

National Learner
Satisfaction Survey (NLSS)
2007

Summary of findings for learners with
disabilities and/or learning
difficulties in the FE system

Research Study Conducted for
LSC

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*National Learner Satisfaction Survey 2007 for LSC
Further Education Learners with Disabilities and/or Learning Difficulties*

Introduction

This report summarises the findings from interviews conducted with learners with a disability and/or with learning difficulties within the further education (FE) system¹. These learners were surveyed as part of the 2007 National Learner Satisfaction Survey (NLSS) which was conducted by Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute on behalf of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), and included a total of 43,756 interviews with learners.

Detailed reports have been produced which analyse the findings for learners with a disability and learners with learning difficulties separately. The purpose of this report is to summarise these findings, and to draw out similarities and differences between the following groups (*italics show the description used for each group in the remainder of the report*):

- *learners with both a disability and learning difficulties*: three per cent of the total sample, 926 respondents;
- *learners with a disability only* (i.e. without learning difficulties): four per cent of the total sample, 1,183 respondents;
- *learners with learning difficulties only* (i.e. without a disability): four per cent of the total sample, 1,515 respondents.

Comparisons are also made as appropriate with learners in the FE system without any disability or learning difficulties (28,118 respondents), and with all learners in the FE system (31,742 learners).

Interviews were conducted by telephone between 19 February and 26 July 2007. Learners who were unable to take part by telephone due to their disability and/or because they had learning difficulties were offered the opportunity to be interviewed using a proxy (for people with a disability e.g. hearing impairment or speech impairment) or with their support worker/carer (for people with learning difficulties).

Learner characteristics

Those with learning difficulties (either with or without a disability) were more likely than other learners to be male (52 per cent compared with 39 per cent for all learners in the FE system).

¹ Learners with a disability and/or learning difficulties from the Work Based Learning, Personal and Community Development Learning, and Adult Community Learning systems are not included in this analysis.

The age profile of learners with both a disability and learning difficulties was similar to FE learners as a whole. However, those with a disability only tended to be older than other learners (44 per cent were aged over 40 compared with 30 per cent of other FE learners), while those with learning difficulties only were younger (64 per cent were aged under 21 compared with 40 per cent of other FE learners).

Learners with a disability and/or learning difficulties were more likely to be studying at Entry Level or Level 1 (40 per cent for those with both a disability and learning difficulties, 28 per cent among those with a disability only and 30 per cent among those with learning difficulties only), in comparison with learners without a disability or learning difficulties (18 per cent). In terms of previous qualifications, those with learning difficulties tended to have lower qualifications than other learners, and 19 per cent of those with both learning difficulties and a disability had no qualifications. Those with a disability only were similar to learners as a whole.

These variations (by gender, age, level studied and qualifications) are important in interpreting the findings: differences between people with a disability and/or learning difficulties and other learners may be related to the profile of the former in terms of gender, age, level studied and qualifications, rather than by their disability or learning difficulties.

Satisfaction with the learning experience

The vast majority of learners were satisfied with their overall learning experience, and levels of satisfaction were very similar across the groups covered in this report (between 90 and 92 per cent were satisfied). However, learners with a disability and/or learning difficulty were more likely to be *extremely* satisfied than learners without a disability or learning difficulty; satisfaction was significantly higher for those with both a disability and learning difficulties, and for those with a disability only. Details are shown in Table 1. The reasons for satisfaction were similar across the various respondent groups.

Table 1: Satisfaction with overall learning experience

	<i>All with a disability only</i>	<i>All with learning difficultie s only</i>	<i>All with both a disability and learning difficulties</i>	<i>All without disability or learning difficulties</i>
<i>Base: all</i>	<i>(1,183)</i>	<i>(1,515)</i>	<i>(926)</i>	<i>(28,118)</i>
	%	%	%	%
Extremely satisfied	30	29	33	26
Very satisfied	40	40	37	43
Fairly satisfied	19	23	22	21
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	4	2	3	3
Fairly dissatisfied	4	4	2	4
Very dissatisfied	1	1	2	1
Extremely dissatisfied	2	2	1	2
SATISFIED	90	91	92	90
DISSATISFIED	6	7	5	7
Net satisfied	+83	+85	+86	+83

Similarly, most learners agreed that the learning programme was meeting their needs, and again there was very little variation between different learner groups (between 87 per cent and 90 per cent agreed that their needs were being met).

