

2012 NIACE Adult Participation in Learning Survey

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NIACE, the national organisation for adult learning, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training, particularly for those who do not have easy access because of barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties and disabilities, or insufficient financial resources.

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Foreword

Participating in learning can have many benefits including helping people to secure work, stay and flourish in their jobs, support their family, keep healthy and play a positive role in their community. So it is disappointing that participation in learning is declining, with many of the people who could most benefit missing out.

The findings of this survey show that you are much less likely to take part in learning if you are retired or outside the labour market, if you are in a low-skilled job, or if you didn't do well in school. It confirms that there are enormous inequalities between those who do and don't learn in adult life.

We know from this year's Adult Learners' Week Award Winners – like all previous winners – that when people are given the right opportunities their lives really do change for the better. We also know that many of those who get involved in learning will have a positive impact on others around them, whether that be in their family, the community or workplace.

There is plenty of evidence to support these assertions about the benefits and yet there are many people who are not convinced; around a third of those surveyed say that there is nothing that can be done to make them more likely to take up learning. Even more alarming is that 79% of those who have done no learning since leaving full-time education say that they are unlikely to take up learning in the future.

This year, we want to engage key stakeholders and decision-makers from the learning world and beyond to respond to these findings. If you have a belief that learning is important, in life and work, then help us to make an impact on the scale and patterns of participation. There are many ways you might be able to help: you might be able to support and persuade others into learning at work; to reach out to different groups of people in your communities; to influence policy-makers in government; or to persuade your employer to provide informal training opportunities to all staff. Whatever it is, we want to hear from you, because we believe new actions and activities are needed if the scale and patterns of participation are to change.

Let us know what you will do, what you want to see others do and how you think NIACE can support actions to address the challenges. You can do this by emailing us at **LearningSurvey@niace.org.uk** or tweeting @NIACEhq using #LearningSurvey

Thank you,



David Hughes

Chief Executive, NIACE

Introduction

In May 2012, NIACE published an overview of the headline findings from the 2012 NIACE Adult Participation in Learning Survey, providing the latest figures on the proportion of adults taking part in learning and a breakdown of who participates and who does not.

This report provides more detail on the range of questions asked within the survey and explores who participates, how and why adults learn, how we might support more and different adults to learn in the future, and how adults find out about learning. In addition, the report also includes the findings from a range of questions asked within the 2012 survey to explore the relationship between learning and work.

NIACE, The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, is the national organisation for adult learning in England and Wales, and is an independent charity owned and governed by its members. As a non-governmental organisation, NIACE works with its members and a wide range of stakeholders to advance adult learning.

We believe that all adults should have opportunities to participate in learning throughout their lives because learning supports the achievement of freedom of choice, control over individual and group destinies, health and well-being, identity and tolerance. With particular emphasis on those who have missed out on previous opportunities or are under-represented in learning, NIACE's work is aimed at: securing **more** opportunities for adults to learn; extending learning to **different** adults; and promoting **better**-quality learning.

The Survey

For nearly two decades, NIACE has undertaken a series of annual surveys to measure adult participation in learning. These surveys have not only provided information on the proportion of adults taking part in learning and a detailed breakdown of who participates and who does not, but comparison of results within the series has also enabled us to examine how patterns of participation have changed over time.

Each year, 5000 adults aged 17 and over across the UK are provided with the following definition of learning, and are asked when they last took part in any learning:

“Learning can mean practising, studying or reading about something. It can also mean being taught, instructed or coached. This is so you can develop skills, knowledge, abilities or understanding of something. Learning can also be called education or training. You can do it regularly (each day or month) or you can do it for a short period of time. It can be full time, or part time, done at home, at work, or in another place like a college. Learning does not have to lead to a qualification. We are interested in any learning you have done, whether or not it was finished.”

The survey deliberately adopts a broad definition of learning, including a wide range of formal, non-formal and informal learning, far beyond the limits of publicly offered educational opportunities for adults.

1 Who participates?

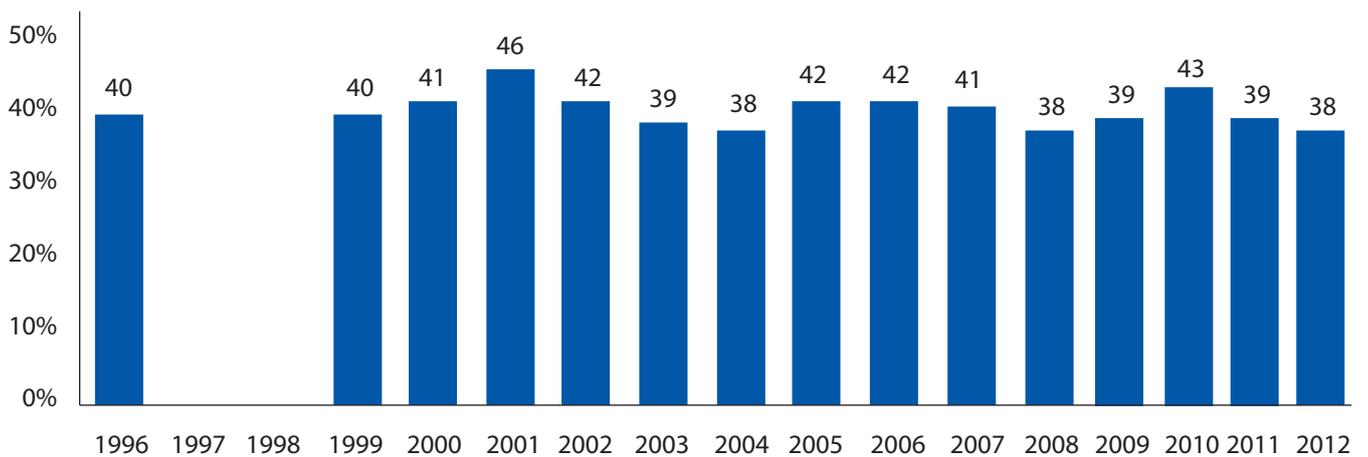
Year on year around two-fifths of the adult population in the UK say that they have taken part in some form of learning in the previous three years, while around one third say they have not participated since leaving full-time education (See Figure 1).

Adults participating in learning during the past three years: **38%**

Adults who have done no learning since leaving full time education: **36%**

In the 2012 survey, 19% of adults said that they are currently engaged in learning, with a total of 38% having taken part during the previous three years. 36% of all adults report not having learned since leaving full-time education. Since 2010 – when 43% of adults reported learning in the previous three years – the survey has shown a decline in participation.

Figure 1: Participation in learning, 1996–2012

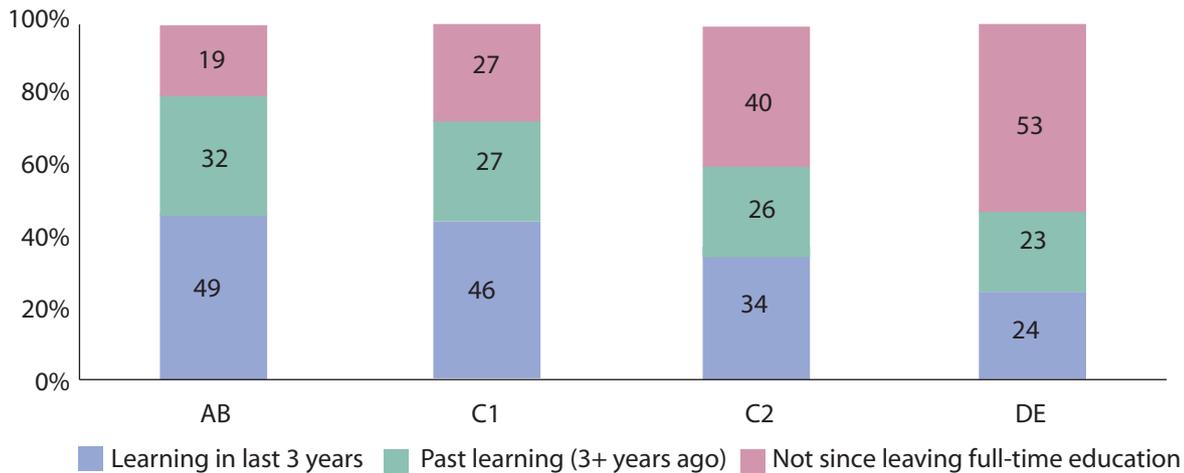


Base: all respondents

Opportunities to learn as an adult, however, are not evenly distributed across society. As in previous years, the 2012 survey clearly shows that participation in learning is determined by class, employment status, age and prior learning.

