what they need to achieve (rather than using wording that reminds students of a module that they may have studied).
- Providers were keen that future surveys should be able to provide results by level of learning, i.e. foundation, advanced, etc.
- 'Enrichment activities', i.e. extra curricular or community activities in which they are involved and how important these are, particularly in relation to Welsh medium schools.

One provider wanted more from the survey in terms of pointers for driving forward learner engagement:

*'It would have to be more discriminating than what you've got here as a first shot, and it would have to give us real leads…I think for me, if I as a Head could get a clearer notion of what it would take to get these young people to engage more productively in what they're doing … and it's around being more independent in their learning, it's around what sort of feedback they need; it's around the balance of being didactic and other methods; it's around the use of follow-up work, homework and assessment;  it's that sort of feedback.  When you've got this whole battery of strategies … of all this work going in, what is it that actually will count for them in terms of moving them forward?'*

A number of providers thought it would be useful to extend the survey to other groups, specifically younger learners and those who have decided to leave their School Sixth Form:

*'Having done this survey which is the starting point in post 16 … I'd be interested in going back to 14 year olds to look at that point where they are heading and what the options are.'*

*'You could pick up on the issue about value of learning if you were to include those people who had to drop out … And what issues and for what reasons they had (*to leave*) and you could try to fill the gap.  That's the only way to do it.'*

*'In the broader area of the Young Peoples Partnership…they've got something called the 'KIT' which is the 'Keeping In Touch' strategy… They are looking at students who are lost to the system and how you keep in touch with them and the whole issue of exiting, and all that.  It is a big agenda and it would be very interesting to explore how we do that and how we access the range of advice they get.'*

Getting behind social attitudes was also felt to be important by some providers, as it would help them understand their learners in terms of their life and challenges outside of school.   One provider mentioned the Communities That Care Survey and how useful the contextual information provided by that survey would have been to his school:

*'Are you familiar with the 'Communities That Care Survey'… what it actually produced was an extremely detailed and comprehensive snapshot of social attitudes within the areas.  And I have to say now, I regret, despite all the potential risks and worry, I now regret not having been part of it because the sort of information it provided would have been very useful for me as evidence of the*

*context in which we now work because of the issue with the free school meal benchmarking and so on.'*

*'The broader issue I'm coming to is that the trouble, with these sorts of things, is that we tend to see kids as living in some sort of compartmentalised life. You know, that their education is a separate part of their real world. Whereas in reality, they have a very complicated life that they are leading.'*

*'(Life) doesn't just stop at the school gate. They don't just come in as a different person with a school tie and become an academic whiz kid. They've got all these things going on in their lives and that's what impacts on them.*

## Appendix I: Details of Attendance

**Work Based Learning Workshop, St Asaph, 8th February**

| Type of organization | Number expected | Number attending |
|---|---|---|
| Careers Wales | 2 | 2 |
| Colleges/ public training providers | 12 | 10 |
| ELWa | 5 | 5 |
| Other | 2 | 2 |
| Private training providers | 4 | 4 |
| **Total** | **25** | **23** |

**School Sixth Forms Workshop, Port Talbot, 21st February**

| Type of organisation | Number expected | Number attending |
|---|---|---|
| Schools | 32 | 23 |
| Local government representatives | 2 | 1 |
| Careers Wales | 1 | 1 |
| Estyn | 1 | 1 |
| ELWa | 2 | 1 |
| Other | 6 | 4 |
| **Total** | **44** | **31** |

**Work Based Learning Workshop, Cardiff, 28th February**

| Type of organisation | Number expected | Number attending |
|---|---|---|
| Private training providers | 37 | 22 |
| Colleges/public training providers | 9 | 8 |
| Sector Skills Councils | 4 | 3 |
| Careers Wales | 2 | 2 |
| Welsh Learning & Skills consortium | 2 | 2 |
| Local government representatives | 3 | 1 |
| Estyn | 1 | 1 |
| ELWa | 5 | 5 |
| Other | 10 | 6 |
| **Total** | **73** | **50** |

**School Sixth Forms Workshop, Llandudno, 8<sup>th</sup> March**

| Type of organisation | Number expected | Number attending |
|---|---|---|
| Schools | 11 | 8 |
| Local government representatives | 2 | 1 |
| Sector Skills Councils | 2 | 1 |
| Careers Wales | 3 | 2 |
| LEA | 2 | 2 |
| ELWa | 6 | 5 |
| Other | 1 | 2 |
| **Total** | **26** | **21** |

