

PRESS RELEASE

The *Young People into 2022* report

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We have just published *Young People into 2022*, which presents figures from a sample of **nearly 150,000** young people (*149,090*) completing surveys in 2020 and 2021. This report is the 35<sup>th</sup> in a series begun in 1987. The full report may be obtained in PDF format by [application to SHEU](#).

This is the first report we have produced in this series which includes figures from more than one calendar year, which we did because of the impact of *coronavirus* on schools (and ourselves!).

Some of the latest figures are different from those we last published in 2019, but not all the differences are new – it's better to describe them as continuations of trends that we have seen going on for some time. And some might be meaningless 'wobbles' in the data set.

1. New or sharper turn:

*decline going to the dentist in the last year* (p.17)  
*decline in being bullied at school* (p.28)  
*decline in experimentation with vape products* (p.58)  
*decline in being offered and trying cannabis* (p.59-60)  
*decline in enjoying school lessons* (p.76)  
*decline in intentions to stay in full-time education* (p.77)  
*decline in awareness of free condoms* (p.94)  
*increase in thinking school cares if they are happy* (p.96)

2. Continuation of existing trend:

*decline scoring high for self-esteem* (p.81)  
*increase missing lunch* (p.3)  
*decline in tried smoking* (p.54)

3. No change 2019-2020/21:

*wellbeing scores* (p.82) and *resilience scores* (p.83)

Angela Balding, Surveys Manager at SHEU, comments:

*"It's been a peculiar couple of years for ourselves and for everyone involved with education. Nonetheless, we can see lots of results showing young people getting through their lives with success, and not taking unnecessary risks.*

*"However, a minority of young people do give us concern, either because of poor emotional wellbeing or risky behaviour or both. We can see plenty of experimentation with vapes by non-smokers (which is new) and a further fall in the **self-esteem scores** of the older females in secondary schools (p.81).*

*"If a young person meets one criterion for concern, they are more likely to meet other such criteria; risk and poor wellbeing are not evenly distributed. For example, on page 61 we show a connection between lower **satisfaction with life** and increased likelihood of **experimentation with drugs**.*

*As well as these many connections between individual behaviours, we can show that social and economic background factors may have a significant influence on young people's wellbeing and lifestyle. **Minority ethnicity, being LGBT and having a disability** are all associated with **worse outcomes** in this report. "*

Dr. David Regis, Research Manager at SHEU, comments:

*"**Don't blame COVID for all of children's poor wellbeing.** It is hard to disentangle the impact of coronavirus lockdowns and restrictions from other effects. There has been much talk in the press about a 'mental health crisis' among young people, for example, but we do not see a crisis in our figures and we do not attribute any declines in young people's emotional health and wellbeing exclusively to the pandemic and its consequences. For example, **a fall in the oldest females' esteem scores is of concern**, but these scores were in decline long before anyone had heard of COVID-19 and may continue to decline after we have learned to live with it. (There may well be a crisis in the delivery of mental health services to young people, but I am not able to shed any light on this.)*

*"With all the criticism of school lockdowns, we were pleasantly surprised to see that **pupils' general perceptions of school were no worse and may have improved** between 2019 and 2020/21. "*

**Where are the figures from?**

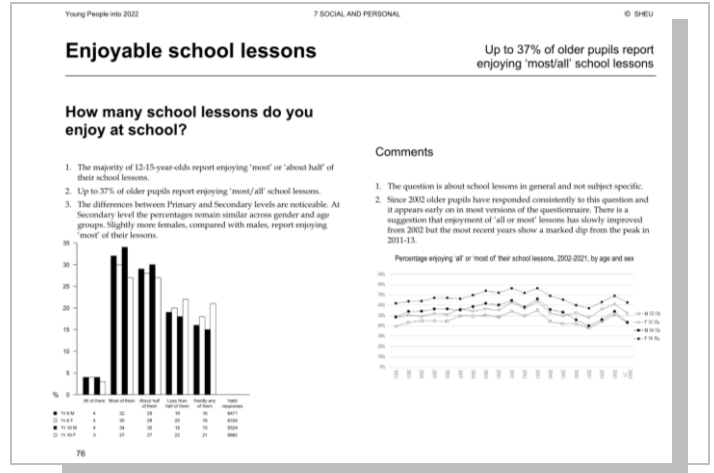
Every year, SHEU carry out healthy lifestyle surveys with young people for local authorities and each year these surveys involve tens of thousands of young people. At the end of each calendar year, we put all the results from all the surveys together, and publish a report. These reports contain findings from over 100 health-related behaviour questions using answers from pupils in primary and secondary schools. They tell us about what they do at home, at school, and with their friends.

