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National Learner Satisfaction
Survey: Pre-employment Training

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 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 findings for 253 learners taking part in Skills for Jobs (SFJ) programmes and 272 learners on Employability Skills Programme (ESP) learning. These learners were surveyed as part of the National Learner Satisfaction Survey (NLSS) 2009, which was conducted by Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute and commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The LSC has now been superseded by the Skills Funding Agency and the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA), with the research function of the LSC transferring to the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). The NLSS is a large tracking survey of around 25,000 then LSC-funded learners aged 16 and over. The NLSS provides a wealth of information 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).

Sampling

The NLSS covers learners in further education (FE), Apprenticeships, other Learner Responsive¹, non-accredited personal and community development learning (PCDL), and pre-employment training, namely SFJ and ESP learning.

SFJ and ESP learners were sampled from the LSC's individualised learner record (ILR) and weighted according to the gender and age profile of these learners on the ILR. Further details about the sampling and weighting approach are provided in the technical report.

Sample profile

Table 1 shows that SFJ and ESP learners both have higher than average representation of female learners, BME learners and learners with learning difficulties or disabilities. Almost all learners are aged 18 or over.

¹ includes charities, HEIs, local authorities, business organisations, public or voluntary organisations

Table 1: Sample demographic profile (weighted)

	SFJ	ESP
<i>(Unweighted Base: all respondents)</i>	<i>(253) %</i>	<i>(272) %</i>
Gender		
Male	36	36
Female	64	64
Age		
16–18	*	2
19+	100	98
Refused	-	-
Ethnicity		
White	63	54
BME	36	45
Refused	*	-
Not known	1	1
Disability	13	22
Learning difficulty	8	11

Multivariate analysis

In addition to standard analysis of the data, multiple regression analysis technique (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 among two groups of learners - FE learners and Apprentices. This analysis was not conducted for SFJ or ESP learners because the sample sizes for these two groups were not sufficiently large. However, the key factors identified for FE learners and Apprentices are broadly similar and, moreover, they are consistent with the key drivers identified in NLSS 2007. Therefore, on this basis, this report focuses on the factors identified as key drivers for FE learners and report on these for SFJ and ESP learners where relevant (not all questions identified as key drivers for FE learners were asked of SFJ and ESP learners).

Interpretation of data

It should be remembered that a sample and not the entire population of learners has been interviewed. Consequently, all results are subject to sampling tolerances, which means that not all differences are statistically significant. The sample sizes for both SFJ and ESP learners are relatively small. Therefore, although it may appear at times that there is a distinct difference between the two groups, this difference may not actually be statistically significant. Table 2 shows the confidence intervals for both the SFJ and ESP learners' results at the 95% confidence level, as well as the differences required for significance when comparing the results between SFJ and ESP learners as well as against other learner groups (FE, Apprentices and Other LR learners). **This report focuses on findings that are statistically significant.**

Size of samples on which survey result is based	Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at or near these levels		
	10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
	±	±	±
253 ESJ	3.7	5.7	6.2
272 ESP	3.6	5.5	6.0
100 learners (sub-sample)	5.9	9.0	9.8
80 learners (sub-sample)	6.6	10.1	11.0
253 ESJ vs. 272 ESP	5.1	7.9	8.6
253/272 vs. 15,724 FE	3.7	5.7	6.2
253/272 vs. 4,979 Apprentices	3.8	5.8	6.3
253/272 vs. 1,856 Other LR	3.9	6.6	6.6

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 five main sections:

- Summary of key findings and implications;
- Overall satisfaction and advocacy;
- Performance on key drivers;
- Attitudes to learning and benefits of learning;
- Early leavers; and

In addition to this report, separate reports are also available for Apprentices, FE learners, other LR and PCDL learners, learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, young learners and adult learners. There is also an overall summary report, as well as a detailed technical report.

To protect BIS' interests 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 is high

The large majority of SFJ and ESP learners (86 per cent and 87 per cent, respectively) are satisfied with their learning experience although they are slightly less satisfied than other groups of learners such as FE learners and Apprentices.

