Learning Lessons

Young People's Views on Poverty and Education in Scotland

Survey Results

SCYP
Scotland's Commissioner for Children & Young People

Save the Children
INTRODUCTION
Learning Lessons is a joint study by Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People and Save the Children. The project aimed to develop a better understanding of young people's views on how poverty impacts on their education in Scotland and what additional support is required to support young people living in poverty to reach their full potential and achieve at school.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used to explore young people's views. The main report, Learning Lessons (2014) is published separately and provides the main findings from the focus groups and survey.  

As part of this study, a self-complete survey was designed for completion by young people in schools across Scotland. The survey was carried out in autumn 2013.

The following report presents summary findings from this survey. 

READING THIS REPORT
Valid responses
A total of 885 surveys were returned. However, not all participants answered all questions. These blank responses have been excluded from the baseline totals for relevant questions.

Similarly, some participants did not answer questions within the instructions. For example, a question may have specified to ‘tick one box’ and the participant has selected multiple boxes, or the instruction may have been ‘tick your top 5’ and the participant has selected six or more. For the purposes of this report, these responses have also been excluded from the baseline totals for relevant questions.

1 Learning Lessons: Young people’s views on Poverty and Education (2014) (Save the Children and Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People)
2 Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People and Save the Children would like to thank Adelle Gardiner (Freelance Research and Evaluation) for undertaking the analysis of the survey returns and the compilation of this report.
ABOUT THE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

A total of 885 completed surveys were returned.

Location

Twelve schools across six local authorities took part in the survey:

- 3 schools from Edinburgh City;
- 2 schools from Aberdeen City, Fife, Glasgow, and West Dunbartonshire; and
- 1 school from North Ayrshire.

Schools from Edinburgh and Fife each contributed nearly one quarter of the total number of returns (see figure 1).

Year group

Each participating school had three classes complete a survey: an S1 class, an S3 class and an S5 class. Each year group returned a similar number of completed surveys (see figure 2).
Age
Participants were between ages 11 and 18 years. 2% of participants did not indicate their age.

Figure 3: Percentage of survey returns by participant age [% of 885]

Gender
Similar numbers of surveys were returned from male and female participants (see figure 4). 2% of participants did not indicate their gender. A similar gender distribution is found within the survey returns for each year group.

Figure 4: Percentage of survey returns by gender [% of 885]
Parental employment

Participants were asked to indicate whether or not their parents or carers had paid jobs. Nearly half (48%) of all participants indicated that both of their parents or carers were in paid employment. One third (34%) of participants indicated that one of their parents or carers was in paid employment (see figure 5).

It should be noted that care should be taken in the interpretation of responses to this question. Margin notes by participants indicate that some may have selected ‘one parent or carer’ if they live in a single parent household. Participants also noted reasons for one or both parents not being in paid employment including further education and caring responsibilities.
1. **POVERTY IN THE FAMILY**

1.1 **Being successful in life**

Question 2 asked ‘What are the five most important things you think children and young people need to be successful in life?’ Participants could select their five responses from 10 listed options.

For over 80% of participants, a home, an education, food and drink, and a supportive family were the factors most important for success (see figure 6). ‘Somewhere quiet to study’ was deemed the least important factor for success with only 6% of participants including this in their top five.

![Figure 6: Participant selection of the five most important things they think children and young people need to be successful in life [% of 851]](image-url)
There was little variation in this pattern by gender. Ranking the responses from each gender shows that among male participants ‘money’ was more important than ‘warmth’, whereas the converse was true among female participants (see figure 7).

There were some variations in the responses of participants in different year groups. Although still one of the top responses, fewer S1 participants included

Figure 7: Participant selection of the five most important things they think children and young people need to be successful in life, by gender [Male responses % of 404; Female responses % of 432]
‘an education’ in their top five compared to older participants. A ranking of S1 responses places ‘an education’ third behind ‘a home’ and ‘food and drink’ (see figure 8).

More S5 participants considered ‘friends’ to be important to success (32%), than did S3 (20%) and S1 (22%) participants.