**What’s in the report?**

The report has 7 chapters:

- CHAPTER 1 - Food choices & weight control
- CHAPTER 2 - Doctor & Dentist
- CHAPTER 3 - Health & Safety
- CHAPTER 4 - Family & Home
- CHAPTER 5 - Legal & Illegal Drugs
- CHAPTER 6 - Exercise & Sport
- CHAPTER 7 - Social & Personal

The pages in each chapter show results from one question (sometimes two) and may also show links between questions and trends in responses going back over decades.



Notes

1. SHEU (the Schools and Students Health Education Unit) was founded in Exeter University in 1977 by John Balding and has operated independently since 1997. It is the leading provider of health and lifestyle surveys for schools and holds a unique set of databanks showing levels of and trends in young people's behaviours since in the 1980s.

2. The sample size was 149,090, but not all respondents answered all questions, and only 111,281 were in the target year groups.

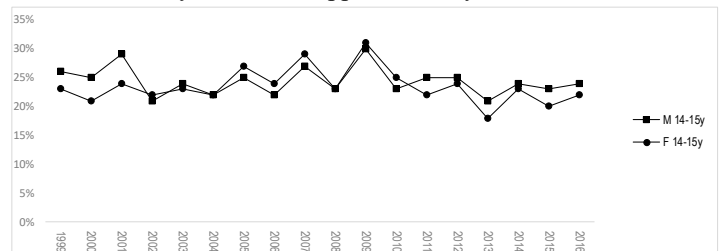
**Ages and year groups reported were:**

Phase	Year group	Ages
Primary	Year 4	8-9 years old
	Year 6	10-11 years old
Secondary	Year 8	12-13 years old
	Year 10	14-15 years old

3. We discourage surveys being conducted on Mondays, so 'the day before the survey' should have been a normal school day, and similarly 'the week before the survey' will not have been a holiday week.

4. The accumulated databank from the hundreds of school surveys we support each year, involving tens of thousands of young people, is a valuable resource of information and provides many opportunities for insight and research. But we caution against simple reporting and interpretation of our figures as being from 'a national survey'; it didn't happen that way.

Many authorities use us every other year, and so will appear and disappear from the data sets, and there are some trends in which we can see evidence of a regional effect in the figures we obtain – as in the case of figures for eating wholemeal bread *on most days* in the middle 2000s, which shows a 'rollercoaster':



#### CHAPTER 1 - Food choices & weight control

- Headlines*
- Around 10% of all pupils said they ate no portions of fruit or vegetables yesterday. Over 30% of pupils aged 8-11 but less than 25% of 14-15-year-old pupils said they ate at least the recommended 5 portions on the day before the survey.
  - Up to 10% of pupils say they had no water to drink on the day before the survey.
  - There is a marked increase once we get to the secondary age group among females wanting to lose weight – 58% of 14-15-year-old females said they would like to lose weight.
- Trends*
- The trend for more pupils to skip lunch steadied about 10 years ago.
  - Daily consumption of crisps declined after about 2000 and has stabilised since.
- Links*
- Year 10 females who skipped breakfast on the morning of the survey were also more likely to have skipped lunch on the day before the survey, and to want to lose weight.

#### CHAPTER 2 - Doctor & Dentist

- Headlines*
- Nearly half of pupils have visited a doctor in the last three months.
  - 13% of 14-15-year-old females felt *quite* or *very uneasy* on their last visit.
  - 80-95% of all groups had been to the dentist in the last year.
  - About 83% of all groups brushed their teeth at least twice on the day before the survey.
- Trends*
- The proportion visiting the dentist in the last year dropped in this report.

