

**Life in Lancashire Panel Wave 9**  
Report from panel research  
carried out on behalf of  
**LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**  
September - October 2003



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

british market research association



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES .....	1
1.2 METHODOLOGY.....	2
1.3 INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA.....	2
<b>2. BEING A LIFE IN LANCASHIRE PANEL MEMBER</b> .....	<b>3</b>
2.1 VIEWS ON BEING A PANEL MEMBER .....	3
2.2 FUTURE SUBJECTS FOR LIFE IN LANCASHIRE RESEARCH .....	4
<b>3. OPINION OF LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL</b> .....	<b>5</b>
3.1 OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL.....	5
3.2 HAVE THINGS GOT BETTER OR WORSE? .....	6
3.3 MAKING IMPROVEMENTS .....	7
<b>4. EDUCATION</b> .....	<b>9</b>
4.1 OPINION OF STATE-PROVIDED EDUCATION IN LANCASHIRE.....	9
4.1.1 Satisfaction Overall and with Specific Aspects of Education in Lancashire .....	9
4.1.2 Perceived Causes of Low Standards of Education and Improvements .....	12
4.1.3 The Future.....	14
4.1.4 Information about Education Issues .....	14
4.1.5 Interest in Children's Education .....	16
4.2 ADULT EDUCATION IN LANCASHIRE .....	17
4.2.1 Need for Basic Skills Education .....	17
4.2.2 Experience of Adult Learning Courses .....	18
4.2.3 Future Use of Adult Learning Courses .....	19
4.2.4 Sources of Information about Adult Education .....	21
4.2.5 Attitudes Towards Adult Learning in Lancashire .....	21
<b>5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	<b>23</b>
5.1 BEING A LIFE IN LANCASHIRE PANEL MEMBER .....	23
5.2 OPINION OF LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL .....	23
5.3 CHILDREN'S EDUCATION .....	25
Satisfaction Overall and with Specific Aspects of Education in Lancashire.....	25
Possible Causes of Low Standards of Education and Improvements .....	25
The Future .....	26
Information on Education Issues .....	26
Interest in Children's Education.....	26
5.4 ADULT EDUCATION.....	27
Need for Basic Skills Education .....	27
Experience of Adult Education .....	27
Future Use of Adult Learning Courses .....	28
Sources of Information about Adult Education.....	28
Attitudes Towards Adult Learning .....	28

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This report contains the main findings to emerge from a survey of members of the Life in Lancashire citizens' panel. RBA Research recruited a panel covering the 12 districts within Lancashire County Council in June 2001, and this is the ninth time that the main panel has been surveyed.

### **1.1 Background and Objectives**

The Life in Lancashire panel provides an opportunity to approach willing participants on a regular basis to seek their views on a range of topics. Panel members are all volunteers. The panel has been designed to be a demographic cross-section of the population of the County, and the results of each survey are weighted in order to reflect the demographic profile of the County's population.

The panel provides ready access to this broad cross section of the population. It also provides access to a sufficiently large sample of the population that reliable results can be reported at County-wide level and at a number of sub-area or sub-group levels.

Each activation of the Panel is 'themed' for two key reasons. Firstly, it enables us to have sufficient coverage on a particular topic to be able to provide insight into that topic. Secondly, it comes across better to the residents completing the questionnaires if there is a clear theme (or 2-3 clear themes) within each survey.

This latest survey focuses on education (both for children and adults), and more generally on the perceived effectiveness of the County Council, and on being a Panel member.

- The education questions were designed to measure current satisfaction with various aspects of education provision for young people, and perceptions of potential improvements. For adult education, the questions were designed to provide an understanding of both past and potential future use of the facilities available. In both cases, the Council also wished to obtain a better understanding of the level and sources of information that panel members perceive to be available on education.
- Panel members were also asked questions about their general perceptions of the Council and their effectiveness in running and improving things in Lancashire, with a view to directing future efforts and / or communication.
- Questions about being a panel member were specifically designed to identify what effect this involvement has had on panel members' views of the Council and its function, and to build upon this experience for future panel surveys.

## **1.2 Methodology**

Postal questionnaires were sent out to all those on the Lancashire panel database (1589 residents) on 18 September 2003. A reminder was sent out to non-responders on 02 October 2003. By 22 October 2003, 786 questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of 49%.

This response rate represents a fall on that achieved previously, and continues the downward move first noted in July of this year (56%). This is to be expected, given the age of the panel, and points to the requirement for panel refreshment before too much further research is carried out among panel members.

The results of the survey have been weighted by district, age, gender and housing tenure.

## **1.3 Interpretation of the Data**

This report contains several tables and charts that show the survey results. In some instances, the responses may not add up to 100%. There are several reasons why this might happen: the question may have allowed each respondent to give more than one answer; only the most common responses may be shown on the table; or individual percentages may have been rounded to the nearest whole number such that the total comes to 99% or 101%.

All of the figures given in this report are taken from the weighted dataset.

## 2. BEING A LIFE IN LANCASHIRE PANEL MEMBER

### 2.1 Views on Being a Panel Member

Panel members were asked to indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with a series of statements about being a member of the Life in Lancashire panel. The overall results are shown in Table 1, with a net agreement score indicating strength of feeling – a positive net agreement score indicates that the balance of opinion is positive.

Table 1 illustrates that respondents see numerous advantages to being a member. The main benefits are felt to be a better understanding of what the County Council does and doesn't do, and almost half of respondents say their membership has made them feel more positive about the Council. Views are more mixed, however, about the *effect* of their survey responses: there is less strength of feeling about true involvement, whether the Council really listens to the views expressed, or in particular, whether they act on feedback from panel members.

**Table 1: Perceived Effect of Being a Panel Member**

Base: All (Weighted = 1158; unweighted = 786)

	% agree	% disagree	Net agree*
I am now more aware of what Lancashire County Council does	72	11	+61
I am now more aware of what Lancashire County Council does <i>not</i> do	56	13	+43
As a result of being on the panel, I feel more positive towards Lancashire County Council	47	15	+32
The County Council listens to my views	45	22	+23
I feel involved in what Lancashire County Council does	40	29	+11
The County Council acts on my views	25	27	-2

\* (% agree minus % disagree)

There is net agreement with almost all these statements, the exception being '*the County Council acts on my views*'. In this instance, respondents are very slightly more likely to disagree than they are to agree (27% disagree and 25% agree). Over two-fifths of panel members in fact do not pass an opinion on this statement (43% neither agree nor disagree), suggesting that they do not know whether or not the Council acts on their views. Whilst not a directly negative finding, it is somewhat concerning in that a perceived lack of effect could be contributory towards 'drop out' and non-response in future surveys.

Views are also more mixed about feelings of personal involvement in County Council decisions, and on whether the Council truly listens to panel members:

- Just under half (45%) agree the Council does listen to their views, but a fifth (22%) disagree. Men are more likely than women to say the Council *does* listen (51% and 39% respectively agree).
- Slightly less positive overall is the feeling of involvement in what the County Council does: two-fifths (40%) agree they feel involved, but three out of ten (29%) disagree.

Half (47%) agree that they feel more positive towards the Council since taking part in the panel, and a further third neither agree nor disagree (35%). This leaves just one in seven who do not feel that their participation had had this positive effect (15%).

Panel members aged in the 'middle' age band of 25-59 are more likely than older and younger respondents to say they feel more aware of what the County Council does (78%). Women are more likely than men to say they now feel more aware of what the County Council does *not* do (63% compared with 49%).

Around a third of panel members overall spontaneously added further comments about being a panel member (36%). These are listed in full in the Marked Up Questionnaire (Appendix B), and show a fairly even balance of positive and negative comments. Worth noting are those who say that more feedback is needed (5%), that they feel their views don't matter (3%), and that no significant changes have been made (3%). This highlights the important aspect of communicating with panel members to ensure they kept aware of progress on issues, to maximise motivation and panel continuation.

Overall, it is clear that respondents see many positive outcomes of having been a panel member. Bear in mind, however, that only 49% of panel members chose to respond to this survey – it is possible that the remaining 51% do not feel as positive, hence their decision not to take part in the latest survey.

## **2.2 Future Subjects for Life in Lancashire Research**

A third of panel members made suggestions for future topics of research. These are again listed in full in Appendix B, with the top mentions being: improvements to facilities and services such as education and the health service, environmental improvements, and improvements to the Council / lower rates (7% each).

