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National Learner Satisfaction
Survey: Adults in FE,
Apprenticeship, other LR and PCDL

FEBRUARY 2011

Trinh Tu, Claire Lambert, Billie Lever Taylor, Claire Lister and Angela Klein managed this project at Ipsos MORI and would like to thank Tracy Mitchell, Charlotte Beckford and James Davison and all colleagues at LSC, Skills Funding Agency, Young People's Learning Agency and BIS who worked on the research for all their help and assistance; thanks are also due to all the survey respondents who gave up their time to take part.

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Introduction

Background

This report presents the key findings for further education (FE), other learner responsive (LR)¹, personal and community development learners (PCDL) and Apprentices aged 19 and over (described as adult learners for the purposes of this report), who took part in the National Learner Satisfaction Survey (NLSS) 2009. The NLSS was conducted by Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute and commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). In April 2010, the LSC was superseded by the Skills Funding Agency and the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA). The LSC research function was transferred to the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).

The NLSS is a large tracking survey of then LSC-funded learners aged 16 and over. The NLSS provides a wealth of data on learners' satisfaction with their learning experience over time, including detailed information on three key aspects of the learner journey: initial choice and information; support during learning; and benefits of participation. There have been six national surveys since 2001 (annually between 2001 and 2004, 2007 and 2009). A total of 13,679 adults in FE, PCDL and other LR learning and Apprenticeships took part in the 2009 survey, out of a total of 25,084 telephone interviews conducted.

The 2009 survey comprises three waves, each dealing with a distinct set of modular questions:

- Pre-entry advice and guidance (wave 15);
- Support for learners (wave 16); and
- Impact of learning (wave 17).

There is a set of core questions that are also covered in all three waves:

- overall satisfaction with the learning experience;
- overall satisfaction with the quality of teaching and management of learning; and
- how likely the learner is to return to learning in the future

Sampling

The NLSS covers learners in further education (FE), Apprenticeships, other Learner Responsive courses², non-accredited personal and community development learning (PCDL), Skills for Jobs (SFJ) and Employability Skills programme (ESP) learning.

¹ Other LR provision includes charities, HEIs, local authorities, business organisations, public or voluntary organisations.

² includes charities, HEIs, local authorities, business organisations, public or voluntary organisations

Learners were sampled from the LSC's individualised learner record (ILR), with the exception of PCDL learners who were sampled directly from local education authorities' records due to the lack of a robust national database of these learners. In line with previous years of NLSS, quotas were set by local LSCs for the FE learners, and by local education authorities for PCDL learners.

Data from all learners drawn from the ILR were weighted using final ILR profiles for the 2007/08 academic year. Further details about the sampling and weighting approach are provided in the technical report.

Sample profile

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of learners aged 19+. PCDL and other LR learners are predominantly female, while there is a broadly even gender split across FE learners and Apprentices.

The majority of FE, Other LR and PCDL learners are 25 years old and over, while Apprentices are largely between 19 and 24 years old.

Around one in six FE and other LR learners are from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups, considerably higher than the proportions in Apprenticeships and PCDL.

Table 1: Sample demographic profile (weighted)

	FE	Apprentices	Other LR	PCDL
<i>(Unweighted Base: all respondents)</i>	<i>(7,547) %</i>	<i>(2,804) %</i>	<i>(1,389) %</i>	<i>(1939) %</i>
Gender				
Male	40	52	27	23
Female	60	48	73	77
Age				
19-24	23	72	11	2
25+	77	28	89	98
Ethnicity				
White	83	92	81	93
BME	16	8	18	5
Refused	*	-	*	1
Not known	1	*	1	-
Disability	9	6	12	11
Learning difficulty	7	5	9	5

Multivariate analysis

In addition to standard analysis of the data, multiple regression (also known as key driver analysis – KDA) was used to examine the relative importance of a range of factors in explaining overall satisfaction with the learning experience. (PCDL learners were excluded from this analysis because the representativeness of this sample is unknown – there is no population profile data).

Interpretation of data

It should be remembered that a sample and not the entire population of adult learners on FE, other LR, PCDL course or Apprenticeships has been interviewed. Consequently, all results are subject to sampling tolerances, which means that not all differences are statistically significant. **This report comments only on findings that are statistically significant.**

Where percentages do not sum to 100, this is due to computer rounding, the exclusion of 'don't know' categories, or multiple answers. An asterisk (*) denotes values above zero but less than 0.5 per cent.

In this report, reference is made to 'combined scores'. This is where we combine 'extremely', 'very' and 'fairly', or 'strongly' and 'tend to' scores. The report also makes reference to 'net' figures. This represents the balance of opinion on attitudinal questions. In the case of a 'net satisfaction' figure, this represents the percentage satisfied with a particular issue, less the percentage dissatisfied. For example, if an aspect of learning records 40 per cent satisfied and 25 per cent dissatisfied, the 'net satisfaction' figure is +15 points.

Combined and net scores are calculated using the true value of the scores before they are rounded. This can result in a small discrepancy (usually one percentage point) between the combined score and the sum of the rounded scores it relates to.

This report also makes reference to mean scores for questions where learners were asked to rank an aspect of their course or provider on a scale of 1 to 10. The mean score is compiled by adding the scores provided by all learners and dividing it by the number of learners answering the question.

Report structure

This report is organised into six main sections:

- Summary of key findings and implications;
- Satisfaction with learning experience and advocacy;
- Satisfaction with teaching and the provider;
- Needs and expectations;
- Information, advice and support; and
- Early leavers

To protect the LSC's interest in ensuring that the findings of this research are accurately reported, any such publications are therefore subject to the advance approval of Ipsos MORI.

Such approval will only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misrepresentation.

Summary and Implications

Summary

Satisfaction with the learning experience

Overall, around nine in ten adult learners are satisfied with their learning experience, including around one in five who are extremely satisfied. Only one in twenty are dissatisfied. However, there has been a decline across all learner groups in the proportion reporting they are extremely satisfied with their learning experience, reversing the previous upwards trends.

Reasons for satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the course focus on the quality of teaching and issues related to the course. For all learner groups the quality of teaching is the most commonly-cited reason for satisfaction. A badly run course is the top reason for dissatisfaction among FE learners, Apprentices and other LR learners, whilst the course not being what they expected is the top cause of dissatisfaction among PCDL learners.

The majority of adult learners would speak highly of their provider, including around one in three who would so without being asked. PCDL learners are more positive about their learning provider than Apprentices or FE learners.

Satisfaction with teaching and the provider

As with overall satisfaction, a high proportion of adult learners are satisfied with the quality of teaching at their provider (around nine in ten), in line with 2007 levels. As is the case with advocacy, PCDL learners are more satisfied with the quality of teaching than Apprentices or FE learners.

Adult learners are also positive about specific elements of the course related to teaching, including the tutors making the subject interesting or enjoyable, understanding how the learner likes to learn and managing the group of learners. PCDL and other LR learners tend to be more positive than FE learners and Apprentices on all the specific course aspects we asked about.

Needs and expectations

Most adult learners feel that their learning experience has at least met their expectations, and around one in three say it has exceeded their expectations. However, around one in five learners says they did not know what to expect. Apprentices and FE learners are more likely to say they did not know what to expect, while PCDL learners are more likely to say it met their expectations.

Around nine in ten adult learners agree that the course has met their needs, with more PCDL learners *strongly* agreeing compared to FE learners or Apprentices.

Information, advice and support

The vast majority of adult learners are positive about the support they receive from their provider, with at least half reporting it is *very good*. Similarly, adult learners across all groups are very positive about the support received from staff in the first few weeks of the course, with nine in ten saying it is good.

Around two in five adult learners have experienced problems on their course. For PCDL, FE and other LR learners the most commonly-cited problem is fitting course commitments in with commitments at home. In line with the more vocational nature of the course, Apprentices, however, are most likely to mention fitting their course commitments in with work commitments as an issue. Other problems among all learner groups are maintaining personal motivation, keeping up with the standard of work required and dealing with money pressures.

Most adult learners feel that they received good information when they were choosing their course, including around two in three who say it was *very good*.

Personalisation, learner involvement and provider responsiveness

The vast majority of adult learners feel the respect staff show to them is good, with PCDL learners the most positive, followed by other LR learners.

Adult learners also rate their tutors well on how they relate to them as people, with mean scores ranging from 8.42 (FE learners) to 8.74 (PCDL learners). PCDL and other LR learners rate their tutors significantly higher on this measure than Apprentices and FE learners.

The majority of adult learners say their provider is good at listening to their views, with Apprentices the most positive. Furthermore, the majority think their provider is good at acting on those views. While these figures are slightly lower than those who agree their provider listens to their views, much of the reduction comes from an increase in learners saying they do not know or that this does not apply.

Attitudes to learning and the benefits of learning

Roughly over half of adult learners say they had positive feelings about education when they left school; this proportion ranges from 52 per cent of Apprentices and other LR learners to 63 per cent of PCDL learners.

The majority of adult learners say they are more positive about learning since beginning their course, with Apprentices particularly likely to say this.

Usefulness of course for future career

A high proportion of adult learners say their course will help them in their career or future jobs. The exception to this is PCDL learners, who, perhaps reflecting the type of courses they are taking, are less likely to agree. Apprentices are the most positive about the usefulness of their course.

Likelihood to undertake future learning

Around three in five adult learners say they are likely to undertake learning in the next three years, though for Apprentices the proportion drops to just under half. Other LR and PCDL learners are most confident about enrolling in further learning.

Which learners are more satisfied, and which are less satisfied?

The key factor influencing overall satisfaction and attitudes to various aspects of the learning experience is the learner's status on the course – specifically whether they have left the course early. These learners are less satisfied than other adult learners with their learning experience and are less positive over a range of measures.

In terms of learner groups, PCDL learners tend to be more positive about all aspects of their learning experience compared to other learner groups.

Whether or not the learner pays fees also has a bearing on satisfaction: those who do not pay fees are generally more positive about their learning experience than those who do. For instance, satisfaction with learning experience and advocacy tend to be higher among other LR and PCDL learners who do not pay fees compared to those who do pay fees. These differences could be linked to learners' expectations: those who pay fees are more likely than those who do not to have expectations about the course.

Related to this, FE learners who claim financial support (e.g. an Adult Learning Grant) and those who hold a Skills Account or an Adult Learner Account are more positive than those who do not about aspects such as learner involvement, provider responsiveness, the impact on the course on their future career and on their feelings about learning. This is in line with differences observed in this learner group as a whole.

FE learners on Level 3 courses tend to be less positive than FE learners on Level 2 or lower courses. They are more likely to say their course is worse than they expected, to have problems while on their course and to be dissatisfied with their learning experience.

The quality of teaching continues to be an important driver of satisfaction, and is often given as the main reason for satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Adult learners aged 25 years and over are

more likely to be satisfied with the quality of teaching and aspects relating to it, such as managing the group of learners and making the subject interesting.

It should be noted that the differences described above are small, and satisfaction is high across all demographic groups.

Early leavers

The profile of adult early leavers is broadly similar to learners as a whole in their respective learner groups, though there are some differences. Women on FE, Apprenticeship and other LR courses are over-represented among early leavers, and those with learning difficulties or disabilities on FE courses or Apprenticeships are more likely to leave early. The proportion of early leavers has remained similar to 2007.