**Further Education and Adult and Community Education Workshop, Llandrindod Wells, 5<sup>th</sup> April**

| Type of organisation | Number expected | Number attending |
|---|---|---|
| Colleges | 29 | 21 |
| Sector Skills Councils | 5 | 1 |
| Careers Wales | 1 | 1 |
| Local government representatives | 4 | 3 |
| Estyn | 1 | 1 |
| ELWa | 6 | 6 |
| Fforwm | 1 | 1 |
| WEA | 1 | 1 |
| Other | 3 | 3 |
| **Total** | **51** | **38** |

## Appendix II: Delegate Evaluation

### (i)     Introduction

As part of the Customer Research Strategy, ELWa organised a series of learner satisfaction workshops to discuss and explore the findings of the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 and the National School Sixth Form Survey for Wales 2004. The objectives of the events were to:

*Disseminate findings:*
- explain the purpose of the research and how the findings may be used
- build confidence in, and understanding of, the study findings

*Explore ideas/best practice:*
- enable the key partners to acknowledge and understand their role in using the study findings to help quality standards in their own services
- stimulate idea generation
- share best practice in an environment in which participants are able to discuss openly their ideas and opinions with their peers

The sessions were highly interactive and included a presentation of the findings, followed by breakout groups discussing pre-determined themes. This paper analyses the feedback from the evaluation sheets completed by delegates at the end of the events.

In total there were five events, as follows:

- Work Based Learning, Oriel House, St Asaph, North Wales, 8th February

- School Sixth Forms, Aberavon Beach Hotel, Port Talbot, SW Wales, 21st February

- Work Based Learning, New House Country Hotel, Cardiff, SE Wales, 28th February

- School Sixth Forms, St Georges Hotel, Llandudno, North Wales, 8th March

- Further Education and Adult and Community Education, Pavilion Conference Centre, Llandrindod Wells, Mid Wales, 5th April

## (ii) Overall ratings of events

The following tables show the combined ratings gathered from all of the workshop events that took place in Wales. The figures are directly translated from the workshop evaluation sheets that were completed by the delegates in attendance.

The first set of results relate to the presentation based on the scale of very good to very poor.

The ratings given are positive with 99% of attendees rating the slide clarity as good or very good. All respondents thought the quality of presenter to be good or very good, and 93% of those attending ranked the relevance of the breakout groups to be good or very good.

| Presentation<br>Base: All respondents who<br>answered (101) | Very Good % | Good % | Poor % | Very Poor % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Clarity of slides | 60 | 39 | 1 | 0 |
| Quality of Presenter | 42 | 56 | 0 | 0 |
| Relevance of breakout groups | 40 | 53 | 4 | 3 |

When reviewing the actual content of the presentations, ratings are equally encouraging. Almost all (93%) of the delegates felt they were better informed about the survey issues due of the workshops. Almost 9 in 10 (88%) of respondents agreed that the survey covered areas they had expected it to, and 89% thought that the survey results could inform their day to day work.

| Survey Findings | Yes | No |
| :--- | :---: | :---: |
| Base: All respondents who answered (101) | % | % |
| Do you feel better informed about the issues covered by the survey? | 93 | 8 |
| Did the survey cover the areas you expected? | 88 | 12 |
| Do you think the results could inform your day to day work? | 89 | 11 |

Almost 6 in 10 (58%) of delegates requested further contact about the long term use of the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003, the relevance of the information, and its benefits to there are of work.

Some of the comments received from delegates were as follows:

*"Breakout groups were very informative and gave an opportunity to share good practice"* WBL 28th Feb

*"Excellent discussion- good practice shown"* WBL 8th Feb

*" A number of interesting points were raised in the breakout group"* School Sixth Form 21st Feb

*"An excellent event with plenty of opportunity for discussion, feedback and networking"* FE 5th April

*"I thought it was very relevant, useful and can be utilised in my college"* FE 5th April

*"A useful chance to discuss common issues"* School Sixth Form 8th March

These overall figures should be reviewed in light of the original goals that these workshops set out to achieve:

- The aim of disseminating the findings can be seen to have been achieved when we consider the high number of attendees who felt better informed through their respective workshops and who rated the presentations so highly.

- The goal of exploring ideas and best practice was most closely linked to the content and structure of the workshop. 93% of attendees thought they were better informed following the breakout groups.

## (iii) Ratings of Individual Workshops

This section shows the responses gained from the individual events that took place.

