

A thing that makes me happy: Children, young people and poetry in 2018

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Why a survey on poetry? Over the last five years, poetry's popularity – as measured in book sales, event attendance and National Poetry Day participation – has grown. This seemed worth investigating further, particularly as our annual literacy survey of children and young people has long shown that there are benefits to engaging with poetry, with those children and young people who read and write poetry in their free time having improved literacy outcomes.

Additionally, since 2005 we have consistently found that children on free school meals, our proxy of socioeconomic background, are slightly more likely to read and write poetry in their own time than children who don't receive free school meals. Therefore, poetry might offer benefits to groups of children and young people who traditionally are more likely to struggle with literacy.

However, our annual literacy survey asks children and young people whether they read and write poetry in their free time and we wanted to know more about their views of poetry: what they think poetry is, how exactly they are engaging with it (or not) and why. We also sought to know more about the various new ways of encountering and making poetry and were particularly interested in exploring why pupils from a free school meals background are more likely to turn to poetry in their spare time than their peers from more advantaged families.

To this end, and to support National Poetry Day in October 2018, the National Literacy Trust was commissioned to conduct the first ever national survey of children and young people's views of poetry in England. We conducted the online survey between May 2018 and July 2018, and 2,948 8 to 18-year-olds from 27 schools participated.

We found that:

- Almost 1 in 2 (46.1%) children and young people engage with poetry in their free time: this means they "consume" it (read, listen to or watch; 25.4%), create it (write or perform; 10.4%) or do both (10.3%).

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- Most of them say it makes them feel creative, grants them freedom to choose topics they want and is great for self-expression.
- Children on free school meals are more likely to spend free time on poetry than their better-off peers (55.7% vs. 43.0%). They are also more likely to enter poetry competitions and slams.
- Poets were most often described as someone who is creative, followed by funny, imaginative and intelligent.
- Poetry's many different forms are recognized: most children and young people say that poetry can be found in books (87.6%) and online (74.4%), they also know you can listen to it (78.2%) and watch it (61.6%).
- Most of those who engage in poetry said that their teachers, parents or carers had encouraged them.

A focus on the 'consumers' of poetry

- Although paper-based poetry is still the norm, with three out of five young "poetry consumers" saying that they read poems on paper, digital is making inroads: a third (32.6%) said they read poetry online or on a phone, and the same proportion (31.7%) watch it as a video. Overall, spoken recordings or soundtracks were less popular (18.6%), though the really keen "once a week or more" poetry consumers said that they listen to poetry more than they read it on paper.
- Almost all (96.3%) children and young people who read, listen to or watch poetry in their spare time say they enjoy it, with half of them (52.5%) enjoying it very much or quite a lot.
- Half (47.9%) of these young poetry consumers read, listen to or watch poetry in their spare time frequently (at least once a week). Among this "keen" category, listening to and watching poetry is more popular than reading it on paper.
- The main reasons they give for doing this are that poetry makes them feel creative (68.9%), gives them a choice of subject-matter (63.9%) and ways of self-expression (59.9%). They also say its more playful than other forms of writing. Only a third (35.1%) of children and young people say that they read, listen to or watch poetry because it is short.
- Teachers (44.8%) and parents or carers (43.0%) are the main sources of encouragement to engage with poetry in their spare time. Fewer are encouraged to read, listen to or watch poetry by their siblings (18.3%) or their friends (16.8%).

A focus on the 'creators' of poetry

- Most children and young people who create poetry do so by writing it on paper (74.2%). However, 1 in 6 (16.4%) write poetry online or on their phone and 1 in 10 say that they record poetry as an audio file or podcast (9.4%) or make a video of it (10.8%).
- Enjoyment among those who create poetry is high at 94.8%, with two-thirds (63.8%) saying they enjoy creating poetry very much or quite a lot.
- 4 in 10 (39.1%) children and young people who create poetry do so at least once a week. High engagement goes with phone and screen use: more of these frequent creators record poetry at least once a week (54.2%) and video it (43.4%) than write it down either online (40.0%) or on paper (30.8%).
- Most children and young people who create poetry say that it makes them feel creative (76.0%) and that poetry is a great way to express themselves and their

feelings (66.7%). Poetry also offers nearly 3 in 5 (57.8%) a chance to create something special out of words and is considered a more playful form of writing by over half (55.5%). Its specialness is also highlighted, with 52.7% saying that they write or perform poetry in their spare time because it is different to other forms of writing they have to do in school, while 46.0% said that they create poetry because they don't have to obey as many rules as other forms of writing.

- When asked about their intended audience, most of these creators said they create poetry mostly for themselves (62.2%). 2 in 5 (40.6%) create it for their parents or carers, while 3 in 10 create it for their friends, teacher, siblings or other family members. Only a tiny proportion (3.9%) say that they create poetry for people they follow on social media.
- Their teacher is the main source of encouragement to create poetry in their spare time for half of children and young people (50.1%). 42.5% say that their parents or carers encourage them to create poetry. 1 in 5 (18.2%) told us that they are self-directed, with no one encouraging them to write or perform poetry.

A focus on those who don't engage with poetry at all

- Over 1 in 2 (53.9%) told us that they don't engage with poetry at all in their spare time.
- Half of these told us that this is because poetry is boring (50.0%), while 4 in 10 (40.0%) said that they don't engage with poetry because it isn't about topics they are interested in. 1 in 5 (21.4%) said that they don't 'get' poetry, while only 12.1% said it is too hard and even fewer (8.9%) don't engage with it because in their mind poetry is only for clever people.
- Older children engage less: children between 11 and 14 are half as likely to engage with poetry than those aged 8 to 11.
- When asked what would make poetry more appealing to them, most children and young people told us that they would engage with poetry more if it was funnier, more like a story, more relevant and if it involved sports or (video) games.

A special focus on those from disadvantaged backgrounds

- More children who receive free school meals (FSMs) than those who don't say that they read, listen to or watch poetry in their spare time (34.8% vs. 23.0%). This is in line with previous findings. FSM and non-FSM pupils were equally likely to write or perform poetry (11.5% vs. 9.7%) or do both (9.5% vs. 10.3%).
- Even though more FSM pupils consume poetry in their spare time, they report a similar level of enjoyment as non-FSM pupils (94.5% vs. 95.9%). They are also as likely to engage with it on a weekly basis (48.8% vs. 47.5%).
- When asked why they consume poetry, more FSM pupils than non-FSM pupils told us that they like reading, listening to and watching poetry because it is short and because it is more playful than other forms of writing (44.4% vs. 33.9%; and 59.8% vs. 51.9% respectively).
- These reasons are replicated when asked about why they write or perform poetry, with more FSM pupils than non-FSM pupils saying that they create poetry because it is a more playful form of writing (62.5% vs. 56.7%) and because they can choose the topic (72.7% vs. 54.7%). They also told us that they like creating poetry because it is short (39.1% vs. 34.2%) and they like taking part in poetry competitions and slams more than their non-FSM peers (35.9% vs. 27.1%).

Overall, this survey has given us some rich and interesting insight into children and young people's engagement with poetry. Many of them understand poetry as something to be heard, seen and performed as well as read and written, and they value poetry in terms of creativity, playfulness and self-expression.

It is worth pointing out that the nation's poetry-writers are, above all, young: those covered in this survey are seven times more likely to write poetry than adults, with the Taking Part Survey 2016 showing that only 3.1% of adults wrote poetry in the past year, compared to 20.7% of children and young people.

What is poetry and what defines a poet?

What is poetry?

We first wanted to know what children and young people think poetry is in their own words, and therefore asked a free-text question to get their views. As the word cloud in Figure 1 shows, of the 2,267 children and young people who shared their views of what poetry is, most said that it is writing that rhymes (N = 1,175) or a way to express one's feelings (N = 451). Other stand-out characteristics of poetry according to children and young people is that it is reflective, short, creative, powerful and, for some, boring. Some also described it as a song with no music.

Figure 1: Word cloud of commonly used terms to describe what poetry is



Some take-out quotes include:

“Poetry is a kind of writing that can rhyme or describe something. Also it can tell a story that you might not notice. It can make you emotional and can sometimes be very sad or happy.” (Boy, Y5)

“Poetry is a thing that makes me happy.” (Boy, Y4)

“Poetry is freedom to express every thought, passion and opinion in a variety of different ways.” (Girl, Y10)

“Poetry is a story or description about anything described in ways (maybe with an inner meaning) using adjectives and phrases that group together to form a kind of entertainment.” (Girl, Y7)

“Poetry is a way of writing how you feel or what you think about something without being judged. It's a bit like a song.” (Girl, Y8)

What kind of a person is a poet?

In addition to their thoughts on poetry, we also wanted to know what type of a person children and young people consider a poet to be. As the word cloud in Figure 2 shows, the main characteristics used by children and young people to describe a poet are “creative”, followed by “funny”, “imaginative” and “intelligent”.

Figure 2: Word cloud of commonly used terms to describe the type of person a poet is



Again, some take-out quotes include:

“A poet is a wordsmith.” (Y9)

“I don't think there is a certain type of people for a poet.” (Girl, Y10)

“Someone who wants to make little pieces of writing for the world to enjoy.” (Girl, Y6)

“Someone who wasted there (sic) life getting broke.” (Boy, Y6)

“Somebody who can see the world from many different angles.” (Boy, Y9)

“I think a poet is an inspirational and creative kind of writer that can push boundaries to create a stylish piece of literature.” (Girl, Y10)

“I think anyone could be a poet, but mostly, I think thoughtful people who can see things different to others are poets.” (Girl, Y6)

Ways to engage with poetry

We also wanted to know how aware children and young people are of the different formats that poetry can be consumed. When asked which of the following they thought was true for poetry, most children and young people indicated that one can read poetry in a book or listen to it (see Figure 3). A large percentage are also aware that it can be read online and 6 in 10 were aware that one can watch poetry being performed, either in a video or live performance.

Figure 3: What is poetry?



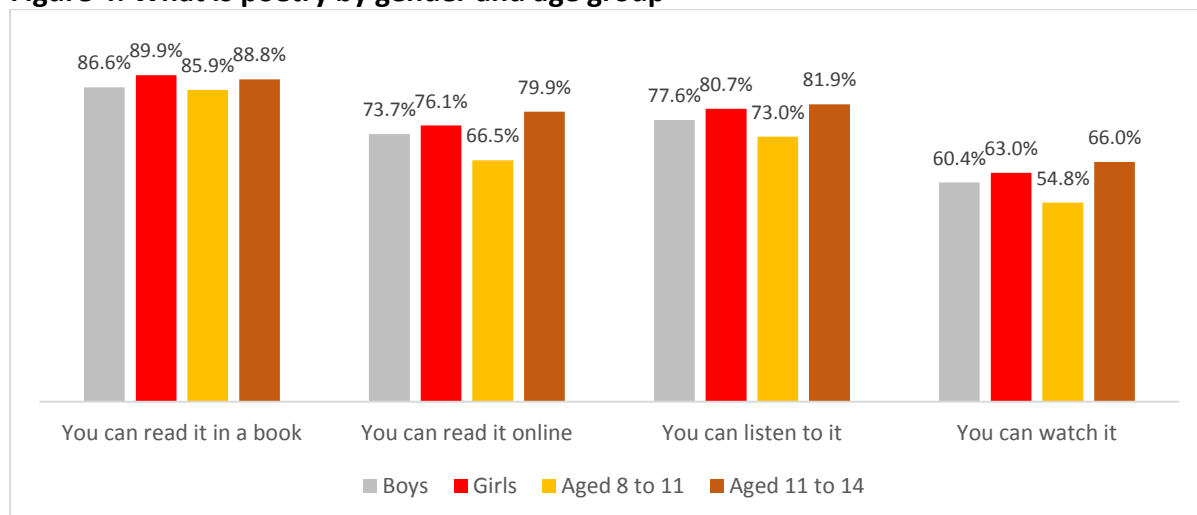
As children and young people could tick all that apply these percentages don't add up to 100

There were no differences between boys and girls¹ in their awareness of the different types of formats with which poetry can be consumed (see Figure 4). While there was no difference between pupils aged 8 to 11 and those aged 11 to 14² in their awareness that one can read poetry in books, more pupils aged 11 to 14 were aware that one can read poetry online, listen to it as a recording or watch it as a video or live performance. This finding reflects those made with respect to other aspects of reading and writing, which also show older pupils being more likely to engage with technology, and perhaps also having greater access to computers, phones, social networking sites than their younger counterparts.

