

Performance Audit

School Transport System
Education Division

Report by the Auditor General

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Mr. Speaker,

This report has been prepared and is being submitted in terms of sub-paragraph 8(a)(ii) of the First Schedule of the Auditor General and National Audit Office Act, 1997, for presentation to the House of Representatives in accordance with sub-paragraph 8(b) of the said Act.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. G. Galea', with a stylized flourish at the end.

J. G. Galea
Auditor General

The Hon. Speaker
House of Representatives
Valletta

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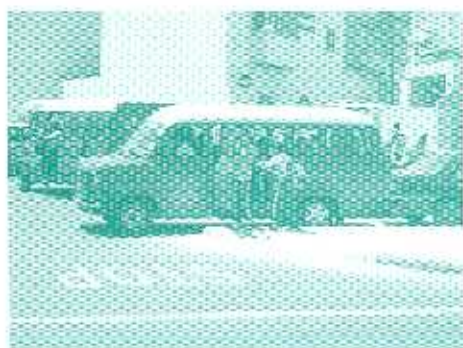
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Glossary

DAS	Departmental Accounting System
L.N.	Legal Notice
Minibus Co-op	Co-operative of minibus owners
MUT	Malta Union of Teachers
NAO	National Audit Office
PTA	Public Transport Association
Service Provider(s)	Public Transport Association/Unscheduled Bus Service / Co- operative of minibus owners - as applicable
STR	School Transport Requirement sheet
STS	School Transport Section (Education Division)
TNP	Trips Not Performed report compiled by schools
UBS	Unscheduled Bus Service
(n =)	size of sample being analysed



Executive Summary



Executive Summary

1. The National Audit Office (NAO) undertook a performance audit of the School Transport System provided by the Education Division within the Ministry of Education. The audit was undertaken during the period October 2001 to May 2002.

Legislative framework

2. School transport is supplied free of charge to all students attending government schools, residing beyond the walking distance of 1.6km (or 1 mile) from school.

Eligible students for school transport	18,718
Number of schools eligible for school transport	83
Number of vehicles operating the system	739
Government Annual Expenditure on this service	Approx Lm1 million

Managing the System

3. The School Transport Section (STS), falling under the Operations Department of the Education Division is responsible to plan and manage school transport. The section is poorly managed by one official whose duties range from planning and setting routes to finalising payment for the service.

4. At school level, heads in general supported by their union, refrain from taking full responsibility for monitoring the service. This seemingly lack of ownership of the service is contributing to shortcomings in the service and abuse in payment for the service.

5. Overpayments estimated at 10 per cent of total payments during 2001, arise from trips not performed and phantom routes included in invoices for payment. NAO informed the Education Division that there is strong evidence that such overpayment was carried out fraudulently.
6. The Education Division has stated that it will try to implement a number of internal control improvements to prevent these overpayments from recurring.
7. There is a high element of collusion in price setting among service providers of school transport. During the ongoing negotiations with the Education Division on a new agreement, the service providers are maintaining a common front and are effectively operating as a cartel. This has ultimately strengthened the service providers' negotiating position with the Education Division, itself a dominant player in the market for unscheduled transport.

The schools' perception of the service

8. A questionnaire was mailed to all the schools in November 2001. Responses made mention of instances of the following weaknesses in the system:
 - Drivers not conforming to the official route;
 - Trip amalgamation, when one vehicle picks up students from different schools or students from the same school but of different routes;
 - Students being picked up early in the morning and others left waiting for a long time after school finishes unsupervised;
 - Students arriving late at school after the first lesson starts;
 - The absence of an established policy regarding supervision of students on the vehicle;

- Lack of awareness of who is responsible for the welfare of the students while in transit;
 - Complaints ranging from time related, trip-route related, driver/vehicle related to student related complaints.
9. Only 50 per cent of the complaints forwarded to the School Transport Section are settled while another 18 per cent of the complaints are solved temporarily and resurface again.
10. The schools rated the school transport as 7 out of 10 however, this high rating has to be considered against resistance by heads of school, supported by their union, in being involved in the management and control of school transport.

Users' perception of the school transport service

11. In order to assess the level of satisfaction with the school transport service, NAO undertook a telephone survey among students and parents of children eligible to use school transport. The survey, based on a sample of 613 students eligible for transport, reveals that 89 per cent of students make use of all or part of the service.

12. The following were the major shortcomings in the service experienced by a significant share of respondents in the survey:

Timeliness factors

- Incidents of irregular pick up times by vehicle drivers in the morning (35 per cent of interviewed morning users) and delays in pick up times in the afternoon (48 per cent of interviewed afternoon users);

- Trips lasting longer than 30 minutes (27 per cent of interviewed morning users);
- Students waiting at pick up point more than one hour before school start (28 per cent of interviewed morning users);
- Incidents of students reporting cases of arrival at school before schools open/school start and left waiting unsupervised (23 per cent of interviewed morning users);
- Incidents of students reporting cases of arrival after school has already started (10 per cent of interviewed morning users);
- Incidents of students reporting cases of waiting unsupervised for late school transport outside school premises (22 per cent of interviewed afternoon users).

Factors related to quality of service

- Incidents of overcrowding on school buses (27 per cent of interviewed morning users, 32 per cent of interviewed afternoon users);
- Lack of cleanliness on school buses (4 per cent of interviewed users);
- Cases of driver misconduct (6 per cent of interviewed users).

Factors related to route management

- Incidents of missed trips (19 per cent of interviewed morning users and 18 per cent of interviewed afternoon users);
- Cases of amalgamated trips with other schools (16 per cent of interviewed morning users and 14 per cent of interviewed afternoon users);

- Cases of rerouting of trips (4 per cent of interviewed morning users and 7 per cent of interviewed afternoon users).

13. The survey's findings reveal that on average respondents graded their level of satisfaction with the service at 3.78 points, out of a maximum of 5, which indicates that users are satisfied with the level of service. Respondents indicated comfort and consistency as positive aspects of the service.

Seating capacity and cost of transport

14. Average utilisation of vehicle capacity was estimated to be 69 per cent. The average daily cost of two way transport per eligible student is 30 cents.

Factors contributing towards shortcomings in the school transport system and in the quality of service

15. NAO opines that the major factors giving rise to shortcomings in the school transport system and the quality of service are:

- The absence of a formal contract regulating the conditions under which the school transport service is to be provided and the quality of service to be expected from the service providers¹ ;
- Lack of ownership, clear responsibilities related to transport issues from planning to payment for services and weak management at school level of the school transport system.

¹ Presently, negotiations are underway between the Education Division and the Service Providers to enter into the first formal contract between the two parties since 1976. The contract should include clear responsibilities related to transport issues.

16. Recommendations are included at the end of this report in order to address the findings recorded in the audit.

17. A critical issue of this service is lack of clarity regarding the liability in case of accidents during transit of students. Legal advice sought by NAO indicates that the Education Division could be held liable for the welfare of students during transit.



Introduction



Part 1 - Introduction

1.1 The National Audit Office (NAO) carried out the performance audit of the School Transport system provided by the Education Division within the Ministry of Education. The audit was conducted during the period October 2001 to May 2002. The findings in this report are as presented and verified by the NAO as at end May 2002.

Audit Concern

1.2 The school transport in Malta is an issue that concerns all the people having school children entitled to free school transport. For the major part of the users of this service and their parents, the quality of service given by the service providers is poor. On the media, one is made aware of the complaints raised on school transport: drivers picking up the school children very early in the morning and then waiting for more than an hour at school before school starts; overcrowding on buses and stranded children.

Audit Problem

1.3 Deficiencies in the system resulted from the absence of an adequate management structure to run the school transport system and the absence of internal controls to monitor expenditure incurred and quality of service received.

Background

1.4 The L.N. 11 of 1978 founded the Central Offices of the Scheduled and the Unscheduled Bus Service to regulate the public scheduled and unscheduled transport in Malta.

1.5 Prior to 1978 before the Unscheduled Bus Service was set up, the Education Division used to procure school transport services from the private contractors following a call for tenders through the Accountant General. When calls for tenders were issued the Government used to fix a ceiling beyond which contractors could not quote. The contracts entered into were based on one scholastic year. The department also exercised the ‘*pass*’ system to students eligible for school transport but not making use of it. These students were given a ‘*pass*’ to ride free of charge to and from school on buses or being reimbursed for bus fares paid.

1.6 In 1984, the Director of Education appointed a Board on School Transport. The Board was composed of three members – a Chairman and two members. The Director of Education and the Board designed the transport system to be exercised in running the school transport. The Board carried out various studies regarding the economic and efficient aspects of the school transport. These studies covered such aspects as routes covering less than 1 mile and routes covered by excessive number of buses. On the 20th March 1984 the Board recommended that the Department should enter into an agreement with the Unscheduled and Scheduled Bus Service in order to safeguard the continuity of service and establishing the conditions of hire. This recommendation led the then Education Department to issue a call for quotation for the supply of school transport as per Government Gazette number 14,264 of 13th April 1984.

1.7 After the call for quotation was published in the Government Gazette, the Education Department informed various transport service providers including the Unscheduled Bus Service about the said notice.

1.8 This call for quotations instigated various reactions from the UBS. The UBS ordered the Director of Education to revoke the call for quotations because this was not in accordance to L.N. 11 of 1978. The UBS was already carrying out school

transport services to the Education Department and was expecting more work to be passed on to its office by the said department.

1.9 The letter from UBS coerced the Education Department to take action in favour of UBS and informed the service providers about the non-acceptance of their quotations.

1.10 The L.N. 143 of 1989 added another section to L.N. 11 of 1978. This section regulated the transport of school children. In 1991, another legal notice was issued L.N.144/1991 in exercise of the powers conferred by section 17 of the Traffic Regulation Ordinance and by section 27 of the Public Transport Authority Act, 1989 which defined the duties of the central offices of the transport service providers.

1.11 In 1992, the problem of regulating school transport through tender/contracts was again addressed by the Public Transport Authority. However the Education Department informed Public Transport Authority that no tender/contract should be entered into due to LN 144/91, which states that transport of school children is to be performed exclusively by PTA, UBS and Minibus Co-op. At present, no formal contract has yet been signed between the Education Division and the Service Providers. However, negotiations are underway between the two parties to enter into the first formal agreement since 1976.

1.12 The three service providers have a strong position in the market. This is the result of the following factors:

- The service providers have consolidated and dominated the passenger transport industry. The three associations or cooperatives provide private transport services to state and private schools, to the tourism and entertainment sector and to industry. They own all transport facilities and cater for all scheduled transport.

- The buyers operating in this market are fragmented and range from small to medium and large organisations, the Education Division being probably the largest single buyer in this market. In such an oligopolistic situation, buyers are usually price-takers.

1.13 This market structure ultimately means that the service providers:

- Do not depend on the Education Division for a significant percentage of their turnover.
- A high element of collusion and interdependence among the service providers is making the service providers look more like a cartel and the market's structure more like a monopoly. The service providers maintain a common front during negotiations with the Education Division and enforce a price-fixing arrangement amongst them. They also enjoy the exclusivity granted to them by Government over the provision of transport to public schools.
- The service is important to the Education Division and there are few or no alternatives.

1.14 However, the Education Division remains a significant buyer in the market, operating a centralised system that buys in large quantities. Therefore, it can use its purchasing power as leverage to bargain its own terms and conditions.

Present School Transport System

1.15 On deciding on school transport one has to take into consideration the number of schools, the number of students eligible for transport and the distances the students have to travel.

1.16 According to the Education Act Cap.327 section 16(2):
“For the purpose mentioned in sub-article (1), the Minister

shall whenever possible maintain a school in every town or village and shall provide transport for pupils who reside in areas which are distant from the school.”

1.17 The school transport in Malta is supplied to all students attending government schools, residing beyond the walking distance of 1.6km (or 1 mile) from school, free of charge.

1.18 The Education Division has a specific section within its departments to manage the school transport. The School Transport Section (STS) is responsible for organising school transport routes, vetting of invoices for services received and the processing of payments to Accounts².

The School Transport Section

1.19 The School Transport Section falls under the Operations Department of the Education Division.

1.20 The main role of this section is to organise and provide transport to school children in state schools and monitor the system throughout the scholastic year³. In order to fulfil this role this section is headed by an officer on loan from the Public Transport Authority and a support worker from the Education Division. The head has been occupying the post since 1994.

1.21 Chart 1.1 (Page 26) explains the relationships of the STS within the Education Division.

Government expenditure on school transport

1.22 The government expenditure on school transport is approximately Lm1 million per annum. The Education Division provides transport to all those students eligible for the transport

² Source: Annual Report of Government Departments – 1999

³ Source: Internal Audit Report 12/07/1999

and for students with special needs. This audit reviews the school transport performed by the three service providers (PTA, UBS and Mini Bus Co-op) for the Primary, Secondary and Trade schools referred to as the mainstream schools in Malta.

Table 1.1 - Estimated and Actual Payment for School Transport

Year	Estimated Expenditure Mainstream Lm	Actual Expenditure Mainstream Lm
1997	767,000	811,840
1998	805,000	976,501
1999	845,000	909,649
2000	726,000	934,118
2001	757,000	953,656

Source: Government Estimates 1997 - 2001 and DAS

1.23 The rates paid to the service providers were last revised in 1996. The following are the rates for the buses/coaches and mini-buses which cover the relative distances.

Table 1.2 - Rates per Trip

Distances per trip In Km.	Rates Buses/Coaches Lm	Rates Mini-Buses Lm
Up to 16	3.10	2.40
Over 16 to 24	3.70	3.00
Over 24 to 32	4.25	3.60
Over 32 to 40	5.40	4.20
Over 40	6.00	4.80

Source: School Transport Section - Education Division

The Providers of the School Transport

1.24 The Education Division tries to cater for different needs of the students in providing school transport. The transport provided varies from the mainstream transport of students by buses/coaches and mini buses to vehicles with lifters for the special needs and taxi service for students with special needs or court cases. This audit focuses on the mainstream transport which makes up the major part of the school transport.

1.25 The Education Division entrusted the mainstream school transport service to the Public Transport Association (PTA), Unscheduled Bus Services (UBS) and Mini Bus co-operative (MB). No documentation of contracts and conditions were found at the Education Division in respect of these service providers. The provision of school transport services by the said service providers is regulated by I.N. 144/1991.

1.26 Every day the STS provides 739 school vehicles to over 18,000 students eligible for school transport.

1.27 The whole school route network consists of 620 routes and is carried out by 480 buses/coaches and 259 mini buses. Some routes are catered for by more than one vehicle. These vehicles are supplied by the service providers to the following school categories:-

Table 1.3 - Buses/Coaches supplied

	Primary	Secondary	Trade	Total
Public Transport Association	49	190	14	253
Unscheduled Bus Service	37	177	13	227
	86	367	27	480

Source: School Routes Register 2001/2002 at Education Division

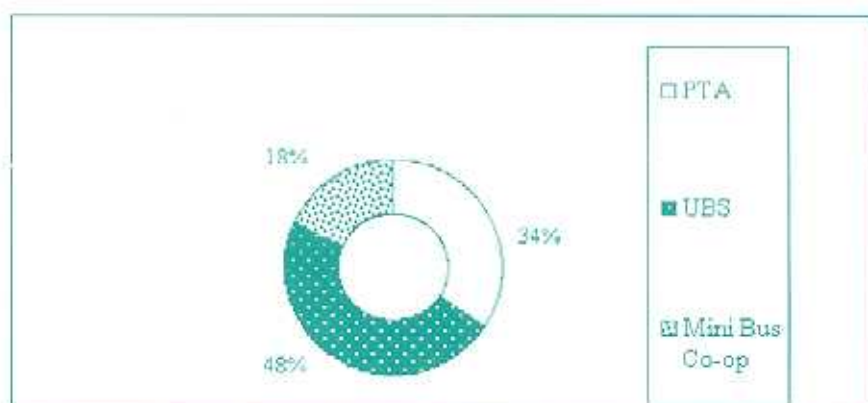
Table 1.4 - Mini – Buses supplied

	Primary	Secondary	Trade	Total
Unscheduled Bus Service	19	46	59	124
Mini Bus Co-operative	70	57	8	135
	89	103	67	259

Source: School Routes Register 2001/2002 at Education Division

1.28 The following table shows the relative share of school transport vehicles with respect to the three service providers.

Chart 1.2 - Share of transport vehicles per service provider



Source: School Routes Register 2001/2002 at Education Division

1.29 Chart 1.2 shows that there is an unequal share in transport between the service providers. UBS offers a wider variety of vehicles. It supplies both buses/coaches and mini buses for the school transport. Whereas PTA only provides buses and the Mini Bus Co-op supplies mini buses.

Objectives of Audit

1.30 This audit was performed in order to ensure whether the Education Division:

- adheres to the government policy and objectives of providing transport to school children,
- is provided at the least cost,
- operates efficiently and effectively.

Scope of Audit

1.31 The scope of this audit included the review of:

- the policy of the Education Division towards the provision of school transport;
- the laws related to school transport;
- documentation prepared by the Education Division and the schools:-

Documents from the Education Division:

- i. the payment vouchers and invoices relating to the three service providers namely Public Transport Association (PTA), Unscheduled Bus Service (UBS) and Mini Bus Co-op (MB Co-op)
- ii. the school route register held by the Division.

Documents from the schools:

- i. a copy of the school route register
- ii. copies of monthly invoices from the service providers
- iii. trips not performed reports (TNPs)

1.32 This study does not cover transport for Special Needs students and school transport in Gozo even though these are paid out of the public funds.

