

National School Sixth Form Survey for Wales 2004

MAIN REPORT

Customer Research Strategy – Report Two



NATIONAL SCHOOL SIXTH FORM SURVEY FOR WALES 2004

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NOP World

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

In the UK, NOP employs around 600 staff and it is split into specialist divisions. The team working on the National School Sixth Form Survey for Wales 2004 is in the division that specialises in Social Research and there are 20 researchers dedicated to this field. The team has relevant experience of both large-scale social research surveys and of carrying out customer satisfaction research.

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CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD By Sheila Drury



ELWa recognises that to implement its ambitious modernisation agenda for post-16 learning, we must continue to understand learners to ensure that they are at the heart

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

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

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

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

share best practice and improve satisfaction levels for all learners.

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

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

Sheila Drury – Chairman
September 2004

1.0 INTRODUCTION

ELWa has responsibility for planning, funding and promoting post-16 learning provision in Wales, with the exception of Higher Education. This includes Further Education (FE), Adult Continuing Education (ACE), School Sixth Forms and Work Based Learning (WBL) programmes.

A key element of fulfilling its responsibilities to learners is that ELWa should understand learner needs and experiences and use this knowledge to continually improve the range and quality of provision.

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

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

The Strategy encompasses three main strands of activity:

- Understanding what motivates customers to learn in order to widen and deepen participation in learning
- Understanding what customers think of the education and learning services they receive
- Tracking and understanding participation within the customer groups (individuals, businesses and communities)

As a key element of the Customer Research Strategy, ELWa commissioned a research project amongst school sixth form students to assess levels of satisfaction with their learning experiences. This was very much an initial step towards understanding this customer group and, given the positive response amongst schools, it is envisaged that it will be the beginning of a longer term commitment to understanding and responding to sixth formers' views of their learning experiences.

This report looks at students' perceptions and describes the learning experience from their point of view. The information it provides will be used to help ELWa and other stakeholders to improve the quality of education for young people in the school sixth form environment.

For further details of ELWa's Customer Research Strategy and how the sixth form research is integrated within it, please see Appendix D.

1.1 Survey Coverage – Sample

The 2004 survey amongst school sixth form students marked a first step in ascertaining what this group of customers thought about learning. Initially, it was envisaged that this would be a primarily qualitative exercise, comprising 12 focus groups in 8 schools, with a small-scale, quantitative self-completion questionnaire exercise. All school sixth forms were invited to take part in the research and response was very positive, with 72 schools expressing an interest. For this reason, it was decided that the self-completion survey of Year 12 and Year 13 students should be offered to all schools showing an interest. In the end, 61 schools agreed to participate and completed questionnaires were received from 54.

In total, 9,434 questionnaires were issued to participating schools and 5,717 students completed questionnaires and returned them directly to NOP. This gave a student response rate of 61%.

The survey was designed to build upon the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 (NLSSW) which interviewed around 6,200 learners in Further Education, accredited Adult Continuing Education, and Work-Based Learning programmes. School sixth formers were not included in this initial blanket survey because the telephone survey methodology was considered inappropriate for this learner group. Therefore the School Sixth Form Survey for Wales was designed to ensure that the views of this learner group were also considered.



1.2 Survey Coverage – Question Areas

The topics covered by the schools sixth form survey overlap with the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales conducted by NOP in 2003. This overlap was designed into the process to ensure that the results would be comparable. The key areas for investigation were as follows:

- expectations of sixth form
- incidence of achieving first choice of learning provider/course of study
- satisfaction with teaching
- levels of motivation
- overall satisfaction with the learning experience and reasons for this

Copies of the self-completion questionnaire and focus group discussion guide are provided in the Appendix.

1.3 Methodology

Headteachers of all school sixth forms in ELWa-funded provision were written to and invited to take part in the research. ELWa monitored responses, and a list of interested schools was issued to NOP.

The schools were divided into regions and into those delivering primarily in the Welsh medium and those delivering learning in English. Schools on both lists were given a deprivation 'score' based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation and linked to the school postcode (where this was provided). On this basis, schools were contacted and recruited to take part in focus groups, ensuring that a broad range of deprivation scores were covered and that both Welsh and English medium schools were included. Focus groups at Welsh medium schools were moderated in Welsh.

All schools taking part in the focus groups were asked to distribute a self-completion questionnaire to their Year 12 and Year 13 students. In addition, schools that had shown an interest in being involved in the research, but were not involved in focus groups, were invited to participate in the quantitative survey.

The quantitative survey was carried out using a self-completion paper questionnaire. In order to

preserve their anonymity, all students were provided with an envelope in which to insert their completed survey. The survey was administered by the individual schools, which were responsible for both distributing questionnaires to Year 12 and Year 13 students on one day, and collecting in and returning completed questionnaires to NOP.

The questionnaire was provided in bilingual format, so that students had the option to respond in either English or Welsh. The survey (focus groups and self-completion survey) took place between February and April 2004.

Full details of response are included in the Technical Appendix.

1.4 Reporting

The substantial sample size of students generated by the self-completion survey and the robustness of the survey data provides the opportunity of analysing results down to ELWa region level. In addition, ELWa has devised a 'rurality' measure to identify which electoral wards have least access to a variety of services (and may therefore have problems accessing learning services). This measure was mapped against the postcode of each participating school, enabling analysis of 'most rural' versus 'less rural' schools.

Wherever possible, comparisons have been made between the results for sixth form students and those for 16 to 18 year old learners in FE and WBL (as identified in the recent NLSSW). It should be noted that different methods of data collection were used in the two surveys and therefore direct comparisons are made with a degree of caution.

Feedback from the 12 focus groups is provided in shaded boxes to differentiate it from the quantitative analysis. Where verbatim comments from students are included in the report, these are italicised and referenced by a school number. A list of schools and their characteristics is provided in the Technical Appendix.

The intention of this report is to highlight the most significant findings from the School Sixth Form Survey, supporting these where possible with anecdotal feedback from the focus groups. In addition, each school participating in the self-completion survey has been issued with a graphical summary of the results for their students compared against the results for all students participating in the research.

All those involved in the project are, however, keen that all the data collected is put to full use. With this in mind, the overall data (i.e. that for all students) will be made available on the ELWa website for further analysis: <http://www.elwa.org.uk>. (Note, it will not be possible to analyse responses by individual school).

1.5 Guidance on Interpretation of the Data

The tables in this report are based on all students answering each question.

A table on interpretation of the data is provided in the Technical Appendix.

The accuracy of estimates based on the survey data depends on two things: firstly the sample size; secondly, the actual survey result. For example, based on 5,000 interviews, a finding of 50% has a margin of error of $\pm 1.4\%$. So if 50% of sixth form students in the survey say they are satisfied with the overall quality of teaching they received, the true figure for sixth form students as a whole (i.e. the sixth form population) is between 48.6% and 51.4%. The margins of error are larger in the middle of the scale (i.e. for results around the 50% mark) and smaller at the top and bottom of the scale.

A finding of 10% (or a finding of 90%) has a margin of error of $\pm 0.8\%$. So if 90% of sixth form students say they are satisfied with the overall quality of teaching they received (or 10% were dissatisfied), the true finding in the population is between 89.2% and 90.8% (or between 9.2% and 10.8% dissatisfied).

The smaller the sample size, the larger the margin of error. It is generally not advisable to analyse any

subgroup smaller than 100. However, this report does publish some figures for smaller groups to enable maximum use to be made of the findings. Users of the data should remain aware of this issue when dealing with the data.

In comparing results in different subgroups, e.g. for students in Welsh medium schools and students in English medium schools, as a general rule, based on sample sizes of 100 or more, a difference of 12% (or more) between two groups is always statistically significant. So, if there is a finding of 50% amongst students in Welsh medium schools and a finding of 62% amongst students in English medium schools, the difference between the two groups indicates a genuine difference in the population, and is not just a result of the survey margins of error. The larger the sample size, the smaller the difference needs to be to indicate a genuine difference between different groups in the whole population.

Some figures in the charts and tables may not add to 100% due to rounding. In cases where answers add to more than 100% because multiple responses are allowed, a note has been provided.

The following symbols have been used in the tables:

- * to indicate percentages of less than 0.5 per cent but more than zero
- to indicate zero per cent

2.0 OVERALL SATISFACTION

This section covers:

- Students' overall satisfaction with their experience of learning in their sixth form
- Students' expectations of the sixth form and the extent to which these had been met

2.1 Overall Satisfaction with the Learning Experience

Students were asked to take into account all aspects of learning in their sixth form and provide an overall rating for their level of satisfaction. This was done using a seven-point satisfaction scale, ranging from extremely satisfied to extremely dissatisfied.

The overall picture was positive. Just under half of students (45%) were extremely or very satisfied with their overall learning experience, whilst a further 40% described themselves as fairly satisfied. This means that 85% of students expressed some degree of satisfaction, whilst just 6% expressed dissatisfaction. In terms of making improvements for the future it is not only those learners who expressed dissatisfaction that should be considered, but also those expressing just mild satisfaction (i.e. describing themselves as fairly satisfied).

These findings were consistent across gender and year group, and by size of school.

Table 2.1 Overall satisfaction with experience

Extremely satisfied	9%
Very satisfied	35%
Fairly satisfied	40%
Dissatisfied	6%
Summary	
Total extremely/very satisfied	45%
Total satisfied	85%
Total dissatisfied	6%

(Note: The total of extremely/very satisfied students totals 45% due to rounding)

Notably, the language in which students were taught influenced overall satisfaction; half of students (51%) at Welsh medium schools were extremely or very satisfied compared with 43% of those at English medium schools.

This ties in with the feedback from focus groups with students in Welsh medium schools, which showed that levels of satisfaction were positively influenced by the culture of school. These schools were characterised by students who were involved in extra curricular activities that often focussed on Welsh tradition, e.g. eisteddfods. In addition, it was surmised that these students tended to have very supportive and involved parents, who were instrumental in the decision to attend that particular school.

'Welsh medium education is totally different. Lots of English schools don't even offer a sixth form. I think you're a lot more comfortable in a Welsh school; you socialise a lot more in school, things like the Eisteddfod.'
(School no. 1)

There was also an impact on satisfaction levels according to the region in which the students were located. Thus, 40% of students in South East Wales described themselves as extremely or very satisfied compared with 46% or more in other regions. In addition, students at schools in the more rural wards were more likely to be extremely or very satisfied than other students (52% versus 44% respectively). To some extent, these variables are interlinked.

Whilst type of qualification had no significant impact on levels of satisfaction, course subject was an influential factor. Most notably, the subjects in which over half of students were extremely or very satisfied included:

- Languages (Welsh)
- Languages (Other)
- Key skills

Fewer than 40% of students studying the following subjects were extremely or very satisfied with their overall learning experience:

- Business, administration and law
- Sport science

Table 2.1 Overall satisfaction with the learning experience

	Gender			Region				Medium of school		Rurality	
	Total	Male	Female	SE	SW	Mid	North	Welsh	English	Most rural	Less rural
Base: all answering	5563	2438	3069	2555	1240	654	1114	1194	4369	587	4976
% Extremely satisfied	9	9	10	8	13	8	9	12	8	11	9
% Very satisfied	35	34	37	32	37	38	39	38	34	40	35
% Fairly satisfied	40	41	40	42	38	41	37	38	41	39	40
% Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	10	11	9	11	8	8	9	7	11	6	10
% Fairly dissatisfied	4	4	4	5	3	3	4	3	4	3	4
% Very dissatisfied	1	1	1	1	*	*	1	1	1	*	1
% Extremely dissatisfied	1	1	1	1	1	1	*	1	1	1	1
% Extremely/very satisfied	45	42	46	40	49	46	48	51	43	52	44
% Extremely/very dissatisfied	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	1	2

Predictably, there was a strong correlation between levels of overall satisfaction with the learning experience and satisfaction levels with the quality of teaching. Hence, students expressing high levels of satisfaction with the quality of teaching were more likely to express high levels of satisfaction overall. Similarly with motivation levels; those students who described themselves as highly motivated were more likely than less motivated students to say they were extremely or very satisfied with the overall learning experience.

Comparison with the findings from the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 (NLSSW) revealed some interesting contrasts. Levels of satisfaction amongst school sixth form students were much lower than for 16 to 18 year old learners in FE or WBL. Thus, around seven in ten of both FE (67%) and WBL (70%) learners described themselves as extremely or very satisfied, compared with just 45% of school sixth form students.

The self-completion survey did not specifically ask sixth form students to state their reasons for satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their learning experience. However, the focus groups provide useful anecdotal feedback in terms of students' ideas about ideal versus actual experiences of being in the sixth form.

Much dissatisfaction with the sixth form experience related to a perceived lack of freedom; the amount of work had negatively impacted on some students' views, and where courses were enforced, there was often a negative response (e.g. key skills, Welsh Baccalaureate).

Poor teaching methods and teachers treating students 'like children' were also mentioned as having a negative effect.



**Table 2.2 Overall satisfaction with the learning experience – FE and WBL
(from NLSSW 2003)**

	FE	WBL	School Sixth Form students
Base: Unweighted	1387	351	5563
Base: Weighted	1153	355	–
% Extremely satisfied	26	24	9
% Very satisfied	41	46	35
% Fairly satisfied	27	25	40
% Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3	1	10
% Fairly dissatisfied	1	3	4
% Very dissatisfied	*	*	1
% Extremely dissatisfied	1	1	1
% Extremely/very satisfied	67	70	–
% Extremely/very dissatisfied	2	1	–

‘There’s a teacher missing, so we’re only getting half our lessons.’ (School no. 7)

‘She adapts old stuff to the new syllabus and it doesn’t really work’ (School no. 3)

‘Treat us more as adults – as individual people!’ (School no. 7)

‘I think people expected a bit more respect... we wanted to be treated a bit more like adults’ (School no. 5)

2.2 Expectations of Sixth Form

Satisfaction is influenced by a variety of factors, such as the student’s disposition (i.e. their character and outlook) and by their expectations. Therefore, students were asked about their expectations prior to joining their sixth form in terms of whether or not these had been met, or indeed, whether they had an expectation on certain issues.

Table 2.3 (next page) reveals that students were far more likely to hold expectations regarding the standard of work and amount of work they would have to undertake (around a tenth of students had no expectations in this regard), as opposed to the teaching styles and methods used and the structure of courses (around a fifth of students held no expectation on these issues). It was somewhat surprising, however, that just under a fifth of students had no expectations about the content of their courses.

When the results were analysed purely in terms of those who had an expectation on each issue, it was evident that students were more likely to feel that expectations had been met in terms of the standard of work expected (89% said expectation was met) and the amount of work they would have to do (87% said expectation had been met). In contrast, just 75% felt that their expectations had been met in terms of teaching styles and methods used in lessons.