The most common reason for leaving early varies by learning group. Other LR and PCDL learners tend to cite health reasons, while FE learners find it difficult to combine family commitments with the course and Apprentices mention changing jobs.

Apprentices are most likely to have sought support before leaving their course, with three in five having done so. Around two in five FE and other LR learners sought support, and one in five PCDL learners did.

Again, Apprentices have the highest proportion of those offered support (58 per cent), followed by other LR learners (46 per cent), FE learners (40 per cent) and PCDL learners (30 per cent).

Implications

Across all learner groups, learners' satisfaction with their learning experience is very high. The proportion who are extremely satisfied has decreased significantly since 2007. However, this drop is consistent across all subgroups and learner groups and so does not appear to be limited to a certain group of learners. Additionally, learners' assessment of their course on a range of issues remains positive, indicating no clear reason for this change.

One area that may be linked to relatively lower proportions of those extremely satisfied is expectations: around two in five adult learners say their course is meeting their needs and roughly one in five say they did not know what to expect. Finding ways to manage – and where possible exceed - expectations may help to increase the group of learners who are extremely satisfied.

The differences noted earlier between learners who do and do not pay fees, and between learners on FE Level 3 courses and those on FE Level 2 or below courses, are specific to adults - they are not observed among learners aged 16 to 18. Initial investigations indicate that, when these learners are dissatisfied by their course, it is because they feel the course is being badly run, the tutors are not being supportive, and/or feel they have unmet expectations. It may be

worth considering further research to investigate these issues in more depth. However, it should be borne in mind that the majority of learners in these groups are still very positive about their courses.

As mentioned previously, adult early leavers are more negative about numerous aspects of their course compared to other adult learners. The proportion of early leavers has remained similar to last year as have the reasons adult learners give for leaving early. While providers may not be able to counteract reasons such as health problems and family and work commitments, they perhaps could do more on pre-entry information to address the numbers who say they chose the wrong course or cite teaching quality as a reason for leaving early. However, these recommendations should be seen in the context of high levels of satisfaction on pre-entry information and teaching quality.

The majority of adult learners say they are likely to undertake further learning in the next three years. As this research looks at the findings of adult learners, the finding indicates that learning is continuing to play an important, long-term role in people's lives.

Overall satisfaction

Satisfaction with the learning experience

Around nine in ten adult learners across all learner groups are satisfied with their learning experience. Few significant differences emerge among learner groups, though PCDL learners report significantly higher satisfaction levels than FE learners (92 per cent compared to 90 per cent).

Satisfaction among adult Apprentices³ is in line with satisfaction among Apprentices aged 16-18 (93 per cent among 16-18 year olds and 92 per cent among adults). However, adult FE learners are slightly less likely to be satisfied than young FE learners (90 per cent compared to 92 per cent of 16-18 year olds).

FE learners on Level 3 courses have lower rates of satisfaction than FE learners on Level 2 courses or below (89 per cent for those on Level 3 compared to 91 per cent of FE learners at Level 2 or below). Other LR and PCDL learners who do not pay fees have higher levels of satisfaction with their learning experience than those who do (94 per cent and 95 per cent, respectively, compared to 90 per cent and 92 per cent of those who do not pay fees). This is also generally the case across all key satisfaction measures included within this report.

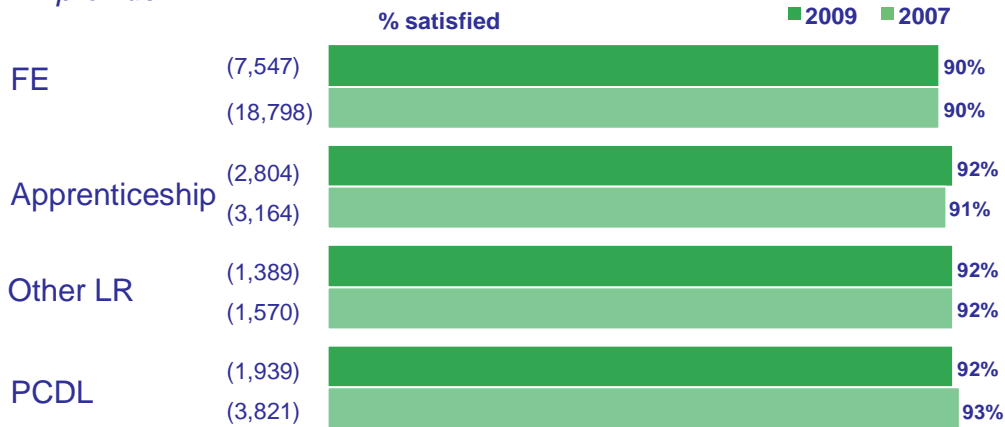


Overall satisfaction levels are similar to those reported in the 2007 survey (Figure 2). Satisfaction among adult Apprentices has increased one percentage point, while satisfaction among PCDL learners has decreased one percentage point.

³ For the purposes of this report, adult Apprentices are those aged 19+.

Figure 2: Trends in satisfaction with the learning experience

Q And now taking all the issues we have discussed into account, how satisfied are you with your current learning experience at your provider?

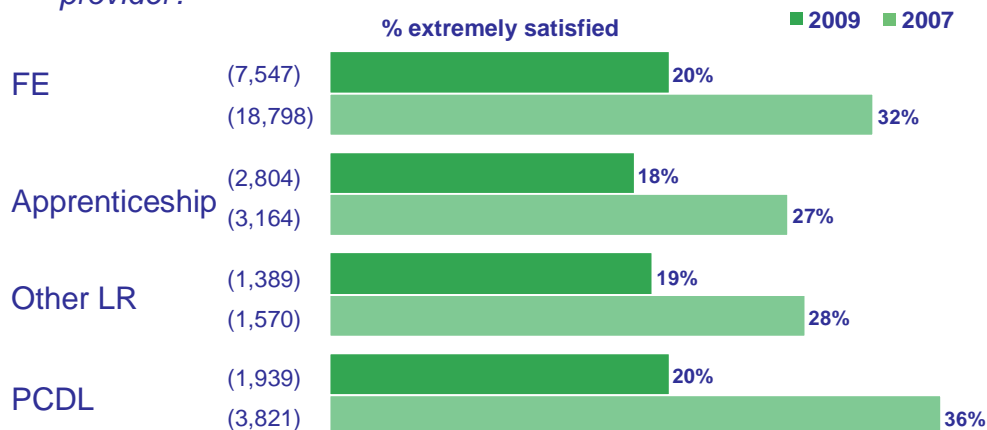


Bases in brackets: Learners aged 19+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009; waves 12, 13 and 14, 2007.

While overall satisfaction has remained broadly similar since 2007, the proportions reporting they are *extremely* satisfied have declined significantly among adult learners across all learner groups (Figure 3). However, these findings need to be seen in the context of the high levels of satisfaction overall, and in the stable trends in the proportion who are satisfied (i.e. combining those extremely, very and fairly satisfied).

Figure 3: Decline in extreme satisfaction

Q And now taking all the issues we have discussed into account, how satisfied are you with your current learning experience at your provider?



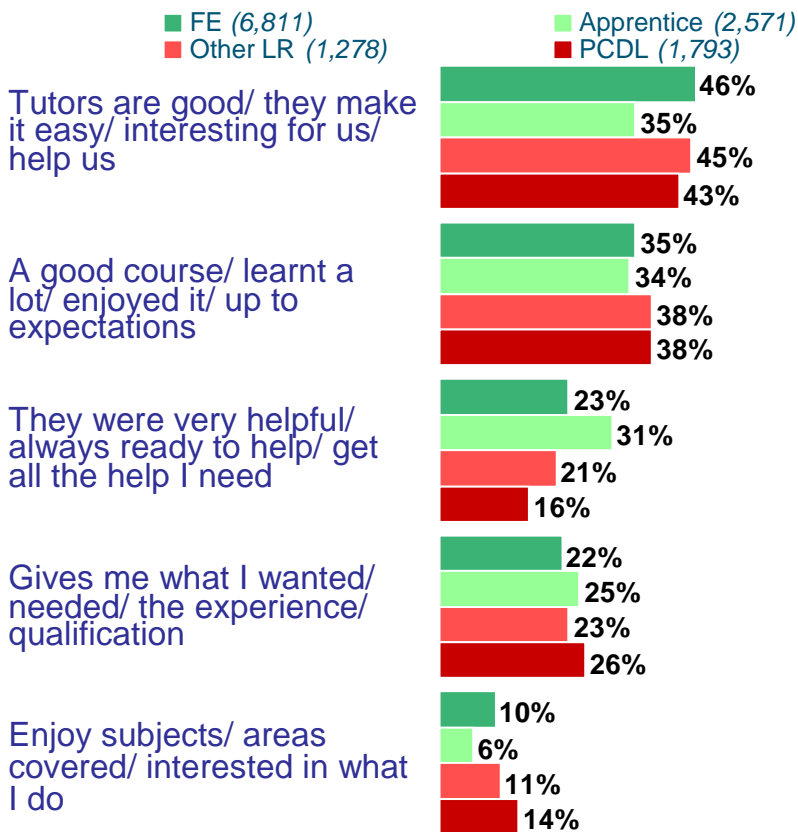
Bases in brackets: Learners aged 19+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009; waves 12, 13 and 14, 2007.

Top reasons for satisfaction among all learner groups include good quality tutors, enjoyment of course and satisfying learner needs (Figure 4). Perhaps reflecting the type of learning, FE,

PCDL and other LR learners cite the quality of their tutors more frequently than Apprentices, while Apprentices mention helpfulness of their providers more than other learner groups.

Figure 4: Top reasons for satisfaction with the learning experience

Q You said you were extremely/ very/ fairly satisfied, what is the main reason for this?



Base: Learners aged 19+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009

Adult learners who are dissatisfied with their course are most likely to say this was because the course was badly run, the tutors had poor attitudes, they did not get the help they needed or the course was disappointing or not what they expected. Top mentions differentiated by learner group are shown in Table 2.

PCDL learners are least likely to cite lack of staff/changes in staff as a reason for dissatisfaction (six per cent), while Apprentices, reflecting their type of learning, more often point to an unsupportive employer as contributing to their dissatisfaction (11 per cent). This is a particular cause of dissatisfaction for Apprentices aged 25+ (19 percent compared to seven per cent of

those aged 19-24). However, caution should be taken when comparing the two because of low base sizes⁴.

