

EDUCATION, TRAINING, SKILLS AND CAREERS

Introduction

The Girls' Attitudes Survey was launched by Girlguiding UK in 2009, at the start of our Centenary year. We aim to canvass the opinions of girls and young women throughout the UK, to find out about what matters in their lives and how they see the world today. This major survey, now in its third year, explores girls' views on a range of issues of topical interest, enabling us to discover what motivates and inhibits them, and the ways in which they respond to the pressures of everyday life.

This year's survey continues to build on findings from previous years, tracking changes that have occurred over time and questioning more deeply into the same topic areas, as well as asking about the impact of recent events. The survey goes beyond Girlguiding UK's membership to cover all girls and young women, in a comprehensive overview that can contribute to external as well as internal policy.

All the results from the 2011 survey can be found on our interactive Girls' Attitudes Survey website, www.girlguiding.org.uk/girlsattitudes. Visit the site to search the results by theme, region and age group, compare them with results from previous years, access spreadsheets of individual data sets and download PDF versions of our reports.

Research findings

What would make school better?

When asked what they don't like about school, many girls say that it is often repetitive and boring. We asked them to tell us what could be done to improve this.

One in three (35 per cent) wants school to be more fun, enjoyable and exciting. Others want more activities, games and clubs (14 per cent); more variation (11 per cent); and school to be more interesting and relevant (9 per cent). More specifically, 9 per cent (especially girls from ethnic minorities) want to spend more time outside, including lessons and school trips.

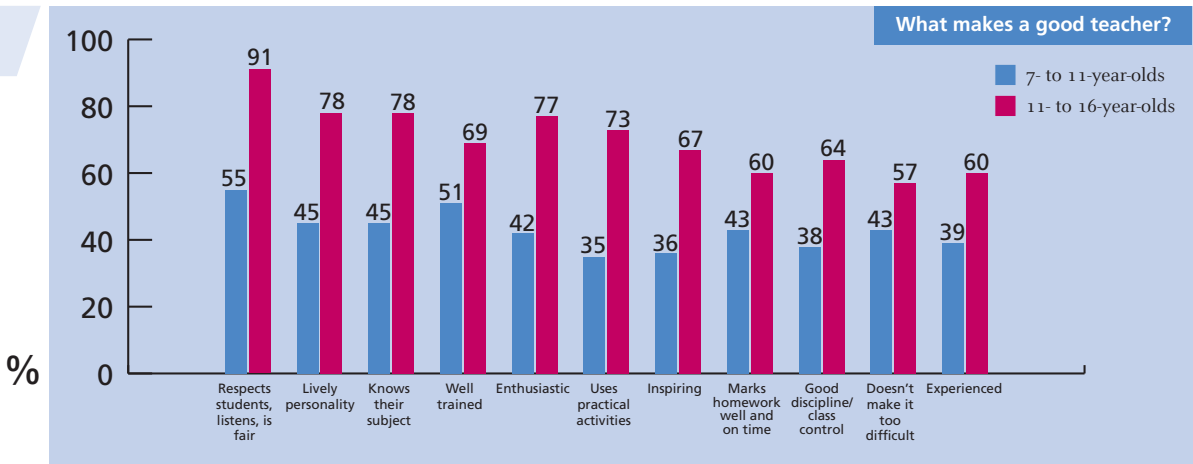
Just a small number of girls, mainly those at primary school, can see no need to change – 8 per cent like school and enjoy it as it is.

What makes a good teacher?

Girls appreciate teachers who respect their students, listen to them and are fair. Almost three quarters of those aged 7 to 16 chose this (73 per cent), rising to nine in ten among the older students (91 per cent of 11 to 16s).

Beyond this, girls think that teachers should know their subject (61 per cent) and be well trained (60 per cent), but they also need to have a lively personality (62 per cent) and be enthusiastic (59 per cent).





How long do you plan to stay on in education or training?

Among those aged 11 to 16, one in ten plans to leave education at age 16, and a further 30 per cent plan to do so at 18 (the proposed minimum leaving age from 2015 onwards). Just under half plan to continue in education until age 21 or above (48 per cent). This shows little change from a year ago.

The majority of those who have stayed on in education beyond age 16 plan to continue to age 21 or beyond. Girls from ethnic minorities are more likely to plan to stay on in education, reflecting a higher interest in the professions among this group.

