



What Parents Want

**Listening to the views of parents
and carers in the UK**

NAGC

April 2009

Summary

1. NAGC is the only national organisation in the UK that is the parents' voice for parents and carers of gifted and talented children. Established in 1967, we support over 10,000 people a year in a variety of different ways including an Information and Advice Service, magazines for parents and also children and local branches and Family Support Networks.
2. It is important for NAGC that parents and carers are actively involved in our work so that we can accurately represent their views to government and other bodies and lobby on their behalf. We do this in a variety of ways including polls and questionnaires on our website, feedback from workshops, parental feedback we request from members and parents' groups we run.
3. For the PACT:GT conference in April, the parent participants decided it would be a good idea to send a short questionnaire out to parents to ask three main questions:
 - One good thing about the UK education system
 - One thing that they would change about the UK education system
 - One thing that would support them in their role as the parent of a gifted and talented child
4. One in five parents expressing a view felt that the best thing about the UK education system was the freedom of choice between the state sector, independent sector and home education
5. Almost one in four parents said that the one thing they would change about the UK education system would be to have more grading of children according to their abilities and/or intelligence
6. Almost half of the parents responding to the question said what would help them more in their role as a parent and/or carer of a gifted child would be teachers in school who were better trained and educated in supporting gifted and talented children
7. NAGC will be taking these issues to the UK government and will be working with other parents to see how we could achieve points 5 and 6 in the current education system.
8. It will also be interesting to compare how the UK system differs from- and is similar to – the systems in Turkey and Austria.

About NAGC

The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) is the only national organisation in the UK that represents all parents and carers of a gifted and talented child and acts as the parents' voice to represent their views, concerns and needs to Government and other organisations.

We also help parents and carers to support the social, emotional and learning needs of their gifted child and to give them the skills and confidence to enable their child to maximise their potential.

We are a membership charity with membership drawn from all education sectors, including the state sector; independent sector (public schools) and the home educated sector and we advise and support parents in each of these sectors.

NAGC was established in 1967, 42 years ago, and we support more than 10,000 people a year. Our services include:

- **An Information and Advice Service, including:**
 - A Telephone Helpline which takes about 3,500 calls a year
 - Fact Sheets on a variety of issues relevant to parents
 - A Parent School Partnership service to provide local mediation in schools
 - Other projects. At the moment we are undertaking a project to support parents from 'hard to reach' families with their older children to help them with university
- **Membership Services, including:**
 - A termly magazine for parents
 - A termly magazine for children and young people
 - A Parents' Forum on the website
 - Parents' groups on a variety of subjects including a Home Educators' Forum; a Viral Marketing Group and a Children's Computer Group
 - Monthly e-letters
 - Access to branches
 - International membership

- **A proactive website, including:**
 - Information for parents, schools and children
 - A shop
- **National Events, including:**
 - Family weekends
 - Workshops for parents, children and schools
 - 'It's Alright to be Bright' week
 - Confidence building days
- **Local support, including:**
 - Branches
 - Explorer clubs
 - Family Support Groups

Involving Parents and Carers in NAGC's work

Parental engagement is an essential part of NAGC's work. It is important for NAGC that parents and carers are actively involved in our work so that we can accurately represent their views to government and other bodies and lobby on their behalf. We do this in a variety of ways including polls and questionnaires on our website, feedback from workshops, parental feedback we request from members and parents' groups we run.

Early in 2009, to prepare for the PACT:GT Conference between 16th -19th April, NAGC held a meeting and invited all those parents/carers in the UK who had expressed an interest in being involved in the project. At this meeting, the parents helped to structure the UK conference; discussed what they would like to get out of the work and came up with some ideas for activities we could do both to prepare for the conference and at the conference itself.

One of these ideas was for a questionnaire to be sent to our family members asking three simple questions:

- Name one good thing about the UK education system
- One thing about the UK education system they would change
- One thing that would support you in your role as a parent of a gifted child.

This report summarises the results of this survey so that participants at the PACT: GT conference can see a snapshot of what parents and carers in the UK think about education in this country.

A summary of results of the research

i) What is good about the UK education system?