Table 2: Reasons for dissatisfaction (weighted)

	FE	Apprentices	Other LR	PCDL
<i>(Unweighted Base: learners who are dissatisfied with their course)</i>	<i>(453) %</i>	<i>(145) %</i>	<i>(72) %</i>	<i>(101) %</i>
Badly organised/run	32	33	31	27
Poor attitudes of tutors/not supportive	31	26	24	31
Didn't get the help I needed	27	31	20	20
It was disappointing/not what I was expecting	24	22	34	29
Lack of staff/assessors/change of staff	15	16	13	6

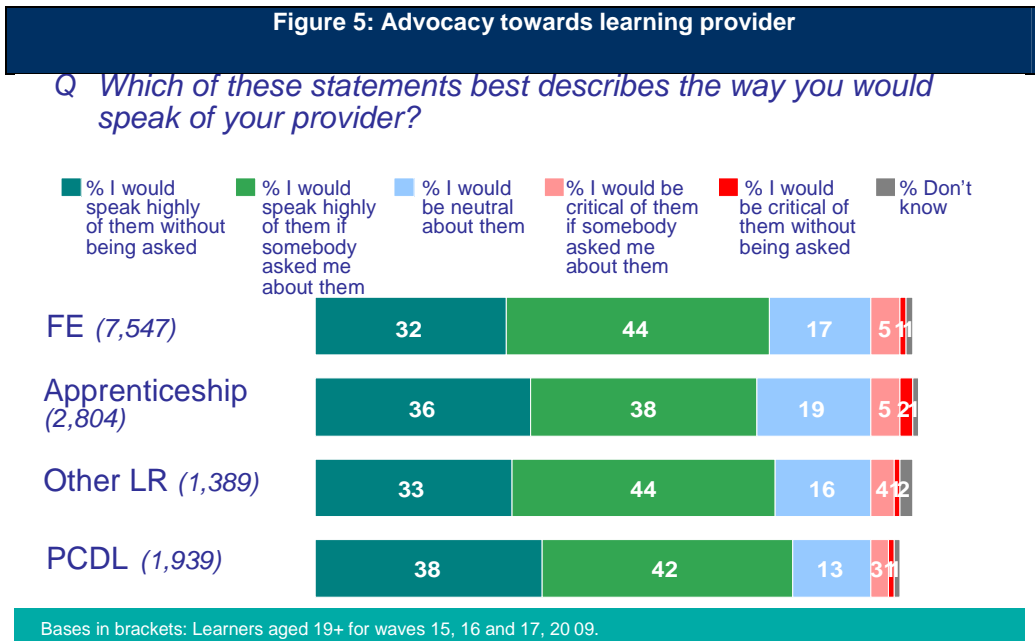
Advocating the provider

Most adult learners would speak highly of their provider, including around one in three who would do so without being asked (Figure 5). Only around one in twenty would be critical. PCDL learners tend to be more positive than FE learners or Apprentices. PCDL learners and Apprentices aged 25+ are most likely to speak highly *without being asked* (39 per cent and 45 per cent, respectively), while Apprentices aged 19-24 are most likely to be critics (seven per cent).

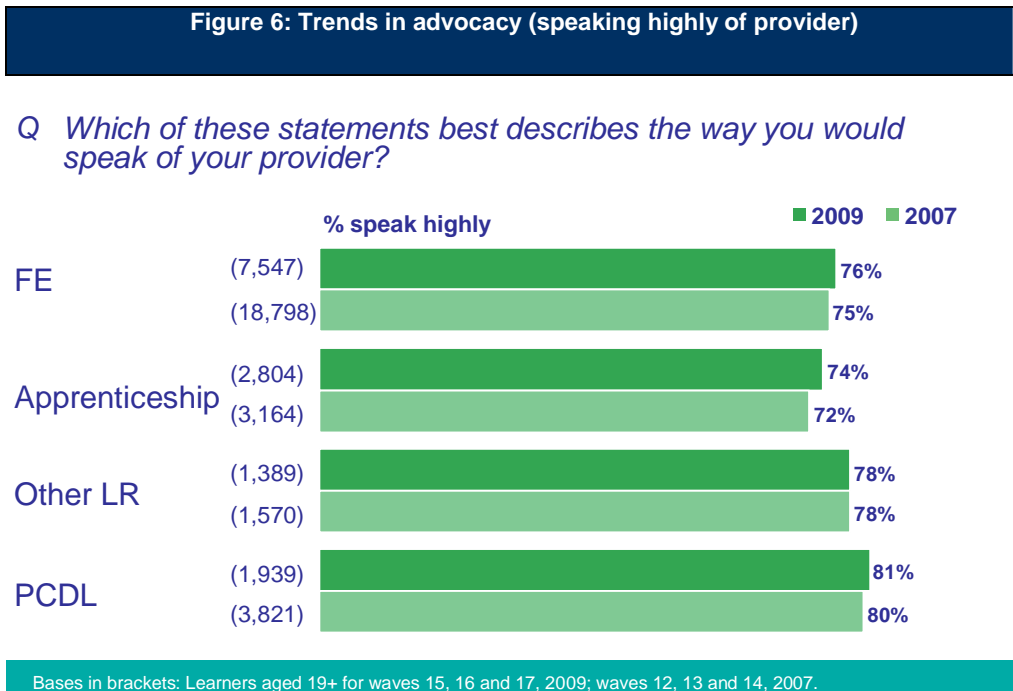
Other LR and PCDL learners who do not pay fees are significantly more positive about their learning providers: 82 per cent of other LR learners and 84 per cent of PCDL learners who do not pay fees would speak highly of their learning provider, compared to 75 per cent of other LR learners and 80 per cent of PCDL learners who pay fees. Similarly to satisfaction with learning experience, a lower proportion of FE learners on Level 3 courses advocate their provider than FE learners on Level 2 courses or below (73 per cent of Level 3 FE learners are advocates compared to 78 per cent of those on Level 2 or below).

⁴ Base for Apprentices aged 19-24 is 102 and for Apprentices aged 25+ is 43.

As with satisfaction with learning experience, adult Apprentices are just as likely to be satisfied as young Apprentices.



The proportion of adult learners who would speak highly of their provider has remained broadly similar to the level observed in 2007, with an increase of one percentage point for FE learners and PCDL learners and no significant change for other LR learners. The proportion of Apprenticeship advocates has increased two percentage points (Figure 6).



What drives satisfaction with the learning experience?

Regression analysis was undertaken to determine the factors most commonly associated with high satisfaction and advocacy among all Apprentices, FE, and other LR learners (i.e. including young people as well as adult learners). The following factors were identified as being particularly closely linked to learner's **overall satisfaction with the learning experience and advocacy**:

- The extent to which the learning programme is deemed by learners to be meeting their needs and expectations;
- The quality of tutors or teachers; and
- Issues related to provider responsiveness and learner involvement, such as listening to and acting on learner views and treating learners with respect.

It should be noted that, although the factors closely linked to overall satisfaction and advocacy are similar; issues related to learner responsiveness are even more strongly related to advocacy than overall satisfaction. Additionally, for Apprentices in particular, good levels of support provided on the course and helpfulness of staff in the first few weeks is also closely linked to satisfaction with the learning experience.

The following chapter focuses on providers' performance against these key drivers for **adult learners only**. Full results of the regression analysis for Apprentices, FE, and other LR learners generally are contained in the related learner group reports.

Performance on key drivers

This section looks at adult learners' views on the key drivers that were identified in the Apprenticeship, FE, and/or other LR learners KDA: quality of teaching; needs and expectations; information, advice and support; and personalisation, learner involvement and provider responsiveness.

Table 3 summarises adult learners' ratings for the key drivers. The ratings are presented as either the percentage rating each item positively or the mean score (on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest rating).

Table 3: Performance on key drivers for adult learners– summary

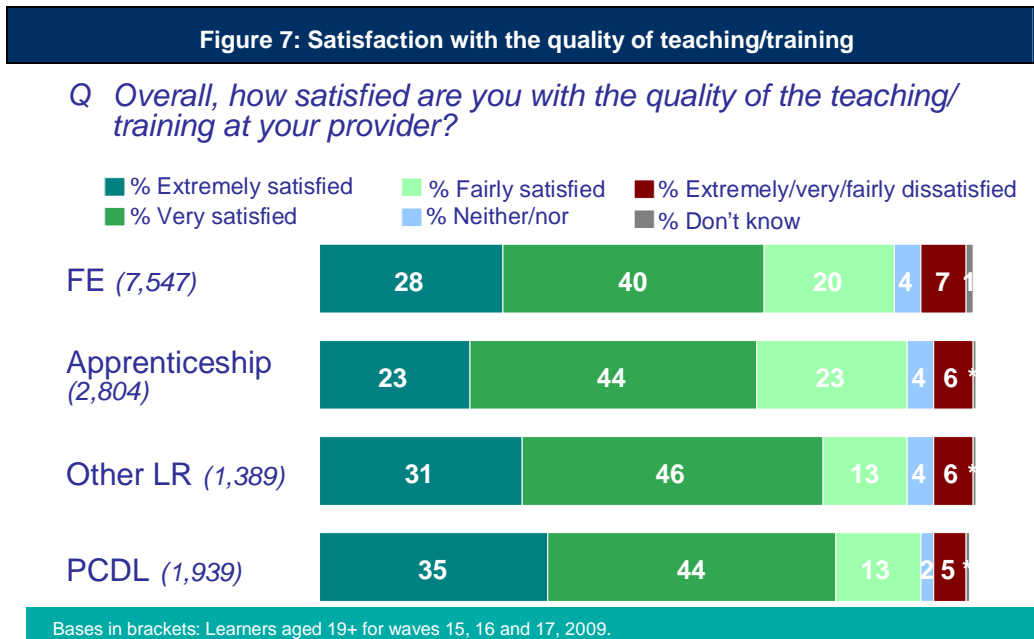
	Learners in FE	Apprentices	Other LR	PCDL
<i>(Base varies by question)</i>				
Tutors/teachers				
Satisfied with quality of teaching	89%	90%	92%	93%
Understand learner(s) and how they like to learn (mean score)	7.9	8.0	8.2	8.2
Set clear goals to improve (mean score)	7.9	7.1	7.1	8.1
Manage the group well (mean score)	8.1	8.0	8.4	8.5
Interest and enjoyment (mean score)	8.2	8.0	7.6	8.7
Needs and expectations				
Learning programme is meeting my needs (% agree)	90%	90%	91%	90%
Experience was better than expected	35%	32%	36%	35%
Information, advice and support				
Satisfied overall because learning provider was helpful/always ready to help	23%	32%	20%	15%
Good support on the course	87%	91%	92%	90%
Good help in the first few weeks	90%	90%	96%	92%
Well informed of course content	88%	92%	87%	88%
No problems experienced during course	58%	65%	63%	61%
Future Career				
Good advice on next steps	67%	73%	60%	53%
Relationship				
Tutors relate to learner(s) as a person (mean)	8.2	8.0	8.6	8.7
Respect shown to learner	95%	94%	96%	96%
Provider good at listening to views	73%	85%	75%	65%
Provider good at acting on views	64%	79%	64%	54%

Satisfaction with teaching and the provider

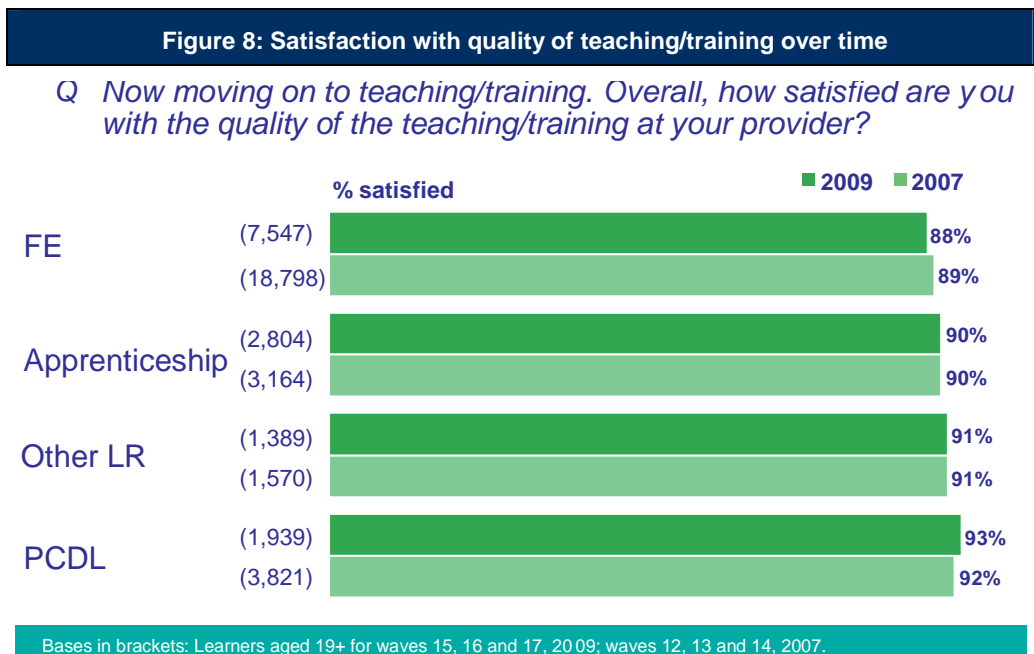
Figure 7 shows adult learners' attitudes to the quality of teaching or training on their course. Views are generally positive, with around nine in ten satisfied across learner groups. Among learner groups, PCDL learners not only have significantly higher levels of satisfaction than Apprentices and FE learners, but they also have higher levels of those *extremely* satisfied.