### 3 OPINION OF LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

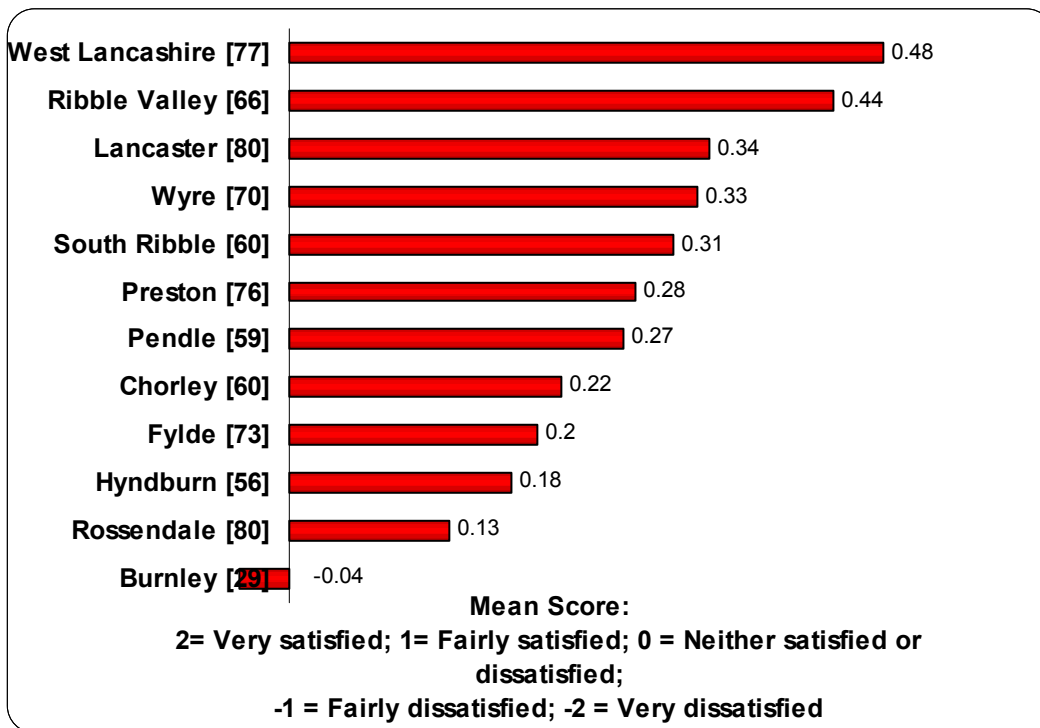
#### 3.1 Overall Satisfaction with Lancashire County Council

Half of respondents say they are satisfied overall with the way in which Lancashire County Council run things (49%), although most of those are *fairly* satisfied (46%). Conversely, a fifth say they are dissatisfied (21%), one in twenty *very* dissatisfied (5%).

Dissatisfaction is higher among C2s (29% dissatisfied) than among either C1s (18%) or DEs (19%). There are also differences by district which are shown in Chart 1. This chart shows the 'mean score', which is calculated using the full range of responses given, and gives more weight to *very* satisfied/dissatisfied ratings than to *fairly* satisfied/dissatisfied ratings. This analysis suggests that West Lancashire and Ribble Valley residents tend to be more satisfied, whereas Burnley and Rossendale residents tend to be least so.

**Chart 1: Overall Satisfaction with the Council, by District**

Base: All (Unweighted bases shown on chart)



Because of the low response rate to this survey, the base sizes for individual districts are relatively small, and therefore differences between districts should be interpreted with caution.

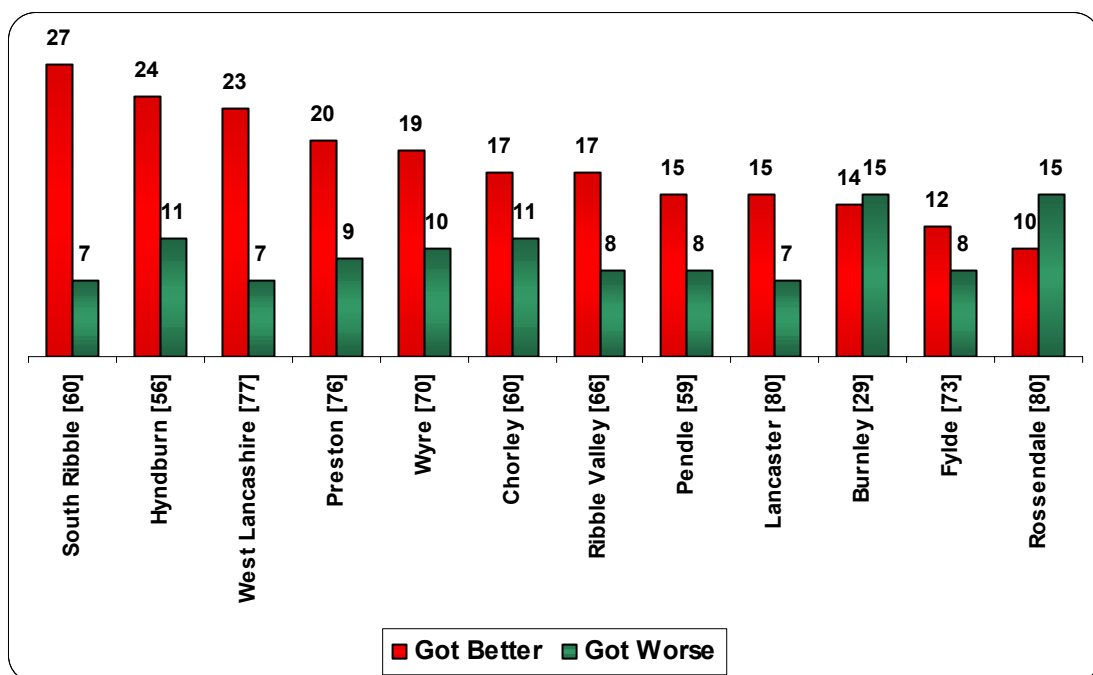
### 3.2 Have Things got Better or Worse?

Two-thirds (67%) say that the way in which Lancashire County Council operates has not changed during the period of time they have been panel members. Almost a fifth, however, say it has got better (18%), and one in eleven say it has got worse (9%).

There are again differences by district shown in Chart 2, with Burnley and Rossendale again standing out as more negative. Similar proportions across all districts take the view that things have stayed the same. Again, these district differences should be interpreted with caution due to low base sizes.

**Chart 2: Way in which Lancashire County Council operates has got Better or Worse during the time as a panel member**

Base: All (Unweighted bases shown on chart)





### 3.3 Making Improvements

Respondents were asked a series of questions about how effective they think the County Council and its partners (police and others) have been in making improvements within Lancashire. Table 2 shows the proportions of panel members who say they have been effective or not, and the resultant net effectiveness figures.

It is clear to see that on balance in most of the listed areas, panel members say the Council and partners have *not* been effective in making such improvements. Panel members are most negative about perceived improvements in tackling domestic violence (net -28), tackling drug misuse (net -39), and tackling problems caused by alcohol (net -41).

On a more positive note, improvements are perceived to have been made in promoting safer use of roads (+13), supporting families with problems (+12), improving environments (+5), and promoting safer public transport (+4).

**Table 2: Effectiveness of Council and partners in making improvements**

Base: All (Weighted 1158; Unweighted 786)

	Effective %	Not effective %	Net effective*
Promoting safer use of roads	52	39	+13
Supporting families with problems	48	36	+12
Improving environments e.g. street lights	49	44	+5
Promoting safer public transport	46	42	+4
Promoting racial harmony	42	43	-1
Protecting vulnerable children	40	44	-4
Promoting employment and tackling poverty	42	50	-8
Providing activities for and working with young people	36	52	-16
Supporting older people	36	53	-17
Working with young offenders	32	50	-18
Supporting victims of crime	33	51	-18
Working with schools to tackle anti-social behaviour	35	53	-18
Representing the views and interests of young people	33	52	-19
Tackling domestic violence	27	55	-28
Tackling drug misuse	24	63	-39
Tackling problems caused by alcohol	24	65	-41

\* % effective minus % not effective

Views are more mixed on the effectiveness of promoting racial harmony (net -1) and protecting vulnerable children (net -4).

Slightly more negative is the overall view on improvements in promoting employment and tackling poverty (-8). DEs are on balance more positive on this measure (47% say effective, net +4), as are panel members living in rural areas when compared with those living in urban areas (respectively 48% effective / net +3, compared with 33% effective / net -24).

Just over a third overall say improvements have been made in providing activities for and working with young people (36%), although on balance the view is negative (-16). Older panel members tend to be more positive, (44% of those aged 60+ say effective / net +6), but younger respondents - who are perhaps more likely to have direct experience – tend to be more negative (29% aged <25 say effective / net -38; 31% aged 25-44 say effective / net -28). Similarly, those aged 60+ are more likely to say that improvements have been made in representing the views of young people (40% say effective / net +4), which compares with a quarter of those aged under 25 (24% say effective / net -44).