Methodology

1.33 The assignment was based from the information obtained from the Education Division, heads of school and the schools/ students who are the users of this service. Information was collated from the following sources:

- an evaluation of the administration of the school transport system was carried out at the Education Division through various interviews conducted with the relative officials and the performance of a compliance test to check the payment system;
- a questionnaire to school heads covering the management and co-ordination of school transport by schools;
- a survey to parents to assess their satisfaction with the school transport system.

Testing of the School Transport Payment System and Procedure

1.34 A compliance test was carried out in order to check the payment system and the procedures in operation. The review was carried out through a sample of 40 schools (37 per cent of schools) which covered all categories. These schools were selected to cover the largest number of students eligible for transport possible. The schools in sample covered a student population of 14,066 being 75 per cent of total student eligible for school transport. The test covered five months (November 2000, February 2001, March 2001, April 2001 and May 2001) of the scholastic year 2000-2001.

Table 1.5 – Number of students eligible for school transport in schools chosen for sample

Category	Number of Schools	Students eligible for transport
Primary	13	1,568
Secondary	22	12,006
Trade and Ex-Opportunity	3	399
Special Needs	2	93
Total	40	14,066

Source: List of eligible students submitted by schools.

Questionnaire to schools

1.35 NAO issued a questionnaire (Appendix 1) to 102 schools in November 2001, representing the total school population in Malta. Not all the schools are entitled to school transport. The questionnaire covered the following areas in school transport;

- responsibilities of the school;
- co-ordination;
- control;
- complaints handling mechanism;
- satisfaction rating.

1.36 However, NAO was obstructed from proceeding with the questionnaire due to MUT directive 4th December 2001. This directive was specifically designed to prevent the school head teachers from responding question 2.5. This question asked the head teachers to assure whether the trips assigned to their schools were all performed, collate the number of students

boarding the vehicle and the seating capacity of the vehicle attached to the relative route. Notwithstanding the above directive, 100 per cent of schools completed the questionnaire except question 2.5 which was filled by 68 per cent of the schools.

Questionnaire to Parents

1.37 Between 6th February and 6th March 2002 a survey was conducted on a sample of 739 students/ parents. The survey was based on a questionnaire (Appendix 2) carried out through telephone interviews. It was decided that the sample would include a group of 613 students chosen through stratification methods from 100 schools, the sample from each school being directly proportional to its population. In addition, the user-population of the remaining two schools, a total of 126, would be taken in its entirety. The parents were asked questions covering their satisfaction with the efficiency and effectiveness of the school transport system.

Managing the System



Part 2 - Managing the System

The School Transport System

2.1 The planning of school transport is carried out during the summer months. In the first week of July the STS sends a *School Transport Requirement sheet* (STR) to every school. Schools are requested to fill in the STR, indicating the number of students requiring transport, the town/village and the pick up point. This document has to reach the STS by not later than the beginning of August (i.e. one month after receipt)

2.2 The information received from schools would be processed by the section and transformed into a schools' route register. The schools' route register indicates the:

- routes attached to each individual school;
- number of vehicles allocated to the route;
- company which is responsible for the route;
- rate of the trip.

2.3 Where there is no response from the schools, transport requirements are calculated by STS on the previous year's services.

2.4 The schools' route registers are distributed to the Accounts Section of the Education Division and another one to the service providers. The school route register sent to the Accounts Section is divided into three sub log books each containing the routes appertaining to each service provider. Each service provider

receives the log book indicating the school and the routes which concern them only. Each school receives that 'section' of the schools' route register pertaining to it.

2.5 Every month during the scholastic year the service providers each send an invoice to their respective schools. The invoice shows the number of trips performed and the respective rates. The invoice is sent in triplicate form, one to be checked by the school and sent to STS, another one to be returned checked by the school to the service provider and the third to be retained by the school.

2.6 The school prepares a *Trips Not Performed Report (TNP)* which should be filled every month highlighting which trips were not performed and the service provider in charge of the trip. The TNP is also to be sent to STS even if all trips were performed. TNPs are compiled from reports of children stranded. The TNP is to be endorsed by the school and sent to STS together with the monthly invoice.

2.7 The STS receives the invoice and the TNP from the schools and after checking the TNPs to the invoices passes them on to the Accounts Section. Currently most heads of school are following a union's directive not to be involved in the management of school transport including validation of invoices.

2.8 The Accounts Section checks that TNPs have been deducted from the invoice amount and pays accordingly. The payment for the service is done in two stages. The first payment of every month covers 75 per cent of the total charge for the month and is made against a pre-invoice issued by the service providers. The rest is paid by a second payment, which is effected when all the monthly invoices have been received from the schools and adjusted for TNPs.

2.9 Chart 2.1 (Page 40) shows five centers (Service Provider, school, school transport section, accounts section and the

Treasury Department) through which transport related documentation flows.

Complaints Handling System

2.10 The STS receives complaints from schools, parents and local councils. Complaints regarding the school transport reach the section, either by phone, fax and/or letters. The STS tries to sort them out immediately when possible by contacting the service provider or the driver involved according to the case.

2.11 The majority of the complaints reach the section at the beginning of the scholastic year until things start to settle down.

Internal Control Weaknesses

The System

2.12 The school transport section is run by one officer. The officer in charge of school transport organises the transport requirements, acts as liaison officer with the three transport companies, carries out inspections and certifies correct the invoices sent for payment by the transport companies⁴.

2.13 The officer in charge does not carry out physical inspection of the service being provided. On the other hand, heads of school do not monitor transport due to their union's directive.

School Routes

Determining the services required

2.14 STS is responsible for the formulation of school transport requirements for the following year. This formulation is drawn up in consultation with heads of school during the summer months.

⁴Source: Internal Audit Report, 12 July 1999.

2.15 From the questionnaire to 83 heads of school entitled to school transport it was revealed that only 48 per cent of the schools are consulted in route formulation. It appeared that the schools apply various criteria in formulating the routes. Table 2.1 shows that 55 per cent of the respondents determine their routes according to prevailing students' exigencies, 30 per cent apply the previous year's routes and 12 per cent are not aware of how the routes are formulated. The schools own useful information about their students, which can help in route formulation. Only 55 per cent of the schools take the initiative to apply available information on students when formulating the routes. This may lead to mis-allocation of vehicles.

Table 2.1 – Criteria used in school route determination

Criteria	Percentage of responses
As per previous year	30
According to prevailing students' exigencies	55
According to service providers' exigencies	3
Do not know	12
	100

Source: NAO School Transport Questionnaire (Heads of School) November 2001

2.16 The school routes should be finalised before the scholastic year commences. 71 per cent of the schools finalise the planning of the routes before the start of the scholastic year. Whereas 24 per cent finalise the planning of the routes during the first week of school. The Education Division should make sure that the submission of the School Transport Requirement Sheet by the schools is on time and all procedures from the Education Division's side are ready before the scholastic year commences.

Distances – rates

2.17 The service providers are paid for the trip according to the distances as per Tables 2.2 and 2.3. NAO was informed by

STS that the distances of the routes are calculated off-hand by the STS officer. NAO questions the basis of rates and more so distances attached to the rates.

Table 2.2 - Distribution of daily routes by buses/coaches and rates applied

Distance per trip in Km	Rates Bus/Coach Lm	PTA	UBS	Total
Up to 16	3.10	96	162	258
Over 16 to 24	3.70	101	48	149
Over 24 to 32	4.25	51	15	66
Over 32 to 40	5.40	3	1	4
Over 40	6.00	2	1	3
		253	227	480

Source: School Route Register 2001-2002 at Education Division

Table 2.3 - Distribution of daily routes by mini-buses and rates applied

Distance per trip in Km	Rates Mini Buses Lm	UBS	Mini Bus Co-op	Total
Up to 16	2.40	27	53	80
Over 16 to 24	3.00	31	39	70
Over 24 to 32	3.60	32	15	47
Over 32 to 40	4.20	21	21	42
Over 40	4.80	13	7	20
		124	135	259

Source: School Route Register 2001-2002 at Education Division

School Route Register

2.18 The formulation of school transport requirements by STS is developed into a School Route Register. It was found out that the school route register held at STS and the school routes distributed to the schools for the scholastic year (2000-2001) did not tally. It is incomprehensible how this should occur. The

questionnaire to heads of school revealed that 35 per cent of schools (29 schools) do not receive a school route register. These schools are actually not aware of the number of vehicles and routes their school is entitled to by the STS. They rely on the vehicles and routes which were established over the years.

2.19 These inaccuracies resulted in phantom routes. Phantom routes appear on the STS register, are paid for but are non-existent. It was estimated from the sample (Para. 2.23 refers) that this flaw in the system cost the Education Division an approximate overpayment of Lm 492 per scholastic day.

Financial Aspect

No Service Contracts exist

2.20 On inquiring about the appointment of the service providers, it was revealed that no contracts were signed between the Education Division and the service providers. Their appointment is instituted in L.N. 144/1991. The L.N. 144/1991 gives powers to the Director of Education to distribute school transport routes between Public Transport Association, Unscheduled Bus Service and Mini Bus Co-op.

2.21 It came to NAO's knowledge that the other transport provided by the Education Division being the transport provided for the students with special needs requiring vehicles with lifters and special case students requiring taxis, was not procured through a call for quotation. The special needs and special cases service providers are picked by the STS without any formal tender or quotations.

Lack of internal controls within the system

Invoices and TNPs

2.22 Every month the schools should receive a monthly invoice from the service providers indicating the trips performed and

the charge for the month. The schools do not endorse the invoice due to the union's directive of 1993. However, every month they prepare a 'Trips Not Performed' (TNP) report. A nil report is also expected to be sent to the STS. The Accounts Section at the Education Division should consider this report prior to issuing payments to transport providers.

2.23 A compliance test was carried out to review the school transport payment system and the procedures for payment. The test was carried out through a sample of 40 schools which covered all categories (primary, secondary, trade and special needs). The schools in sample covered a student population of 14,066 being 75 per cent of total students eligible for school transport. The test covered 5 months (November 2000, February 2001, March 2001, April 2001 and May 2001) of the scholastic year 2000-2001.

2.24 It was detected from the test that procedures adopted by the schools are not standard throughout. The following shortcomings in procedures are being exercised:

- not preparing the TNPs at all;
- amending the invoice with trips not performed but raising no TNP;
- reporting for each service provider in a different manner;
- recording TNPs only for the service provider which did not hand in the invoice to the school;
- one school prepared the TNP every two months;
- reporting on other documents which do not have the same format as that issued by STS.

2.25 Most schools were not clear in filling in their TNP report.

This resulted from:

- number of trips not performed not properly indicated;
- no distinction between the three service providers;
- amalgamated trips not indicated;
- routes of stranded students being reported instead of number of buses not showing up;
- no indication of the days when transport was not required due to school activities i.e. parents' day, prize day and staff meetings.

2.26 The above inconsistencies in filling in TNP reports make it hard to update invoices to reflect actual service delivered. There were TNPs which though clear and consistent were not consulted to amend the invoices.

2.27 From the sample various overpayments were effected from:

- Lack of arithmetical and accounting controls within the Accounts Section amounting to Lm 625 overpaid
- Seemingly forged signatures on invoices amounting to Lm 5,156. Whilst schools approved invoices for the value of trips actually performed, the invoices at the Accounts Section were inflated by the value of non existent routes with the head's signature seemed forged.
- Invoices not being adjusted by the TNPs amounting to Lm3,506 overpaid
- Phantom routes and rates arising from differences between STS route register and school route register. These amounted to Lm45,264 in the five months reviewed.

2.28 The total overpayment resulting from the sample taken in the compliance testing amounted to:

Table 2.4 – Total overpayment from sample taken

	Lm
Over payment in payment vouchers	625
Differences in invoices of school and Accounts Section - (mismatched signatures)	5,156
Invoices not adjusted by TNP - (payment for trips not performed)	3,506
Differences between school route register and STS register - (phantom routes and rates excluding Lm2,046 included in mismatched signatures)	43,218
	52,505

Source: NAO working papers

This shows that out of Lm 517,465 paid for the five months selected for the test 10 per cent were overpaid. If extrapolated on full population it would add up to Lm89,490.

There were other overpayments resulting from amalgamated trips which could not be effectively audited.

2.29 Not all the invoices are endorsed by the schools due to a union directive. In the absence of any signature by the school, STS unilaterally signs and stamps the invoice. The fact that not all invoices are being signed by heads of school is a major internal control weakness.

2.30 The invoices issued by PTA were incomplete. There were certain important features on the invoice which were missing and so misclassify the invoice as a proper invoice. The invoice did not bear a date when it was issued and it was not numbered.

Payment Procedures

2.31 The service providers adopted a different procedure in delivering the invoice to the schools.

- UBS generally bypassed the schools by sending the invoice directly to the STS and the latter forwards them to the Accounts Section;
- PTA officials approached most of the schools to sign the invoices and the invoices are taken back by PTA officials by hand to STS which passes them on to the Accounts Section; while
- Mini Bus Co-op generally sends the invoices to the school by post and the schools send the invoice to the STS. STS passes on the documents to the Accounts Section.

2.32 These adopted procedures vary from those established in Chart 2.1. This creates a confusion in the inflow of information to the STS which may lead to problems in the payment of invoices. Moreover, bypassing standard procedures weakens internal controls.

2.33 Officials from the Accounts Section informed NAO there is a procedure where the service providers are paid 75 per cent of the monthly charge against a pre-invoice raised by the service provider. The balance (i.e. 25 per cent or less due to TNPs) is paid after all the individual school invoices and the respective TNPs are received.

2.34 From the compliance test it was revealed that this procedure was not consistently adhered to. There were cases where the PTA was paid the whole balance in one payment. There were other instances where payment vouchers were found in the files forwarded to the NAO by Accounts Section officials. This hindered NAO from tracing the authorisation of the payment.

2.35 Documentation covering management of the school transport (route register, invoices, TNPs, payment vouchers) do not seem to be effective enough to ensure adequate control on public funds.

2.36 In view of the above results, the Education Division has made a verbal statement to the effect that it will endeavour to implement the following changes:

- The school routes register at the School Transport Section will be similar to the school route register held at the school;
- It will check that a unique, complete and accurate invoice is issued by the service provider;
- The presentation of the invoice by schools to the Education Division will be carried out by personnel of the Education Division.

The Efficiency and Effectiveness of the System- The Schools' Perceptions



Part 3 - The efficiency and effectiveness of the system - The schools' perceptions

School Transport Questionnaire

3.1 A questionnaire was distributed to all the mainstream schools in Malta, which add up to 102 schools. The mainstream schools are classified under Primary schools (A, B, C), Secondary schools which include Area Secondary schools and Junior Lyceums schools and Trade schools comprising Ex-Opportunity schools and Trade schools. The mainstream students are entitled to school transport if they reside beyond the walking distance of 1.6 km (1 mile) from school. Out of the 102 mainstream schools, 83 schools are attended by students eligible to use school transport.

3.2 This Chapter focuses on the responses of the school officials to the questions (Appendix 1 – *School Transport Questionnaire - Heads of School November 2001*). All the data refers to the scholastic year 2001 – 2002. The questionnaire focused on the following: -

- School transport co-ordination;
- School transport control;
- Complaints handling mechanism;
- Rating of level of satisfaction with school transport service by school heads.

3.3 These issues dealt with the management and control of school transport at school level and the respondent's perception and rating of the school transport system.

3.4 All schools returned the questionnaire. However, only 68 per cent of schools answered question 2.5 due to a union's directive not to reply to this question.

Officials responsible for school transport at school

3.5 The designation of the officials responsible for School transport varies from one school to another. Table 3.1 shows that 90 per cent of the Primary School officials responsible for school transport are either heads of school or assistant heads, whereas in Secondary Schools the administration of school transport is delegated more to the assistant head. Other officials responsible for school transport include teachers, clerks and other school staff.

Table 3.1 – Officials responsible for School Transport

	Primary Schools	%	Secondary Schools	%	Trade Schools	%
Heads of School	20	43	1	4	3	34
Assistant Heads	22	47	24	89	2	22
Other	5	10	2	7	4	44
	47	100	27	100	9	100

Source: NAO School Transport Questionnaire (Heads of School) - November 2001

The schools' population

3.6 Table 3.2 shows that the total student population attending mainstream schools adds up to 40,818 students out of which 18,718 students qualify for school transport.

Table 3.2 - Students entitled and making use of school transport

	Population *	%	Students eligible for transport **	%	Students making use of transport **	%
Primary	23,564	58	3,892	21	3,628	20
Secondary	15,864	39	13,486	72	12,957	72
Trade	1,390	3	1,340	7	1,319	8
Total	40,818	100	18,718	100	17,904	100

Source: * Education Division

** NAO School Transport Questionnaire (Heads of School) - November 2001

3.7 47 Primary Schools, 27 Secondary Schools and 9 Trade Schools are entitled to school transport. Primary Schools take up the largest share of the student population. However, only 21 per cent of students within primary schools are eligible to use school transport.

3.8 Table 3.3 shows in percentage terms the proportion of eligible students to the total student population, the proportion of actual students making use of transport to the total eligible students and the proportion of actual students making use of school transport to the total student population in respect of each school category.

Table 3.3 – Students making use of transport

Schools	Percentage Eligible Students/Population	Percentage Actual students making use of transport/Eligible students	Percentage Actual students making use of transport/Total student Population
Primary	17	93	15
Secondary	85	96	82
Trade	96	98	95

Source: NAO School Transport Questionnaire (Heads of School) - November 2001

3.9 This difference between schools emerges from the fact that Primary Schools are generally found in each locality making them accessible within walking distance. However, Secondary Schools and Trade Schools are fewer in number and each school within these categories has several localities within their catchment area. This results in higher demand for school transport in these categories.

