

# Adult learning in Wales

## Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2025

Oriane Nermond, Bradley Phipps and Emily Jones

March 2026

**Learning and Work Institute**

Patron: HRH The Princess Royal | Chief Executive: Stephen Evans  
A company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales  
Registration No. 2603322 Registered Charity No. 1002775  
Registered office: Unit 1.23, St Martin's House, 7 Peacock Lane, Leicester, LE1 5PZ

**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE®**  
We invest in people Gold





## About Learning and Work Institute

Learning and Work Institute is an independent policy and research organisation focused on lifelong learning and better work. Our vision is for a fair and prosperous society where learning and work enable everyone to realise their potential. We research what works, influence policy and develop new ideas to improve practice.

**Stay informed. Be involved. Keep engaged. Sign up to become a Learning and Work Institute supporter:** <https://learningandwork.org.uk/cy/supporters-network/>

Published by National Learning and Work Institute

Unit 1.23, St Martins House, 7 Peacock Lane, Leicester, LE1 5PZ UK

Company registration no. 2603322 | Charity registration no. 1002775

[www.learningandwork.org.uk](http://www.learningandwork.org.uk)

@LearnWorkUK

@LearnWorkCymru (Wales)

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without the written permission of the publishers, save in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency.

# Contents

Executive summary.....	5
Introduction.....	7
Adult participation in learning in Wales.....	8
More adults are participating in learning in Wales than in the UK.....	8
There are significant socio-demographic inequalities.....	10
Inequalities are at risk of becoming self-perpetuating.....	15
How adults are learning.....	18
One in three learners report learning on independently on their own.....	18
Adults are most likely to be undertaking work-related learning.....	19
Just under two thirds of learners say that at least some of their learning has been online.....	20
Motivations for learning.....	21
Work and careers are learners' primary motivation.....	21
However, learners' broad motivations are more varied.....	21
Benefits of learning.....	23
The benefits of learning are many.....	23
The benefits of learning relate to the motivation of the learner.....	24
Barriers to learning.....	26
Age, cost and inclination prevent people from engaging in learning.....	26
Most learners experience challenges while learning.....	28
Conclusion.....	30
Annex: Survey method.....	31

## Executive summary

**In 2025, nearly half (47%) of adults in Wales report participating in learning of any kind – formal, informal or non-formal – in the past three years.**<sup>1</sup> However, one in five (22%) say they have not taken part in learning since leaving full-time education.

**More adults report learning in Wales than in the UK as a whole (47% vs 42%). However, inequalities by social grade and working status appear to be wider in Wales.** Just over half (55%) of people in the highest social grade in Wales say they have taken part in learning in the last three years, compared to 36% in the lowest grade. This corresponds to a 19 percentage point difference, compared to a 10 percentage point difference in the UK. Three fifths (59%) of full-time employees report that they have taken part in learning in the past three years, compared to 28% of economically inactive people. This is a difference of 31 percentage points, which is greater than the gap of 26 percentage points in the UK.

**In line with the UK, learning participation declines with age.** In Wales, people aged 50-74 years are half as likely to have participated in learning in the last three years as adults aged 25-49 (30% vs 59%).

**The longer someone stays in full-time education, the more likely they are to learn later in life.** People who left full-time education at age 16 or under (34%) are less likely to report having participated in learning than people who left full-time education aged 21 or above (53%).

**Adults are most likely to learn in a work-related setting, followed by independently.** In Wales, just over two fifths (43%) of learners report that they have participated in learning in a work-related setting, such as at work, in an apprenticeship or on a training course arranged by their employers. Furthermore, 39% of learners report learning independently – on their own or with others. This could be supported by online learning, with just under two thirds (63%) of the learners reporting that at least some of their learning was online.

**Adult learners are more likely to be motivated to take up learning for work or career related reasons than for leisure or personal interests (58% vs 41%).** However, learners also report a broad range of motivations for taking up learning, including

---

<sup>1</sup> Formal learning refers to structured, curriculum-based education delivered through recognised institutions such as schools, colleges and universities, typically leading to accredited qualifications. Non-formal learning describes organised and purposeful learning that takes place outside the formal education system, often designed for specific groups or objectives and not usually leading to formal accreditation. Informal learning refers to unstructured, often self-directed learning that occurs through everyday activities, interactions and experiences in settings such as work, home and the community. These categories are widely used but not always clearly defined, and may overlap in practice.

developing as a person (44%), helping them to do their job or improve their job skills (32%), and to gain a recognised qualification (30%).