Socio-economic class remains a key predictor of participation in learning (see Figure 2). Just under one half of those in the highest classes (49% of ABs; 46% of C1s) report taking part in learning during the previous three years, compared with 34% of skilled manual workers (C2s) and 24% of unskilled workers and people on limited incomes (DEs). Over the previous 12 months, participation among C2DEs has remained constant, with a decline of 2–3 percentage points among ABs.

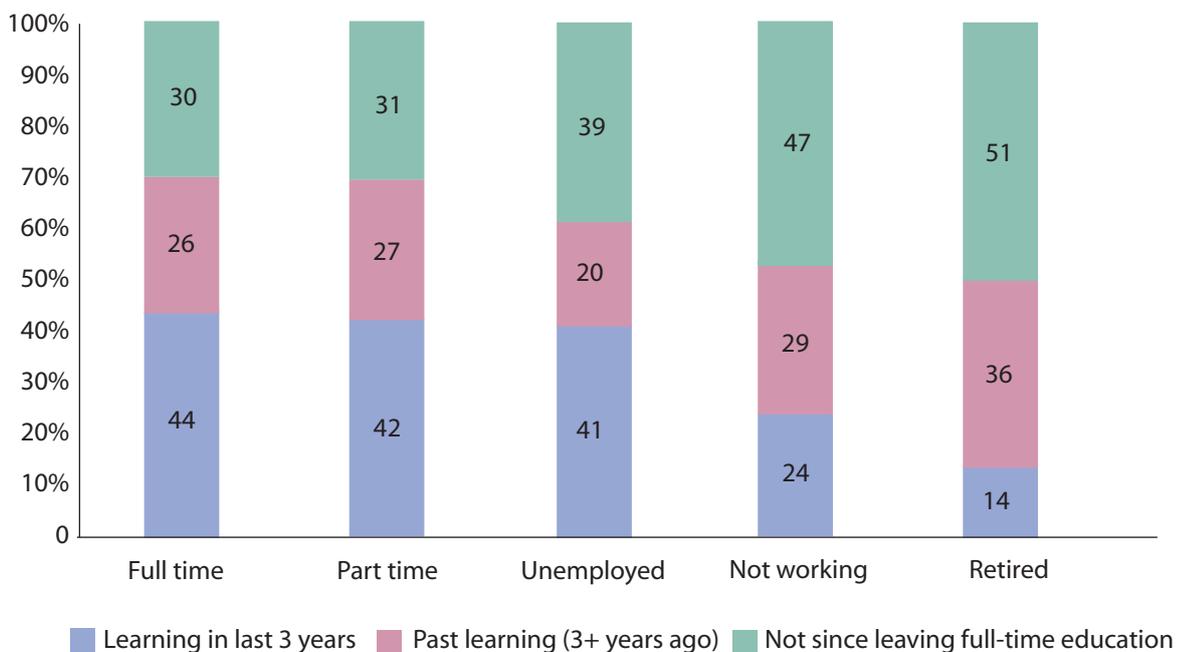
Figure 2: Participation in learning by socio-economic class, 2012



Base: all respondents

The importance of work, both as a place to learn and as a motivation for learning can be seen in the participation rates of workers, unemployed adults and those outside the workforce (see Figure 3). Levels of participation in learning are significantly higher among those adults in employment (44% of full-time workers; 42% of part-time workers) or looking for work (41%) than for those who are retired (14%) or otherwise outside of the workforce (24%). Over the previous 12 months, there has been a decline in participation, of 2–3 percentage points, among employed adults.

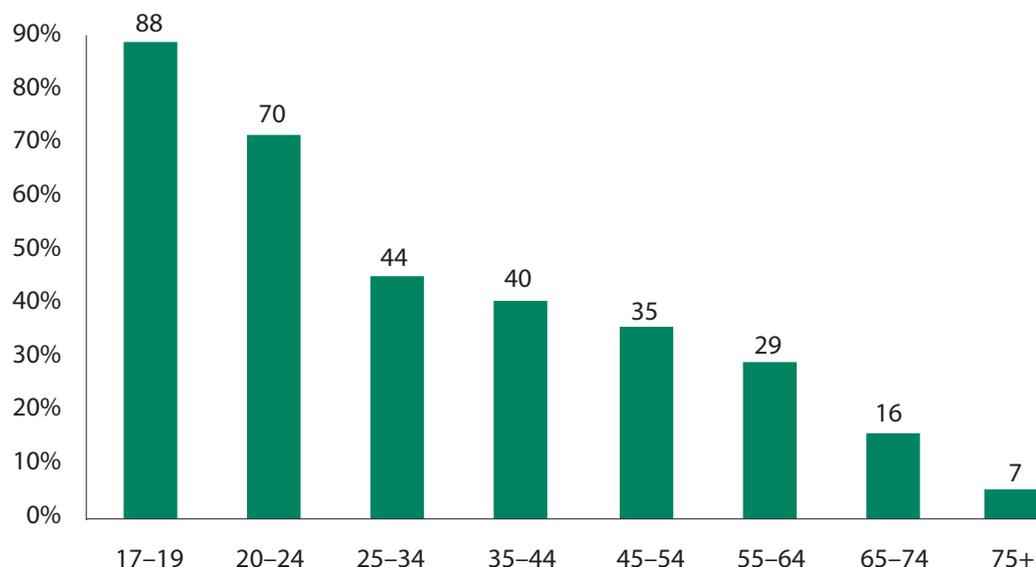
Figure 3: Participation in learning by working status, 2012



Base: all respondents

In general, the older people are, the less likely they are to take part in learning (see Figure 4). 88% of 17–19-year olds and 70% of 20–24-year olds are learning compared with less than two-fifths of the rest of the working age population. The decline in participation is particularly steep for those aged 65 and over, with only 16% of those aged 65–74 and 7% of those aged 75+ regarding themselves as learners. Over the previous 12 months, there has been a small decline in participation across most age groups. Among those aged 45–54, however, participation has declined by 6 percentage points. In contrast, 20–24-year-olds are now more likely to be learning.

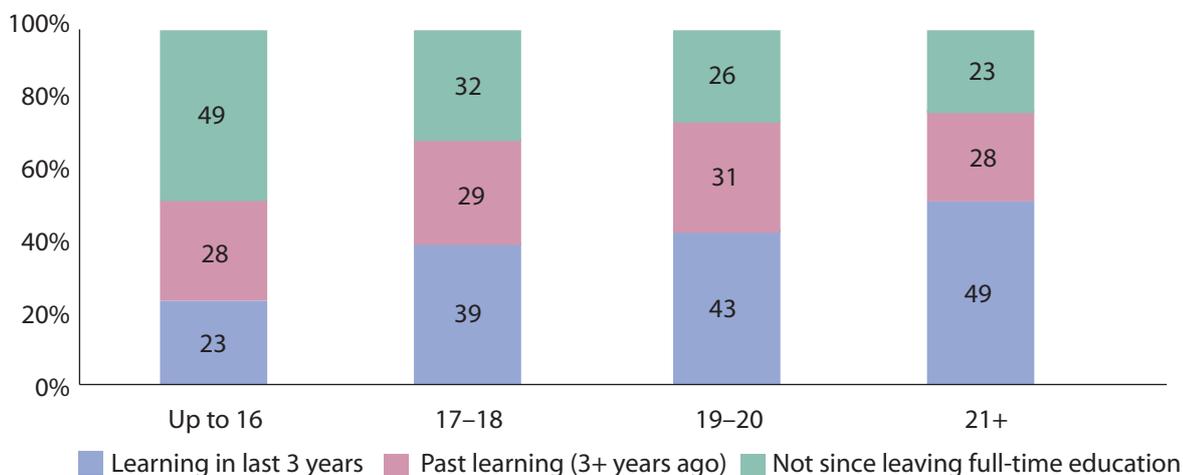
Figure 4: Participation in learning by age, 2012



Base: all adults

As with all previous surveys, the 2012 survey confirms the key divide between those who leave school at the earliest opportunity and those who stay on even for a short while. Around one half (49%) of those who left full-time education aged 21 or more are learning, compared with just 23% of those who left school at or before 16 (See Figure 5).