Just over seven in ten (72 per cent each) of both SFJ and ESP learners would speak highly of their provider and only around one in twenty would be critical.

Providers' performance on key drivers of satisfaction is rated highly by SFJ and ESP learners

Satisfaction with the quality of training is an important key driver of satisfaction and, given the high levels of overall satisfaction expressed by SFJ and ESP learners, it is unsurprising to observe that the large majority are also satisfied with the quality of training. SFJ learners are less satisfied (85 per cent) than some other groups of learners (including Apprentices), but ESP learners show similar levels of satisfaction (89 per cent) to learners in general.

ESP learners are more likely than both FE learners and Apprentices to report that the course had exceeded their expectations (43 per cent, compared to 35 per cent and 33 per cent respectively). Results for SFJ learners are in line with those for both FE learners and Apprentices (38 per cent report their course exceeded their expectations).

Four in five SFJ and ESP learners (82 per cent and 80 per cent, respectively) also say that their learning programme is meeting their needs. However, these figures are the lowest of all the learner groups.

Encouragingly, three-quarters of both SFJ and ESP learners (75 per cent and 76 per cent, respectively) say they are likely to undertake further learning in the next three years, including around half saying they would be *very likely* to do so.

SFJ and ESP learners are likely to experience problems or require extra support

More than half of SFJ and ESP learners (53 per cent and 58 per cent, respectively) say they had experienced specific problems since starting their course. Commonly cited problems include money pressures and balancing course and family commitments. ESP learners also reported problems with reading or writing.

One in five ESP learners (20 per cent) say there was support that would have helped them with their course that they did not receive. This was also the case for 15 per cent of SFJ learners. These learners mostly wanted more support from their tutor².

Findings indicate that getting a job is the most common reason for leaving both courses early

The proportion of SFJ and ESP learners who, at the time of the interview, had left their course prior to completion was 13 and 14 per cent, respectively.

Given the objectives of the training, however, it is interesting that getting a job was the most common reason given for leaving the course early by both SFJ and ESP learners. It is important to bear in mind, however, that because of low sample size, this only really equates to a very small group of learners³.

Implications

Satisfaction levels are high for both SFJ and ESP learners although they are below that of many other groups of learners. This may be due to the fact that these learners are either fairly new to learning or have not undertaken any learning for a considerable amount of time.

Results for SFJ learners are less positive than those for ESP learners on a number of key drivers of satisfaction (especially specific elements of teaching). However, these differences need to be considered within the context of fairly high levels of satisfaction among both groups. Nevertheless, it may be worth further investigating what SFJ learners feel, if anything, could be improved in this area.

SFJ and ESP learners were the most likely of all learners to experience problems, although this is likely to be linked to their prior education experience. Because of the small base size for this question, it is difficult to understand what these problems are in detail. It may be beneficial, therefore, to further investigate this, especially as commonly cited problems included money pressures and issues with travel.

² Results are indicative only due to small base size: SFJ (39) ESP (49)

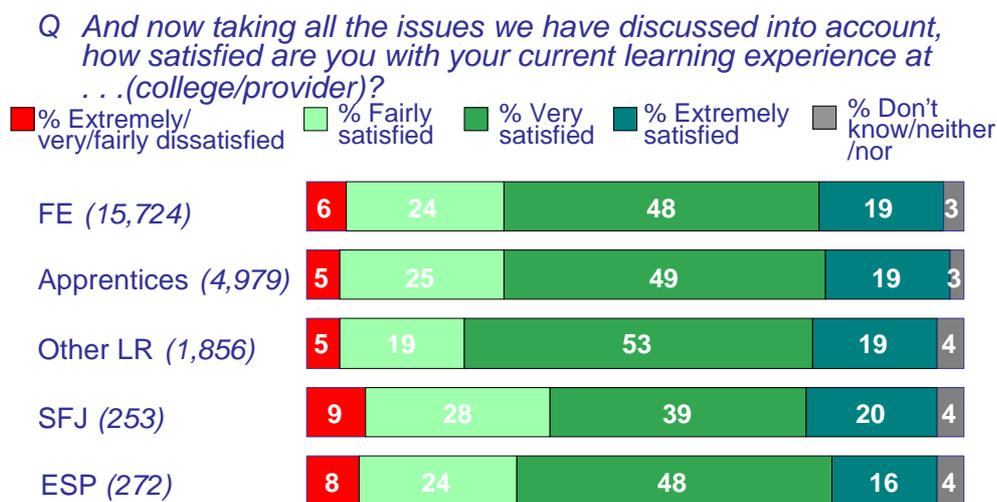
³ SFJ (32 learners); ESP (38 learners)