Table 2.3 Expectations of Sixth Form

	Base: all answering	Expectation met	Expectation not met	No expectation
% The standard of work expected	5246	81	10	9
% The amount of work you would have to do	5351	79	11	9
% The number of deadlines you would have to meet	5268	71	16	13
% The amount of responsibility you would have to take	5251	71	14	16
% The content of your course(s)	5174	70	13	17
% The structure of your course(s)	5153	65	14	21
% Teaching styles and methods used in lessons	5164	59	20	20

(Note: percentages add up in rows. 'Don't know' excluded)

Table 2.4 Expectations of Sixth Form (all those with an expectation)

	Base: all with an expectation	Expectation met	Expectation not met
% The standard of work expected	4762	89	11
% The amount of work you would have to do	4858	87	13
% The amount of responsibility you would have to take	4437	84	16
% The content of your course(s)	4295	84	16
% The structure of your course(s)	4056	82	18
% The number of deadlines you would have to meet	4579	82	18
% Teaching styles and methods used in lessons	4107	75	25

(Note: percentages add up in rows. 'Don't know' and 'no expectation' excluded)

Female students were slightly more likely to have had their expectations met regarding the number of deadlines they would have to meet than their male counterparts (84% versus 79%). In addition, Year 13 students were more likely to feel their expectations

had been met on this issue than those in Year 12 (86% versus 79% respectively) – this was predictable, given the longer time served in the sixth form by Year 13 students.



Table 2.5 Whether expectation met about number of deadlines by gender and year group

	Total	Gender		Year group	
		Male	Female	Yr 12	Yr 13
Base: all with an expectation	4579	1928	2541	2658	1807
% Expectation met	82	79	84	79	86
% Expectation not met	18	21	16	21	14

(Note: percentages add up in rows. 'Don't know' and 'no expectation' excluded)

It is worth noting that, in line with the results for NLSSW, for all the issues listed, where students possessed an expectation they were more likely to have seriously considered leaving their sixth form where these had not been met. This was a trend most pronounced regarding the structure of courses and the teaching styles and methods used in lessons.

Students participating in the focus groups felt that, in general, their expectations of being in the sixth form had been realistic and that these had largely been met. Expectations were primarily based on the experiences of family and friends, information from teachers and on students' own observations of those ahead of them.

The following themes emerged regarding expectations:

Responsibility and relationships with teachers

Most students expected teachers to treat them as adults, making a distinction between them and the rest of the school.

'(I thought) we'd rule the school!' (School no. 6)

'(Teachers) appreciate you are continuing studying, further education-wise and they respect that.' (School no. 8)

'(We) get to organise events and stuff – like you get to organise a disco, charity events.' (School no. 4)

'Teachers are relaxed because they've a small class and they know that the people studying the subject are probably more than likely to want to do it.' (School no. 4)

'There's a feeling that they're trying to treat you differently and be diplomatic and stuff, but it never works out because the teachers still think of you as children.' (School no. 2)

'Teachers don't pester you – they give us the work and if we do it we hand it in...we have the responsibility to do the work by ourselves.' (School no. 7)

'Teachers do treat you better than lower down the school' (School no. 5)

'We have to do more stuff for ourselves – teachers don't do it all for you' (School no. 3)

'It was nice seeing the little children looking up to you; it's made a link between the sixth and the rest of the school' (School no. 2 – on organising school eisteddfod)

The fact that students are taught in smaller classes than at GCSE was seen as a major contributor to their development of better relationships with teachers:

'There's lots more one-to-one.' (School no. 7)

'You feel less inhibited in a smaller group' (School no. 5)

Nature of courses

Most students acknowledged that because they were studying their chosen subjects and qualifications they were finding their studies interesting. However, a number of students conceded that they had found the jump from GSCE to A level to be harder than they had imagined:

'We chose what we wanted to do, so it should be interesting.' (School no. 1)

'You're not doing lessons you don't like...in the sixth form, because I've chosen the subjects, I just find it easier.' (School no. 7)

'We have to be more organised – at GCSE it was all given to you.' (School no. 5)

'I didn't really think about how the courses were going to be, just thought about all the free time.' (School no. 2)

'A level physics is harder than AS level'
(School no. 7)

'They should make GCSEs harder or A levels easier, it's too big a jump' (School no. 6)

Amount of work

Views varied, but the general impression was that the amount of work was greater than expected.

'For GCSEs it was quite easy. I came back and did the same type of work as before and didn't pass the tests. It's such a big jump; nobody prepares you for the jump.'
(School no. 1)

'You cut down on the lessons you have, so you don't think you'll have as much work, but then it turns out to be double.' (School no. 8)

'Teachers told us it would be similar to GCSE, but that's not true. In GCSE you had set tasks but now we're given all the work in one go and have to work at our pace... we're not told what to do.' (School no. 6)

'I didn't expect it to be this hard; I didn't expect so much homework.' (School no. 5)

'There's a lot of pressure in the sixth form – you get home and work a few hours, it's always on your mind. If you don't keep up you won't get the grades you want... We should do more class work so that there's less homework...I'm 16 and I have a job and other things in my life – it's not just work.' (School no. 5)

'Sometimes there is a lot of work in all your subjects at the same time.' (School no. 3)

There was a general expectation that there would be more freedom and more free time in the sixth form, and whilst this expectation was met in some schools, this was not the case in others.

(Actual experience of sixth form is...)'Relaxed and more freedom.' (School no. 8)

'I thought we'd be given a lot more freedom than we've got.' (School no. 5)

'I thought there would be more privileges. In our common room we have to work, whereas in other (schools) you have play stations.' (School no. 5)

'I'd choose college (if I was starting again) because I'd rather have more freedom.'
(School no. 1)

'If we'd gone to college, we could wear what we want, be treated like adults... here... people mix up who's a child and who's an adult.' (School no. 5)

Where 'freedom' had been granted, there were sometimes mixed reactions. Indeed, for some students, the more disciplined environment of school was seen as a positive:

'It's too laid back in college; you wear what you like, do what you like' (School no. 1)

'They're trying to treat us like adults, but you need deadlines and punishments if you're not working'
(School no. 6)

Relationships between teachers and students can be too good – Mr X doesn't get annoyed with anything you do – makes you think you can do anything' (School no. 4)

2.2.1 Comparison with Further Education and Work Based Learning

When the results for school sixth forms were compared with those for FE and WBL there were some distinct differences. For example, whilst the views of sixth formers and FE students were broadly similar regarding the amount of work they would have to do and the standard of work expected, FE and WBL students were at least 10% more likely than sixth formers to say their expectations had been met on the following:



- Structure of courses
- Amount of responsibility
- Course content
- Teaching styles and methods used

In addition, those in FE were also over 10% more likely than sixth form students to say their expectations had been met in relation to:

- Amount of deadlines you would have to meet

2.3 Summary of Key Points

85% of school sixth form students expressed some degree of satisfaction with their overall learning experience. Indeed, just under half of students (45%) were extremely or very satisfied overall. Just 6% of students expressed dissatisfaction.

Comparison with the NLSSW shows that levels of satisfaction with the learning experience are lower amongst school sixth form students than amongst those in FE or WBL of the same age (where around seven in ten in each group described themselves as extremely or very satisfied).

Satisfaction varied by location and by the medium in which students were taught. Thus, 40% of students in South East Wales were extremely or very satisfied, compared with 46% or more in other regions. Students at Welsh medium schools were more likely than their counterparts in English medium schools to describe themselves as extremely or very satisfied (51% versus 43% respectively).

Judging from the qualitative research, the main areas of dissatisfaction related to false expectations regarding the amount of freedom students would have, the amount of work they would have to do and the way their courses would be taught.

Whilst the majority of students (just under 90%) appeared to have had accurate expectations regarding the standard of work and the amount of work they would need to do, a small but significant minority did not. Their main problems lay with adjusting to a higher level of work required and juggling coinciding deadlines.

A quarter of students did not have their expectations met regarding teaching styles. Where experiences had not met expectations, this appeared to be largely due to the difficult balance between expecting students to take responsibility for themselves and also maintaining a good support structure.

3.0 MAKING THE DECISION

This section covers:

- The choices that students made and whether they managed to get their first choice of learning provider and course(s)
- The reasons for deciding to attend school sixth forms
- The advice sought in making those choices
- Preferred advice options (anecdotal information from focus groups)

3.1 PROVIDER AND COURSE CHOICE

3.1.1 Choice of Provider

Students were asked about their main reasons for deciding to attend their sixth form and whether their school was their first choice in terms of where to study. Subject and course choices were also examined in terms of whether these were first choices, and if not, why it had not been possible to study preferred courses.

Almost three-quarters of sixth form students (73%) were attending their first choice of learning provider. When the results were analysed by various demographic and school features, there were no significant differences by gender nor by the language medium of school. In addition, the subject and qualifications studied appear to have no impact on whether students were attending their first choice of sixth form.

Students in Mid Wales were less likely to be attending their first choice of provider. Linking with this, students in the most rural wards were slightly less likely to be attending their first choice (70% versus 73% respectively). Further, as the size of the sixth form increased, so did the proportion of students stating that they were attending their first choice.

Year 12 students were slightly more likely to report that they were studying at their first choice of provider (74% versus 71% of Year 13 students). Furthermore, Year 12 students were much less likely than their Year 13 counterparts to say that they didn't actively consider another option (15% versus 21% respectively). Possibly this related to the time lapsed since the decision was taken, which may have affected students' perceptions regarding the choices they had made.

Chart 3.1 Attending first choice of learning provider

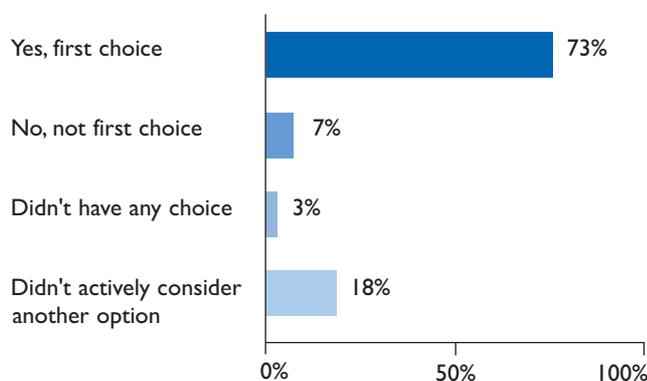


Table 3.1 Studying at first choice of provider by year group, region and size of sixth form

	Year group			Region				Sixth form size				
	Total	Yr 12	Yr 13	SE	SW	Mid	North	Up to 100	101 – 150	151 – 200	201 – 250	251+
Base: all answering	5656	3251	2237	2605	1261	661	1129	700	1082	1375	546	1953
% Yes, first choice	73	74	71	71	80	65	74	68	69	71	73	78
% No, not first choice	7	9	5	7	7	10	6	11	7	7	6	6
% Didn't have a choice	3	2	3	3	2	5	2	2	4	2	3	2
% Didn't actively consider another option	18	15	21	20	12	20	17	19	21	20	18	14



Comparison with the results of the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 (NLSSW) reveals that a greater proportion of learners in Further Education were studying at their first choice of provider (88% versus 73% of sixth form students). Similar proportions felt that they didn't have any choice (4% of 16 to 18 year olds in FE versus 3% of sixth form students). However, whilst 18% of sixth form students 'didn't actively consider another option', the same was true for just 3% of those in FE, reflecting the different decision paths followed by the two groups.

School sixth form students were slightly more likely to be studying at their first choice of provider than 16 to 18 years olds in Work Based Learning (73% versus 68% respectively). Those in WBL were far more likely to say that they didn't have a choice of provider (13% versus 3% of sixth form students), which is predictable given that their learning was undertaken via their employer.

3.1.2 Choice of Course

Over three-quarters of sixth form students were studying their first choice of course (subject and qualification), whilst for a fifth (19%) this was not the case. These proportions were consistent across gender and language medium of the school.

Several factors, however, did influence the likelihood of a student following their first choice of course, as follows:

- Students in Year 12 were less likely than those in Year 13 to report that they were studying their first choice courses (74% versus 82% respectively).
- As with choice of school, students in Mid Wales were less likely than those in other regions to be pursuing

their first choice courses. This links with the finding that students attending schools deemed to be most rural were slightly less likely to be studying their first choice of courses than other students

- Students studying A level or equivalent and AS level were more likely to be studying their first choice courses than students studying other qualifications
- 75% or fewer of those studying 'business, admin & law', 'sport science', 'ICT' and 'key skills' were studying their first choice courses

A key theme of the focus groups was students reporting an almost automatic transition from Year 11 to Year 12. The impression is that, for many, this relates to their expectations or those of their family – it's just 'what you do'.

'(At this school there are) the sorts of people who go to (Welsh medium primary school), to (this school) and stay on for the sixth – the Welsh middle class.' (School no. 2)

'You stay with your friends – it's like an extension of school.' (School no. 3)

Chart 3.2 First choice of course(s)

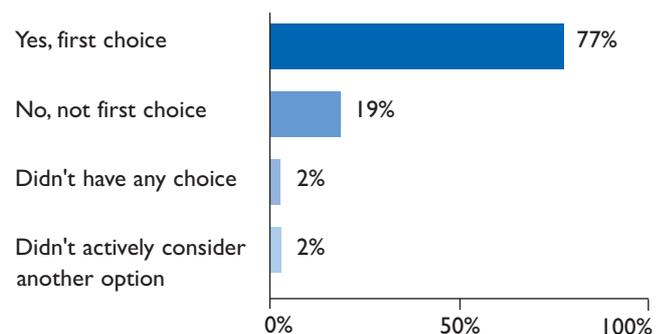


Table 3.2 Studying first choice of course(s) by year group, region and school rurality

	Total	Year group		Region				Rurality	
		Yr 12	Yr 13	SE	SW	Mid	North	Most Rural	Less Rural
Base: all answering	5647	3253	2243	2614	1247	662	1124	595	5052
% Yes, first choice	77	74	82	77	80	72	78	75	78
% No, not first choice	19	21	14	19	16	24	18	22	18
% Didn't have a choice	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	1	2
% Didn't actively consider another option	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2

Table 3.3 Studying first choice of course(s) by qualification

	Total	Type of qualification						
		A level or equivalent	AS level	CSYS ¹ or equivalent	GCSE	RSA ²	GNVQ	Others
Base: all answering	5647	5105	3042	35	214	5	229	25
% Yes, first choice	77	79	78	63	55	40	49	80
% No, not first choice	19	17	19	23	35	20	35	16
% Didn't have a choice	2	1	1	6	8	40	14	–
% Didn't actively consider another option	2	2	2	9	2	–	2	4

1 CSYS – Certificate of Sixth Year Studies

2 RSA – Royal Society of Arts; qualifications awarded for administrative subjects such as typing skills

Comparison with the NLSSW revealed that school sixth form students were far less likely than learners in FE and WBL to be studying their first choice courses (77% versus 89% in FE and 85% in WBL).

The focus groups revealed that students in smaller schools tended to have limited options at sixth form, although these schools often link up with local colleges to widen the choice available to students. Thus, the choice of certain courses would necessitate spending some time off school premises and this could be a factor influencing course choice, sometimes with a poor outcome:

'I just picked psychology which I thought would be interesting... but I wish I hadn't done it because I failed it. It was after school two nights a week... by the time I got there I was too tired and couldn't be bothered to do anything.' (School no. 7).

For Welsh medium schools, many of the students expressed a preference to receive some of their education in English, largely because of a lack of resources in the Welsh medium and the constant need to translate.

'If I was starting again, I'd choose all English subjects' (School no. 1)

'For me this place has worked fine, because I need core subjects anyway. I've been able to do half my work in English.' (School no. 2)

As a general point, in line with the results from the NLSSW, accessing first choice in both learning provider and course influenced overall satisfaction with the sixth form learning experience.