Figure 5: Participation in learning by terminal age of education, 2012



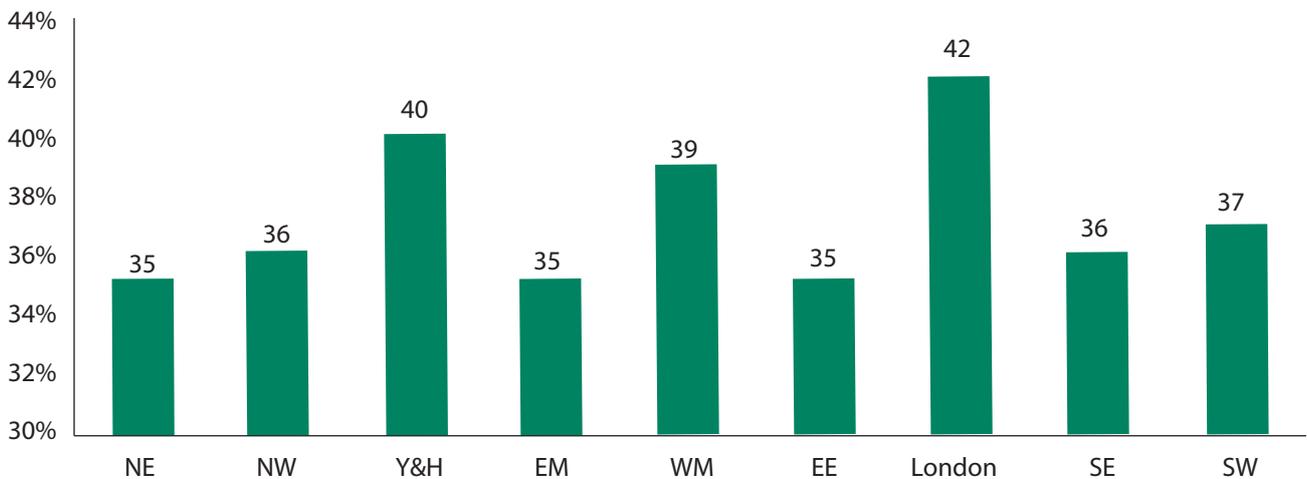
Base: all adults

The 2012 survey shows that, in general, men and women are equally likely to participate in learning. This represents a change from recent years, in which women were more likely than men to be learning.

Across the UK nations, adults living in Wales are least likely to say they are participating in learning. 42% of adults in Scotland, 40% of those in Northern Ireland and 37% of those in England report learning in the previous three years, compared with just 31% of adults in Wales.

While generally there is little variation in participation within the English regions, Londoners are significantly more likely to be learning than adults living in many other parts of the country (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Participation in learning by English region, 2012



Base: all adults

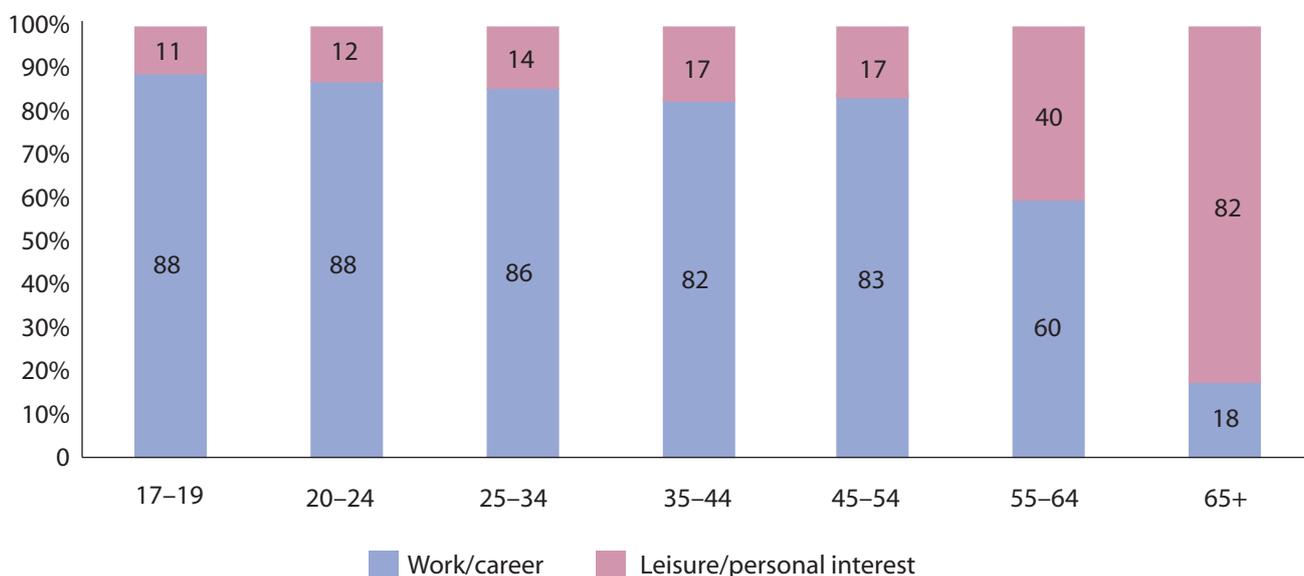
2 Why do adults learn?

Adult learners taking part for work-related reasons: **78%**

Across the survey, 78% of learners say that they took up their learning for work or career reasons, with 21% learning for leisure or personal interest.

A greater proportion of young adults are learning for work-related reasons. Older adults are more likely to be learning for leisure or personal interest, although 18% of those aged 65 and over continue to learn for work (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Proportion of learners taking up learning for leisure/personal interest or work/career reasons, by age



Base: all current/recent learners

Skilled manual workers (C2s) are most likely to be learning for work-related reasons (85%), with DEs (68%) significantly less likely than adults in other socio-economic classes to be doing so. 76% of ABs and 81% of C1s say that they took up their learning for work-related reasons.

Adults in full-time employment (87%) are significantly more likely to be learning for work-related reasons than those of any other working status: 82% of part-timers, 77% of unemployed adults are learning for work, as are 56% of others not in paid employment and 15% of retired adults (see Figure 8).

80% of learners with internet access are learning for work-related reasons, compared with just 53% of those without access.

Figure 8: Proportion of learners taking up learning for leisure/personal interest or work/career reasons, by working status



Base: all current/recent learners

When asked in more detail about the range of factors involved in their decision to take up learning, learner responses reflected the often complex mix of both personal and work-related reasons that come together to encourage adults to begin to take part. As Table 1 shows, the most popular reasons given for starting learning are: to gain a recognised qualification (29%); to help in their current job (26%); to develop themselves as a person; out of interest in the subject (24%); and to get a paid job (23%).