Satisfaction and Advocacy

Satisfaction with the learning experience

The vast majority of SFJ and ESP learners are satisfied with their learning experience although they are slightly less satisfied than other learners (Figure 1). SFJ learners express similar levels of high satisfaction to other groups of learners but are less likely to say they are *very* satisfied.

Figure 1: Satisfaction with the learning experience



Bases in brackets: All learners aged 16+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009.

Enjoyment of the course is most the commonly cited reason for satisfaction amongst ESP learners whilst SFJ learners are most likely to cite *the quality of the tutors* (Table 3).

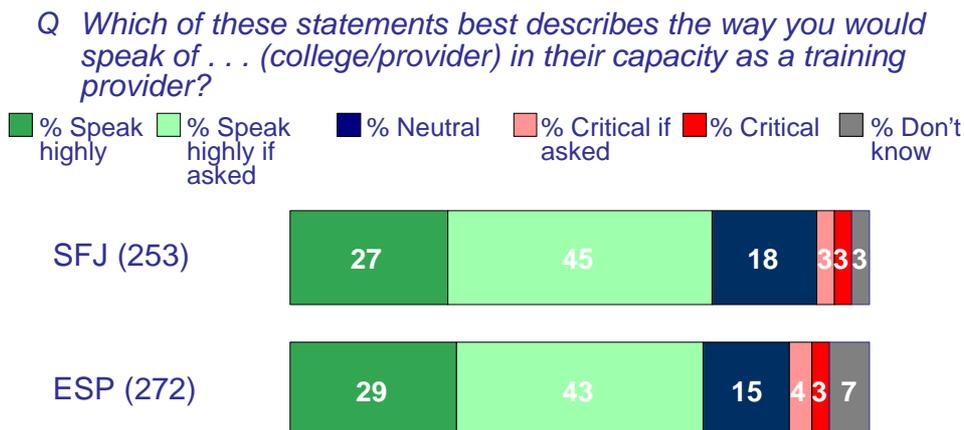
Table 3: Top three reasons for satisfaction with learning experience

	Type of learner	
	SFJ	ESP
<i>A good course/learnt a lot/enjoyed it/up to expectations</i>	33	40
<i>Tutors are good/they make it easy /interesting for us/help us</i>	39	33
<i>They were very helpful/always ready to help/get all the help I need</i>	27	27

Advocacy

Seven in ten SFJ and ESP learners would speak highly of their provider, including 27 and 29 per cent, respectively, who would do so *without being asked* (Figure 2). Only around one in twenty would be critical.

Figure 2: Advocacy towards learning provider



Bases in brackets: All SFJ and ESP learners aged 16+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009

Performance on key drivers

This chapter examines providers' performance on key drivers of satisfaction. As discussed in paragraph 5, Key Driver Analysis (KDA) was not conducted for SFJ and ESP learners due to the small sample sizes. Therefore, Table 4 summarises SFJ and ESP learners' ratings for the key drivers that were identified by the FE learners' KDA. Figures in the table show either the percentage rating each item positively, or the mean score out of 10 (a higher score indicating a more positive rating).