**Work Based Learning, Oriel House, St Asaph, North Wales, 8<sup>th</sup> February**

| Presentation<br>Base: All respondents who answered (16) | Very Good<br>% | Good<br>% | Poor<br>% | Very Poor<br>% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Clarity of slides | 69 | 31 | 0 | 0 |
| Quality of presenter | 56 | 44 | 0 | 0 |
| Relevance of breakout groups | 63 | 38 | 0 | 0 |

| Survey Findings<br>Base: All respondents who answered (16) | Yes<br>% | No<br>% |
|---|---|---|
| Do you feel better informed about the issues covered by the survey? | 94 | 6 |
| Did the survey cover the areas you expected? | 94 | 6 |
| Do you think the results could inform your day-to-day work? | 100 | 0 |

**School Sixth Form, Aberavon Beach Hotel, Port Talbot, SW Wales, 21st February**

| Presentation<br>Base: All respondents who answered (22) | Very Good<br><br>% | Good<br><br><br>% | Poor<br><br><br>% | Very Poor<br><br>% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Clarity of slides | 68 | 27 | 5 | 0 |
| Quality of Presenter | 23 | 64 | 9 | 0 |
| Relevance of Breakout groups | 27 | 50 | 14 | 9 |

| Survey Findings<br>Base: All respondents who answered (22) | Yes<br>% | No<br>% |
|---|---|---|
| Do you feel better informed about the issues covered by the survey? | 90 | 10 |
| Did the survey cover the areas you expected? | 73 | 28 |
| Do you think the results could inform your day to day work? | 83 | 18 |

Whilst some of the feedback scores for this workshop were disappointing, it should be stressed that these results contrasted markedly with those at the later School Sixth Form session (which was refined using the feedback from this first workshop). Therefore, we feel that these results are very specific to this one event.

This first workshop provided the opportunity for a number of school representatives to raise questions regarding the validity of comparing the views of sixth form students with those from FE, ACE and WBL given the different modes of data collection. In addition, some members of the group were unhappy with the way in which ELWa had disseminated the results and felt that this should have been handled more sensitively.

Following the workshop, ELWa wrote to each of the delegates who had raised queries and complaints, in order to answer the specific points raised and inviting them to enter into further discussion with senior members of the Intelligence and Marketing Team, should they wish to do so.

**Work Based Learning, New House Country Hotel, Cardiff, SE Wales, 28th February**

| Presentation<br>Base: All respondents who answered (32) | Very Good<br>% | Good<br>% | Poor<br>% | Very Poor<br>% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Clarity of slides | 41 | 59 | 0 | 0 |
| Quality of Presenter | 41 | 59 | 0 | 0 |
| Relevance of Breakout groups | 44 | 50 | 3 | 3 |

| Survey Findings<br>Base: All respondents who answered (32) | Yes<br>% | No<br>% |
|---|---|---|
| Do you feel better informed about the issues covered by the survey? | 89 | 11 |
| Did the survey cover the areas you expected? | 90 | 10 |
| Do you think the results could inform your day to day work? | 87 | 13 |

**School Sixth Forms, St Georges Hotel, Llandudno, North Wales, 8th March**

| Presentation<br>Base: All respondents who answered (9) | Very Good<br>% | Good<br>% | Poor<br>% | Very Poor<br>% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Clarity of slides | 56 | 44 | 0 | 0 |
| Quality of Presenter | 44 | 56 | 0 | 0 |
| Relevance of Breakout groups | 33 | 67 | 0 | 0 |

| Survey Findings<br>Base: All respondents who answered (9) | Yes<br>% | No<br>% |
|---|---|---|
| Do you feel better informed about the issues covered by the survey? | 89 | 11 |
| Did the survey cover the areas you expected? | 94 | 6 |
| Do you think the results could inform your day to day work? | 89 | 11 |

**Further Education and Adult and Community Education, Pavilion Conference Centre, Llandrindod Wells, Mid Wales, 5th April**

| Presentation<br>Base: All respondents who answered (22) | Very Good<br>% | Good<br>% | Poor<br>% | Very Poor<br>% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Clarity of slides | 77 | 23 | 0 | 0 |
| Quality of Presenter | 50 | 48 | 0 | 0 |
| Relevance of Breakout groups | 32 | 68 | 0 | 0 |

| Survey Findings<br>Base: All respondents who answered (22) | Yes<br>% | No<br>% |
|---|---|---|
| Do you feel better informed about the issues covered by the survey | 100 | 0 |
| Did the survey cover the areas you expected? | 95 | 5 |
| Do you think the results could inform your day to day work? | 84 | 16 |