Table 1: Reasons that best describe why respondents took up their learning

Base: all current/recent learners

| Reasons for taking up learning | Proportion of learners (%) |
|---|----------------------------|
| To get a recognised qualification | 29 |
| To help in my current job | 26 |
| To develop myself as a person | 25 |
| I am interested in the subject/personal interest | 24 |
| To get a paid job | 23 |
| I enjoy learning/It gives me pleasure | 17 |
| To improve my self-confidence | 13 |
| To get a rise in earnings | 10 |
| To make my work more satisfying | 9 |
| Not really my choice – employer requirement | 9 |
| To change the type of work I do | 8 |
| To help me get onto a future course of learning | 8 |
| To get a promotion | 7 |
| To meet people | 6 |
| Not really my choice – professional requirement | 5 |
| To get a job with a different employer | 3 |
| To support my children’s schooling | 2 |
| To improve my health | 2 |
| Because friends/family/colleagues are also learning | 2 |
| As a result of participating in another activity | 1 |
| To get an unpaid job | 1 |

Although overall there were few gender differences in the reasons given for taking up learning, men are significantly more likely than women to be learning in order to get a rise in earnings (men 12%; women 9%) or a job with a different employer (men 4%; women 2%). In contrast, women are significantly more likely than men to be learning for pleasure (men 14%; women 20%), to improve self-confidence (men 11%; women 15%), to meet people (men 5%; women 8%) and to support their child’s schooling (men 1%; women 4%).

Younger adults are more likely to be learning to get a job or to gain a recognised qualification, with those in their mid-20s to 50s placing greater value on learning as a means of career change and development. Learners in this age range are also more likely to be learning as a result of an employer or professional requirement, rather than of their own choice. Personal development and improving self-confidence are equally important to learners across all age groups. Older adults are most likely to be learning for pleasure or personal interest, while learning as a means of meeting new people is particularly important for both the youngest and oldest of the learners surveyed.

Tables 2–4 below explore motivations for learning among different groups of adults – focusing on those traditionally least likely to participate. Taken together, these factors can help us to understand how learning provision could be developed and promoted in order to encourage more and different adults to participate. In each table the second column identifies the most-frequently cited motivations for learning. The third column highlights reasons that are relatively more important for this group of learners than for others.

Table 2: Reasons for taking up learning: 50–74 and 75+

Base: all current/recent learners

| Category of learner | Main reasons for taking up learning | Other relatively important reasons |
|---------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| 50–74 | Personal interest (31%) Help in current job (29%) Enjoyment of learning (25%) | No choice: employer requirement |
| 75+ | Personal interest (46%) Enjoyment of learning (33%) Personal development (25%) Help in current job (13%) | Improve health Meet new people |

So, for example, while the most frequently cited reasons for starting learning among C2s and DEs are out of personal interest, to help in their current job, and because they enjoy learning, C2 learners are more likely than learners in other socio-economic groups to be learning because of an employer requirement, while DE learners are relatively more likely to be learning to improve their health or meet new people.

Table 3: Reasons for taking up learning: C2 and DE

Base: all current/recent learners

| Category of learner | Main reasons for taking up learning | Reasons relatively more important for this category of learner |
|---------------------|--|--|
| C2 | Get a recognised qualification (29%) Help in current job (27%) Personal development (25%) Get a paid job (24%) Personal interest (20%) | Improve self-confidence Employer requirement |
| DE | Get a paid job (30%) Get a recognised qualification (28%) Personal development (24%) Personal interest (20%) Enjoyment of learning (18%) | Improve self-confidence Meet people Improve health |

Learners in full-time or part-time employment are most likely to be learning for a range of work-related reasons, though 48% of unemployed learners and 26% of those not in paid employment are learning in order to help them get a paid job. Gaining a recognised qualification is also an important motivator for unemployed learners (38%).

Adults not in paid employment are most likely to be learning for personal development (34%) and out of personal interest (30%). They are also significantly more likely than other groups to be learning in order to support their child’s schooling (14%) and to meet people (13%). Retired adults are most likely to be learning out of personal interest (47%) and for enjoyment (33%).

Table 4: Reasons for taking up learning: unemployed, not in paid employment and retired adults

Base: all current/recent learners

| Category of learner | Main reasons for taking up learning | Reasons relatively more important for this category of learner |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Unemployed | Get a paid job (48%) Get a recognised qualification (38%) Personal development (27%) | Get a paid job Get a recognised qualification Improve self-confidence |
| Not in paid employment | Personal development (34%) Personal interest (30%) Get a paid job (26%) Improve self-confidence (24%) | Support child’s schooling Meet people Get an unpaid job Change the type of work I do |
| Retired | Personal interest (47%) Enjoyment of learning (33%) Personal development (22%) | Personal interest Enjoyment of learning Improve health Friends/family are also learning |

3 How do adults learn?

Adult learners studying in a further education institution: **18%**

Nearly one quarter of learners surveyed (24%) say they are undertaking their 'main' learning through a university and 18% through a further education (FE) college. Many learners are learning at or through work, with 18% on a training course at work, 10% on an external training course arranged by their employer and 13% learning on the job. 9% of learners are learning online, 12% independently on their own and 5% independently with others (see Table 5).

Table 5: How adults are learning

Base: all current/recent learners

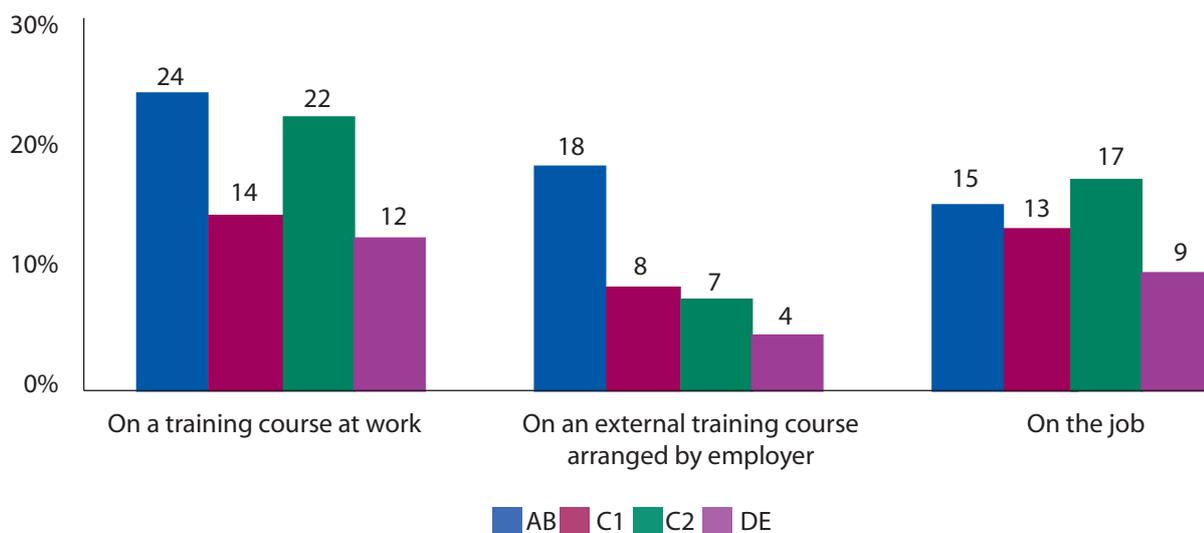
| How adults are are undertaking their 'main' learning | Proportion of learners (%) |
|--|----------------------------|
| Through a university or higher education institution | 24 |
| On a training course at work | 18 |
| Through a further education/sixth form college | 18 |
| On the job | 13 |
| Independently on my own | 12 |
| On an external training course arranged by my employer | 10 |
| Online | 9 |
| Through a local adult education centre or class | 6 |
| Independently with others | 5 |
| Through local community facilities, e.g. library, church | 3 |
| Through a local school | 2 |
| Through a voluntary organisation, e.g. Age Concern, Pre-School Learning Alliance, etc. | 2 |
| Through a leisure or health club | 1 |
| Other | 1 |

While few gender differences exist in how adults are learning, men are significantly more likely than women to be learning online (men 11%; women 8%) and to be learning independently (men 15%; women 9%).