Number of vehicles supplied for school transport

3.10 739 vehicles are being supplied to the Education Division by the service providers for the scholastic year 2001-2002. These vehicles consist of buses, coaches and mini-buses. Mini-buses on average have a seating capacity of 14 seats. The seating capacity of buses and coaches varies approximately between 40 to 53 seats respectively.

Table 3.4 – Eligible and actual students making use of school transport

	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools	Trade Schools	Total
Seated capacity supplied	5,167	18,423	2,187	25,777
Eligible students making use of school transport	3,892	13,486	1,340	18,718
Utilisation of seating capacity by eligible students	75%	73%	61%	73%
Actual students making use of school transport	3,628	12,957	1,319	17,904
Utilisation of seating capacity by actual students	70%	70%	60%	69%

Source: NAO working papers

3.11 NAO estimated the seating capacity offered by the Education Division to the mainstream schools as per the School Route Register (2001 – 2002). Table 3.4 shows the estimated

number of seats available per school category and the utilisation of seating capacity. The workings include phantom routes (Para. 2.19 refers) which are not being performed.

3.12 Prima facie, the above table indicates underutilisation of seating capacity. Utilisation rate at 69 per cent however, needs further analysis. Better utilisation of seating capacity, if possible, will result in a more cost efficient service.

Payments to Service Providers

3.13 During 2001, the school transport service providers were paid Lm 953,656 for mainstream school transport.

Table 3.5 – Daily cost per student

	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools	Trade Schools	Total Schools
Payment in 2001	Lm185,071	Lm680,505	Lm88,080	Lm953,656
Eligible Students	3,892	13,486	1,340	18,718
Expenditure on each student per scholastic year	Lm48	Lm50	Lm66	Lm51
Assuming 170 days per year - 2 trips: home to school and back	28c per day	29c per day	39c per day	30c per day

Source: NAO working papers

3.14 Table 3.5 shows the distribution of this expenditure on each school category and the average cost per student in each case. The average daily cost per student does not vary notably from one category to the other except for trade schools. The average cost is 30 cents per student per day.

System inefficiencies

3.15 It was revealed through the questionnaire that system inefficiencies are resulting in various routes as officially set not being followed and in amalgamated trips.

Official routes not followed

3.16 The vehicles' drivers should follow the routes according to the School Route Register. Nonetheless not all the routes are performed in conformity to the official routes. From the questionnaire it was revealed that 22 per cent of schools reported cases of non-conformity with official routes. In these cases, the driver does not follow the route as set out in the school route register. Generally, schools are informed that official route was not followed through feedback from students.

3.17 In cases of such non-compliance, 52 per cent of respondents stated that the school reports the occurrence to the driver/service provider, 36 per cent informed the STS at the Education Division, whilst only 11 per cent of respondents recorded the occurrence on the TNP.

3.18 After the complaint was lodged, 57 per cent of respondents stated that the driver started following the original route again, 31 per cent of respondents stated that the route was adjusted according to the driver's exigencies, whilst 12 per cent stated that there was no outcome from their complaint.

Amalgamated Trips

3.19 Amalgamated trips occur when the vehicle picks up: -

- students from different schools;
- students from the same school but of different routes.

3.20 It is very difficult to establish the frequency and extent of amalgamated trips. 41 per cent of the schools stated that at least one incidence of amalgamated trips was reported to the Education Division. 23 per cent of these respondents also lodged a complaint with the service provider and 13 per cent of these respondents also complained to the driver.

3.21 However, only 13 per cent of respondents stated that they recorded these cases on the TNP report. Amalgamated trips should be recorded by schools on the TNP report and the invoice amount adjusted for the value of trips not performed due to the amalgamation.

Timings

3.22 A question was set to the schools to record the time of arrival of the first vehicle and the last vehicle at school *on the day preceding* the filling in of the questionnaire.

3.23 5 per cent of school heads reported that the first vehicle arrived at school more than 45 minutes before the school gates were opened. This indicates that students were left unsupervised outside the school premises. 41 per cent of school heads stated that the first vehicle arrived at school after the school gates were opened.

3.24 34 per cent of school heads reported that the first vehicle arrived at school more than 45 minutes before school started. One school stated that the first vehicles arrived at school 15 minutes after school started. Students thus arrived late for school.

3.25 58 per cent of respondents stated that the last vehicle arrived at school before school started while 28 per cent reported that the last vehicle arrived at school up to 15 minutes after school started.

3.26 The above results depict two extremes, students arriving at school more than an hour before school opens and students being transported to school late.

Supervision

3.27 Supervision during the trip is one of the important welfare and safety measures to be applied to school transport. The main duties of the supervisor as selected by the respondents are the maintenance of order during the trip and the reporting of exceptional occurrences.

3.28 When enquiring school heads as to who performs supervisory duties on vehicles, 22 per cent of the respondents stated that a bus prefect supervises students while another 20 per cent stated the driver as the supervisor. 14 per cent indicated the bus prefect or driver as the supervisor while 23 per cent stated that no one supervises students on buses.

3.29 A question was set to establish who is responsible according to school heads for the welfare of the students during the trip. 36 per cent of the respondents stated that they assumed responsibility for their welfare. 23 per cent placed the onus on the bus drivers and the service provider, 5 per cent placed the burden on the Education Division and 36 per cent do not know who is responsible for the welfare of students.

3.30 These perceptions raise serious concern regarding the accountability for students' welfare. It is not clear of who is assuming liability for the welfare and safety of students in transit. This office sought legal advice on the matter. The advice, which was forwarded to the Education Division, states that transport services, contracted by the Education Division render the Division accountable for the welfare and safety of students using the school transport provided.

Complaints handling procedure

3.31 The schools are not equipped to inspect the performance of school transport and identify complaints at source. The information they obtain is through the feedback from students

and parents. 92 per cent of the respondents received less than 50 school transport related complaints, while 5 per cent received more than 50 complaints for the period October to November 2001. The nature of the complaints related to timing, trip/route, driver/vehicle and students' behaviour issues.

Timing related complaints

3.32 The main timing related complaints received by the respondents related to students being picked up early in the morning. The occurrence of frequent early pick up time was reported by 34 per cent of the respondents. 74 per cent of these come from secondary schools. 23 per cent of the respondents stated that the students are being left waiting at school for a long time in the afternoon after the last lesson terminates. 30 per cent of the respondents come from the secondary school category.

3.33 Long distance from the students' residence to the pick up point is another concern to the students and parents. 13 per cent of the respondents recorded frequent complaints as regards to long distance.

Trip-Route related complaints

3.34 The level of complaints related to the trip-route is not high. 12 per cent of the respondents stated that they frequently receive complaints related to overcrowding. 14 per cent receive occasional complaints related to missed trips and 17 per cent receive complaints related to inconsistent routes.

Driver/vehicle related

3.35 22 per cent of the respondents receive occasional complaints regarding the drivers' behaviour. Complaints regarding excessive driving, lack of safety and lack of cleanliness were minimal.

Other students-related complaints

3.36 The students' behaviour on the vehicle is another cause for concern. Bad behaviour causes drivers to be distracted. 46 per cent of the respondents reported occasional complaints regarding students' bad behaviour. This may result from the lack of supervision while the students are on the vehicle.

3.37 It appears from the questionnaire that no standard complaints mechanism is in place. On average 60 per cent of the respondents report the complaints to the driver/service provider while 37 per cent forward their complaint to the Education Division. An average of 67 per cent of the respondents who report to the Education Division do so verbally while the rest report their complaint in writing. This system is only settling on average 50 per cent of complaints, while another 18 per cent of the complaints are solved temporarily and then resurface again.

Rating levels

Communication

3.38 62 per cent of the schools reported that the communication level with the parents is good while 22 per cent rated the communication as excellent. The Education Division relies on the school administration in order to carry out the service. 53 per cent of the schools feel that their communication level with the Education Division is good while 26 per cent of the respondents classified it as excellent.

Satisfaction

3.39 A question was set to establish the level of satisfaction of schools regarding the school transport service. Specific questions were asked on the routing efficiency, time consistency, time convenience, student safety, level of cleanliness, comfortable ride, students' behaviour, drivers' behaviour and level of

supervision. Table 3.6 shows the ratings of the schools for the school transport qualities.

Table 3.6 – Rating level

	Per cent of respondents				
	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Routing efficiency	12	69	13	1	1
Time consistency	9	42	39	10	0
Time convenience	8	45	36	8	3
Student safety	5	48	34	6	0
Level of cleanliness	11	56	25	0	0
Comfortable ride	9	47	34	5	0
Students' behaviour	0	47	44	4	1
Drivers' behaviour	8	58	29	1	0
Level of supervision	2	42	24	24	7

Source: NAO School Transport Questionnaire (Heads of School) November 2001

3.40 As can be seen, schools rated the attributes as good or average. The routing efficiency, level of cleanliness and drivers' behaviour were rated the highest. However the perception on supervision, time consistency and time convenience need to be addressed further.

3.41 The schools were also asked to provide an overall grade to the school transport system. Their overall level of satisfaction rated 7 out of 10, which is quite satisfactory.

3.42 These high ratings have to be considered against resistance by heads of school, supported by their union, in being involved in the management and control of school transport (Para 2.7 refers).

3.43 The next chapter will assess the level of satisfaction of the school transport system from the students and parents point of view.

3.44 This assessment is critical as students/parents are considered as the final clients or customers of the service.

The Efficiency and Effectiveness of the System- The Perceptions of the End-Users



Part 4 - The efficiency and effectiveness of the system - The perceptions of the end-user

Introduction

4.1 The National Audit Office (NAO) undertook a telephone survey among students and parents of children eligible to use school transport⁵. The survey covered the following issues:

- Factors affecting decisions on whether to use school transport
- The quality of service of the school transport system
- The level of satisfaction with the service provided

4.2 The methodology used in the survey consisted of a questionnaire addressed on the telephone to a sample of school transport end-users. A copy of the questionnaire and a description of the methodology applied are found, in the report's appendices 2 and 3 respectively.

Survey results

4.3 This section will examine the survey results, which covered the following elements:

- Portrait of the sample population
 - i. Type of usage
 - ii. Respondents using the service
 - iii. Reasons for not using the service

⁵The list of students eligible to use school transport was compiled by each respective school.

- Time-related factors
 - i. Drivers' punctuality
 - ii. Length of morning trip
 - iii. Pick-up time in relation to school start time
 - iv. Students arriving at school before school gates open
 - v. Students arriving at school after school starts
 - vi. Time taken to arrive home after school

- Quality of Service
 - i. Pick-up points
 - ii. Safety while waiting outside school premises
 - iii. Supervision
 - iv. Crowding
 - v. Cleanliness
 - vi. Conduct of drivers

- Route Management
 - i. Missed trips
 - ii. Amalgamated trips
 - iii. Route variations

- End-Users Concerns

- Users' Perceptions of Complaints Handling

- Level of Satisfaction

- Challenges faced by respondents in particular schools

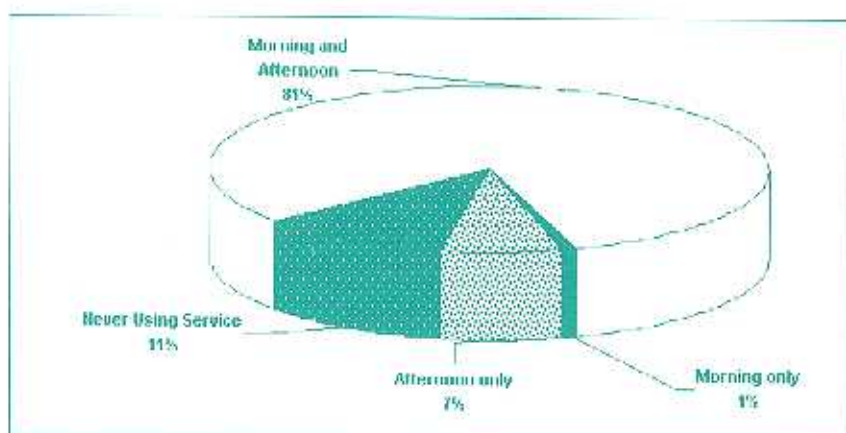
- The Diversity of End-Users Needs and Concerns

Portrait of the Sample Population

Type of Usage

4.4 Overall, the survey's findings portray a population that depends on the school transport service with a total of 89 per cent of students eligible to use school transport stating that they use all or part of the service.⁶ In fact, around 4 out every 5 respondents (81 per cent) said that they use the service twice daily (morning and afternoon). The remaining respondents said that they either never use the service (11 per cent), or use the service solely in the morning (1 per cent), or use the afternoon service only (7 per cent). Chart 4.1 shows the respondents' preferences.

Chart 4.1: School Transport Usage (n = 613)



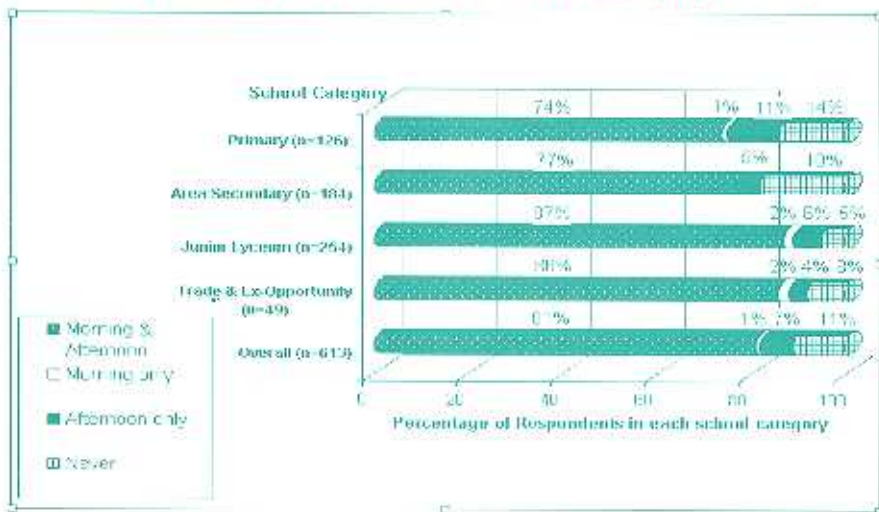
Source: NAO working papers

Respondents Using the Service

4.5 The respondents opting to use the service (n=545), were made up of primary school students (20 per cent) and secondary school students (80 per cent). Chart 4.2 delineates the respondents' usage preferences by school type.

⁶ According to the data gathered from schools, out of an eligible population of 18,718 students, 17,904 students or 95 per cent were reported by the schools to be using the school transport service.

Chart 4.2: Transport Preference by School Category (n = 613)

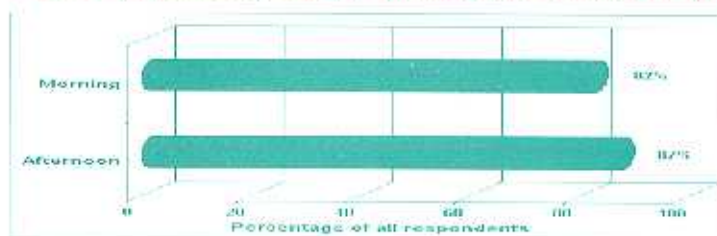


Source: NAO working papers

4.6 The study shows that respondents attending more distant regional schools such as junior lyciums, trade schools and ex-opportunity schools are more likely to use the service than those attending area (primary and secondary) schools. In fact, 95 per cent of the junior lycium respondents (n=254) and 92 per cent of respondents (n= 49) from trade and ex-opportunity schools said that they use the school transport. This is significantly higher than the 82 per cent share of responses registered by area secondary school respondents (n=184) and the 86 per cent share of primary school responses (n=126).

4.7 The demand for school transport appears to be higher for afternoon trips than for morning ones (Chart 4.3). In fact, the survey showed a 7 per cent increase in the demand for the afternoon service over the morning service.

Chart 4.3: Percentage Usage: Morning vs Afternoon (n = 613)

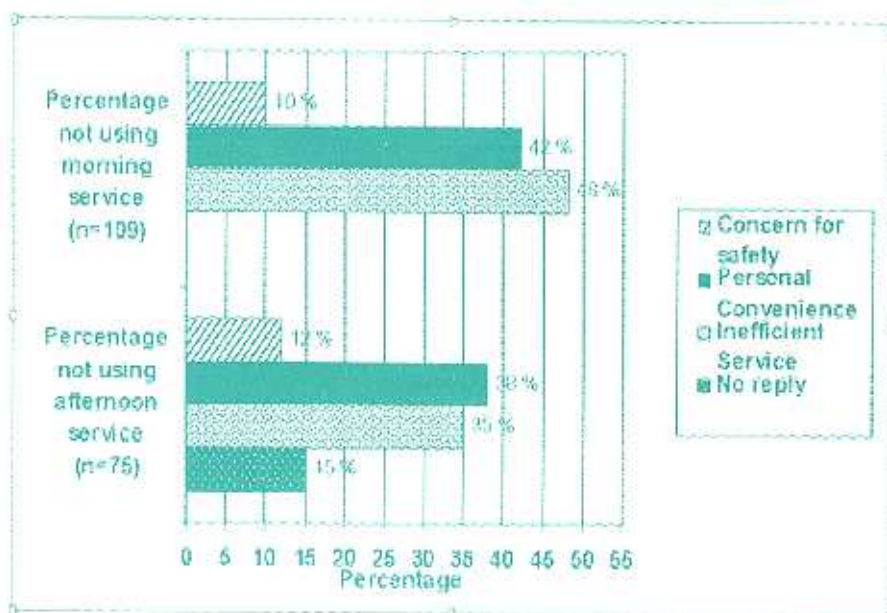


Source: NAO working papers

Reasons for not using the Service

4.8 The 109 respondents not using school transport in the morning (18 per cent of students eligible for school transport in the sample) and/or in the afternoon (12 per cent of the students eligible for school transport in the sample) were asked for their reasons why they opted for alternatives (Chart 4.4).

