



# STATE OF THE NATION SURVEY 2008

## Executive Summary

In 1998, the Campaign for Learning undertook a large-scale MORI survey on attitudes to learning of young people and adults across the country. The results influenced both the Campaign's own strategies and wider policy development. The survey remains one of MORI's most frequently requested reports.

Ten years on we re-ran the poll to determine if attitudes had changed. In the interim, we have undertaken regular surveys of young people through the MORI Schools Omnibus, but this is our first full-scale survey since the original study. The 2008 poll took place in two parts – the young people's poll as part of the 2008 Survey of Secondary School Pupils and a specially commissioned face-to-face poll with adults, using questions from 1998 that remained relevant and adding extra relevant questions.

Below are the headline results of the two polls. For a full breakdown and further interesting findings, please see the full report, obtainable from our website on [www.campaignforlearning.org.uk](http://www.campaignforlearning.org.uk). We are grateful to Select Education and the LSC for sponsoring the young people's and adult survey respectively.

# Young People's Survey

The aim of this survey was to gather information on young people's experiences and perceptions of learning and teaching. Fieldwork took place between 11 January and 28 March 2008 among 11-16 year olds at middle and secondary state schools in England and Wales. 100 schools participated, giving a response rate of 32% and producing 2,387 completed questionnaires. Data were weighted to the known profile of the school population by gender, age and region, and responses were compared with earlier data as a point of validation.

## Do students enjoy learning at school?

Findings suggest that learning at school is as enjoyable for students now as in 1998 – around half found learning very or fairly enjoyable (47%, compared with 50% in 1998).

## Where does the responsibility for learning lie?

Encouragingly for the Campaign, which advocates learners taking control of their own learning, two thirds of students (65%) saw learning as their responsibility, not that of their school. Students felt their schools were run democratically and fairly. Four in five (79%) said their schools tried to help all students to develop, not just the cleverest, and 69% reported that students had chances to feed back to teachers on improving learning.

## How do students prefer to learn?

The popularity of learning through doing practical things has increased dramatically (56% now, compared with 39% last year and 35% in 1998). Learning with friends is also popular (53%) – again, much more than last year (35%) or 1998 (28%).

Over a third of respondents liked to learn using computers (37%), but less than one in five preferred to learn by seeing things done, or from a teacher (18% & 17% respectively). The proportion preferring to learn from a teacher has declined steadily since 1998, when 29% chose this. This may reflect the wider range of learning methods available now.

## How do students actually learn?

When asked what they actually do most often in school, however, most 11-16 year olds say they copy from the board or from a book (65%) or 'listen to a teacher talking for a long time' (63%). In general, teacher-led activities seem to have increased in recent years – copying from the board or a book was identified by 52% last year, and listening to a teacher talking scored only 33%<sup>1</sup> in 2007. What respondents term a 'long time' is clearly subjective, but the contrast with previous years is marked. We may speculate on reasons for this, but at the very least there appears to be a gap between students' preferences and their perception of what actually happens that warrants further investigation.

## What do students enjoy about learning?

Motivations seem to have shifted since 1998. Students now seem to focus more on careers: 55% (compared with 47% in 1998) say they like learning new things as it will help them get a job. Higher education aspirations are higher too: 42% see access to higher education as a benefit of learning new things (compared with only 34% in 1998.) A sense of achievement now ranks much lower as a benefit of learning (identified by 35% in 1998 but only 19% in 2008), perhaps reflecting concerns that learning is now 'uncool'.

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<sup>1</sup> N.B The list of options was in a different order in 2008 compared to previous years, which may have impacted somewhat on the most frequently cited responses, so results must be treated with caution.

### Where do students learn about new things?

Most new learning still occurs in the classroom: four in five (80%) say they learn the most about new things in class at school. This proportion has remained stable (78% in 1998), as has the proportion who say they learn new things at home (29% now; 30% in 1998).

Computers and in particular the internet are also important sources of learning - far more, unsurprisingly, than in 1998. 45% say they learn about new things from the internet (12% in 1998), while over a third (34%) learn on the computer (27% in 1998).

### Who helps students to learn?

When asked who helped them to learn the most, nearly three quarters of pupils (72%) mentioned their mothers. Three in five (61%) identified their teacher – more than nominated their father (55%). One third (32%) mentioned friends. Mothers and teachers both feature slightly more than when we first asked in 2000 (66% mother; 57% teacher).