The picture is similar for the improvements perceived in supporting older people, ie those most likely to have direct experience tend to be less positive: those aged 60+ are *less* likely to say improvements have been effective (29% / net -27). This compares to over two-fifths of those aged 45-59 (43% / net -6) and almost a fifth of those aged 25-44 (38% / net -13). Women are more likely than men to say improvements in this area have been made (41% compared with 32%), as are panel members living in rural areas compared to those in urban (41% compared to 29%).

A third of panel members say they feel that improvements have been made in supporting victims of crime (33%), although on balance the view is negative with over half saying improvements have *not* been made (51% / net -18).

## 4 EDUCATION

### 4.1 Opinion of State-Provided Education in Lancashire

In this section of the questionnaire, panel members were asked for their views on education in general, what might be causing low standards, and their perceptions of possible improvements.

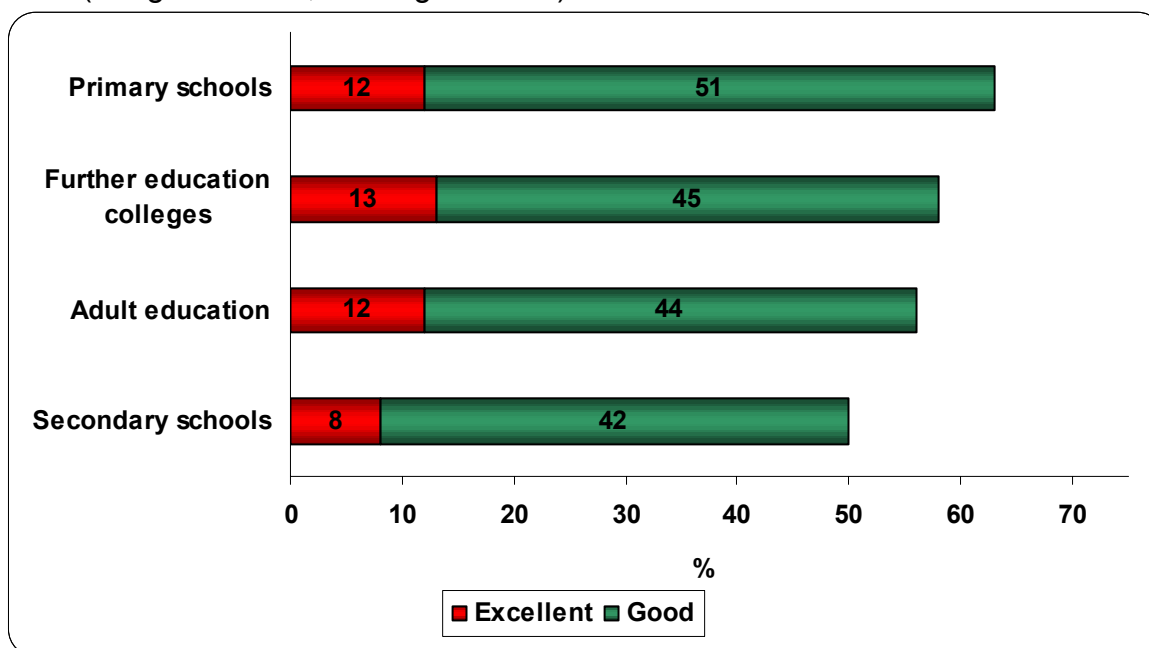
#### 4.1.1 Satisfaction Overall and with Specific Aspects of Education in Lancashire

Chart 3 shows the overall opinion of state-provided education for each of four different areas. For all four, at least half of respondents give an 'excellent' or 'good' rating. Primary schools have the highest rating, with over three-fifths (63%) rating this provision as either excellent (12%) or good (51%). This is a slightly better rating than that attributed to either further education colleges or adult education, which are rated similarly (58% and 56% respectively rate as excellent / good), although it is the 'good' rather than the 'excellent' rating that makes the difference.

Secondary schools receive the lowest rating of the four, with half saying they are either good or excellent (50%), with the proportion saying they are 'excellent' lower at 8%.

#### Chart 3: Opinion of State-Provided Education

Base: All (Weighted 1158; Unweighted 786)



Those with children in the household rate primary schools more highly than those without (70% and 60% respectively say excellent / good). Those living in rural areas also tend to have a more positive view than those in urban (68% and 56% respectively say good / excellent). Those living in urban areas are more likely to rate primary schools as 'fair' (22%).

Women are more likely than men to rate both further education colleges and adult education in Lancashire as ‘excellent’ (respectively 17% and 16% compared with 9% of men in both instances). Panel members without children in the household are more likely to rate adult education as ‘excellent’ (15% compared with 8% of those in households with children).

There are also differences by district which are summarised in Table 3, using mean scores. In this instance, a mean score of 3 would indicate an ‘excellent’ rating, 2 a ‘good’ rating, 1 a ‘fair’ rating and 0 a ‘poor’ rating overall. As can be seen, panel members in Chorley consistently rate the education provision relatively well, whereas those in Burnley tend to be least positive. As with all district analysis on this survey, small base sizes mean that the results should be interpreted with caution.

**Table 3: Opinion of State-Provided Education, by District**

Base: All (Unweighted bases shown in [ ]s)

	<b>Primary Schools</b>	<b>Secondary Schools</b>	<b>FE Colleges</b>	<b>Adult Education</b>
Chorley [60]	2.04	1.87	2.07	2.10
Fylde [73]	1.96	1.80	1.97	1.72
Wyre [70]	1.92	1.53	1.71	1.73
Pendle [59]	1.92	1.35	1.82	1.62
West Lancashire [77]	1.91	1.73	1.77	1.61
Ribble Valley [66]	1.89	1.63	1.78	1.91
Hyndburn [56]	1.88	1.65	1.85	1.85
Rosendale [80]	1.87	1.75	1.69	1.53
South Ribble [60]	1.84	1.66	1.97	1.87
Preston [76]	1.82	1.71	1.86	1.87
Lancaster [80]	1.79	1.50	1.70	1.84
Burnley [29]	1.53	1.45	1.72	1.58

Specific areas of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with education in Lancashire are shown in Table 4, using net satisfaction scores. This indicates that on balance panel members are satisfied with most of these specific factors, but *dissatisfied* with pupil behaviour in particular (net satisfaction -42), and also effective class sizes (-15), state of repair of school buildings (-12), and to an extent, attracting funding for development (-4).

It is worth noting that, for several of the factors in the middle of the table, high proportions do not come down on one side of the fence or the other, suggesting that they do not feel they know enough to form a definite opinion.

**Table 4: Satisfaction with Specific Aspects of Education**

Base: All (Weighted = 1158; Unweighted 786)

	Satisfied %	Dissatisfied %	Net satisfaction*
Quality of teaching	62	10	+52
Access to information about adult education	55	11	+44
Academic standards achieved	53	12	+41
Support for special needs	52	15	+37
Support for faith-based schools	42	8	+34
Choice of curriculum subjects	41	11	+30
Leadership of schools	42	14	+28
Information about the education system in Lancashire	41	15	+26
Achievement of ethnic minority pupils	32	7	+25
Attracting funding for development	21	25	-4
State of repair of school buildings	25	37	-12
Achieving effective class sizes	22	37	-15
Pupil behaviour	16	58	-42

\* % satisfied minus % dissatisfied

For many of these aspects, women are more likely than men to be satisfied – although in many instances this is due to men being less likely to offer an opinion rather than being more critical. Aspects on which women tend to be more likely to say they are satisfied include:

- quality of teaching (70%);
- academic standards achieved (59%);
- access to information about adult education (59%);
- support for special needs (58%);
- support for faith-based schools (47%);
- choice of curriculum subjects (46%);
- information about the education system in Lancashire (46%);
- achievement of ethnic minority pupils (37%);
- achieving effective class sizes (26%);
- and state of repair of school buildings (30%).

Views on the quality of teaching are particularly worth noting since seven out of ten women overall say they are satisfied (70%, 16% very satisfied). Also, three-quarters of those with children in the household (who are more likely to have recent direct experience) say they are satisfied with the quality of teaching (74%), with one in seven very much so (15%). This compares to fewer than three-fifths of panel members in households without children in the household (56%), although 23% of these say they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Those with children tend to have a less negative view of pupil behaviour than those without, although on balance it is still net dissatisfaction: a quarter of the former say they are satisfied with pupil behaviour (26%, net -29), which compares with just one in nine of those in households without children (11%, net -49).