Learning in a further or higher education institution is more popular among younger adults, while older adults of working age are much more likely to be learning at or through work, online or independently. Local adult education centres and other community facilities are particularly popular among those aged 65 and over.

ABs are more likely than learners in lower socio-economic classes to be learning on training courses at work, particularly external training courses, and to be learning online or independently on their own (see Figure 9).

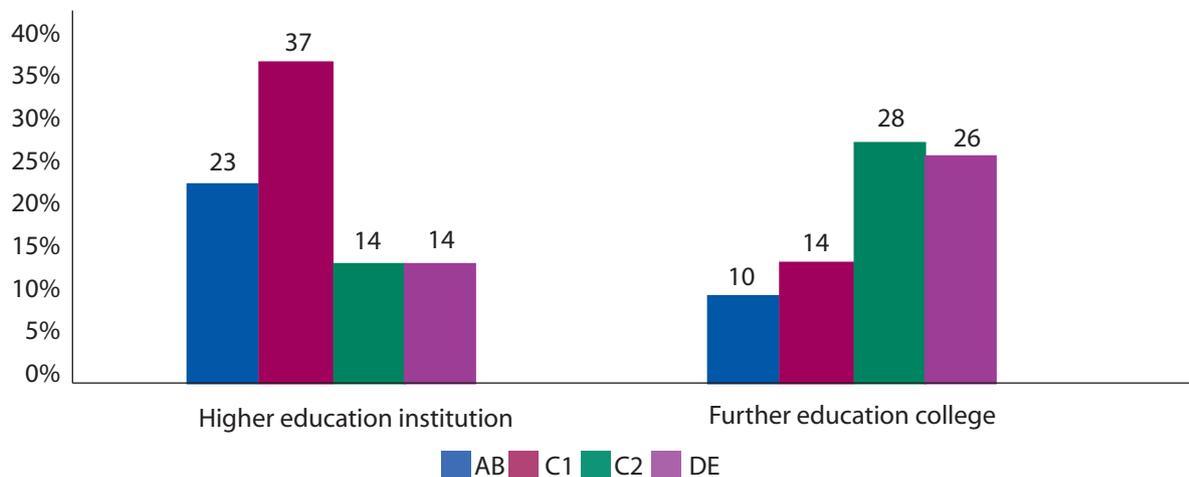
Figure 9: Learning at work, by social class



Base: all current/recent learners

Within formal education institutions too, a clear class divide exists with ABC1 learners more likely to be studying at a higher education institution and C2DEs in further education colleges (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Learning in higher or further education institutions, by social class



Base: all current/recent learners

Equal proportions of part-time and full-time employees are learning on the job, although full-time workers are significantly more likely than their part-time colleagues to be taking part in either external training courses or training courses at work (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: Learning through work, by employment status



Base: all current/recent learners

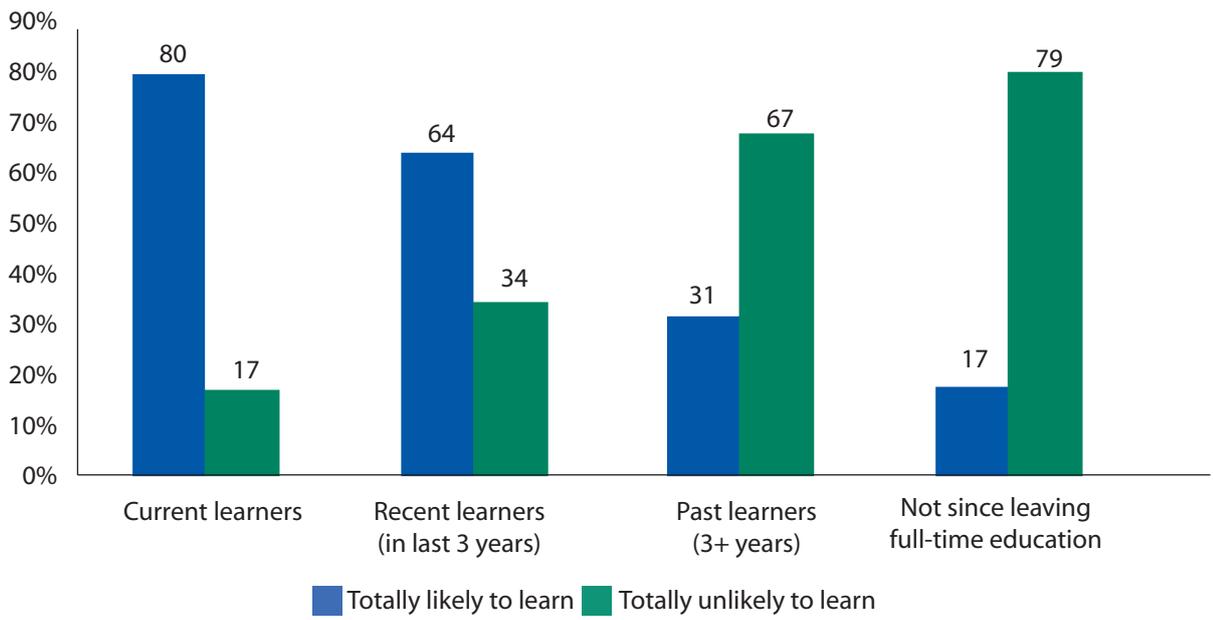
4 Who will be learning in the future?

When asked how likely they are to take up learning in the next three years, 41% of adults surveyed say that they are likely to do so, with 56% saying that they are unlikely to learn. Over the previous 12 months, intentions to learn have increased 4 percentage points from 37%, though they remain far short of the record high of 47% in 2010.

Adults intending to learn in the next three years:
41%

As in previous years, current participation in learning is a key indicator of future intentions to learn. In 2012, 80% of current learners say that they are likely to take up learning in the next three years compared with just 17% of those who have done no learning since leaving full-time education (see Figure 12).

Figure 12: Future intentions to take up learning, by current learning status, 2012



Base: all adults

Adults who have done no learning since school who also say they're unlikely to do any in the future:
79%

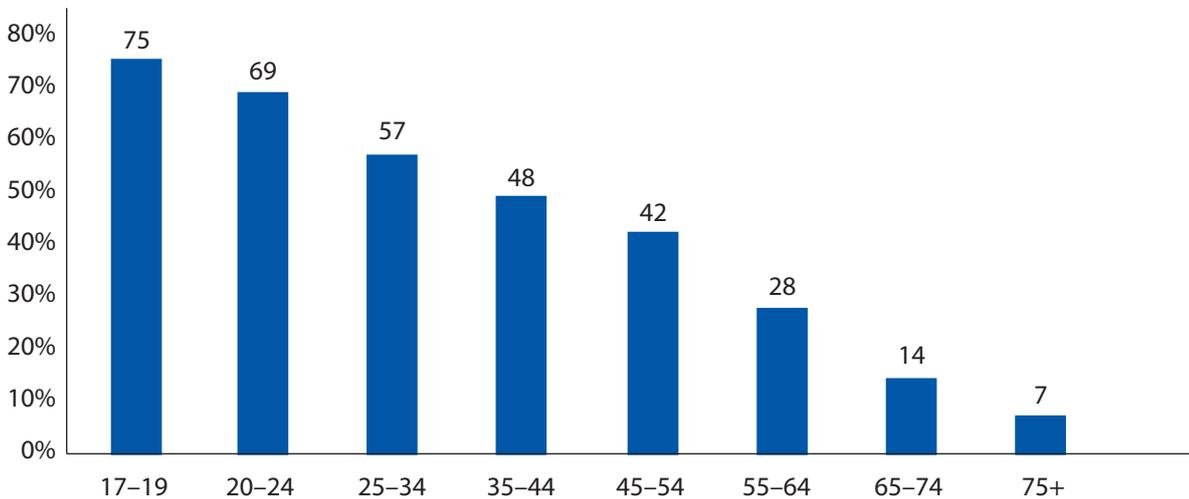
Although men and women say that they are equally likely to take up learning in the next three years, significant differences existed in intentions to learn according to class, employment status and age.

