
Parental opinion survey 2010

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Introduction

This research brief presents findings from the second annual Parental Opinion Survey conducted in 2010, and carried out by TNS-BMRB on behalf of the former Department for Children, Schools and Families (now known as the Department for Education).

Key Findings

- The vast majority of parents (93 per cent) were confident when caring for their children.
- The average mean score of the Confidence Index has increased (up from 69 to 70) which is in line with expectations given that just a year has elapsed since the first survey, although this change does represent a statistically significant increase.
- Two thirds of parents said they found it easy to obtain the information they needed.
- Although overall the level of parents' involvement in their child's progress through school life is high, a third of parents want to be more involved. This was particularly the case amongst non-resident parents (50 per cent) and fathers (38 per cent).

Key Differences in Findings between Year One and Year Two Survey

- The year 2 survey has on the whole acted to re-enforce the findings from the year 1 survey, with few significant differences.
- Frustration levels amongst non-white parents have fallen by 10 per cent. As in year 1, this group were also least likely to find parenting frustrating. In 2009, parents with an illness or disability, and parents of children with an illness or disability reported they were less likely than average to get on well with their child. The Finding was not repeated in year 2.
- There was an increase in the proportion of parents who were service users (up from, 68 per cent to 72 per cent) and the proportion of heavy service users (accessing five or more services) also increased (up from 10 per cent to 14 per cent).
- The proportion of parents who felt that the childcare services they had received improved their parenting skills or confidence increased (up from 53 per cent to 66 per cent).

Background and research

The then DCSF commissioned TNS-BMRB to set up and co-ordinate an annual Parental Opinion Survey. This survey collected parents' views on a range of issues focusing on their role as parents, in particular confidence in their parenting skills and in the services available to them in their parenting role.

To provide a structure and inform the questions to be used in the survey the former DCSF devised a number of parental confidence measures that were grouped under four major themes:

- Confidence in parenting skills
- Perceived ability of parents to support their children's learning
- Access to parental information and advice services
- Confidence in parental support services

These measures acted as key aims and objectives for both the first and second year surveys. More specifically, the questionnaire and the report were structured around them.

The second annual survey allows the department to compare and contrast findings with the first survey.

Methodology

The survey used quantitative methods and was based on a representative sample of parents and carers of children aged 0-19 in England. The survey sample consisted of a core sample and a boost sample of parents living in deprived areas. This was designed to ensure adequate coverage of parents in low income households.

The questionnaire used for the survey had eight discrete sections:

- A. Household Grid / Child selection
- B. Child's education status
- C. Segmentation questions
- D. Parental engagement with children's learning

E. Information / Advice and confidence in support services

F. Informal parenting information / advice services

G. Confidence in parenting skills (self-completion)

H. Demographics

Interviewing was conducted using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI), which took place in respondents' homes between December 2009 and April 2010. A total of 2,319 interviews were conducted with parents. All data were weighted to make the findings representative of the sample population.

Main findings

Confidence in Parenting Skills

As in year 1, the vast majority (93 per cent) of parents were confident when caring for their children. Confidence was highest for full-time working parents, parents of older children and amongst parents who left the education system at a later age (aged 22 or over). Levels of confidence were lowest amongst parents who did not speak English as a first language (80 per cent). Although still relatively high, this is lower than for other groups. These findings are similar to those found in the year 1 survey.

As in year 1, nearly all parents (99 per cent) found parenting rewarding, with the vast majority (93 per cent) saying that they found it rewarding 'most of the time'. Parents of children under three years old found parenting most rewarding (93 per cent), whilst parents of children with SEN expressed the lowest levels of satisfaction (76 per cent).

Two thirds of parents found parenting frustrating most or some of the time. Parents of children with SEN were less likely than average to find parenting rewarding and more likely to find it frustrating most or some of the time (78 per cent said this was the case).

Non white parents were least likely to find parenting frustrating and the number reporting that they found parenting frustrating fell by 10 per cent from year 1.

Both demographic and attitudinal factors are key drivers of frustration. Frustration is increased for parents in larger families, lone parents and parents of children with SEN. Attitudinal factors which have the largest impact include perceived ability to control child's behaviour, frequency argue with child and a perceived lack of time.

One third (33 per cent) of parents argued with their child either most days or more than once a week. The proportion doing so increased amongst parents of children aged 6-10 (41 per cent) and those with an income of £45,000 and over (37 per cent). However, parents of children aged 6-10 were most likely to say they got on very well with their child (79 per cent).

The percentage of parents saying that they got on very well with their children fell gradually with increasing age of the child.

Parents of children with SEN were more likely than average to cite difficulties in managing their children's behaviour and experience negative outcomes as a result. More specifically, they were more likely than average to argue with their children at increased frequency; get on less well with their children; have problems with their child's obedience; experience behaviour problems which have affected their mental health; experience tension with their partners; and to have used support services to obtain information and advice on behaviour issues.