#### CHAPTER 3 - Health & Safety

- Headlines*
- Around 1/3 of primary pupils said they experienced bullying behaviours *often* or *every day* – these behaviours included *teasing* and *name-calling* but also being *pushed/hit*.
  - Of those bullied often, about 1/3 report being bullied during school break times.
  - The most common reasons reported for being bullied were *size or weight* and *the way you look*, especially for older females.
  - Fear of bullying at school declines with age.
  - Up to a quarter of older pupils report unwelcome behaviours from boyfriends/girlfriends, like jealousy, hurtful language and checking my 'phone.
  - 86% of all groups say they have been told how to stay safe while online.
  - 11% of older females (14-15yo) say they have sent sexual images of themselves.
  - 1/3 of pupils (more males) reported having an accident in the last year that needed medical attention.
- Trends*
- Reports of being bullied and the fear of being bullied have increased since 2011.
- Links*
- Getting plenty of sleep is associated with fewer worries and more contentment with their weight in 14-15-year-old females.
  - There is a 'humped' association between wellbeing and time spent online or using a 'phone, with students reporting moderate use also having the highest wellbeing scores.

#### CHAPTER 4 - Family & Home

- Headlines*
- About 1/2 of the older pupils walked at least part of the way to school on the day of the survey.
  - About 2/3 of the sample live with mother and father; less as they get older.
  - About 3/4 of the sample identify as White (British or other).
- Trends*
- A rise in time spent playing computer games is shown clearly in our figures for males of all ages.
- Links*
- Being a young carer is associated with several unwelcome outcomes – more reports of being bullied, of smoking, of money worries and of accidents.
  - Similarly, having free school meals is also associated with being bullied.

## CHAPTER 5 - Legal & Illegal Drugs

- Headlines*
- 15% of the 14-15-year-olds had drunk alcohol in the week before the survey. Drinking was done most often at home.
  - About 5% of 14-15-year-olds had smoked a cigarette in the week before the survey.
  - 1/3 of pupils live in homes where someone smokes, but less than 10% report someone smoking indoors.
  - 23% of 14-15yo have tried tobacco cigarettes, but 39% report trying e-cigarettes.
  - 9% of pupils aged 14-15 years had ever tried drugs – nearly always cannabis, if nothing else.
- Trends*
- Smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol are in long-term decline in our figures; cannabis experimentation has been fairly stable for the last decade.
  - Figures for reported experience with cannabis are notable for an absence of much effect of legislation during changes 2004-2009.
- Links*
- There is an association between finding drugs education lessons more useful and lower substance use (see Chapter 7).
  - Alcohol use always used to be associated with higher self-esteem among older pupils, but this pattern has reversed in recent years.

## CHAPTER 6 - Exercise & Sport

- Headlines*
- Around 90% of all groups say they did some sort of exercise last week but less than 10% said they exercised every day, and even fewer claimed to exercise hard enough to get hot. (Recommendations are for daily exercise of at least an hour in total, including some vigorous exercise and strength-building activities.)
  - Weekly sports and activities included *going for walks* (over half of secondary females) *soccer* (over half of secondary males) and *dancing* (over a quarter of secondary females).
  - Among secondary pupils, the most commonly reported barriers to taking exercise were *time, cost, availability* and, especially in females, *shyness* (36% of 14-15yo girls).
- Trends*
- Enjoyment of physical activities is lowest among 14-15-year-old females and is declining.
  - Perceived fitness is in decline among both secondary year groups and both sexes.