Broadly, adult learners aged 25+ are more likely to be extremely satisfied than those aged 19-24. However, a higher proportion of Apprentices aged 19-24 report they are satisfied than the proportion of Apprentices aged 25+.

Once again, no difference emerges between adult and young Apprentices. However, FE learners aged 16-18 are slightly more likely to be satisfied with the quality of teaching compared to adult FE learners (90 per cent compared to 88 per cent), a similar pattern to satisfaction with the overall learning experience.

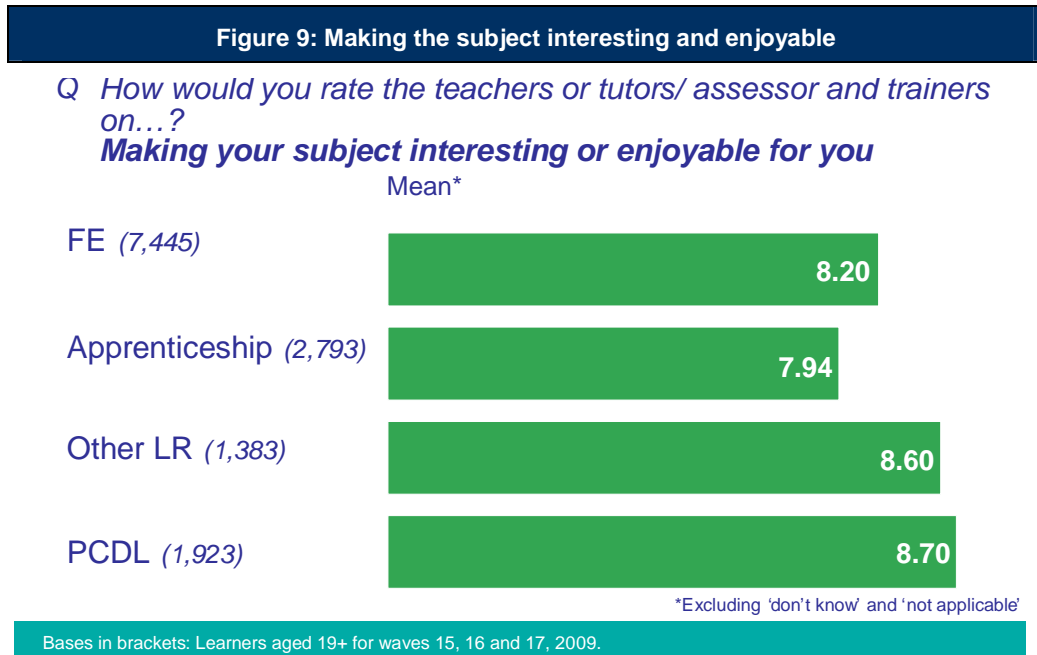


These findings are very similar to those obtained in 2007 and in previous years, as Figure 8 shows. FE adult learners show a one percentage point decrease in satisfaction, while no other learner groups show significant differences.



Specific aspects of quality of teaching

Figure 9 summarises the findings for the first of three important elements of teaching: making the subject interesting and enjoyable. Asked to give a rating between 1 (very poor) and 10 (excellent), adult learners generally give high ratings.



PCDL and other LR learners give the highest ratings among learner groups. Broadly, learners aged 25+ are more positive than those aged 19-24, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Making the subject interesting and enjoyable*

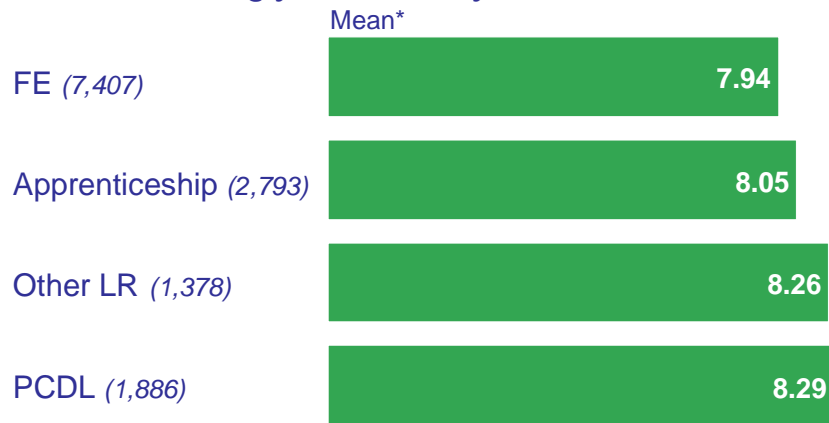
	FE	Apprentices	Other LR	PCDL
<i>(Unweighted Base: All learners)</i>	(7,445)	(2,793)	(1,383)	(1,923)
Age				
Aged 19-24	7.89	7.87	7.94	8.53**
Aged 25+	8.30	8.13	8.68	8.71

*excluding 'don't know' and 'not applicable'
**Caution: low base size

Figure 10 shows how adult learners rate their teachers or tutors on understanding how they like to learn, and again adult learners rate this aspect highly.

Figure 10: Understanding the learner and how they like to learn

Q How would you rate the teachers or tutors/ assessor and trainers on...?
Understanding you and how you like to learn



*Excluding 'don't know' and 'not applicable'

Bases in brackets: Learners aged 19+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009.

Again other LR and PCDL learners give higher ratings and those aged 25+ are more positive than those aged 19-24. FE learners and Apprentices in Level 3 learning are less likely to rate their tutors highly, while female learners rate their tutors higher than male learners (see Table 5).

Table 5: Understanding the learner and how they like to learn*

	FE	Apprentices	Other LR	PCDL
<i>(Unweighted Base: All learners)</i>	<i>(7,445)</i>	<i>(2,793)</i>	<i>(1,383)</i>	<i>(1,923)</i>
Age				
Aged 19-24	7.67	7.95	7.59	8.32**
Aged 25+	8.02	8.32	8.34	8.29
Current level of study				
Below Level 2	8.33	6.86**	8.42	8.19
Level 2	7.91	8.27	8.17	8.13
Level 3 or higher	7.71	7.88	7.90	8.11
Gender				
Male	7.85	7.76	8.15	8.06
Female	8.00	8.38	8.29	8.36

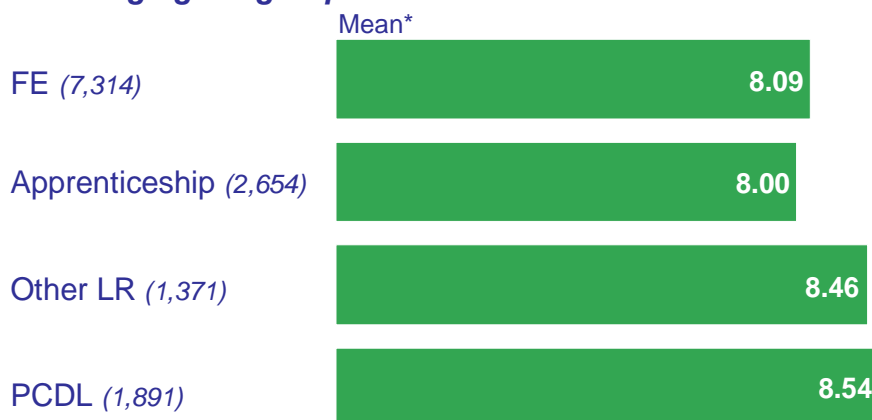
*excluding 'don't know' and 'not applicable'
**Caution: low base size

Another key factor in the quality of teaching is how well the tutor manages the group of learners. As shown in Figure 11, adult learners again rate their tutors highly on this aspect.

Figure 11: Managing the group of learners

Q How would you rate the teachers or tutors/ assessor and trainers on...?

Managing the group of learners



*Excluding 'don't know' and 'not applicable'

Bases for each in brackets: Learners aged 19+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009.

As seen with other questions, PCDL and other LR learners give the highest ratings. Furthermore, adult learners aged 25 and over give higher ratings than those aged 19-24 (shown in Table 6). Similarly to ratings of understanding how the learner likes to learn, women rate their tutors higher than men on managing the group of learners.

Table 6: Managing the group of learners*				
	FE	Apprentices	Other LR	PCDL
<i>(Unweighted Base: All learners)</i>	<i>(7,445)</i>	<i>(2,793)</i>	<i>(1,383)</i>	<i>(1,923)</i>
Age				
Aged 19-24	7.80	7.91	7.77	8.48**
Aged 25+	8.18	8.25	8.54	8.54
Gender				
Male	7.99	7.79	8.31	8.37
Female	8.16	8.25	8.51	8.59

*excluding 'don't know' and 'not applicable'
**Caution: low base size

Needs and expectations

This section focuses on the expectations of adult learners before they started the course and whether the course is meeting their needs.

Meeting learners' expectations

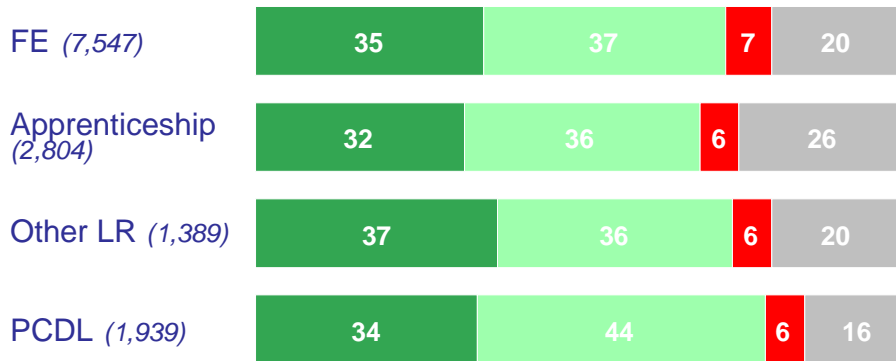
A new question was asked in the 2009 survey about meeting learners' expectations. Overall, most adult learners feel that their expectations have at least been met, with around one in three saying their experience of the course has exceeded their expectations. Figure 12 shows adult learners' views of how their courses matched their expectations.