Extremely satisfied
Very satisfied
Fairly satisfied
Indifferent/dissatisfied

↓
Proportion with first choice of provider/course declines through groups

3.1.3 Reasons for Not Studying First Choice Course

Amongst those students who were not studying their preferred courses, the main reasons for this related to:

- Could not fit choices into the timetable (47%)
- School did not provide the courses or subjects that I wanted (36%)
- Advised by teachers not to follow first choice(s) (14%)

Some groups were more likely to cite 'school not being able to provide courses/subjects' as the reason for not pursuing their first choice of subject, as follows:



- Female students (39% versus 33%)
- Year 13 students (41% versus 35%)
- Students in Mid Wales which encompassed the most rural schools (52% cited this reasons, versus 35% or less in other regions)
- Students in smaller sixth forms (150 pupils or fewer)
- Students attending Welsh medium schools (46% cited this reason versus 33% in English medium schools)

For reference, the reasons given by Further Education and Work Based learners regarding not following first choice course were as follows:

Further Education:

- Could not get on chosen training course (17%)
 - Changed my mind/ preferred this course when I heard about it (13%)
 - Didn't enjoy my first choice of training (11%)
 - Provider did not provide the training I wanted (10%)
- Work Based Learning:
- No places on training course (18%)
 - Could not get on the chosen training course (16%)
 - Didn't enjoy my first choice of training (13%)
 - Provider did not provide the training I wanted (10%)

On the whole, students that participated in the groups felt that, if they could make their choices again, they would stick by their choice of school, although some would opt for different courses. The exception to this was the school that is a pilot school for the Welsh Baccalaureate.

Several students said they would have preferred to go to a non-pilot school:

'Employers won't recognise WBAC as an A level'
(School no. 6)

'Doesn't count for (entrance to) English universities'
(School no. 6)

The timetable was a topic raised during all the focus groups. The first choice of course could not always be accommodated into the school timetable,

and for many students this meant they chose to compromise their choice rather than change schools or go to college.

'I would've liked to have studied languages, but there's no language options at this school.'

(School no. 6)

'I really wanted to do Spanish... but they didn't offer it here' (School no. 5)

'When we were taking our options, it said on the form that if there were less than 8 people opting for a subject then it might not run' (School no. 5)

Some students ended up working around timetable obstacles.

'I go to all the normal French lessons and work on my Art stuff when I have free lessons'

(School no. 3)

3.2 Reasons for Attending Sixth Form

Familiarity was key when deciding to attend a particular school and 84% of students said that one of their main reasons for choosing their sixth form was that they were already attending the school. This ties in with the 18% of students who didn't actively consider another option when it came to choosing their place of study. Other key reasons for attending a particular school included:

- convenient location/nearest (53%)
- offered the courses and/ or subjects I wanted (53%)
- friends were going there (51%)

The range of choice available at larger schools and in more populated areas was reflected in the fact that students in these schools/areas were more likely to have been influenced by the fact that their school 'offered the courses and/ or subjects I wanted'.

When the results for sixth forms were compared with those for FE and WBL learners, it was clear that there was an overlap in terms of the key reasons for choosing a provider, namely convenience and offering specific courses or subjects.

Table 3.4 Reasons for attending sixth form by gender, year group and region

	Total	Gender		Year Group		Region			
		Male	Female	Yr 12	Yr 13	SE	SW	Mid	North
Base: all answering	5681	2439	3084	3261	2240	2615	1269	661	1136
% I was already attending this school	85	83	86	83	88	87	83	85	82
% Convenient location/nearest	54	52	55	53	56	53	57	57	50
% Offered the course(s) and/or subject(s) I wanted	53	52	55	56	50	53	56	46	56
% Friends were going there	51	52	50	52	50	49	56	51	50
% Best reputation	23	24	23	23	23	16	29	25	31
% Recommended by careers advisor	6	7	6	7	5	6	9	6	6
% Offered teaching in the Welsh language	6	5	6	6	6	3	4	8	13
% Other	2	2	3	3	2	2	3	3	5
% Don't know	*	*	—	*	—	*	—	—	—
% Had no choice – only option in my area	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

(Note: Multiple responses allowed)

Focus group feedback showed that the pull towards familiarity was very strong and many students did not consider leaving their school, as they assumed they would continue into the sixth form with their peer group, where teachers were a known entity. In other words, arriving in the sixth form often happened 'automatically', rather than via a process of careful consideration.

'It felt like the right thing to do...didn't fancy going to college... My friends came here, plus I wanted to do A levels here – I knew the teachers.' (School no. 7)

'All through the summer holidays I wanted to go to college, but two nights before the start of term I changed my mind. I think I was scared of going to college and all my friends were staying here.' (School no. 1)

'I enjoyed my time in school from Year 7, so I didn't see any reason to change' (School no. 3)

'You know the environment – the teachers... know our personalities and what we prefer' (School no. 3)

'Doing AS and A (levels) you have enough pressure without having to learn a new school system or anything like that' (School no. 3)

'I don't think there ever was a choice really – everyone else in the family has gone on. I never thought about not going on' (School no. 4)

'I like the idea of a sixth form college, but there isn't one round here' (School no. 3)



For some, college was never a consideration. The style of teaching and the fact that college courses tend to be more vocational put students off:

'It's too laid back in college. You wear what you like, do what you like.' (School no. 1)

'It's like there's a kind of taboo, you only go to the tech if you're not clever enough to come to the sixth form really, that's the impression you get.' (School no. 2)

Notably, in the Welsh medium schools it is not the language medium that is voiced as the motivating factor, but more the extracurricular/ social aspects of school.

'I was looking forward to things...we've just had the school eisteddfod, taking part in stuff like that, there's nothing like that in college.' (School no. 1)

'There's more opportunities to do the (extracurricular) things you want to do than in college' (School no. 1)

3.3 ADVICE ABOUT CHOICE OF PROVIDER AND COURSE

3.3.1 Advice Seeking Activity

Students were asked to say whether they had sought advice regarding choice of school and courses. Where students had obtained advice, the sources of advice were examined.

Students were more likely to have sought advice about what to study (58%) than about where to study (34%). This links with decision making patterns; for many students, proceeding to the sixth form in their current school happened automatically. Over a quarter of students (27%) did not seek advice on either issue.

Advice seeking was more likely amongst female students than amongst male students, particularly regarding course of study (61% of females seek advice on courses compared with 54% of male students).

Whilst similar proportions of students in all regions sought advice on what to study, those in South West Wales were more likely than other students to have sought advice on where to study (44% versus 34% or less in other regions).

Feedback from the focus groups revealed that the decision of what to study is key and can drive decisions regarding where to study (if a choice is available and or if students are sufficiently motivated).

The different pattern of advice seeking between genders may relate to a comparatively more mature attitude amongst female students, as observed during the focus groups. For example, female students tended to have clearer ideas about the future in terms of wanting to progress onto their next life stage, rather than staying in the relatively 'safe' school environment.

The incidence of advice seeking correlated with both satisfaction and motivation levels, thus:

- Students who had sought advice on where to study and or what to study were more likely to describe themselves as highly or fairly motivated than those who had taken no advice (76% and 77% versus 64%).
- Similarly with overall satisfaction, those who had sought advice on where and/or what to study were more likely to say they were extremely or very satisfied than those who had taken no advice (49% and 51% versus 34% respectively).

The causal links in the data are, however, unclear. For example, it may be that self-motivated students were more likely to seek advice, rather than advice directly contributing to increased motivation levels amongst these students.

3.3.2 Sources of Advice

Table 4.5 shows that the most commonly cited sources of advice are teachers at school (70%), Careers Wales advisor in or out of school (69%) and parents/other family members (65%). A third of students (35%) cited friends as a source of advice.

'(We asked teachers) if we'd be any good (at that subject)' (School no. 3)

'I asked (the teacher) if she thought I could cope with A levels' (School no. 5)

Whilst similar proportions of male and female students cited teachers as a source of advice, female students were more likely to cite family members as an advice source. Female students were also slightly more likely than their male counterparts to cite Careers Wales (71% versus 67% respectively).

- Notably, students in Year 12 were more likely to cite Careers Wales advisors as a source of advice than those in Year 13 (72% versus 65%)

Sources of advice were generally consistent across the regions. However, students attending schools in the most rural wards were more likely than other students to cite teachers at school as a key advice source (77% versus 70%).

Table 3.5 Sources of advice by gender, year group, medium of school and school rurality

	Total	Gender		Year group		Medium of School		Rurality	
		Male	Female	Yr 12	Yr 13	Welsh	English	Most Rural	Less Rural
Base: all answering who obtained advice	3939	1597	2255	2316	1521	880	3059	414	3525
% Teachers at school	70	70	71	69	73	74	69	77	70
% Careers Wales advisor, in or out of school	69	67	71	72	65	70	69	71	69
% Parents/other family members	65	58	70	67	63	69	64	68	65
% Friends	35	33	36	36	34	35	35	32	35
% Sixth forms admissions personnel	20	22	18	17	23	16	21	18	20
% learndirect Service	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
% Others	1	1	1	1	1	*	1	1	1

(Note: Multiple responses allowed)

Students attending Welsh medium schools were more likely than other school sixth form students to cite teachers at school (74% versus 69%) and parents/other family members (69% versus 64%) as sources of advice.

Focus group feedback suggests that many students are attending Welsh medium schools as a result of parental influence and choices. In these cases, it is reasonable to assume that parental involvement will continue throughout the school career and will be important at times of decision-making.

When the results for school sixth form students were compared with those for FE and WBL learners, the patterns of advice seeking were broadly similar (table 4.6), although greater proportions of school sixth form students cited most of the advice sources that overlapped between the surveys. However, FE and WBL learners were more likely than school sixth form students to cite friends and Learndirect services as advice sources.



Table 3.6 Sources of advice – FE and WBL (from NLSSW 2003)

	FE	WBL
Base: Unweighted	1387	351
Base: Weighted	1153	355
Careers Wales	55	65
College admissions office	33	17
Teachers at school	58	38
Teachers/tutors at provider	59	37
Parents or other family members	59	54
Friends	58	47
Employer	14	51
School Careers Advisor	65	53
learndirect service	9	8
learndirect website	6	5
Other	5	4

(Note: Multiple answers allowed. 'No answer' not shown)

The focus groups revealed that the standard and amount of advice available varies enormously amongst schools. Some offer careers lessons to help students focus their choices, whilst others offer meetings with the careers advisor from as early as Year 9.

A number of schools offered open evenings/days during Year 11, to which students from other schools could attend.

Timing is important. A number of students commented that Year 11 is too late to receive advice about choices, whereas others felt that they had less well formed ideas about what they wanted lower down the school. Students in a number of schools felt that ongoing advice in Year 13 is or would be useful.

The groups also provided evidence of mixed views regarding careers advisors in schools. Several students acknowledged the value of the service offered by a

careers advisor, for example, good for advising what options to take in order to study medicine at university or how to apply to join the armed forces.

'I thought it was helpful – it got to the point, you talked about what you wanted to do and whether sixth form would be suitable' (School no. 5)

'I thought it was really good. The combinations of A levels I had chosen did not fit well together... He changed my mind and helped me choose better subjects.' (School no. 8)

'You talk through subjects, qualifications, where you can move on to, uni and continuing your education... Tends to give you career facts... He looks at what grades you are expected to get and he might say, 'you would do better in college, but this is what is available for you.' (School no. 8)

However, the advice tended to focus on the most common options, rather than being tailored to the

individual, and for those who had little idea of their future direction, this meeting was felt to be a 'waste of time'.

'(She) just said what I needed to do the course I wanted to do at university to get a job and that was pretty much it. She didn't explain anything about... the other options. If you wanted to know something, you'd have to go and find it yourself.' (School no. 5)

'There's no effort about what you could do' (School no. 6)

'She didn't want to know what you wanted to do. She told you what she thought you could be.' (School no. 7)

In one school, the careers advisor had advised many students to go to college rather than stay on in the sixth form, but this advice was rejected. It was also felt that the advisor deliberately did not promote 'good' universities when advising students where to apply. Is this a case of an advisor's expectations of students' abilities being too low?

In the Welsh medium schools, advice was regarded as poor. Students in one school felt that they had been 'kept in the dark' about their options, particularly about those at the local English medium school sixth form. This was interpreted as a desire to keep up the numbers staying on in the school's own sixth form. In another school, students felt they were being too channelled towards university.

'A lot of schools focus on what's good for the school, rather than what's good for the individual.' (School no. 2)

'There's a lot of people who don't want to go to university. I don't believe there's enough information for them. We haven't got a clue about how to get an apprenticeship or something like that.' (School no. 1)

One of the key messages from the groups was that the decision about which courses to study was often based on what students enjoyed or excelled at during GCSE, as opposed to being driven by longer term career choices. Thus, careers advice at Year 11 was less significant than pursuing their 'best' subjects whilst working within the constraints of timetabling options.

'(You choose) what you think you'll be good at.' (School no. 4)

'Because I liked the subjects at GCSE I just carried on really.' (School no. 7)

Teachers also influence choice in a more personal manner. If a teacher earns little respect or is generally disliked, some students will avoid that subject.

'You avoid subjects with teachers that you don't like' (School no. 6)

'Coming up through (name of school) you knew which subjects were taught well' (School no. 4)

A couple of schools involved in the focus groups produced Sixth Form Handbooks for students in Year 11. These usually contained references to life in the sixth form, student responsibilities and information about the different subjects on offer. These were generally deemed useful:

'Particularly helpful for new subjects, like Philosophy or Sociology' (School no. 3)

'Because the school produced it, we knew it was for our school – not just for all the schools in Wales.' (School no. 3)

The influence of friends and family was important. For many students, they aspired to be like students/siblings who were ahead of them at school. On the other hand, where others had failed, this inspired them to try harder and to make sure they didn't make the same mistakes. This was seen as a very important time in their lives and crucial in terms of their future.

'My mum left school when she was 16, had a kid when she was 18 and since then she's just been at home and I could just not do that. I want to make a career for myself before I start my family.' (School no. 7)

'(Ex-students) come back from uni and say how great it is, how glad they are they actually managed it.' (School no. 7)

'You know you'll achieve better than (failed students). My sister's a reminder... I do not want to go that way.' (School no. 3)



As a final observation, the social characteristics of an area can be hugely influential in students' lives – those from 'middle class' backgrounds tended to have more parental involvement in their lives and this influenced expectations. As one student, who came from a deprived area to a Welsh medium school comments:

'I come from a poor area, this is a rich area. I think people's expectations in the two places are totally different. It's been a real shock for me to come here and see that people know what they want to do, kind of clear paths. It's the influence of the area.' (School no. 2)

3.3.3 Preferred Advice Options (anecdotal feedback from focus groups)

The discussion surrounding advice in the focus groups unearthed feedback about what students would have found useful. These may be summarised by the following:

- More tailored advice about future career options
- Ongoing advice into Years 12 and 13
- More specific advice about courses available in sixth form (e.g. content, workload, what type of person you need to be to successfully cope with course)
- Possibly greater facilitation of visits to universities and employers to explore the reality of each option

'The careers advisor can't tell you what jobs are really like.' (School no. 6)

The anecdotal feedback suggested that providing advice to students at appropriate points pre Year 12 and then during their sixth form has benefits in terms of motivation. If students know what they are working towards, their efforts are more focused. It was those students with little idea about their future plans that tended to appear demotivated during the groups.