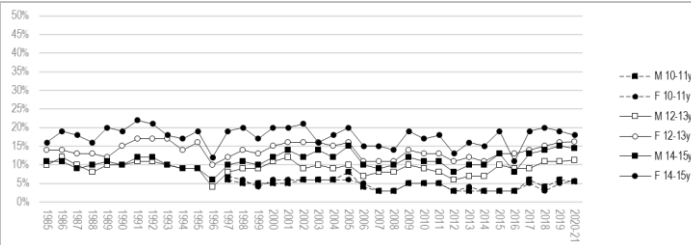
## CHAPTER 7 - Social & Personal

- Headlines*
- Over half of 10-11-year-olds agree that *the school cares whether I am happy or not* but just a third of 14-15-year-olds say the same.
  - The majority of 12-15-year-olds enjoy *at least half* of their lessons.
  - Worries about *school* and *the way you look* are higher in secondary age groups, particularly among 14-15-year-old females (over 50% of whom are worried at least 'quite a lot' about each issue).
  - The most commonly reported response to having a problem or feeling stressed is to *talk to someone about it*. Some pupils distract themselves with *music* or comfort themselves with *eating more*; over 10% of 14-15yo females say they sometimes *cut or hurt myself*.
  - Over 2/3 of secondary pupils judge that they can *usually or always say no* if someone wants them to do something that they don't want to do.
  - About 10% of 14-15-year-old pupils know where to get condoms free of charge.
- Trends*
- We see a continued decline in the proportion of 14-15-year-old females who score in the top bracket of self-esteem scores, with more scoring in the lower brackets.
  - Worry about *school, exams and tests* seems to be increasing among 14-15 year-olds.
- Links*
- Lesbian, gay and bisexual young people are more likely than their peers to report being bullied and also to have tried smoking or drugs.

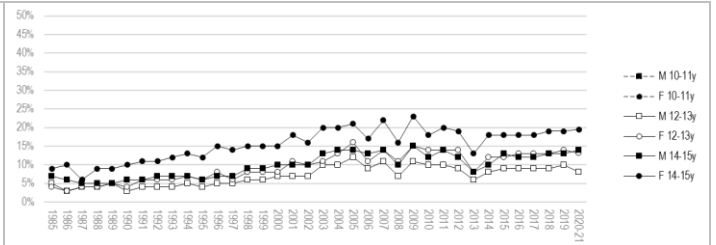
### What about coronavirus?

- Much of the effect of lockdown and other restrictions on young people has been adverse, but not all of it: about 40% of young people say they have been *generally happy* and over a third report *improved relationships with family*.
- There are several trends charts which show a discontinuity from 2019 to 2021/22 – either a change of direction or a change of pace (see p.96).
  - Some of these are easy to attribute to coronavirus restrictions and their impact (*decline going to the dentist in the last year*) but some are not (*increase in thinking school cares if they are happy*).
  - Some we might be tempted to attribute to coronavirus (*decline scoring high for self-esteem*) but these are more likely to have manifested as a continuation of existing trend.

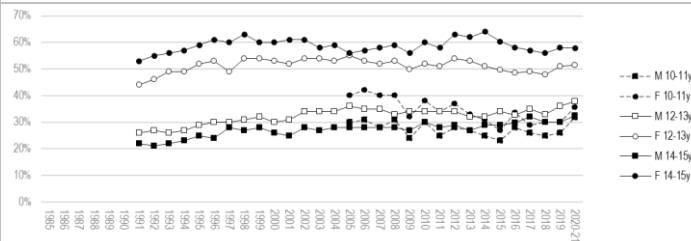
## Selected trends



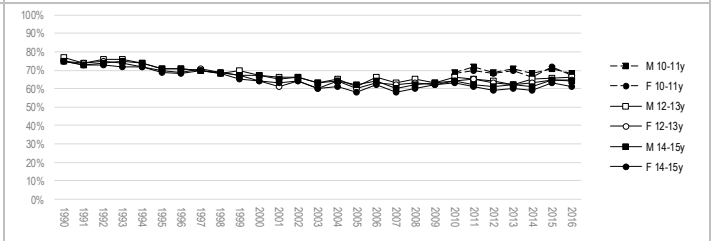
Percentage having nothing for breakfast, 1985-2020/21, by age and sex



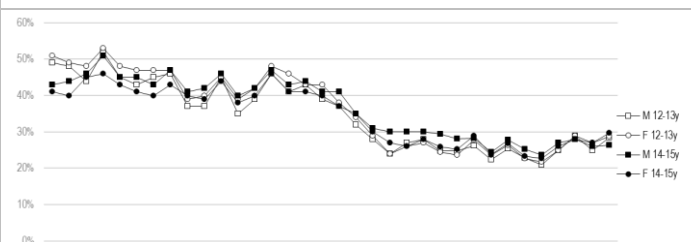
Percentage having nothing for lunch, 1985-2020/21, by age and sex