Apprentices are most likely to say they did not know what to expect, followed by FE learners. PCDL learners, however, have significantly higher proportions saying their course is similar to what they expected. FE learners, especially those aged over 25, have higher numbers saying the course is worse than they expected (eight per cent). However, this is still a small minority of FE learners overall.

Figure 12: Learner expectations

Q Overall, would you say that your experience with your course/training is better than you expected, similar to what you expected, worse than you expected, or did you not know what to expect?

■ % Better than I expected ■ % Worse than I expected ■ % Don't know
 ■ % Similar to what I expected ■ % I didn't know what to expect



Bases in brackets: Learners aged 19+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009.

FE and other LR learners who paid fees are more likely to say the course was worse than they expected than those who did not pay fees (FE learners: eight per cent among those who did pay fees compared to seven per cent who did not; other LR learners: eight per cent among those who did pay fees and three per cent among those who did not).

In FE and Apprenticeships, the proportion saying their course is better than expected is significantly higher among those who hold a Skills Account or an Adult Learner Account⁵, as shown in Table 7.

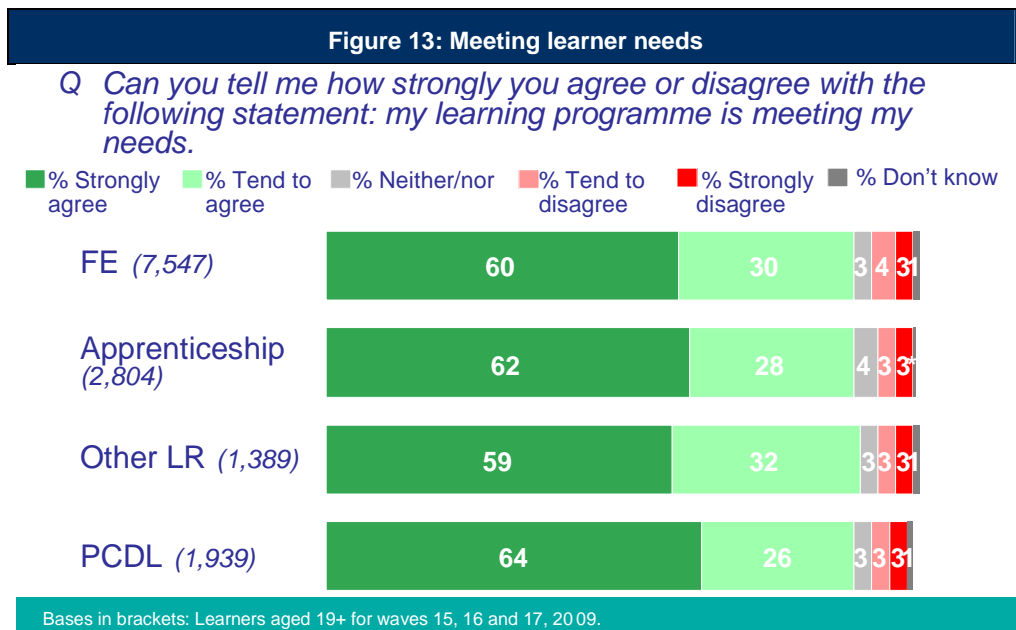
⁵ 10 per cent of adult FE learners and 8 per cent of adult apprentices hold a Skills Account or an Adult Learner Account.

Table 7: Proportion saying the course was better than expected – differences by account holders

	% better than expected
<i>(Unweighted Base: All learners)</i>	
FE	
Skills Account (211)	43
Adult Learner Account (514)	42
None of these (6,339)	34
Apprenticeship	
Skills Account (114)	40
Adult Learner Account (100)	46
None of these (2,391)	30

Meeting learners' needs

Figure 13 shows the extent to which adult learners feel that their course has met their needs. Around nine in ten agree that the course has met their needs, while roughly one in 16 disagree. Among learner groups, PCDL learners have a higher proportion *strongly* agreeing their course is meeting their needs compared to FE and other LR learners. Apprentices aged 19-24 are more likely to agree than Apprentices aged over 25.



Information, advice and support

This section examines the information, advice and support given to adult learners. It looks at the support given during the course, the help received in the first few weeks, any problems experienced during the course and the provision of information before starting the course.

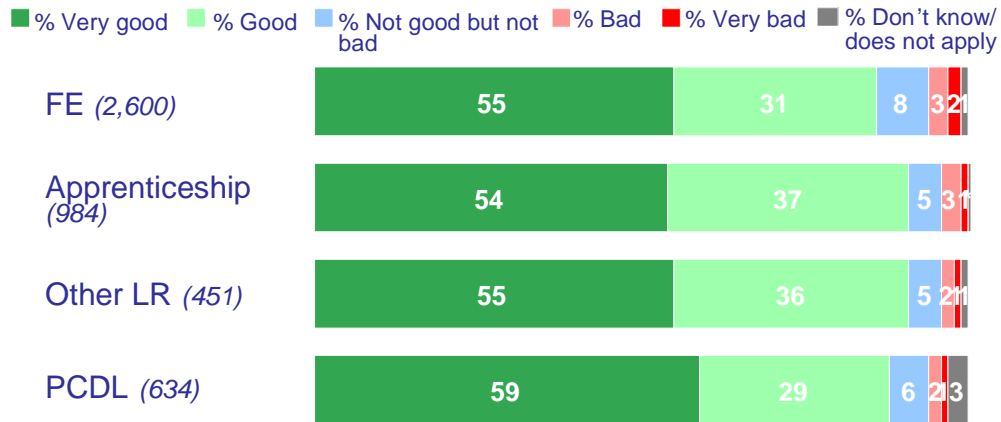
Support given while on course

Adult learners are very positive about the support given to them while on their course. Across learner groups, over half think the support they receive is very good, and less than one in twenty say it is bad (Figure 14).

Few significant subgroup differences emerge. Apprentices and other LR learners are more likely than FE learners to say the support they receive is good. Indeed, Apprentices aged 19-24 are more positive than FE and PCDL learners about the support they have received (92 per cent, 86 per cent and 88 per cent, respectively).

Figure 14: Learner support

Q Please tell me how good or bad: how good is the support you get on this course/learning programme/training programme?



Bases in brackets: Learners aged 19+ for wave 16, 2009.

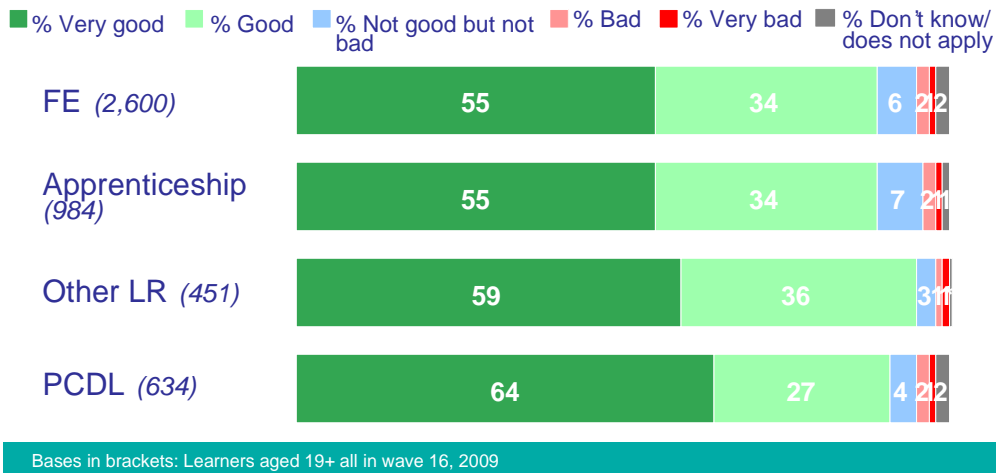
Help given in the first few weeks

Adult learners are also positive about the help they received from staff in the first few weeks, with around nine in ten saying this was good (Figure 15). Only a small minority rate their help as bad. This is reflected in the finding that a top reason for course satisfaction is the helpfulness of tutors.

Other LR learners aged 25+ are most positive about the help they received in the first few weeks. Apprentices and FE learners aged 25 and over are more likely than their younger counterparts to say staff help was *very good*, though it should be noted that older Apprentices are also more likely than younger Apprentices to say the help they received was bad.

Figure 15: Support in early weeks

Q How good was the help staff gave you in the first few weeks at the college/of your learning programme/of your training programme



Problems experienced during the course

Overall, around two in five adult learners say that they experienced at least one of the problems read out to them (the most common of which are shown in Figure 16). The problems cover a range of issues related both to the course itself and to external pressures that cause learners difficulty.

The most commonly cited problem for all learner groups aside from Apprentices is fitting the course in with home commitments. Apprentices, especially those aged 25 and over, have more difficulty fitting the course with other work commitments (12 per cent and 20 per cent for those aged 25+), as might perhaps be expected given the nature of the learning. Maths and numeracy skills are also a particular problem for older Apprentices. Dealing with money issues and reading and writing skills are more commonly cited among FE learners (11 per cent and five per cent, respectively).

Figure 16: Problems encountered during the course over time

Q Since you started the course have you had any problems with any of the following?

■ FE (2,600) ■ Apprenticeship (984) ■ Other LR (451) ■ PCDL (634)



Bases in brackets: Learners aged 19+ all wave 16, 2009.

Apprentices aged 19-24 are the least likely to have experienced a problem (69 per cent say they have not experienced any problems), while FE learners on Level 3 courses are more likely to have experienced problems than FE learners on Level 2 courses or below (53 per cent compared to 59 per cent of Level 2 or below). Men across the Apprenticeship, FE and other LR learner groups are less likely to say they have experienced problems compared to women, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Proportion of learners who have *not* encountered problems

	FE	Apprentices	Other LR	PCDL
<i>(Unweighted Base: All learners at wave 16)</i>	<i>(2,600)</i> %	<i>(984)</i> %	<i>(451)</i> %	<i>(634)</i> %
Gender				
Male	61	70	72	59
Female	54	60	54	62

Among adult FE learners, experiencing problems during the course is more common among those who receive learner support (e.g. an Adult Learning Grant) than among those who do not (50 per cent compared with 42 per cent). This is in line with findings for all FE learners.