'I think there's a lot of people in Year 11 that don't know what they want to do – I didn't – and she (careers advisor in school) didn't give me any clue of what I could do or what would suit me best' (School no. 5)

'Find out what you actually like doing and put you on the right track, or tell you this would suit you, this type of job.' (School no. 5)

"She didn't ask for your opinion' (School no. 7)

'They don't ask about our interests or anything, they just quickly say 'what do you think you want to do?' (School no. 5)

Indeed, in one of the smaller schools, students warmly praised a teacher who was prepared to commit time to talk to students about their options, listen to their opinions and, most importantly, encourage and support them.

'He gives you loads of options – he doesn't just say to you that's what you've got to do.' (School no. 7)

'He cares about his pupils achieving.' (School no. 7)

In another school, Year 12 was doing a short course focusing on the future. This covered career options, university life and options for the future. It was generally well received, particularly those aspects covering CV writing and personal statements:

'It helps you to be positive about yourself.' (School no. 3)

'It helps you understand what to put in your CV and your personal statements...when you were doing your Record of Achievement when you were 11, it was like hard to write down your personal statement.' (School no. 3)

Overall, it appears that students liked to be 'fed' information in a structured way (e.g. via prospectus/booklets, open evenings), but that it was also important that advice was readily available when they felt they needed it, and that this was tailored to their individual circumstances.

3.4 Summary of Key Points

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

Year group, size of sixth form and region were influential in choice. Year 12 students were slightly more likely than those in Year 13 to say they were attending their first choice provider. Students at larger schools were more likely to be studying at their first choice of provider. Students in Mid Wales were less likely than other students to have achieved their first choice provider or courses.

The main reasons for not studying first choice courses related to timetable clashes (47%), schools not providing preferred courses (36%) and advice from teachers not to follow first choices (14%).

Students were more likely to have sought advice about what to study (58%) than about where to study (34%), although 27% of students had not sought advice on either issue. The key sources of advice were teachers at school (70%), Careers Wales advisor in or out of school (69%) and parents/other family members (65%).

The general picture emerging from the qualitative research was that for many students, their choices at the end of Year 11 regarding where to study had been fairly automatic, given most stayed on at the same school. This meant that they possibly did less research into their decision than they would have done if considering a change of provider, and choice of course was more likely to be influenced by the subject teachers' reputation.

A number of the students who sought advice from advisors found that it was not sufficiently tailored to them as individuals and felt that they were just being given the standard 'line' or worse still, biased advice. This was disappointing for those who needed active help in order to develop their own thinking regarding course choices after Year 11 and career choices following completion of Year 13.

4.0 QUALITY OF TEACHING

This section covers:

Students' opinions of the teaching they receive, looking specifically at the following aspects:

- Making your subject interesting or enjoyable for you
- Understanding you and how you like to learn
- The support they give you; for example, in improving your study techniques or time management
- Makes good use of session time
- The quality and availability of teaching materials they use
- Setting clear targets or learning goals to help you improve
- Providing prompt and regular feedback on progress
- Dealing with disruptive learners

– Ability to explain the subject

– Listening to your needs

- Their overall satisfaction with the teaching they receive and views on what constitutes good teaching (from the focus groups).

4.1 Overall Satisfaction with Teaching

Half the students who responded to the survey were either extremely or very satisfied with the quality of teaching and a further 36% were fairly satisfied. Only 6% expressed any degree of dissatisfaction.

There were minor differences by gender (see table 4.1) with female students being marginally more positive.

Size of sixth form appeared to have an effect on satisfaction, in that the smallest sixth forms and those at the larger end of the spectrum achieved higher satisfaction ratings than those in the middle range.

Table 4.1 Overall satisfaction with quality of teaching by gender, year group, size of sixth form

	Total	Gender		Year group		Sixth form size				
		Male	Female	Yr 12	Yr 13	Up to 150	101 – 250	151 – 200	201 – 250	251+
Base: all answering	5563	2379	3050	3189	2218	696	1049	1350	546	1922
% Extremely satisfied	10	11	10	10	12	9	10	9	12	11
% Very satisfied	40	38	42	40	40	43	38	39	41	41
% Fairly satisfied	36	35	37	37	35	37	36	37	34	36
% Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	8	9	6	7	8	5	10	9	8	7
% Fairly dissatisfied	4	4	3	4	4	3	4	5	4	3
% Very dissatisfied	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	*
% Extremely dissatisfied	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	*	2	1
% Extremely/very satisfied	51	49	52	50	52	53	48	48	53	52
% Extremely/very dissatisfied	2	2	1	2	22	2	3	1	2	2

Linking in with the size issue mentioned above, table 4.2 shows that Welsh medium schools and those in the most rural wards scored more highly than their

counterparts. Scores for schools in the South West were also higher than for other regions.

Table 4.2 Overall satisfaction with the teaching by region, medium of school and school rurality

	Total	Region				Medium of School		Rurality	
		SE	SW	Mid	North	Welsh	English	Most rural	Less rural
Base: all answering	5563	2564	1241	657	1101	1169	4394	584	4979
% Extremely satisfied	10	9	14	9	11	14	9	13	10
% Very satisfied	40	38	44	41	41	43	40	48	39
% Fairly satisfied	36	37	34	39	35	33	37	32	37
% Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	8	9	6	7	7	6	8	5	8
% Fairly dissatisfied	4	4	2	3	5	3	4	2	4
% Very dissatisfied	1	1	*	1	1	1	1	1	1
% Extremely dissatisfied	1	2	1	*	1	1	1	1	1
% Extremely/very satisfied	51	47	58	50	51	57	49	61	49
% Extremely/very dissatisfied	2	3	1	1	2	1	2	1	2

A comparison of these results with those gathered during the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 (NLSSW) from 16 to 18 year olds in FE and WBL provision showed that sixth form students were less likely to be extremely satisfied. Thus, whilst 10% of sixth form students were extremely satisfied with the quality of teaching, the same was true for 18% of WBL learners and 25% of those in FE.

4.2 Rating Specific Aspects of Teaching

Students were asked to rate specific aspects of teaching on a 5-point scale from 'very good' to 'very poor'. Table 5.3 shows the detailed ratings, with the factors listed in order from top rated to bottom rated on the basis of the mean score (i.e. the average score for each factor on a scale of 1 to 5). This data sheds some light on the factors that are possibly diluting the overall satisfaction scores.

Students tended to opt for the 'fairly good' rating rather than the 'very good' and there was also a relatively high proportion (around 20% or so) choosing the middle ground.



Table 4.3 How would you rate the teachers on the following aspects?

Base: all answering (5717)	Very good (5)	Fairly good (4)	Neither good nor poor (3)	Fairly poor	Very poor	Don't know	Mean Score
% Ability to explain the subject	36	54	7	3	1	*	4.24
% Making good use of lesson time	29	47	16	5	2	1	3.95
% The quality and availability of the teaching materials they use	28	46	17	6	2	1	3.93
% Listening to you needs	26	47	18	6	2	1	3.90
% Setting clear targets to help you improve	27	44	21	5	2	1	3.90
% The support they give you	28	40	21	7	2	1	3.87
% Providing prompt and regular feedback on progress	26	43	20	7	2	1	3.86
% Making your subject interesting or enjoyable	22	49	19	6	2	1	3.82
% Dealing with disruptive learners	25	36	20	6	4	8	3.77
% Understanding you and how you like to learn	18	43	26	9	3	1	3.65

(Note: percentages add up in rows. Base sizes vary for each factor depending on the number who gave a rating for each)

The three top ranked aspects related to delivery of lessons, although it is notable that ‘making the subject interesting or enjoyable’ was also a key element of lesson delivery but falls in the bottom three. This may be an indication that whilst the basic standards of teaching are professional, ‘enjoyable’ may be too strong a word for some of the students. This could reflect the fact that, whilst these students were no longer in compulsory education in theory, in practice many felt that they still were, particularly given the high percentage who had stayed on at their original school and the fact that uniforms of some sort applied in most of the schools involved in the focus groups. Alternatively it could reflect a lack of variety in teaching styles, linking in with the fact that ‘understanding you and how you like to learn’ was the lowest rated factor.

Two of the bottom five factors related to support and feedback: ‘the support they give you’ and ‘providing

prompt and regular feedback on progress’. These emerged from the NLSSW as key areas particularly for the younger age groups and reflect the fact that some students find the transition to A level, or to a more independent style of learning quite difficult.

It was not possible to make detailed comparisons with the NLSSW results because different scales were used on the two surveys (the original scale was adapted to make it more suitable for a self completion questionnaire). Comparing the order, however, the main differences were that:

- Amongst 16 to 18 year old FE learners, making good use of lesson time was only the sixth highest rated factor whereas it is second amongst the school sixth formers. Conversely ‘the support they give you’ was the fourth highest rated factor among FE learners but is sixth among school sixth formers.

- Amongst WBL, the rank order differed in a similar way. Thus, 'making good use of session time' was the seventh highest rated factor and 'the support they give you' received the fourth highest ranking.

Looking at the results by gender (see table 5.4), female students were consistently more positive and were particularly so on the following factors:

- 'Listening to your needs' (77% rate very/fairly good compared to 69% of males)

- 'Understanding you and how you like to learn' (64% versus 58%)
 - 'Making the subject interesting or enjoyable' (74% versus 68%)
 - 'Dealing with disruptive learners' (64% versus 57%)
- The discrepancy on the first two factors may indicate that female students were better at establishing a dialogue with their teachers.

In line with the overall satisfaction findings, small school sixth forms (less than 100 students) tended to achieve higher scores on most factors (by 4–5% points).

Table 4.4 Ratings aspects of teaching by gender, year group, size of sixth form (percentage rating very good or fairly good)

	Total	Gender		Year group		Sixth form size				
		Male	Female	Yr 12	Yr 13	Up to 100	101 – 250	151 – 200	201 – 250	251+
Base: all answering	5717	2455	3096	3274	2256	708	1088	1382	560	1979
% Ability to explain the subject	91	89	92	91	90	92	90	91	89	90
% Making good use of lesson time	76	74	77	78	73	76	77	73	76	77
% The quality and availability of the teaching materials they use	74	72	75	75	73	77	72	73	73	75
% Listening to you needs	73	69	77	73	74	78	72	72	74	73
% Setting clear targets to help you improve	71	69	73	71	71	75	71	68	71	71
% The support they give you	69	68	69	69	68	71	68	67	70	69
% Providing prompt and regular feedback on progress	70	68	71	71	68	74	67	68	70	71
% Making your subject interesting or enjoyable	71	68	74	72	71	75	68	71	70	72
% Dealing with disruptive learners	61	57	64	62	61	65	60	58	63	62
% Understanding you and how you like to learn	61	58	64	61	61	66	59	60	63	61

(Note: 'Don't knows' have been excluded from the base. Base sizes vary for each factor depending on the number who gave a rating for each)

Table 5.5 shows how results vary by location and it is notable that the South West scored highest on all factors, whereas the South East was lower than the other regions on some factors, particularly:

- 'listening to your needs'
- 'quality and availability of teaching materials'

Also in line with the overall satisfaction findings, Welsh medium schools and rural schools gained slightly higher scores, most notably on 'listening to your needs' where rural schools rated 10% points higher than their less rural counterparts.



Table 4.5 Ratings aspects of teaching by region, medium of school, and school rurality (percentage rating very good or fairly good)

	Total	Region				Medium of School		Rurality	
		SE	SW	Mid	North	Welsh	English	Most rural	Less rural
Base: all answering	5717	2611	1245	661	1119	880	3059	414	3525
% Ability to explain the subject	91	90	92	92	91	92	90	93	90
% Making good use of lesson time	76	75	79	75	76	77	76	78	76
% The quality and availability of the teaching materials they use	74	71	78	75	76	79	73	80	73
% Listening to you needs	73	70	77	76	75	78	72	82	72
% Setting clear targets to help you improve	71	69	75	70	72	74	70	75	70
% The support they give you	69	67	73	70	68	72	68	76	68
% Providing prompt and regular feedback on progress	70	68	73	71	69	73	69	77	69
% Making your subject interesting or enjoyable	71	70	77	70	70	72	71	77	71
% Dealing with disruptive learners	61	60	66	60	61	65	60	68	60
% Understanding you and how you like to learn	61	59	65	61	61	64	60	69	60

(Note: 'Don't knows' have been excluded from the base. Base sizes vary for each factor depending on the number who gave a rating for each)

4.3 Drivers of Satisfaction with Teaching

Statistical analysis was carried out to determine what contribution the different elements of teaching made to driving overall satisfaction with the quality of teaching and how students rated performance on each element.

Chart 4.1 maps out the statistical analysis by positioning the aspects of teaching according to the satisfaction ratings and the contribution each aspect makes in driving satisfaction.

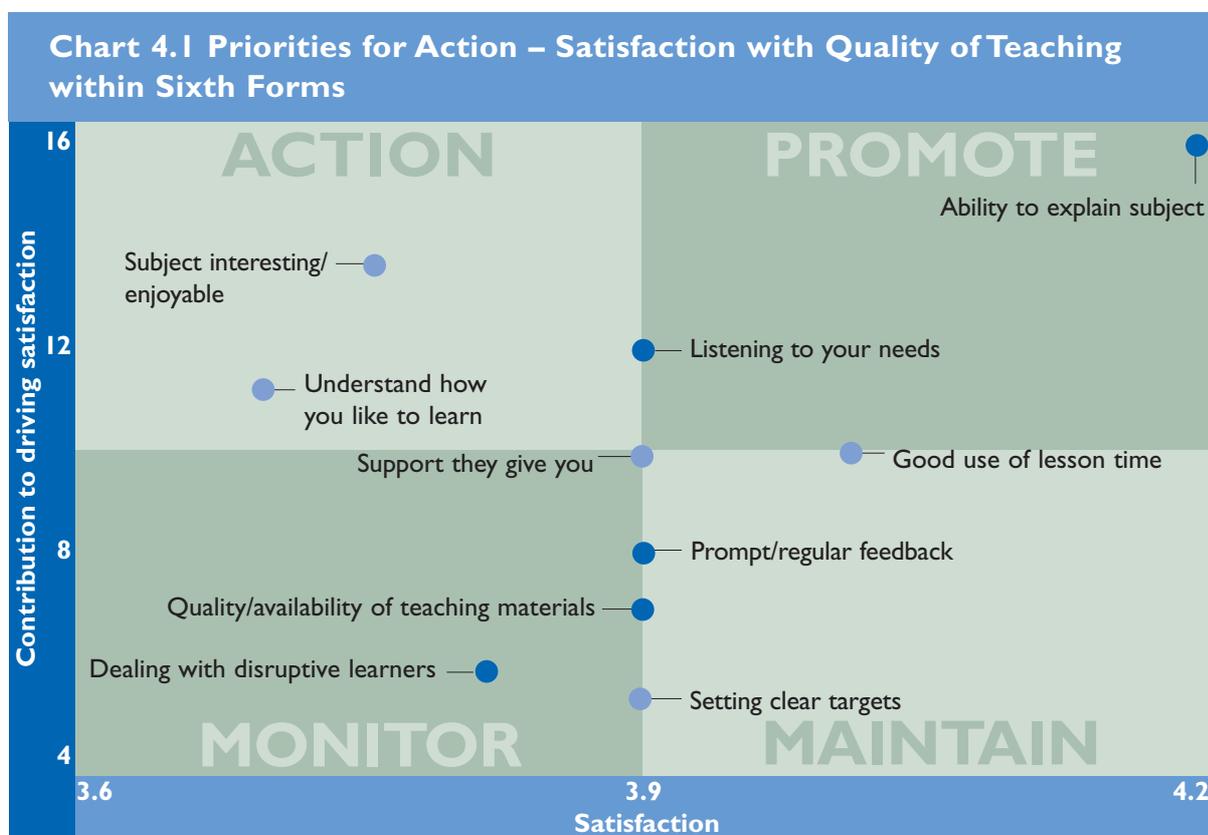
This provides four quadrants:

Top left hand: High contribution but lower satisfaction indicating need for **action**

Top right hand: High contribution and high satisfaction indicating case for **promotion** of these strengths

Bottom left hand: Lower contribution and lower satisfaction indicating case for **monitoring** these aspects

Bottom right hand: Lower contribution but high satisfaction indicating need to **maintain** performance



Note: The axis on the grid is built around the scores given. They do not therefore start at zero. There are no mean satisfaction scores below 3.6 out of 10 and no mean importance scores below 4.