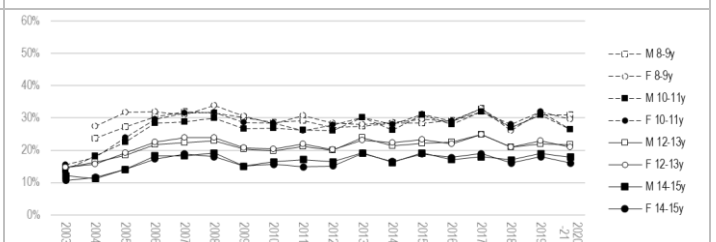
Percentage wanting to lose weight, 1991-2020/21, by age and sex



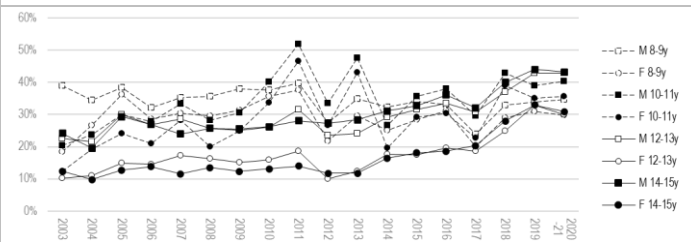
Percentage of pupils reporting living with mother and father at home 1990-2020/21



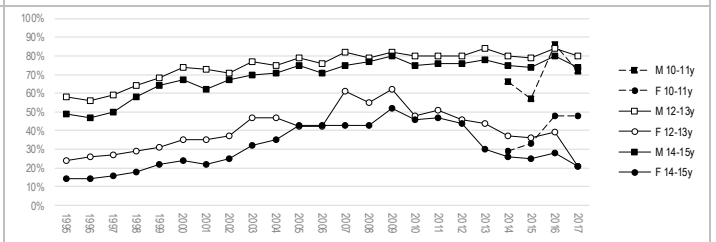
Percentage eating crisps 'on most days', 2003-2020/21, by age and sex



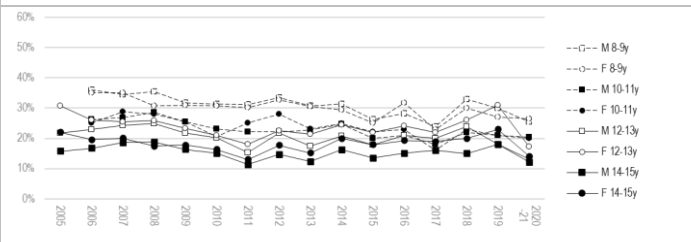
Percentage having 5 portions fruit/veg on the day before the survey, 2003-2020/21



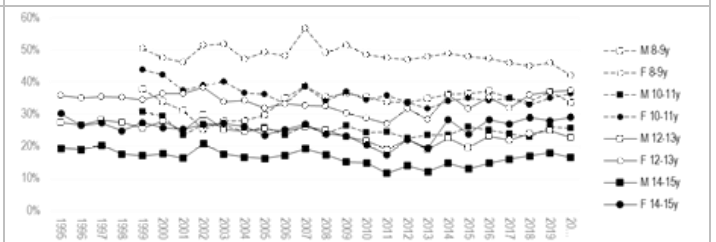
Percentage drinking at least a litre of water yesterday, 2003-2020/21, by age and sex



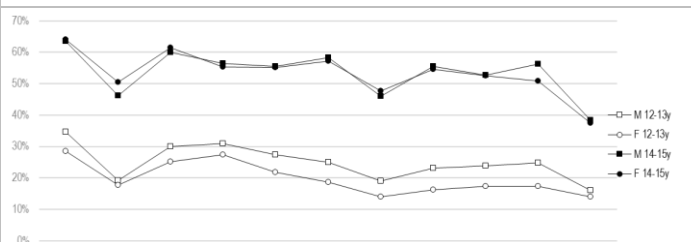
Percentage who reported spending any time at all on computer games 1995-2020/21