¹ 47.8% of the sample were boys, 46.3% were girls. 2.0% described themselves as “other”, while 3.9% didn’t want to tell us their gender. These latter two categories were excluded from any analysis due to their small numbers.

² Most of the pupils were aged 11 to 14 (KS3; 52.9%) or aged 8 to 11 (KS2; 42.7%). 4.1% of pupils were aged 14 to 16 (KS4) and 0.4% were aged 16 to 18 (KS5). Again, the latter two categories were excluded from any analyses due to their small numbers.

Figure 4: What is poetry by gender and age group

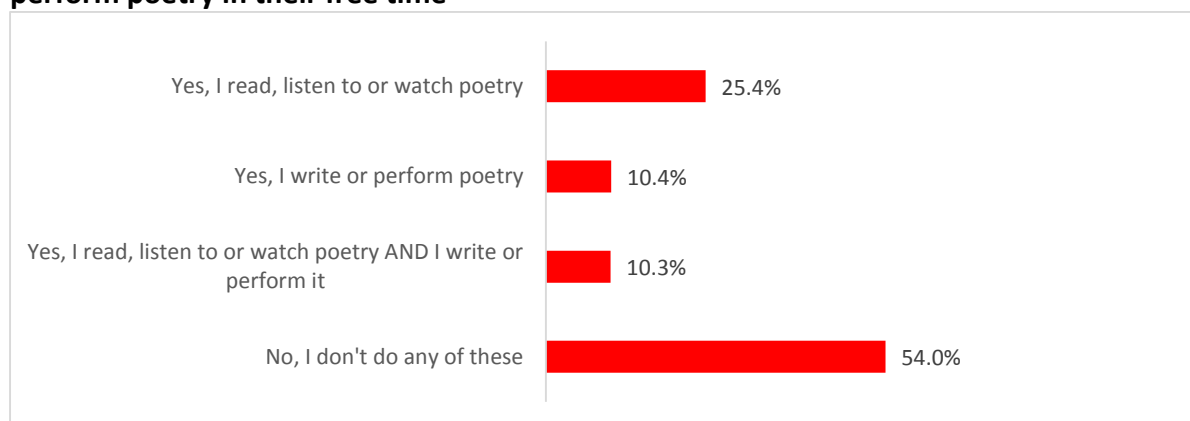


Children and young people as consumers and creators of poetry

The sample is quite evenly split between those who engage with poetry at some level (46%, N = 1,537) and those who don't (54%, N = 1,591; see Figure 5). Overall, children and young people are over twice as likely to say that they read, listen to or watch poetry (which we will now call 'consume' poetry) than they are to say that they write or perform it (which we will now call 'create'). A further 1 in 10 identified themselves as both consumers and creators of poetry.

The percentage of children and young people who consume poetry is similar to that found in other surveys such as our annual literacy survey, which in 2017/18 showed that 24.5% of children and young people said that they read poetry outside class at least once a month. The percentage of children and young people who create poetry is slightly lower than the findings from our annual literacy survey 2017/18, where 23.3% said that they write poetry outside class at least once a month.

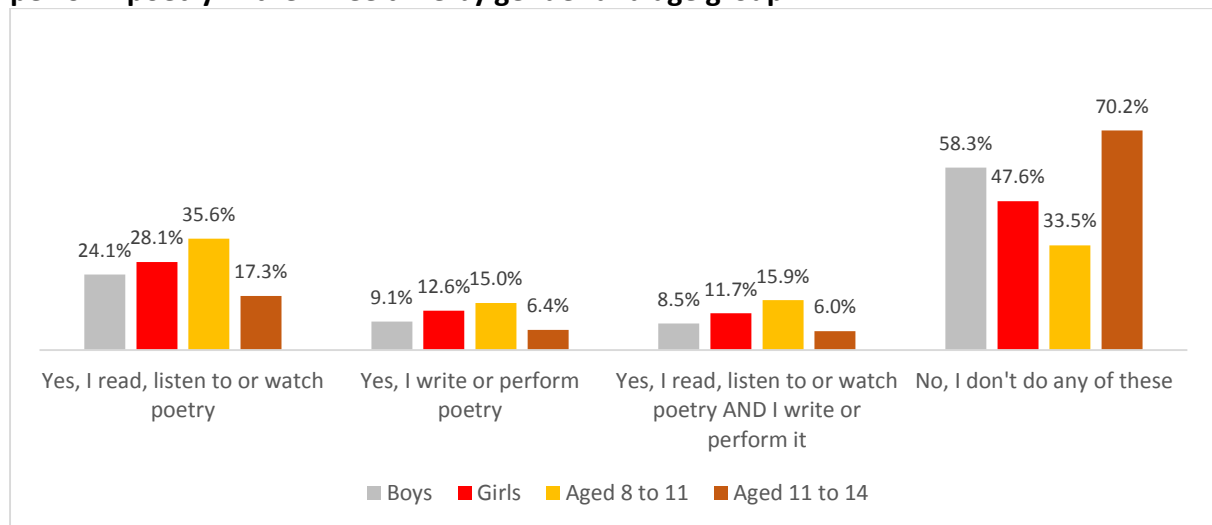
Figure 5: Percentage of children and young people who read, listen to, watch, write or perform poetry in their free time



Slightly more girls than boys said that they consume poetry, create poetry or do both in their spare time (see Figure 6). Overall, nearly 3 in 5 boys compared with 1 in 2 girls say that they don't engage with poetry at all. However, the differences between boys and girls were not statistically significant.

The biggest difference, however, was found with respect to age group, with nearly twice as many pupils aged 8 to 11 saying that they consume poetry, create poetry or do both compared with their older peers. Overall, twice as many pupils aged 11 to 14 say that they don't consume or create poetry at all in their spare time.

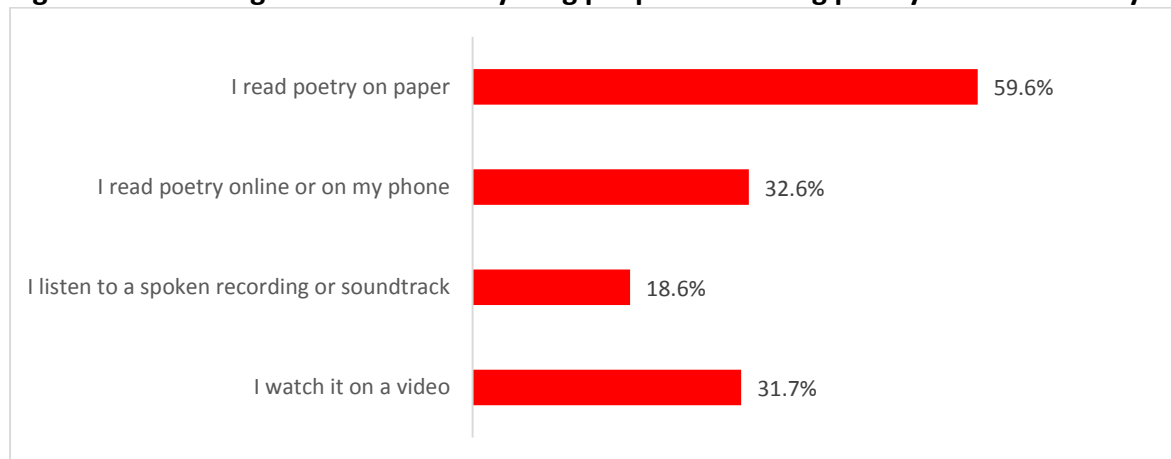
Figure 6: Percentage of children and young people who read, listen to, watch, write or perform poetry in their free time by gender and age group



The consumers of poetry

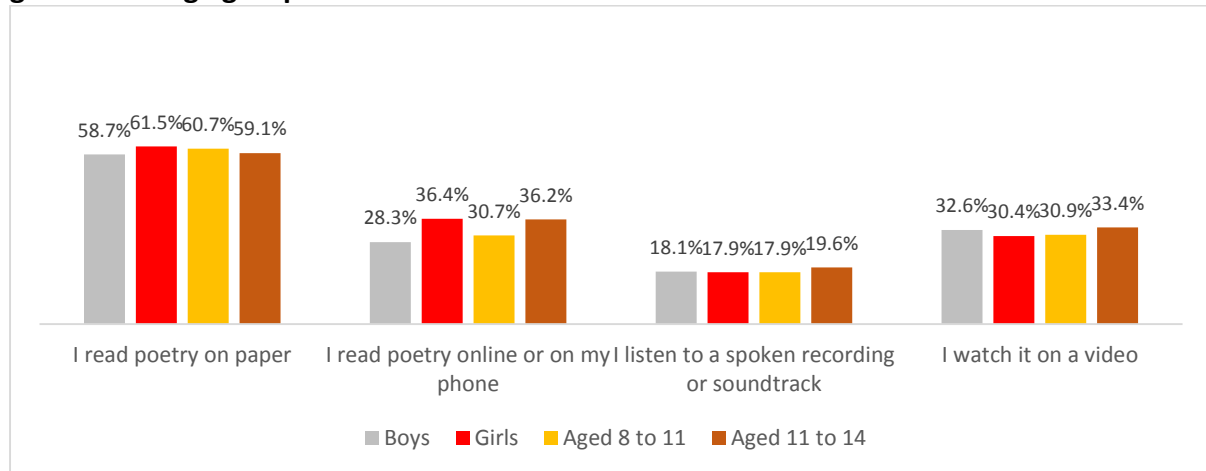
Of those who say that they consume poetry (N = 1,051), paper-based poetry still appears to be the norm. As shown in Figure 7, nearly twice as many children and young people read poetry on paper compared with reading it online or on a phone. Twice as many children and young people also say that they watch poetry in video-form (e.g. YouTube) or see it performed compared with listening to it as a SoundCloud or podcast.

Figure 7: Percentage of children and young people consuming poetry in different ways



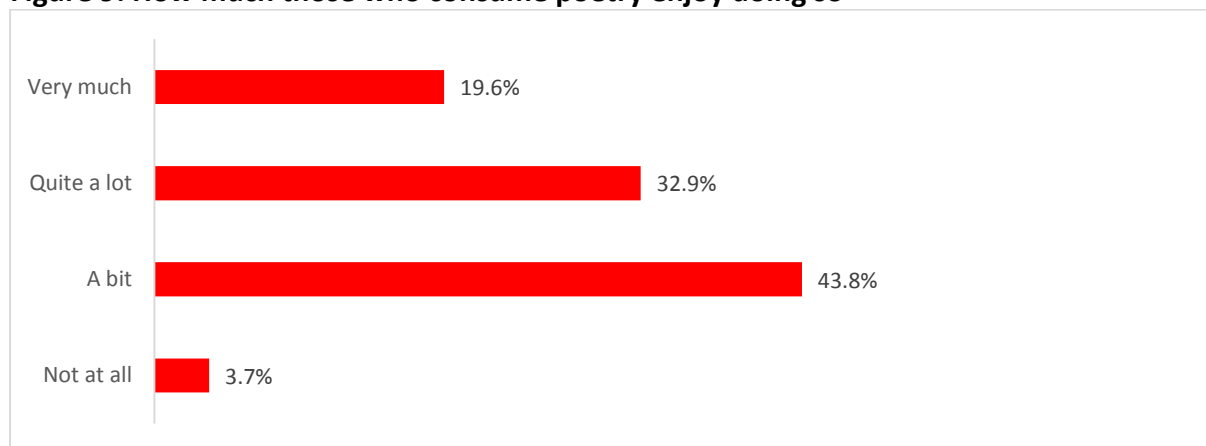
With the exception of reading poetry online, which is higher among girls than boys and among pupils aged 11 to 14 than those aged 8 to 11 (see Figure 8), there were no differences by gender or age group in the percentage of children and young people who read poetry on paper, listen to it as a recording or watch it as a video or live performance.