A Confidence Index was recreated in year 2 of the survey and provided a measure of parental confidence. As in year 1, age of child was the key driver determining high confidence and parents of children aged under three were most likely to appear in the 'higher' confidence group (42 per cent), while only two per cent of parents of young people aged 16 or above were highly confident. Other factors were also important. Non-white parents (27 per cent), those not working (25 per cent) and parents who left the education system aged 19 or above (23 per cent). In contrast, non-resident parents were most likely to appear in the 'lower' confidence group (43 per cent).

There was a slight (but significantly significant) increase in the mean average confidence score since year 1 (up from 69 to 70)

High levels of confidence had positive impacts on other aspects of parenting, such as enjoyment of parenting, parental involvement and behaviour management. In contrast, low levels of

confidence had negative impacts on the factors mentioned above.

Multivariate analysis was undertaken to explore confidence levels. In relation to high confidence; the number of children in the household, respondent gender and age of child were all found to influence the level of high confidence.

Implications for policy

A policy challenge for Government relates to how to engage parents with low confidence and help build their self esteem. The challenge for schools will involve appropriate targeting and promotion of services to those parents in greatest need.

Frustrated parents may need more support and encouragement as well as work to build their parental self-esteem and confidence. There are possible opportunities for schools to reach out to these parents, although they may require help identifying and supporting them.

The diversity of child SEN and the resulting needs of parents mean that government policies need to respond to these demands. Parents of children with SEN desire both greater involvement and are open to accessing support services for the information they require, showing there is scope for support services to offer greater information and guidance to parents of children with SEN.

Perceived Ability of Parents to Support Child's Learning

Nine in ten parents (92 per cent) said that they felt involved in their child's progress through school. Levels of parental involvement in children's learning were lowest amongst non-resident parents (42 per cent said they were not involved). Involvement was highest amongst parents not working, mothers and parents of children with an illness or disability.

Thirty four per cent of fathers (an increase of six per cent over the year one survey) felt very involved. However, they were less likely than average to feel very involved. Mothers were almost five times more likely than fathers to say they were more involved in their child's school life than their partner. A third of parents said that they and their partner were equally involved in their child's schooling. These findings are similar to year 1.

As in year 1, most parents (91 per cent for both years) felt confident in their ability to support their child's learning and development. Confidence was highest amongst parents of younger children (10 or under) (95 per cent) and those with more experience of the education system (terminal education age of 19 or older) (94 per cent). Parents of children with SEN were less likely than average to feel confident (84 per cent).

The age of the child was an important factor affecting parental confidence in helping children with homework. Confidence was highest amongst parents of children under 10 (86 per cent). In contrast, confidence was lowest for parents of children aged 16 or over (48 per cent). As in year 1, the frequency of helping with homework is closely tied in with the child's school year. Parents of children in lower school years were more likely than parents of children in later school years to help their child with homework.

As in the previous year, nearly half (47 per cent) of full-time working parents said that they did not spend enough time with their children. Fathers and non-resident parents were more likely than average to say that they did not spend enough time with their child. In contrast, 10 per cent of young parents (aged under 25) felt they spent too much time with their child.

A third (32 per cent) of parents wanted to be more involved. Many parents who claimed to be less involved in their child's schooling expressed a desire for more involvement in the future. Non-resident parents were most likely to report a desire to get more involved (50 per cent). As in year 1, fathers were more likely than mothers to say they wanted to be more involved (38 versus 28 per cent).

Implications for policy

The challenge for educational establishments is to reach out to parents who desire to be further involved in their child's education and specifically in increasing parents' confidence in helping their child with their homework. There will be the need for flexibility when considering how best to engage and involve different types of parents in their child's school life and helping with homework.

Engaging non-resident¹ parents in their child's learning and development is a complex issue. Many of these parents may already have some involvement with the school or other support services, whilst others will be more marginalised. There is scope for educational establishments and support services to reach out and engage these parents further in both their child's education and the information and support services that exist

A further challenge for both government and schools centres on the need to understand and overcome the barriers that some fathers face in getting involved with their child's learning. There is a need to provide appropriate ways to facilitate greater involvement amongst fathers (given the desire for involvement that exists).

Access to parental information and advice services

Around three-quarters (72 per cent) of all parents were 'service users', i.e. they had used at least one of the support services asked about within the last year. This is an increase from year 1 (68 per cent). Parents of children aged under three were most likely to be service users (85 per cent), whilst the least likely users were non-resident parents (39 per cent).

A minority of parents who had not used a particular service said they had required information but not received it, i.e. the overwhelming majority of non-service users reported that they simply do not require any advice.

In relation to 'informal services' it was found that seven in ten (69 per cent) parents had spoken to other parents / carers about parenting issues within the last month and four-fifths (79 per cent) to other family members; however, 13 per cent of parents had spoken to neither. In general, the types of parents who were less likely to spend time talking to other parents or family members were generally the same groups as those who were also found to be less likely to have used formal support services in the last year.

Parents were most likely to obtain information, advice or support in person (61 per cent) or via leaflets (51 per cent), smaller proportions

¹ To be eligible for interview absent parents must have seen their child in the last 12 months or attempted to do so in the last 12 months.

browsed the internet (36 per cent) and used telephone helplines (16 per cent) for this purpose.