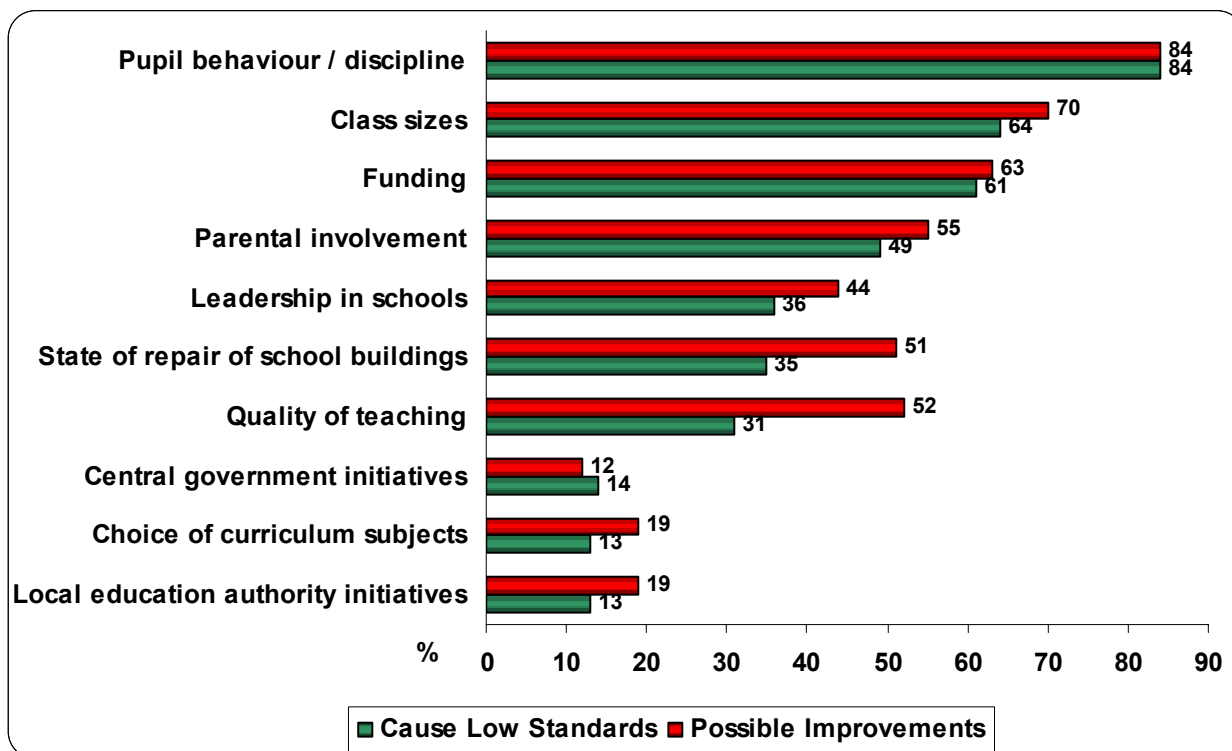
Women and those with children at home tend to be slightly more positive about the state of repair of school buildings (30% and 31% satisfied respectively), as are those living in rural areas compared with those in urban (25% satisfied compared with 17%).

#### 4.1.2 Perceived Causes of Low Standards of Education and Improvements

When asked specifically from a list what might be causing low standards of education in Lancashire, pupil behaviour/discipline features most strongly, followed by large class sizes – both specific aspects of net dissatisfaction with the education provision (see section 4.1.1). Panel members were also asked what improvements they think would improve the standard of education in Lancashire, and in Chart 4 these are shown alongside the possible causes of low standards for comparison.

**Chart 4: Perceived Causes of Low Standards of Education in Lancashire and Improvements**

Base: All (Weighted = 1158; Unweighted = 786)



In many cases, more panel members say these issues would represent improvements in standards of education in Lancashire than are causes of current low standards. Notable exceptions are pupil behaviour/discipline, funding and central government initiatives.

Pupil behaviour/discipline is the most criticised and considered the most effective improvement that could be made. Both those with children in their household and those without are equally likely to say that improved pupil behaviour would improve standards of education (85% each), but those *without* children in the household are more likely to identify this as a cause of low standards of education than those with (86% and 78% respectively).

Class sizes and funding are similarly felt to be causes of low standards of education (64% and 61% respectively), but seven out of ten say that smaller class sizes would be an improvement (70%), compared to just over three-fifths saying that more funding would (63%). Younger panel members are more likely to identify class sizes as both a cause of low standards and a possible improvement - 69% of those aged 25-44 say large classes cause low standards and 77% say smaller classes would be an improvement. This contrasts particularly with the over-60s, of whom 56% say class sizes cause low standards and 64% say smaller classes would be an improvement. Also those with children in the household are more likely to identify large class sizes as a cause of low standards of education (72% compared with 60% of those without children).

Half of respondents overall say that the lack of parental involvement is a cause of low standards of education (49%), with a slightly higher proportion saying this is an area for improvement (55%). Those in urban locations particularly identify this as an area for possible improvement (60%).

Around a third of panel members overall say that leadership in schools (36%), the state of repair of school buildings (35%) and the quality of teaching (31%) are currently causes of low standards. Those in urban locations are more likely to mention poor state of repair of buildings (40%) than are those in rural areas (28%), and men are more likely than women to mention low quality of teaching (35% and 27% respectively).

Over two-fifths say that better quality of leadership would be an improvement (44%), particularly those in urban areas (51%).

The subjects *least* likely to be considered either a cause of current low standards of education, or an area for improvement include both LEA and central government initiatives, and the choice of curriculum subjects. Women are more likely than men to suggest initiatives from both the local authority and central government might improve standards (respectively 24% compared with 15% referring to local education authority, and 15% compared with 8% suggest central government). DEs are also more likely to say that local authority initiatives would improve standards (27%).

No sub-groups stand out as being more likely to consider a wider range of curriculum subjects as helping to improve standards of education, but some are more likely to say a limited curriculum choice could be a *cause* of current low standards. These include:

- women (15% say it is a cause of low standards, compared with 10% of men);
- C2DEs (20% and 16% respectively, compared with just 5% of ABs);
- those without children (14% compared with 8% of those with children); and
- those living in urban areas or market towns (13% and 17% respectively compared with 7% of those in rural areas).

### 4.1.3 The Future

Opinions are mixed about their expectations of education over the next few years. Just over a quarter say they expect standards to improve (27%) and the same proportion expect standards to get worse (27%). Two-fifths say they expect it to stay the same (37%).

Those with children are more likely to take an optimistic view, with a third saying they expect standards to get better (33%). Those without children are more likely to say they expect standards to stay the same (39%). Those living in urban areas tend to be less optimistic than those in rural areas (31% and 21% respectively say they expect standards to get worse).

Socio-economic group is also a differentiator, with a third of ABs saying they expect standards to improve (33%). In contrast, C2s are more likely to say they expect things to get worse (33%).

By district, Burnley again stands out as being less positive about the future expectations of education provision (42% expect standards will get worse).

### 4.1.4 Information about Education Issues

Just over three-fifths say they receive about the right amount of information about education issues for their needs (63%), but around a quarter say they receive too little for their needs (27%). Just 4% say they receive too much.

Those who are less happy with the amount of information they receive about education include younger panel members (38% of those aged under 45 say they receive too little), and those with children in the household (40%). C2s are also more likely to say they receive too little when compared with C1s and DEs (respectively 38%, 27% and 21%).

The generally lower levels of satisfaction with education are expressed again amongst panel members in the Burnley area, as shown in Chart 5.

**Chart 5: Receive too little education information by District**

Base: All (Unweighted bases shown in [ ] on chart)