Just under one half of ABs (48%) and C1s (47%) express an intention to learn in the next three years compared with 38% of C2s and 33% of DEs.

Similarly, 48% of full-time workers and 47% of part-time workers anticipate taking up learning, compared with 39% of those not in paid employment and 13% of retired adults. Two thirds of unemployed adults consider it likely that they will participate in learning during the next three years.

75% of 17–19-year olds say that they are likely to take up learning in the next three years. However, as with participation in learning, future intentions to learn declined with age; less than one third of adults over 50 anticipate learning in the near future (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: Future intentions to take up learning, by age, 2012



Base: all adults

5 What would encourage adults to learn?

22% of adults say that they would be more likely to take part in learning if it related to something that they were interested in; 18% if it led to a qualification that employers recognise; 17% if they could learn at home; and 16% if their employer would pay all the costs.

A number of responses were then grouped together under broader headings, showing that 39% of adults would be more likely to learn if learning took place at a convenient time or location; 22% if the resulting qualification would benefit them; 20% if they received some form of help from their employer; and 11% if they received support from another individual (see Table 6).

Around one third of respondents (34%) say that none of these factors would make them more likely to take up learning and a further 6% are unsure as to whether they would make a difference. Adults who have not taken part in learning since leaving full-time education (50%) and those who think it unlikely that they would take up learning in the next three years (52%) were most likely to say that none of these factors would make learning more attractive. One quarter of both groups, however, do think that they would be more likely to take up learning if it was made available at a convenient time and location.

Adults who would be more likely to take up learning if it took place at a convenient time or location:

39%

Adults who could not identify any factors that would make learning more attractive:

34%

While men are more likely than women to consider that employer support would make learning more attractive (men 21%; women 18%), women placed greater value on the convenience of learning (women 40%; men 37%) as well as on support from others (women 12%; men 10%).

Table 6: Factors that would make adults more likely to take up learning

Base: all adults

| | All respondents (%) | Adults who have not participated in learning since leaving full-time education (%) | Adults who say they are unlikely to learn in the next three years (%) |
|--|---------------------|--|---|
| If someone I knew and trusted encouraged me | 7 | 5 | 4 |
| If someone I knew and trusted came with me | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| If someone could help me decide what would be the best learning for me | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| If I could learn somewhere I already know and feel comfortable | 6 | 4 | 4 |
| If the learning was related to something I'm interested in | 22 | 12 | 15 |
| If I had a say in what and when I was going to learn | 6 | 4 | 3 |
| If it led to a qualification which employers recognise | 18 | 9 | 9 |
| If it led to a qualification that would help them earn more/gain a promotion | 13 | 7 | 7 |
| If my line manager/employer encouraged me | 6 | 3 | 3 |
| If it was cheaper/fees were lower | 13 | 7 | 7 |
| If my employer would pay all of the costs | 16 | 9 | 11 |
| If my employer would pay some of the costs | 9 | 5 | 5 |
| If I could learn nearer to my home | 9 | 6 | 5 |
| If I could learn at home | 17 | 12 | 11 |
| If I could learn nearer to my work | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| If I could learn at work | 14 | 8 | 9 |
| If I could learn in the evening | 10 | 7 | 5 |
| If I could learn in the daytime | 8 | 5 | 4 |
| If I could learn at weekends | 8 | 6 | 4 |
| Net: If learning was more convenient | 39 | 27 | 25 |
| Net: If qualification was beneficial | 22 | 12 | 12 |
| Net: If received help from employer | 20 | 11 | 13 |
| Net: If received support from others | 11 | 8 | 6 |
| None | 34 | 50 | 52 |
| Don't know | 6 | 8 | 6 |

Employer support and the convenience of learning is most highly valued among adults aged 20–54, with perceived benefit of a qualification being most important for young adults, and then declining with age.

70% of adults aged 65 and over say that nothing would make learning more attractive. Factors that are identified as being able to make an important difference to some older adults include: being able to take part in learning that is related to something they are already interested in; being able to learn at a convenient time and location; and being able to access learning that is more affordable.

35% of those in the lowest socio-economic classes (DEs) say that they would be more likely to take up learning if it were more convenient; 17% if the qualification is perceived to be of benefit; 14% if they receive help from their employer; and 11% if they receive support from others. 41%, however – significantly more than in any other socio-economic class – say that nothing would make learning more attractive.

A major challenge arising from this analysis is that adults who are least likely to be already engaged in learning are not only least likely to think that they would take part in the future, but are also least likely to feel that the practical measures proposed would make any difference. In contrast, those in the highest socio-economic classes (AB) are significantly more likely than other adults to consider that paying less for learning, having encouragement from their employer and having the opportunity to be involved in learning that related to their interests would make learning more attractive.

Unemployed adults are most likely to be able to identify factors that would make them more likely to take up learning, with only 11% believing that nothing would make learning more attractive. Over one half (54%) say that they would be more likely to take up learning if it were more convenient; 36% if the qualification was perceived to be valuable; 26% if they received support from an employer; and 21% if they received support from others.

6 How do adults find out about learning?

Although adults find out about learning opportunities in a variety of ways and from a variety of sources, the 2012 survey shows that the most popular source of information about learning is the Internet, with 34% saying that this was the first method they would use. In contrast, ten years ago just 2% of adults said the Internet would be their first port of call.

The Internet is now the most popular source of information about learning for all kinds of adult except the retired, those aged 65+ and those without regular access to the Internet. Among older and retired adults, the public library is the most popular place that they would go to first to find out about learning opportunities.

After the Internet, education institutions (further education 8%; higher education 7%) and the public library (8%) are the next most popular sources of information. 15% of adults say that they would not know where to go to find out information (see Table 7).

Adults who would use the Internet first to find out about learning opportunities:
34%

Table 7: The first place that adults would go to find out about learning opportunities

Base: all adults

| Source of information | Proportion of adults (%) |
|---|--------------------------|
| Internet | 34 |
| Further education institution | 8 |
| Public library | 8 |
| University/higher education institution | 7 |
| Adult education centre/WEA | 5 |
| Friends/family | 4 |
| Work: my employer/training officer/personnel officer | 4 |
| Jobcentre Plus/employment agency | 4 |
| Workmates/colleagues | 2 |
| Professional association | 2 |
| Careers Advice Service | 2 |
| Workplace/Union Learning Representative | 1 |
| Newspapers/magazines | 1 |
| Local school | 1 |
| Community centre/voluntary organisation/religious group | 1 |
| Other | 1 |
| Don't know | 15 |

Men are more likely than women to use the Internet and sources of information associated with their workplace to find out about learning opportunities, while women are more likely to approach their further education college, adult education centre, public library or school.

Young people under 25 are much more likely to approach the Careers Service or a further or higher education institution, while at the other end of the age spectrum the library and other community settings are much more important for adults in their fifties and beyond. 18% of those aged 65+ say they would go to the public library first to find out about learning opportunities; a much more important source of information for this age group than the Internet.

While the Internet is the most important source of information about learning for adults in the lowest socio-economic classes, DEs are also significantly more likely than other adults to look to the public library (10%), the Jobcentre (9%), friends and family (6%) and community centres (3%) for information.

7 Employer support for learning

The powerful relationship between learning and work is evident across the survey. Adults in work are more likely than those outside of the workplace to take part in learning. Nearly four-fifths of learners say that they took up learning for work-related reasons. Many learners are learning on the job or through a course funded or provided by their employer. One in five adults say that they would be more likely to learn if they received help from their employer and 18% agree that being able to gain a qualification that employers recognise would make learning more attractive.