Chart 4.4: Reasons for not using morning and afternoon services



Source: NAO working papers

4.9 In general, the main reasons reported were:

- Concerns on inefficiencies in the service provided such as lack of timeliness, accessibility, reliability and punctuality were recorded by 52 respondents or 48 per cent of the non-users of the morning transport and 26 respondents or 35 per cent of the non-users of the afternoon service. The results reflected a significantly high incidence of complaints on untimely arrival to school and distant pick-up or drop-off points. Moreover, 18 out of 25 non-users who expressed their concern on the untimely arrival at school in the morning

were from Junior Lyceums and Area Secondary Schools. (Para. 4.30 refers).

- Concerns on the absence of adequate safety standards in the school transport system were mentioned by 11 respondents or 10 per cent of the non-users of the morning transport and 9 respondents or 12 per cent of the non-users of the afternoon transport. Further examination of the survey results also showed that nine out of eleven respondents who voiced safety concerns as the main reason for not using the school transport service were primary school students.
- Individual choice, based on personal convenience and the selection of more suitable means of commuting, was mentioned as the main reason by 46 respondents or 42 per cent of the non-users of the morning transport and 29 respondents or 38 per cent of the non-users of the afternoon transport.

Time-Related Factors

Drivers' Punctuality

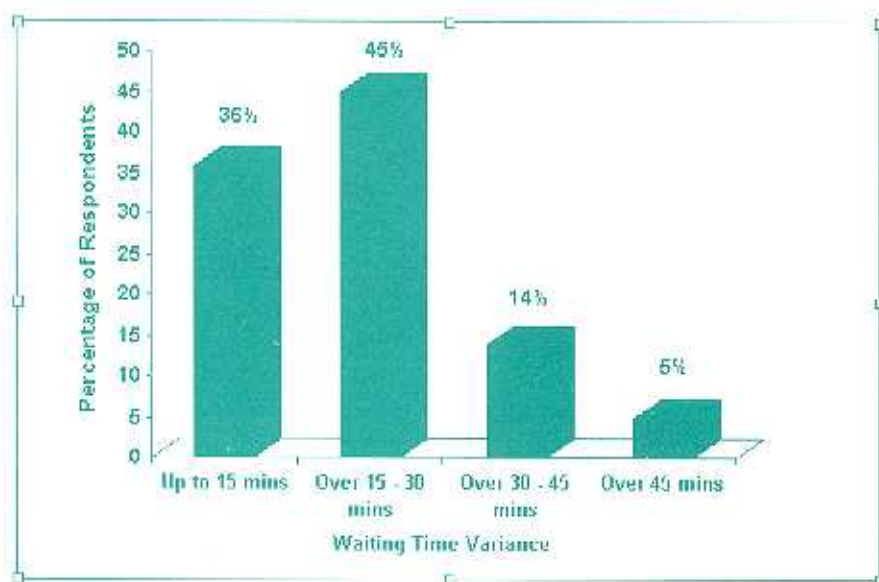
4.10 The end-users' perceptions on the drivers' punctuality were also recorded in the survey. The findings show that a considerable share of the respondents felt that they had experienced either significant waiting time variations at their pick-up points in the morning and/or delays in the afternoon. These reports on time variations and delays were common and there was no distinction by type of school vehicle.

In the Morning

4.11 Nearly two out of every three respondents (65 per cent) using the school transport service in the morning (n=504) said that their driver was punctual and kept to the same time.

4.12 On the other hand, 35 per cent of respondents (n=504) reported incidents of irregular pick-up times in the morning (Chart 4.5). Out of the 177 respondents falling within this bracket, a significant share (45 per cent) said that they had experienced incidents with waiting time differences of between 16 minutes and 30 minutes, whilst 19 per cent reported cases of waiting times varying by over 30 minutes. The latter share represents 7 per cent of total morning users (n=504).

Chart 4.5: Incidents of Varying Waiting Times Due to Irregularity in Drivers' Punctuality in the Morning (n = 177)



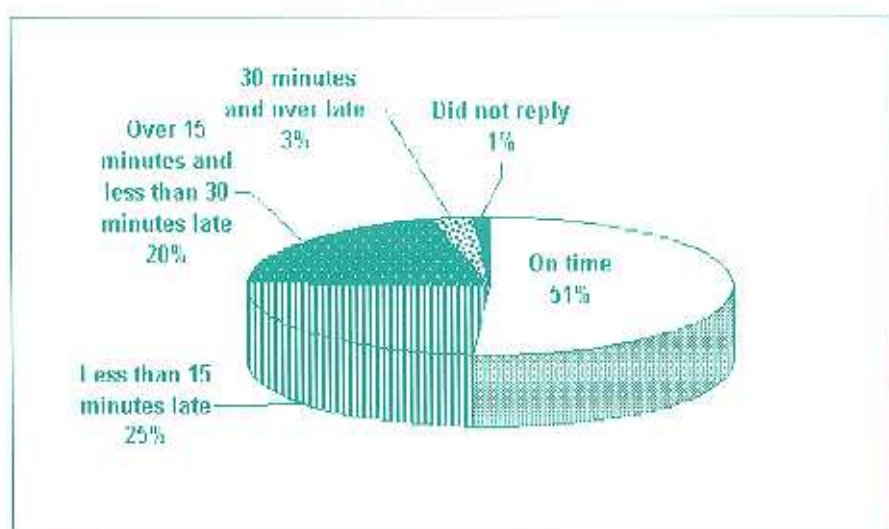
Source: NAO working papers

4.13 As regards students from secondary schools, wider variances of waiting times were reported. In fact, 24 per cent of respondents attending secondary schools and using the morning service (n=410) reported incidents with waiting time varying by over 15 minutes at their pick-up point. The ratio for primary school students was lower with 15 per cent (n=95) of respondents using morning transport reporting similar incidents and variances.

In the Afternoon

4.14 In the afternoon at end of school, the respondents, in general, viewed the situation as more critical with incidents of delays being reported between when school finishes and when the transport provider arrives for collection (Chart 4.6). These incidents were reported by nearly one out of every two (48 per cent) respondents (n=538). Out of these, nearly one out of four (23 per cent) reported cases of delays of over 15 minutes.

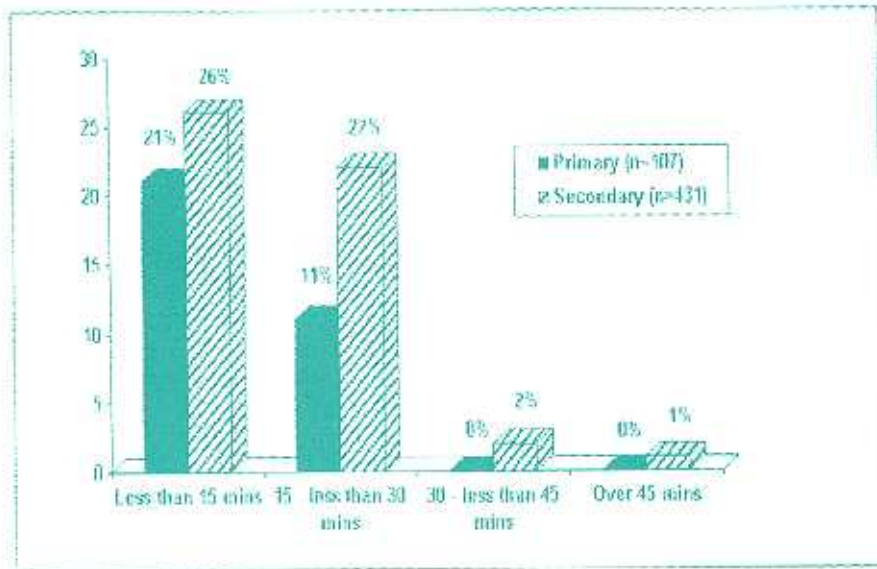
Chart 4.6: Incidents of Delays in Waiting Time for Drivers at Schools in the Afternoon (n = 538)



Source: NAO working papers

4.15 It seems that secondary schools were notably more effected than primary schools by these delays (Chart 4.7). In fact, all the incidents of delays of over 30 minutes were reported by secondary school respondents. Also, secondary school respondents were found to be twice more likely than primary school respondents to have experienced incidents when waiting time was over 15 minutes but less than 30 minutes.

Chart 4.7: Incidents of Delays in Waiting Time for Drivers at Schools in the Afternoon by Category of School¹



Source: NAO working papers

Length of Morning Trip (Time in Transit)

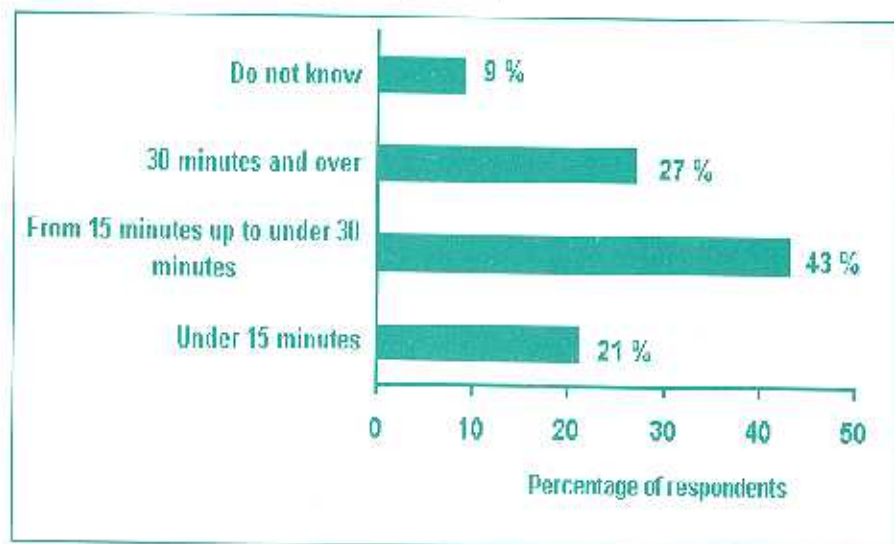
4.16 In order to assess the convenience of the service, the survey also recorded the respondents' estimated duration of morning trips. More than one out of every four (27 per cent) morning users (n=504) reported that the length of their trip was over 30 minutes. 43 per cent said that their trip lasted from over 15 minutes up to 30 minutes. 21 per cent estimated that their trip was up to 15 minutes long (Chart 4.8).

4.17 The most frequently reported length of trip (mode) was 15 minutes. The average length of the trip was 22 minutes with a standard deviation of 12.13.

4.18 Further findings seem to indicate that primary schools students have shorter trips to school, perhaps because of the

¹ 64 per cent of primary school respondents said that their driver was always on time and 4 per cent failed to reply. 48 per cent of secondary school respondents reported that their driver was punctual and 1 per cent did not reply.

Chart 4.8: Length of Morning Trip (Time in Transit)
(n=504)



Source: NAO working papers

size and close proximity of the schools, than secondary schools students. In fact, 94 per cent of primary school users (n=94) estimated the normal duration of their morning trip as being less than 30 minutes.

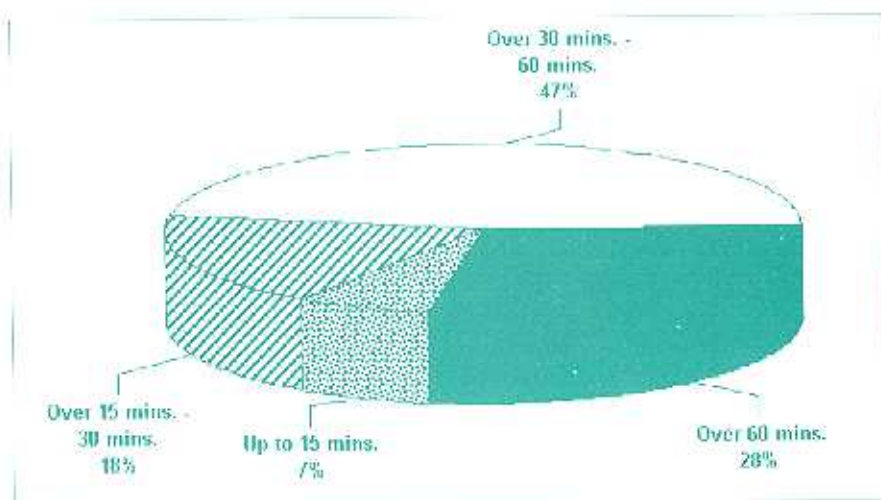
4.19 Comparatively, among the secondary school respondents (n=410), a smaller share (56 per cent) reported that the duration of their trip could last less than 30 minutes.

Pick-Up Time in Relation to School Start Time

4.20 The survey also focused on whether school transport vehicles were picking up respondents too early in the morning (n=504). In general, the results show that a high share of respondents (28 per cent) reported that they had to be at their pick-up point more than one hour before school started (Chart 4.9).⁵

⁵The respective opening school hours were extracted from the Schools' Questionnaire discussed in Part 3.

Chart 4.9: Time span between earliest reported pick-up time and school start time (n=504)



Source: NAO working papers

4.21 The results show that users from secondary schools reported most of the cases of pick-up times of over one hour before school started. Out of the 142 reported cases, 140 or 99 per cent were from secondary school students.

4.22 In fact, the secondary school subgroup (n=410) was characterised by a high incidence of early pick-up times. 34 per cent of morning users from secondary schools reported cases of when they had to be at their pick-up point over one hour before school started. Comparatively, only 2 per cent of primary school students (n=94) reported such similar incidents.

4.23 In order to enable a better assessment of the survey's findings, the users (n=504) were further sub-divided between those experiencing regular pick-up times (65 per cent) and others who reported cases of irregularity (35 per cent).

4.24 28 per cent of respondents who reported regular driver timings in the morning (n=327), had to be at their pick-up point more than one hour before their school started. This is the same

Table 4.1: Pick-Up Time in Relation to School Start Time

Time Span	Primary (n=94)	Secondary (n=410)
Up to 15 minutes (mins)	17%	5%
Over 15 mins - 30 mins	35%	14%
Over 30 mins - 60 mins	46%	47%
Over 60 mins	2%	34%
Total	100%	100%

Source: NAO working papers

percentage as the one found for the overall population of morning users.

4.25 For these respondents, the most frequently reported time span from pick-up to arrival at school (mode) was 30 minutes, with the average length being 50 minutes with a standard deviation of 24.75.

4.26 These calculations were also compared with the responses of the users who reported cases of erratic pick-up times in the morning (n=177). The resulting analysis reflected a similar incidence of lengthy periods between time at pick-up point and school opening time for respondents with cases of erratic timings. In fact, in this subgroup 51 or 29 per cent of these respondents reported incidents of maximum periods of over 60 minutes, with the length of time (mode) most frequently reported being 45 minutes.

Students Arriving at School Before School Gates Open

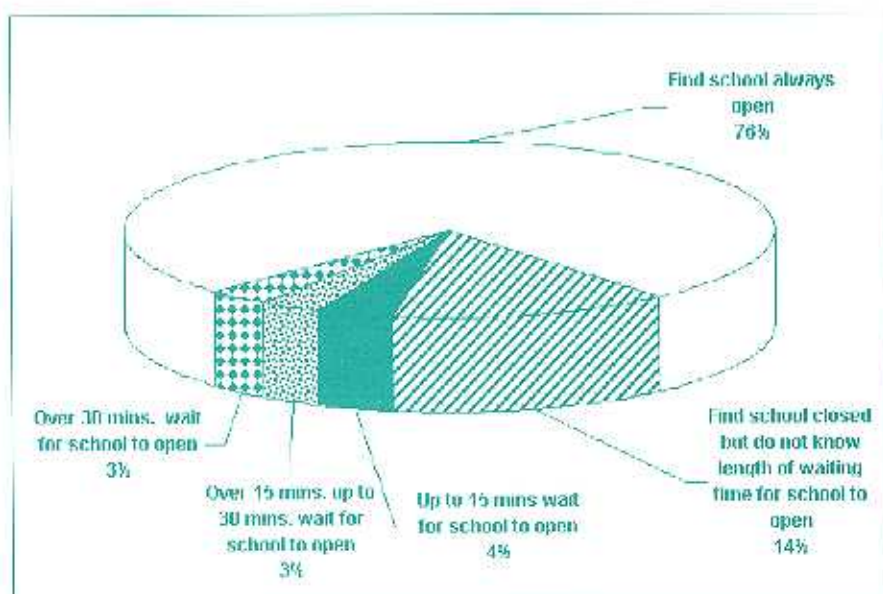
6.27 Overall, cases of arrival at school before schools opened were reported by 23 per cent of morning users (n=504), with 3 per cent saying that they had experienced incidents when they

had arrived at school more than 30 minutes before opening time (Chart 4.10). On the other hand, 77 per cent (n=504) said that they always found the school open on arrival.

4.28 Both primary school respondents and secondary school respondents reported this problem. In the primary school subgroup (n=94), 30 per cent of respondents reported cases of untimely early arrival and in the secondary school subgroup (n=410), 22 per cent reported similar cases.

4.29 Furthermore, it was found that morning users who experienced regular pick-up times (n=327) also seem to be experiencing a higher incidence of arrival at school when school premises were still closed. In fact, 24 per cent of these respondents stated that usually the school would be closed when they were dropped-off at school.