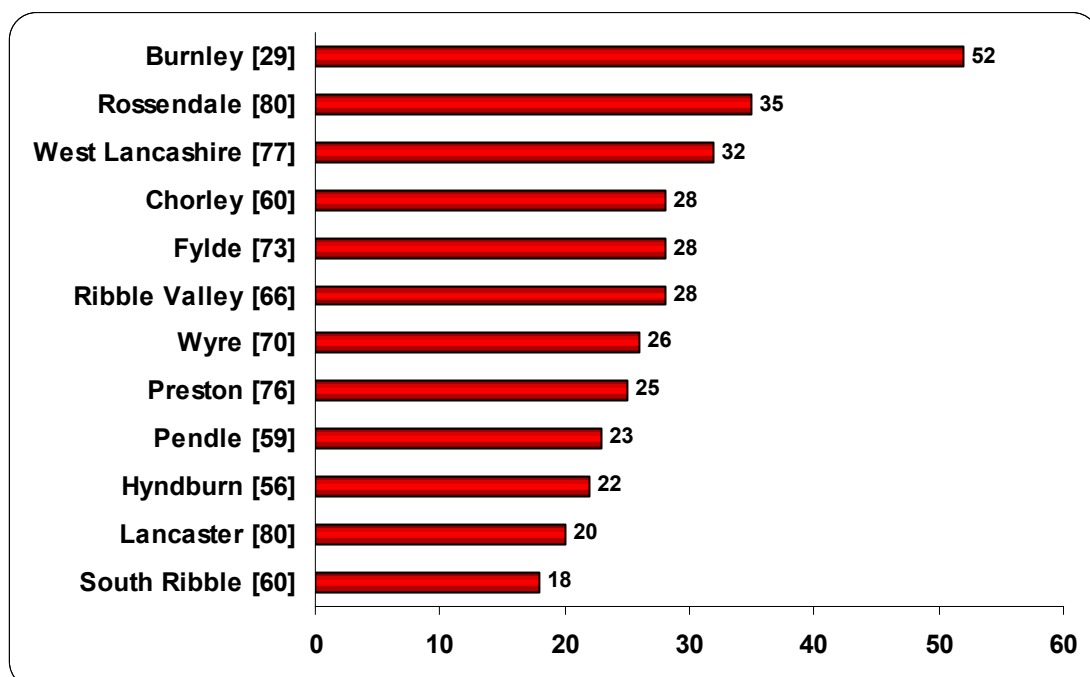
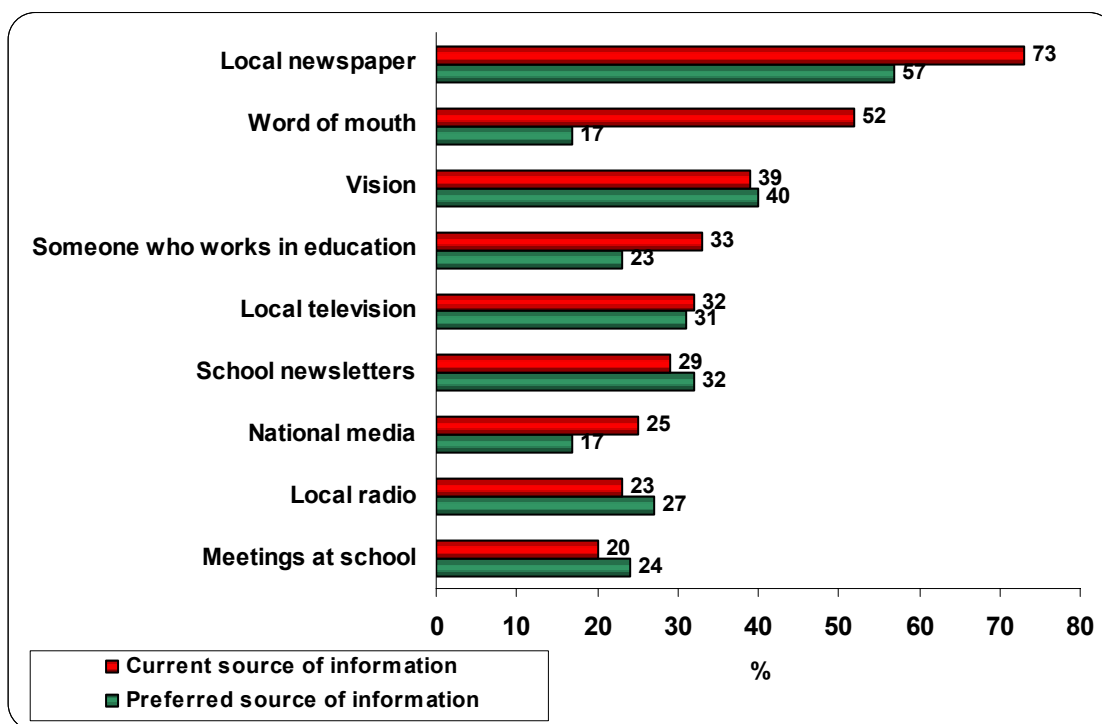




Chart 6 shows the sources of information from which panel members say they currently receive information about education issues in Lancashire. It also shows the sources of information from which respondents would *prefer* to receive such information. Those with a large 'gap' between preference and actual experience are perhaps areas where resources would be better invested in communicating information about education.

**Chart 6: Sources of information about education issues: current and preferred**  
**Base: Weighted = 1158; Unweighted = 786**



The closeness of data between sources used and those preferred suggest that current methods of communication are about right, although ideally panel members would appear to prefer less word of mouth.

The most common source of information about education currently for panel members is a local newspaper (73%), followed by word of mouth (52%). The local newspaper is also one of the preferred methods of communication for almost three-fifths of panel members (57%). Generally, it is the more formal methods of communication at a local level that are preferred, with fewer panel members saying they would prefer word of mouth (17%), hearing from someone who works in education (23%), or national media (17%).

In terms of how information is currently received about education, those with children in the household are more likely to say they utilise word of mouth (63%), someone who works in education (38%), meetings at school (38%), and/or school newsletters (59%).

School newsletters are a more common source of information for those with primary school age children than those with secondary (72% compared with 54% respectively).

In terms of preferred sources of information, those with children in the household are more likely to mention:

- school newsletters (58%), particularly those with primary age children (68%), and
- meetings at school (41%), again particularly those with younger children (46%).

#### 4.1.5 Interest in Children's Education

Panel members were also asked from a list what subjects about children's education in general they would be interested in. The list comprised:

- Learning about child development
- Knowing how children are taught
- Taking part in some form of learning activity with my child / children
- A parenting skills course

Half of all panel members say they would be interested in one or more of the subjects suggested (50%), a proportion which is understandably higher amongst those with children in the household (66%), women (54%) and younger respondents (18% of those aged under 45).

The most popular subject is knowing how children are taught. Just under two-fifths say they would be interested in this overall (37%), and is of greater interest to women (44% compared with 30% of men).

A fifth or just under say they would be interested in learning about child development (20%) and / or taking part in some form of learning activity with their children (17%). Learning about child development appeals particularly to those with primary school age children (35%), while a shared learning activity has more appeal to women (20%). One in nine say they would be interested in a parenting skills course (11%).

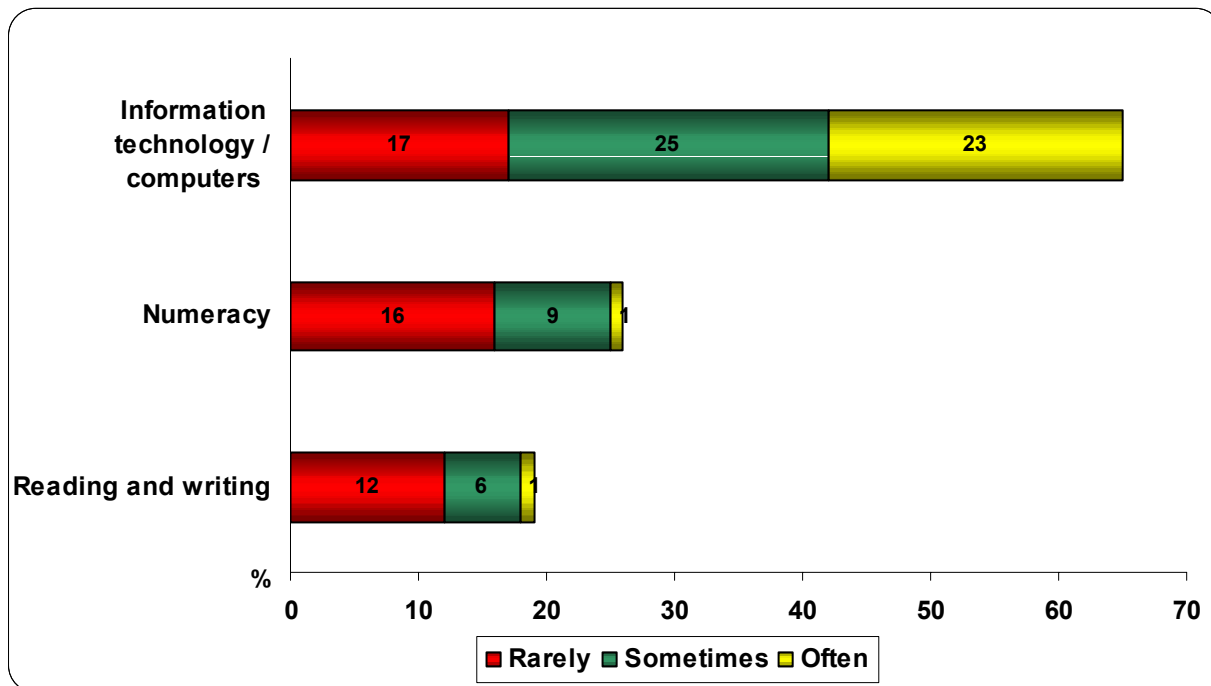
## 4.2 Adult Education in Lancashire

### 4.2.1 Need for Basic Skills Education

Panel members were presented with a list of basic skills and were asked how often they have difficulty with any of them. The responses are shown in Chart 7.