The elements of teaching that fall into, or on the cusp of, the action quadrant include:

- Making the subject interesting or enjoyable
- Understanding you and how you like to learn
- Listening to your needs
- Support they give to you, for example, in improving your study techniques or time management

Improvement of these elements would have maximum impact on levels of overall satisfaction with the quality of teaching. Given that overall satisfaction with the quality of teaching is strongly related to overall satisfaction levels with the sixth form learning experience, it would follow that impacts made in one area would be beneficial in the other.

The aspect of teaching that would benefit from continued promotion is:

- Ability to explain the subject

4.4 Feedback from the Focus Groups

The focus groups shed light on most of the above findings. There were three main strands to the discussion of teaching quality. These were:

- Teaching styles
- Relationships
- Support and direction

4.1.1 Teaching Styles

As illustrated by the quantitative results, students felt that teachers could explain their subject but could they adapt their style to meet learner requirements and to provide a degree of variety? Ability to do so emerged as one of the key requirements of students.



By variety, they meant, wherever possible, providing as many opportunities as possible for class participation – whether in the form of debates, discussions or practical demonstrations. They recognised that this would not always be possible in some subjects but felt that some teachers (particularly some of the older generation) were unwilling to mix and match techniques:

‘We’ll talk about women’s rights – we’ll debate, have discussions. People have their own opinions. That works so much better ‘cause we learn so much more’ (School no. 7)

‘They talk and you make notes and I think they think it’s a more adult way of learning, like you would in a lecture but it’s boring’ (School no. 4)

‘My teacher is quite young, she’s just come out of uni, so she knows how to relate to us, she’s only a couple of years older, so she understands if you don’t like it’ (School no. 8)

‘Younger teachers haven’t been taught to teach in certain ways – they’ve all got different ideas... older teachers need to look at what they are doing – they must know that they are not liked’ (School no. 5)

The use of visual techniques and different media was also welcomed but only if the teacher had mastered the technology involved!

‘Diagrams can be pretty helpful, when they give you diagrams to explain stuff rather than sheets of writing – it’s easier to digest...you take it in and remember it as well.’ (School no. 8)

‘I don’t like those interactive white boards, they’re stupid. It takes the teachers so long to sort out how to use them.’ (School no. 1)

Clearly, variety was one important element but the over-riding desire was for a teacher who really enjoyed their subject and could communicate that enjoyment:

‘If they’re miserable they make the lesson boring but if they’re happy they give a happy vibe’ (School no. 1)

‘He’s interested in the subject as well, he does all these OU courses...he’s a bit crazy but he absolutely loves (his subject). He knows more than just about the syllabus’ (School no. 8)

‘Even if they’re really good at their subject they’ve got to be interesting as well’ (School no. 2)

(To me a good teacher will...)

‘Be enthusiastic.’ (School no. 6)

4.4.2 Relationships

Part of what students were requesting when asking for different teaching approaches was that teachers should build a relationship with them. They felt this was possible because they had chosen the subject and were taking a more mature approach to their studies. In their view a teacher would capitalise on this by creating a more relaxed atmosphere in class and getting to know them individually:

‘You have to click (with the teacher); like with a friend.’ (School no. 1)

‘Relaxed environment. You’re treated as adults by the teachers, encouraged and motivated by tutors’ (School no. 8)

‘When the teacher speaks to you like you’re one of them, you feel more relaxed’ (School no. 5)

‘I think the best way of being taught is when the teacher develops a relationship with the class where everyone feels at ease with them. Lower down the school with some teachers you feel scared if you put one finger out of place.’ (School no. 5)

‘One teacher puts tables facing in so everyone is equal, not the traditional set-up and we can exchange ideas across the table.’ (School no. 5)

(To me a good teacher will...) ‘Show concern and care’ (School no. 6)

The key is respect rather than friendship. Students were fully aware of the danger of the relationship between teacher and student becoming too relaxed and still wanted the teacher to maintain authority:

'If you've got respect for the teacher, you're going to work. It works both ways' (School no. 2)

'Liking the teacher, you feel guilty if you don't do well in a subject.' (School no. 4)

'Relationships between teachers and students can be too good – Mr X doesn't get annoyed with anything you do – makes you think you can do anything' (School no. 4)

Clearly teachers who had low standards lost respect but most importantly their lack of activity was interpreted as a sign that they did not care about the individual students and how they performed. They felt let down:

'That's the worst, if the teachers just haven't looked up the lesson and just tell us to look it up on the internet' (School no. 2)

'When the teachers don't turn up on time or don't turn up at all... that really annoys me' (School no. 5)

'You've got to feel like the teacher's your friend. I like to think that the teacher generally wants to see you succeed.' (School no. 5)

(To me a good teacher will...) 'Mark homework so that students have feedback.' (School no. 6)

4.4.3 Support and Direction

Whilst students appreciated the more relaxed atmosphere and adult relationships which could develop in sixth form, it was clear that certain of their number still needed a fair amount of individual support and positive feedback.

The less confident students commented on how much they appreciated the more patient teachers:

'You like it when you've got teachers that you can ask the same question ten times and they don't get cross with you, without feeling stupid' (School no. 1)

'He comes over and talks to you separately as well and makes sure you're OK.' (School no. 3)

'There should be more individual (time) between teacher and pupil – tell you where you're going wrong and where you're going right.' (School no. 5)

But this can cause problems when the class is perceived to be mixed ability:

'There's differences in the time needed to explain to really good and less good – it holds up the class – or they don't get it and don't benefit' (School no. 4)

Some students said that they value the opportunity of sessions after lessons where they could ask questions and sort out problems. Even though this sometimes resulted in extra work, they clearly valued the opportunity to gain clarification without being shown up. They also felt it meant that teachers were aware that some of them needed extra help and were not just going to ignore the fact:

'They'll maybe give you a bit of extra work to do – they'll mark it so you know you've got it OK.' (School no. 4)

(a good teacher will) 'understand when you are having problems and help sort them out, no matter how long it takes. They will give you the confidence you need to believe you can do it.' (School no. 8)

At one school, students felt that teachers should be paid overtime to stay behind with students who were struggling and give them extra tuition.

The students were keenly aware of any imbalance in the way individuals were treated, resenting any signs of favouritism or scapegoating:

'If you're not on their good side they put you down' (School no. 4)

'It's one thing to take you aside. It's another thing altogether to embarrass you in front of the whole class. That's horrible.' (School no. 2)

'(Two girls) are his favourites. They talk about (name of subject) – how it links in – it's boring for the rest of us.' (School no. 3)

(To me a good teacher will...) 'Treat everyone equally.' (School no. 6)



Clearly some students felt very de-motivated when they perceived everyone, teachers, parents etc. to be 'nagging' and criticising. Worse still was no feedback at all, but students would like the balance to swing towards encouragement and praise:

'They should provide feedback on how you're doing/on your work. Lower down the school you'd have a comment on the bottom of the page saying you need to do this and so on. Now they literally just give you your score. You don't know what you've done wrong – you need that one-to-one evaluation of your work.'
(School no. 5)

'I'd much rather know what I've done wrong, even if it's how I've structured it or the sentences I've used or the grammar I've used.' (School no. 3)

'There's not a lot of it in this school but I feel that if the teacher encouraged a lot more, that would go a long way.'
(School no. 5)

'(My teacher) encourages you, he cares about you'
(School no. 8)

'A good teacher... supports you and has a positive attitude.' (School no. 1)

4.5 Summary of Key Points

School size and location were the main factors which influence satisfaction with teaching: results were higher for schools in the South West, in rural areas and for Welsh medium schools. There was clearly some overlap between each of these variables.

Overall satisfaction with teaching was reasonably high, with half the students saying they are either extremely or very satisfied and a further 36% describing themselves as fairly satisfied.

Looking at aspects of satisfaction in more detail, the highest rated factors were:

- 'ability to explain the subject' (91% rating very/fairly good)
- 'making good use of lesson time' (76% rating very/fairly good)
- 'the quality and availability of teaching materials' (74% rating very/fairly good)

Amongst some of the lower-rated factors were those which related to the more individual aspects of teaching, in particular 'understanding you and how you like to learn' which was rated very/fairly good by 61% and factors relating to individual support and feedback (69% and 70% respectively).

These issues also emerged in the qualitative research in which students affirmed that the best teachers:

- established a relationship with their sixth form students, built on mutual respect
- used this relationship to understand students needs and vary teaching styles accordingly offering, for example, more opportunities for discussion and class participation and providing information in a variety of forms e.g. diagrammatic forms rather than just notes
- showed a real interest in their subject and showed that they cared about how the students do
- recognised that some students needed support and positive encouragement (some teachers were considered to be too ready to fallback on sarcasm and humiliation when some students were struggling)

Students were able to cite many examples of good teaching, mostly relating to teachers who were putting energy into communicating their subject and giving them a lot of positive encouragement. The key for them seemed to lie in teachers taking advantage of the opportunities that sixth form offered in terms of having a more relaxed teaching environment and smaller classes to establish a rapport and be a bit more flexible than was possible in the lower school. That said they were keenly aware that there needed to be a safety net for those who were struggling with the style of learning in sixth form and felt that the solution to this lay in more one-to-one help for those individuals

In several of the groups, it was felt that younger teachers were better at varying their teaching styles than older ones.

5. MOTIVATION

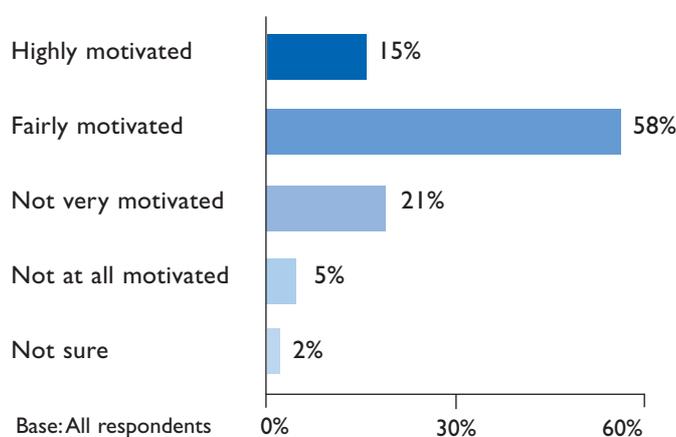
This section covers:

- The levels of motivation sixth form students have in relation to their studies
- The reasons for their level of motivation
- Any problems they have encountered in the sixth form
- Whether they have ever thought about leaving

5.1 Overall Levels of Motivation

Overall, almost three-quarters of students described themselves as either highly or fairly motivated in their studies (73%), although the majority of this group were fairly motivated (58%) rather than highly motivated (only 15%). A sizeable minority of students said they were not very motivated (21%) and 5% described themselves as not motivated at all.

Chart 5.1 Overall levels of motivation



There was a strong correlation between levels of motivation and students that were satisfied with the learning experience at sixth form. Half of the students (50%) that were extremely satisfied with the sixth form learning experience described themselves as highly motivated, compared to only 4% that were dissatisfied with the sixth form learning experience. (Table 5.1).

Choice of provider and course also had an impact on motivation. Students that were studying at their first choice of provider were far more likely to describe themselves as highly or fairly motivated (77%), compared to those that weren't (64%), and the proportion of students feeling motivated dropped to only 46% for those who felt they had no choice. There was a similar pattern for those studying their first choice of course (table 5.2).

First choice of school /course
Not first choice
Didn't have a choice



Levels of motivation declines through groups

The chief motivators for students were:

- Want to achieve good qualifications/grades/exam results (14%)
- Ambitious/want to do well/ well motivated (13%)
- Wish/need to achieve good exam results/A Levels to attend university (12%)
- Enjoy learning/chosen subjects (12%)
- Receive good encouragement (5%)

The necessity of getting good qualifications in order to go to university and have better job prospects emerged as a strong driver of motivation during the focus groups:

'Just the fact that you've got to get a degree to get anywhere is a motivation in itself'
(School no. 5)

'Competition in general, especially when it comes to university – those degrees that are high in demand; you've got to do well to get on them' (School no. 5)

'All the Upper Sixth have got the ambition to go the university and that keeps you going – they know they want to achieve that target'
(School no. 7)

'(I) try to keep motivated to get good enough grades to study psychology at college.'
(School no. 6)



Table 5.1 Levels of motivation by level of overall satisfaction with sixth form

	Overall satisfaction with sixth form					
	Total	Extremely satisfied	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied
Base: all answering	5638	514	1946	2221	537	306
% Highly motivated	15	50	20	6	2	4
% Fairly motivated	58	46	69	63	33	18
% Not very motivated	21	3	9	26	49	40
% Not at all motivated	5	1	1	3	13	36
% Not sure	2	*	1	2	3	3
% Highly/fairly motivated	73	96	89	69	36	22
% Not very/not at all motivated	26	4	10	29	61	75

Table 5.2 Levels of motivation by choice of provider and course

	Total	First choice provider			First choice of course		
		Yes	No	No choice	Yes	No	No choice
Base: all answering	5638	4065	393	147	4336	1028	94
% Highly motivated	15	17	9	9	16	9	7
% Fairly motivated	58	61	55	37	60	54	37
% Not very motivated	21	18	25	32	19	26	32
% Not at all motivated	5	3	9	18	4	8	17
% Not sure	2	1	2	4	1	3	6
% Highly/fairly motivated	73	77	64	46	76	63	45
% Not very/not at all motivated	26	21	34	50	23	34	49

(Note: first choice of provider and course does not include responses for 'didn't actively consider another option')

Several students who work part-time said that they were motivated to get good qualifications in order to get a better job than the one they do now or because they had been inspired by someone about the job they eventually wanted:

'It's a part-time job and I just think I don't want to be stuck doing that job for the rest of my life' (School no. 2)

'(You see) people on benefits – and you think I'm never going to be like that – I'm going to make something of myself – and you do – you put in the extra effort' (School no. 2)

'I spoke to a barrister and solicitor and that really inspired me...really motivating' (School no. 5)

A small proportion of students (5%) said that good encouragement motivated them and encouragement, praise and support from teachers, parents and friends were mentioned by a number of students in the focus groups:

'One teacher – we're like her children; she's really glad when we do well' (School no. 5)

'He cares about his pupils achieving' (School no. 7)

'(My teacher) encourages you, he cares about you' (School no. 8)

'Sometimes you have a really bad day and you get home and mum will say 'look, come on, you've only got another 12 weeks of lessons left this year''(School no. 5)

'My mum just says 'if you don't do it, you're never going to get where you want to be.' (School no. 7)

Other factors that influence motivation which emerged during the focus groups were the need to keep up with siblings and because students wanted to do better than their friends or family that they felt had taken the wrong path:

'You know you'll achieve better than them – my sister's a reminder.. I do not want to go that way.' (School no. 3)

'Half of my family have succeeded and half haven't done so well. So I look at both and ask myself 'do I want to end up there, or do I want to end up there?' (School no. 5)

'My mum left school when she was 16 – had a kid when she was 18 and since then she's just been at home and I could just not do that – I want to make a career for myself before I start my family' (School no. 2)

'(I get motivation) from my friends who have chosen the wrong path and they tell you they wish they'd worked harder. I think it pushes you to work harder...' (School no. 5)

'I've got a sister in uni already – I want to do the same thing like she's doing already' (School no. 7)

Self-motivation also played an important part:

The thought of opening your results – and being really disappointed when you know you could have done better' (School no. 4)

'I take things one day at a time; try to remain positive' (School no. 5)

'(You say to yourself) Pick yourself up – if you don't do it now you're never going to' (School no. 7)

'Everyone goes through stages of being de-motivated, but you just push on.' (School no. 6)

The reasons for being not motivated were more fragmented. The biggest factor was heavy workload, mentioned by almost 1 in 10 students (9%).