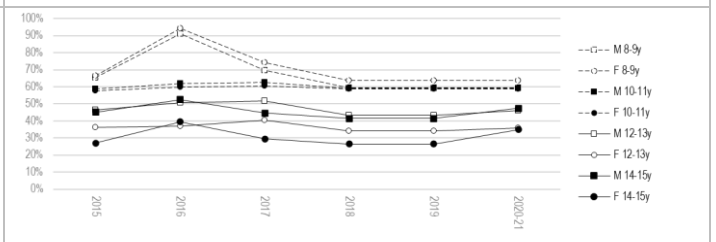
Percentage being bullied at or near school in the last 12 months, 2005-2020/21



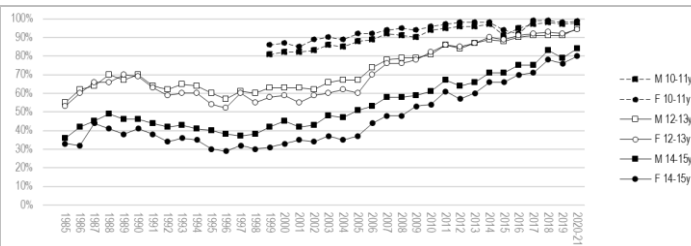
Percentage fearing going to school because of bullying at least sometimes, 1995-2020/21



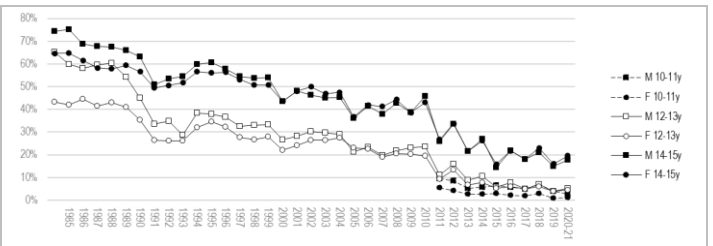
Percentage who know where they can get condoms free of charge 2010-2020/21



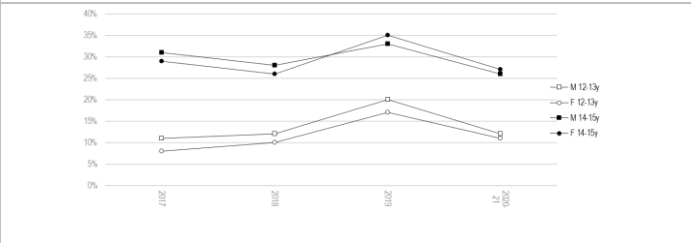
Percentage scoring in highest bracket of resilience scores 2015-2020/21



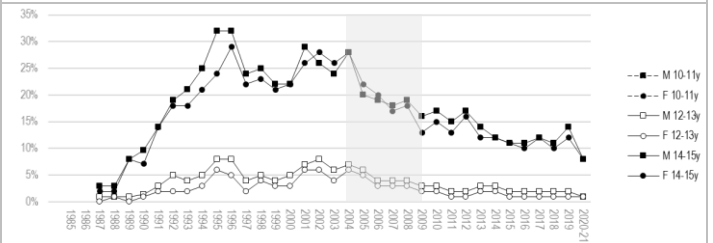
Percentage of pupils who have never smoked at all, 1985-2020/21



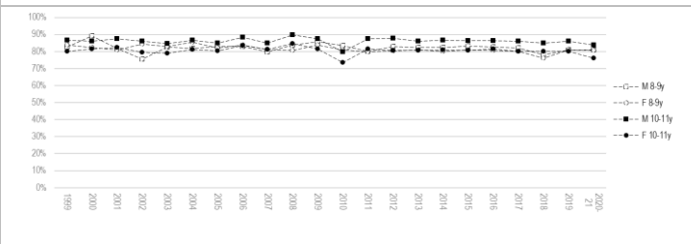
Percentage of pupils who drank last week, 1985-2020/21



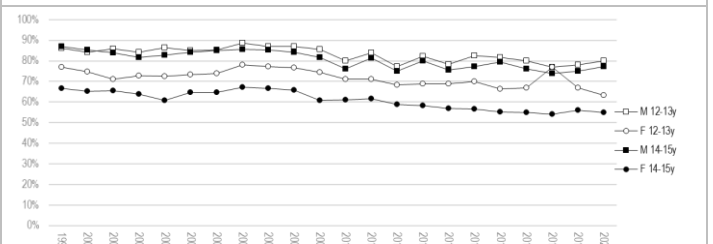
Percentage of pupils ever trying vapour products, 2017-2020/21, by age and sex