## Appendix III – Group Discussion Guides

These topic guides were designed by NOP in conjunction with ELWa in order to provide a tool for the NOP researchers and to ensure some consistency between groups.  They have been included to provide context for the reader but it should be noted that were produced purely as an aid for the researchers

**i)  WORK BASED LEARNING**

**Breakout session 1: Pre entry**

THIS IS THE FIRST BREAK OUT GROUP SO WE WILL NEED:

- INTRODUCTIONS
- BRIEF OUTLINE OF WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN EACH GROUP (FACILITATOR HAS A TOPIC GUIDE, DISCUSSION IS PROMPTED BY FACILITATOR AND HE/SHE WILL PROBE, GUIDE THE DISCUSSION SO THAT ALL AREAS ARE COVERED)
- EXPLAIN THE TAPING

This particular group will cover the following areas:

- Motivations and use of advice to influence decisions
- Marketing
- Contact prior to the training/preparedness
- Induction

**Motivation/Use of advice to influence decisions**

Decision to undertake the training: What motivates and guides individuals in their choices? What motivates employers to offer Work Based Learning for individuals?

REPEAT SOME OF THE KEY FINDINGS ABOUT SOURCES OF ADVICE AND USEFULNESS SCORES

How do you feel about the sources of advice being used? Do you think that these agencies have the best knowledge/quality of advice about WBL?

Do providers feel that advice and guidance given out by other agencies and personal contacts truly reflect the course aims? If not, how can the quality of advice be improved?

How can they work together with agencies and other less formal influencers? Should providers have more contact/dialogue with the various sources of advice being used?

GO THROUGH EACH SOURCE AND PROBE FOR:

- Is more dialogue needed? Is it realistic?
- How could providers approach and inform these sources of advice?

**Marketing**

Are providers marketing courses to different types of individuals and/or employers? If so, what is their activity/how intensive is it and are they getting the right messages across?

PROBE FOR:

Examples of best practice where providers have marketed to specific target groups? What has worked and why is this the case?

Examples where marketing has not been so effective and why do they think that this is the case?

**Contact prior to the training/preparedness**

What types of contact do the providers have with:

- individuals prior to learning – what type of contact do they have? How well prepared do they feel individuals are before they embark on WBL? Do they think INDIVIDUALS have a good understanding of what is involved?

  PROBE FOR:

  - standard of work required
  - type of assessment
  - type of training methods used in sessions
  - the other learners they will meet

- employers prior to offering individuals WBL and what type of contact they have that is on-going? Do they think EMPLOYERS have a good understanding of what is involved?
  PROBE FOR:

  - standard of work required
  - type of assessment
  - type of training methods used in sessions
  - the other learners they will meet

- How do they discuss further needs with employers – is this type of contact generally prompted by the provider or by the employer?

- How can providers ensure that individuals are undertaking their courses for the right reasons? How can providers ensure that employers are happy with the training they are offering their staff?

**Induction**

What induction process do providers have? Do they feel that this is adequate? Is there anything that they would like to add to the process that they have not to date?

Managing expectations – Do individuals have the right expectations of the course? What procedures (i.e. induction) can be put in place/developed further to ensure that any mismatch in expectations is rectified as soon as possible?

**Summary and round up**

For all pre entry and induction issues considered:

- Where are providers now? How positive are they – what are they doing right?
- What are the main problems faced by providers?
- What are the solutions to these problems?
- If there are three main issues to come from this discussion that need addressing what are they?

**Breakout session 2: Quality of training**

This session will cover:

- Quality of trainers/tutors/assessors
- Management of learning

**Quality of trainers/tutors/assessors**

REMIND THE GROUP OF THE OVERALL SATISFACTION SCORE. How do they feel about this rating? Do they feel positive or negative with the way provision has been rated overall?

MOVE ONTO THE INDIVIDUAL MEASURES IN THE SURVEY – DISCUSS IN RELATION TO THE ACTION GRID AND PROBE FOR:

**ACTION AREAS**

FOR EACH OF THE MEASURES BELOW THE RESPONDENTS SAID THAT WHILST THEY WERE IMPORTANT THE PERFORMANCE WAS RELATIVELY LOWER THAN OTHER MEASURES. FOR EACH ONE, what do providers

perceive that the problems might be in performance? What are the solutions/how can performance in these areas possibly improve?