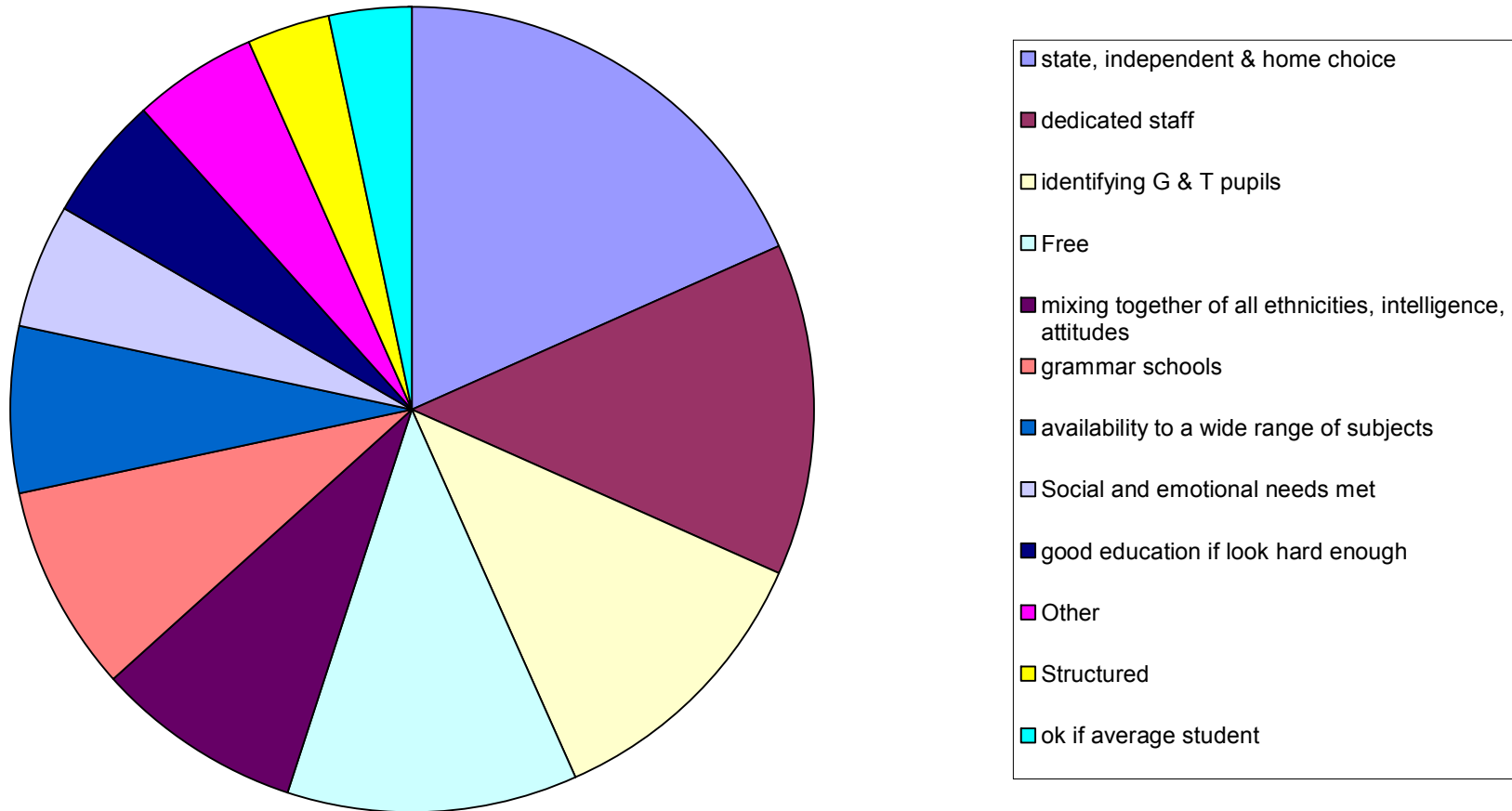
As a culture, in the UK, we are often seen as negative about our education system. Nonetheless, as can be seen on Page 6, parents put forward 14 main things that they felt were good about the UK education system. The top four issues were:

- **Freedom of choice** for parents between educating their children in the state or private sectors or home educating them
- **Dedicated staff** in the form of teachers, teaching assistants and other to support their children
- **Identification of Gifted and Talented pupils**
- **Free education** available in all areas of the country

Other issues mentioned by parents included

- mixing together of people from a variety of backgrounds
- the grammar school system
- the wide range of subjects taught

The best think about the UK education system



ii) What is the one thing that you would change about the UK education system?

