Talking about data

The skill of extracting specific information from lists, tables, charts, diagrams and graphs is an important one, but so too is looking at the information as a whole and drawing conclusions from it. Encouraging learners to talk or write about the data that they are examining can not only improve their use of the terminology associated with data handling, but also support them to read and interpret information more critically. It is important to use sources of data that are of relevance to your learners, say by asking them to come up with their own areas of interest, or using themselves and their own lives as topics for research.

Some examples are as follows:

- Look at the order in which these items are presented in this list… Is this the most useful way to order them (e.g. taxi firms in alphabetical order in a telephone book)? What might be a more useful way (e.g. by geographical location)?

- Which was the most popular choice in the survey? And the least popular? Why do you think this might be?

- From the temperature charts, where would you choose to go on holiday and why?

- Compare the weight charts for each baby's first two weeks and describe the changes in each baby's weight over that period. How do they differ?

- How else could this data have been presented? Would it have worked better that way? Why/why not?

- Re-draw this bar chart using a larger scale. How does that change the way that the information looks? Which scale would you use if you wanted people to think that there is not much variation in the data?

- Imagine that you are going to use the data that you've collected to persuade the management to improve the catering facilities. Think about the best way to represent this information. What statements can you make that will best summarise your findings? Can you prepare a presentation on this, using ICT applications such as a word-processor, a spreadsheet or presentation software?

Useful link:

A series of six articles on understanding statistics in the news on the [BBC News websites](#) (some of the content is aimed at higher levels but parts could be adapted for lower ones).