**Learners experience a range of benefits from learning as well as challenges.**

Improved self-confidence (37%), achieving or moving closer to personal development goals (34%) and greater enjoyment of learning (33%) are the most commonly reported benefits among learners in Wales. However, 71% of learners report encountering at least one challenge while learning. Three in ten (30%) report time pressures, followed by a lack of confidence (25%) and cost (20%).

**Adults who say they have not taken part in learning in the past three years most commonly report feeling too old as a barrier (34%).** This is followed by cost and affordability (31%) and not wanting to (27%). Increasing adults' perceived value of learning as well as removing barriers can encourage more adults to take up learning.

## Introduction

Adult learning is crucial for people, businesses and society. It can help people find work, support health and wellbeing, promote social integration, and many more benefits besides. Lifelong learning will only grow in importance as the population ages, people have longer working lives, and our economy and society changes.

Learning and Work Institute (L&W) has published the Adult Participation in Learning Survey for nearly 30 years. It is the longest running survey of its kind, and the definitive report on who's learning, how and why.

Each year, a representative sample of around 5,000 people aged 17 and over across the UK are surveyed to produce the findings. The survey adopts a purposely broad definition of learning, extending beyond government and employer funded education and training opportunities for adults:

'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 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.'

In 2025, the Wales sample was boosted to survey 800 adults, enabling additional analysis and comparison to the UK as a whole.<sup>2</sup> The sample has been weighted to provide a dataset representative of the Welsh adult population. The report presents the findings broken down by key characteristics whenever possible, including age, region, social grade, work status and ethnicity.

Fieldwork was conducted in June and July 2025 by Kantar, a market research company, via their UK online omnibus survey. Further information about the methodology can be found in the Annex. To find out about the survey series and explore trend data through our interactive charts, visit [www.learningandwork.org.uk](http://www.learningandwork.org.uk)

---

<sup>2</sup> The boosted sample comprises 251 adults in Wales included in the UK-wide survey, plus 600 additional cases in Wales. When comparing Wales to the UK overall, the weighted UK sample was used, including the 251 Welsh adults included in the UK-wide survey but excluding the Wales boost. This ensures that the UK-wide sample is not skewed by an over-representation of Welsh respondents. These comparisons need to be treated with caution due to the difference between the sample sizes.

# Adult participation in learning in Wales

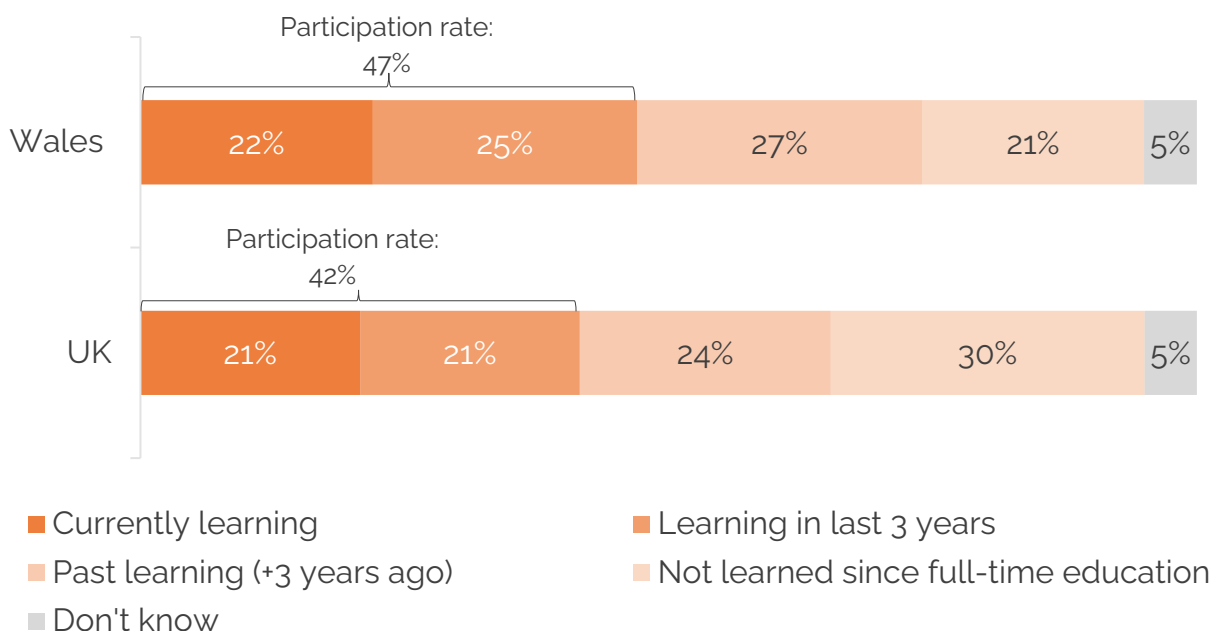
## More adults are participating in learning in Wales than in the UK