Figure 8: Percentage of children and young people consuming poetry in different ways by gender and age group



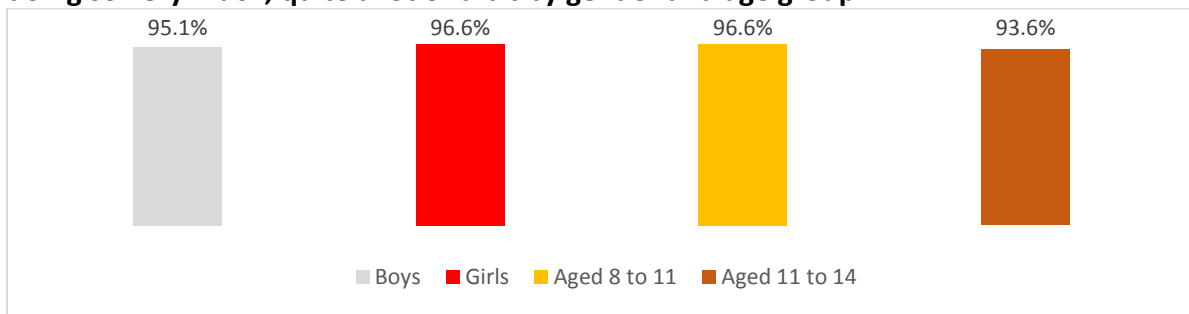
Almost all (97.3%) of those who consume poetry enjoy it, with one in five saying they enjoy it very much, while 1 in 3 enjoy reading poetry quite a lot, as Figure 9 shows. Most children and young people (2 in 5) say that they enjoy consuming poetry a bit, while only 3.7% don't enjoy it at all. This level of enjoyment is regardless of whether children and young people read poetry on paper (96.4%), online (96.5%), listen to a recording (98.6%) or watch a performance (98.5%).

Figure 9: How much those who consume poetry enjoy doing so



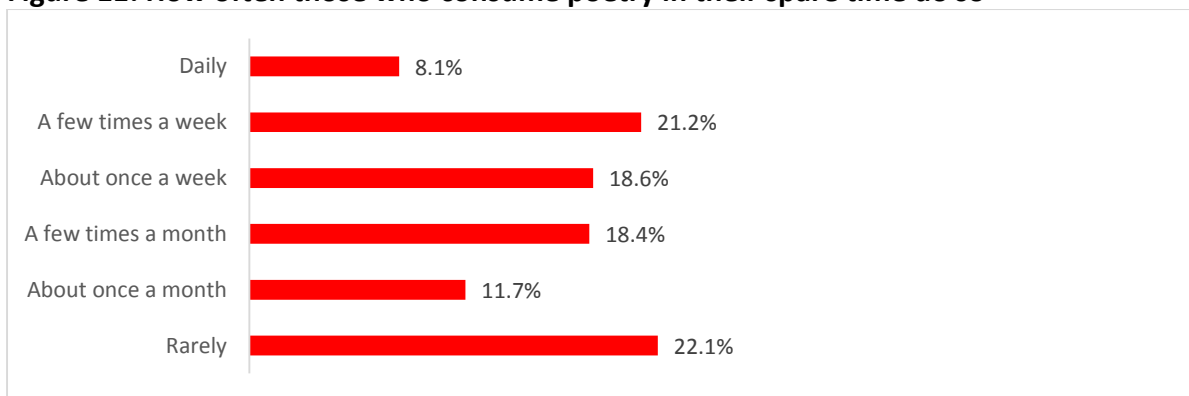
There were no differences between boys and girls in the degree to which they enjoyed reading, listen to or watching poetry either very much, quite a lot or a bit (see Figure 10). Similarly, there were no differences in the level of enjoyment between pupils aged 8 to 11 and their older peers.

Figure 10: Percentage of children and young people who consume poetry and who enjoy doing so very much, quite a lot or a bit by gender and age group



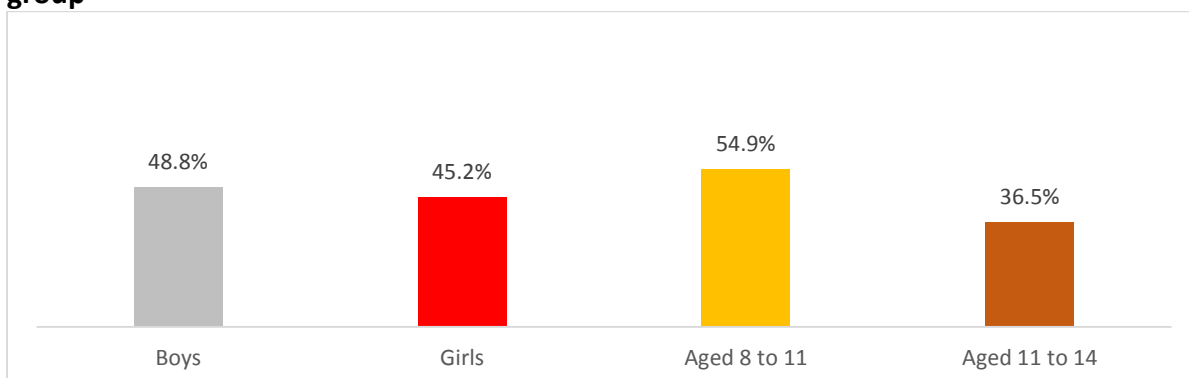
Overall, nearly half (47.9%) of children and young people who consume poetry in their spare time do so at least once a week. 1 in 5 say that they either read, listen to or watch poetry a couple of times a week (Figure 11), while 1 in 10 do so daily. There are also some differences in how often children and young people engage with poetry depending on the format, with more children and young people listening to poetry at least once a week (59.3%) compared with watching it (53.8%), reading it on paper (49.5%) or reading it online (42.0%).

Figure 11: How often those who consume poetry in their spare time do so



Although slightly more boys than girls say that they consume poetry at least once a week (see Figure 12), this difference was not statistically significant. However, pupils aged 8 to 11 are 1.5 times more likely to say that they read, listen to or watch poetry in their spare time compared with their peers aged 11 to 14.

Figure 12: Percentage of those who consume poetry at least once a week by gender and age group



Why do children and young people consume poetry? When asked why they consume poetry, most (nearly 7 in 10) said that reading, listening to or watching poetry makes them feel creative, while 3 in 5 said that poetry is a great way to express themselves and their feelings (see Figure 13). Nearly 2 in 3 said that they consume poetry because they can choose the topic they want to read about, reflecting the importance of personal choice, and over half appreciate the fact that poetry is a more playful form of writing and different from other forms of writing that they have to do in school. Only a third like the fact that poetry tends to be short.

Figure 13: Why those who consume poetry do so



There were several differences by gender in the factors that what motivate children and young people to consume poetry. As can be seen in Figure 14 (overleaf), more girls than boys say that poetry makes them feel creative and is a great way to express their feelings and speaks to them at an emotional level. More girls than boys also like the fact that they can choose the topic they want to read about. By contrast, more boys than girls say they like poetry because it isn't standard English. Although more boys than girls say they like poetry because it is different from other forms of writing and it is short, those differences were not statistically significant.

Overall, there were fewer statistically significant differences by age group. More pupils aged 11 to 14 than their younger peers said that they like poetry because they can choose the topics they want to read about, while more pupils aged 8 to 11 than their older peers said that they like poetry because of the sound it makes.

Finally, we asked those who read, listen to or watch poetry in their spare time who encourages them to do so. Teachers and parents or carers are the two main sources of encouragement for 2 in 5 children and young people (see Figure 15). Fewer are encouraged to consume poetry by their siblings or friends, while even fewer say that people such as musicians, celebrities or people they follow on social media encourage them. Overall, 1 in 5 say that no one encourages them to read, listen to or watch poetry.

Figure 14: Why those who consume poetry do so by gender and age group

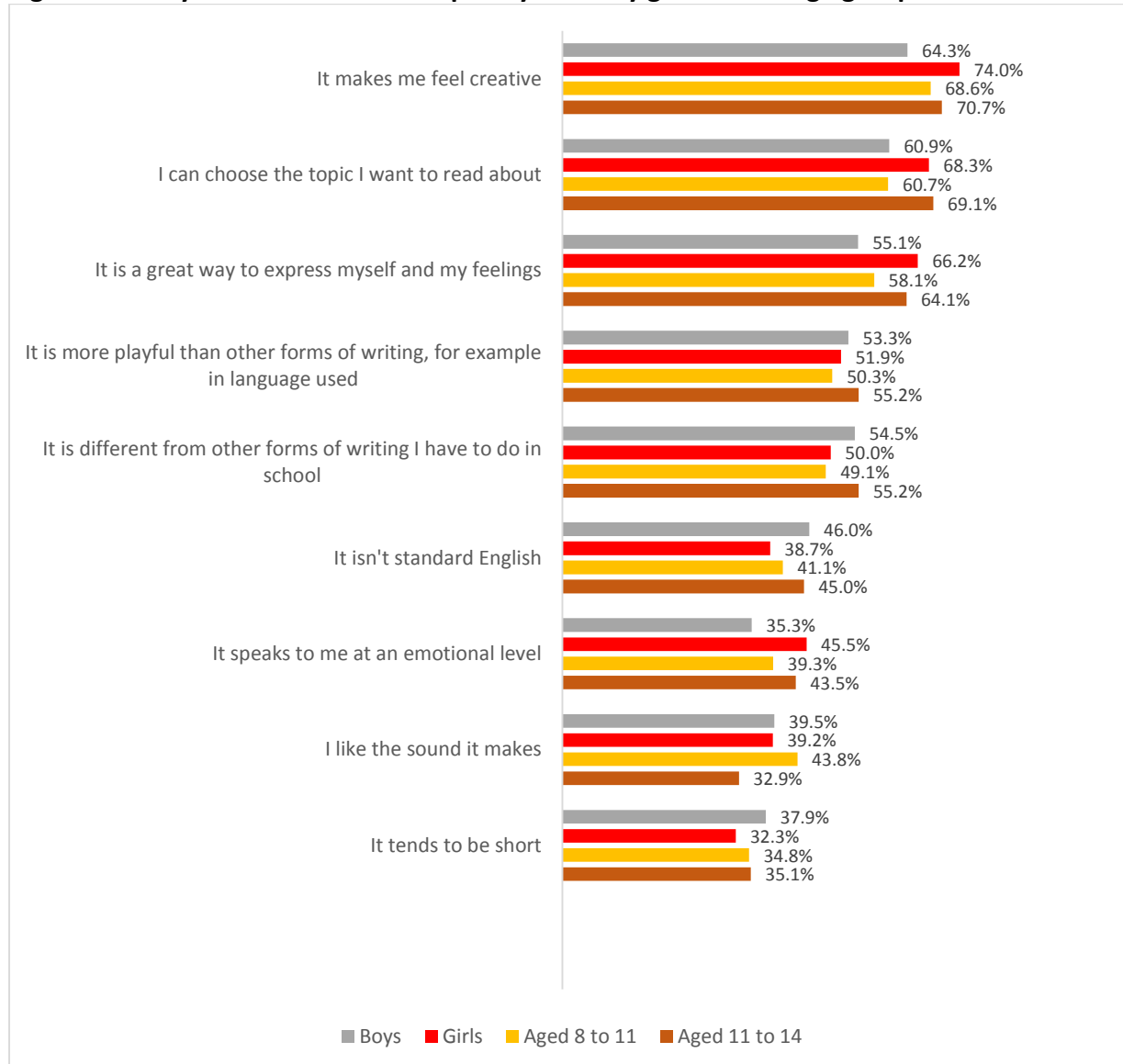
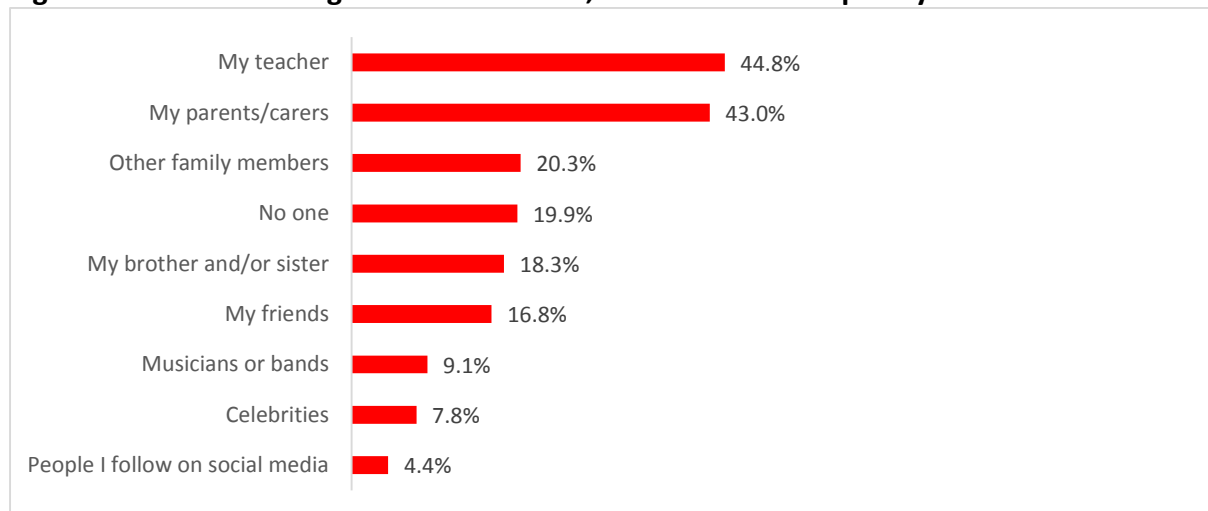
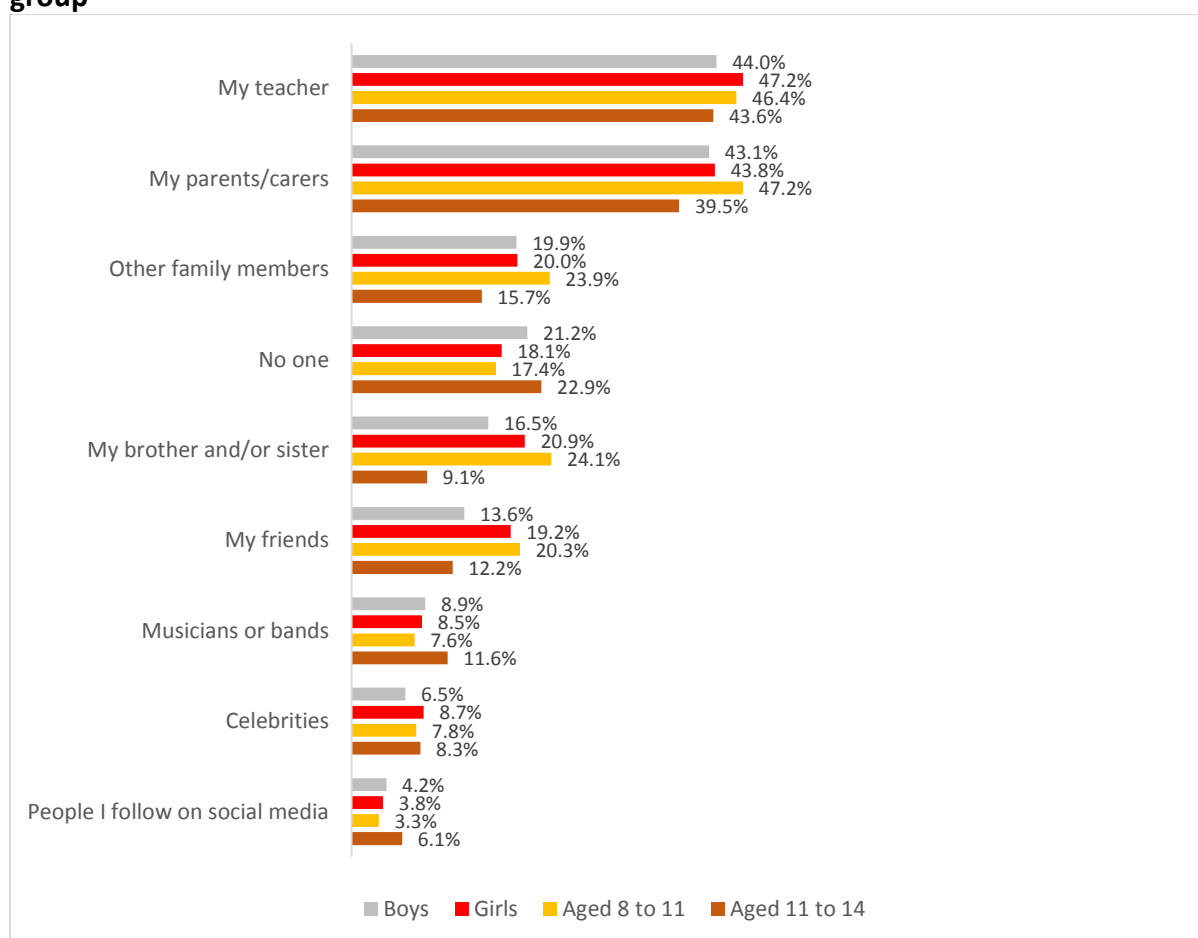