Information provision after induction

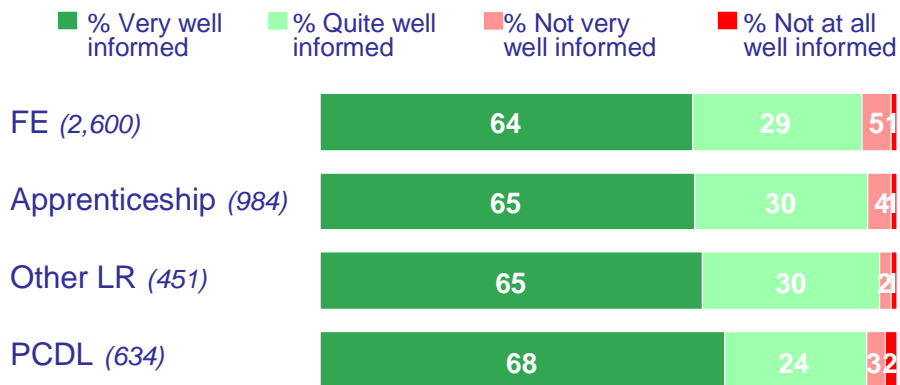
The vast majority of adult learners say they received good information about the content of the course and the subjects they would cover, including around two in three who say it was very good. Only around one in twenty describe the information as bad (Figure 17).

FE learners and Apprentices aged 19 to 24 and over are more likely to say they were well informed compared to their cohorts overall and PCDL learners (95 per cent, 95 per cent and 92 per cent, respectively). Though a very small minority (three per cent), PCDL learners have higher proportions saying they do not know, perhaps reflecting the types of courses they undertake.

Figure 17: Information at induction

Q Please say whether you felt very well informed, quite well informed, not very well informed or not at all informed after induction?

The content of the course, what subjects you would cover.



Bases in brackets: Learners aged 19+ all wave 16, 2009.

Personalisation, learner involvement and provider responsiveness

This section will examine findings among adult learners on how good the respect they were shown by programme staff is, how well staff relate to them as a person, how well their provider listens to their views and how well they act on them.

Respect shown by staff

Figure 18 shows that the majority of adult learners rate staff as *very good* at showing them respect, with most of the remainder rating staff as *good*. Very few say the respect staff have shown is poor.

PCDL learners tend to be the most positive, with the highest proportion rating staff as very good. They and other LR learners are more likely than Apprentices and FE learners to say respect shown is good.

Other LR learners aged 19-24 have the highest level of those saying respect shown to them by staff is bad (five per cent), though this is a very small minority of learners.



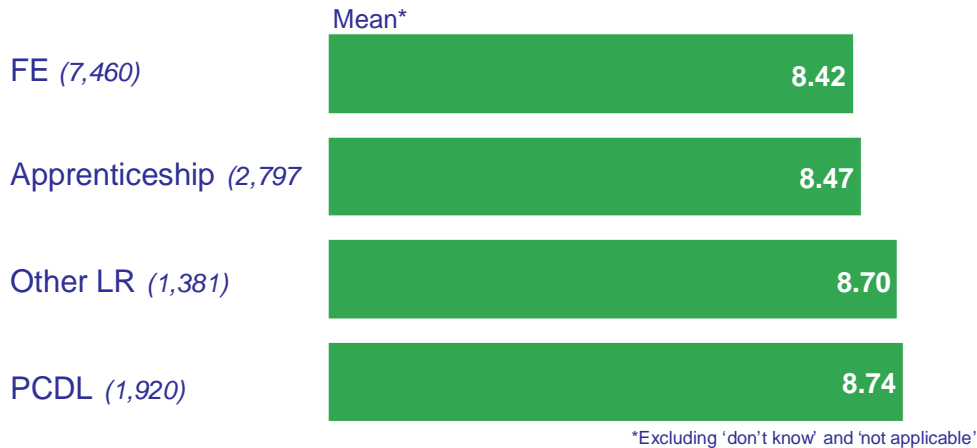
Relating to learners as people

As with other factors relating to teaching, most adult learners are positive towards the way their teachers or tutors relate to them as a person. When rating them between 1 (very poor) and 10 (excellent), around two in five give a rating of 10.

Figure 19: Relating to learners as people

Q How would you rate the teachers or tutors/ assessor and trainers on...?

How well they relate to you as a person



Bases in brackets: Learners aged 19+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 20 09.

PCDL and other LR learners rate their tutors significantly higher on relating to them as people than FE learners and Apprentices do. As shown in Table 9, adult learners aged 25 and over are more likely to be positive than those aged 19-24 (though the PCDL base size for 19-24 year olds is low and so comparisons should be treated with caution)⁶.

Table 9: Relating to learners as people*

	FE	Apprentices	Other LR	PCDL
(Unweighted Base: All learners)	(7,445)	(2,793)	(1,383)	(1,923)
Age				
Aged 19-24	8.12	8.34	7.94	8.79**
Aged 25+	8.51	8.79	8.79	8.74

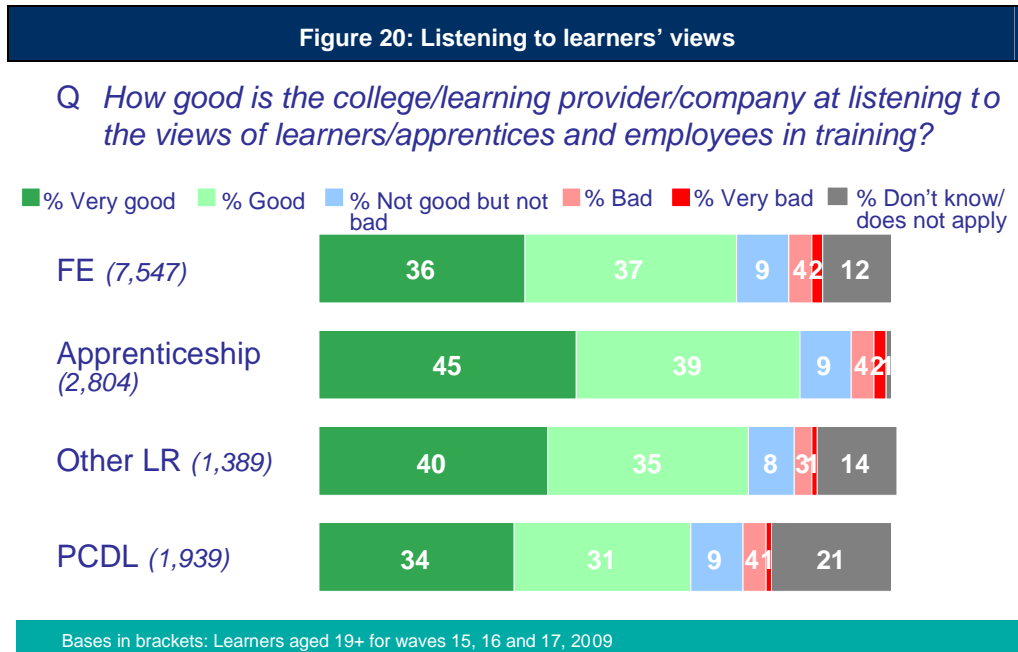
*excluding 'don't know' and 'not applicable'

**Caution: low base size

Listening and acting on learners' views

⁶ Base size for PCDL learners aged 19-24 is 34.

As shown in Figure 20, the majority of adult learners say that providers are good or very good at listening to their views, though this ranges from 65 per cent of PCDL learners to 84 per cent of Apprentices. A small minority say their provider is bad at listening to their views.



Apprentices are the most positive about providers listening to their views; they are more likely to say their provider is *very good* at listening. FE learners aged 19-24 are also particularly positive (80 per cent). PCDL learners are less likely to say providers are good at listening to the views of learners, but it should be noted they are significantly more likely to say this does not apply or they do not know (20 per cent).

As seen in previous analysis, those who do not pay fees are more positive than those who do (Table 10).

Table 10: Proportion saying their provider is good at listening to learners' views – differences by whether learners pay fees or not

	FE	Other LR	PCDL
<i>(Unweighted Base: All learners)</i>	<i>(7,547)</i>	<i>(1,389)</i>	<i>(1,939)</i>
Pay fees	69%	69%	60%
Do not pay fees	77%	83%	82%

Related to this, adult FE learners who receive learner support have a greater tendency than those who do not to rate their provider as good at listening to learners' views (Table 11). In addition, adult FE learners who hold a Skills Account or an Adult Learner Account (of whom 18 per cent receive learner support) are more likely to rate their provider as good. These

differences are not specific to adult learners – they are also observed among FE learners aged 16 to 18.

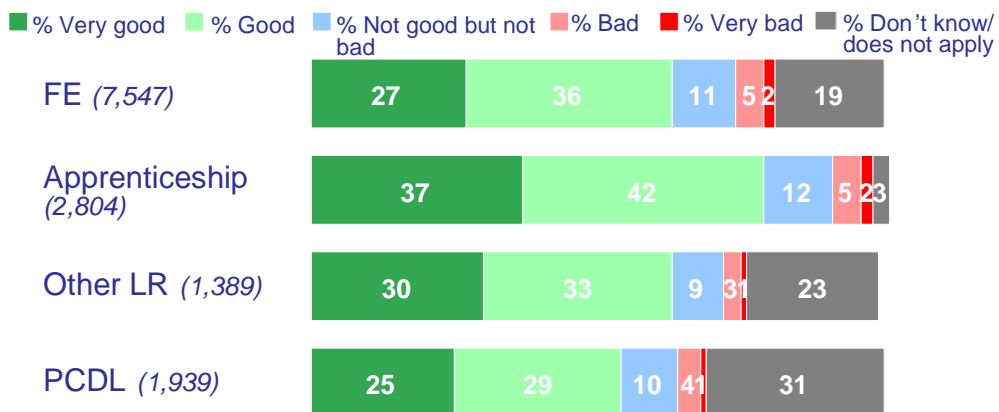
Table 11: Proportion of adult FE learners saying their provider is good at listening to learners' views – differences by account holders and learner support received

	% good
<i>(Unweighted Base: All learners)</i>	
FE	
Skills Account (211)	81
Adult Learner Account (514)	82
None of these (6,339)	72
Received learner support	79
Do receive learner support	72

A high proportion of adult learners are also positive about providers acting on learners' views (Figure 21), though slightly less positive than they are about providers listening to their views. Much of this drop is due to increasing numbers saying they do not know or it does not apply. The exception is Apprentices, whose proportion is in line with the proportion saying their provider is good at listening to their views.

Figure 21: Acting on learners' views

Q How good is the college/learning provider/company at acting on those views?



Bases in brackets: Learners aged 19+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009

Apprentices are significantly more likely to say their provider is very good at acting on learners' views compared to other learner groups. FE learners rate their provider highly compared to PCDL learners, and FE learners aged 19-24 are particularly positive (72 per cent of this age group say their providers are good). As before, PCDL learners are most likely to say they do not know or this does not apply.

Again, those who do not pay fees are more positive (Table 12).

Table 12: Proportion saying their provider is good at acting on learners' views – differences by whether learners pay fees or not			
	FE	Other LR	PCDL
<i>(Unweighted Base: All learners)</i>	<i>(7,547)</i>	<i>(1,389)</i>	<i>(1,939)</i>
Pay fees	58%	57%	48%
Do not pay fees	67%	72%	73%

In line with the differences observed on learner involvement, other LR and FE learners who hold a Skills Account or an Adult Learner Account are more likely to rate their provider as good at acting on learners' views. This is also the case with those who claim learner support compared with those who do not (Table 13). Again these differences are not specific to adult learners.