The vast majority of parents said they found it easy to obtain information about nearly all the different services they required, with services related to pregnancy, maternity or babies recording the highest levels for ease of acquiring information (97 per cent). Services related to disability (78 per cent) and those related to relationships (76 per cent) recorded the lowest levels of satisfaction with ease of obtaining information.

Around a third (30 per cent) of fathers said they would be likely to attend a local group specifically for fathers to discuss parenting issues. This was an increase from year 1 at a quarter (25 per cent). Enthusiasm was highest amongst non-white fathers (61 per cent) and fathers where English was not their first language (55 per cent). As was found in year 1, confidence is a key determinant in, whether fathers, would be likely to attend a fathers' group: those in the high confidence group were significantly more likely than those in the low confidence group to say they might attend (44 and 24 per cent respectively).

Implications for policy

Lower confidence may to some extent explain the reluctance of some parents to seek assistance. A potential policy challenge therefore centres on how to instil these parents with the necessary knowledge and confidence to seek support when needed.

Confidence in parental support services

As in year 1, the vast majority of parents felt that the support services they had accessed were useful. In particular, 94 per cent of both parents who had used services offering information or advice on pregnancy, maternity or babies and services offering family support felt they had been of use. Services relating to teenagers received the lowest rating in terms of usefulness (73 per cent).

There was considerable variation across the different services in relation to whether parents felt their parenting skills / confidence had been improved as a result of the service accessed (this was also the case in year 1). Four-fifths (81 per cent) of parents who had sought advice on

pregnancy, maternity or babies felt their parenting skills had improved to some extent, compared with two-fifths (41 per cent) of parents who had accessed information on finances.

There has been a significant increase in the proportions reporting that childcare services (66 per cent) and schools (61 per cent) have improved their parenting confidence between year 1 and year 2 of the survey.

Although certain support services recorded lower proportions of parents indicating that the information received had enhanced their parenting skills/confidence, this is not necessarily a negative indicator. Parents may have felt that the information provided by these services (although perceived as useful) did not directly relate to parenting skills/confidence.

There was also some variance across the different services in relation to those that parents said had given them the opportunity to provide feedback. One third (31 per cent) of parents who had accessed family support services said that the option to provide feedback had been available decreasing to twelve per cent who said there was an opportunity to do so for services related to teenagers, finances and laws and rights.

Around four-fifths (82 per cent) of parents said they were confident they would know where to go if they needed to obtain information or advice about general or specific parenting issues. (An increase of five per cent on year 1).

Implications for policy

There appears to be limited provision for parents to provide input on their customer experiences in the form of feedback facilities so this may be an area that could be further addressed in the future.

Year 1 and year 2 comparison

The overriding theme throughout the report is that there has been little difference between the two years of the survey; the differences that have occurred have been minimal. The year 2 survey has on the whole acted to re-enforce the findings from the year 1 survey. The key differences that were found are detailed below:

Confidence in parenting skills

- The average mean score of the Confidence Index has increased year on year (up from 69 to 70). This represents a statistically significant increase.
- Frustration levels remained consistent across the two years.
- However, as in year 1 non-white parents were least likely to say they found parenting frustrating most or some of the time. Frustration levels for this group have fallen from year 1 (58 down to 48 per cent).
- While parents with an illness or disability, and parents of children with an illness or disability reported last year they were less likely than average to get on well with their child this finding was not supported in the year 2 survey.

Perceived ability of parents to support child's learning

- Although parents of children with SEN had reported last year they were most likely to feel involved in their child's progress through school life in year 1, their involvement in year 2 was comparable to the average.
- Fathers working full-time (in year 2) were more likely than their year 1 counterparts to say they were more involved as were full-time working mothers.
- Last year parents who did not speak English as their first language reported they were less likely than average to feel confident in supporting their child's learning at home; this was not evident in year 2.
- Parents in year 2 who did not speak English as their first language were more likely than their year 1 counterparts to agree that they knew a lot about how to help with their child's education.

Access to parental information and advice services

- There was a significant increase year on year in the proportion of parents who were 'service users' and the proportion of 'heavy' service users (accessing five or more services) also increased across the two years.
- The usage of services related to schools, health, childcare, safety and protections and family support increased.
- There was a decrease in the proportion of service users reporting that they had found it easy to obtain information on schools, sport and play and teenagers.
- There was an increase in the proportion of fathers reporting they were likely to attend a local group to discuss parenting issues and socialise with other fathers.

Confidence in parental support services

- The proportions reporting that childcare services and schools have improved their parenting confidence increased from year 1 to year 2.
- The usefulness of both services relating to teenagers and those related to finances decreased from year 1 to year 2.
- There was an increase in the use of school websites, emails and text messages to obtain information.

Additional Information

The full report can be accessed at www.education.gov.uk/research

Further information about this research can be obtained from
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This research report was commissioned before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE).

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.