**Chart 7: Difficulty with Basic Skills**

Base: All (Weighted = 1158; Unweighted = 786)



Information technology and computer skills are the most common areas of difficulty. Almost two-thirds say they have difficulty to a degree (64%), with the frequency of difficulty largely related to age and social group. Older panel members (aged 60+) and DEs are most likely to say they experience such difficulties often (36% and 36%), while the younger respondents and ABs are more likely to say they never experience difficulties (34% of those aged under 45, 41% of ABs).

Around a quarter of panel members say they do experience some difficulty with numbers/numeracy (27%). Most of these say they rarely or sometimes experience difficulty, with just 1% saying they often do so. The proportion saying they experience difficulty is greater amongst *younger* respondents (15% of those aged under 45 say they often or sometimes have difficulty), and again amongst C2DEs (13% of C2s and 18% of DEs say they often or sometimes experience difficulty with numeracy).

Around a fifth say they have some kind of difficulty with reading and writing (19%)<sup>1</sup>. As with numeracy, most of these say they rarely have difficulty (12%), with one in sixteen admitting they sometimes have difficulty (6%), and just 1% saying they often have difficulty. These numbers are higher amongst DEs (14% say they sometimes or often have difficulty), and those in Council or housing association homes (23%).

Over half of panel members overall say they would be interested in improving one or more of these skills (55%). Greater levels of interest are shown by those who experience difficulty with these skills sometimes or often:

- 77% of those who often/sometimes have difficulty with IT say they would be interested in improving those skills, compared with 52% of panel members overall
- 53% of those who often/sometimes have difficulty with numbers/numeracy say they would be interested in improving those skills, compared with 9% of panel members overall
- 60% of those who often/sometimes have difficulty with reading/writing say they would be interested in improving those skills, compared with 7% of panel members overall

These data demonstrate the potential popularity of information technology / computer learning facilities, but also show the importance of numeracy and reading / writing skills opportunities for those who do experience difficulties.

Those more interested in information technology skills training include those aged 45-59 (63%) and C2s (64%). Particularly interested in numeracy and literacy are those living in Council or housing association homes (18% say would be interested in improving numeracy skills, 20% say they would be interested in improving reading / writing skills).

#### 4.2.2 *Experience of Adult Learning Courses*

Just under two-fifths of panel members say they have attended at least one adult learning course in the past three years (37%). On average, this is just one course (mean 0.87), with three out of ten having attended one or two courses (29%), one in fourteen having attended 3-5 courses (7%), and just 1% having attended more than that.

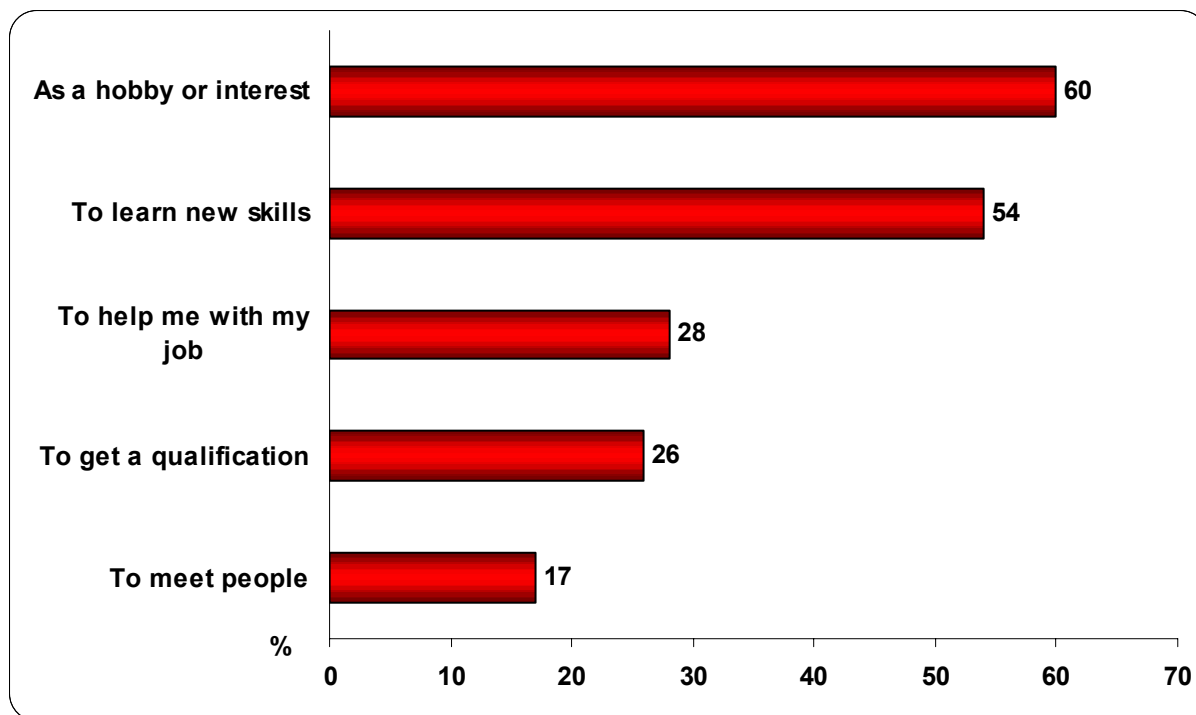
Women are more likely than men to say they have attended adult learning courses (42% compared with 31%), as are ABC1 and C2s (41% of Abs, 45% of C1s, and 39% of C2s, compared with 26% of DEs).

<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that those with reading/writing difficulty are probably less likely to join a panel based on self-completion questionnaires, so it is highly likely that the 'real' level of difficulty is higher than indicated here.

The main reason given for attending adult learning courses is 'as a hobby or interest', voiced by three-fifths of panel members who have attended courses in the previous three years (60%). This proportion is higher amongst men (67%) and older panel members (70% of those aged 45-59, 83% of those aged 60+). Other reasons given are summarised in Chart 8:

**Chart 8: Reasons for attending an adult education or learning course**

Base: Attended course(s) in last 3 years (Weighted = 431; Unweighted = 298)



Those with children in the household are more likely to say they have undertaken adult education to get a qualification (42%), whereas those without children at home are more likely to have done so for a hobby or interest (66%).

**4.2.3 Future Use of Adult Learning Courses**

Two-fifths of all panel members say they will be likely to attend an adult education course in the next 12 months (40%): a quarter possibly so (25%) and one in seven definitely so (14%). This leaves 23% saying they probably will not attend a course, and 21% saying they definitely will not.

Women are more likely than men to say they definitely will attend a course (17% compared with 11%), whereas older panel members and DEs are more likely to say they definitely will not (32% each of those aged 60+ and DEs).

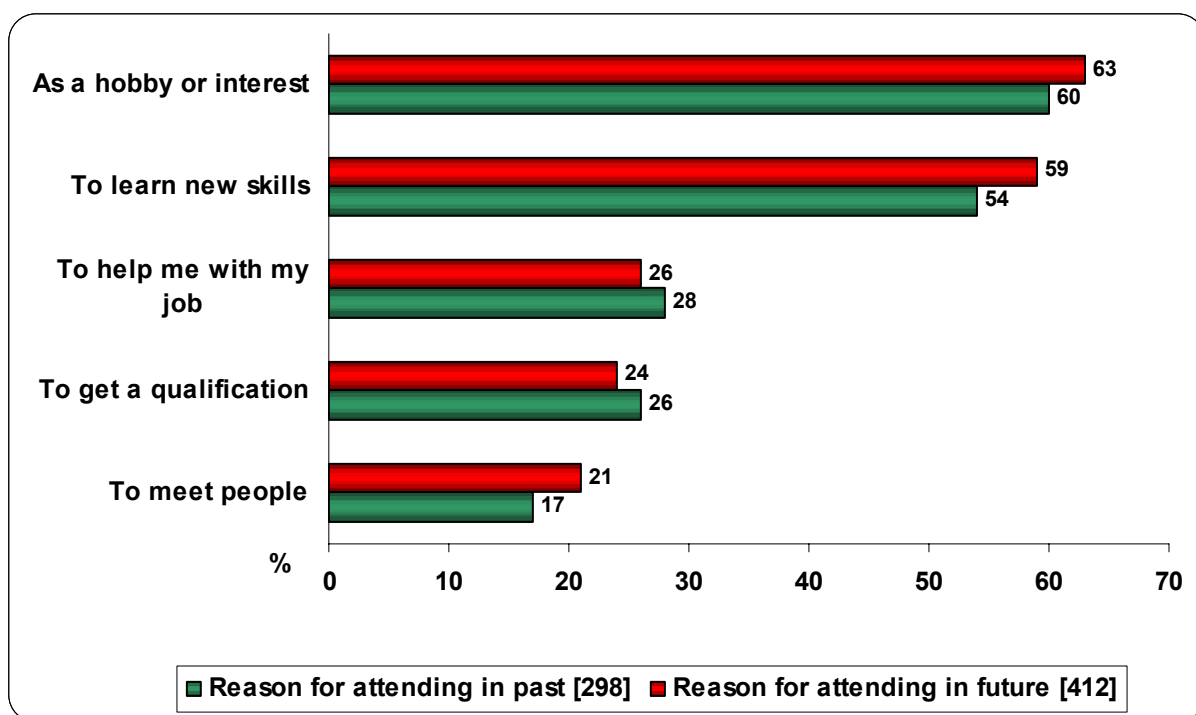
Interestingly, those who say they definitely will attend a course in the next 12 months are far more likely to have attended adult education courses previously. Almost nine out of ten (87%) of those who say they will definitely attend a course have attended courses in the past three years, with three out of ten having attended between 3 and 5 courses during that period (31%).