Other key factors included:

- Can't be bothered/losing interest (6%)
- Finding the work boring or repetitive (6%)
- Lack of encouragement or support (5%)
- Lack of interest or not enjoying school any more (4%)
- Finding school or pressure of exams stressful (4%)
- Finding work difficult or harder than expected (4%)
- Subjects not interesting/stimulating (3%)
- Feeling lazy/tired (3%)
- Not enjoying all chosen subjects (3%)



The volume and intensity of the work came through strongly in the focus groups. Although it was not always de-motivating, many students found it difficult to keep up with the heavy workload:

'The course content is pretty hard to get done'
(School no. 5)

'I do English literature, I like reading, but the course is so intense...you don't have time to discuss things, you have to get straight on to the coursework' (School no. 5)

'It's not the difficulty – it's just loads and loads of work'
(School no. 3)

'I find that during the week I can't go dancing as much as I used to because I've got so much homework'
(School no. 5)

'I do 3 hours a night (homework) and pretty much all day Sunday...If I did get a job on a Saturday I wouldn't have a single day off or to myself' (School no. 5)

'Constant talk about the EXAMS! – intense pressure to get everything done in very little time' (School no. 4)

'I thought the first year would be much more hard and you'd have less time to do it all, but for two years it's being all pressurised...I didn't expect that to be honest...'
(School no. 5)

'More work than I ever imagined – particularly with the Welsh Bacc.' (School no. 6)

'(Teachers) make A levels sound easier than they are.'
(School no. 6)

One of the key factors that affected motivation were bad grades or a lack of recognition for hard work:

'It can be a downward spiral – what's the point in trying?'
(School no. 5)

'If you try really hard and sometimes you still get bad grades... you just think, you're trying your best but still not getting anywhere.'
(School no. 8)

'If you've worked and don't get recognition for it you think I won't bother again' (School no. 2)

Lack of encouragement or support from teachers was another factor that influenced students' motivation in the focus groups:

'It'd be better if we got more encouragement'
(School no. 4)

'I work better if I'm pushed....told that I'm capable of doing it and then positive encouragement' (School no. 5)

'There should be more individual (time) between teacher and pupil – tell you where you're going wrong and where you're going right, so that you have realistic expectations'
(School no. 5)

'Recognise when an individual's down, needs a lift.'
(School no. 3)

At some schools several students felt they had been given too much freedom and responsibility and needed more deadlines and pressure from teachers to encourage them to work hard:

'I think if some teachers could be more strict on checking homework, checking on work on a weekly basis, which can get you more motivated...'(School no. 8)

'You're expected to use your initiative but that's hard when you're been pushed along through the rest of school' (School no. 6)

Several students mentioned that they had expected to get more support from teachers when in the sixth form, but in reality they felt the younger pupils were getting priority:

'When you're lower down the school you think that students doing A levels get priority and you sort of accept that....then when you get to A levels, she's off to teach Year 7 and we don't get priority' (School no. 5)

Making lessons interesting and adapting teaching methods to suit the students in the class were raised as issues by several students:

'I think the subject teachers need to do more to motivate you... if their teaching styles don't appeal to us. They just sit you down and read out to you and it just doesn't do anything for you.' (School no. 8)

'Less going over of same things all the time, more interesting things to add to loads of boring facts'
(School no. 4)

'If you're really bored and the teacher just drones on reading out of a book you just fall asleep' (School no. 4)

'In some subjects, it's a very tense atmosphere.'
(School no. 3)

'A little death-by-worksheets in some classes.'
(School no. 3)

5.1.1 Levels of Motivation by Gender

Female students were more likely to describe themselves as highly or fairly motivated (76%), compared to male students (69%). Their reasons for being motivated were broadly similar, although female students were slightly more likely to say:

- the workload is extremely large or heavy (11% compared to 7% of male students)
- there is a lack of encouragement or more support needed (6% compared to 3% for males)

5.1.2 Level of Motivation by Year Group

There were no differences between the proportion of Year 12 and Year 13 students in terms of overall motivation, although Year 13 students were slightly more likely to describe themselves as highly motivated (16% compared to 13%).

Year 12 students were more likely to:

- Be motivated by a general desire to do well (15% compared to 10% in Year 13)
- Enjoy learning or their chosen subject (14% compared to 8% in Year 13)
- Find the work difficult or harder than expected (5% compared to 2% in Year 13)

Their responses suggested that Year 12 students initially struggled with the adjustment between GCSE and A level and the volume and standard of work required for A levels. The results also indicated that while many students were studying their favourite or 'best' subjects at A level, levels of interest began to wane by the second year of studying.

Table 5.3 Levels of motivation by gender, year group and region

	Total	Gender		Year Group		Region			
		Male	Female	Yr 12	Yr 13	SE	SW	Mid	North
Base: all answering	5638	2441	3067	3248	2244	2591	1255	664	1128
% Highly motivated	15	13	16	13	16	13	16	13	17
% Fairly motivated	58	56	60	60	56	57	62	60	55
% Not very motivated	21	24	19	20	22	23	17	20	21
% Not at all motivated	5	6	4	5	5	6	3	5	5
% Not sure	2	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	2
% Highly/fairly motivated	73	69	76	73	72	70	78	73	72
% Not very/not at all motivated	26	29	23	25	27	29	21	25	26



In contrast, Year 13 students were more likely to:

- Be motivated by the need to achieve good exam results to attend university (21% compared to 6% in Year 12)
- Lack interest or not be enjoying school anymore (7% compared to 3% in Year 12)

- Find school stressful or feel the pressure of exams (6% compared to 2% in Year 12)

Feedback from the focus groups suggested that by Year 13 many students felt they had outgrown school and were ready to move on. Full details of the reasons for levels of motivation are shown in the table below.

Table 5.4 Reasons for not being motivated by gender, year group

	Total	Gender		Year Group	
		Male	Female	Yr 12	Yr 13
Base: all answering	4522	1891	2534	2598	1808
% Want to achieve good qualifications/grades/exam results	14	14	14	15	13
% Ambitious/want to do well/well motivated	13	12	13	15	10
% Wish/need to achieve good exam results/ A Levels to attend University	12	11	13	6	21
% Enjoy learning/chosen subjects	12	12	12	14	8
% Workload is extremely large/heavy	9	7	11	10	8
% Can't be bothered/not that well motivated/ can't apply myself/losing interest	6	7	6	6	6
% Find certain aspects of the work boring/repetitive	6	6	6	7	5
% Receive good encouragement	5	4	5	6	4
% Lack of encouragement/more support needed	5	3	6	5	5
% Lack of interest in school/don't enjoy school anymore	4	4	5	3	7
% School is stressful/pressure of exams	4	3	4	2	6
% Find work difficult/harder than expected	4	3	4	5	2

(Note: 'Others' and 'Don't know' responses not included. Total responses of less than 4% not shown. Multiple answers allowed).

5.1.3 Levels of Motivation by Region

In terms of region, students in SW Wales were more likely to be highly or fairly motivated (78%) compared

to Mid Wales (73%), North Wales (72%) and South East Wales (70%). The reasons for levels of motivation were broadly similar between the regions.

Table 5.5 Reasons for levels of motivation by region, medium of school

	Total	Region				Medium of school	
		SE	SW	Mid	North	Welsh	English
Base: all answering	4522	2068	987	552	915	913	3609
% Want to achieve good qualifications/grades/exam results	14	12	16	14	14	14	14
% Ambitious/want to do well/well motivated	13	13	12	13	12	11	13
% Wish/need to achieve good exam results/ A Levels to attend University	12	12	14	8	14	11	13
% Enjoy learning/chosen subjects	12	11	13	15	10	13	12
% Workload is extremely large/heavy	9	9	8	10	10	9	9
% Can't be bothered/not that well motivated/ can't apply myself/losing interest	6	6	5	5	8	6	6
% Find certain aspects of the work boring/repetitive	6	7	5	5	6	4	6
% Receive good encouragement	5	5	5	4	5	7	5
% Lack of encouragement/more support needed	5	5	3	5	5	5	5
% Lack of interest in school/don't enjoy school anymore	4	5	4	7	3	6	4
% School is stressful/pressure of exams	4	4	3	3	4	4	4
% Find work difficult/harder than expected	4	3	3	6	4	4	4

(Note: 'Others' and Don't know responses not included. total responses of less than 4% not shown. Multiple answers allowed)

5.1.4 Level of Motivation by Language Medium of School

A slightly higher proportion of students studying at Welsh medium schools described themselves as either very or fairly motivated (76%) than those studying at English medium schools (72%). Reasons for motivation levels were broadly the same for both school types.

5.2 PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

5.2.1 No Problems Experienced

Students were asked if they had faced any problems since starting in the sixth form. Encouragingly, one fifth of students (22%) said they hadn't experienced any problems. (Please note: comparison with 16 to 18 year olds in FE and WBL is not possible for this area, as the lists of potential problems presented to learners differed between the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003 and for the Schools Sixth Form Survey).



In terms of demographic groups, students who were more likely to have not experienced problems were:

- Welsh medium schools (32%)
- Small sixth forms with less than 100 students (26%)
- Schools in SW and North Wales (25% in each)
- Male students (24%)
- Year 12 students (23%)

5.2.2 Problems Experienced

The biggest problem encountered by students, by quite a large margin, was maintaining personal motivation (mentioned by 57% of students). Just over a third of students (37%) said they had struggled to keep up with the standard of work required.

Problems encountered with the standard of work required were raised by several students during the focus groups:

'The jump from GCSE to A level chemistry, it's so much more in depth, it's a lot harder than I expected.'
(School no. 5)

'I thought it would be easier than it was... the teachers put more pressure on you, more responsibility, you have to start motivating yourself to work' (School no. 5)

'I didn't expect it to be this hard; I didn't expect so much homework' (School no. 5)

'It's harder – they don't explain the courses to you'
(School no. 6)

'They should make GCSEs harder or A levels easier – it's too big a jump.' (School no. 6)

'I thought it'd be a lot easier than it is.' (School no. 7)

Looking in more detail at demographic groups, Year 13 students were more likely than those in Year 12 to have faced problems with personal motivation (62% compared to 54%). As raised in the motivation section, Year 12 students were more likely to struggle with the standard of work (40% compared to 33% in Year 13).

Table 5.6 Problems experienced since starting sixth form by gender, year group, size of sixth form

	Total	Gender		Year group		Sixth form size				
		Male	Female	Yr 12	Yr 13	Up to 100	101 – 150	151 – 200	201 – 250	251+
Base: all answering	5016	2164	2789	2937	2004	634	957	1227	484	1714
% Maintaining your personal motivation	57	56	57	54	62	53	55	57	59	58
% Keeping up with the standard of work required	37	35	39	40	33	39	36	36	38	38
% Problems of any kind with other students	15	14	15	14	17	15	15	15	15	15
% Travelling to school	10	10	10	9	11	7	9	11	10	11
% Help you were promised not being provided	8	8	9	7	9	7	9	8	7	8
% Time management	1	*	1	1	*	2	1	–	*	1
% High workload	1	*	1	1	*	1	1	1	–	1
% Others	2	1	2	2	2	3	2	3	2	2
% No problems	22	24	21	23	20	26	23	23	18	20

There were few differences between male and female students, although female students were marginally more likely to say they struggled with the standard of work (39% compared to 35% for male students).

As a further point, it was notable that as the size of the sixth form increased, students were more likely to say that they had experienced problems maintaining motivation.

As mentioned earlier, a higher proportion of students at Welsh medium schools had not encountered any problems whilst in sixth form (32%) compared to students at English medium schools (19%). The table below shows that students at English medium schools were more likely to face problems with personal motivation (59% compared to 47%) and keeping up with the standard of work (39% compared to 31%). Across the regions, the proportions of students citing each problem were broadly similar.

Table 5.7 Problems experienced by medium of school and by region

	Medium of school		Region			
	Welsh	English	SE	SW	Mid	North
Base: all answering	1063	3953	2314	1090	600	1012
% Maintaining your personal motivation	47	59	58	55	59	54
% Keeping up with the standard of work required	31	39	39	36	37	35
% Problems of any kind with other students	12	16	14	14	13	18
% Travelling to school	8	11	11	8	12	10
% Extra help you were promised not being provided	6	9	10	6	9	8
% Time management	1	*	*	1	2	*
% High workload	1	1	1	*	1	1
% Others	2	2	2	1	5	3
% No problems	32	19	20	25	21	25

Typical problems that were raised during the focus groups included:

- teachers running late or not attending the lesson at all
- classroom management issues
- poor quality teaching or not preparing for the lesson
- expecting too much of students
- teachers having favourites
- being taught topics which aren't on the syllabus
- unplanned teacher absence and no cover arranged
- posts being unfilled for a long length of time

- being embarrassed or humiliated in front of the class
- being still treated like children rather than young adults

'When the teachers don't turn up on time or don't turn up at all, and that really annoys me' (School no. 5)

'There's these girls at the back of class, and they're 'yap, yap, yap', and the teachers don't shut them up – it drives me crazy... it's a constant whine from the back of the class' (School no. 5)



'I wouldn't have chosen one of my subjects because of the teachers. We have two teachers and one of them is not very good at all' (School no. 5)

'There's a teacher missing so we're only getting half the lessons' (School no. 7)

'We're supposed to get on with it for ourselves but if you don't understand it you're stuck' (School no. 7)

'The teacher was away ill ...so now we're two weeks behind in our work' (School no. 7)

'She adapts old stuff to the new syllabus and it doesn't really work' (School no. 3)

'I think people expected a bit more respect... we wanted to be treated a bit more like adults' (School no. 5)

'The (teachers) who treat us like kids....some of the people in the class pick up on that and act like lower school kids' (School no. 3)

The proportions of male and female students, those in Year 12 and Year 13, and those at Welsh and English medium schools that had considered leaving were broadly similar.