![Figure 8: Participant selection of the five most important things they think children and young people need to be successful in life, by year group [S1 % of 290; S3 % of 279; S5 % of 282]](image-url)
1.2 Chances of success

Question 3a asked, ‘What are the chances of a young person being successful in life if they are brought up in a family that doesn’t have a lot of money?’ Participants could select one of five listed options.

Of the 869 valid responses, more than half (55%) believed a young person had the same chance of being successful in life if they are brought up in a family that doesn’t have a lot of money. A third (33%) believed they would have ‘some chance’.

![Pie chart](image)

Figure 9: Response to ‘what are the chances of a young person being successful in life if they are brought up in a family that doesn't have a lot of money?’ [% of 869]

There was no significant variation in responses from male and female participants.

S5 participants were slightly more optimistic about a young person’s chance of success if they are brought up in a family that doesn’t have a lot of money. Over 60% of S5 participants believed such young people had ‘the same chance’ compared to 50% of S1 participants. 10% of S5 participants believed such young people had ‘every chance’. Just 3% of S3 participants believed this (see figure 10).
Figure 10: Response to ‘what are the chances of a young person being successful in life if they are brought up in a family that doesn’t have a lot of money?’ by year group [S1 % of 298; S3 % of 286; S5 % of 285]
2. POVERTY AND SCHOOL

2.1 Impact of poverty on schooling

Question 4 listed six factors which could impact on a young person's education:

- How well they do at school
- How many school trips they can go on
- Taking part in after school activities like sports or clubs
- The help they get at home with their studies
- The resources they have at home (e.g. computer, books)
- Whether they have a quiet place to study at home

Participants were asked whether they thought growing up in a family that doesn't have a lot of money made a difference to each of these.

**How well they do at school**

There were 877 valid responses to this question. Of these participants, two-thirds (63%) thought that growing up in a family that doesn't have a lot of money **does not** make a difference to how well a young person does at school.

![Figure 11: Does growing up without a lot of money make a difference to how well a young person does at school [% of 877]](image)

There was no significant variation in responses from male and female participants. The proportion of participants who thought it **does not** make a difference increased with each year group.
How many school trips they can go on

Nearly three quarters (71%) of participants thought growing up in a family without a lot of money does make a difference to how many school trips they can go on.

There was no significant variation in responses from male and female participants. The proportion of participants who thought it does make a difference increased with each year group.
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Figure 14: Responses to question ‘If a young person grows up in a family that doesn’t have a lot of money, do you think it makes a difference to how many school trips they can go on?’ by year group [S1 % of 301; S3 % of 288; S5 % of 284]

**Taking part in after school activities like sports or clubs**

Over half of participants thought that growing up in a family without a lot of money **does not** make a difference to taking part in after school activities like sports or clubs. Over one quarter (27%) of participants thought that it **does** make a difference.

Figure 15: Responses to question ‘If a young person grows up in a family that doesn't have a lot of money, do you think it makes a difference to taking part in after school activities like sports or clubs?’ [% of 870]

There was no significant variation in responses from male and female participants. The proportion of participants who thought it **does not** make a difference increased gradually with each year group. 51% of S1 participants thought it **does not** make a difference, compared to 59% of S3 participants, and 65% of S5 participants.

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The help they get at home with their studies

Around one third (32%) of participants thought growing up in a family without a lot of money does make a difference to the help they get at home with their studies. Around half (49%) thought that it does not make a difference.

There was no significant variation in responses from male and female participants.

A greater proportion of S5 participants believed it does not make a difference, than did the younger year groups (see figure 18).
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The resources they have at home (e.g. computer, books)
An overwhelming 81% of participants thought growing up in a family without a lot of money does make a difference to the resources a young person has at home.

![Pie chart showing 81% Yes, 10% No, and 9% Don’t know](image)

Figure 18: Responses to question ‘If a young person grows up in a family that doesn’t have a lot of money, do you think it makes a difference to the resources they have at home (e.g. computer, books)?’ [% of 871]

There was no significant variation in responses from male and female participants. There was also no significant variation in responses from the different year groups, although there was a slight increase in participants who thought it does make a difference: 75% of S1 participants thought it does make a difference, compared to 83% of S3 participants and 86% of S5 participants.