Most of those who plan to leave education and training at 16 are doing so because this is what they want to do (47 per cent), they don't enjoy studying (44 per cent), they don't need to study further (33 per cent), or this is what they need to do for their job (27 per cent). One in six, 16 per cent, can't afford to study or needs a paid job, up from 11 per cent last year.

Among those who plan to leave education and training at age 18, motivations are similar. Two in five will leave because they want to (40 per cent), or because this is what they need for their job (38 per cent); others because they don't need to study further (28 per cent). For a minority, this is something that their school expects (16 per cent), or their parents expect (11 per cent). More than one in five say that they can't afford to study (22 per cent), up from just 8 per cent a year ago.

Those staying in education until age 21 are doing so because this is what is needed for their job (54 per cent) or will give them the highest qualification they need (39 per cent), or because they want to (36 per cent).

Among girls from ethnic minorities, almost one in five mentions parents' expectations (19 per cent), compared with just 7 per cent of white girls. Those from better-performing schools are twice as likely to do so (14 per cent compared with 7 per cent).

What is important to you when you are thinking about a career or job?

For girls and young women aged 11 to 21, two considerations stand out when thinking about their career or job: earning a good salary (important to 85 per cent), and having a job that is interesting and satisfying (78 per cent).

Career progression (54 per cent), a job that is flexible to fit in with a family (49 per cent), and one that makes a positive contribution (48 per cent), are important to

Just under half of 11- to 16-year-old girls plan to stay in education until age 21 or beyond.



around half, while others, particularly older girls, want a job that offers security (44 per cent) or is challenging (40 per cent).

Four in ten want a job that is local so that they can be near their family, partner or friends (40 per cent, up from 27 per cent last year), while slightly fewer want one that will let them travel or work abroad (35 per cent).

A third want to work with children or animals (34 per cent), particularly younger girls and those from rural areas.

What worries you about school?

Most girls (92 per cent) worry about some aspect of school. For those at secondary school, worries about exams (66 per cent) are followed by concern about getting a job when they finish education (62 per cent) and being able to afford to go to college or university (50 per cent).

The number of secondary school pupils who are worried about jobs has increased by almost half, from 44 per cent last year to 62 per cent this year, while concern about paying for college or university has risen from 30 per cent to 50 per cent of pupils. Girls from rural areas are the most concerned – 65 per cent mention this, compared with just 45 per cent of those from urban areas.

Having to sit exams or tests is the major concern across the school age range, with 52 per cent of girls aged 7 to 16 worried about this. Other widespread concerns are falling out with friends (44 per cent), being bullied (41 per cent), and teachers who are unfair (37 per cent). For those at primary school, the two greatest worries are being bullied (54 per cent) and falling out with friends (51 per cent), followed by concerns about exams or SATs (39 per cent) and going up to secondary school (38 per cent).

Higher education and careers

Girls feel strongly that everyone should be able to go to university (87 per cent of 11 to 21s agree), and that the increase in university fees is unfair (82 per cent).

Almost two in three girls think that going to university is a big financial risk (64 per cent), and that the increase in university fees will put them off going (61 per cent). However, they also believe that the money spent on higher education will be worth it because of the higher salary they can earn (58 per cent).

On the wider issue of career choice, the majority feel that they don't get enough advice about choosing the right GCSEs and A levels (56 per cent), although a significant minority (36 per cent) disagree.

On balance, girls don't support the view that too many young people go to university nowadays – just 32 per cent agree, while 53 per cent disagree. Views are also split about who should pay – 31 per cent agree that those who benefit from a university education should pay for it, but a slightly higher proportion, 41 per cent, disagree.

The argument that only those who go on to become higher earners will have to pay back their fees does not seem to have persuaded this important group.

Effect of the economic downturn on education plans

Two years ago, the effect of the economic downturn was to increase the number of girls who planned to stay on in education, with the shortage of jobs making it more worth their while to acquire further qualifications. This year, however, a growing number are deterred from staying on, uncertain about the cost and the longer-term benefit. The effect is most marked among 16- to 21-year-olds.