Several students during the focus groups said they had considered leaving sixth form. Their reasons varied from thinking about pursuing more vocational courses, not being able to keep up with the standard or volume of work and getting negative feedback from teachers about their work.

One student was told his technology project was 'all wrong':

'I hated him for that and I just wanted to leave' (School no. 4)

'My friend was going away to college... she was saying the freedom you get, you get treated a lot more like an adult... but I knew if I left, it would be so much harder, the teachers changing, subjects changing... I decided to stay because I just like the style of teaching here.' (School no. 5)

'I wanted to leave... I had a good chat with (the head of sixth form)... He made me realise I can do it... gives you more confidence... made me realise I can actually get there.' (School no. 7)

5.3 Considered Leaving

Overall, 30% of students had considered leaving their sixth form, and this proportion was slightly higher than that recorded for FE students (25% had thought about leaving) and WBL students (22% had considered leaving).

Table 5.8 Considered leaving sixth form by gender and language medium of school

	Total	Gender		Medium of school	
		Male	Female	Welsh	English
Base: all answering	5548	2432	3052	1186	4362
% Yes	30	29	31	29	31
% No	59	61	57	60	59
% Don't know	11	10	11	11	11

5.4 Summary of Key Points

Around 8 in 10 students experienced problems. The biggest single problem, mentioned by 57% of those experiencing problems, was maintaining motivation. The next most common problem was dealing with the standard of work, mentioned by 37%. This was largely to do with what some perceive as the 'leap' between GCSE and A levels.

Just over a quarter of students described themselves as 'not very' or 'not at all' motivated. Male students were less motivated than female students (29% versus 23%) and around a third of those who failed to get their first choice provider or course described themselves as not motivated. Motivation levels were marginally higher in Welsh medium schools than in English medium schools (just 22% not motivated versus 27% respectively).

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

Overall, 30% of students had considered leaving their sixth form, and this proportion was broadly similar when the results were analysed by gender, year group and language medium of school.

6.0 WELSH LANGUAGE PROVISION

This section covers:

- How much of students' learning is currently in Welsh
- Students' preferences for the balance between English-medium and Welsh-medium provision
- Note: the questions used in the self-completion survey differed from those used in the NLSSW, and therefore comparison with FE and WBL is not possible.

6.1 Current Proportion of Learning in Welsh

The vast majority of students (75%) reported that none of their learning was in the Welsh medium. Just 4% said that all their learning at school was in Welsh, whilst a further tenth (8%) said that over 50% was via the Welsh-medium.

Location had an impact on response. For example, 84% of students in South East Wales said that none of their learning was in Welsh compared with 61% in North Wales. Linking in with this, whilst 44% of students in the most rural wards said that none of their learning was in Welsh, the same was true for 78% of students in less rural wards.

Notably within schools that were deemed to be Welsh-medium, just 18% of students said that all of their learning was in the Welsh medium, whilst a further third (31%) said 50% or more of their learning was in Welsh. This ties in with the feedback from the focus groups, in which many students in Welsh-medium schools were studying their courses in English, and this was often due to a lack of Welsh-medium resources for that subject or qualification.

Table 6.1 Proportion of learning via Welsh medium by region, language medium of school, size of sixth form

	Total	Region				Medium of School		Rurality				
		SE	SW	Mid	North	Welsh	English	Up to 100	101 – 150	151 – 200	201 – 250	251+
Base: all answering	5535	2541	1235	652	1107	1191	4344	691	1063	1342	529	1910
% All lessons	4	3	3	3	8	18	*	11	9	4	*	*
50% or more of lessons	8	3	11	9	18	31	2	17	9	13	2	3
Less than 50% of lessons	13	10	14	20	12	18	11	15	16	11	14	11
% None	75	84	72	67	61	32	87	57	67	71	84	86

6.2 Preferences for Learning

In order to assess gaps in the provision of learning in Welsh, students were asked 'Thinking about the language in which you are taught, what balance of teaching would you prefer at this school?'

Similar proportions of male and female students said they would prefer all or more of their learning to be in Welsh (around 10%). Half of male students said they

would prefer all their learning to be in English, whilst the same was true for just a third (35%) of female students. Female students were more likely than their male counterparts to feel that the balance of their learning was about right (44% versus 31% respectively).

Table 6.2 Preferences for learning by gender, region, rurality

	Gender			Region				Rurality	
	Total	Male	Female	SE	SW	Mid	North	Most rural	Less rural
Base: all answering	5562	2430	3066	2551	1244	657	1110	587	4975
% Prefer all Welsh	3	4	3	2	2	2	8	8	3
% Prefer more Welsh	7	6	9	7	7	11	8	9	7
% It's about right	38	31	44	32	42	48	40	49	36
% Prefer more English	4	4	3	3	5	3	4	7	3
% Prefer all English	42	50	35	49	39	30	36	22	44
% Don't know	6	5	6	7	6	6	4	5	6
% Prefer all/more Welsh	11	10	12	9	9	13	16	17	10
% Prefer all/more English	46	54	38	52	43	33	39	29	47

Table 6.3 Preferences for learning

	Taught in Welsh				Medium of School		Size of sixth form				
	All lessons	50%+ lessons	<50% lessons	None	Welsh	English	Up to 100	101 – 150	151 – 200	201 – 250	251+
Base: all answering	228	452	696	4109	1190	4372	696	1063	1348	537	1918
% Prefer all Welsh	42	12	2	1	13	1	9	6	3	*	1
% Prefer more Welsh	5	11	16	6	9	7	9	9	8	8	5
% It's about right	38	59	52	33	52	34	45	37	39	36	34
% Prefer more English	9	10	5	2	7	3	3	4	5	2	3
% Prefer all English	3	6	19	52	14	49	28	37	38	47	51
% Don't know	3	3	5	6	4	6	5	6	7	7	6
% Prefer all/more Welsh	47	22	18	6	23	8	19	15	11	8	6
% Prefer all/more English	12	16	25	54	21	52	31	42	43	49	54



Region strongly influenced views on preferences for language medium. Students in the South East were far more likely than other students to state their preference was for all or more English (52%). This contrasts with Mid Wales, where just 33% of students stated this as their preference. Linking with this, analysis by the rural characteristic of the ward in which schools were located showed that students in the most rural wards were more likely to state a preference for all or more Welsh provision than those in less rural locations (17% versus 10%).

Of those students who stated that 'all' of their lessons were taught in the Welsh medium, four in ten (38%) were happy with the balance of their teaching, but just under half (47%) stated a preference for all or more Welsh learning, whilst 12% wanted all or more English. As the proportion of lessons taught in Welsh decreased, so did the proportion of students stating a preference for all or more Welsh learning (table 6.3).

Where students were attending a Welsh-medium school, whilst half felt the balance of teaching in their lessons was about right, similar proportions wanted all or more Welsh provision (23%) or all or more English provision (21%).

Size of sixth form influenced student's opinions.

Those in smaller sixth forms (up to 100 students) were more likely to state a preference for all or more Welsh provision, and this proportion decreased as the size of the sixth form increased.

6.3 Summary of Key Points

4% of students said that all their learning was in the Welsh medium, whilst a further tenth (8%) said that over half was in Welsh. The vast majority of students (75%), however, reported that none of their learning was in the Welsh medium.

Students were more likely to be learning in the Welsh medium in smaller schools and in North Wales.

Similar proportions of male and female students stated a preference for all or more of their learning to be in the Welsh medium (around 10%). Students in the most rural locations were more likely to state a preference for all or more learning in the Welsh medium (17% versus 10%).

Of those students who stated that 'all' of their lessons were taught in the Welsh medium, four in ten (38%) were happy with the balance of their teaching, but just under half (47%) stated a preference for all or more Welsh learning, whilst 12% wanted all or more English. As the proportion of lessons taught in Welsh decreased, so did the proportion of students stating a preference for all or more Welsh learning (table 6.3).

TECHNICAL APPENDIX

Focus Groups

The process for recruiting schools involved the ELWa project team writing to all schools with sixth forms in Wales (169 schools in total).

This letter outlined the reasons for the research and the proposed method (a copy of the letter is provided at Appendix A). Schools were invited to fax a response back to ELWa indicating their willingness to be involved (in effect, this served the purpose of an opt out exercise). A list of schools willing to participate was provided to NOP to allow recruitment by telephone.

Twelve focus groups were recruited in eight schools. The quotas for the groups were designed to ensure a mix of Year 12 and Year 13 students, and to ensure that all four ELWa regions were included in the research. In addition, schools were recruited to reflect degrees of deprivation

(as identified by the Index of Multiple Deprivation). Four groups were moderated in Welsh at Welsh medium schools.

A discussion guide for the focus groups was developed in consultation with ELWa. A copy of the discussion guide is included at Appendix B.

All groups were moderated by experienced senior researchers from NOP (four groups were moderated in Welsh). In order to assist with analysis and reporting, moderators were debriefed following the focus groups, so that key themes could be discussed and understood.

The following grid provides the characteristics of each of the eight participating schools. Throughout the main body of the report, comments from students at each school are referenced on this basis.

Self-Completion Questionnaire

School	Medium of school	Size of sixth form (number of pupils)	Level of deprivation according to the Multiple Index of Deprivation*
1	Welsh medium	Over 150	Higher score
2	Welsh medium	150 or under	Lower score
3	English medium	150 or under	Higher score
4	English medium	Over 150	Lower score
5	English medium	Over 150	Lower score
6	English medium	150 or under	Higher score
7	English medium	150 or under	Higher score
8	English medium	Over 150	Lower score

* high score = more deprived

The questionnaire was designed in consultation with ELWa and included a number of questions used in the National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales 2003, so that comparisons could be made between the views of sixth form students and those aged 16 to 18 in FE and WBL provision. The questionnaire was designed in a bilingual format (a copy of the questionnaire is provided at Appendix C).

All schools showing a willingness to be involved in the research (including those that agreed to host focus groups) were invited to take part in the self-completion

survey of Year 12 and Year 13 students. The schools were recruited by telephone, and the survey process explained. A contact person was nominated by each school to oversee the survey, and sufficient questionnaires were sent to this person so that all Year 12 and Year 13 students could participate in the research. In total, out of the 72 schools that showed an initial interest (i.e. returned a fax back form to ELWa indicating an interest in participation), 61 schools agreed to take part in the self-completion survey.



Schools were instructed to hand out the questionnaires at registration on an agreed day (the day was chosen at the discretion of the Headteacher, but within a fieldwork period defined by NOP). Students were provided with an envelope in which to seal their completed questionnaire, and these were collected in centrally before being returned to NOP using postage paid packaging.

Student absences (e.g. illness, field trips) meant that response was lower at some schools than at others, and it may be advisable for future research following a similar methodology to factor in additional time for students to complete the survey.

Response Rates

Response rates were assisted by the development of a relationship with the nominated contact at the school. This person was contacted by telephone to remind them about the cut off date for the receipt of questionnaires. In total, 54 schools returned completed questionnaires to NOP in

time for analysis (representing a school response rate of 88% amongst schools that agreed to participate).

In terms of student response, this equated to 61%. In other words, 5,717 students completed questionnaires out of a total of 9,434 questionnaires issued to schools.

For reference, there are 169 school sixth forms in Wales, with a total student population of around 26,000.

Analysing the Data

On receipt at NOP, questionnaires were automatically scanned using Eyes and Hands software. The data was checked against a tailored edit programme to identify errors, omissions and inconsistencies. Verbatim responses were coded by an experienced coding team.

Interpreting the Data

The following grid provides a useful rule of thumb when judging the statistical significance of the figures relating to the self-completion survey contained in this report:

95% Confidence Intervals for different expected proportions and sample sizes

Sample size	Expected proportion				
	50% or 50%	40% 60%	30% 70%	20% 80%	10% 90%
100	+/-9.7%	+/-9.5%	+/-8.9%	+/-7.8%	+/-5.8%
200	+/-6.8%	+/-6.7%	+/-6.2%	+/-5.4%	+/-4.1%
300	+/-5.5%	+/-5.4%	+/-5.0%	+/-4.4%	+/-3.3%
400	+/-4.7%	+/-4.6%	+/-4.3%	+/-3.8%	+/-2.8%
500	+/-4.2%	+/-4.1%	+/-3.8%	+/-3.3%	+/-2.5%
600	+/-3.8%	+/-3.7%	+/-3.5%	+/-3.0%	+/-2.3%
700	+/-3.5%	+/-3.4%	+/-3.2%	+/-2.8%	+/-2.1%
800	+/-3.2%	+/-3.1%	+/-2.9%	+/-2.6%	+/-1.9%
900	+/-3.0%	+/-2.9%	+/-2.7%	+/-2.4%	+/-1.8%
1000	+/-2.8%	+/-2.8%	+/-2.6%	+/-2.3%	+/-1.7%
1500	+/-2.2%	+/-2.1%	+/-2.0%	+/-1.7%	+/-1.3%
2000	+/-1.8%	+/-1.7%	+/-1.6%	+/-1.4%	+/-1.1%
2500	+/-1.5%	+/-1.4%	+/-1.3%	+/-1.2%	+/-0.9%
3000	+/-1.2%	+/-1.2%	+/-1.1%	+/-1.0%	+/-0.7%
3500	+/-1.0%	+/-1.0%	+/-0.9%	+/-0.8%	+/-0.6%
4000	+/-0.8%	+/-0.8%	+/-0.8%	+/-0.7%	+/-0.5%

APPENDIX A Letter of invitation to Headteachers

5 January 2004

Headteacher

School Address

Dear Mr/Mrs

We wrote to you on 11th March 2003 to introduce ELWa's Customer Research Strategy which aims to develop better knowledge of what motivates individuals, businesses and communities to learn and of their satisfaction or otherwise with the learning experience. This knowledge will enable ELWa and its partners to have far better chance of realising our shared vision of ensuring that the learning provided is in line with learner needs.

The first strand of this major three-year research programme is the National Learner Satisfaction Survey, which aims to gain an understanding of learners' views on many aspects of their learning experience. We have already made a start and over 6,300 learners were interviewed during July and August 2003. The findings are currently being analysed in order to produce a report covering the views of learners undertaking courses in Further Education, Adult Continuing Education and Work Based Learning.

Whilst planning the learner satisfaction survey we worked closely with our project partners, Dysg, and we consulted with the Welsh Secondary Schools Association, the Secondary Heads Association, and Cydag. We were advised that a different approach was required in order to gather the views of sixth form students. On this basis, we would like therefore to conduct targeted research amongst Year 12 and Year 13 students in a number of schools across Wales during February 2004.