Table 4: Performance on key drivers – summary

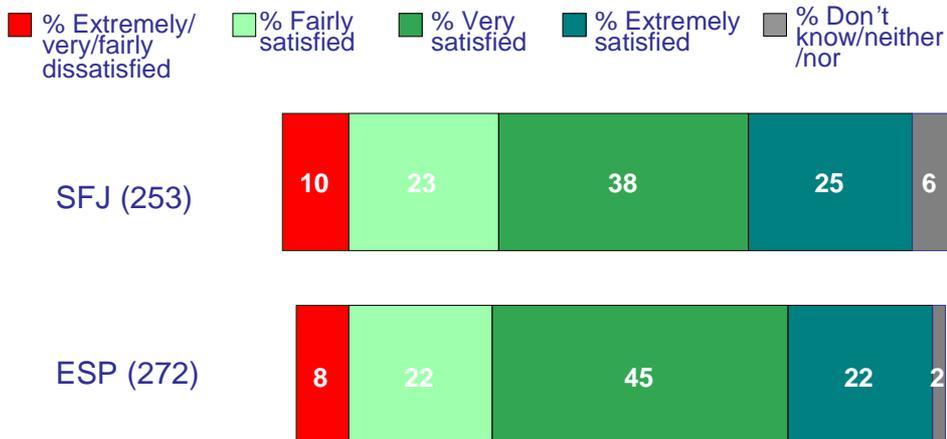
	SJP learners	ESP learners
<i>(Base varies by question)</i>		
Satisfaction with teaching and provider		
Satisfied with quality	85%	89%
Make subject interesting/ enjoyable (mean)	7.7	8.2
Understand learner(s) and how they like to learn (mean)	7.6	8.2
Condition of the buildings	-	-
Needs and expectations		
Learning programme is meeting my needs	82%	80%
Experience was better than expected	38%	43%
Information, advice and support		
Good support provided on course	-	-
Staff helpful in first few weeks	-	-
Informed about course content	91%	83%
Personalisation, learner involvement and provider responsiveness		
Staff good at showing respect	-	-
Tutors relate to learner(s) as a person (mean)	8.1	8.5
Provider good at listening to views	-	-
Provider good at acting on views	-	-
Attitudes to learning		
Likelihood of undertaking further learning	75%	76%

Satisfaction with teaching and provider

As would be expected, satisfaction with the quality of training is closely linked to learners' overall satisfaction with the learning experience, with the vast majority of SFJ and ESP learners expressing satisfaction (Figure 3). SFJ learners are less satisfied than some other groups of learners including Apprentices (86 per cent compared with 90 per cent for Apprentices), but ESP learners show similar levels of satisfaction to learners in general.

Figure 3: Satisfaction with the quality of teaching

Q Overall, how satisfied are you with the quality of the teaching/training at . . . ?



Bases in brackets: All SFJ and ESP learners aged 16+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009.

In terms of specific areas of teaching, both tutors *making the subject interesting or enjoyable* and *understanding the learner and how they like to learn* were identified as key drivers of overall satisfaction.

When asked to give a rating between 1 (very poor) and 10 (excellent), learners generally give high ratings for teachers or tutors making the subject interesting or enjoyable for them: ESP learners give an average rating of 8.22 out of 10. SFJ learners are less positive although they still, on average, rate tutors as good (mean rating of 7.69).

A similar pattern is observed with regards to how well tutors understand learning style within these groups. Again, ESP learners rate this higher, on average, than SFJ learners (mean ratings of 8.16 and 7.62, respectively).

Needs and expectations

A new question was asked in NLSS 2009 about meeting learners' expectations. ESP learners are more likely than both FE learners and Apprentices to report that the course had exceeded their expectations (43 per cent, compared to 35 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively). Results for SFJ learners are similar to both FE learners and Apprentices (38 per cent report their course exceeded their expectations). However, around one in four SFJ and ESP learners say that they did not know what to expect from the course (24 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively).

The large majority of SFJ and ESP learners also say that their learning programme is meeting their needs (82 and 80 per cent, respectively). However, these figures are the lowest of all the learner groups.

Information, advice and support

Just over a quarter of satisfied SFJ and ESP learners reported they were satisfied because their provider was very helpful and always ready to help (see Table 3; paragraph 28).

Specifically, both SFJ and ESP learners rate the tutors highly in terms of the support they provide to them (mean rating of 8.2 and 7.76, respectively).

More than half of SFJ and ESP learners say they had experienced specific problems since starting their course. Dealing with money pressures, fitting course commitments around commitments at home and travelling to their provider were the most commonly cited problems amongst SFJ learners (Table 5).