Chart 4.10: Morning Arrival at School. Proportion of respondents who find school open and proportion who have to wait. (n=504)



Source: NAO working papers

Students Arriving at School After School Starts

4.30 10 per cent of morning users (n=504) reported cases of arrival after start of school. This level of incidence was reflected in all the school categories, with 7 per cent of primary school respondents (n=94) and 11 per cent of respondents in the secondary school subgroup (n=410) reporting cases of arrival after school started.

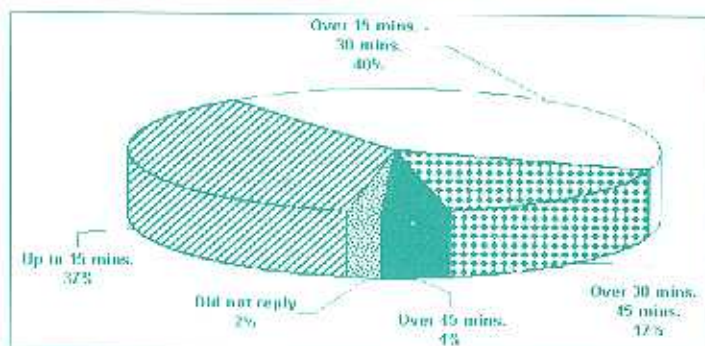
4.31 Most of the respondents reporting cases of arrival after start of school were found to be users who had experienced erratic pick-up times in the morning. In fact, 41 out of the 52 cases of morning users reporting late arrival at school also reported time irregularities.

Time Taken to Arrive Home After School

4.32 Respondents were asked on the time taken for the child to arrive home from school. In general, 35 per cent of all afternoon users (n=538) reported that they arrived home over 30 minutes after school normally finishes. A further 64 per cent reported time spans of up to 30 minutes, whilst 1 per cent did not reply to this question.

4.33 Users were further sub-divided between those reporting regular arrival at home and others who reported cases of inconsistency.

Chart 4.11: Time taken by respondents to arrive home from school. Regular timings (n=406)



Source: NAO working papers

4.34 21 per cent of the respondents who reported regular arrival at home (n=406) estimated that it took them over thirty minutes to arrive home from when they thought school finished (Chart 4.11). The most frequently reported length of time (mode) to get home from school for these respondents was 15 minutes. The average time span was 24 minutes with a standard deviation of 13.28.

4.35 Reports from users experiencing regular arrival at home (n=406) were also analysed by type of school. As expected, area primary and secondary schools were found to have shorter time spans between when school finishes and when the child arrives home. In fact, 8 per cent of respondents from primary schools (n=95) and 13 per cent of respondents from secondary schools (n=110) reported time spans of over 30 minutes. Comparatively, 32 per cent of respondents from the more distant schools, that is junior lyceums and trade/ ex-opportunity schools (n=201), reported time spans of over 30 minutes.

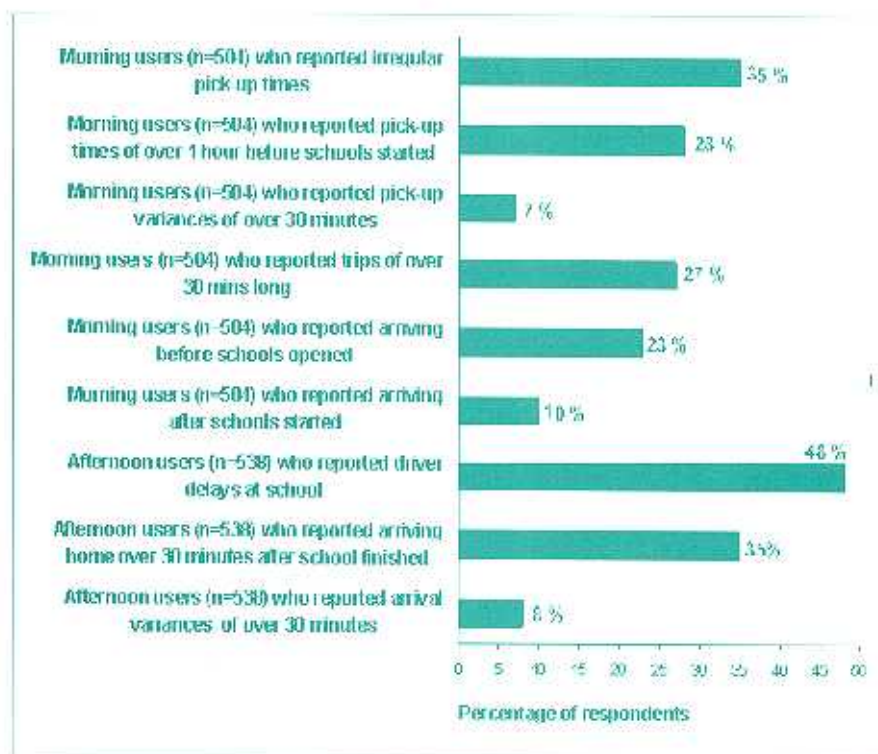
4.36 The responses of users who reported cases of erratic arrival times at home (n=132) were also reviewed. It was found that a significantly large share of these were also estimating that they had incidents of longer time spans periods from when school finished to when the child arrived home. In fact, in this subgroup, 120 respondents out of 132 (91 per cent) in this category reported incidents of (maximum) periods of 30 minutes and over, with the length of time (mode) most frequently reported being 45 minutes.

4.37 These time span variances (n=132) were further examined to identify whether the reported gaps between earliest and latest arrival home were significantly wide enough to raise concern. It was found that the most frequently reported cases (mode) were variances of 15 minutes, with the average variance being 24 minutes. In other words, the majority (85 out of 132 respondents) said that their arrival time fluctuated between a maximum bracket of between 15 and 29 minutes. Another significant share (45) reported that they experienced variances of thirty minutes and over.

Summary of findings on time-related factors

4.38 These findings on length of trips and waiting times underscore the problems related to timeliness faced by a notable share of the respondents and point to the challenges lying ahead for the improvement of the service (Chart 4.12).

Chart 4.12: Key issues faced by respondents reporting regular timings in the morning and/or afternoon



Source: NAO working papers

Quality of Service

4.39 The questionnaire used in the survey probed further issues linked to the quality, convenience, safety, reliability and professionalism of the service. The respondents in the sample using school transport (n=545) were asked to comment on the following key areas:

- The estimated distance from home to the morning pick-up points;
- The frequency of waiting periods outside school premises;
- Supervision during afternoon wait for delayed trips;
- The occurrence of overcrowding on school vehicles;
- The level of cleanliness on school vehicles;
- Their perceptions of driver behaviour.

Pick-Up Points in the morning

4.40 Most of the respondents, from all school categories and using the morning service (n=504) reported nearby morning pick-up points. In fact, 81 per cent stated that it takes them less than five minutes to reach on foot their pick-up point and a further 14 per cent estimated a walk of between five to ten minutes.

4.41 On the other hand, 5 per cent said that it takes them more than ten minutes to reach their pick-up point.

Safety while waiting outside school premises

4.42 In addition to the timeliness factors discussed in paragraphs 4.10 to 4.38 above, respondents were also asked to comment on the level of safety outside school premises while the children waited for the schools to open, or in the afternoon while they waited for the driver.

The school vehicle brought the children too early to school

4.43 23 per cent, or 118 out of 504 morning users, reported that their school would be closed when the vehicle dropped them. Furthermore, 38 per cent or 47 of these 123

respondents said that they waited outside the school gate, perhaps in unsafe scenarios. This share could be higher as 29 additional respondents reported that they did not know where their children stayed. The remaining 42 respondents said that they waited outside in the schoolyard until the school doors were opened.

4.44 This means that at least 23 per cent of respondents using the service in the morning were found to be lacking supervision before school started.

4.45 Another notable finding was that 22 per cent, or 21 out of the 94 primary school respondents using the morning transport, reported waiting outside the school gates in the morning for their school to open. However, only 6 per cent, or 26 out of the 410 secondary school respondents using morning transport reported waiting outside school gates for their school to open.

The driver was late in picking the children from school in the afternoon

4.46 Correspondingly, in the afternoon, a high percentage of respondents said that children waited outside school premises. In fact 49 per cent, or 264 out of 538 respondents using the afternoon service, reported occasional and frequent delays in the afternoon. 41 per cent of these reported waiting outside school premises. An additional 5 per cent said that they did not know where their child waited.

4.47 Another conspicuous result was that 34 per cent, or 80 of the 236 Junior Lyceum users of the afternoon service in the survey, reported waiting outside school for the delayed driver.

4.48 It is also important to note that both in the morning and afternoon cases, children were reported to have been left facing weather elements without shelter.

Supervision during afternoon wait for delayed trip

4.49 Related to the issue of the appropriate waiting system, is the availability of supervision during the afternoon wait. From the respondents who reported occasional or frequent delays in the afternoon (n=264), a considerable 44 per cent reported that there was no supervision of children left waiting. Further analysis shows that more than half of the effected primary school children (n=39) and a corresponding 42 per cent of the secondary school respondents (n=225) reported this concern.

Crowding on School Vehicles

4.50 A significant number of reports of overcrowding on school vehicles were registered from respondents using both the morning and the afternoon school transport. The survey shows that this problem is experienced in all school categories, with secondary schools experiencing a marginally higher level of incidence.

4.51 In the morning, 27 per cent of the users (n=504) reported problems on overcrowding, meaning that not all the students were properly seated during the course of the trip. In fact, out of the total number of morning users, a significant 14 per cent reported that their school vehicle was always overcrowded and a further 13 per cent reported that during most trips their vehicle was overcrowded.

4.52 In the afternoon, 32 per cent of respondents reported cases of overcrowding (n=538). 19 per cent reported that their vehicle was always packed and 13 per cent reported that theirs was nearly always overcrowded.

4.53 The data was further analysed to identify whether the problem of overcrowding was associated with particular types of vehicles. The extracted results indicate that there is no distinction between the type of vehicle and cases of overcrowding. Similar shares of respondents using buses, or coaches and or minibuses, approximately 26 per cent in the

morning (n=504) and 32 per cent in the afternoon (n=538), reported experiencing regular cases of overcrowding.

Cleanliness on School Vehicles

4.54 Around 72 per cent of users of morning or afternoon trips (n=545) found their school vehicles to be “always clean” and 14 per cent reported that their transport was occasionally clean. 4 per cent of respondents reported ill-kept vehicles. However, it must be noted that 11 per cent of respondents failed to reply.

Level of Satisfaction with Conduct of Driver

4.55 A similar level of positive response was received when respondents were asked on their impressions of driver conduct. Approximately 78 per cent of respondents (n=545) described their drivers’ conduct as “excellent” and a further 10 per cent classified the drivers’ behaviour as “good”. However, driver misconduct was reported by 6 per cent of respondents.

Quality Challenges

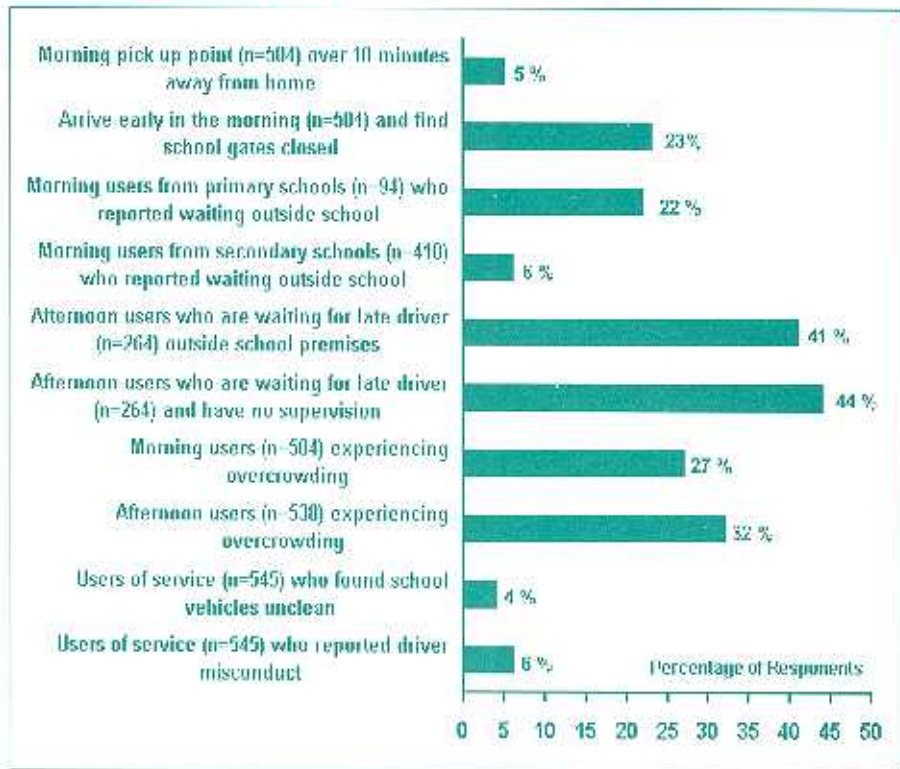
4.56 Chart 4.13 gives a graphical summary of some of the survey’s findings under this section (Quality of Service) and points to particular challenges lying ahead for the improvement in quality of service.

Route Management

4.57 Specific questions in the survey attempted to capture the respondents’ regular experiences and observations, as end-users, in relation to:

- The frequency of missed trips;
- The possibility of trips being amalgamated with other schools;
- The occurrence of route variations.

Chart 4.13: Challenges Related to the Quality of Service



Source: NAO working papers

Missed Trips

4.58 The likelihood of regular missed trips appears, from the survey, to be minimal with a significant number of respondents reporting that they did not experience any missed trips between September 2001 and February 2002. Smaller percentages, however, reported isolated cases of missed trips.

4.59 In fact, the survey showed that three out of every four respondents (75 per cent) who use the service in the morning (n=504), reported that all trips were done. A further 17 per cent reported up to five missed trips between September 2001 and February 2002.

4.60 However, a small but notable number of secondary school students reported missed trips ranging from six to twenty

incidents during the same period. These made up 2 per cent of the total number of the morning users (n=504).

4.61 In the afternoon, a similar higher percentage (78 per cent) of the users (n=538) reported no missed trips since the beginning of the ongoing scholastic year. 16 per cent reported up to five missed trips and 2 per cent (again, secondary school respondents) reported more than five missed trips ranging from six to twenty incidents.

Trips being amalgamated with other schools

4.62 A considerable share, approximately 15 per cent, of morning and/or afternoon users reported amalgamated trips, meaning that their school driver was taking aboard children from other schools. It must be mentioned that the Education Division does not permit amalgamation of trips among schools.

4.63 The survey results suggest that 11 per cent of the morning users (n=504) always travel with children from other schools. A further 5 per cent travel frequently with students from other schools.

4.64 A similar situation seems to exist in the afternoon. 7 per cent of the afternoon users (n=538) confirmed that their trip was always amalgamated with another school's trip. A further 7 per cent said that this was a frequent occurrence.

4.65 Further analysis shows that trip amalgamation among schools is not restricted to a type of vehicle. In fact, an approximately similar share of users of buses, coaches and minibuses reported experiencing regular cases of amalgamation. The rate of incidence ranged between 11 per cent and 18 per cent for buses, coaches and minibuses in the morning (n=504) and afternoon (n=538).

4.66 Feedback obtained from telephone interviews indicated that amalgamated trips were not necessarily among children

of the same age and gender, but included passengers from primary and secondary schools, and from male and female secondary schools. Some parents reported cases of bullying resulting from this aggregation.

The occurrence of route variations

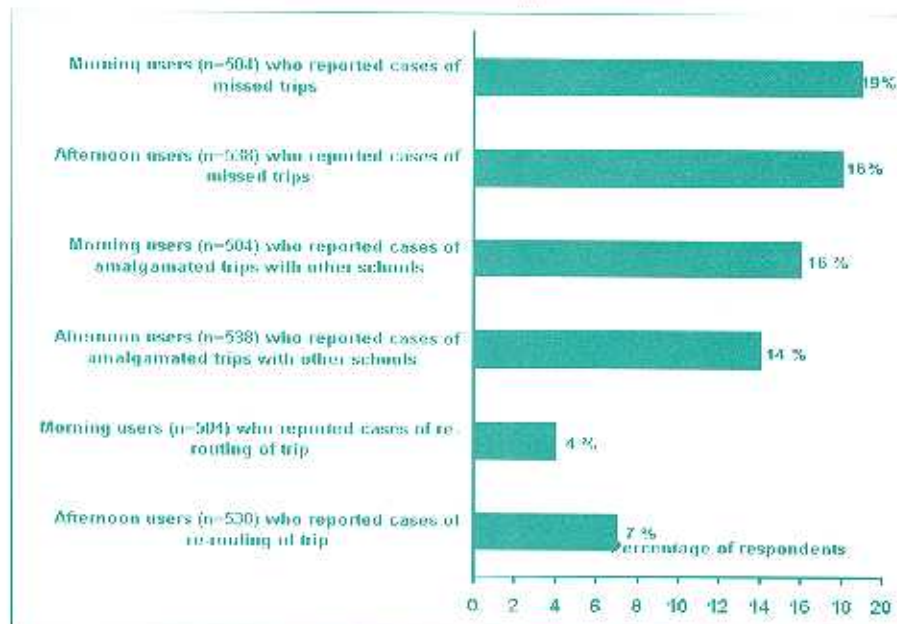
4.67 Most drivers keep to the same routes. This was reported by nine out of every ten respondents both in the morning (91 per cent, n=504), and in the afternoon (90 per cent, n=538).

4.68 However, an interesting 4 per cent of users in the morning and 7 per cent of users in the afternoon reported occasional or frequent route variations.