Figure 15: Who encourages those who read, listen to or watch poetry



As can be seen in Figure 16, boys and girls generally perceive similar levels of encouragement from the different types of people listed – although girls are slightly more likely than boys to say they are encouraged towards poetry by their friends. By contrast, more pupils aged 8 to 11 compared with their older peers say that their parents/carers, siblings, other family members and friends encourage them to read, listen to or watch poetry in their spare time. While nearly twice as many pupils aged 11 to 14 than those aged 8 to 11 say that people they follow on social media sites, musicians and celebrities encourage them to consume poetry, these differences were not statistically significant.

Figure 16: Who encourages those who read, listen to or watch poetry by gender and age group



In sum

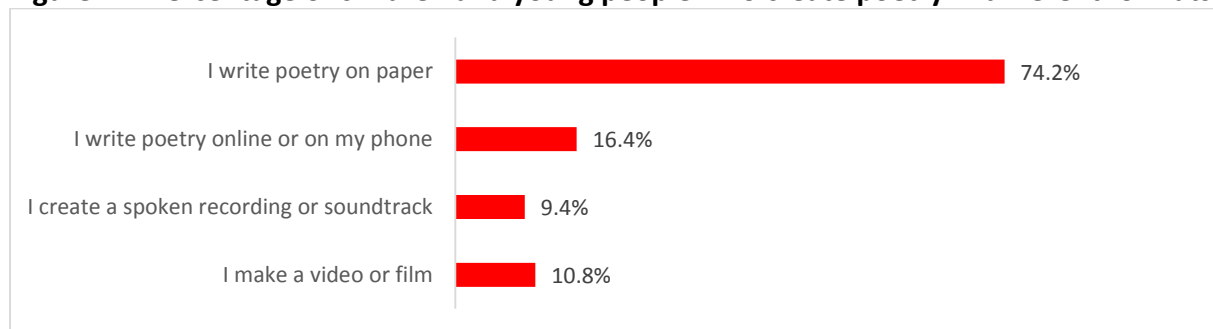
Half of those who consume poetry in their spare time do so at least once week. Although paper-based poetry is still the norm, a significant proportion of children and young people also find it online as videos or audio recordings. More children and young people listen to poetry at least once a week than watch it, read it on paper or online. Creativity and self-expression are the main reasons why children consume poetry in their spare time, and teachers and parents or carers are the main sources of encouragement to engage with poetry.

The following section will explore how those who write or perform, i.e. those who create poetry, feel about it.

The creators of poetry

Most of those who create poetry in their spare time (N = 609) say that they mainly write poetry on paper (see Figure 17). However, 1 in 6 told us that they write poetry online or on their phone and 1 in 10 say that they either record their poetry as a soundtrack or podcast or make a video or film of it. This, in turn, might also indicate how new technologies are used by children and young people to support their literacy, creativity and self-expression.

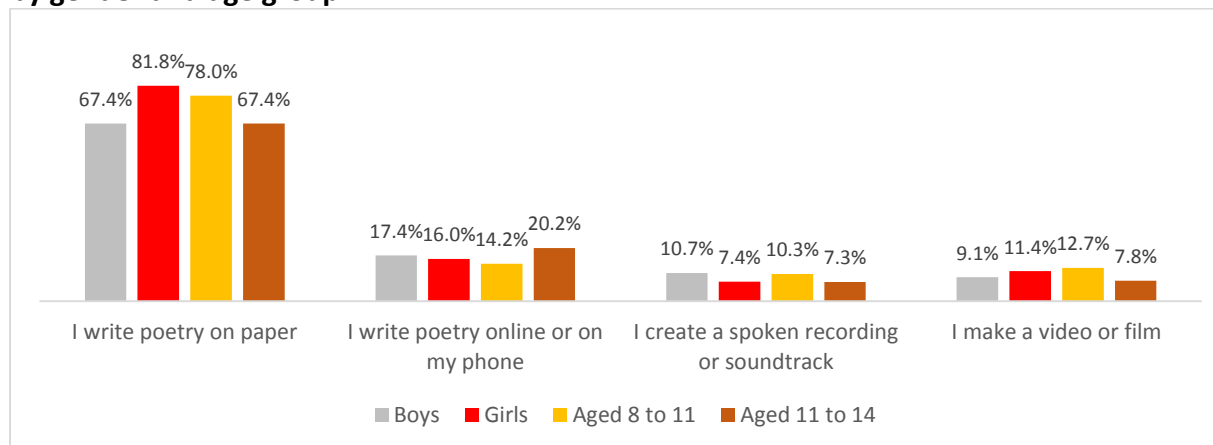
Figure 17: Percentage of children and young people who create poetry in different formats



Boys and girls create poetry in their spare time to similar degrees across different formats (see Figure 18), with the exception of writing poetry on paper, which more girls than boys do.

Similarly, more pupils aged 8 to 11 than those aged 11 to 14 say that they write poetry on paper, while those aged 11 to 14 are more likely to say that they write poetry online or on their phone compared with their younger peers.

Figure 18: Percentage of children and young people who create poetry in different formats by gender and age group



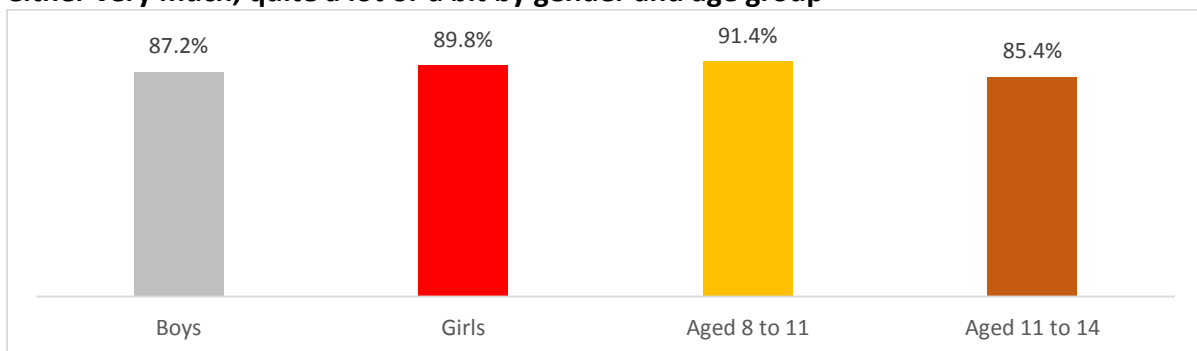
We also asked those children and young people who told us that they create poetry how much they enjoy writing or performing poetry. As Figure 19 shows, overall 94.8% say that they enjoy creating poetry, with 2 in 3 (63.8%) enjoying it either very much or quite a lot, and one in three (31.0%) enjoying it a bit. There was no difference in enjoyment of writing poetry depending on whether it was written on paper (95.8%), written online (95.0%), recorded (94.0%) or videoed (94.2%).

Figure 19: How much children and young people who create poetry enjoy writing or performing it



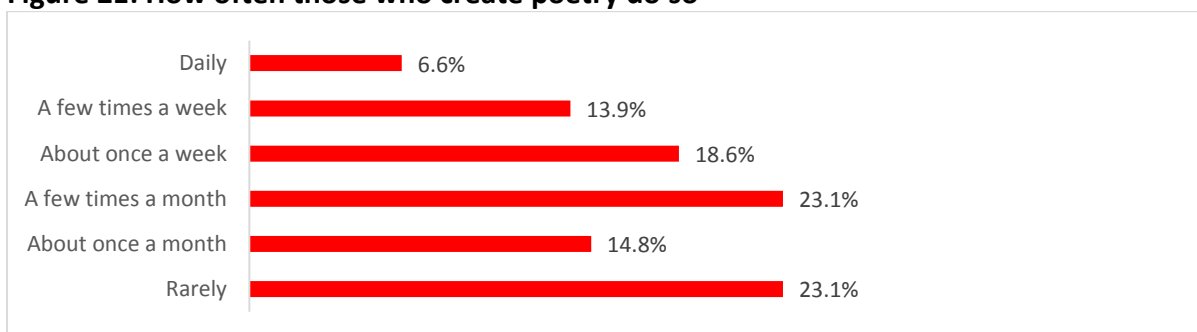
There was no difference between boys and girls in how much they enjoy creating poetry in their spare time (see Figure 20). However, more pupils aged 8 to 11 than aged 11 to 14 say that they enjoy writing or performing poetry. This is regardless of the type of format that they are creating.