ESP learners also experienced problems in these areas, especially dealing with money pressures and balancing course and family commitments. However, by far the most occurring issue amongst this group was problems with literacy.

Table 5: Problems experienced on course (affecting at least 5% of SFJ or ESP learners)⁴

	SFJ learners	ESP learners
	(85)	(98)
Dealing with money pressures	18%	18%
Managing to fit course commitments in with other commitments at home	17%	17%
Travel to college/training centre	17%	9%
Maths or numeracy skills	15%	18%
Maintaining your personal motivation	14%	16%
Reading/writing skills	11%	28%
Managing to keep up with the standard of work required	11%	16%
Extra help you were promised not being provided	6%	5%
Managing to fit course commitments in with other commitments at home	4%	6%

Following on from this, 20 per cent of ESP learners report that there was support that would have helped them with their course that they did *not* receive. This was also the case for 15 per cent of SFJ learners.

⁴ Results are indicative only due to small base size

When asked what support would have helped, ESP learners are most likely to say they would have liked support from their tutor or more help with English (29 per cent and 19 per cent, respectively). SFJ learners would have liked more support from their tutor but also financial support and more advice on what they could do next (13 per cent, 17 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively)⁵.

Looking now at the quality of information learners received, the vast majority of SFJ and ESP learners felt they were well informed *on enrolment* on issues such as course content, the standard of work expected and how the course would help them gain skills to use in a job (Table 6).

They were less informed on issues such as how to access financial support and overall success rates of the provider.

Table 6: How informed learners felt about various issues *on enrolment* (% well informed)⁶

	SFJ learners	ESP learners
	(84)	(88)
The content of the course	91%	81%
The standard of work expected of them	87%	78%
How the course/training would help them gain skills to use in a job	86%	83%
The amount of work expected of them in their own time	83%	79%
The timing of exams and assessments	80%	73%
How to access financial support whilst in learning	67%	69%
The overall success/pass rate for learners at their provider	67%	71%

Learners were also asked how well informed they felt about the course content *after induction*. Given the vast majority of SFJ and ESP learners reported they were well informed on enrolment, similar proportions also felt they were well informed *after induction* (91 per cent and 83 per cent respectively)⁷.

⁵ Results are indicative only due to small base size: SFJ (39) ESP (49)

⁶ Results are indicative only due to small base size

⁷ Results are indicative only due to small base size: SFJ (85) ESP (98)

Personalisation, learner involvement and provider responsiveness

Personalisation and responsiveness was identified as a key driver of satisfaction and SFJ and ESP learners feel that their tutors relate well to them as people (mean of 8.09 and 8.49, respectively). As discussed in paragraph 34, they also believe that their tutors understand how they like to learn although ESP learners rate this higher than SFJ learners (mean of 8.16 and 7.62, respectively).

Attitudes to learning and benefits of learning

Six in ten ESP learners (61 per cent) had positive feelings about education when they left school; the equivalent figure for SFJ learners is lower at 45 per cent.

However, around eight in ten ESP learners and three-quarters of SFJ learners now feel more positive about learning than when they started the course (Table 7). This is in line with FE learners (80 per cent) and Apprentices (86 per cent).

SFJ and ESP learners are very positive about the effects the course has had on them – particularly in terms of their ability to learn. Again, these findings are roughly in line with findings among FE learners and Apprentices.

Table 7: Effects the course has had on the learner personally (% agree)⁸

	SFJ learners	ESP learners
	(84)	(88)
It has given me skills I can use for a job	81%	78%
Taking part in this course will help me move forward in my career and make it easier for me to find the type of job I want	76%	75%
I am more confident in my ability to learn	75%	93%
I feel more positive about learning than I did when I started	75%	81%
I feel more confident socially	73%	80%
I am better at managing my time and responsibilities	68%	81%
It enables me to cope better with daily life	63%	74%
It has benefited my health and sense of well being	62%	62%
I now take a more active part in the community	57%	70%
I feel better able to help my children or siblings with their education	50%	56%

Around half of SFJ and ESP learners (46 per cent and 52 per cent, respectively) believe that their course was essential to their current job or for a future job, with a further 45 per cent and 28 per cent, respectively, believing the course was not essential but will help them in their current or future jobs.

