

Attitudes to Education: The British Social Attitudes Survey 2019

Introduction and background

NatCen's annual British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA) reports on the views of the British public using a representative sample of adults aged 18+ in England, Wales and Scotland. Since the survey began in 1983, The Department for Education (DfE) has commissioned questions on education on several occasions. Responses to the questions provide useful information about attitudes to many topics: children's mental health, rules in secondary education, skills that schools should teach, preparing young people for the job market, continued education and future job security. The achieved sample for the DfE questions, asked of respondents in England only, was 2,783 for the face-to-face questionnaire and 2,241 for the self-completion booklet.

Key findings

Children's mental health

- Respondents were asked about a number of factors which could contribute to poor mental health among children. They were most likely to agree that pressure from social media and online activity contributed to children's poor mental health a great deal or quite a lot (81%).
- Over two thirds thought that an unhealthy lifestyle and a difficult home life each contributed a great deal or quite a lot to children's poor mental health (72% and 71% respectively). Fewer felt that school-related stress or worry (62%) or poor relationships with other children (56%) contributed to poor mental health.
- Women (85%) were more likely than men (78%) to agree that all the above factors would contribute to poor mental health. For example, 85 per cent of women agreed that that pressure from social media and online activity contributed 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' to poor mental health in children, compared to 78 per cent of men.
- Respondents with no educational qualifications were less concerned about the impact of social media and of a difficult home life than those with A levels or similar qualifications.

Conduct and discipline in schools

- Overall, respondents want schools to be strict in dealing with pupil misbehaviour. Sixty-six per cent agreed that schools should be much more or a little stricter; just 23 per cent felt that discipline was at the right level. A mere 5 per cent felt that schools should be less strict.
- Older respondents were more likely to desire a higher level of discipline. Whereas 52 per cent of those aged 18 to 24

said schools should be stricter, this figure rose to 76 per cent for those aged between 65 and 74.

- Respondents with children were less likely to support stricter punishment in schools compared with those who had no children in the household (62%, compared with 69% respectively).
- Respondents with degrees were less likely to agree that schools should be stricter than respondents with lower or no qualifications (54%, compared with 71% or 72%).

Mobile phone use in secondary schools

- Overall, respondents were not in favour of pupils being allowed to bring mobile phones to school. Fifty-eight per cent felt that secondary school pupils should probably or definitely not be allowed to bring their mobile phones to school.
- If mobiles were allowed in secondary schools, 52 per cent of respondents felt that pupils should be allowed to use them during break times. Only 25 per cent felt that children should be allowed to use their mobile phones to help them learn in class.
- Younger respondents tended to be more lenient regarding the issue of mobile phones. However, even amongst those aged 18-24, those who thought that pupils should be able to use mobile phones to help them to learn in class were in a minority (44%).
- Attitudes to mobile phones in school varied according to whether respondents were living with children. Respondents with a child in secondary school were more likely to say that children should be allowed to bring their



mobile phones to school than were those who did not have a child in secondary school (45%, compared with 40% respectively).

and online learning. Only 10 per cent chose a fully online course. There was little variation according to age.

Skills and qualities which children should learn in school

- Respondents were asked about the skills and knowledge which they wished they had learned in school – they were given a list from which to select responses.
- The highest proportion (54%) wished that they had learned to manage money. Twenty-seven per cent wished they had learned computer skills or programming and 23 per cent wished they had been taught how to look after their mental health.
- Respondents were asked about the skills and qualities which schools should develop in young people. The 4 most commonly chosen skills were personal qualities such as character and resilience (84%); gaining qualifications or certificates of achievement (72%); and skills and knowledge for a science or technology career (60%).
- Older people were more likely to prioritise skills for a career in science or technology. Those with a degree were significantly more likely to prioritise the development of personal qualities (92% compared with 73% for those with no qualifications).

Preparing young people for the current job market

- Most respondents felt that the current job market was more difficult than the one which they had encountered when they completed full-time education. Sixty-three per cent felt that it was more difficult to get a job now and just 11 per cent felt that it was easier. Women were more likely to perceive the current job market as more difficult (67% compared to 58% of men). There were also significant differences by level of qualification - 74 per cent of those with no qualifications felt that it was more difficult, compared with 54 per cent of those with a degree.
- Fifty-five per cent of respondents felt that young people were not well prepared for the job market on leaving school. Younger people were more likely to feel this way (70% of 18-24 year-olds compared to 64 per cent of 25-34 year-olds).
- Respondents were asked about which factors were most likely to help young people to be ready for work. Good basic skills (reading, writing and maths) were considered most important (24%), followed by necessary qualifications (22%) and work experience (16%).

Continued education and job security

- Respondents were asked how likely it was that they would need to learn new skills. Fifty-two per cent felt that it was very or quite likely that they would have to do so. Unsurprisingly the proportion decreased with age; just 41 per cent of those in the 55-64 age group felt that they would have to learn new skills.
- Only 17 per cent of respondents were worried about their job being replaced by automation or technology in the future.
- Respondents were asked how they would like to be taught, if they were to learn new skills. Fifty-eight per cent expressed a preference for a combination of face-to-face

The full document can be downloaded from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/attitudes-to-education-and-childrens-services>