Figure 20: Percentage of children and young people who enjoy writing or performing poetry either very much, quite a lot or a bit by gender and age group



4 in 10 (39.1%) children and young people who told us that they create poetry do so at least once a week, while overall 3 in 4 (77.0%) say that they write or perform poetry at least once a month (see Figure 21). Nearly 1 in 4 told us that though they create their own poetry they do so rarely.

Figure 21: How often those who create poetry do so

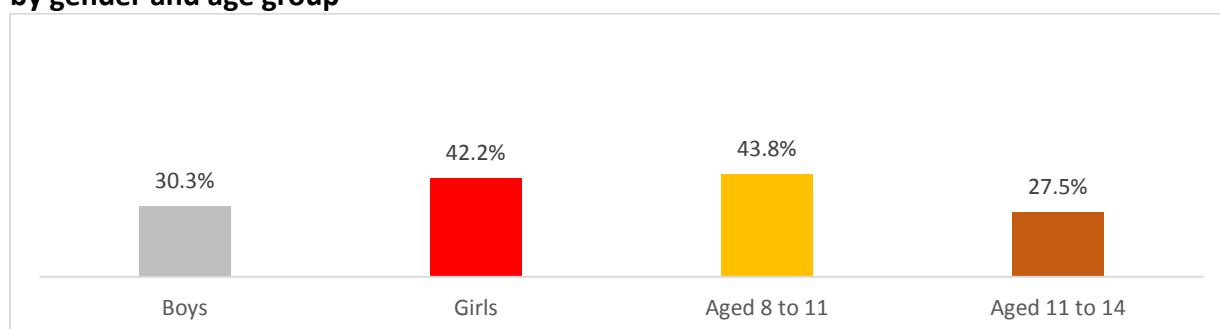


There were interesting differences around formats and frequency of creation, with more children recording poetry at least once a week (54.2%) and videoing it (43.4%) than writing it online (40.0%) or on paper (30.8%).

While 4 in 10 of those who create poetry told us that they do so at least once a week, slightly more read, listen to or watch poetry over the same period of time (48.3%).

As shown in Figure 22, more girls than boys say that they either write or perform poetry at least once a week in their spare time. Pupils aged 8 to 11 are also more likely to write or perform poetry at least once a week compared with their peers aged 11 to 14.

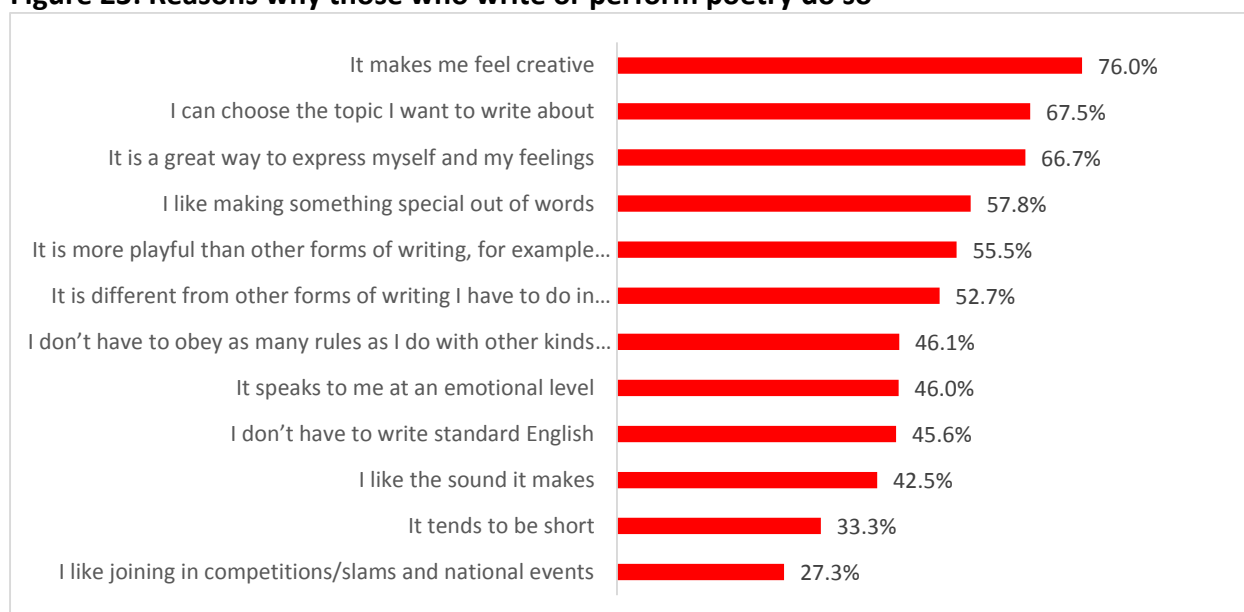
Figure 22: Percentage of children who create poetry at least once a week in their spare time by gender and age group



Why do children and young people create poetry? As shown in Figure 23, most of those who write or perform poetry do so because it makes them feel creative, because they can choose what they write about and because it gives them an outlet to express themselves and their feelings. For over half of the children and young people, poetry offers the opportunity to create something special and allows them to play with language.

Indeed, for a large number of children and young people, poetry also offers a form of writing with a difference: half of those who create poetry say that they like poetry because it is different from other forms of writing they have to do in school, because it is not standard English and because they don't have to follow the same rules as other forms of writing.

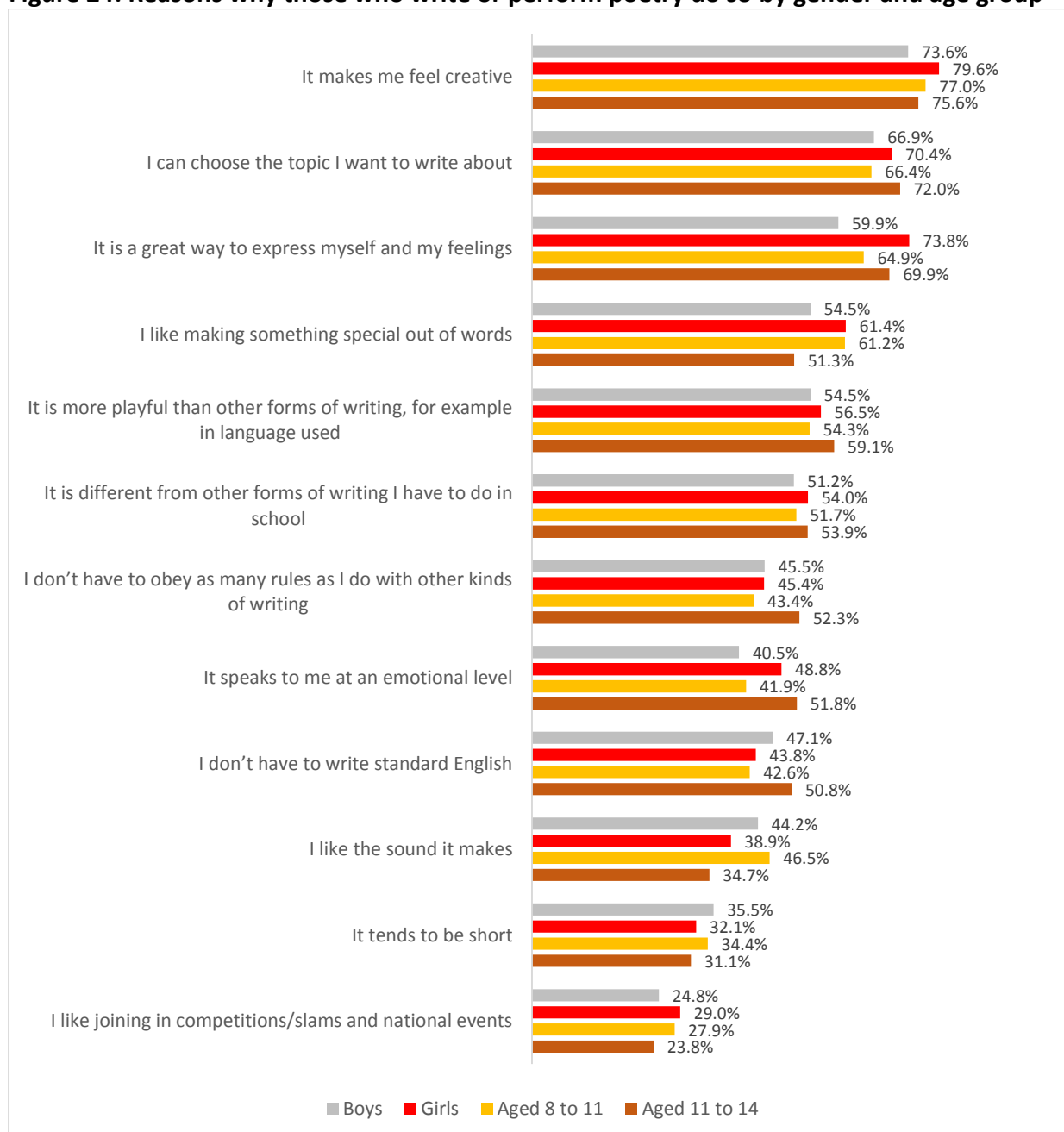
Figure 23: Reasons why those who write or perform poetry do so



There was only one statistically significant difference between boys and girls and their motivation to create poetry and that relates to the poetry being a great way to express themselves and their feelings, which more girls than boys subscribe to (see Figure 24). None of the other undulations in motivation between boys and girls were significant in the statistical sense.

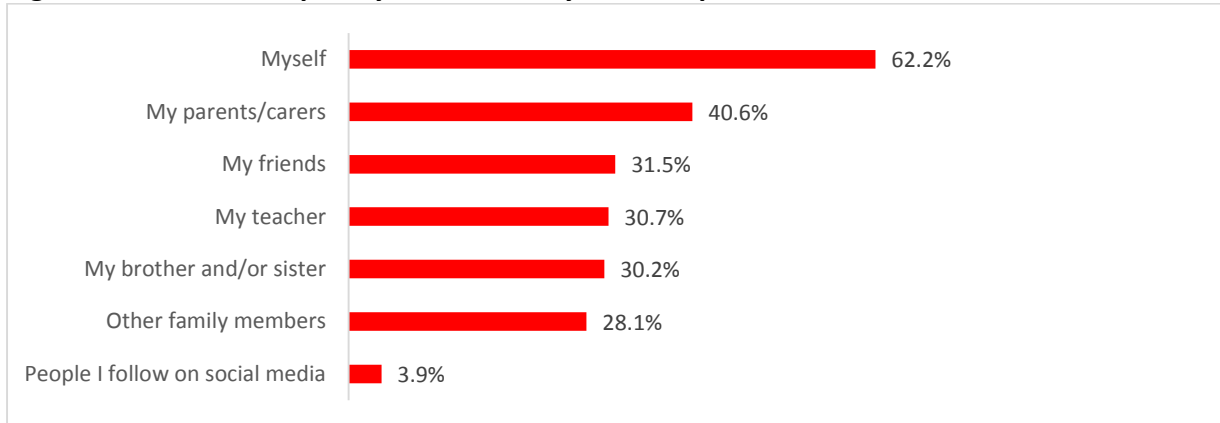
There were only a few more differences in terms of age group that were significant. As the figure shows, more pupils aged 11 to 14 than their younger peers believe that poetry speaks to them at an emotional level. More older pupils also believe that creating poetry means that they don't need to obey the rules that apply to other forms of writing. By contrast, more pupils aged 8 to 11 say that they create poetry because they like the sound it makes and because they like making something special out of words.

Figure 24: Reasons why those who write or perform poetry do so by gender and age group



Those who create poetry were also asked who they write or perform for. As Figure 25 shows, writing or performing poetry is still a very private affair for the majority of children and young people, with 3 in 5 saying that they create poetry mainly for themselves. 2 in 5 create poetry for their parents or carers, while 3 in 10 create poetry for their friends, teacher, siblings or other family members. Less than 1 in 20 (n = 24) say that they create poetry for people they follow on social media.