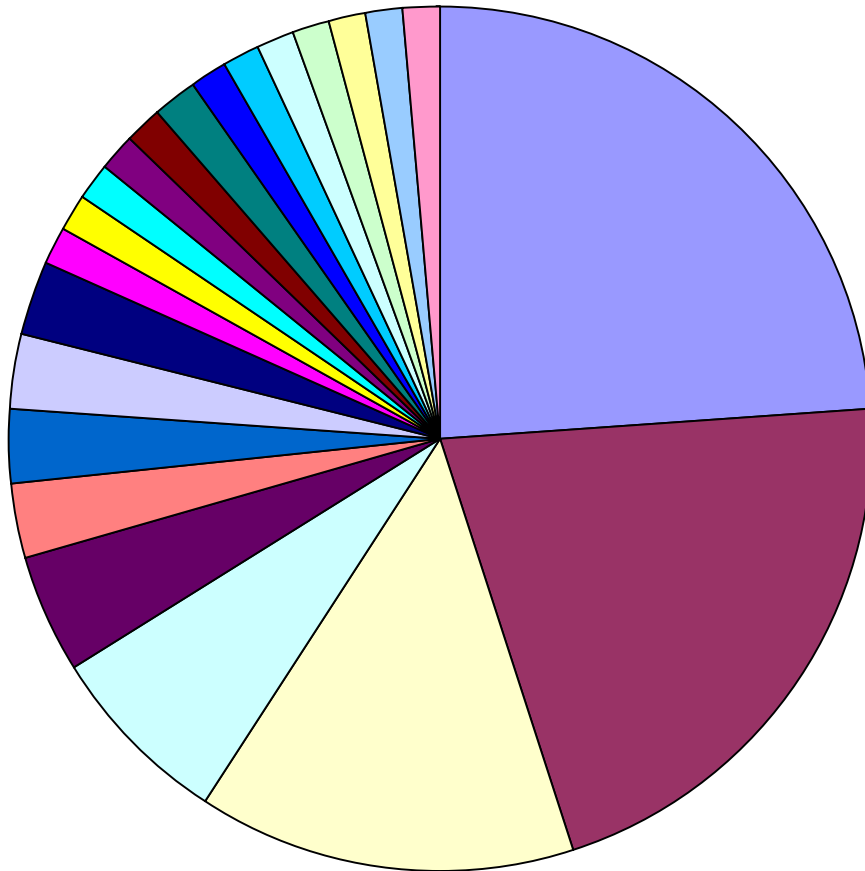
Parents were then asked for the one thing they would change about the UK education system. As might have been expected, the answers they gave could be grouped into more categories – 23 in all. However, what is interesting is that over two thirds of the responses (64.35%) could be grouped into four categories:

- **grading children** according to abilities or intelligence. This had almost one in four of the responses from parents (23%)
- **more provision or stimulation for gifted and talented children** (20%)
- **Smaller class sizes** (13%)
- **Changes to the compulsory age for going to school**

Other issues raised by parents included:

- Regular training for teachers on giftedness
- More provision to meet the emotional needs of children
- A gifted and talented framework in independent schools
- Standardised testing
- Abolition of the SATS tests
- Higher expectations for children

What is the one thing you would change in the UK education system?



- grading children according to abilities/intelligence
- more provision/stimulation for G & T pupils
- smaller classes
- age of compulsory formal education
- regular training on giftedness for teachers
- foreign language access
- more space/time for teachers to be creative
- lack of emotional provision
- for independent schools to have a G&T framework
- standardised testing
- abolishing SATS
- information about other G&T families in area
- children involved in designing curriculum
- school to provide exact information on G&T education
- higher expectations
- children to attend local school
- dismantle over-regulation

iii) Name one thing that would support you as the parent of a gifted child?