The reasons given for potentially attending a course very closely reflect those given by panel members who have actually attended an adult education course in the past three years, as shown in Chart 9 (probably due to the fact that those who plan to attend a course are mainly the same people that have already done so recently).

Sub-group variations are very similar to the reasons given for having attended, with older panel members being more likely to say they may attend for a hobby or interest (86%), whereas younger respondents are more likely to mention learning new skills, helping with a job, and / or getting a qualification. The last reason is particularly notable amongst those aged under 45 (41%). Women are more likely to say they might attend an adult education course in the next 12 months with a view to using it to meet people (27% say this, compared with 13% of men).

**Chart 9: Reasons for attending an adult education or learning course**

Base: All who have attended a course / all who definitely or probably will attend a course or don't know if they will (unweighted shown on chart)



All respondents (whether or not they envisage taking part in adult education/learning) were asked which venue(s) they would be most likely to go for an adult learning course. The most popular venue for adult education would be a local college (64%). Alternatively, similar numbers of panel members would be likely to attend a course at a local school (37%), a local community venue such as a village hall (33%), and / or a local library (29%). A fifth say they would be likely to undertake adult learning at home (20%).

Those who answered that they *are* likely to attend a course in the next twelve months mentioned a local college more than those who do *not* foresee taking the course (77%, and 58% respectively). For the remaining locations specified there is little difference in the proportions of responses between those who do envisage taking a course and those who do not.

Whilst a local college is the most popular venue overall, it is less so for older panel members (48%) and DEs (50%). A local school is more attractive to women than men as a venue (42% compared with 31%), but is also *less* attractive to DEs (26%). A local library

has more appeal to older panel members (42% of those aged 60+), and education at home has more appeal to DEs (26%). A local community venue has similar appeal across the sub-groups.

#### 4.2.4 Sources of Information about Adult Education

Almost three-quarters of panel members overall say they would use newspapers to obtain information on adult learning opportunities in Lancashire (73%, rising to 80% among those aged 25-44). Newspapers as a source of information are also more popular amongst those in owner-occupied homes (76%) than those in Council rented or housing association properties (54%).

Over half say they would use leaflets through the door (56%), in this instance a more popular source of information for those in the 'mid-age' bands (61% of those aged 25-59).

Just under half say they would refer to a County Council library or information centre (45%), a source of information which has *less* appeal to younger panel members (29% of those aged under 25).

Around a third overall say they would use the Internet or a website (35%), a source which decreases in attraction amongst older age groups. Three-fifths of those aged under 25 say they would use the Internet (59%), but this appeals to only 7% of those aged 60+. This is also a more popular source of information for ABs (54%), and for those with children in the household (49%), ie those most likely to have Internet access at home.

A fifth or just under say they would look for information from the local education office (20%), and / or the radio (17%).

#### 4.2.5 Attitudes Towards Adult Learning in Lancashire

Finally, panel members were given a series of statements about adult learning in general, and were asked how strongly they agree or disagree with each. The results are summarised in Table 5:

**Table 5: Attitudes towards adult learning**

Base: All (Weighted = 1158; Unweighted = 786)

	Agree %	Disagree %	Net agree*
It is easy to find out what adult learning is available to me	76	14	+62
The courses available meet my needs	58	10	+48
Courses are held somewhere that is easy for me to get to	63	17	+46
Courses are held at times convenient to me	54	21	+33
Courses are too expensive	45	19	+25

\* % agree minus % disagree

Attitudes to all these statements are mostly positive, with net agreement evident in all cases. The exception is the cost of courses where on balance the view is that courses are too expensive (45%). Women are more likely than men to take this view (51% compared with 39%), although it is the older respondents who are most likely to feel strongly about this – a fifth of those aged 60+ agree strongly that courses are too expensive (20%, compared with 13% overall).

There is particularly strong agreement that it is easy to find out what adult learning is available, with three-quarters agreeing (76%), and a fifth agreeing *strongly* that this is the case (21%). Older panel members (27% of those aged 60+) are more likely to agree strongly, whereas those panel members with children in the household are more likely to *disagree* (20% disagree compared to 12% of those in households without children).

Almost two-thirds of panel members agree that courses are held in easily accessible venues (63%), a view slightly more likely to be held by those with access to a car (68%). Those without a car are more likely to *disagree* that venues are easy to get to (28% do, compared with 17% overall).

Just over half overall agree that courses are held at convenient times (54%). Older panel members (68% of those aged 60+) and those without children in the household (59%) are most likely to agree that this is the case.

Those panel members who say they definitely will attend a training course in the next 12 months are more likely to agree with all of these positive statements, but are no more or less likely than others to say that courses are too expensive.



## 5 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Being a Life in Lancashire Panel Member

On balance, respondents see many positive outcomes from their being a panel member – 72% say they have a better awareness of what the County Council does and 56% that they know more about what the County Council does *not* do. Almost half (47%) say they feel more positive about the Council as a result of being a member.

Of some concern, however, are the divided views on the perceived effectiveness of their participation:

- 45% say the County Council listens to their views – but 22% disagree;
- 40% say they feel involved in the County Council’s decisions – but 29% disagree;
- 25% say the County Council acts on their views – but 27% disagree.

Whilst not a directly negative finding, these mixed views on the perceived effectiveness of panel contribution are likely to be a contributory factor to the falling response rates.

These findings suggest that:

- If the Council decides to continue with Life in Lancashire in some shape or form, it is definitely time to refresh the panel (this survey achieved a response rate of only 49%, and response rates have been falling steadily over recent months).
- Respondents’ comments also point to the need for more effective<sup>2</sup> feedback to panel members, making it clear that the Council is listening to and acting on their views.
- When planning survey content, it would be advisable to ensure that, on a regular basis, questions are included that are likely to yield the kind of feedback that panel members want.

### 5.2 Opinion of Lancashire County Council

Half (49%) of panel members say they are satisfied overall with the way the County Council runs things with most of these being ‘fairly satisfied’ (46%) as opposed to ‘very satisfied’ (3%). One-fifth are *dissatisfied* (21%), particularly C2s and panel members in the Rossendale and Burnley districts.

Two-thirds say the way in which the County Council operates has not changed during the period of panel membership (67%). Almost a fifth say it has got better (18%), particularly women and those aged 45-59. One in eleven say it has got worse (9%), especially those in Burnley and Rossendale.

<sup>2</sup> ‘NB Effective’ does not necessarily mean ‘frequent’! The quality of the information is more important than the quantity; RBA’s research among panel members suggests that many do not even recall receiving feedback if it does not give them concrete information about what the council is doing with the information they provide.

Improvements thought to have been made effectively by the County Council and its partners include:

- promoting safer use of roads (52% say they have been very/quite effective, 39% say they have not been effective);
- supporting families with problems (48% effective, 36% not effective);
- improving the environment by things like street lighting (49% effective, 44% not effective); and
- promoting safer public transport (46% effective, 42% not effective).

Views are more mixed on the effectiveness of improvements in:

- promoting racial harmony (42% effective, 43% not effective);
- protecting vulnerable children (40% effective, 44% not effective); and
- promoting employment and tackling poverty (42% effective, 50% not effective), although DEs and those in rural areas tend to be more positive about improvements in this area.

In matters relating to activities for young people and supporting older people, views tend to be slightly more negative, especially among those directly affected:

- 36% overall say that the partners have been effective in making improvements in providing activities for and working with young people, but fewer young panel members agree (31% of those aged under 45);
- 36% overall say that improvements have been made in support of older people, but fewer older panel members agree (29% of those aged 60+).

Around a third of panel members overall say that improvements have been made in the following areas, but on balance the view is that the partners have *not* been effective in:

- working with young offenders (32% say effective, 50% say not effective);
- supporting victims of crime (33% say effective, 51% say not effective);
- working with schools to tackle antisocial behaviour (35% say effective, 53% say not effective);
- representing the views and interests of young people (33% say effective, 52% say not effective);
- tackling domestic violence (27% say effective, 55% say not effective);
- tackling drug misuse (24% say effective, 63% say not effective); and
- tackling problems caused by alcohol (24% say effective, 65% say not effective).