### What makes it difficult for students to learn?

Students' perceptions of barriers to learning have changed little: poor teaching (81%), teachers not understanding how they learned and feeling unhappy (77% in both) were the main barriers, along with having too many other things to think about (71%), no chances to learn about things that interested them (57%) and lack of confidence (51%).

### What changes would students like to see at their school?

More visits to places of interest scored highest here (65%). 35% of respondents wanted to be able to concentrate on the things they are good at, and similarly 32% wanted to be helped to plan their own futures. 28% wanted to use more new technologies, while 24% wanted their school to concentrate on getting everyone to pass their exams.

Regarding activities outside school, fewer students now wanted more work experience placements (22% in 2008; 32% in 1998) and fewer wanted their school more out of school activities (11% in 2008; 18% in 1998). This contrasts interestingly with the preference for external visits, and perhaps merits more detailed investigation.

## Adult Survey

This survey aimed to assess adults', aged 16+, current views and attitudes on learning. Ipsos MORI interviewers conducted 1,016 15-minute face to face interviews in respondents' homes. Fieldwork ran between 13 September & 2 October 2008 in 52 sampling points<sup>2</sup> in England, Scotland and Wales. Quotas were set and data weighted on gender, age and working status.

### Current and future learning

People feel as satisfied with their lives as they did ten years ago (76% in 2008; 78% in 1998), but are now much more confident about their ability to achieve: 65% now agree that they always achieve what they aim for in life, up from 55% in 1998. This is interesting, as interviews took place just as reports of the economic downturn were appearing in the media.

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<sup>2</sup> For this survey, an MDOA (MORI Double Output Area) was used for each point. These generally consist of around 250 households and are made up of two paired-up output areas (OAs)

The qualifications profile of adults was also interesting in comparison with 1998. 25% of current respondents had no formal qualifications on leaving school, significantly below the 34% in this category in ten years ago. Around 10% of those without qualifications when leaving school went on to achieve one, such that only 16% currently held no qualifications. This shows a drop of 7% from 1998, and may reflect some success in Government policy over the past ten years. Just over half (56%) saw school as a good foundation for future learning (56%), but 33% did not feel school prepared them well.

The proportion of people involved in taught learning activities was unchanged from 1998 – 46% had taken part in some type of taught learning in the past 12 months, with courses designed to help develop skills for use in a job the most common (17%). Most encouragingly, three in five people (59%) wanted to take part in taught learning activities in the next 12 months, and 50% of people thought they would actually do so. Participation in non-taught learning was slightly higher, with 49% of people involved in some way, most by keeping up to date with developments related to their work (22%).

A high proportion of people felt that learning would become more important over the next ten years (78%), with just under half (47%) strongly agreeing that this would be the case.

### How and why we learn

We were delighted to see learning was something that nearly everyone (93%) enjoyed: moreover, more people agreed strongly that they enjoyed learning than in 1998 (56%; 48% in 1998). Three quarters of people (76%) felt it was important to devote time to developing themselves. People said learning benefited them by stretching their brains (29%), while almost as many felt it improved their job prospects (27%) – an interesting parallel with young people's attitudes, which perhaps reflects the economic situation.

The workplace and friends were mentioned most frequently as influencers to start learning (32% and 27% respectively), just as in 1998 – but now the internet was another key influence on starting to learn for 24% of respondents.

As in 1998, over a third of people (36%) felt the stress laid on gaining qualifications had put them off learning, but almost half (46%) did not feel this way.

Just like young people, the way adults most liked to learn was by doing practical things (42%). This was also true in 1998, although now almost a quarter (23%) mentioned using computers, mobile phones and the internet - not feasible options for most in 1998.

### Where we learn

It is pleasing to note that three quarters of people (74%) were satisfied with the learning opportunities available to them, although older people tended to be less satisfied. The workplace was identified as the place where people learned the most (42%), followed by the home (36%, a drop of 21% from 1998.) Government prioritisation of workplace learning may have played a part here, but the change may also relate to the addition of an extra category - 'On a computer/internet', now considered a good place to learn by a third of people (32%) – which may be accessed at home, work or elsewhere.

Seven in ten people would rather work for an employer who provided time, money or support for training than one who gave big salary increases but little training. Three in five people (61%) felt employers should support staff to do a courses not directly related to their job. However, people did not necessarily feel employers should be responsible for planning and paying for training; 40% felt this should be individuals' responsibility.