Table 13: Proportion of adult learners saying their provider is good at acting on learners' views – differences by account holders and learner support received

	% good
<i>(Unweighted Base: All learners)</i>	
FE	
Skills Account (211)	79
Adult Learner Account (514)	78
None of these (6,339)	61
Receive learner support (1,288)	71
Does not receive learner support (6,076)	62
Other LR	
Skills Account (29)	73
Adult Learner Account (107)	75
None of these (1,167)	62
Receive learner support (126)	79
Do not receive learner support (1,228)	62

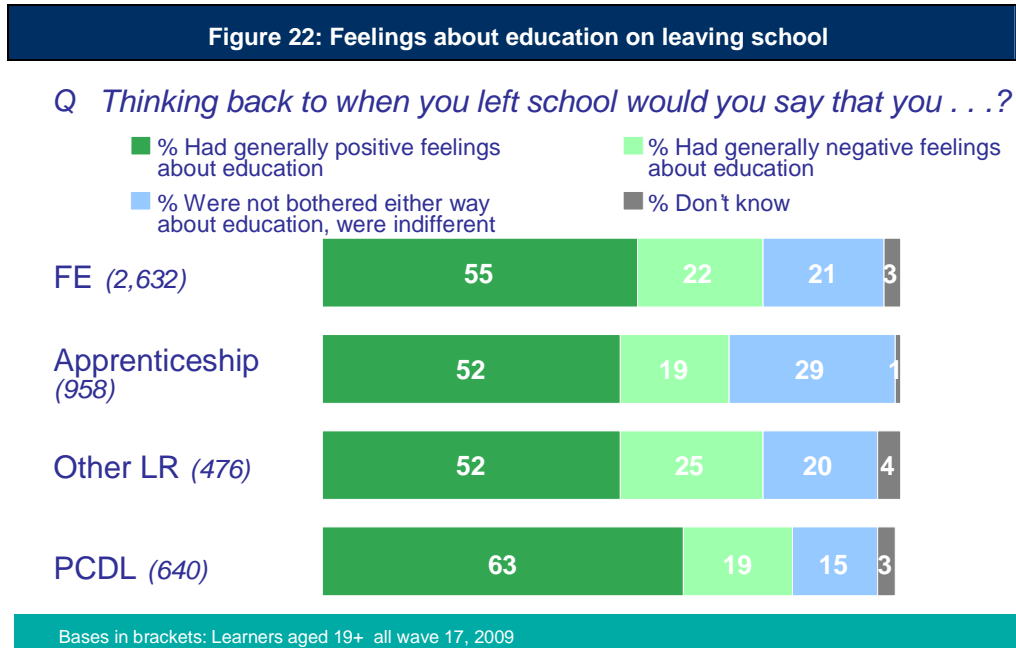
Attitudes to learning and benefits of learning

This section looks at learners' attitudes to learning and education, as well as the perceived usefulness of their course to their future career. It also examines the likelihood of undertaking further learning.

Feelings about education on leaving school

A majority of adult learners had generally positive feelings about education when they left school, while around one in four had negative feelings; details are shown in Figure 22.

PCDL learners had the highest levels of those saying they had positive feelings when leaving school, while Apprentices are most likely to say they were indifferent.

Figure 22: Feelings about education on leaving school

Feelings about learning currently

The majority of adult learners agree that they feel more positive about learning since beginning their course (Figure 23). These proportions compare favourably to the proportion that were positive about learning when leaving school.

Apprentices are particularly likely to agree with this statement, while PCDL learners are more likely to disagree (although it should be noted that these learners are already very positive about education when leaving school).

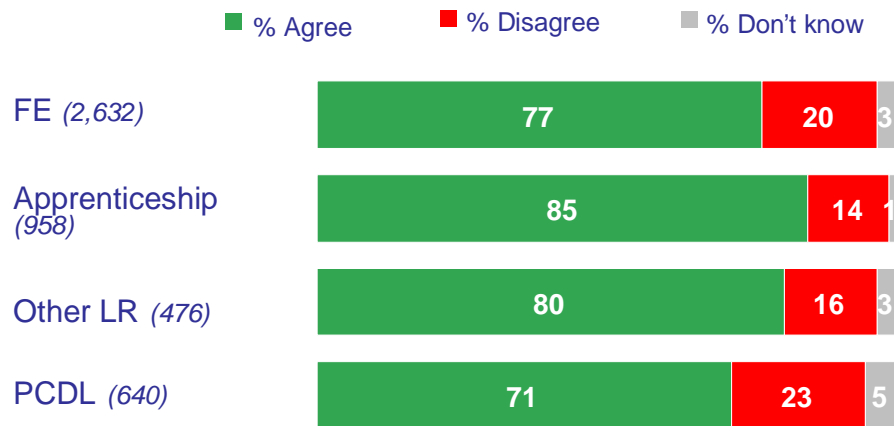
Few differences among age groups emerge, but FE learners 19-24 are more likely to agree than FE learners aged 25+.

FE and other LR learners who do not contribute to their fees have higher levels saying they are positive about learning (FE learners: 80 per cent of those who paid no fees compared to 74 per cent of those did agree; other LR learners: 86 per cent compared to 76 per cent).

Related to this, FE learners who hold a Skills Account or and Adult Learner Account (of whom 55 and 57 per cent do not contribute toward their course fee) are also more likely to agree with the statement, compared with those who do not hold such accounts (89 per cent compared with 76 per cent).

Figure 23: Feelings about learning currently

Q Can you tell me whether you agree or disagree with...
I feel more positive about learning than I did when I started



Bases in brackets: Learners aged 19+ all wave 17, 2009

Usefulness of course for future career

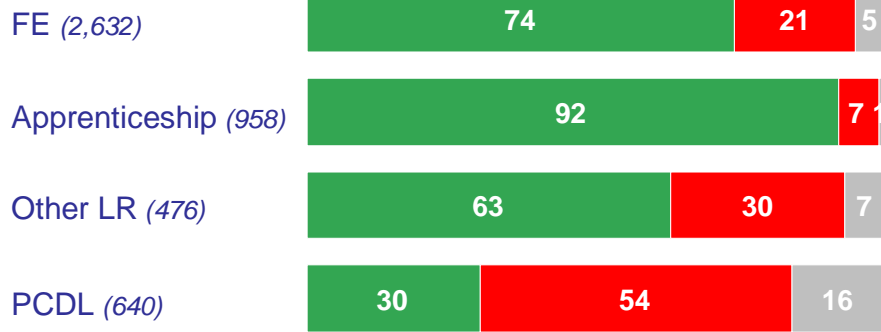
A high proportion of learners report that their course will help them move forward in their career and make it easier to find the type of job they want (Figure 24).

Apprentices overwhelmingly agree with this statement (92 per cent), followed by FE learners. Among both these sets of learners, those aged 19-24 are more positive than those aged 25 and over (95 per cent and 90 per cent, respectively compared to 84 per cent and 69 per cent, respectively) perhaps reflecting the different stages their careers are likely to be at.

The exception is PCDL learners, who, possibly because of the courses they take, have fewer numbers agreeing.

In line with earlier findings, agreement with this statement is higher among FE learners who receive learner support (90 per cent) compared with those who do not (71 per cent), and among those who hold a Skills Account or an Adult Learner Account, compared with those who do not (86 per cent, 81 per cent and 73 per cent respectively).

Figure 24: Usefulness of course for future career



Bases in brackets: Learners aged 19+ all wave 17, 2009

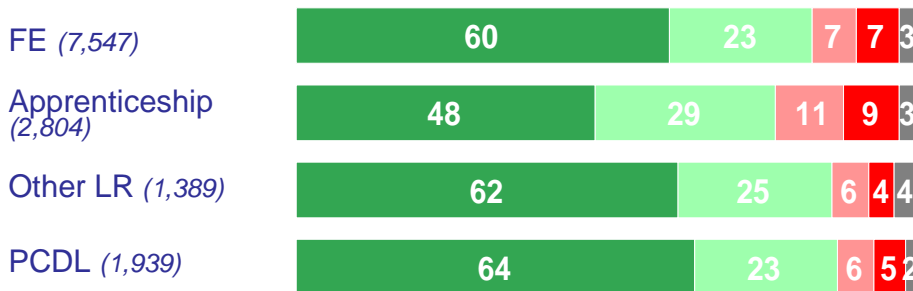
Likelihood to undertake future learning

Roughly three in five learners say they are *very likely* to undertake further learning in the future (e.g. in the next three years), aside from Apprentices, where just less than half say they are *very likely* to do so (Figure 25).

Figure 25: Likelihood of undertaking further learning

Q How likely will you be to undertake further learning in the next 3 years?

■ % Very likely
 ■ % Fairly likely
 ■ % Fairly unlikely
 ■ % Very unlikely
 ■ % Don't know



Bases in brackets: Learners aged 19+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009

Other LR and PCDL learners are not only significantly more likely to undertake further learning, but *very likely*. Apprentices are least positive about undertaking further learning, with one in eleven (nine per cent) saying this is *very unlikely*.

FE and other LR learners aged 25 and over are more positive about further learning than their younger cohorts (see Table 14). Female learners on FE, Apprenticeships or other LR courses also have a higher propensity to say they will undertake further learning than their male colleagues.

Table 14: Likelihood of undertaking further learning

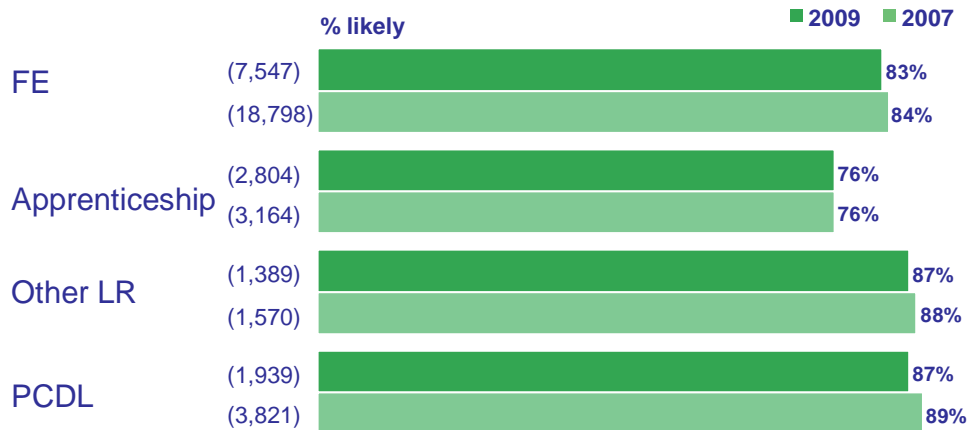
	FE	Apprentices	Other LR	PCDL
<i>(Unweighted Base: All learners at wave 16)</i>	<i>(7,547) %</i>	<i>(2,804) %</i>	<i>(1,389) %</i>	<i>(1,939) %</i>
Age				
19-24	78	76	69	94*
25+	84	78	89	87
Gender				
Male	81	73	79	87
Female	84	80	89	87

*Caution: low base size

Adult learners' likelihood of undertaking further learning has remained broadly similar to 2007 findings (Figure 26). The proportion of FE and other LR learners agreeing it is likely has decreased by one percentage point, while the proportion of PCDL learners agreeing has decreased by two percentage points.

Figure 26: Likelihood of undertaking further learning compared to 2007

Q How likely will you be to undertake further learning in the next 3 years?



Bases in brackets: Learners aged 19+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009; waves 12, 13 and 14, 2007.