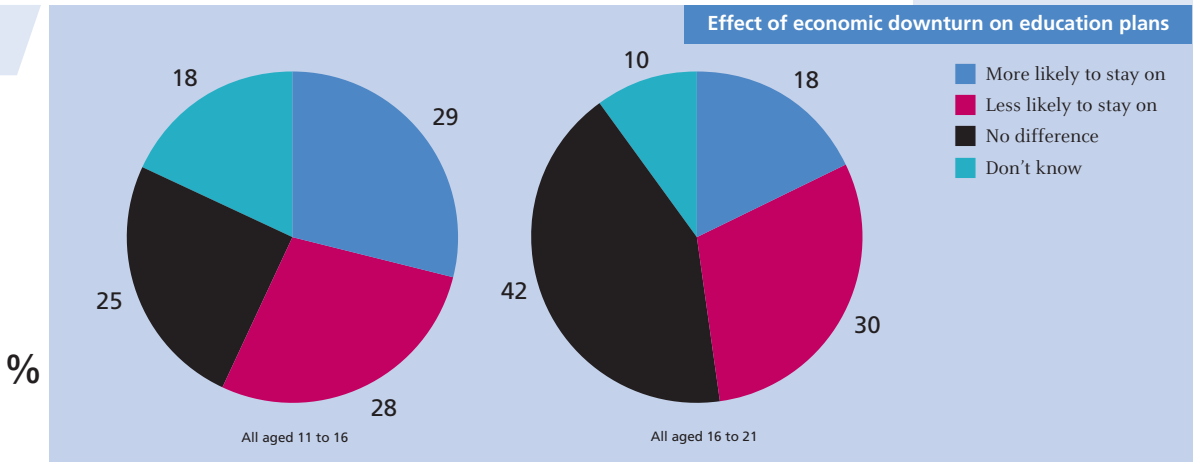
Almost all girls – 92 per cent – worry about school.

82 per cent of girls think the increase in university tuition fees is unfair.



Girls' Attitudes

Overall, 29 per cent of 11- to 21-year-olds say that the economic downturn has made them less likely to stay on in education, compared with 23 per cent who are more likely to stay on, and 34 per cent who feel it has made no difference. Two years ago, just 8 per cent were less likely to stay on, while almost one in three were more likely to do so (32 per cent), and 46 per cent said their decision was unaffected.



Career choices

Despite many years of campaigning for wider representation, careers often conform to gender stereotypes – the top career choice among girls in the 2009 survey was hairdresser or beautician, and few girls would consider a career in science or engineering. We asked girls in this year's survey why this is.

More than half of girls say that hairdressing is what girls are interested in (57 per cent), while they veer away from engineering because of a lack of interest (51 per cent) and of female role models (60 per cent). There is also a perception that not many girls or women do this kind of job (47 per cent), and that they don't know enough about it (43 per cent). By contrast, one in three thinks that hairdressing is popular because it's all girls know about (35 per cent), and because they know others who do it (32 per cent).

Almost half of girls think that it is easy to get a job in hairdressing or beauty (48 per cent) and 29 per cent think it's a nice place to work. By contrast, 53 per cent think science/engineering is too hard or complicated, 35 per cent say it would be difficult to get a job of this kind, and 22 per cent would be put off by the working environment.

Some (43 per cent) think that girls opt for hairdressing because some jobs are more for girls, and 27 per cent feel that engineering loses out because some jobs are more for boys. Younger girls (11 to 16) are particularly likely to refer to girls' or boys' jobs, and girls' interest, or lack of, in certain areas. Three in ten girls (30 per cent) think that worries about sexism in the workplace put girls off a career in science or engineering.

Conclusions

Recent changes in education funding have had a major impact on girls' attitudes to higher education and careers. Concern about the cost of college or university, and being able to find a job, is placing increasing pressure on them at secondary school.

School plays an important part in girls' lives; for younger girls, it is where they make friends and learn about forming relationships. Bullying and falling out with friends are the two greatest worries at this age. Older girls worry about exams, getting a job, and being able to afford college or university.



Girls' Attitudes

The planned introduction of higher fees has provoked strong emotions. Girls feel strongly that everyone should have the opportunity to go to university, and that the increase in fees is unfair. While many believe that the expense will be worth it because of the higher salary they can earn, they still see this as a big financial risk, and more than half say that they are put off going as a result.