Amongst the minority of learners who were dissatisfied with their overall learning experience, those with both a disability and learning difficulties were more likely than other learners to say they were dissatisfied because of the lack of support or poor attitude from tutors (50 per cent versus 36 per cent of all dissatisfied FE learners), while those with learning difficulties only were more likely than other respondents to say that this was because they didn't get the help they needed (46 per cent compared with 28 per cent of all dissatisfied FE learners).

Overall, eight per cent of FE learners left their course early, and this was significantly higher amongst those with a disability only (10 per cent), in comparison with learners without a disability or learning difficulties (8 per cent). It appears that this increased incidence of early leavers can be accounted for by disability related reasons: one in three learners with a disability only (32 per cent) left the course early because of health problems, significantly higher than the other groups. Those with a disability only were less likely to have left the course early because of problems with the teacher or teaching quality (six per cent compared with 13 per cent or more in the FE system as a whole).

Satisfaction with the teaching and the provider

Satisfaction with the quality of teaching was high amongst all learners, with between 89 and 90 per cent satisfied in the groups covered in this report. However, learners with a disability and/or learning difficulties were again more likely to be *extremely* satisfied than learners without a disability or learning difficulties (30 per cent compared with 25 per cent).

Learners also rated their teachers and tutors highly on a number of key aspects. Ratings were generally higher amongst learners with a disability and/or learning difficulties than other learners. This applied specifically to understanding learners and how they like to learn; giving support; planning lessons; setting clear targets and learning goals; providing prompt and regular feedback on progress; managing the group of learners; and the quality and availability of teaching materials. In addition, learners with a disability only gave higher ratings than other groups for subject knowledge and how well teachers/tutors related to them as a person, while ratings for making the subject interesting and enjoyable were higher amongst learners with a disability (with or without learning difficulties) than those with learning difficulties only or learners without a disability or learning difficulties.

The main disruptions to learning reported were other students arriving late and other students making a noise and disrupting the class. Both of these types of problem were mentioned more frequently by those with learning difficulties only than other learners without any disability or learning difficulties (67 per cent compared with 60 per cent for other students arriving late, and 42 per cent compared with 25 per cent for other students making a noise or disrupting the class). This is linked to variations by age group: amongst FE learners as a whole, younger learners were more likely than older learners to mention these problems.

The vast majority of learners agreed that they were treated fairly and with respect by staff (94 per cent and 96 per cent of all FE learners respectively), and this did not vary between the different groups covered in this report. However, learners with mental ill health were less likely than average to feel respected.

Learners with learning difficulties (both those who also had a disability and those who had learning difficulties only) tended to be more positive than other learners towards the level of consultation they had experienced. This applied specifically to having their views sought on the quality of the learning programme, ways to improve the learning programme, the college and facilities. These learners were also more likely than average to feel that they had been listened to (when they had been consulted). Learners with mental ill health were less likely than average to feel they had been consulted.

Pre-entry information, advice and guidance

The reasons given by learners for choosing their course were broadly similar across the different groups. However, personal interest was most likely to be mentioned by learners with both a disability and learning difficulties. Learners with a disability (with or without learning difficulties) were more likely to say they chose the course in order to advance their skills in the area, but were less likely to say it was to get a better/different job or a promotion.

Learners generally felt well informed before they enrolled on the course. However, those with **both** a disability and learning difficulties tended to feel less well informed than other learners about the type of assessments they would be given (73 per cent compared with 81 per cent of FE learners overall) and the standard of work expected (81 per cent compared with 87 per cent).

Learner support during the course

The vast majority of learners felt there was support available to help them carry out their learning programme, although this was a little lower amongst those with a disability only (87 per cent, compared with 91 per cent of other learners). In particular, views were more negative amongst learners with multiple disabilities or mental ill health.

