

## Learning and Training Research in Wales

GfK NOP Social Research has worked with the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS, formerly ELWa) on their customer research programme since 2003. This programme involves interviewing individuals, employers and other stakeholders about their attitudes towards, and experiences of, learning and training.

### The research challenge

The remit of DCELLS is learning and training provision across all age groups. The key objectives of the Department's research programme are to

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

There are three main strands of activity:

1. understanding what motivates customers to learn in order to widen and deepen participation in learning
2. understanding what customers think of the education and learning services they receive
3. to identify the learning needs of the Welsh people



During 2003-2006, GfK NOP developed a programme of research to provide information on all DCELLS' customer groups. From 2007, the focus has been to update key measures, collect baseline data on customers that only recently became part of the Department's remit (those under 16) and to look more closely at existing data trends using qualitative techniques. The main challenges are to provide Ministers with timely inputs of data to inform diverse policy discussions and to ensure that the results of surveys are shared with a wide audience.

### Why GfK NOP?

- Our standing as leaders in conducting both quantitative and qualitative research and in facilitating dissemination events

- Our sector-specific expertise, combined with experience of working with other public sector bodies in Wales
- Our ability to facilitate bilingual research

In 2007, the research contract was re-tendered and GfK NOP was successful in winning a new 3 year contract. We now work in consortium with independent consultant, Malcolm Maguire, and Arad Consulting. This working arrangement offers a combination of research expertise, sector knowledge and a Welsh policy perspective, with the aim to deliver more focussed outputs for a variety of audiences.

## What we did

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The wide ranging scope of this on-going project is a key challenge, which was met by designing separate but complementary approaches for each type of respondent, tailoring the methodology to suit each specific audience. Some of the surveys that we have undertaken are summarised below:

**Learner Satisfaction surveys** to investigate people's expectations of, and satisfaction with, learning, as well as to understand their choice and decision making in relation to learning. In 2003, we undertook a telephone survey of c 6,700 learners in FE, WBL and ACL. In 2004, a learner satisfaction survey of sixth form students took place, involving a series of focus groups and a self-completion survey of c 5,000 year 12 and 13 students.

**Longitudinal survey of adults aged 16+** to monitor their participation in learning, and the triggers and barriers to learning. This consisted of surveys in 2004, 2005 and 2006, each involving c 2000 face to face interviews with the general population.

**Leavers' Surveys** to examine the outcomes of learning episodes. These have comprised a four-wave telephone pilot study in 2005, covering 600 WBL leavers per wave who had completed or left a training course; follow up telephone interviews with 500 FE respondents from the 2003 National Learner Satisfaction Survey; and, in 2007, a telephone survey of 1,200 FE leavers and 800 WBL leavers.

**New learning options for 14 to 19 year olds:** in 2006 we researched the awareness of, and attitudes towards, learning options for this age cohort. This included telephone interviews with c1000 people aged 14 – 19, in addition to c800 interviews with parents of young people of

the same age group and an online survey of c100 providers.

**Employer research:** we have examined the activities and decision making processes in place in Welsh businesses with regard to training and learning across the full range of industrial sectors in Wales. This began with twenty-eight face to face depth case study interviews in 2004 which fed into the design of the Employer Panel Survey - a survey of c2000 telephone interviews with employers in 2005, 2006 and 2007. In addition, after the 2007 survey, we spoke in detail with 25 employers that had taken part in all three waves of the Panel survey to gain further insights into their decision making process.

Each strand of research results was presented in a full written report and key data sets loaded onto a customised, secure website, where authorised users from the client company can interrogate the data.

In addition, in 2005 GfK NOP facilitated five **dissemination workshops** with providers, to share findings from the learner satisfaction surveys. These events allowed those at the front line of service provision to discuss the survey outcomes and debate how these might be used to improve service quality.

## Benefits

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Our long standing relationship with DCELLS facilitates a flexible partnership working arrangement that fits with the changing landscape of learning and skills in Wales.

GfK NOP, as part of the new Consortium, is working to deliver a wider variety of outputs to facilitate wider dissemination of the research findings.

## Overview of organisations

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### **Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS)**

The Department aims to improve children's services, education and training provision to secure better outcomes for learners, business, and employers in Wales. The Department operates through four groups, which are responsible for policy, planning, funding and monitoring services in their respective areas.

From 1st April 2008 these are:

- Children, Young People and School Effectiveness Group
- Skills, Higher Education & Lifelong Learning Group
- Qualifications Curriculum and Learning Improvement Group
- Business Improvement & Resource Investment Group

### **GfK NOP Social Research**

GfK NOP Social Research is a leading primary research partner to public sector organisations in the UK, providing both quantitative and qualitative research services to all major government departments as well as non-governmental organisations. We frequently work in partnership with a range of academic institutions and consultancies to supply outputs that incorporate specialist sector knowledge and recommendations. We combine first class research experience and public policy knowledge to deliver robust data that is used to inform policy development, spending decisions and communication strategies. ■

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