The areas to action specifically for WBL are (most of them relate to planning and resourcing):

- Setting clear targets
- Making good use of lesson/session time
- The support they give you
- Prompt and regular feedback
- Making the subject interesting and enjoyable

We want to concentrate on some of the other performance measures now. For each category can we discuss once again:

- Aspects of good practice
- What you perceive the problems might be in performance?
- What are the solutions/how can performance in these areas possibly improve?

**1)** How the trainer/tutor/assessor actually **relates to learners:** Listening to your needs/Understanding you and how you like to learn/The support they give you for example in improving your study techniques or time management

**2) Dealing with young learners (the 16-18s as opposed to the 19 plus)**

**3) Getting the information across:** Ability to explain the subject/Making your subject interesting or enjoyable for you

**4) Managing the group:** Dealing with disruptive learners

**5) Preventing learners from leaving early**

**Management of learning**

We now want to look at TWO management related aspects. Once again for each category can we discuss:

- Aspects of good practice
- What you perceive the problems might be in performance?
- What are the solutions/how can performance in these areas possibly improve?

**1) Communicating with the learner timetables/changes**
- Helping new people settle in
- Managing timetables so that they suit the learner as best they can
- Communicating changes in times for sessions

**2) Providing full cover**
- Making sure enough trainers and/or assessors are available
- Providing support when I or other learners have problems
- Assessors turning up as planned
- Seeing the same assessor throughout

Summary and round up

For all trainers and management related issues considered….

Where are providers now? How positive are they – what are they doing right?
What are the main problems faced by providers?
What are the solutions to these problems?
If there are three main issues to come from this discussion that need addressing what are they?

Support whilst learning (including facilities, resources/equipment and counselling/personal support to learners)

In this section we will cover the following:

- Facilities

- Dealing with learner's problems
- Complaints procedure
- Early leavers

**Facilities**

The analysis that explored drivers of satisfaction found that facilities were important to the work based learner.

Are ratings of facilities/resources as providers would expect?

How do providers feel that their own facilities might be rated – IT/library, canteen, Specialist equipment etc.?

FOR THOSE THAT ARE COMPLEMENTARY ABOUT THEIR OWN FACILITIES What makes them so good? PROBE FOR BEST PRACTICE IDEAS
FOR THOSE WHO ARE CRITICAL TO SOME DEGREE OF THEIR OWN FACILITIES What would they like to do? Will anything be done about this in the short/medium term? IF SO What and how? IF NOT Why not/what are the barriers?

If you had to prioritise spending/budget between these particular aspects/facilities tell me which areas would be high priority, medium priority and low priority
FACILITATOR TO HAVE EACH TYPE OF FACILITY/RESOURCE FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE ON A AN A4 PIECE OF PAPER AND WILL CHOOSE A PILE DEPENDING ON THE MAJORITY OF OPINION

*Learner support*

Problems experienced – Are providers aware of the problems that their learners face?

To what extent are tutors/teachers/trainers able to actively seek information relating to problems? Is it the case that problems only emerge if the learner raises them? PROBE FOR BEST PRACTICE **ON RECOGNISING PROBLEMS**

What support mechanisms could/should there be in place? How realistic are these to put in place? What seems to work? PROBE FOR BEST PRACTICE **ON DEALING WITH PROBLEMS**

Thinking specifically about the use of a counsellor, do providers offer this? Do they know of any other providers offering this? What are the benefits? Would it be advisable for all providers?

**Complaints procedure**

What is the complaints procedure? Do providers feel that this is intimidating for the younger work based learners? PROBE FOR BEST PRACTICE How quickly do you aim for an issue to reach an outcome?

How is the complaints procedure communicated to learners?

**Early leavers**

Early leavers – Is enough being done to prevent learners leaving the course? What happens to someone who leaves the course early:

- Are they given an exit interview?
- Are they signposted elsewhere for perhaps more advice/a different type of training?
- Are leavers followed up?
- What priority do providers put on getting leavers back onto the course?

Summary and round up

For all of these issues considered….

Where are providers now? How positive are they – what are they doing right?
What are the main problems faced by providers?
What are the solutions to these problems?
If there are three main issues to come from this discussion that need addressing what are they?

## ii)    FURTHER EDUCATION/ ADULT AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

**Breakout session 1: Pre entry**

THIS IS THE FIRST BREAK OUT GROUP SO WE WILL NEED:

- INTRODUCTIONS
- BRIEF OUTLINE OF WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN EACH GROUP (FACILITATOR HAS A TOPIC GUIDE, DISCUSSION IS PROMPTED BY FACILITATOR AND HE/SHE WILL PROBE, GUIDE THE DISCUSSION SO THAT ALL AREAS ARE COVERED)
- EXPLAIN THE TAPING AND OBTAIN AGREEMENT FROM ALL

This particular group will cover the following areas:

- Motivations and use of advice to influence decisions
- Marketing
- Contact prior to the learning/preparedness
- Induction
- Learner support
- Complaints procedure
- Early leavers

**Motivation/Use of advice to influence decisions**

Decision to undertake the learning: What motivates and guides individuals in their choices?