Whether they have a quiet place to study at home
There was greater uncertainty around whether growing up in a family without a lot of money makes a difference to whether a young person has a quiet place to study at home. Over a quarter of participants responded ‘Don’t know’. Almost half of participants thought that it does not make a difference.

![Pie chart showing 46% No, 29% Yes, and 25% Don’t know](image)

Figure 19: Responses to question ‘If a young person grows up in a family that doesn’t have a lot of money, do you think it makes a difference to whether they have a quiet place to study at home?’ [% of 872]
There was no significant variation in responses from male and female participants. However, a greater proportion of S5 participants thought that it does not make a difference, compared to the younger year groups (see figure 20).

![Figure 20: Responses to question 'If a young person grows up in a family that doesn't have a lot of money, do you think it makes a difference to whether they have a quiet place to study at home?', by year group. [S1 % of 297; S3 % of 290; S5 % of 285]](image)

### 2.2 A way out of poverty

Question 5 asked ‘Do you think school and education can give young people a way out of poverty?’

There were 876 valid responses to this question. Of these, three quarters responded ‘Yes, school and education can give young people a way out of poverty.’

![Figure 21: Response to ‘do you think school and education can give young people a way out of poverty?’ [876]](image)
A slightly higher proportion of male participants answered ‘yes’ to this question than did the female participants (Male=80%, Female=70%).

The proportion of participants who answered ‘yes’ increased with each year group.

![Bar chart showing response to 'do you think school and education can give young people a way out of poverty?' by year group.]

Figure 22: Response to ‘do you think school and education can give young people a way out of poverty?’ by year group [S1 % of 302; S3 % of 291; S5 % of 283]

### 2.3 Helping young people from poorer families

Question 6 asked ‘If schools had the money to help young people from poorer families do well, what would you tell them to spend it on?’ Participants could select their top five from a list of 10 options.

Ranking the responses shows that the most selected options were: specialist teachers (e.g. guidance, pastoral, EAL support); more Maths and English tutoring in school; improving feedback between teachers and pupils; and more one to one tuition (see Figure 23).
Figure 23: Responses to ‘If schools had the money to help young people from poorer families do well, what would you tell them to spend it on?’ [% of 851]

A breakdown of responses by gender shows that a higher proportion of female participants included ‘improving feedback between teachers and pupils’ in their top 5, compared to male participants (female=67%, male=56%).

‘More Maths and English tutoring in school’ appears to be more important to male participants, with 67% including this in their top 5 compared to 59% of female participants. Ranking responses shows that ‘more Maths and English tutoring in school’ is the top response from male participants, and fourth on the ranking of responses from female participants (figure 24).
Smaller class sizes became progressively more important with each year group. While 21% of S1 students included this in their top five, 31% of S3 students included it, and 41% of S5 students included it. More one to one tuition was significantly more important to S5 students than to younger students. Less than half (46%) of S1 students included this in their top five, compared to 70% of S5 students.
Figure 25: Responses to ‘If schools had the money to help young people from poorer families do well, what would you tell them to spend it on?’, by year group [S1 % of 290, S3 % of 279, S5 % of 282]
3. **POVERTY AND THE FUTURE**

3.1 **Money and future hopes**

Question 7 asked ‘Do you think not having much money affects young people's hopes for the future?’

Participants were split, with a similar proportion responding ‘yes’ and ‘no’ (see figure 26).

![Figure 26](image)

**Figure 26: response to ‘Do you think not having much money affects young people’s hopes for the future?’ [% of 876]**

There was no significant variation in responses from male and female participants. There was also no significant variation in responses from S1, S3, and S5 participant groups.

3.2 **Money and further study**

Question 8 asked ‘Do you think not having much money affects whether young people go on to further study or training after leaving school?’

There were 874 valid responses to this question. Of these, half (48%) responded ‘yes’. Slightly more than a quarter (29%) did not think having much money affects whether young people go on to further study or training after leaving school.