Early leavers

In this section we examine early leavers in more detail, including their demographic profile, reasons for leaving early, and whether they sought or received support.

Profile of early leavers

In total, between four and seven per cent of adult learners had left their course early at the time of their interview. Most respondents were still on the course at the time of the interview, so the survey does not aim to collect data on completion rates; these are monitored by the LSC's own analysis of the individualised learner record (ILR) database.

The proportion of early leavers is similar to the 2007 survey, as shown in Figure 27.

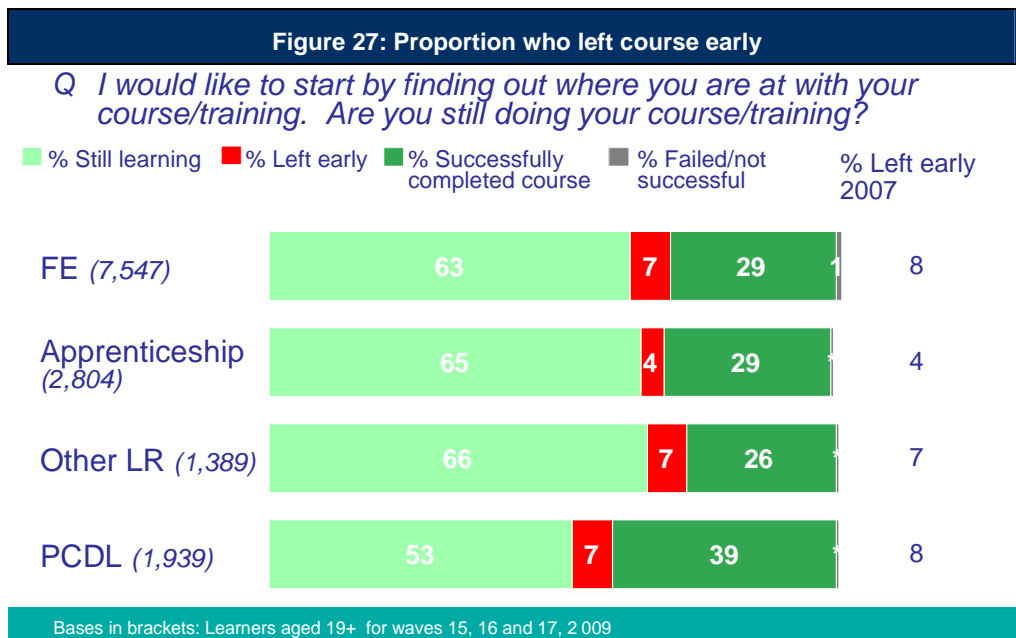


Table 15 examines the profile of early leavers. This profile is broadly similar to that of the population of adult learners within their respective learner groups. However, among FE learners, Apprentices and other LR learners the sample of early leavers contains a disproportionately higher percentage of women. Additionally, FE and Apprentice early leavers contain a high proportion of those with learning difficulties or disabilities.

Table 15: Sample demographic profile of early leavers compared to all learners in learner group (weighted)

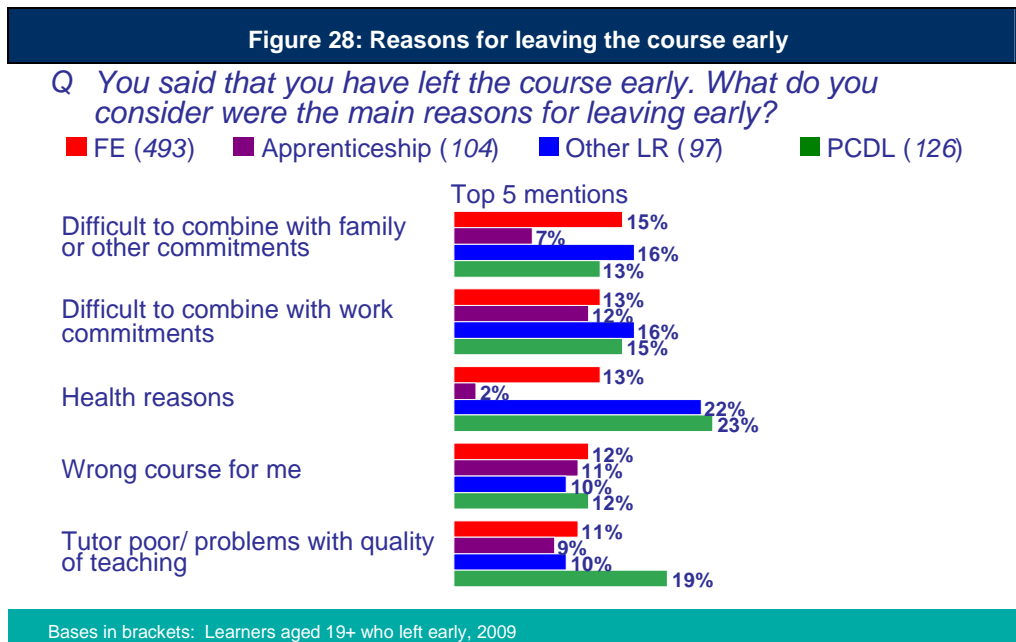
	FE		Apprentices		Other LR		PCDL	
<i>(Unweighted Base: Early leavers and all respondents)</i>	<i>(493)</i>	<i>(7,547)</i>	<i>(104)</i>	<i>(2,804)</i>	<i>(97)</i>	<i>(1,389)</i>	<i>(126)</i>	<i>(1,939)</i>
	%		%		%		%	
Gender								
Male	35	40	44	52	23	27	25	23
Female	65	60	56	48	77	73	75	77
Age								
19-24	23	23	65	72	14	11	-	2
25+	77	77	35	28	86	89	100	98
Ethnicity								
White	81	83	93	92	81	81	91	93
BME	18	16	7	8	15	18	7	5
Refused	*	*	-	-	-	*	2	1
Not known	-	1	-	*	5	1	-	-
Disability	13	9	10	6	12	12	13	11
Learning difficulty	10	7	7	5	12	9	6	5

Reasons for leaving early

The top reasons given for leaving courses early are shown in Figure 28. Adult learners who left their course early can be divided into two groups. The first group left for reasons related to the course itself – either because they felt the course was not as expected or was not right for them, or because they had problems with the tutor or teaching. The second group left early because of external factors – family, work, health or other personal issues.

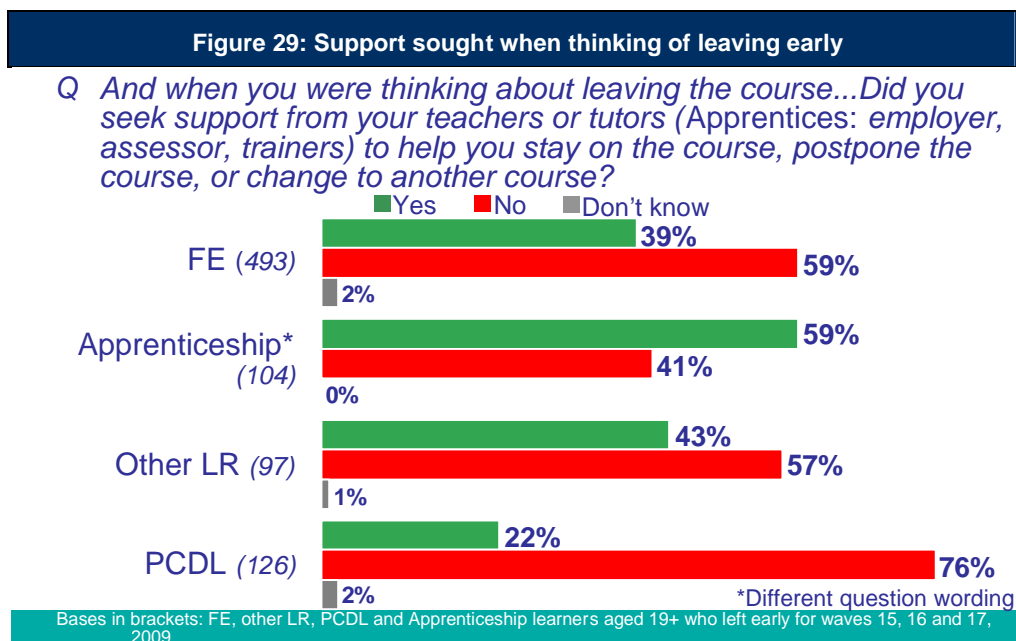
As can be seen in Figure 28, the reasons for leaving early vary according to learner group. Other LR and PCDL learners (perhaps reflecting a sample with higher proportions of older learners) more often leave because of health reasons. Additionally, PCDL learners are more likely than any other learner group to say they left because of problems with the quality of teaching. FE learners point to difficulties combining their course with family commitments caused their withdrawal, while Apprentices cite changing jobs as the cause (22 per cent).

A top reason among all learner groups for leaving early is that course was not right for them. However, a majority of early leavers rate the information they were given when choosing their course as good, suggesting that better information will not completely solve this issue.



Support for learners thinking of leaving early

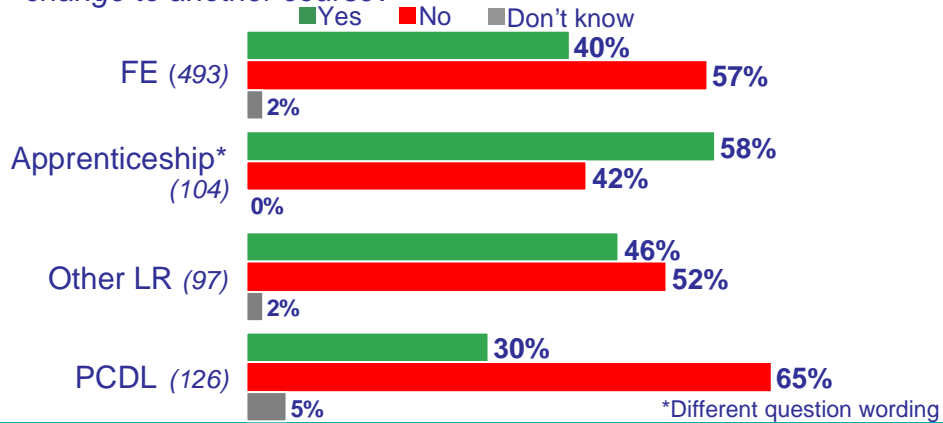
As can be seen in Figure 29, the proportion of early leavers who sought support from their teachers, trainers, employers or assessors varies by learner group. Apprentices have the highest proportions seeking support, while FE and other LR learners are more likely than PCDL learners to have turned for help.



The same pattern can be seen when looking at learners who say they received support. Again, Apprentices are most likely to say they were offered support, while PCDL are the least likely. No significant differences emerge among age groups.

Figure 30: Support offered when thinking of leaving early

Q And when you were thinking about leaving the course...Did your teachers or tutors (Apprentices: employer, assessor, trainers) offer support to help you stay on the course, postpone the course, or change to another course?



Bases in brackets: FE, other LR, PCDL and Apprenticeship learners aged 19+ who left early for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009

Finally, in general, early leavers across all learner groups are less positive about their course than those who did not leave early. For example, they are less likely to be satisfied with their learning experience, to speak highly of their provider and are more likely to have had problems on their course.

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