The research will comprise one or two focus groups per school (involving a selection of students in Years 12 and 13 or both) and a paper questionnaire to be completed by all Year 12 and 13 students. We are seeking to work with around 12 schools and the purpose of this letter is to request your co-operation in taking part in this activity. From the responses received to this letter, we shall select the schools in order to obtain a representative sample of school catchment areas.

We hope to hold the focus groups on school premises during the school day. A focus group typically lasts around 60 – 90 minutes, and we envisage scheduling the groups during double free periods when sufficient students are available. We would be keen to work closely with your school to determine the best day and times for the group(s).

When selecting students to take part in the groups, it is important that we are as objective as possible to ensure a good cross section of different student types and abilities. One means of doing this is for each school to supply a list of students who are free at the time of the focus group(s), and our research agency, NOP, will select 8 students at random to participate per group.

The self-completion questionnaire element of the research would be administered on the day of the focus group(s). NOP would send a batch of questionnaires to a named contact at your school for distribution to students, ideally during registration. Students would be asked to complete questionnaires (it should take around 10 minutes to complete the survey) and then seal their questionnaire in an envelope. If possible, we would like these to be gathered in by your nominated contact person and handed over to the focus group moderator in one batch.



The benefits of taking part in this activity are that each school will be presented with a graphical overview of the results of the self-completion questionnaire. This will show the overall results for the eight schools involved and the results per school. Schools will remain anonymous, and will be identified by a letter, with each school told which letter corresponds to their school. In addition, the school will have a unique opportunity to feed into the development of the future annual National Learner Satisfaction Survey.

We would be grateful if you could complete the following form to advise whether your school would volunteer to take part in this activity. In the meantime, should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact Elizabeth Lyon, Customer and Market Analyst on 01745 538 544 or email lyone@elwa.org.uk.

May I take this opportunity to thank you in advance for your support.

Yours sincerely

Grenville Jackson

Director of Strategy and Communications

APPENDIX B Focus Group Discussion Guide

School Sixth Forms Topic Guide

Moderator's introduction

- Thank respondents for taking part in the research.
- Introduce self (full name), NOP, explain nature of research: to ask their opinions and views on their course of education and what they think of their school sixth form.
- Reassure: confidentiality, tape recorder, Market Research Society Code of Conduct. Teachers will NOT hear the tapes.
- Discussion will last for 60/90 minutes and it will be recorded for the purpose of the research.
- Importance of everyone being able to say what they think, respecting one another's views, not talking over one another.
- Any questions?
- Round Robin of names – Introduce yourself, what subjects you are studying, hobbies and interests.

Expectations

- To start our discussion, tell me why you have decided to continue learning after Year 11?
- What are the benefits to continuing learning?
- Before you started, what were your expectations of being in your school sixth form?
Prompt for: being treated differently, more freedom, (possibly) relaxation on uniform
- And what were your expectations of your courses?
Prompt for: The workload; course content; teaching method, standard of work expected.
- And which of these expectations have been met or not met?
Prompt for: course(s), sixth form
- How have these expectations been met?
- Were your expectations realistic?
- What had you based your expectations on?
Prompt for: word of mouth from friends, family; talking to teachers
- What do you hope to do/go after you've finished in your sixth form?

Advice about choices

- When deciding on what you were going to do after Year 11, who did you go to for advice about where to study?
Prompt for: family, friends, teachers, Careers Wales advisor either in or out of school
- And who did you go to for advice about what to study?
Prompt for: family, friends, teachers, Careers Wales advisor either in or out of school
- So, can I just check, did any of you use the same sources of advice when deciding where to study and what to study?
- Were there any other advice options?
What were these?
- And what was the information/advice like?
Was it enough to steer you towards the right course or subjects?
Was it off-putting?
Was it appropriate to your age and experience?
Was it enough?
- Did you decide where to study and then choose subjects according to what was available, or was it the other way around?
- If you were starting again, what would you ask about where to study? What to study?
Probe: What if anything would you do differently?
- And in your opinion, what's the best way of giving this type of information to you? What format?
What kind of language?
- Is there a difference between the best way to get information about what to study as opposed to where to study?

Quality of teaching/training

- Interviewer prompt: Ask group to think about their experiences of teaching methods/styles that they found valuable and had a positive impression on them.
- What is the best way of being taught (FLIP CHART RESPONSES)
- What teaching style do you like? Why?
- Which teaching styles encourage you to learn/be attentive?



- Where do you recall having the best learning experience – primary or secondary school? Why?
- So how do you NOT want to be taught (FLIP CHART RESPONSES)
- What are the worst ways of teaching? Why?

Prompt for examples

- What do you dislike having to do on your course? Why?
- How are you least likely to learn? Why?
- How do you rate the overall quality of teaching in your sixth form?

In Welsh medium schools, prompt for: delivery of lessons in Welsh, supply of Welsh speaking teachers. Ask for rating out of 10, where 1 extremely poor and 10 extremely good.

- Are there any problems with the way you are currently taught?

Prompt for: teaching methods, discipline in class/ class room management, supply of staff/ cover for lessons

- Why do you think there are problems?
- And thinking about if you had the choice, how would you prefer to learn?

Prompt for: methods and styles

IF NECESSARY

- What methods would help you achieve your full potential?

IF NOT ALREADY COVERED

- Can you tell me about any experiences where classroom management has failed?
Why did it fail?
Was it the fault of the teacher?
Was it the fault of pupils?
Could the teacher have done anything about it?
How was it dealt with?
What should the teacher have done?
What should teachers do to prevent that sort of thing happening in the future?

Motivation

- What is it that keeps you motivated?
What is it that keeps you going?
Prompt for: the need for qualifications, Parents, friends, teaching staff.

IF NECESSARY

- Who are the people that keep you motivated?
Prompt for: parents, peers Probe: Who else?
- Why do they motivate you?
Prompt for: What is their impact?
- How do you motivate yourself on a day to day basis?
- What could be done to motivate you more?
Prompt for: What do you think would make you enjoy learning more?
- Who should be doing the motivating?

De-motivation

- Can you give examples of times when you have felt de-motivated and someone/something has helped turn that around?
Prompt for: tutor talking with you, constructive feedback on assignment, encouragement from teacher, encouragement from friends
- Have any of you ever thought about leaving your sixth form?
Probe: Why?
- What or who made you change your mind?

Summary

- We want to do some summing up exercises now. Using the post-it notes, write down your ideal experience in your school sixth form and on another post it note, write down your actual experience.
(Repeat for worst experience – but only if you have time to do next two exercises, otherwise finish at this point)
- Finally, can you complete the following sentences using around 5 words:
‘To me a good teacher will...’
(write down the responses on another flip chart)
‘A good learning experience will...’
(write down the responses on another flip chart)

APPENDIX C School Sixth Form Survey

This survey is being conducted by NOP, an independent research company, for ELW_a, who wants to know the views of sixth formers about learning. ELW_a is responsible for funding, planning and promoting learning for people aged over 16 (with the exception of Higher Education). Please spare 15 minutes to complete this survey by following the instructions for each question. All your answers to the survey are confidential and your school will not know how you responded.

Please seal your completed questionnaire in the envelope provided and this will be collected in by one of your tutors. If you have any queries about the survey, please call Viv Young at NOP on freephone number 0800 XXXX.

Q.1 What are your main reasons for deciding to attend this sixth form?

TICK ALL THAT APPLY	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I was already attending this school
<input type="checkbox"/>	Friends were going there
<input type="checkbox"/>	Convenient location/nearest
<input type="checkbox"/>	Offered the course(s) and/ or subject(s) I wanted
<input type="checkbox"/>	Best reputation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Recommended by career advisor
<input type="checkbox"/>	Offered teaching in Welsh language
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please write in)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	OR Had no choice – only option in my area

Q.2 And was this school your first choice, in other words, the place where you most wanted to do your course(s)?

TICK ALL THAT APPLY	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes, first choice
<input type="checkbox"/>	No, not first choice
<input type="checkbox"/>	Didn't have a choice
<input type="checkbox"/>	Didn't actively consider another option

Q.3 Below is a list of issues that you may have had expectations about before starting in your sixth form. For each, please say whether your expectation was met or whether you had no expectation on this issue.

PLEASE TICK ONE COLUMN PER EXPECTATION	Expectation met	Expectation not met	No Expectation	Do not know
The amount of work you would have to do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The structure of your course(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The amount of responsibility you would have to take	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The number of deadlines you would have to meet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The content of your course(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teaching styles and methods used in lessons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The standard of work expected	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q.4 What subject(s) are you studying?

TICK ALL THAT APPLY
<input type="checkbox"/> Arts & media (including music, art, media studies)
<input type="checkbox"/> Business, administration, law
<input type="checkbox"/> Science & Mathematics (including biology, chemistry, physics)
<input type="checkbox"/> Earth Sciences (including geology, geography)
<input type="checkbox"/> Humanities & Social sciences (e.g. history, psychology, sociology, religious studies)
<input type="checkbox"/> Sports Science (including physical education)
<input type="checkbox"/> Design & technology
<input type="checkbox"/> Information & communication technology (ICT)
<input type="checkbox"/> Languages - English
<input type="checkbox"/> Languages - Welsh
<input type="checkbox"/> Languages - Other
<input type="checkbox"/> Key skills
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please write in)

Q.6 Are the types of courses that you are studying your first choice? In other words, are they the subjects and qualifications that you most want to do?

TICK ALL THAT APPLY
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, first choice
<input type="checkbox"/> No, not first choice
<input type="checkbox"/> Didn't have a choice
<input type="checkbox"/> Didn't actively consider another option

Q.5 And what qualification(s) do you hope to achieve by studying in your sixth form?

TICK ALL THAT APPLY
<input type="checkbox"/> A level/ Vocational A level or equivalent
<input type="checkbox"/> AS level
<input type="checkbox"/> Certificate of sixth year studies (CSYS) or equivalent
<input type="checkbox"/> GCSE
<input type="checkbox"/> RSA
<input type="checkbox"/> GNVQ
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please write in)

Q.7 If you are not studying your first choice of course(s), why is this?

TICK ALL THAT APPLY
<input type="checkbox"/> School does not provide the course(s) or subject(s) I wanted
<input type="checkbox"/> Could not fit my choices into the timetable
<input type="checkbox"/> Advised by teacher not to follow first choice(s)
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please write in)
<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/> OR Not applicable - studying first choice(s)

Q.8 Did you obtain advice about where to study and what to study before joining your sixth form?

TICK ONE ONLY	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes, advice on where to study (go to question 9)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes, advice on where to study (go to question 9)
<input type="checkbox"/>	No advice on where or what to study (go to question 10)

Q.9 Which sources of advice did you use?

TICK ALL THAT APPLY	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Careers Wales advisor - in or out of school
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sixth form admissions personnel
<input type="checkbox"/>	Teachers at school
<input type="checkbox"/>	Parents/ other family members
<input type="checkbox"/>	Friends
<input type="checkbox"/>	Learn Direct Service (helpline, website)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please write in)

Q.10 Overall how satisfied are you with the quality of teaching in your sixth form?

Extremely satisfied	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Extremely dissatisfied
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q.11 How do you rate your teachers on the following? We realise that ratings may vary for different teachers, but please give us an overall rating.

	Very good	Fairly good	Neither good nor poor	Fairly poor	Very poor	Don't know
Ability to explain the subject	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Listening to your needs	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Making your subject interesting or enjoyable	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Understanding you and how you like to learn	<input type="checkbox"/>					
The support they give you, e.g. improving your study techniques or time management	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Making good use of lesson time	<input type="checkbox"/>					
The quality and availability of the teaching materials they use	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Setting clear targets to help you improve	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Providing prompt and regular feedback on progress	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Dealing with disruptive learners	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Q.12 At the moment, how would you describe your level of motivation in your studies?

TICK ONE ONLY

Highly motivated Fairly motivated Not very motivated Not at all motivated Not sure

Q.13 Why is that?

Q.14 Since you started in your sixth form, have you had any problems with any of the following?

TICK ALL THAT APPLY

Problems of any kind with other students

Problems of any kind with a member of staff

Maintaining your personal motivation

Traveling to school

Extra help you were promised not being provided

Keeping up with the standard of work required

Other (please write in)

OR No problems

Q.15 Have you ever seriously thought about leaving your sixth form?

TICK ONE ONLY

Yes

No

Don't know

Q.16 Were you offered any of your learning at this school through the medium of Welsh?

TICK ONE ONLY

Yes

No

Don't know

Q.17 How much of your learning would you like to be in the medium of Welsh?

TICK ONE ONLY

Prefer all Welsh
 Prefer some Welsh
 Prefer not to have any Welsh
 Don't mind either way
 Don't know

Q.18 Taking into account all aspects of learning in your sixth form, overall how satisfied are you with your learning experience?

Extremely satisfied	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Extremely dissatisfied
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The last few questions are about you and will help to put your answers in context. All the information you provide remains confidential.

Q.19 Are you?

Male
 Female

Q.20 Which year are you in?

Year 12
 Year 13

Thank you very much for your help. Please seal the questionnaire in the envelope provided and this will be collected in by one of your tutors.

APPENDIX D The Customer Research Strategy

The Customer Research Strategy

The National Council – ELWa’s 2002/3 Corporate Plan included a requirement to establish ‘An integrated programme to understand the needs of our customers in order to ensure that all future product development is based upon their needs’ (Corporate Plan – 2002/03 ref. P13)

Following a wide internal consultation process, the Customer Research Strategy was developed to provide an understanding of learner needs, motivation and satisfaction. This activity would allow ELWa to:

- understand what motivates customers to learn, so enabling us to widen and deepen participation in learning
- understand what customers think of the education and learning services they receive, particularly those which we fund

- track and understand participation within the different customer groups

The proposed three-year research programme was outlined to the Council in May 2003 and includes the following elements:

- a blanket learner satisfaction survey during Summer 2003, including 20 minute telephone interviews with over 6,200 learners
- the development of a methodology to collect similar information from Sixth Form students across Wales
- the establishment of an individuals panel and an employers panel in order to track changes in attitudes to and participation in learning
- the production of a range of themed reports throughout the programme lifetime

Activity	Fieldwork
National Learner Satisfaction Survey for Wales	6200 FE, WBL and ACE learners were interviewed by telephone in Summer 2003. The survey aimed to provide an understanding of learners’ views and satisfaction with their learning experiences.
ELWa School Sixth Form Survey	5,000 sixth formers filled in self-completion questionnaires and 12 focus groups held February 2004.
Employer Case Studies	28 case studies carried out during January/February 2004. Interviewing directors and line managers and surveying staff from a range of employers across Wales. Focussing on attitudes to learning within the work place and the decision making process around work place learning.
Employers Panel	2,000 employers will be interviewed twice each year by telephone in order to track and analyse attitudes to learning. The questionnaire and sample are currently being designed – first wave of fieldwork planned for September.
Individuals Panel	2,000 individuals from across Wales were interviewed face-to-face during Dec 03/Jan 04. These individuals will form a panel which will be interviewed annually to improve understanding in relation to attitudes to learning and to track changes in attitudes and perceptions.
Work Based Learners Leavers Survey (Pilot)	As part of ELWa’s requirements under its Management Schedules, a pilot project has been designed to interview a sample of WBL programme learners approximately 6 months after leaving the programme. 600 20-minute telephone interviews were carried out in May 2004.