Financial support for learning

One half of all learners in employment say that their employer pays for *all* the costs of their learning. A further 9% say that their employer pays for *some* of the costs.

Virtually all of the learning (97%) which is financially supported by employers is being undertaken for work-related reasons, though a small proportion of investment also supports learning for leisure and personal interest.

70% of employees who are undertaking learning that is not financially supported by their employer are also learning for work-related reasons.

Although there is no significant difference in employer contribution between male and female employees, full-time workers (55%) are significantly more likely than part-time workers (35%) to have their learning fully funded.

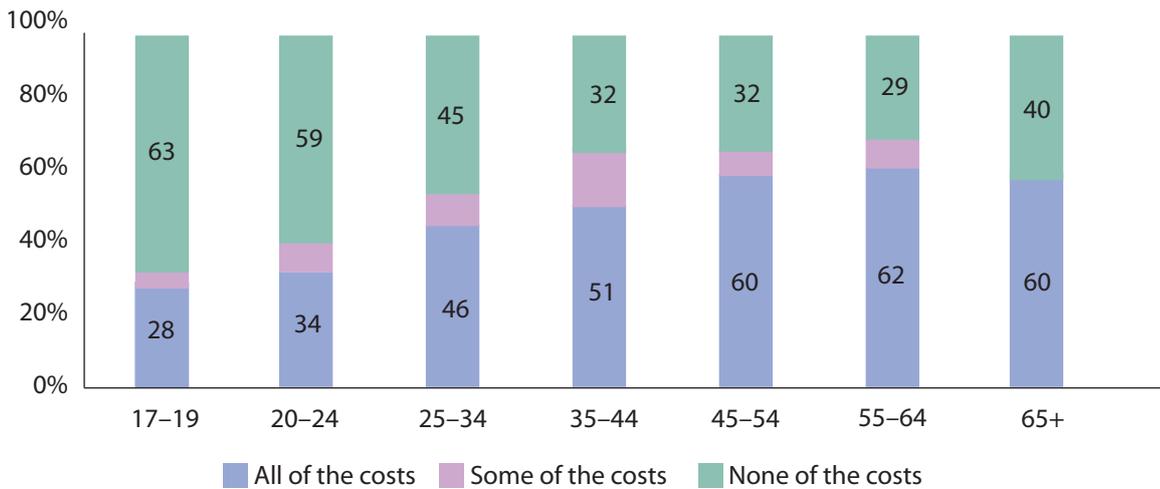
Part-time workers whose learning was fully funded by their employer:
35%

Older employees are most likely to receive financial support for learning from their employer. Employees under 35 are least likely to receive a financial contribution from their employer, while over two-thirds of those aged 45–64 receive some contribution (see Figure 14).

Full-time workers whose learning was fully funded by their employer:

55%

Figure 14: Employees who received a financial contribution from their employer towards their learning



Base: all employees who are learning

ABs are significantly more likely to be *at least* partially funded by their employer than learners in any other socio-economic class. ABs and C2s are most likely to be fully funded.

Wider employer support for learning

While financial support for learning can be very important, many employees also benefit from a much wider range of support from their employer (see Table 8).

Although 31% of employed learners do not receive any form of support from their employer for their learning, 34% say that their employer offers financial support, 34% receive support in relation to time or resources and 33% say that they are offered opportunities to practice or discuss their learning.

The figures are even more favourable among those employees learning for work-related reasons – 76% of whom receive some form of support – although 23% of employees learning for personal interest also receive some form of employer support.

Employees who received no employer support for their learning
31%

Table 8: Employer support for learning

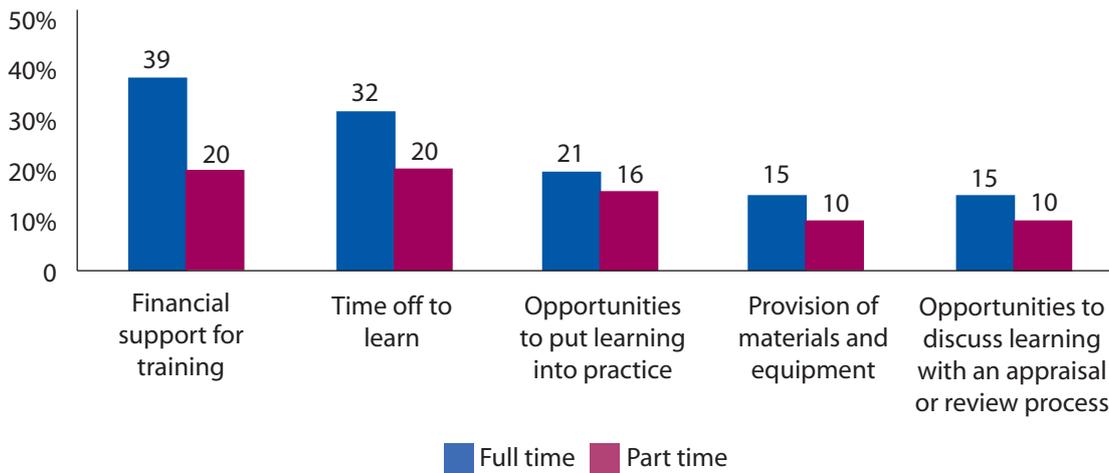
Base: all employees who are learning

| Employer support | All learners (%) | Learners who are learning for leisure/ personal interest (%) | Learners who are learning for work/ career (%) |
|---|-------------------------|---|---|
| Financial support to pay fees | 29 | 6 | 33 |
| Time off to learn | 29 | 6 | 32 |
| Opportunities to put learning into practice | 20 | 5 | 23 |
| Workplace learning centres | 16 | 8 | 19 |
| Provision of materials and equipment | 14 | 2 | 16 |
| Opportunities to discuss learning within an appraisal or review | 14 | 3 | 16 |
| Financial support for materials, equipment, exam costs | 11 | 2 | 12 |
| Financial support towards transport costs | 9 | 1 | 10 |
| Employee development schemes – non-work-related learning | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Financial support for child/elder care costs while learning | 1 | * | 1 |
| Learning clubs | 1 | - | 1 |
| Other | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| | | | |
| Net: Time/resources | 34 | 8 | 39 |
| Net: Financial support | 34 | 9 | 38 |
| Net: Opportunities to practise/discuss | 33 | 7 | 38 |
| | | | |
| My employer does not offer any support for learning | 31 | 77 | 24 |

Employees aged 35 and over are more likely to have access to a wide range of employer support for learning than their young colleagues.

Full-time workers (39%) are almost twice as likely as their part-time (20%) counterparts to receive financial support from their employer for their learning. They are also significantly more likely to have access to time off to learn, to provision of materials and equipment, and to opportunities to discuss their learning within an appraisal or review process (see Figure 15).

