

Answers from 59 schools involved nearly 11,000 Year 8 and Year 10 pupils. Drugs education scores best of all topics in both year groups.

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What do young people think of PSHE?

Some recent results from SHEU surveys

Version 21 of the secondary Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire saw the introduction of a new set of questions about school lessons.

R13 How useful have you found school lessons about the following?

- a HIV/AIDS
 - b Puberty and growing up
 - c Other sex education
 - d Education about illegal drugs
 - e Other health education
 - f Careers
 - g The environment
- 0 = Can't remember any
1 = Not at all useful
2 = Some use
3 = Quite useful
4 = Very useful

The answers from 59 schools whose pupils completed the questionnaire during the Spring and Summer of 2000.

In the Schools Health Education Unit (SHEU) we have always been rather bashful about asking questions of this type ourselves, although we hope that schools do solicit feedback about courses from their pupils.

The sample

We have recently had a look at the answers from 59 schools whose pupils completed the questionnaire during the Spring and Summer of 2000. The largest areas surveyed in this period were: Camden & Islington, Cumbria, Cornwall, Gloucester, Kingston & Richmond, North Staffs, Nottingham, Portsmouth Sandwell, and Teesside.

There were 5441 pupils in Year 8 and 5330 pupils in Year 10, with about even numbers of males and females in each.

Table 1 shows the proportion of pupils who report remembering any lessons on these topics at all:

Topic	%	Y8	Y10
HIV/AIDS		36	66
Puberty and growing up		89	92
Other sex education		88	92
Education about illegal drugs		83	92
Other health education		83	86
Careers		61	93
The environment		80	74

Table 1. Percentage of pupils who remember lessons

A convenient way of summarising the evaluative data is to look at the proportion who found their lessons useful - that is, "quite useful" or "very useful".

Useful lessons?

Now, if we see that schools save up their careers HIV/AIDS education for later years, it's not fair to take these figures out of all those answering the question; rather, we should report the proportion out of all those that give a rating of usefulness, excluding only those who cannot remember.

The proportion of Year 8 and Year 10 pupils, who remember any lessons on the list saying that they found them 'quite useful' or 'very useful' can be seen in Table 2.

The decision to combine males and females

in this table may be justified, because the responses of the males and females are more

Topic	%	Y8	Y10
HIV/AIDS		37	51
Puberty and growing up		58	47
Other sex education		55	51
Education about illegal drugs		67	60
Other health education		58	44
Careers		50	64
The environment		52	36

Table 2. Percentage of those pupils who remember any lessons, who found them 'quite useful' or 'very useful'.

similar than they are different.

For some items like puberty and drugs education, Year 8 pupils are more positive; others, like HIV and careers, are rated better by Year 10 students. Drugs education scores best of all topics in both year groups. In 'Young People and Illegal Drugs in 2000', we reported how young people in Year 10 are much more likely now than 10 years ago to have clear views about drugs, and for most drugs, they think the drugs are 'always unsafe'. (The exception to this trend is cannabis.) So there is good news here about schools drug education.

The highest ratings are in the 60-70% range, while the lowest are between 30 and 40%.

In all fairness, 'usefulness' is probably a difficult judgement to make for pupils, who may not have had a chance to reflect on their education in the context of a real-life decision. If we asked if their lessons were 'interesting' or 'informative' we might get higher scores.

If we pull in the next rating category, the rather non-committal 'some use', then 70% is the lowest score we see, and some topics start to score 90% (Table 3).

Topic	%	Y8	Y10
HIV/AIDS		69	85
Puberty and growing up		90	88
Other sex education		88	86
Education about illegal drugs		90	90
Other health education		90	86
Careers		81	89
The environment		86	75

Table 3. Percentage of pupils who found lessons 'some use', 'quite useful' or 'very useful'.

The range seen among pupil ratings between schools is great. For example, for the first item in the list, HIV/AIDS, we find a couple of schools where 100% of the Year 10 pupils think their school lessons on this topic were at least some use, while in other schools less than half the pupils evaluate their lessons as any use at all.

Conclusion

Most pupils are positive about most of the lessons that they have had about most of the topics on the lists, considering them at least 'quite useful'. There is some hesitation among Year 10s about the usefulness of lessons about 'the environment', 'puberty' and 'other health education', while 'drugs education', is working the best.