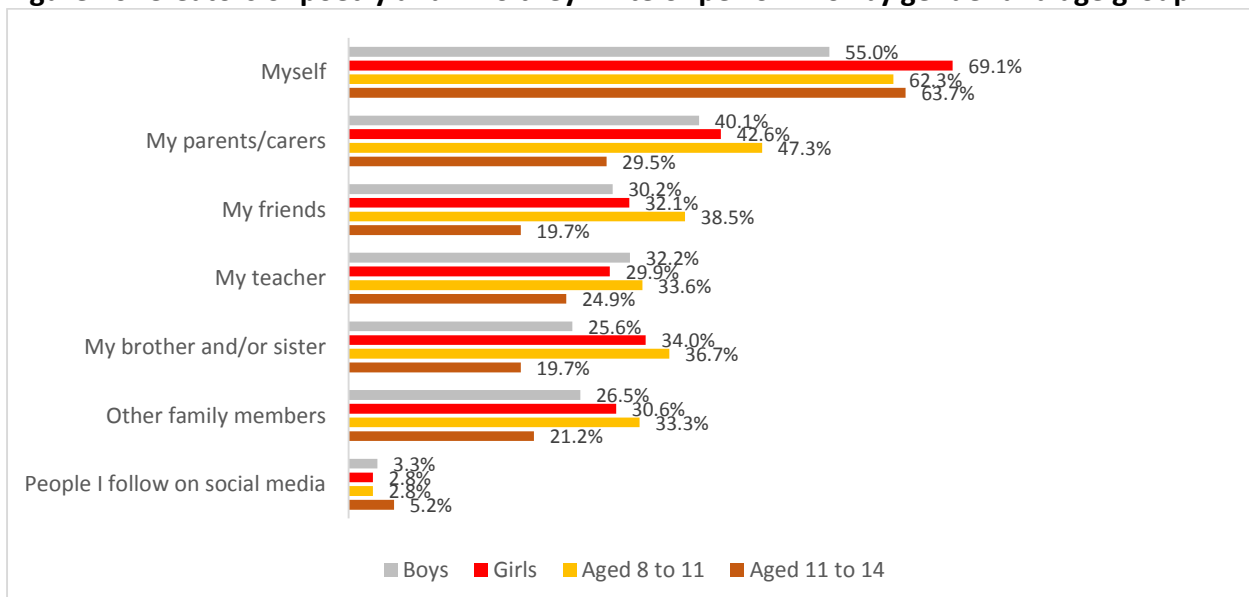
Figure 25: Creators of poetry and who they write or perform for



More girls than boys say that they either write or perform poetry for themselves, perhaps indicating that girls are more private about their poetry writing than boys (see Figure 26). More girls than boys also say that they create poetry for their siblings, despite the fact that boys and girls report similar levels of siblingship. None of the other differences were statistically significant.

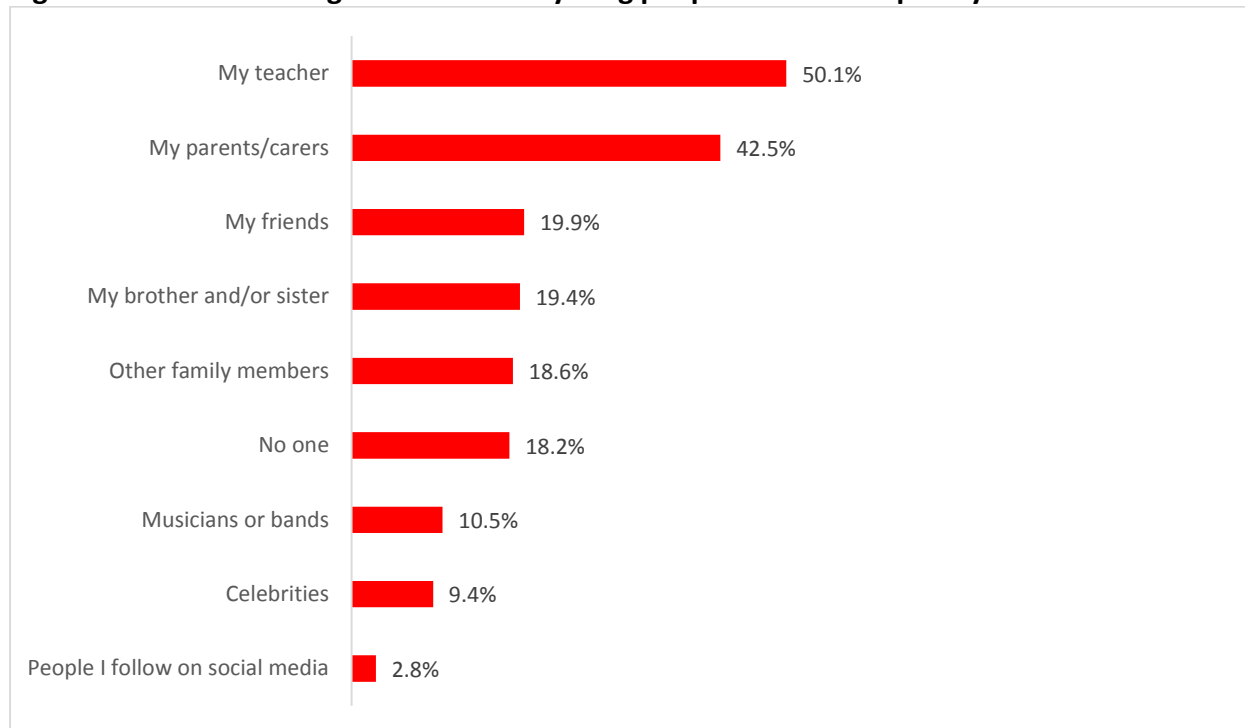
More pupils aged 8 to 11 than their older counterparts said that they write for a wide range of people, including their parents or carers, friends, teacher, siblings and other family members. Although nearly twice as many pupils aged 11 to 14 than those aged 8 to 11 said that they write for people they follow on social media, this was not statistically significant.

Figure 26: Creators of poetry and who they write or perform for by gender and age group



Finally, we asked them who encourages them to write or perform poetry. While only 3 in 10 children and young people write or perform poetry for their teacher (see above), their teacher is the most predominant source of encouragement to create poetry for 1 in 2 children and young people (see Figure 27), followed by their parents or carers. Around 1 in 10 create poetry for musicians, bands or celebrities they follow but only 1 in 40 write or perform poetry for people they follow on social media. However, nearly 1 in 5 indicate that they are self-directed, with no one encouraging them to write or perform poetry.

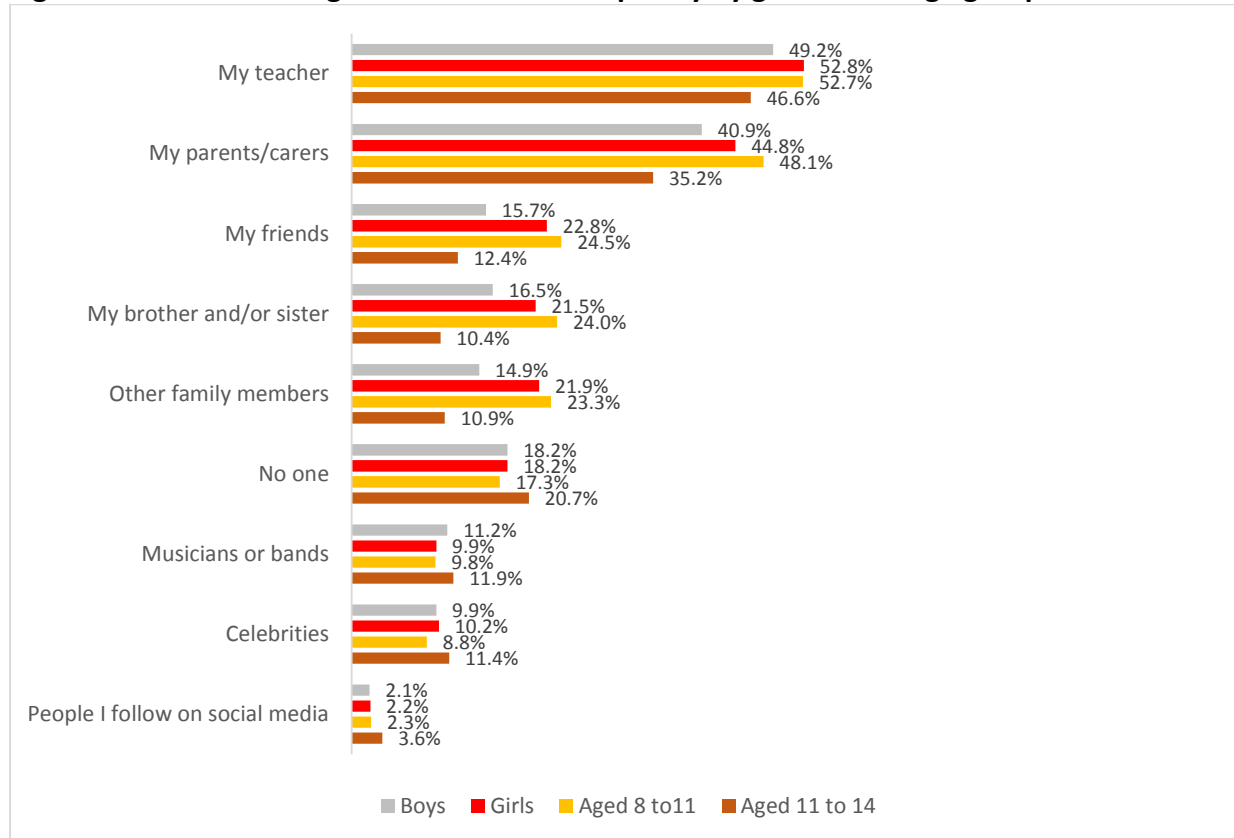
Figure 27: Who encourages children and young people who create poetry



Boys and girls reported similar levels of encouragement to create poetry in their free time from teachers, parents or carers, siblings, people they follow on social media, musicians and celebrities (see Figure 28 overleaf). However, more girls than boys said that they are encouraged to create poetry by friends and other family members.

While teachers, musicians, celebrities and people on social media sites were seen as giving similar levels of encouragement by those aged 8 to 11 as well as those aged 11 to 14, younger pupils were more likely to say that parents or carers, siblings, other family members and friends encourage them to write or perform poetry in their spare time compared with their older counterparts.

Figure 28: Who encourages those who create poetry by gender and age group



In sum

2 in 5 children and young people who create poetry do so at least once a week. Of these frequent poets, more record their poetry at least once a week and video it than write it down either online or on paper – although in general most children and young people who create poetry do so by writing it down on paper.

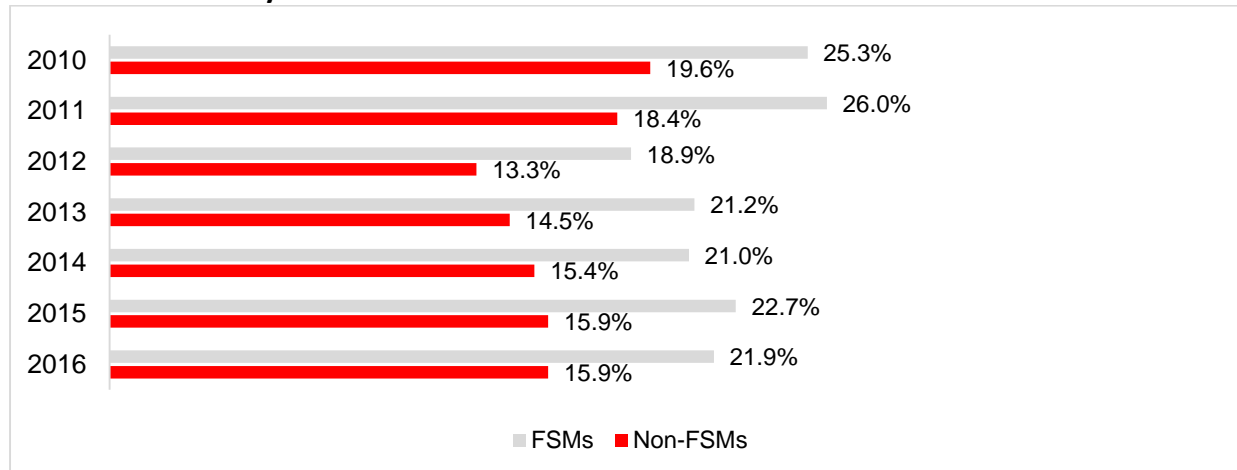
Those who create poetry record high levels of enjoyment. Most children and young people who create poetry say that it makes them feel creative and that poetry is a great way to express themselves and their feelings. Poetry’s difference to other forms of writing is also highlighted, with half saying that they write or perform poetry in their spare time because it is different to other forms of writing they have to do in school, while nearly half said that they create poetry because they don’t have to obey as many rules as other forms of writing.

