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## Young peoples' views of the curriculum

### Overview:

In April, 2008, our research partner CUREE (the Centre for Use of Research and Evidence in Education) conducted a national online survey of a representative sample of 2800 primary and secondary learners (in the ratio of 30:70). The questionnaire contained approximately 100 questions focused on 4 key policy interests:

- Challenge and inspiration
- Flexibility and choice
- Student lifestyles and health
- Motivational influences

This survey was then followed up with 8 focus groups which explored issues in greater depth. The focus groups were also an opportunity to draw out the views of some students who were unlikely to participate in the survey.

This work forms part of QCA's long-standing commitment to collect evidence to support its work and our statutory remit to keep the curriculum under review.

### Some key findings from the survey:

- Most learners are reasonably content with the current curriculum. The majority felt that the curriculum takes account of what they know already, is varied, contains a lot of practical activity and draws on out-of-school experiences.
- But there was room for improvement. They would like to increase the number of varied lessons, practical activities and working with people from outside school.
- Not every learner is given the appropriate level of challenge. 31% of respondents said lessons were too easy and 17% said they were too hard.
- Learners feel that they have insufficient say in the curriculum they experience. Over 70% of both primary and secondary learners experienced the curriculum as largely directed by the teacher in terms of what, and where, they learn and who they learn with.
- Parents place significant expectations on most learners. 85% of pupils thought their parents wanted them to do well at school. 30% felt that parental pressure was too much while 22% felt that parents put too little pressure on them. 17% felt that they were not pressured enough by teachers.

- Some secondary curriculum reforms were already being experienced at the time of the survey (April 2008). Significant numbers of students indicated that the secondary curriculum reforms, being implemented formally in September 2008, were already being introduced.
- Drugs, alcohol and healthy eating education are well established. Both primary and secondary schools indicated this but for secondary students the sight of overweight people on television and in public had greater impact than school activities
- Dealing with stress was the least developed aspect of personal wellbeing education.

## **Conclusions:**

This report is one of the rich outputs that QCA produces and forms part of the Building the Evidence Base programme to ensure that we:

- have a clear picture of the impact of all the Curriculum and Qualifications reforms on pupil attainment and attitudes
- build up a picture of the experience of the reforms over time including the impact on teaching and learning
- track and raise issues and concerns emerging from centres and pupils
- gain an insight into confidence in the reforms in terms of suitability, progression and levels of support available
- build a wealth of knowledge and evidence which, carefully managed, can feed into future policy development and lessons learned.

All our evidence work is constructed and implemented to ensure we get an appropriate balance of views from different groups to cover equalities and diversity requirements.

## **Implications for QCA and other policy organisations:**

Three possible implications from these findings are that:

1. we need further investigation into definitions of stretch and challenge – what do pupils mean when they say lessons are too 'easy'?
2. we need to consider how we can support parents to channel their expectations and pressures into progress for their children
3. we should consider how we might provide support and guidance for learners, their parents, and schools on dealing with stress as part of the personal wellbeing aspect of the curriculum

You can download this report, and other evidence we have gathered to support the development of a curriculum fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, from our *curriculum conversations* pages at [www.qca.org.uk/qca\\_13579.aspx](http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_13579.aspx).

If you have any questions about this work, or would like to get more involved, email us at [evidence@qca.org.uk](mailto:evidence@qca.org.uk).