Route Management Issues

4.69 Chart 4.14 gives a graphical summary of the issues raised in the survey on route management.

Chart 4.14: Route Management Issues



Source: NAO working papers

End-Users Concerns

4.70 The respondents using the transport (n=545) were asked whether there was anything in particular that they wished to complain about on the school transport service. The results, outlined in Table 4.2, accentuate the diversity and incidence of concerns.

4.71 The majority, 305 out of 545 respondents (56 per cent) said that they had concerns on the quality of the service. Of these, 293 respondents expressed 473 complaints, as respondents were given the opportunity to mention more than one complaint. The remaining 12 respondents did not specify the nature of their concerns.

4.72 A significant share (46 per cent) of the complaints (n=473) were related to timeliness. The most common concerns were early arrival to school (20 per cent), long waits for school vehicles (11 per cent), late arrival from school (8 per cent) and inconsistent time (6 per cent).

4.73 The share of complaints related to route management and child safety were approximately equal, with the categories contributing to 28 per cent and 26 per cent respectively of the total number of complaints (n=473).

4.74 In the case of complaints on route management, overcrowding on school buses (10 per cent) and distant pick-up or drop-off points (7 per cent) were the highest percentages (n=473). Complaints related to child safety were focused on one of the following:

- Either, conditions leading to the absence of a safe environment (12 per cent), such as lack of safety measures, absence of shelters and lack of cleanliness,
- Or, student-related problems on school buses (7 per cent) such as bullying, student misbehaviour, and lack of supervision,
- Or, driver inadequacy (7 per cent) including reckless driving and driver misconduct.

Table 4.2 Complaints of End-Users: Including Multiple Responses (n=473)

Nature of Complaint	Incidence of Complaint	Percentage of Grand Total
Timeliness		
Long wait for vehicle	54	11.4
Arrive too early to school	96	20.3
Arrive late to school	7	1.5
Arrive late from school	37	7.9
Inconsistent time	26	5.5
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>220</i>	<i>46.6</i>
Route Management		
Missed trips	19	4.0
Overcrowding on school vehicle	49	10.4
Distant pick-up or drop-off points	32	6.8
Changing drop-off point	1	0.2
No service on half-days or during examination periods	10	2.1
Use of different providers	4	0.8
Amalgamation of trips	8	1.7
Long trips	2	0.4
Passengers left stranded	6	1.3
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>131</i>	<i>27.7</i>
Child Safety		
Bullying on school vehicle	12	2.5
Reckless driving	12	2.5
Driver misconduct	20	4.2
Student misbehaviour	12	2.5
Lack of safety measures	29	6.1
Lack of supervision	9	1.9
Absence of shelters	15	3.2
Lack of cleanliness	13	2.8
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>122</i>	<i>25.7</i>
Total	473	100.0

Source: NAO working papers

4.75 Another significant finding was that the perceptions and concerns of primary school respondents vary significantly from those of secondary school respondents. (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3 Complaints of End-Users by school category

Type of complaint	Percentage of responses from primary school users (n=199)	Percentage of responses from secondary school users (n=274)
Timeliness	87	17
Route Management	8	42
Child Safety	5	41
Total	100	100

Source: NAO working papers

4.76 Whereas 173 out of the 199 complaints received from primary school respondents (87 per cent) were on timeliness, in the secondary school subgroup the type of response was substantially different, with timeliness being included in 47 out of 274 responses from secondary school students (17 per cent).

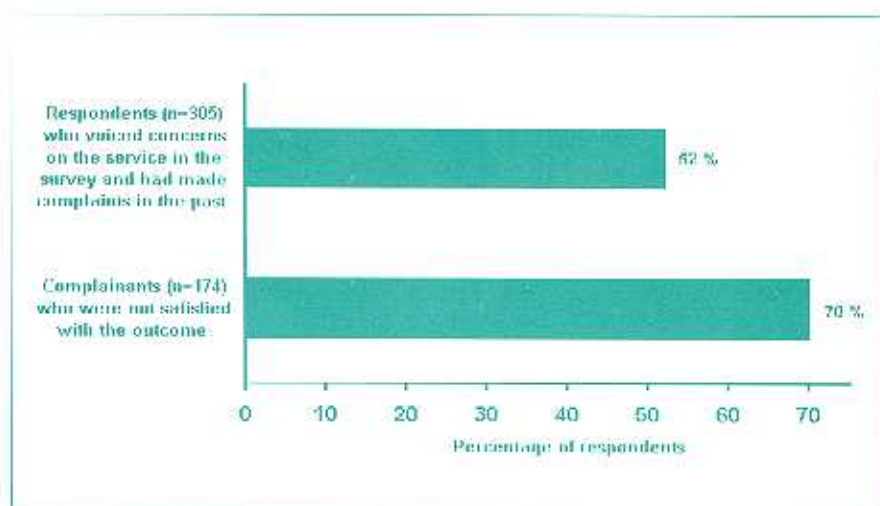
4.77 Instead, route management and child safety were the major issues for secondary school respondents, that is 115 responses (42 per cent) and 112 responses (41 per cent) out of all the responses from secondary schools related to route management and child safety respectively.

Users' perception of complaints handling

4.78 It was found that more than half of the respondents (52 per cent) who expressed their concern about the service (n=305) in the survey, stated that they had complained in the past about the service's shortcomings (Chart 4.15).⁹

⁹ In the survey, a transport user could have expressed concern about the service but had not previously lodged a complaint. Vice-versa, a complainant might have not expressed a concern in the survey but had lodged a complaint.

Chart 4.15: Complaints Handling



Source: NAO working papers

4.79 Secondly, the majority of these complainants were found not to have been satisfied with the outcome. In fact, 121 of the 174 replies received (70 per cent), showed that the respondents' expectations were still not met after they had complained about the service (Chart 4.16).¹⁰ This aggregate is made up of 92 respondents who said that there had been no improvement and another 29 respondents who felt that the subsequent changes had been either short-term or had not reflected any substantial progress.

4.80 The study also found a significant number of respondents (48 per cent) who mentioned specific concerns about the service in the survey (n=305), but had never complained to the service providers. When asked, many of these respondents said that the main reasons for not complaining were that they had felt that it was useless to complain (38 responses) or that they had felt that was no need to complain (35 responses). There were also a notable 24 respondents who said that, despite their concerns, they still had preferred not taking any action, as they disliked complaining.

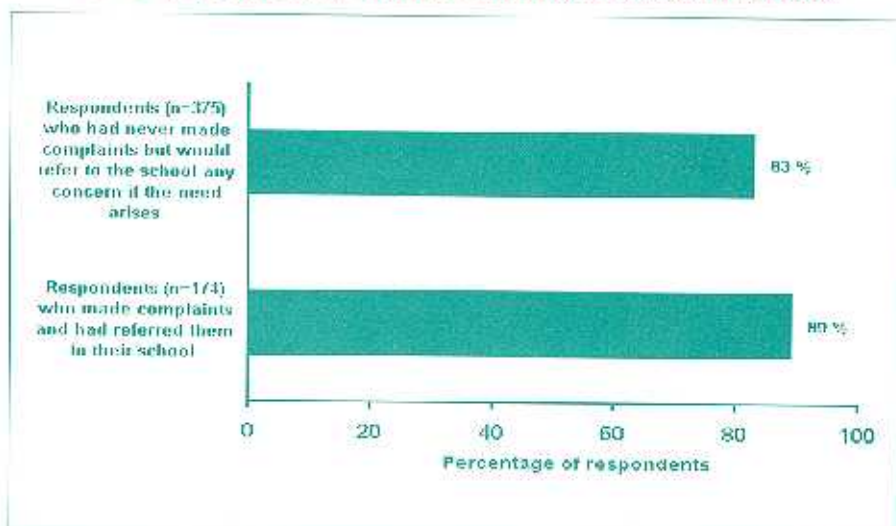
¹⁰ Not all the respondents who had complained on the service replied to the question on whether they were satisfied with the outcome.

Point of reference in case of difficulties

4.81 The survey also indicates that most users of school transport consider their school as the main point of reference in case of difficulties with the service. These findings were gathered from the replies received from respondents who complained about the service in the past and from the responses received from users who have never complained but indicated, in the survey, their preferred point of reference (Chart 4.16).

4.82 In fact, out of 174 replies received from respondents who had complained about the service, 154 responses (89 per cent) indicated that the school had been the receiver of their complaint. By comparison, a notably smaller share of respondents reported that they had referred their complaint to the vehicle driver (9 per cent) or to the Education Division (9 per cent).

Chart 4.16: End-Users' Point of Reference in Case of Difficulties



Source: NAO working papers

4.83 Furthermore, other respondents said that they had communicated their complaint to other channels ranging from the transport service providers¹¹ responsible for their trip to local councils.

¹¹ The transport service providers include the Public Transport Association, the Mini Bus Co-operative and the Unscheduled Bus Service.

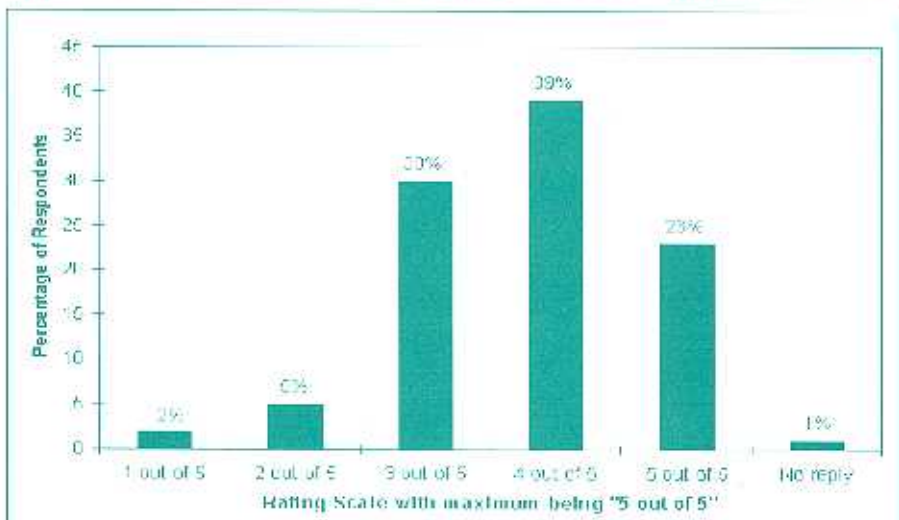
4.84 Respondents who had never complained about the service also considered the school the main point of reference in case of difficulties with the school transport. The survey shows that 83 per cent of the responses received referred to the school as the main contact point (n=375). Other replies referred to the Education Division (9 per cent), the transport operators (7 per cent) and the school vehicle driver (5 per cent).

Level of satisfaction

4.85 The majority of the respondents (n=545) gave the service higher than average ratings, with 23 per cent ranking it in the highest notch (five on a scale of between one and five, with five being the highest) and 39 per cent awarding it the next best mark (“four out of five”). The middle score (“three out of five”) was preferred by 30 per cent. On the other side of the scale, a notable share of respondents showed their overall level dissatisfaction by rating the service as “two” (5 per cent) or as “one” (2 per cent). Chart 4.17 shows how respondents viewed the service.

Chart 4.17: Satisfaction with the service (n=545)

Marks given by end-users, with “5 out of 5” being the maximum notch



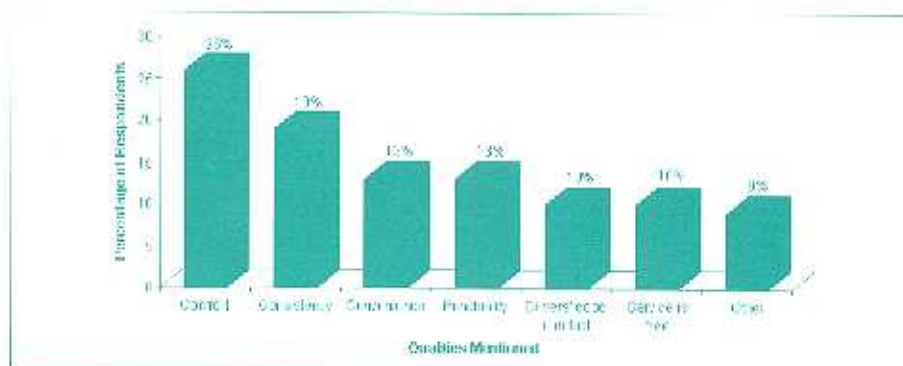
Source: NAO working papers

4.86 The survey's findings show that the respondents' average mark was slightly below the "four out of five" notch (3.78 points). In other words, the respondents' overall level of satisfaction can be classified as close to "very good".¹²

4.87 When probed further on the basis of their judgement, the majority of the respondents who had been using the service for more than one year (n=444) indicated that the service had remained the same (53 per cent) when compared with their situation one year before. 28 per cent reported improvements and a significant 7 per cent noted regression in the quality of the service provided.

4.88 The sample provided another important indicator on what had led to a rating close to a very good level of satisfaction, as respondents were asked to mention the positive qualities of the service. Multiple responses were allowed in this case, 545 respondents giving 699 responses. Most responses (n=699) referred to comfort (26 per cent), consistency (19 per cent), convenience (13 per cent), punctuality (13 per cent), the drivers' good conduct (10 per cent), the fact the service is free (10 per cent), cleanliness (3 per cent), and safety (3 per cent). Chart 4.18 shows the results.

Chart 4.18: Responses received on the positive aspects of the service provided (n=699 responses)



Source: NAO working papers

¹² For the purposes of this survey, the ratings of customer satisfaction are as follows. 5 is considered as excellent, 4 as very good, 3 as good, 2 as poor and 1 as unsatisfactory.

Challenges faced by respondents in particular schools

4.89 The findings of primary schools in the main survey (n=126) were compared with the results of a separate sample of a cluster of students eligible for school transport in two primary schools covering peripheral areas in the northern and southern parts of Malta (n=126). The purpose of this exercise was to assess any particular difficulties related to school transport encountered by smaller peripheral schools.

4.90 In general, there appears to be no significant variance between the perceptions and concerns of the respondents in the main survey and those in the clustered sample.

4.91 However, specific reports of problems experienced by respondents within the clustered sample indicate that the main survey gives an overall view and may not be showing the magnitude of specific needs and concerns of respondents in individual schools.

4.92 For example, in the clustered survey it was found that whilst one school had 65 per cent of its respondents (n=68) reporting that their school was closed on arrival by school transport in the morning, only 12 per cent of the respondents from the other school in the cluster (n=57) reported this concern.

4.93 This therefore shows schools with extreme problems need to be identified and singled out for further assessment.

The Diversity of End-Users needs and Concerns

4.94 The survey's findings emphasise the diversity of the end-users' perceived needs and concerns and indicate the tasks lying ahead for the improvement of the service. The conclusions on the survey's findings will be discussed in Part 5.

Conclusions



Part 5 - Conclusions

5.1 The school transport system is providing easier accessibility to schools to students. However, there are certain shortcomings in the system as outlined in our findings in Parts 2 to 4 which need to be addressed. The factors giving rise to these shortcomings are as follows:

The contract

5.2 The fact that there is no formal contract regulating the level of service and enforcing penalties in the case of non performance has given rise to quality shortcomings such as overcrowding, amalgamated trips, lack of timeliness and safety. However, negotiations are currently underway between the Education Division and the Service Providers to enter into the first formal contract between the two parties since 1976.

Market Conditions

5.3 The existence of a cartel and the granting of exclusivity on the provision of the service may be creating an opportunity for service providers to raise prices with no improvements to quality of service. The cartel can use its unilateral power to block healthy rivalry among competitors and set the rules regarding price, quality and quantity. This development may create a market situation in which a huge player such as the Education Division may still find it difficult to negotiate a contract on an even basis. Although the Education Division has the option of refusing the cartel's conditions, at the same time it is obliged by current legislation to provide free transport for eligible school children during the scholastic year.

5.4 On the other hand, the Education Division is still a dominant player in the market. As a significant buyer in the market it should effectively block the cartel's attempts to dictate terms and set rules regarding price, quality and quantity.

The management of school transport

5.5 The management and/or responsibility for the school transport system is not clearly defined. This gives rise to lack of ownership and interest in the system.

At the Education Division

5.6 The School Transport Section is housed at the Education Division and is run by one official. The official is responsible for:-

- planning the routes and number of vehicles;
- solving problems with the service providers;
- reconciling invoices to TNPs;
- passing on invoices to Accounts Section for payment.

5.7 The current system lacks segregation of duties, which results in an inefficient service with no checks and balances and lack of monitoring of the school transport performance even giving rise to irregularities in the payment for services delivered.

5.8 The above weaknesses in the system at Education Division are giving rise to a number of shortcomings and irregularities as outlined in our report namely:

- Insufficient planning of routes with lengths of routes calculated offhand, and the resulting risk of having trips being overcharged;
- The route registers at the Education Division do not tally to some of the route registers at the schools;
- No monitoring of school routes is being performed during the year.

At the schools

5.9 The heads of school supported by their union are not assuming responsibility for the management of school transport. This has led to a further deterioration of monitoring of the school transport system as well as a number of irregularities as follows:

5.10 Lack of standardisation in documentation of routes performed or missed and related invoices. This resulted in substantial overpayment for the service.

5.11 Different procedures adopted by service providers in delivering invoices to schools resulting in invoices with mismatched signatures and invoices amounts at schools not agreeing to Education Division.

5.12 A number of financial irregularities estimated to amount Lm 89,490 per scholastic year resulting from arithmetic errors, mismatched signatures and invoices not adjusted to TNPs. The Ministry of Education was informed of financial irregularities during the course of our audit.

5.13 In view of the above shortcomings, the Education Division has stated that it will endeavour to implement a number of internal control improvements as described in Part 2, Para. 2.36.