In the Council's feedback to panel members and residents generally, therefore, it seems that more needs to be made of the efforts and achievements in the areas towards the bottom of the above lists.

### 5.3 Children's Education

#### *Satisfaction Overall and with Specific Aspects of Education in Lancashire*

Over three-fifths of panel members rate primary schools as either good (51%) or excellent (12%), with even higher ratings amongst those in rural areas. Primary schools achieve a significantly better rating than either Further Education colleges (58% good / excellent) or adult education (56% good / excellent). Secondary schools receive the lowest rating – half overall say they are either good (42%) or excellent (8%).

Panel members in Chorley consistently rate all types of education more highly, whereas those in Burnley consistently rate them lower.

Panel members say that on balance they are satisfied with many specific aspects of education in Lancashire, especially the quality of teaching (62% satisfied, 10% dissatisfied) and academic standards achieved (53% satisfied, 12% dissatisfied). There are just four areas where dissatisfaction outweighs satisfaction:

- attracting funding for development (21% satisfied, 25% dissatisfied);
- state of repair of school buildings (25% satisfied, 37% dissatisfied);
- achieving effective class sizes (22% satisfied, 37% dissatisfied); and
- pupil behaviour (16% satisfied, 58% dissatisfied).

#### *Possible Causes of Low Standards of Education and Improvements*

Pupil behaviour and large class sizes are the two areas most often identified by panel members as possible causes of low standards of education (84% and 64% respectively) – both are areas of the greatest dissatisfaction with the state education system in Lancashire. These are also the two areas most often noted as potential areas of improvement – 84% suggest that pupil behaviour and discipline would help raise standards, and 70% feel the same about smaller class sizes. Younger panel members and those with children in the household (ie those most likely to have recent direct experience of the system) are more likely to identify smaller class sizes as a necessary improvement.

Three-fifths say that lack of funding is a cause of low standards of education (61%), and a similar proportion (63%) thinks that more funding would bring about improvements.

Half of panel members identify lack of parental involvement as a cause of low standards of education (49%), and slightly more say more quality parental involvement would raise standards (55%), especially in urban areas.

Around a third each suggest that the following are causing of low standards of education:

- lack of leadership in schools (36%);
- the state of repair of school buildings (35%), more frequently mentioned by those in urban areas; and
- the quality of teaching (31%).

Half say that improving the repair of buildings (51%) and / or the quality of teaching (52%) would improve standards, and two-fifths suggest that improved leadership would do so (44%).

Areas *least* likely to be identified as causes of low standards or areas for improvement are:

- LEA initiatives (14% say cause low standards, 12% say would improve education in Lancashire);
- central government initiatives (13% say cause, 19% say would improve things);
- the choice of curriculum subjects (13% say cause, 19% say bigger choice would improve things).

### *The Future*

Views are mixed in terms of expectations of education standards in Lancashire in the next few years. Around a quarter (27%) expect standards to improve – and the same proportion expect them to get worse. The remainder expect standards to remain the same.

Those with children in the household and those in rural areas tend to be more optimistic about future education standards, while those in Burnley tend to be less positive.

### *Information on Education Issues*

Around three-fifths of panel members say they get about the right amount of information about education issues (63%), but a quarter say they do not receive enough (27%). Those less likely to be happy with the supply of information include younger panel members, those with children in the household, and those living in the Burnley district.

Current sources of information very closely match the preferred sources, although ideally panel members might prefer less word of mouth communication. Local newspapers are most important overall (73% use them), and for those with children in the household, information is gleaned from word of mouth (63%), from someone who works in education (38%), school newsletters (59%) and meetings in school (38%). For preference, those with children would like school newsletters (58%) and / or meetings at school (41%).

Two-fifths say they receive information about education via 'Vision', the County Council's free newspaper (39%), and this represents a more important source of information for those without children in the household.

### *Interest in Children's Education*

Around two-fifths of panel members say they would be interested in finding out how children are taught (37%), especially women. This represents the most popular subject.

Around a fifth say they would be interested in learning about child development (20%), and / or taking part in a learning activity with their children (17%). Child development is of particular interest to those with children of primary school age.

One in nine say they would be interested in a parenting skills course (11%).

Overall, the 'children's education' findings suggest that:

- Particular emphasis should be placed on making improvements in urban areas, especially in and around Burnley
- Improvements to pupil behaviour and smaller class sizes are the two aspects that, if tackled successfully, would bring about major improvements in satisfaction with state education in Lancashire
- The relatively positive attitudes towards the quality of teaching should perhaps be communicated to teachers, as this is an aspect of education that is commonly criticised, and these results may help to boost morale
- Parents should be encouraged to get more involved in children's education. It is clear that many parents and non-parents think this would be a good thing, so some further research into why parents do not currently get involved would help to inform such an initiative
- There appears to be a latent demand for more quality information about education, especially among those with children. For parents, more formal channels would be preferred, eg newsletters and meetings, rather than relying so heavily on word of mouth

## **5.4 Adult Education**

### *Need for Basic Skills Education*

Information technology and computer skills are the most common area of difficulty for adults – around two-thirds say they have a degree of difficulty with this (64%), especially older panel members and DEs.

Around a quarter say they experience some difficulty with numeracy (27%), difficulty being more common among younger respondents and C2DEs. A fifth say they have some difficulty with reading and writing (19%), particularly DEs and / or those living in Council rented or housing association property.

More than a half overall say they would be interested in improving one or more of these skills, mostly IT and computer skills (52%), and to an extent numeracy (9%) and literacy (7%). Interest in improving these skills amongst those who experience difficulty is understandably much higher.

### *Experience of Adult Education*

Around two-fifths of panel members say they have attended at least one adult education course in the past three years (37%), with a higher propensity amongst women and ABC1s. Attending as a hobby or interest is the main reason given (60%), although over half of those who attended a course cite learning a new skill (54%) as a reason for doing so.

### *Future Use of Adult Learning Courses*

Two-fifths of panel members say they are likely to attend an adult education course in the next 12 months (40%) – 14% definitely so. Those who say they will definitely attend are very likely to have attended a course in the previous three years.

Reasons given for potentially attending a course are similar to those given for having attended one recently. The main reason is for a hobby or interest, particularly among older respondents. Younger residents are more likely than older ones to mention a specific purpose such as learning a new skill, helping with their job or getting a qualification. Women are more likely than men to indicate that they want to attend for social contact.

Overall, a local college is the most popular venue for adult education (64%). A local school is appealing to a fifth of panel members (37%), especially women. A local community venue (eg village hall) has appeal across all types of panel member (33%). Libraries appeal more to older respondents than to younger ones. Home study appeals more to DEs than to other socio-economic groups.

### *Sources of Information about Adult Education*

Newspapers are the most popular source of information on adult education (73%), followed by leaflets through the door (56%). Just under a half say they would refer to the County Council library (45%), although less so younger respondents.

Around a third say they would use the Internet or a website (35%), especially younger panel members, ABs and those with children in the household (ie those most likely to have home Internet access). A fifth say they would use the local education office (20%) and / or radio (17%).

### *Attitudes Towards Adult Learning*

Attitudes towards adult learning are generally positive amongst panel members, with the exception of the view that courses are too expensive (45% say this) – a view more strongly held by women and older respondents.

Three-quarters say it is easy to find out what adult learning is available (76%), although those with children in the household are more likely to say this is *not* the case.

Around two-thirds say that courses are held in easily accessible venues (63%), although women and non-car drivers are less likely to agree.

Around half say that courses are held at convenient times (54%), especially older panel members and those with no children in the household.

Overall, the 'adult education' findings suggest that:

- There is a lot of demand for IT/computer learning among adults, much of it unmet
- There is less demand for literacy/numeracy learning, but among the significant minority who have difficulty with them, the need is great
- These results probably under-estimate the extent to which adults have difficulty with literacy, and hence the demand for literacy learning, because those who agree to take part in self-completion surveys tend to be more literate than the average
- Those most likely to take part in adult learning are those who have recently done so, suggesting a need to promote local opportunities to those who are not currently 'in the loop'
- Although local colleges are the most popular choice of venue for adult education, they do not hold universal appeal. A wide range of venues (including home study) needs to be provided to ensure that all sectors of the population feel that adult learning is accessible to them
- (Perceived) cost is the main barrier to participation in adult education. If low-cost courses or financial help are available, this fact needs to be communicated more widely, particularly to women and older residents. If low-cost courses and/or financial help are not available, consideration should be given to ways of making them available, eg by encouraging local employers to make contributions for their employees and/or grants being made available from public funds

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**19 November 2003**