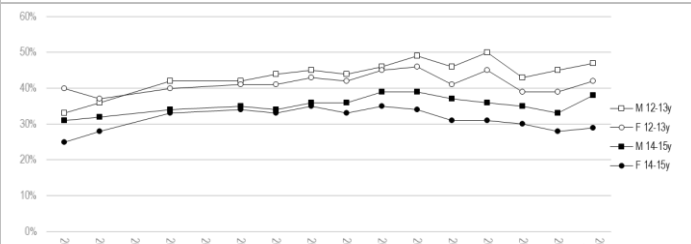
Percentage of pupils ever trying cannabis, 1987-2020/21, by age and sex (shaded = period when Cannabis was moved from Class B to Class C)



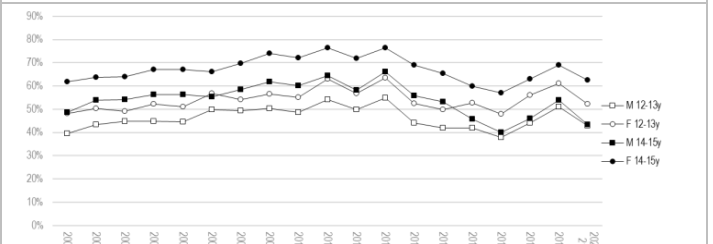
Percentage of primary pupils who enjoy physical activities 'quite a lot' or 'a lot', 1995-2020/21



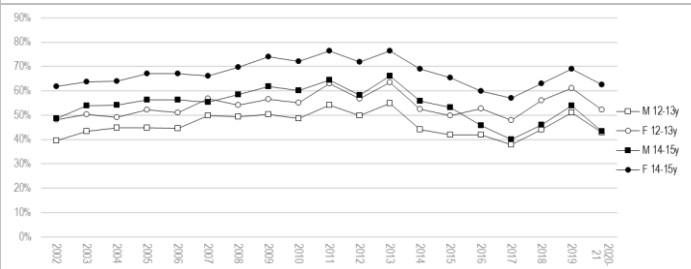
Percentage of secondary pupils who enjoy physical activities 'quite a lot' or 'a lot', 1995-2020/21



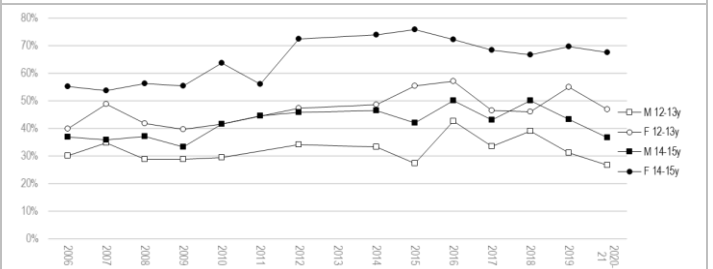
Percentage who agree that 'The school cares if I am happy or not' 2005-2020/21



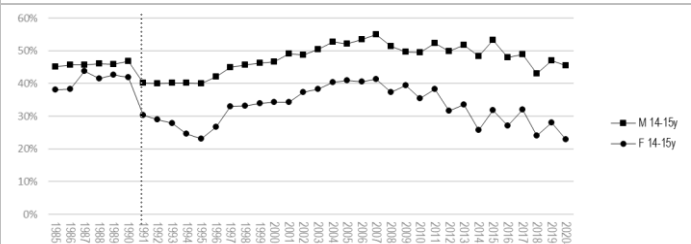
Percentage enjoying 'all' or 'most' of their school lessons, 2002-2020/21



Percentage intending to continue full-time education, 2002-2020/21, by age and sex



Percentage of 14-15yo pupils worrying at least 'quite a lot' about exams and tests, 2004-2020/21



Percentage of young people 14-15y scoring in highest bracket of self-esteem scores, 1985-2020/21, SHEU aggregate figures, by age and sex (1991 change of design)

- KEY
- M 10-11y
  - F 10-11y
  - M 12-13y
  - F 12-13y
  - M 14-15y
  - F 14-15y