The quality of service

5.14 The lack of ownership and monitoring of the school transport system by the Education Division and schools, as well as the absence of a formal contract has led to the following shortcomings in the school transport system:

Inadequate timing of service

In the morning

5.15 Schools and students reported incidents of drivers picking up students too early in the morning even more than one hour before school starts. Furthermore, certain students complained of irregular pick up times and trips to school lasting more than 30 minutes.

In the afternoon

5.16 Students also reported irregular pick up times and delays in the afternoon after school end. Students complained of delayed trips from school lasting more than 30 minutes.

Amalgamated trips

5.17 Although trip amalgamation is not allowed by the Education Division, it is still being practised. Amalgamated trips give rise to a number of other complaints namely overcrowding, bullying, lengthy trips and non-conformity with the original routes. Furthermore, amalgamated trips are an indication of either underutilisation of vehicle capacity or excess capacity demanded.

Supervision

5.18 Very early, late or irregular pick up times in the morning are causing students to arrive early to school, at times earlier than when school gates are opened. Moreover, students are experiencing delays between when school finishes and when

the transport provider arrives. These students are being left unsupervised outside school premises. Furthermore, it seems that there is no established policy on supervision of students while in transit. Lack of adequate supervision on school buses results in lack of safety for students.

Lack of adequate complaints handling by schools

5.19 Complaints by end-users are usually forwarded directly to the schools' administration. The process to resolve complaints is not giving the desired results.

Overall level of satisfaction

Heads of school

5.20 The heads of school rated the overall school transport system as 7 out of 10, which is quite satisfactory. Together with this rating one has to consider the resistance by heads of school, supported by their union, in not being involved in the management and control of school transport. Maybe the status quo fits the teachers' aspirations.

Parents and students

5.21 Although end users stated that there is room for improvement in the type and delivery of the services provided, they rated the service as close to "very good".

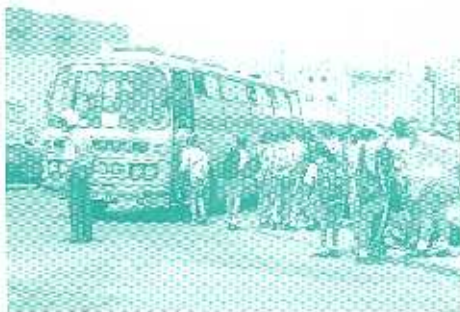
Liabilities in case of incidents occurrence

5.22 NAO sought legal advice regarding responsibility for students' safety in case of accidents during transit. Since transport services are being contracted by the Education Division, the latter is also liable for the safety of students in transit. In fact the responsibility of the Education Division

commences from when the students board the vehicle transporting them to school and ends when they descend from the vehicle in the afternoon. Supervision of students should be provided for by the Education Division or the obligation should be passed on to the service providers for pre and post school time gaps related to transport through a formal contract.



Recommendations



Part 6 - Recommendations

6.1 NAO advises that the following recommendations be taken into consideration:

The contract

6.2 The Education Division, when entering into a formal contract with the service providers, should ensure:

- A fair and reasonable price for the service offered;
- The provision of good quality service including clauses on timeliness, regularity, reliability, cleanliness, safety and liability.

6.3 The rights and obligations of both the Education Division and the service providers should be clearly spelt out. Penalties for non performance should be included in the contract.

Strengthening the School Transport Section

6.4 The School Transport Section should be strengthened and duties adequately segregated to include:

Better planning of school routes

6.5 Planning of school routes should be strengthened and performed more efficiently. Routes are to be measured, and ways of improving route allocation should be looked into.

6.6 School transport routes are to be constantly monitored and updated, preferably with all routes/trips given a proper and unique reference number. A signed and rubberstamped copy of the relevant section of the School Route Register is to be passed on to the schools.

6.7 The School Transport Section should obtain from the schools a detailed list of all students actually making use of school transport covering their names, addresses, and route/ trip number. The School Transport Section would then utilise these lists for amendments to routes, and vehicle types, if necessary.

Monitoring of school transport

6.8 The School Transport Section should be adequately staffed to perform nationwide inspections of the performance of the school transport system.

Verification of school transport invoices

6.9 Furthermore, this section is to verify that invoices have been approved by School Heads and that the invoice value has been adjusted for the value of Trips Not Performed.

A formal complaints handling procedure

6.10 This section should also have a formal complaints handling procedure with logging in of complaints and record of their resolution. The School Transport Section should take immediate action whenever problems crop up.

Progress reports

6.11 The School Transport Section should periodically report on progress to the Director Operations identifying any weaknesses in the system and outlining action to be taken in remedy of these weaknesses.

Strengthening the monitoring of school transport at school level

6.12 Heads of School should assume ownership of the school transport system at school level. An adequate organisational

setup for the monitoring of school transport is to be set up at school level.

6.13 A system for introducing supervision in transit should be introduced. Supervisors could monitor students, report cases of missed trips, amalgamated trips, bullying, lack of cleanliness and other shortcomings.

6.14 A daily record of the performance of all trips both in the morning and afternoon is to be kept by all schools. This information is to be utilised when compiling the Trips Not Performed Report against which payment for service is adjusted.

6.15 All invoices by service providers are to be sent to the Heads of School. The invoice from the service provider is to be verified against the Trips Not Performed Report. The invoice should include a statement to the effect that routes covered in the invoice have been matched to the school route register kept at schools and that Trips Not Performed have been deducted. The invoice is to be signed by the Head of School.

Improving the quality of the school transport service

The operation of a more efficient service

6.16 A study should be undertaken by the Education Division on how to better plan the operation of routes to accommodate children's needs. This could eliminate stress on school children by waking up too early and being left to wait for a long period of time before school hours. Attention should also be given to the reduction in route length.

Maintenance of quality standards

6.17 Constant monitoring of quality standards by the School Transport Section as well as schools is very important to

maintain the highest quality service including timeliness, route efficiency, cleanliness, lack of overcrowding, and driver correct behaviour. These quality standards could be better enforced if schools bind themselves to give a quality service through a quality service charter which would then be distributed to parents.

Effective complaints resolution

6.18 There should also be an effective complaints handling procedure at school level for immediate forwarding of complaints to the School Transport Section and successful completion.

Responsibility for the welfare and safety of students

6.19 Legal advice sought by NAO indicates that the Education Division should assume full responsibility for the welfare and safety of students not only during school hours, but also on their trip to and from school. It should ensure that schools are opened before the first students arrive at school and adequate supervision is effected on school vehicles. It should ensure that adequate shelter is provided for children on school premises whilst waiting for school to start and as soon as school finishes.

Appendices



Appendix 1 – School Transport Questionnaire – Heads of School

School Transport System Questionnaire to Heads of School

1. Respondent

1.1 Name of Respondent

1.2 Position held by Respondent:

Head of School	<input type="checkbox"/>	Assistant Head	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	Secretary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clerk	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify)	<input type="text"/>

1.3 Telephone Number

1.4 Fax Number

1.5 E-mail

1.6 Date of compilation

d d m m y y y y

2. School

2.1 Name of School

2.2 Category

Primary A	<input type="checkbox"/>	Primary B	<input type="checkbox"/>
Primary C	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Junior Lyceum Boys	<input type="checkbox"/>	Junior Lyceum Girls	<input type="checkbox"/>
Area Secondary Boys	<input type="checkbox"/>	Area Secondary Girls	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trade Boys	<input type="checkbox"/>	Trade Girls	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ex Opportunity Boys	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ex Opportunity Girls	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special Needs	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Other (please specify)	<input type="text"/>		

2.3 Mailing Address:

2.4 Locality

2.5 The schedule of bus routes on the following page(s) has been compiled from the official Routes Log Book as issued by the School Transport Section of the Education Division.

Kindly update as necessary by indicating which trips are actually being performed. Please insert any trips not shown on the list.

For each trip being performed, kindly record vehicle seating capacity and the number of students actually making use of each vehicle.

Kindly perform above exercise by physically verifying actual trips on a particular school day and indicate the date when such an exercise was performed.

Date when physical verification was carried out:
d d m m y y y y

Route No.	Operated by	School Route: Start and Pickup points	Vehicle	Is trip actually being regularly performed?		Seating Capacity	Actual number of Students transported
				Yes	No		
999	PTA	Qornil (St. George's School - Church - Main Street) SPECIMEN SCHOOL	Bus 1				
			Bus 2				
999	PTA	Atanal (Mierah Kola - Palma - Church)	Bus 1				
			Bus 2				
999	PTA	Qornil (St. Sebastian Square - Marii - Valleys Road)	Bus 1				
			Bus 2				
999	LBS	L-Meis (Trip Cruise Peace - Tins P.P. Seydon)	Bus 1				
999	LBS	Raber (Nigier - Vial (Haldim - Obar Barva)	Bus 1				
999	LBS	Raber (St. Paul's Church - Terminus)	Bus 1				
999	MB	Raber (Roman Villa) - Marib Aren	M/Bus 1				
999	MB	Raber (St. Dominic Square - St. Sebastian)	M/Bus 1				
999	MB	B'Kara (Tal-Oenus Area - Ty Paris Housing Estate)	M/Bus 1				
999	MB	Zebing (Candisora - Tal - Goroza - St. Mary Hill)	M/Bus 1				
	MB	B'Kara (Ty Paris Housing Estate)	M/Bus 1				

3. Students

- 3.1 Students' age bracket: from years to years
- 3.2 Total student population:
- 3.3 Number of students **eligible to use** free transport (excluding Special Needs students using non-mainstream transport)
- 3.4 Number of students **actually making use** of free transport (excluding Special Needs students using non-mainstream transport)
- 3.5 Number of Special Needs students eligible to use non-mainstream free transport
- 3.6 Number of Special Needs students making use of non-mainstream free transport

4. School official responsible for transport

- 4.1 Name of official
- 4.2 Position held by official:
- | | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Head of School | <input type="checkbox"/> | Assistant Head | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> | Secretary | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Clerk | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (please specify) | <input type="text"/> |
- 4.3 For how many years has the official been responsible for transport?
Less than 1 year 1-5 years More than 5 years
- 4.4 Responsibilities:
- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Preparation of the School Transport Requirement Report | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Checking that the correct number and type of vehicles arrive at school | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Recording missing trips on the monthly Trips Not Performed report | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Endorsing the monthly Trips Not Performed report | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Verifying the invoice as received from the Service Providers | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Amending the Service Providers' invoice to take into account any missed trips | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Endorsing the Service Providers' invoice | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Forwarding invoices and monthly reports to Education Division | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Appointing supervisors/bus prefects | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please specify) | <input type="text"/> |

4. School official responsible for transport (ctd)

Who stands in for this official when he/she is away?

4.5 Name:

4.6 Position held by person standing in:

- | | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Head of School | <input type="checkbox"/> | Assistant Head | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> | Secretary | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Clerk | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (please specify) | <input type="text"/> |

5. School Transport Co-ordination

5.1 Who determines which routes are required?

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| School Head | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| School official responsible for transport | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| School Council | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| School Transport Section at Education Division | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Vehicle driver/owner | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Others (please specify) | <input type="text"/> |

5.2 Who is consulted during the formulation of the routes?

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| School Head | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| School official responsible for transport | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| School Council | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Vehicle driver/owner | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Students and parents | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No consultation takes place | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Don't know | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please specify) | <input type="text"/> |

5.3 On what criteria are routes determined?

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| As per previous year | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| According to students' exigencies | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| According to service providers' exigencies | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Don't know | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please specify) | <input type="text"/> |

5.4 When are these routes finalised?

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Before the start of the scholastic year | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| During the first week of school | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please specify) | <input type="text"/> |

5. School Transport Co-ordination (ctd)

- 5.5 How are parents informed of transport arrangements?
- Mail
 - In writing
 - Through a school meeting
 - By word of mouth through other parents/students
 - Other (please specify)
- 5.6 Who supplies vehicle drivers with route details?
- School official responsible for transport
 - School Transport Section at Education Division
 - PTA / UBS / Minibus Co-Operative as applicable
 - Don't know
 - Other (please specify)
- 5.7 What list are drivers supplied with?
- Total number of passengers
 - Passenger names
 - Pickup points along the route
 - Passenger names at individual pick-up points
 - Number of passengers at individual pick-up points
 - Don't know

6. School Transport Control

General

- 6.1 Is a list of students actually making use of school transport per route being kept?
- Yes No
- If the answer to this question is 'No' please go to Question 6.3*
- 6.2 Is this list updated to reflect changes throughout the year?
- Yes No
- 6.3 The School Transport Section annually issues a School Transport Routes Log Book. This lists routes and pick-up points that vehicles offering service to your school's students will be following, together with the number of vehicles operating on each route. Did you receive this year's copy?
- Yes No
- 6.4 Do you receive services from the PTA?
- Yes No
- If the answer to this question is 'No' please go to Question 6.7*
- 6.5 Does the PTA forward you invoices covering services performed?
- Yes No
- If the answer to this question is 'No' please go to Question 6.7*

6. School Transport Control (ctd)

General (ctd)

6.6 Who do you forward the invoice to?

PTA

School Transport Section

6.7 Do you receive services from the UBS?

Yes No

If the answer to this question is 'No' please go to Question 6.10

6.8 Does the UBS forward you invoices covering services performed?

Yes No

If the answer to this question is 'No' please go to Question 6.10

6.9 Who do you forward the invoice to?

UBS

School Transport Section

6.10 Do you receive services from the Minibus Co-Op?

Yes No

If the answer to this question is 'No' please go to Question 6.13

6.11 Does the Minibus Co-Op forward you invoices covering services performed?

Yes No

If the answer to this question is 'No' please go to Question 6.13

6.12 Who do you forward the invoice to?

Minibus Co-Op

School Transport Section

6.13 Do you (Head or representative) endorse/counter-sign service providers' invoices?

Yes No

Trips not performed

6.14 Are logs recording trips performed each morning kept on a daily basis?

Yes No

6.15 Are logs recording trips performed each afternoon kept on a daily basis?

Yes No

6. School Transport Control (ctd)

Trips not performed (ctd)

6.16 Who updates these logs?

School Official responsible for transport

Assistant Head

Secretary

Clerk

Driver

Bus prefect

No logs are being kept

Other (please specify)

6.17 Kindly update the following with the relevant figures:

Number of school days since start of scholastic year	
Number of instances when regularly-operating trips have not been performed since the start of the scholastic year (kindly consider am and pm trips as 2 separate instances)	

If the number of trips not performed is zero, kindly go to Question 6.21

6.18 In the case of missed trips, what action was taken?

Complained to the driver

Reported the fact to the PTA/UBS/Minibus Co-Op

Reported the fact to the School Transport Section

The school recorded the occurrence in the monthly

Trips Not Performed report submitted to the School

Transport Section

The school adjusted the invoice and signed the amendment

6.19 What was the outcome of the above action?

Trips resumed regularly

Trips continued to be missed

Other (please specify)

6.20 Schools forward the School Transport Section a Trips Not Performed Report. Do you submit this report when:

Trips have been missed during the month

No trips have been missed (NIL report)

Never

6. School Transport Control (ctd)

Official routes not followed

6.21 How do you ensure that official routes are being followed (that is established pick-up points are covered)?

Inspections

Feedback from students

No monitoring is performed

Other (please specify)

6.22 What is the frequency of trips where the official route was not followed?

Never Rare Occasional Frequent Very frequent Don't know

If the answer to this question is 'Never' or 'Don't know', please go to Question 6.25

6.23 What action was taken in cases where the official route was not followed?

The school reported the case to the driver

The school reported the case to the PTA/UBS/Minibus Co-Op

The school reported the case to the School Transport Section

The school reported the fact in the monthly Trips Not Performed report submitted to the School Transport Section

No action was taken

6.24 What was the outcome of the above action?

An adjustment to the original route was made so that the route now being followed by the driver is considered the official route

The driver is now following the original route again

No outcome – the driver continues following the route as adjusted by himself with no action being taken

Stranded students

6.25 Were there cases of students left stranded due to irregular service performance?

Yes No

If the answer to this question is 'No' please go to Question 6.28

6.26 In the case of students left stranded, what action was taken?

Complained to the driver

Reported the fact to the PTA/UBS/Minibus Co-Op

Reported the fact to the School Transport Section

The school recorded the occurrence in the monthly Trips Not Performed report submitted to the School Transport Section

The school adjusted the invoice and signed the amendment

No action

6. School Transport Control (ctd)

Stranded students (ctd)

6.27 What was the outcome of the above action?

Trips resumed regularly

Students continued being left stranded

Other (please specify)

Amalgamated trips

6.28 Were there cases of trips that were amalgamated?

Yes

No

If the answer to this question is 'No' please go to Question 6.31

6.29 In the case of amalgamated trips, what action was taken?

Complained to the driver

Reported the fact to the PTA/UBS/Minibus Co-Op

Reported the fact to the School Transport Section

The school recorded the occurrence in the monthly

Trips Not Performed report submitted to the School

Transport Section

The school adjusted the invoice and signed the amendment

No action

6.30 What was the outcome of the above action?

Trips resumed regularly

Trips continued to be amalgamated

Other (please specify)

Timings

6.31 At what time are the school doors open?

--	--

6.32 At what time does school start?

--	--

6.33 At what time did vehicles start arriving at school yesterday morning?

--	--

6.34 At what time did the last vehicle arrive at school yesterday morning?

--	--

6.35 At what time does school finish?

--	--

6.36 By when had all students making use of school transport left on their vehicles yesterday afternoon?

--	--

6. School Transport Control (ctd)

Supervision

6.37 Who supervises the students during the trip?

- Bus prefect
- Member of the teaching staff
- Parent(s)
- Vehicle driver
- No one

6.38 List the duties of appointed supervisors:

- No supervisors are appointed
- Maintaining order during the trip
- Reporting exceptional occurrences during the trip
- Other (please specify)

6.39 Who is responsible for the welfare of the students (health, bullying, harassment) during the trip?

- Education Division
- School Transport Provider
- School Management
- Don't know
- Other (please specify)

7. Complaints Handling Mechanism

7.1 What was the number of transport-related complaints received by the school during the period Oct to Nov 2001?

- 0-50 51-100 more than 101

7. Complaints Handling Mechanism (ctd)

7.2 A list of potential complaints follows. Kindly tick the appropriate level of occurrence:

	Very Frequent	Frequent	Occasional	Rare	Never
<i>Timing-related</i>					
Pick up point too distant from residence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pick up time too early in relation to school opening time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pick up time erratic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Long waiting time at end of day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Duration of trip unnecessarily long	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Trip/route-related</i>					
Missed trips	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Overcrowding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Actual route differs from official route	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Route not followed consistently	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Driver/vehicle-related</i>					
Driver negative behaviour	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Excessive driving	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of safety on the vehicle	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of cleanliness on the vehicle	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Other students-related</i>					
Other students' negative behaviour	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="text"/>				

Questions 7.3 to 7.5 refer to *timing-related* complaints as per Question 7.2

7.3 How do/would you handle time-related complaints?

School tackles them itself by referring complaints to driver

School tackles them itself by referring complaint to PTA/UBS/Minibus Co-Op

School refers them to School Transport Section

Other (please specify)

7.4 In the case of (timing-related) complaints forwarded to the School Transport Section, in what way are these submitted?

