



# casestory

2008

## Understanding young people's life choices

The longitudinal study of young people in England (LSYPE)

## The research challenge

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Young people are our future (and current) consumers, voters and citizens. We need to understand how and why young people are making their life choices, academically or socially, to prepare for our country's future. In order to guarantee economic and social progress in the 21st century, government policy makers need to understand the reasons why some become skilled, successful adults while others drop out and rely on the state for support.

By carrying out a longitudinal study with both young people and their parents, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) is able to build a comprehensive picture of young people's lives, their ambitions and their achievements and how these inter-relate over time. The information can help direct policy to ensure future generations of young people are given the support, encouragement and services they need to achieve their goals and help build a brighter future for our society.



## Why GfK NOP?

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Our extensive experience in carrying out longitudinal research made GfK NOP a natural member of the consortium that is conducting this research. Having had experience of securing and maintaining longitudinal samples, designing longitudinal questionnaires and collecting and interpreting these vast amounts of data (GfK NOP is one of very few companies in the UK who have such a large and competent field force), GfK NOP has earned its position as a valuable member of the LSYPE fieldwork consortium.

## What we did

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As part of a consortium alongside two other agencies, GfK NOP carries out around 5,500 of the interviews conducted annually with the young people and their families (45% of the total). The sample is made up of young people who were in Year 9 at school in the school year 2003-4 (and therefore aged either 13 or 14 at the first wave of interviews in 2004).

At the two most recent waves, in 2006 and 2007, we achieved a response rate of around 92% at both, which is one of the highest response rates ever recorded for a longitudinal survey of this type.

The length of the face to face interviews varies by wave, but they usually last around 30 minutes with the young person and between 15 and 30 minutes with parent(s). The survey content differs from year to year, covering the different stages in the young people's educational and economic lives.

The questionnaire is designed to look back at the young person's ambitions and their actual academic achievements, to track whether their life choices are attainable and, if they are not, the reasons why they can't progress into the area that they would like to.

## Interesting features of this survey

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LSYPE is one of the few longitudinal studies of young people to interview their parents at the same time and none have done this as frequently. This allows the researchers to collect data about, and look at the effects of, things like a young person's family structure during their younger years, parent's ambitions for their children and family income. The parent interviews concentrate on such things as family history (economically and emotionally) and parental involvement in the young person's life.

The data collected are used by the DCSF and other government departments to understand young people's life choices and assess the effectiveness of existing government policies to help and support young people.

The data produced are:

- Unique – the survey is unparalleled in its size, scope and topic coverage

- Forward looking - the data will continue to be used for many years to help plan services for young people
- Reliable – it is the first time both young people and their parents have been interviewed at the same time enabling us to understand choices
- Robust – it has one of the best response rates recorded across longitudinal studies of this type

## Benefits

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The key benefits that GfK NOP brought to LSYPE include being able to take a large scale, long-term survey, help make it run smoothly and deliver clear, solid, accessible results. Our experience in questionnaire design, the ability to conduct a large number of interviews to a very high standard over a relatively short field work period and the ability to produce robust data that stands up to scrutiny has proved invaluable.

The survey data are widely used by government and other establishments, it is therefore imperative that the methodology and data are robust and fully fit for purpose. GfK NOP and the other consortium members work closely with the DCSF to ensure the greatest value and coverage is gained from the survey as a whole.

## Overview of organisations

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**DCSF (The Department for Children, Schools and Families)** leads work across Government to ensure that all children and young people:

- stay healthy and safe
- secure an excellent education and the highest possible standards of achievement
- enjoy their childhood
- make a positive contribution to society and the economy
- have lives full of opportunity, free from the effects of poverty

The DCSF contact for the LSYPE survey:

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### **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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