The final question that we asked parents was to identify the one thing that would support them the most in their role as the parent or carer of a gifted child. A summary of the results is on Page 10 (below)

The results are skewed towards two issues:

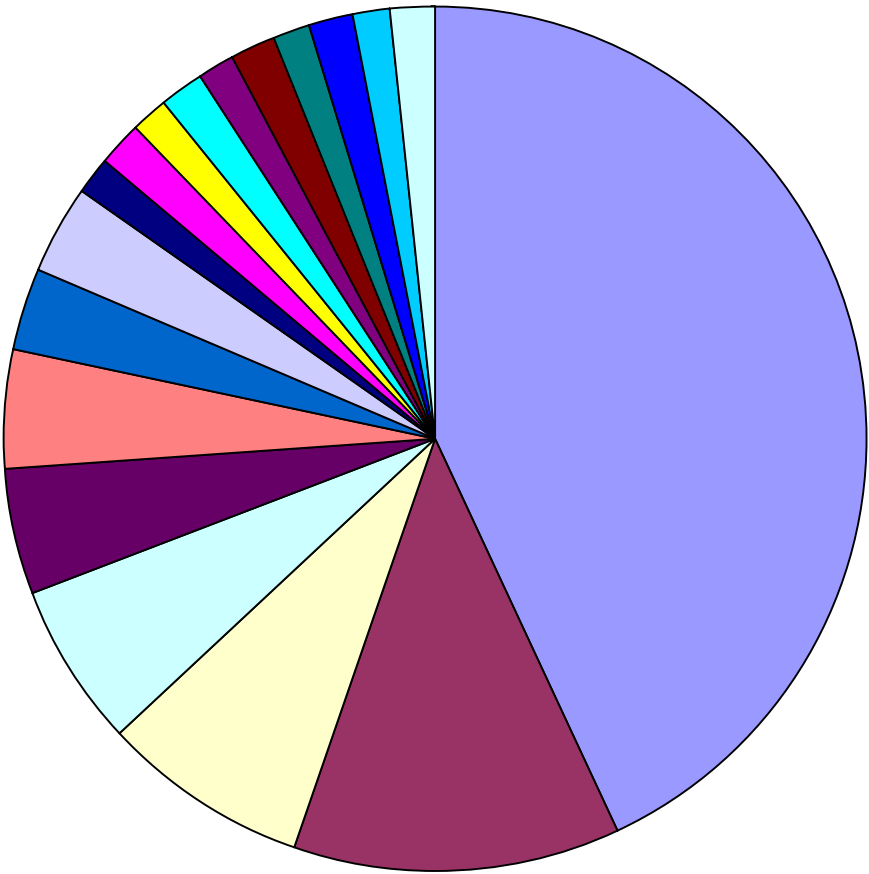
- i) **Teachers/schools to be better educated or trained** in how to support a gifted and talented child. This issue was mentioned by over 43% of parents who took part in this survey
- ii) **Regular meetings** with teachers and other parents of gifted children (12.31%)

Together, these two issues were put forward as the one thing they wanted by over 55% of the respondents.

Other issues raised by parents included:

- Local groups of similar children
- Money/sponsorship to be able to send a child to private school
- Opportunities for activities or workshops for the child
- Information and advice which is consistent around the country
- Support for teachers
- Greater understanding about the needs of gifted children
- Help to stimulate learning at home

Name one thing that would support you in your role as a parent of a gifted child



- Teachers/schools to be better educated/trained in G&T children
- Regular meeting with teachers & other parents of gifted children
- Local area groups of similar children
- Money / sponsorship / family tax allowances
- Opportunities for activities/workshops/access to enthusiasts
- A key worker, to negotiate independently child's needs are met
- Consistent advice/support throughout the country
- Support pack / sources of advice
- NAGC educational experts to support teachers/schools
- More resources/provision for different abilities
- Assessing giftedness in Reception age children
- Understanding in others of giftedness
- Access to experts in the field of giftedness
- NAGC offering social / challenge programme
- Negotiation as educator
- Realistic goal/target setting
- Printed information linked to childrens age

Conclusion

This survey echoes the hopes and concerns of many parents of gifted children in the UK about the best ways in which to meet the needs of their child.

Key recommendations from this small survey would include:

- There is an important and growing need to ensure that teachers and other key staff in schools and within the community are provided with the right training and support so that they:
 - understand and empathise with the needs and gifted children
 - can recognise/identify the needs of a gifted child – whatever they are and at whatever age
 - have the skills to support the gifted child

- The freedom of choice we have in the UK about how to educate our children is seen as important. However, each of the education sectors need to be treated consistently and fairly in terms of the support provided to gifted children

- in addition to support within the school environment, support out of school is seen as important for parents and also for children so that they can meet with other families of gifted children, obtain social and emotional support and to discuss issues of concern

We hope that this work is of interest to participants of the PACT: GT conference in the UK and helps to support some of the discussions we will be having about how to encourage the school to understand and support the needs of the gifted child.