- Verbally
- In writing

7. Complaints Handling Mechanism (ctd)

- 7.5 What is the outcome of these complaints?
- Complaints are normally resolved
 - Complaints are normally not resolved
 - Minor complaints are normally resolved, but major ones remain outstanding
 - Complaints are normally resolved but then re-surface
 - Other (please specify)

Questions 7.6 to 7.8 refer to *trip/route-related* complaints as per Question 7.2

- 7.6 How do/would you handle trip/route-related complaints?
- School tackles them itself by referring complaints to driver
 - School tackles them itself by referring complaint to PTA/UBS/Minibus Co-Op
 - School refers them to School Transport Section
 - Other (please specify)

- 7.7 In the case of (trip/route-related) complaints forwarded to the School Transport Section, in what way are these submitted?
- Verbally
 - In writing

- 7.8 What is the outcome of these complaints?
- Complaints are normally resolved
 - Complaints are normally not resolved
 - Minor complaints are normally resolved, but major ones remain outstanding
 - Complaints are normally resolved but then re-surface
 - Other (please specify)

Questions 7.9 to 7.11 refer to *driver/vehicle-related* complaints as per Question 7.2

- 7.9 How do/would you handle driver/vehicle-related complaints?
- School tackles them itself by referring complaints to driver
 - School tackles them itself by referring complaint to PTA/UBS/Minibus Co-Op
 - School refers them to School Transport Section
 - Other (please specify)

7. Complaints Handling Mechanism (ctd)

7.10 In the case of (driver/vehicle-related) complaints forwarded to the School Transport Section, in what way are these submitted?

- Verbally
In writing

7.11 What is the outcome of these complaints?

- Complaints are normally resolved
Complaints are normally not resolved
Minor complaints are normally resolved, but major ones remain outstanding
Complaints are normally resolved but then re-surface
Other (please specify)

7.12 What is the outcome of complaints in connection with students' negative behaviour?

- Complaints are normally resolved
Complaints are normally not resolved
Minor complaints are normally resolved, but major ones remain outstanding
Complaints are normally resolved but then re-surface
Other (please specify)

8. Rating Levels

8.1 How would you rate **Parents and School** communication arrangements regarding transport?

- Excellent Good Average Poor Very Poor

8.2 How would you rate **School and School Transport Section** communication arrangements?

- Excellent Good Average Poor Very Poor

8.3 How would you rate **School Transport Section and Service Provider** communication arrangements?

- Excellent Good Average Poor Very Poor Don't know

8.4 How would you rate your level of satisfaction with the complaints handling procedure as operated by the School Transport Section?

- Excellent Good Average Poor Very Poor

8. Rating Levels (ctd)

8.5 Kindly indicate your level of satisfaction with the following qualities of school transport:

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Average</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Very poor</u>	<u>Don't know</u>	<u>Nil</u>
Routing efficiency (shortest trip possible)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Timeliness of Service:</i>							
Consistency (regular timing)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Convenience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Student safety	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Level of cleanliness on vehicles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comfort of ride for students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students' behaviour during the voyage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Drivers' behaviour	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Level of supervision of school children while in transit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

8.6 Please grade the school transport system on a scale of 1 to 10:
(10 is Excellent, 1 is Poor)

8.7 Kindly list any changes you would recommend in the school transport system:

School Transport Section/Education Division: _____

Service Providers: _____

The system in general: _____

Signed (Head of School): _____

Name in blocks: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 2 – School Transport Questionnaire – Parents / Students

School Transport Questionnaire to Parents / Students

1. U.R.N. 2. Date 3. Time
4. Initials
5. Interviewee: Parent Student Parent/Student

School-Details

6. Name of school:
7. Category: Primary A Ex-Opportunity Junior Lyceum
Primary B Trade Special Needs
Primary C Secondary
Other (please specify)
8. Locality:

School trip details

9. How does your child get to school?
On foot
Using school transport
Using public transport
Using private transport
Other (please specify)

If the answer to the above question is 'Using School Transport' go to Question 11

10. Why doesn't your child make use of school transport?
The school is nearby
The school does not provide transport
Parents take the child to school
The pickup point is too distant
Waiting time for the vehicle is too long
Child gets to school too early
Vehicle is over-crowded
The service does not operate regularly
Other (please specify)

Go to Question 21

11. How long does it take your child to get from home to the pickup point?
Less than 5 minutes
Between 5 and 10 minutes
More than 10 minutes

12. Is pick-up time consistent? Yes No

13. If 'Yes' what is the pick-up time?

If Question 13 was unanswered, go to Question 16

14. What is the earliest pick-up time?

15. What is the latest pick-up time?

16. At what time does the student arrive at school?

Regular/Earliest

17. Latest (if applicable)

18. Is the school open on arrival? YES NO

If 'Yes' go to Question 21

19. At what time does the school open?

20. Where does your child wait until the school opens?

On public roads Elsewhere (please specify)

Return trip details

21. Does your child make use of school transport in the afternoon?

Yes No

If 'Yes' go to Question 23

22. Why is school transport not utilised?

The school does not provide transport

Long time spent waiting for the vehicle

Long time span from school end to arrival at home

Parents get the child back from school

Child goes to some family member's residence

Child goes for private lessons

Vehicle overcrowding

Inconsistent service

Other (please specify)

If respondent is a non-user both in the morning and in the afternoon, go to Question 49.

If only morning transport is utilised, go to Question 32

23. At what time does school end?

24. Does your child find transport waiting for him/her in the afternoon?

Always Nearly Always Occasionally Rarely Never

If 'Always' go to Question 32

25. If 'Occasionally', 'Rarely' or 'Never' how long is the waiting time?

- Less than 15 minutes
 Between 15 and 30 minutes
 Between 30 and 45 minutes
 Over 45 minutes

26. Where does your child wait for the vehicle?

- On school premises Outside school premises

27. Who supervises the students during their wait?

- Teachers School Personnel
 No one Don't Know

28. Does your child get home regularly at the same time?

- Yes No

If 'No', go to Question 30

29. At what time does your child get home?

Go to Question 32.

30. What is the earliest arrival time?

31. What is the latest arrival time?

32. How many trips were missed since the start of this scholastic year?

Morning	Afternoon
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

33. Is the same vehicle utilised for the morning and the afternoon trip?

- Yes No

34. What type of vehicle is used?

	Morning	Afternoon
Bus	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Coach	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Minibus	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Taxi	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

35. Do you feel that the vehicle is:

	Morning	Afternoon
Overcrowded: Always	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nearly Always	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clean: Always	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nearly Always	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

36. Are there students from other schools on the vehicle?

	Morning	Afternoon
Always	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nearly Always	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

37. The driver's behaviour is normally:

	Morning	Afternoon
Good	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Average	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bad	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

38. Is the same route followed on the way to school and back?

	Morning	Afternoon
Always	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nearly Always	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Occasionally	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Complaints

39. What do you dislike about the service?

Nothing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Long time spent waiting for the vehicle	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child gets to school too early	<input type="checkbox"/>
Long time span from school end to arrival at home	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inconsistent timing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Missed trips	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bullying during the trip	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vehicle overcrowding	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dangerous driving	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="text"/>

If the answer is 'Nothing' go to Question 44

40. Have you ever lodged a complaint in connection with the service?

Yes No

If 'Yes' go to Question 42

41. Why not?

It would be useless to complain	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not aware of where to complain	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fear of consequences	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="text"/>

Go to Question 44.

42. To whom did you forward your complaint?

- | | | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| School | <input type="checkbox"/> | Vehicle Driver | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ministry | <input type="checkbox"/> | Public Transport Association | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Education Division | <input type="checkbox"/> | Minibus Co-Operative | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Local Council | <input type="checkbox"/> | Unscheduled Bus Service | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please specify) | <input type="text"/> | | |

43. Did the situation improve following your complaint?

- Yes No Not Considerably Temporarily
Go to Question 45

44. If you need to complain, who would you contact?

- | | | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| School | <input type="checkbox"/> | Vehicle Driver | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ministry | <input type="checkbox"/> | Public Transport Association | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Education Division | <input type="checkbox"/> | Minibus Co-Operative | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Local Council | <input type="checkbox"/> | Unscheduled Bus Service | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please specify) | <input type="text"/> | | |

Final Comments

45. Is your child a first-time service user? YES NO

If 'Yes' go to Question 47

46. Do you think the service level this year has:

- Improved Remained at par Regressed

47. How would you rate the service on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the least mark and 5 the highest?

48. What do you like about the service?

- | | | | |
|-------------|--------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| Regularity | <input type="checkbox"/> | Comfort | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Punctuality | <input type="checkbox"/> | Practicality | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Convenience | <input type="checkbox"/> | Free of charge | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Other (please specify)

Student details

49. Name: 50. Age:

51. Gender: Male Female

52. Locality (residence):

Appendix 3 – Methodology: End-users’ survey

Methodology

Areas of Interest

1. Specific questions were asked to respondents to address those features and practices considered as most likely to affect the level of service. These questions related to the following subject areas:

- Reliability of the service provided
- Convenience to respondents
- Timeliness of service
- Safety concerns
- Crowding on school vehicles
- Vehicle cleanliness
- Drivers’ conduct
- Successful handling of complaints
- Degree of customer satisfaction

Sample Design

i. School Distribution

2. The sample was chosen from the student population, reported separately by eighty-three mainstream primary and secondary government schools, as being eligible to use school transport. The types of schools covered in the survey were:

- Primary schools
- Area secondary schools
- Junior lyceums

- Trade schools
 - Ex-opportunity schools
3. Students and parents of children attending special schools were excluded from the survey, as the aim of the study was to focus on standard requirements.
 4. The total population of the above selected schools that was eligible to use school transport was 18,718 students. To obtain the sample, NAO opted for stratified sampling in order to extract a more representative group of respondents from each targeted category of schools. Schools were stratified on two dimensions - by type of school and by size of population eligible to use school transport. Within each school category, a random number of elements were chosen in proportion to the school size. A sample size made up of 613 elements was chosen. More details are shown on Table A1.1.
 5. The survey was conducted between 6 February and 6 March 2002 with the interviews being conducted during school holidays, on Saturday mornings and on weekdays in the afternoon. All respondents offered their co-operation and the survey had a 100 per cent response rate.
 6. The representative sample provided a 95 per cent confidence level, with a confidence interval of plus or minus 4 per cent for the whole sample. The confidence interval of subgroups within the entire sample widens as the sizes of subgroups get smaller.
 7. The gender distribution of the respondents attending primary schools, area secondary schools and junior lyceums (n=564) was also fairly distributed between male (46 per cent) and female (54 per cent) groups. The trade and ex-opportunity school category (n= 49), on the other hand, had an exceptionally higher ratio of male respondents (male: 80 per cent; female: 20 per cent). This reflects the higher percentage of male students attending these schools.

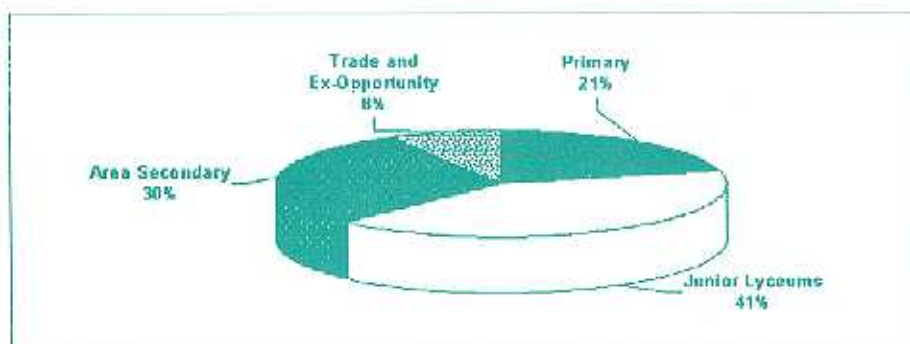
Table A1.1: Total Eligible Population vs. Sample Chosen

Category	Eligible Population		Elements Surveyed	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Primary A	843	4.5	26	4.2
Primary B	1,194	6.4	39	6.4
Primary C	1,855	9.9	61	10.0
Total Primary	3,892	20.8	126	20.6
Junior Lyceum Boys	3,237	17.3	109	17.8
Junior Lyceum Girls	4,464	23.8	145	23.7
Area Secondary Boys	2,818	15.1	90	14.7
Area Secondary Girls	2,967	15.9	94	15.3
Total Junior Lyceum and Area Secondary	13,488	72.0	438	71.5
Ex-Opportunity	996	5.3	37	6.0
Trade	344	1.8	12	2.0
Total Ex-Opportunity and Trade	1,340	7.2	49	8.0
Global	18,718	100.0	613	100.0

Source: NAO working papers

Eligible population supplied by schools

Chart A1.1 shows the distribution of respondents from each school category.

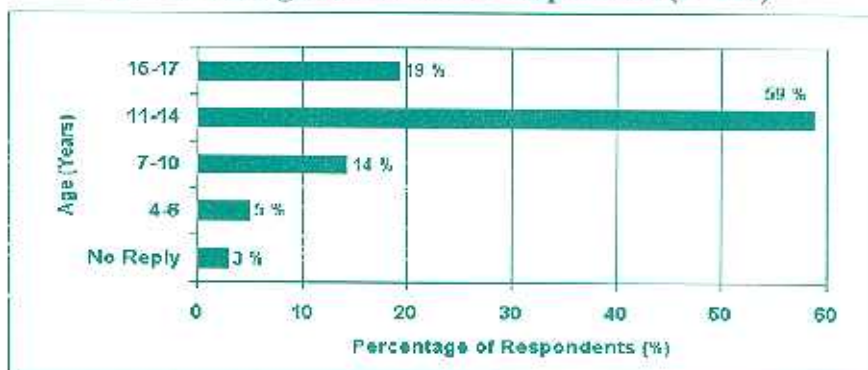
Chart A1.1: Percentage of Respondents by School Category (n=613)

Source: NAO working papers

ii. Age Distribution

8. The mean age of surveyed students (n=595) who indicated their age was 12.2. Chart A1.2 shows the overall age distribution of the sample chosen. The notably high share of respondents aged over 11 in the sample reflects the higher ratio of eligible students in secondary schools (Refer to Table 3.2).

Chart A1.2: Age Distribution of Respondents (n =613)



Source: NAO working papers

iii. Geographical Distribution

9. The survey targeted respondents from all geographical regions. Gozo was excluded from the study, as it does not offer a direct return home-to-school service. Table A1.2 shows the distribution by region of all respondents.

Table A1.2: Distribution of respondents by District

Region	Percentage of respondents (n=613)
Northern District	15
Western District	17
Northern Harbour District	22
South-Eastern District	20
Southern Harbour District	26
Total	100

Note: This classification is based on the geographical coding used by the National Statistics Office

Source: NAO working papers

10. A mix of parents and students answered the survey questions (n=613), with most contributions coming from parents (51 per cent), or parents and students together (20 per cent). This allowed for a highly positive interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee/s, with both parents and students giving their valid contributions. The primary school category (n=126), as expected, involved a high level of parent input with 92 per cent of the interviews involving parents. In the case of secondary schools (n=487), 65 per cent of the interviews involved parents.¹

11. The feedback received from the survey also included an element of first-year users. Out of the total surveyed population, 16 per cent of the respondents stated that they were using the school transport service for the first time during the scholastic year 2001-2. The respondents indicated that the main reasons for not using school transport previously included a change of school or residence, a shift in parents' choices, and child's age.

Separate sample of a cluster of two primary schools

12. In order to be able to assess any particular difficulties related to school transport encountered by smaller peripheral schools, a separate sample made up of a cluster of two primary schools, one from the northern part and one from the southern part of Malta, was selected.

13. All the elements, amounting to 126, representing the total students eligible to use school transport in these two schools were chosen in the cluster.

14. This cluster sample was analysed separately from the main survey of 613 respondents mentioned above.

¹ Junior lyceums, area secondary schools, trade schools and ex-opportunity schools are being collectively referred to as secondary schools for the purposes of this report.