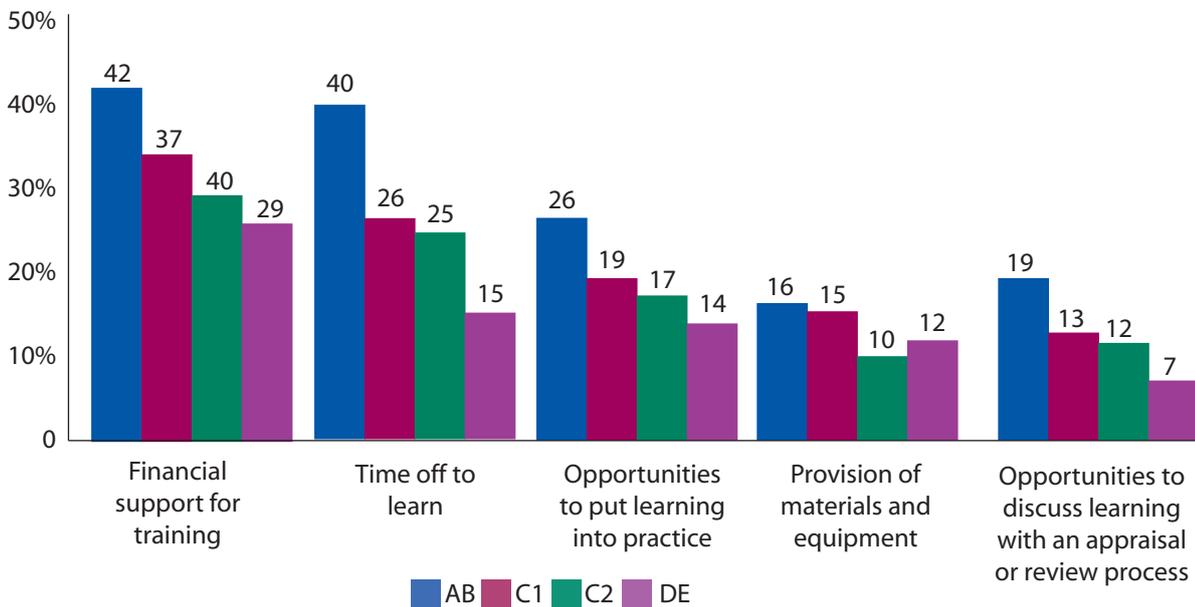
Figure 15: Employees receiving a range of employer support for their learning



Base: all employees who are learning

ABs were significantly more likely than adults in any other socio-economic class to receive financial support from their employer for learning; to be able to take time off to learn; to have opportunities to put learning into practice within the workplace; and to have opportunities to discuss their learning within an appraisal or review process (see Figure 16).

Figure 16: Employees receiving a range of employer support for their learning



Base: all employees who are learning

8 Developing new skills for work

In times of economic turbulence many adults are required to develop new skills for work – sometimes as part of their current role, but also when starting or changing career. Survey respondents were asked to identify what approaches they would consider to help them develop new skills in starting or changing careers.

20% of adults do not feel that they would need to develop new skills as they have permanently given up paid work. A further 22% believe that they already have all the skills they would need to change career (see Table 9).

The most popular approaches to developing skills for a new career are through enrolling on a training course outside of work (19%) and looking for a job with training attached (18%).

Adults who believe they have all the skills they would need to change career:
31%

Table 9: Approaches to developing new skills for work

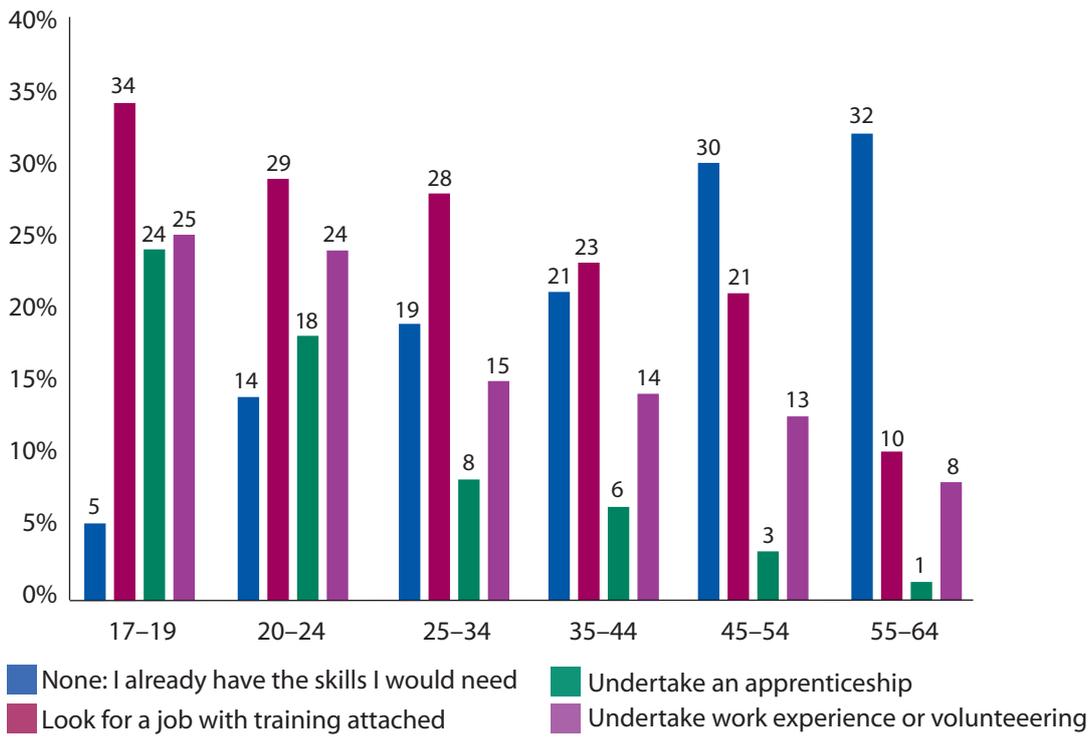
Base: all adults

| Approach | Proportion of all adults (%) |
|---|------------------------------|
| Enrol on a training course outside of work | 19 |
| Look for a job with training attached | 18 |
| Enrol on a training course at work | 14 |
| Undertake a work experience or volunteering placement | 12 |
| Rely on developing skills on the job | 11 |
| Undertake online or distance learning | 11 |
| Undertake an apprenticeship | 6 |
| None, I have already given up paid work permanently | 20 |
| None, I already have the skills I would need | 22 |
| Don't know | 6 |

Men are significantly more likely to rely on developing skills on the job or undertaking an apprenticeship, while a greater proportion of women say that they would seek to develop their skills by undertaking a work experience or volunteering placement.

Older adults are more likely to believe that they have all the skills they would need to change career. Just 5% of 17–19-year-olds hold this view compared with around one third of respondents in their 50s (see Figure 17). In particular, looking for a job with training attached, undertaking work experience or volunteering and undertaking an apprenticeship as strategies for skills development decline with age. In contrast, undertaking online or distance learning and enrolling on a training course outside of work is most important to adults in their 30s and 40s.

Figure 17: Approaches to developing new skills for work, by age, 2012



Base: all adults

39% of unemployed adults say that they would look for a job with training attached, while 25% would enrol on a training course outside of work or undertake work experience or volunteering. 14% of unemployed adults express an interest in undertaking an apprenticeship. Only 12% believe they have all the skills they need.

9 Conclusion

A growing body of research evidence shows that participating in learning makes a difference to the economic and social well-being of individuals, families, communities and nations. Learning is good for our health, for our longevity, and for the levels of social cohesion in the communities in which we live. In addition, the enthusiasm of people fired by learning is infectious and the knowledge and skills acquired for one purpose can often be put to use in others: the children of parents who are active learners fare better with their own education and life chances. The economic prosperity of the UK also depends on people becoming more skilled, innovative and capable through continuing to learn.

NIACE believes that learning throughout life matters, yet our series of surveys on adult participation in learning consistently show that active participation in learning remains a minority activity among adults in the United Kingdom, with significant inequalities in who participates and who does not. As in previous years, the 2012 survey clearly shows that participation in learning is determined by class, employment status, age and prior learning.

Furthermore, the surveys show that the vast majority of adults who have not taken part in learning during the previous three years, consider themselves unlikely to do so in the future, with no easy answers as to what would make learning more attractive. Despite significant investment, numerous initiatives and the hard work and dedication of adult learning providers and practitioners, we have not made significant inroads into addressing such inequalities. If we continue as we are, the situation is unlikely to change.

So, do these inequalities matter? Should we seek to challenge them or should we accept that they are inevitable? If we think it is important to act, then what should be done, and what role should we each play? Join the debate and tell us what you think. You can do this by emailing us at **LearningSurvey@niace.org.uk** or tweeting @NIACEhq using #LearningSurvey