REPEAT SOME OF THE KEY FINDINGS ABOUT SOURCES OF ADVICE AND USEFULNESS SCORES

How do you feel about the sources of advice being used? Do you think that these advice sources have the best knowledge/quality of advice about FE/ ACE?  What

about other sources, e.g personal contacts?   Does the advice given truly reflect the course aims? If not, how can the quality of advice be improved?

How can they work together with agencies and other less formal influencers? Should providers have more contact/dialogue with the various sources of advice being used? GO THROUGH EACH SOURCE AND PROBE FOR:

- Is more dialogue needed? Is it realistic?
- How could providers approach and inform these sources of advice?

**Marketing (Only cover this if time)**

Are providers marketing courses to different types of individuals? If so, what is their activity/how intensive is it and are they getting the right messages across? PROBE FOR:

Examples of best practice where providers have marketed to specific target groups? What has worked and why is this the case?

Examples where marketing has not been so effective and why do they think that this is the case?

**Contact prior to the learning/preparedness**

What types of contact do the providers have with:

- individuals prior to learning – what type of contact do they have? How well prepared do they feel individuals are before they embark on WBL? Do they think INDIVIDUALS have a good understanding of what is involved PROBE FOR:

    - standard of work required
    - type of assessment
    - type of learning methods used in sessions
    - the other learners they will meet

- How can providers ensure that individuals are undertaking the courses best suited to their needs?

**Induction**

What induction process do providers have FOR INDIVIDUALS?
Do they feel that these are adequate? Is there anything that they would like to add to the process that they have not to date?

Managing expectations – Do individuals have the right expectations of the course? What procedures (i.e. induction) can be put in place/developed further to ensure that any mismatch in expectations is rectified as soon as possible?

*Learner support*

Problems experienced – Are providers aware of the problems that their learners face?

To what extent are tutors/teachers/trainers able to actively seek information relating to problems? Is it the case that problems only emerge if the learner raises them? PROBE FOR BEST PRACTICE **ON RECOGNISING PROBLEMS**

What support mechanisms could/should there be in place? How realistic are these to put in place? What seems to work? PROBE FOR BEST PRACTICE **ON DEALING WITH PROBLEMS**

**Complaints procedure**

What is the complaints procedure FOR INDIVIDUALS?
Do providers feel that this is intimidating for the younger work based learners?
PROBE FOR BEST PRACTICE How quickly do you aim for an issue to reach an outcome?

How is the complaints procedure communicated to learners?

**(Early leavers – only if there is time to cover)**

Early leavers – Is enough being done to prevent learners leaving the course? What happens to someone who leaves the course early:

- Are they given an exit interview?
- Are they signposted elsewhere for perhaps more advice/a different type of training?
- Are leavers followed up?
- What priority do providers put on getting leavers back onto the course?

**Summary and round up**

For all pre entry and induction issues considered….

Where are providers now? How positive are they – what are they doing right? What are the main problems faced by providers? What are the solutions to these problems? If there are three main issues to come from this discussion that need addressing what are they?

**Breakout session 2: Quality of training**

*Follow discussion guide as follows. If necessary move into the area of how useful they feel a measure of satisfaction would be in line with what is suggested in ELW'a's Quality Consultation, what ways could this be measured and taken forward etc.*

This session will cover:

- Quality of trainers/tutors
- Management of learning

**Quality of trainers/tutors**

REMIND THE GROUP OF THE OVERALL SATISFACTION SCORE. How do they feel about this rating? Do they feel positive or negative with the way provision has been rated overall?

MOVE ONTO THE INDIVIDUAL MEASURES IN THE SURVEY – DISCUSS IN RELATION TO THE ACTION GRID AND PROBE FOR:

**ACTION AREAS**

FOR EACH OF THE MEASURES BELOW THE RESPONDENTS SAID THAT WHILST THEY WERE IMPORTANT THE PERFORMANCE WAS RELATIVELY LOWER THAN OTHER MEASURES. FOR EACH ONE, what do providers perceive that the problems might be in performance? What are the solutions/how can performance in these areas possibly improve?