When asked about the management of issues affecting learners during the course, learners with a disability only were most positive towards teachers turning up as planned (75 per cent giving a rating of 9 or 10 out of 10), seeing the same teacher throughout (76 per cent) and communicating changes in times of sessions (55 per cent). Learners with both a disability and learning difficulties were more positive than other learners towards managing timetables to suit the learner as best they can (56 per cent) and helping new people settle in (68 per cent).

The majority of learners had experienced at least one type of problem during their course, such as managing to keep up with the standard of work required, travelling to the course, literacy and numeracy skills (all mentioned more frequently by those with learning difficulties, with or without a disability) and balancing their course with home commitments (mentioned most frequently by those with a disability only). Overall, those with a disability and/or learning difficulties were more likely to have experienced at least one type of problem than other learners (68 per cent compared with 59 per cent). Learners with learning difficulties (with or without a disability) were more likely than other learners to have sought help or advice for their problem (43 per cent compared with 34 per cent with a disability only and 29 per cent without a disability or learning difficulties).

Overall, one in seven learners had made a complaint about their provider, and this was higher amongst those with learning difficulties only (17 per cent)

compared with other learners (13 per cent). However, learners with a disability and/or learning difficulties were more likely to be satisfied with the outcome of a complaint than other learners (47 per cent compared with 36 per cent).

Attitude to learning and the benefits of learning

Learners with learning difficulties were more likely to say they had negative feelings about education when they left school (32 per cent with learning difficulties only and 28 per cent with both learning difficulties and a disability), compared with learners with a disability only, or learners without a disability or learning difficulties (20 per cent in each case).

Learners with a disability only had the most positive attitudes towards learning now – 81 per cent enjoyed learning and got a buzz from it. These respondents were also the least likely to say they were carrying on learning to improve their career prospects (66 per cent). Both of these findings reflect variations by age. Learners with both learning difficulties and a disability were more likely than other respondents to say that they enjoyed learning mostly because of the social aspects (62 per cent) and were carrying on learning because they couldn't think of anything better to do (22 per cent). Those with learning difficulties only were most likely to say that they didn't really enjoy learning (11 per cent).

Learners with learning difficulties (both with and without a disability) were more likely than other respondents to express a number of concerns about learning: feeling out of place in a classroom situation, not being able to manage their time, being unable to take on new responsibilities and getting nervous about the standard of work required.

However, those with learning difficulties were more likely than other respondents to report a number of benefits of learning: feeling more confident socially, being more creative and trying new things, and being more active in the community (all higher for those both with or without a disability); and managing their time and responsibilities better, feeling more positive about learning than when they started, coping better with daily life, and improved health and sense of well-being (all higher for those with both learning difficulties and a disability).

Conclusions

Overall attitudes towards the course and learning provider were consistently high amongst learners with a disability and/or with learning difficulties, as amongst learners as a whole. There was little if any variation between learners with a disability and those with learning difficulties on these overall measures.

Within this general pattern, the survey identified particular issues relating to satisfaction with and completion of the course: those with learning difficulties were most likely to mention lack of support or help as a reason for dissatisfaction with their learning experience, while those with a disability only were most likely to leave the course early (often through ill health).

Learners with a disability and/or with learning difficulties were more positive than other learners towards many aspects of teaching, although those with learning difficulties were more likely to encounter disruptions to learning (e.g. caused by other students). However, those with learning difficulties were more likely than other learners to feel they had been consulted about the course and learning facilities.

Learners with a disability tended to be most positive towards the different types of support given to them during their learning. However, learners with a disability and/or learning difficulties were more likely than other learners to have had problems of some kind during their course – for learners with a disability this was often in balancing course commitments with commitments at home, while for those with learning difficulties problems were more likely to relate to the course itself (such keeping up with the standard of work required, literacy or numeracy problems). Despite this, those with learning difficulties were more likely than other learners to report a number of benefits they had gained from their learning experience.