When it comes to preparing for a career, many girls feel that they are not getting enough advice about choosing the right GCSEs and A levels. The recent debate about the value which universities put on 'new' as opposed to traditional subjects makes this a very relevant concern. With the current pressures on HE places, good advice and guidance become increasingly important.

The main things that girls look for from a career are a good salary and a job that is interesting and satisfying. They are also concerned about career progression, having a job that is flexible to fit in with a family, and making a positive contribution. Job security is of lower importance – an indication that young people no longer expect to stay in the same job for a long time.

The majority of girls still hold very traditional views about career choices. They believe that girls choose to be hairdressers or beauticians because this is what they are most interested in, it is easy to get a job of this kind, and some jobs are more for girls. They reject engineering because there are no female role models, it is seen as too hard and complicated, and is just not interesting. One in three girls of secondary age thinks that some jobs are more for boys – which may deter them from taking the appropriate GCSEs and A levels to qualify for this career path.

Teachers clearly have an important role in broadening girls' horizons and encouraging them to reach their full potential. Most critical is that they respect and listen to their students, and are fair. A lively personality, enthusiasm and knowledge of their subject, together with good training, are also important.

The way forward

The action points listed below were suggested by Girlguiding UK's Guiding Advocates, a panel of young women aged between 15 and 24, who reviewed this year's survey findings. They carried out similar reviews of the 2009 and 2010 surveys, and helped to develop this year's questions.

- The increase in tuition fees is placing more pressure on girls at a younger age and causing them to view higher education as a financial risk, albeit one many are willing to take. This change in attitudes underlines the need for easily available and authoritative advice on universities and student finance.
- With half of all girls put off higher education by the increase in tuition fees, urgent action is needed to ensure that university is an option for all and not restricted to those who are able to take a financial risk.
- More and better work experience placements are needed to give girls the opportunity to begin to decide on careers, and to make them aware of career paths that they might not have considered. The government's proposed all-age career service must be able to meet the specific needs of young people and encourage girls to think beyond stereotypically female careers.
- Doing an apprenticeship, or joining a company's training scheme, needs to be given greater value by schools and wider society so that young women do not feel forced into attending university if it is not the right choice for them.
- Those assessing teachers' performance or involved in recruiting new teachers should be aware of the importance girls place on listening to and respecting students and being fair.
- Pupils could play a greater role in improving standards in their schools. Enabling them to give constructive feedback would not only give the school a clearer picture of what teaching methods pupils respond to best, but would also enable young people to take more responsibility for the school community.

Three out of ten girls think that worries about sexism in the workplace put girls off science and engineering careers.



'Let girls have more fun and games. Let them make their own choices about what they want to do.'
(8-year-old)

Methodology

Some 1,200 girls and young women aged between 7 and 21 took part in the 2011 Girls' Attitudes Survey. They were asked about their views on key social, political and economic issues, following on from previous Girls' Attitudes Surveys carried out in 2009 and 2010.

The survey covers five topic areas, originally proposed by girls within the guiding movement as areas that are important and interesting. Questions were designed to follow up views identified in the previous surveys, and explore these in greater depth.

- Education, training, skills and careers
- The environment and world events
- Family and relationships
- Health and well-being
- Society, culture and community

A panel of young women from within guiding works with the project team to develop the survey each year, and to comment on the findings. This year we also consulted pre-teen guiding members, who gave us valuable insights. The research itself represents all girls and young women across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and is not restricted to those involved in guiding.

The majority of interviews were completed online, with 7- to 16-year-olds doing this in school, while the older age group were interviewed via an online panel. Additional face-to-face interviews were carried out with young women who were not in education, employment, or training, to ensure that this potentially marginalised group was fully represented.

The questionnaire was adapted to be suitable for different age groups: 7 to 11, 11 to 16 and 16 to 21 years. Core questions were asked across the full age range, so that changes in attitudes as girls get older can be tracked.

Fieldwork took place during March and April 2011.

COMPARISONS: 2009, 2010 AND 2011

- When asked about their motivations for leaving education, this year 15 per cent refer to affordability, up from 10 per cent last year.
- This year, 62 per cent of secondary school pupils are worried about jobs, up from 44 per cent last year, while concern about paying for college or university has risen from 30 per cent to 50 per cent.
- Three in ten 11- to 21-year-olds (29 per cent) say that the economic downturn has made them less likely to stay on in education, compared with just 8 per cent two years ago.

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