The areas to action specifically for FE are (most of them relate to planning and resourcing):

- Setting clear targets
- Making good use of lesson/session time
- The support they give you
- Prompt and regular feedback
- Understanding you and how you like to learn

We want to concentrate on some of the other performance measures now. For each category can we discuss once again:

- Aspects of good practice
- What you perceive the problems might be in performance?
- What are the solutions/how can performance in these areas possibly improve?

1) How the tutor actually ***relates to learners:*** Listening to your needs/Understanding you and how you like to learn/The support they give you for example in improving your study techniques or time management

2) ***Dealing with young learners (the 16-18s as opposed to the 19 plus)***

3) ***Getting the information across:*** Ability to explain the subject/Making your subject ineresting or enjoyable for you

4) ***Managing the group:*** Dealing with disruptive learners

5) ***Preventing learners from leaving early***

**Management of learning**

We now want to look at TWO  management related aspects. Once again for each category can we discuss:

- Aspects of good practice
- What you perceive the problems might be in performance?
- What are the solutions/how can performance in these areas possibly improve?

1) ***Communicating with the learner timetables/changes***
   - Helping new people settle in
   - Managing timetables so that they suit the learner as best they can
   - Communicating changes in times for sessions

2) ***Providing full cover***
   - Making sure enough tutors are available
   - Providing support when I or other learners have problems

Summary and round up

For all teaching and management related issues considered….

Where are providers now? How positive are they – what are they doing right?

What are the main problems faced by providers?

What are the solutions to these problems?

If there are three main issues to come from this discussion that need addressing what are they?

## iii)   SCHOOL SIXTH FORMS

**Breakout session 1: Pre entry and learner support**

THIS IS THE FIRST BREAK OUT GROUP SO WE WILL NEED:

- INTRODUCTIONS
- BRIEF OUTLINE OF WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN EACH GROUP (FACILITATOR HAS A TOPIC GUIDE, DISCUSSION IS PROMPTED BY FACILITATOR AND HE/SHE WILL PROBE, GUIDE THE DISCUSSION SO THAT ALL AREAS ARE COVERED
- EXPLAIN THE TAPING

This particular group will cover the following areas:

- Motivations and use of advice to influence decisions
- Induction
- Dealing with learner's problems
- Complaints procedure
- Early leavers

**Motivation/Use of advice to influence decisions**

Decision to undertake the learning: What motivates and guides individuals in their choices? How does this impact on their motivation to learn?

REPEAT SOME OF THE KEY FINDINGS ABOUT SOURCES OF ADVICE AND USEFULNESS SCORES:

70% used teachers at school for advice

69% Careers Wales
65% parents/family
35% friends
20% School Sixth Form admissions

How do you feel about the sources of advice being used? Do you think that these agencies have the best knowledge/quality of advice about options for school leavers?

Do School Sixth Forms feel that advice and guidance given out by other agencies and personal contacts truly reflect the course aims? If not, how can the quality of advice be improved?

How can they work together with agencies and other less formal influencers? Should School Sixth Forms have more contact/dialogue with the various sources of advice being used? GO THROUGH EACH SOURCE AND PROBE FOR:

- Is more dialogue needed? Is it realistic?
- How could School Sixth Forms approach and inform these sources of advice?

**Induction**

What induction process do School Sixth Forms have? Do they feel that this is adequate? Is there anything that they would like to add to the process that they have not to date?

Managing expectations – Do individuals have the right expectations of the course? What procedures (i.e. induction) can be put in place/developed further to ensure that any mismatch in expectations is rectified as soon as possible?

*Learner support*

Problems experienced – Are School Sixth Forms aware of the problems that their learners face? What are the main problems experienced by this learner group?

To what extent are teachers able to actively seek information relating to problems? Is it the case that problems only emerge if the learner raises them? PROBE FOR BEST PRACTICE **ON RECOGNISING PROBLEMS**

What support mechanisms could/should there be in place? How realistic are these to put in place? What seems to work? PROBE FOR BEST PRACTICE **ON DEALING WITH PROBLEMS**

IF SCHOOL SIXTH FORMS MENTION COUNSELLOR. Thinking specifically about the use of a counsellor, do School Sixth Forms offer this? Do they know of any other School Sixth Forms offering this? What are the benefits? Would it be advisable for all School Sixth Forms?

**Complaints procedure**

What is the complaints procedure? Do School Sixth Forms feel that this is intimidating for younger learners? PROBE FOR BEST PRACTICE How quickly do you aim for an issue to reach an outcome?