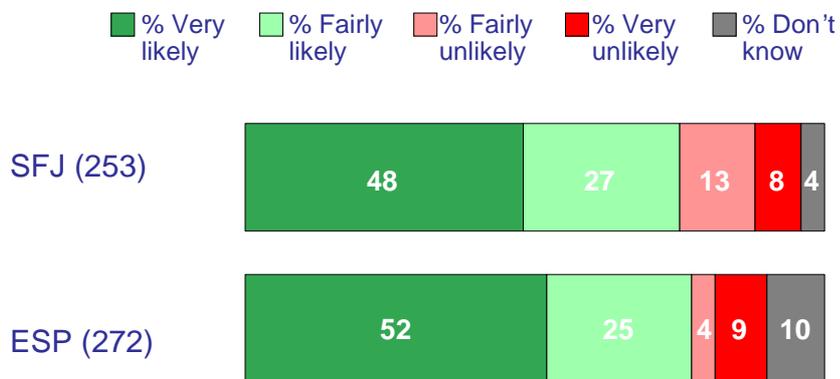
⁸ Results are indicative only due to small base size

Positively, around three-quarters of both SFJ and ESP learners say they are likely to undertake further learning in the next three years, including around half saying they would be *very* likely to do so (Figure 4). Intentions to undertake further learning is slightly lower compared with that for FE learners (84 per cent).

One in ten ESP learners are, however, undecided about future learning.

Figure 4: Likelihood of undertaking further learning

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



Bases in brackets: All SFJ and ESP learners aged 16+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009

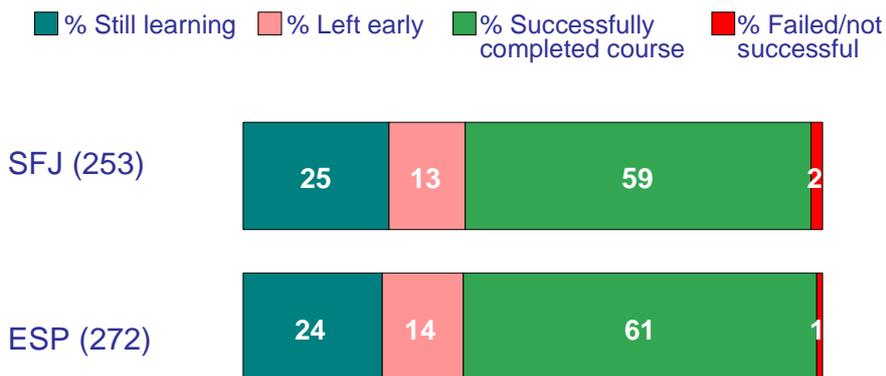
Early Leavers

Who left early?

One in seven SFJ and ESP learners had left their course early at the time of the survey interview (Figure 5) - higher than for other learner groups including Apprentices and FE learners (4 per cent and 7 per cent, respectively). At the same time, higher proportions of SFJ and ESP learners had also completed their course due to relatively shorter course durations. It is important to note that the survey does not seek to collect data on completion rates; these are monitored by the analysis of the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) database.

Figure 5: Profile of SFJ and ESP learners' course outcome

Q I would like to start by finding out where you are at with your course/training. Are you still doing your course/training?



Bases in brackets: All SFJ and ESP learners aged 16+ for waves 15, 16 and 17, 2009

Reasons for leaving early

Getting a job was the most common reason given for leaving the course early by both SFJ and ESP learners (33 per cent and 40 per cent, respectively). This is an interesting finding given that the focus of these courses is to give people prerequisite employability skills. However, it is also important to bear in mind the small sample sizes which means that only a small number of learners responded to this question.

The majority of SFJ and ESP early leavers (around three in five) reported that they did not seek nor were they offered support to stay on the course, postpone the course or change to another course – although similar proportions also say that there was nothing their tutors could have done to help them stay on the course.

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