![Figure 27](image)

**Figure 27: Response to ‘do you think not having much money affects whether young people go on to further study or training after leaving school?’ [% of 874]**
There was no significant variation in responses from male and female participants. There was also no significant variation in responses from S1, S3, and S5 participant groups.

Question 9 asked those who answered ‘yes’ to question 8 to select three reasons why they think this. Participants could select their top three reasons from eight listed options.

There were 412 valid responses to this question.

By a significant margin, the top reason selected was ‘young people can't afford the things they need’ (see figure 28).

![Figure 28: Response to ‘if you answered yes to 8 above, could you please give three reasons why you think this is?’ [% of 412]](image)

There was no significant variation in responses by male and female participants.
Responses from different year groups were very similar. A greater proportion of S3 and S5 participants included ‘they want to get a job straight away after school’ in their top 3 than did the S1 participants (S1=50%, S3=59%, S5=62%).

3.3  Advice about leaving school

Question 10 asked ‘Have you been offered any help or advice about what you want to do after leaving school?’

There were 871 valid responses to this question. Of these, two-thirds (67%) had been offered help or advice about what to do after leaving school. One third (33%) had not been given any help or advice.

![Figure 29: Percentage of participants who had been offered any help or advice about what they want to do after leaving school [% of 871]](image)

There was no significant difference in the responses of male and female participants. A higher proportion of S5 participants indicated they had been offered help and advice, than had S1 and S3 participants (S1=65%, S3=61%, S5=78%).

3.4  Getting a job in Scotland

Question 11 asked ‘How easy do you think it is for young people leaving school to get a job in your area of Scotland?’

Nearly two fifths of participants (37%) responded ‘Okay’. Close to half (46%) thought it was ‘very hard’ (see figure 30).
There were no significant differences between responses from male and female participants and there were no significant differences between responses from each year group.

### 3.5 Plans after leaving school

Question 12 asked participants to indicate what they wanted to do in the first two years after they leave school. Participants could select their top two options from a list of eight.

The options selected most often included: ‘Go to university’, ‘go to college’ and ‘get a job’ (see figure 31).
A greater proportion of female participants included ‘go to university’ in their top two (female=57%; male=47%).

A significantly higher proportion of male participants included ‘get an apprenticeship’ in their top two, compared to female participants (male=19%, female=6%). When male participant responses are ranked ‘get an apprenticeship’ is fourth, compared to seventh in the ranking of female participant responses.
Figure 32: Response to ‘thinking about the first two years after you leave school, what do you want to do’, by gender [Male % of 407; Female % of 434]

Fewer S5 and S3 participants included ‘go to university’ in their top two, than did S1 participants (S1=59%, S3=49%, S5=49%).

More S5 and S3 participants included ‘Get an apprenticeship’ than did S1 participants (S1=6%, S3=16%, S5=16%).
Figure 33: Response to ‘thinking about the first two years after you leave school, what do you want to do?’ by year group [S1 % of 289, S3 % of 281, S5 % of 277]
4. COMMENTS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

As well as the quantitative results presented above, the survey participants also had the opportunity to answer a number of qualitative questions about their understanding of poverty, their chances of success, achieving their future plans and any barriers to these plans.

4.1 Understanding poverty

Participants were asked, “If someone says, a family is living in poverty, what does this mean to you?” They expressed a range of views with the top themes describing poverty as having little or no money, and being unable to afford essential needs:

- **A poor family living with a struggle for money, not the right diet for the family and struggling with food and health, not getting educations** (Female, S1)
- **When someone doesn’t get their tea or lunch everyday. If you don’t have a proper coat or clothes** (Male, S3)
- **A family that is struggling** (Female, S3)

Many of these responses highlighted the family's living conditions:

- Having no home or living on the streets
- Living in a poor or bad neighbourhood
- Living in unclean, unsafe or generally poor conditions
- Being unable to pay rent or household bills
- Having very limited or no food and water
- Being unable to afford warmth or enough clothing

Other responses about what ‘a family living in poverty’ meant to young people included:

- The family being unable to afford luxury possessions or activities
- How hearing about a family in poverty made the respondent feel
- The family being in poor health or at risk of poor health
- The family being in need of help
- Reference to unemployment or underemployment
- The family having less education or qualifications
- The family generally having less compared to other families
- The family or children in the family having less support or care

Note: All comments in this section are presented as supplied, without editing.
4.2 Understanding chances of success

Participants were asked to indicate ‘the chances of a young person being successful in life if they are brought up in a family that doesn't have a lot of money’. Most participants (89%) then explained why they had answered the way they did.\(^4\)

The responses were wide-ranging. Some who thought there was ‘no chance’ of being successful thought it was down to a young person’s lack of money or resources or a presumed lack of education. Others who were more optimistic and thought there was ‘Some chance of being successful’ tended to qualify their responses. They thought that although there may be some chance of success, the young person would have less chance than others because of their lack of money or resources:

*They won’t have much chance because you need money to get a brilliant education* (Male, S1)

Others believed the young person's home life or living situation may negatively influence their chances of success:

*If they don't have money then although the family may be nice, the(y) will probably not be able to fund the resources they need. If because of this they live in a run-down area it is unlikely they will manage to “break free” of their stereotype* (Male, S5)

However, these respondents did believe there was ‘some chance’ for success. Reasons provided for why they thought there was ‘some chance’ included hard work and a positive attitude and that a young person would still have the same education as others,

*Because they can still go to a council run school and get the same education as everyone else attending school* (Female, S3)

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\(^4\) There was no significant variation between the themes raised by male and female respondents. However there was some variation in how often particular themes were raised within each year group.
Just over half of participants thought that a young person would have 'the same chance of being successful as anyone else'. The most prominent reasons for this included:

- A belief that it is a young person's own positive behaviour or attitude that influences success
- That the young person could access the same education as others and therefore have the same chance of success
- A belief that all people are the same and therefore have the same chance of success
- A belief that the amount of money someone has is not an important factor in whether or not that person will be successful

Similar reasons emerged from those who gave the most positive responses ('loads of chance' and 'every chance').

*I think this because I live in poverty and I do better in school than my wealthy friends* (Female, S3)

*Even children who are in poverty have some level of intelligence* (Female, S1)

*Because I know many famous people that were poor then became successful* (Female, S1)

Among different year groups there was some variation in how often particular themes were raised:

- General statements including a belief that everyone is the same, and that there is always some chance, were made more often by S1 respondents than by the older respondents
- Consistent with the quantitative findings, younger respondents were responsible for more of the negative comments than were the S5 respondents. In particular, a higher proportion of S1 and S3 respondents thought not having a lot of money would have a negative impact on the young person's chances of success, and that the young person might not have as good an education as others
- Conversely, more of the older respondents, and particularly the S5 respondents, thought it was a young person's positive behaviour or attitude that would influence success, and that success was possible because everyone had access to the same education. S5 respondents also contributed more comments on how money is not important for success.
4.3 Achieving future plans

Having indicated what they want to do in the first two years after leaving school, participants were asked, ‘What do you think will help you to achieve this?’

*I think the right amount of emotional support followed by help from teachers, family etc would help me achieve this* (Female, S3)

Within these responses five themes were prominent:

**Getting an education and the quality of this education:**

*Good teaching for good exam results* (Male, S3)

*Support from teachers and family, a good education, working hard* (Female, S5)

*Get a good education and listen in class* (Male, S1)

**The young person’s grades and performance at school:**

*By doing well in school, study for my exams and get the right qualifications* (Female, S5)

*Getting good grades and trying hard in school, more one to one teaching in my school to help me better understand my work* (Female, S3)

*Choose what job you want to do and do well on all the lesson go to college/uni and do some volunteering so you get trusted* (Female, S1)

**The young person’s own behaviour or attitude:**

*A positive outlook on the future and the drive to make sure you get where you want to be* (Male, S5)

*Practice football, eat healthy, keep fit, listen to tony, don’t play xbox* (Male, S1)

*I think working hard and having hope and support will help me achieve this* (Female, S3)