How is the complaints procedure communicated to learners?

Are there any formal or informal groups/ways that learners can feed back to the provider – PROBE FOR BEST PRACTICE RELATING TO HOW FEEDBACK MECHANISMS ARE PUT INTO PLACE AND OPERATED How will School Sixth Forms react to feedback and how do they respond to the learners?

**Early leavers**

Early leavers – Is enough being done to prevent learners leaving the course? What happens to someone who leaves the course early:

- Are they given an exit interview?
- Are they signposted elsewhere for perhaps more advice/a different type of learning?
- Are leavers followed up?

- What priority do School Sixth Forms put on getting leavers back onto the course?

Summary and round up

For all of these issues considered….

Where are School Sixth Forms now? How positive are they – what are they doing right?
What are the main problems faced by School Sixth Forms?
What are the solutions to these problems?
If there are three main issues to come from this discussion that need addressing what are they?

**Breakout session 2: Measuring satisfaction**

This session will cover:

- The Action Grid on learner satisfaction
- Measures of satisfaction
- How satisfaction data could be used as a management tool
- A common framework for surveys

**The Action Grid**

SHOW THE GROUP THE ACTION GRID: Explain that these are learners' views and that this is a diagnostic tool.
The items in the Maintain quadrant are important in terms of their contribution to overall satisfaction and learners think that performance is relatively good in these areas:
  - Ability to explain the subject
  - Listening to your needs (on the cusp)
  - The support they give to you (on the cusp)
  - Making good use of lesson time (on the cusp)

In order to have the greatest impact on satisfaction, the focus should be on understanding the issues in the Action quadrant and brainstorming how these could be addressed:

- Making the subject interesting and enjoyable
- Understanding you and how you like to learn

ASSESS THE GROUP'S RECEPTION OF THESE IDEAS AND IF NECESSARY MOVE ONTO THE NEXT SECTION.

IF DEGREE OF INTEREST IN TOOL, ask the group:

Why do you think learners may have rated these items relatively lower than others?
*Prompt for ways in which learners' ratings might be positively impacted.*

**Measuring satisfaction**

We want to think about what broad areas you feel should be explored with learners in School Sixth Forms. PROBE FOR BROAD AREAS THAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED ON A QUESTIONNAIRE. PROBE FOR:

- TEACHING QUALITY
- QUALITY OF EQUIPMENT/MATERIALS
- FACILITIES FOR SOCIALISING
- COMPLAINTS
- PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED
- IMPACTS
- EXPECTATIONS
- SUPPORT

FOR EACH BROAD AREA MENTIONED – GO BACK AND PROBE FOR THE SPECIFICS:

1. WHAT SPECIFIC DATA WOULD THEY REQUIRE UNDER EACH BROAD COMPONENT

2. WHAT PURPOSE WOULD HAVING THIS INFORMATION SERVE/HOW WOULD THEY USE THE DATA

**Using satisfaction data**

What are the "positives" for a learner satisfaction survey? What are the "negatives" for a learner satisfaction survey?

IF THERE ARE SOME POSITIVE THOUGHTS How interested would people round the table be in conducting a survey in their own school? IF THERE IS A DEGREE OF INTEREST How would the information be used? Would the information be incorporated into management and planning at all?

**A common framework for satisfaction surveys**

RUN THROUGH THE IDEA THAT SURVEYS ARE DONE IN SCHOOL SIXTH FORMS – THAT DATA IS FED INTO ONE CENTRAL SOURCE SO THAT NATIONAL BENCHMARKS COULD BE CALCULATED – THIS IS A BOTTOM UP APPROACH.

What is the response to this idea? What are the "positives"? What are the "negatives"?

Could they envisage the following..AND IF SO HOW SHOULD IT BE MANAGED:

- School Sixth Forms agreeing a core set of questions
- Agreement on timing of the survey
- Agreement on method of collecting data

**Summary**

Any final thoughts on the subject of learner satisfaction surveys in their particular environment?

Produced by NOP and ELWa on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG).  ELWa is an Assembly Sponsored Body established in April 2001 under the Learning and Skills Act 2000.  ELWa is responsible for planning, funding, promoting and widening access to post-16 education training in Wales.  From 1 April 2006 ELWa will become part of WAG.

NOP Research Group is the UK arm of NOP World, the nineth largest research agency in the world. In the UK, NOP employs around 600 staff and is split into specialist divisions.  The team working on Learner Satisfaction 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.

LEARNER SATISFACTION PROVIDER WORKSHOP REPORT