Most children and young people told us that they create poetry mostly for themselves, though they also create for their parents or carers. Their teacher is the main source of encouragement to create poetry in their spare time, followed by their parents or carers. 1 in 5 told us that they are self-directed, with no one encouraging them to write or perform poetry.

A special focus on children from disadvantaged backgrounds

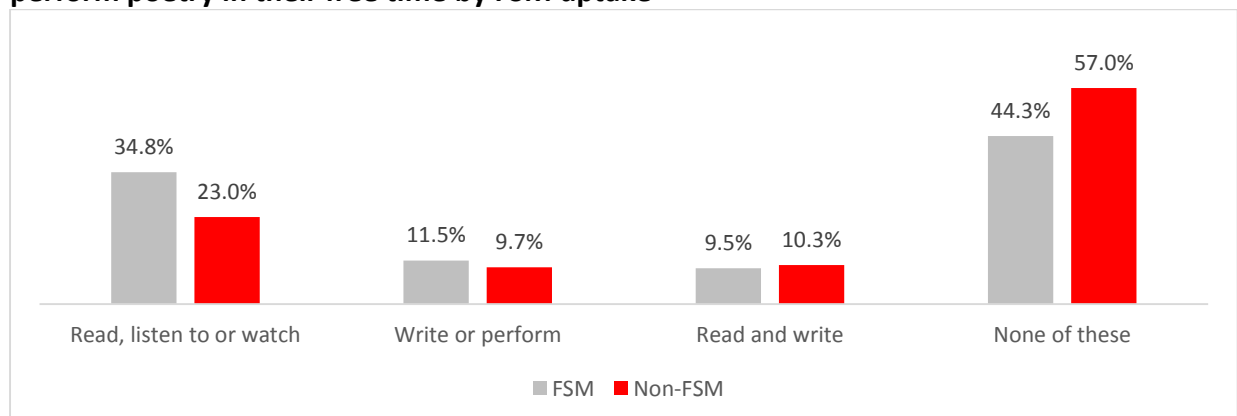
We have run large-scale reading surveys as part of the research programme at the National Literacy Trust since 2005. One of the consistent findings across those surveys is that more children and young people who receive free school meals (FSMs), our proxy measure of socioeconomic background, say that they read or write poetry in their spare time than their peers who do not receive free school meals. The difference between FSM and non-FSM pupils in terms of their reading of poetry outside class since 2010 is shown in Figure 29.

Figure 29: Percentage of children and young people reading poetry in their free time by whether or not they receive free school meals



These findings were supported in this survey, too. We had FSM information from 2,488 children and young people, with 12.3% (N = 305)³ indicating that they receive FSMs. As Figure 30 shows, more FSM children say that they consume poetry in their free time compared with their non-FSM peers. However, the difference between the two groups was minimal with respect to creating poetry or engaging in both the consumption and creation of poetry.

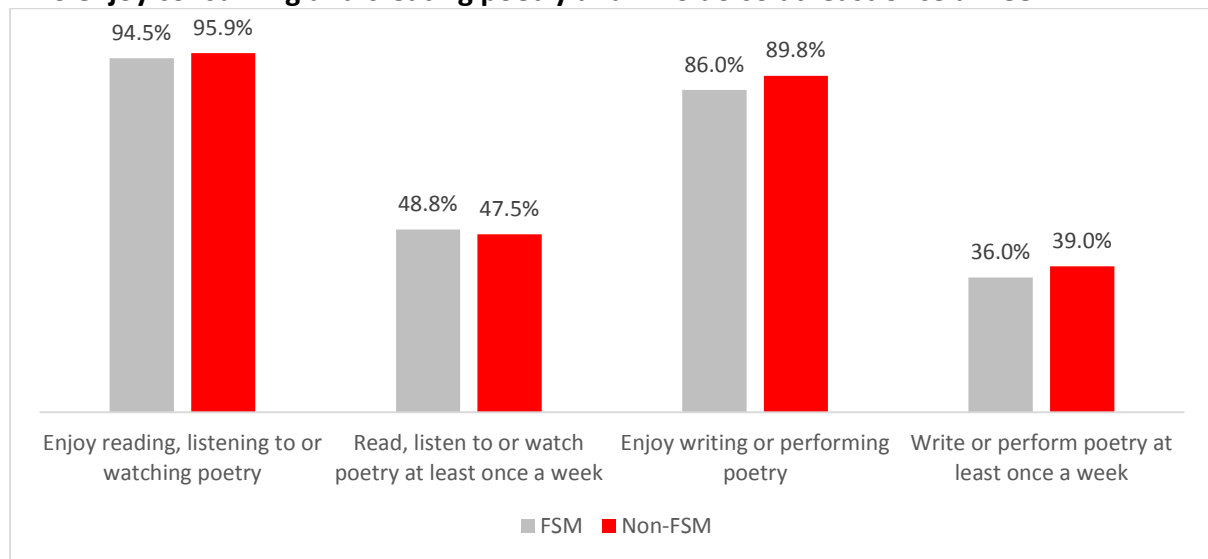
Figure 30: Percentage of children and young people who read, listen to, watch, write or perform poetry in their free time by FSM uptake



While more FSM children and young people say that they consume poetry than their non-FSM peers, levels of enjoyment and frequency are not significantly different.

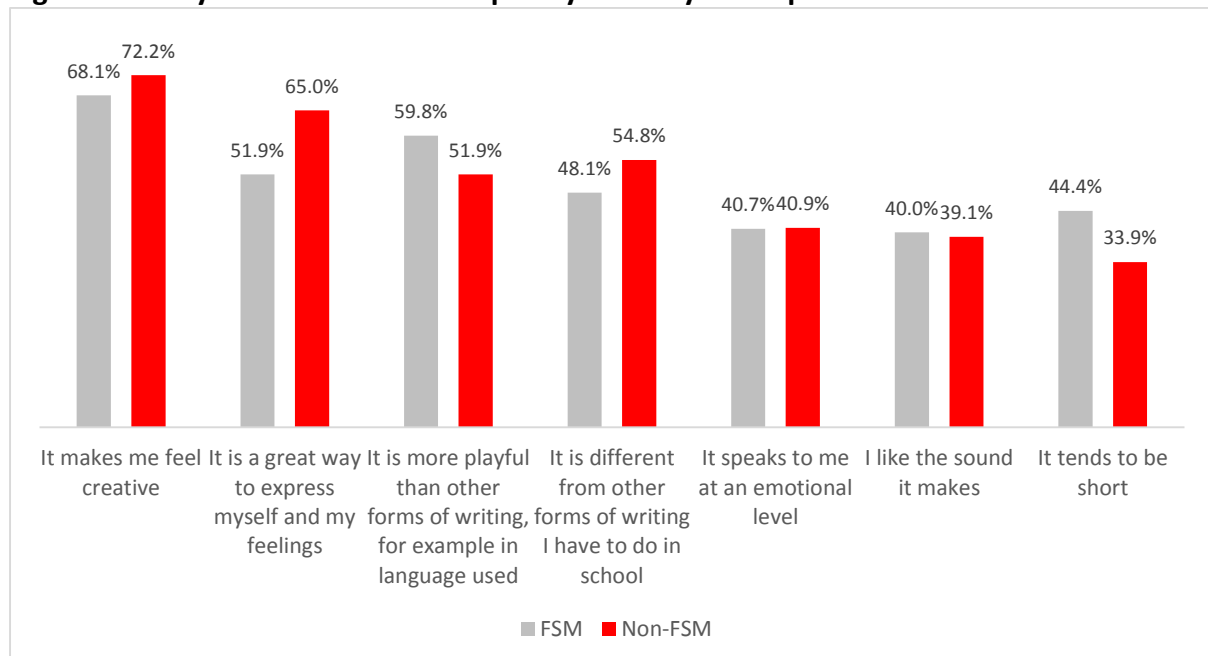
³ The FSM and non-FSM samples were well-matched in terms of gender and age group.

Figure 31: Percentage of children and young people from FSM and non-FSM backgrounds who enjoy consuming and creating poetry and who do so at least once a week



However, our survey provides us with some insight into the motivation of children and young people to consume poetry and Figure 32 shows that children who receive FSMs are more likely to say that they like poetry because it is short and because it is a more playful form of writing compared with their peers who don't receive FSMs, who are more likely to say that they read poetry because it is a great way to express their feelings and because it is different from other forms of writing.

Figure 32: Why those who consume poetry do so by FSM uptake

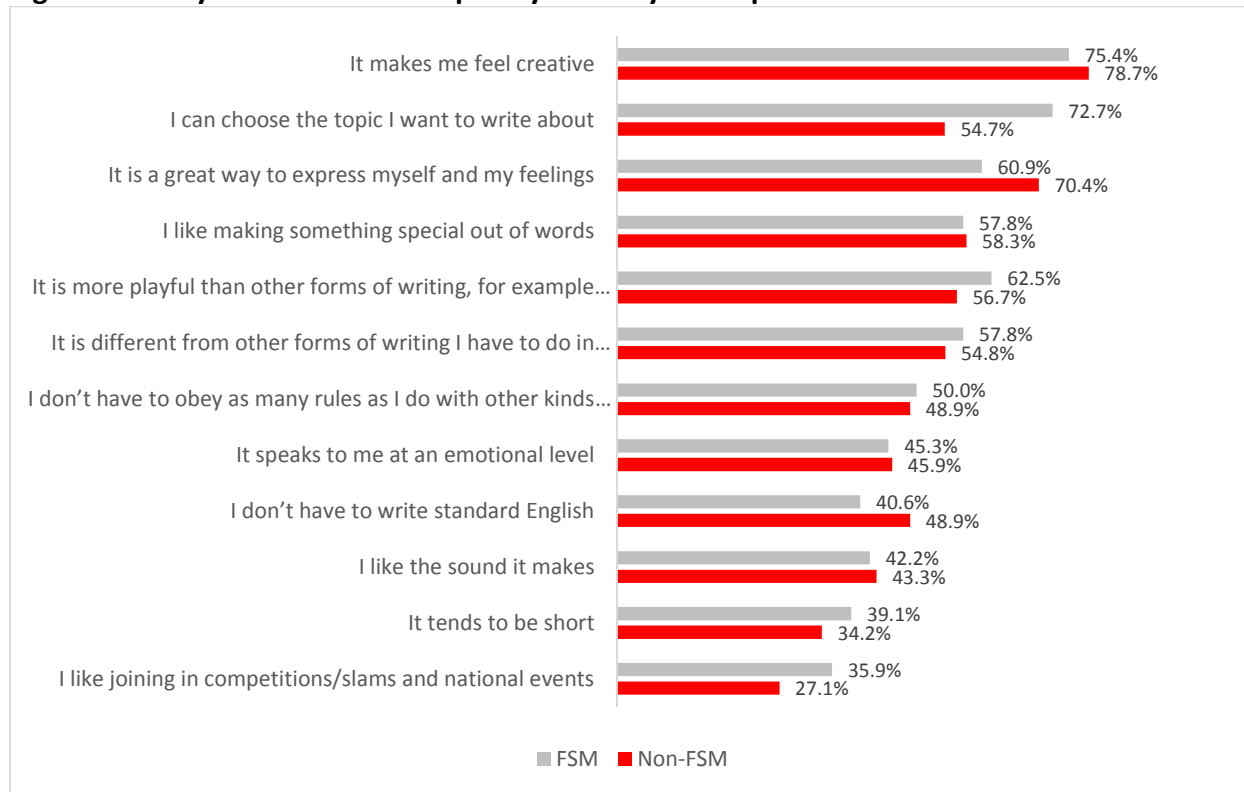


As Figure 33 shows, those differences are also evident when we asked children and young people who create poetry to tell us what they like about poetry. Again, more children and young people who receive FSMs and who create poetry say that they do so because it is more playful than other forms of writing and because it is short. They also told us that they like

writing poetry because they can write about topics they are interested in and that they like taking part in poetry competitions and slams more than their peers who don't receive FSMs.

In contrast, more children and young people who don't receive FSMs say that they like poetry because it helps them express themselves and their feelings and because it is a non-standard way of writing.