**The support they receive:**

*Help from teachers and from home to guide me to the right direction* (Female, S5)

*I think we need support by people around you as well as setting myself goals* (Female, S3)

*Hard work, perseverance, supportive family, prayer and faith* (Male, S5)
**Planning for the future:**

*Working hard in school to get the qualifications I need and making sure I have enough life experience to take me through my gap year successfully* (Female, S5)

*What I think will help me achieve this is to continue to have a better education and also look into my area of interests and see what best suits me* (Male, S5)

*Motivation from teachers and peers. Paying attention in classes and knowing what you need to do to get where you want to be in the future.* (Female, S3)

**Other suggestions**

What young people said might help them to achieve their plans included:

- Access to money and other resources; and
- Aspects of their education such as the curriculum and the learning environment.

### 4.4 Barriers to future plans

Having indicated what they want to do in the first two years after leaving school, participants were asked, ‘What could stand in your way?’

*The things that could stand in my way would be illness, bullies and fears* (Female, S3)

*The thing that would stand in my way is the money and if my grade's aren't good enough* (Male, S3)

Respondents described a variety of potential barriers to them achieving their plans, however five broad themes were prominent:

**The young person’s access to resources:**

*Money - just commuting to school/uni/work takes up a sizeable chunk of my money* (Male, S5)

*The learning difficulties eg. hard word(s), things you can’t do. Money problems can't afford to go to uni* (Male, S1)

*Arguments within your group of friends or family, not enough money or resources, low confidence* (Male, S3)
The young person’s grades or performance at school:

Neither receiving the grades I want and the fact that there is absolutely nothing in my city for practice to what I want to do in the future. The closest place is London (Female, S5)

Not studying and having someone ill at home so you have to look after them (Female S1)

Getting distracted, talking too much in class and being unconstructive. So it holds me back in doing well in school (Female S3)

The young person’s own attitude or behaviour:

Myself because I’m the only one who can make myself get a job and I have to focus on my work and no one else (Male, S3)

Illness or disability or bad grades or having a criminal record or bad attendance at school and having a bad attitude (Female, S3)

Not sticking in school, being lazy, not trying my hardest (Female, S1)

Other people:

Those people that constantly put you down, make you feel worthless and feel that you can’t achieve what you want to in life (Female, S5)

People forcing you to smoke, drink alcohol and join gangs (Male, S1)

Not being able to concentrate, maybe being bullied but I’m not being bullied right now, going out instead of studying or LIFE (Female, S1)

Access to opportunities:

No job vacancies; not having enough money to get to and from either a job or college (Female, S5)

If there’s no jobs. If the Government don’t try hard enough to get people into jobs (Female, S3)

Hundreds of other people trying to get into the same course or job (Male, S5)

Other barriers

Other potential barriers mentioned by respondents included:

- The quality of their education and not getting the qualifications or further education they need
- Their health
- Their learning difficulties
- Hobbies and similar distractions
- Getting a job
**Variation in responses by gender**

Male and female respondents mentioned the same types and variety of potential barriers to achieving their plans.

There were only slight differences between the two sets of responses:

- Among female respondents, comments about their own grades or performance as a barrier were slightly more prominent than among male respondents.
- Within the theme ‘Access to opportunities’, female respondents tended to talk about the lack of jobs or university places whereas male respondents tended to talk about having to compete against people who may be better qualified.

**Variation in responses by year group**

Respondents from each of the three year groups mentioned the same types and variety of potential barriers to achieving their plans. However there appeared to be slight differences in the prominence of responses within each year group:

- Comments about their own grades or performance as a barrier increased in prominence with each year group.
- Comments about access to opportunities as a barrier were more prominent among the S5 year group.
- The S1 year group tended to identify friends or classmates as a potential barrier more than the other year groups. The prominence of this response appeared to decrease with each year group.

**5. FINAL COMMENT**

The survey results have highlighted a wide range of views which young people hold about the impact of poverty on education. They have also provided young people's perspectives on what this means to them and the likely impact on their doing well at school and how it might affect their future plans.