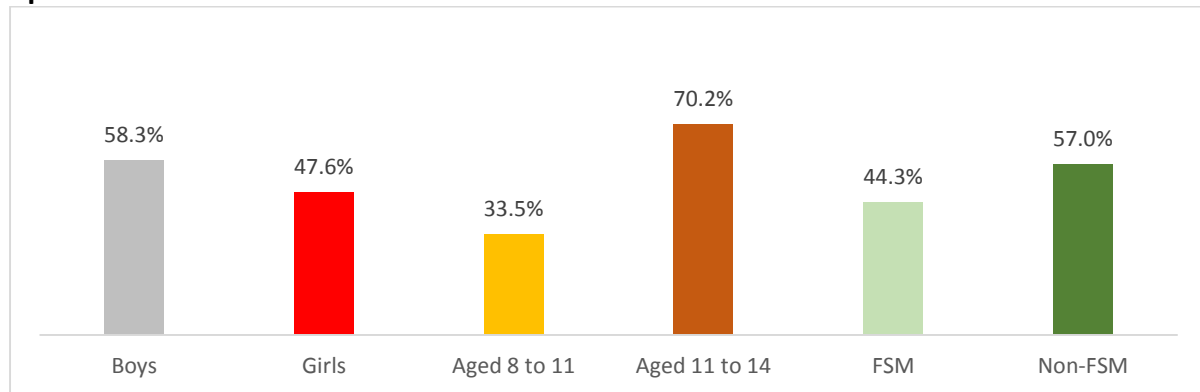
Figure 33: Why those who create poetry do so by FSM uptake



A focus on those who don't engage with poetry

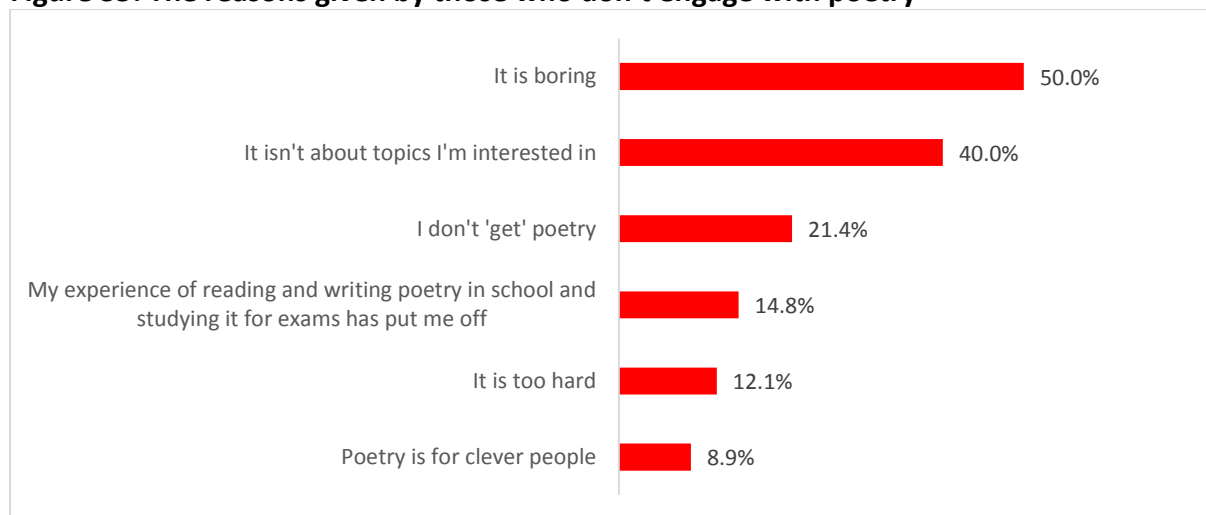
To recap, over half (54%) of our sample told us that they don't read, listen to, watch, write or perform poetry. More boys than girls say this as do pupils who don't receive FSMs compared with those who do (see Figure 34). However, the biggest gap is evident with respect to age group, with twice as many pupils aged 11 to 14 saying that they don't consume or create poetry compared with their young peers.

Figure 34: Percentage of those who don't engage with poetry by gender, age group and FSM uptake



We wanted to know from them why they don't engage with poetry. As Figure 35 shows, 1 in 2 say that they don't consume or create poetry because it is boring, while 2 in 5 say that they don't engage with poetry because it isn't about topics that they are interested in. 1 in 5 also say that they don't engage with poetry because they don't 'get' it.

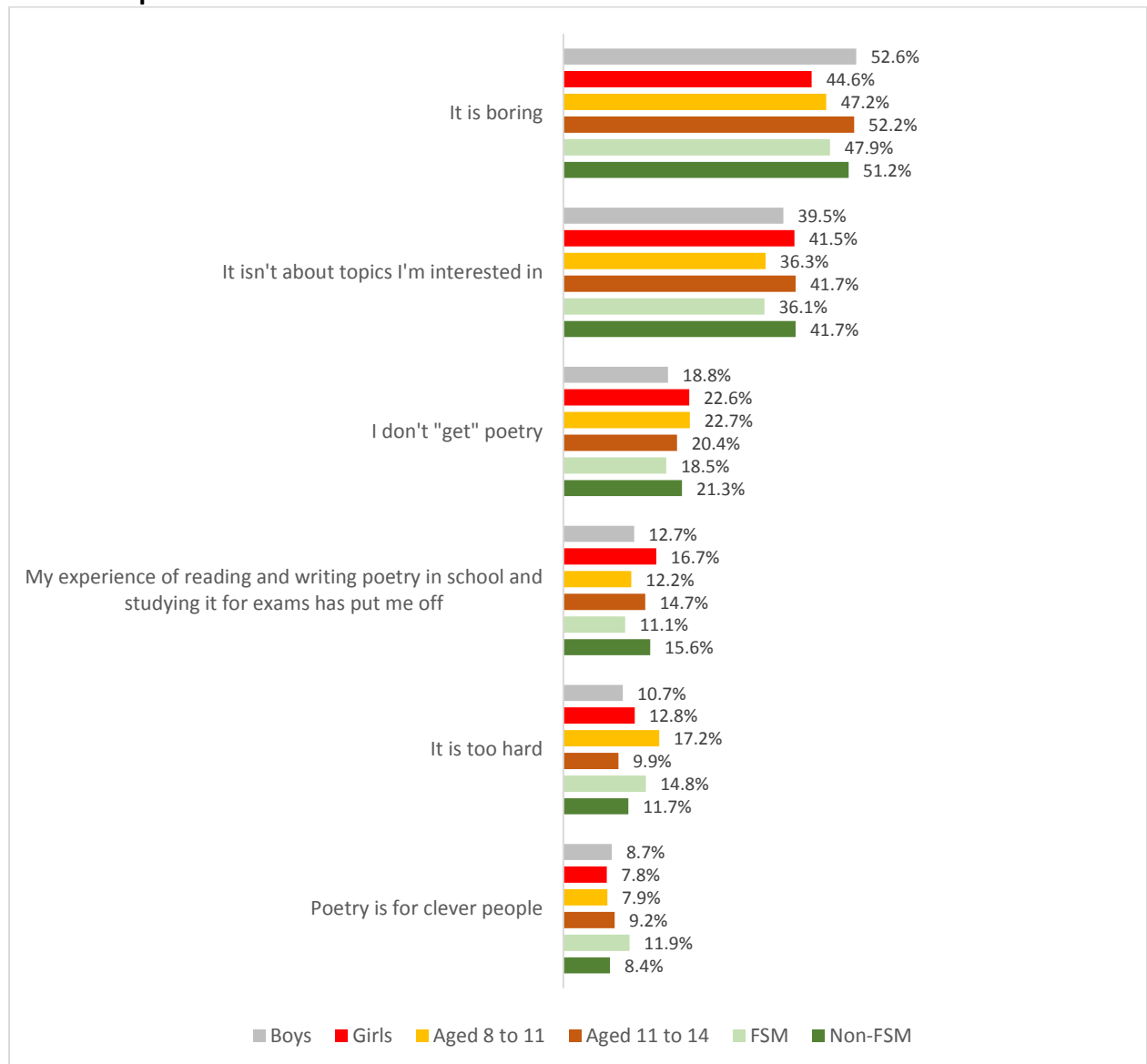
Figure 35: The reasons given by those who don't engage with poetry



Other reasons include children and young people preferring more narrative text to poetry and also finding poetry too restrictive. For example: "I do not not like poetry, it is just that it is not what I enjoy doing because I prefer writing short stories where you are not as restricted" (Boy, Y7).

As can be seen in Figure 36, the reasons for not engaging in poetry in their spare time were very similar across our socio-demographic groups. Indeed, there was only one statistically significant difference, with pupils aged 8 to 11 being more likely than pupils aged 11 to 14 to say that they don't engage with poetry because it is too hard.

Figure 36: The reasons given by those who don't engage with poetry by gender, age group and FSM-uptake



These themes recur when children and young people were asked to tell us what would make poetry more appealing. As the word cloud in Figure 37 shows, children and young people told us that they would engage with poetry more if it was funnier, more narrative like a story, more relevant and “modern” and if it involved sports or (video) games, such as *Fortnite*.

Figure 37: What would make poetry more appealing to you ...



Summing up

So, what has this survey, which we believe to be the first of its kind, shown us? We believe that it has highlighted many things worth celebrating about children and young people's perception of poetry's many aspects. It can be listened to, watched and performed as well as read and written, and it is linked in their minds with creativity, playfulness and self-expression.

Firstly, it is interesting how much creativity pervades every aspect of children and young people's views and experiences of poetry, from being one of the main characteristics of what makes a poet to being the top reason why children and young people read and write poetry. Creativity also surfaced again as a theme more indirectly when children told us that they like making poetry because they like creating something special with words, which in our minds links poetry with creativity via literacy again.

This is perhaps particularly interesting given the current political context of reduced arts funding and a reduction of creative subjects, such as the exclusion of arts subjects from the EBacc, which has been a source of concern for many educationalists and others. We know that creative skills will be in demand in the future workplace, so it's lovely to see how important the creative aspects of poetry, and its promotion of self-expression, is for a large number of children and young people.

The idea of poetry as playfulness is clearly the source of much of its appeal, which we didn't expect and which appears to be particularly important for FSM pupils: it comes a close second to creativity as their reason for consuming poetry and is in fourth place for the reasons why

they create poetry. Although not statistically significant, more pupils aged 11 to 14 than their younger peers mentioned the importance of playfulness for both consuming and creating poetry.

Poetry as a form of self-expression is another theme that crops up time and again, particularly for girls. It would be interesting to explore this aspect of poetry further in the light of the current focus on children and young people's mental health as it might be that girls are more likely to find outlets for their self-expression than boys.

One particular focus of this survey was to understand just why pupils who receive free school meals are more likely to engage with poetry than their peers from more advantaged backgrounds. This survey has given us glimpses of insight we haven't had before. For example, although more FSM children read, listen to and watch poetry in their spare time, their levels of enjoyment and behaviour are roughly the same as their non-FSM peers. But there were also points of difference in that FSM pupils are more likely than non-FSM pupils to be motivated by choice, playfulness, things different from 'normal' school and the opportunity for competition. They are also more likely to say that they like poetry because it is short. Whether this has something to do with generally lower literacy skills for these groups of children or the fact that they might not have grown up in an environment where spending a lot of time just reading or writing for pleasure is encouraged, so poetry is a 'time-efficient' way of having fun for them, ought to be explored in further research.

The other interesting finding is one about a lack of difference – namely in terms of boys' and girls' experience of poetry, particularly the consumption of poetry. Gender differences tend to pervade all aspects of literacy, from skill to enjoyment, behaviour and attitudes. Yet none of this has been prevalent in the present survey where differences between boys and girls have been far and few between when it comes to their reading, listening to and watching poetry. Differences between the genders only emerged when we explored the views of those who created poetry. Although boys and girls created poetry to similar degrees across the different formats, more girls than boys took to pen and paper. Regardless of the format they use to create poetry, more girls than boys do so at least once week. More girls than boys also appear to compose poetry for themselves – maybe like a diary? – and more girls than boys create poetry out of a wish for self-expression.

Another observation relates to age group and the fact that many of the age patterns we found in this survey follow the general patterns for reading and writing, with older children reading poetry more online and younger children enjoying poetry more. What is also interesting is that more 8 to 11-year-olds were recording poetry on their phones, which highlights an 'accessible' and 'creative' use of technology in that age group: while they cannot be part of social networking sites it is great that they can use phones to film and record poetry.

Finally, it is no shock that a large number of those who don't engage with poetry in any form say that they don't do so because poetry is boring. However, it is encouraging that only a small percentage of children and young people say that they don't engage with poetry because they don't 'get' it, because it is too hard or because it is only for clever people. According to children and young people, therefore, it is not difficulty that deters them but a sense that poetry isn't light-hearted or relevant, either in terms of topics of interest and

perceptions of modernity. And that is something that we – as researchers, parents or carers, educationalists and policymakers - can do something about.

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