In Wales, 47% of adults aged 17 and over report that they are currently learning (22%) or have done so in the past three years (25%) (Figure 1). Twenty seven percent report that they have learned more than three years ago and a further 21% report that they have not learned since leaving full-time education (FTE).

The percentage of adults who are currently learning or have recently done so is statistically significantly higher than the UK average (42%). The percentage of adults who say they have not learned since leaving FTE is significantly lower in Wales than in the UK (21% vs 30%).

**Figure 1: More adults in Wales report participating in learning than in the UK.**

Adult participation in learning in Wales and in the UK, 2025



Base: Wales respondents. Weighted base = 851. Unweighted base = 851. Whole of UK respondents. Weighted base = 5,186. Unweighted base = 1,366.

The data indicates that the level of participation in learning in Wales may have increased since 2023, when 41% of adults reported that they had learned in the last three years (Figure 2).<sup>3</sup> There are different possible explanations and contributing factors for this change.

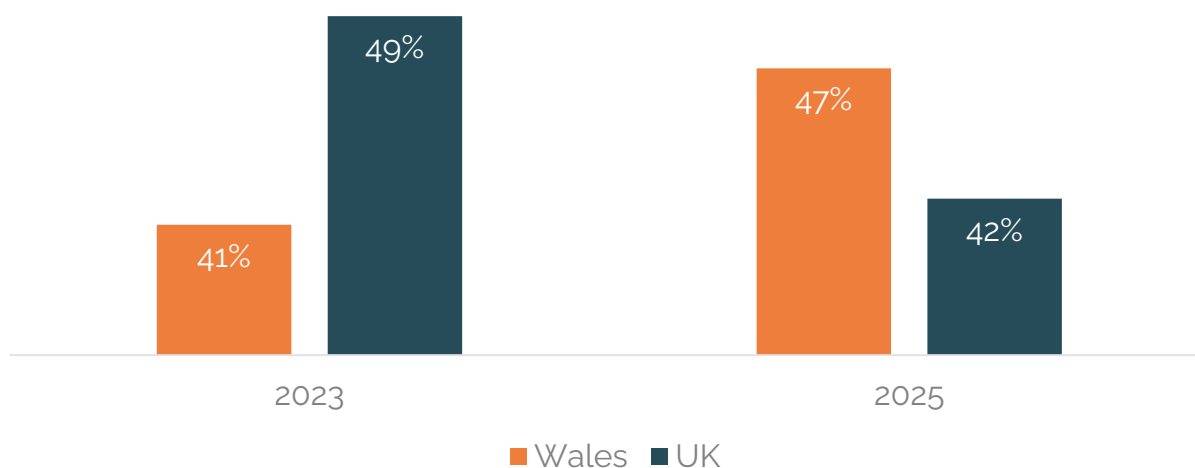
<sup>3</sup> The sample in Wales was last boosted in 2023. However, this comparison should be treated with caution. The 2023 sample size for Wales was half of the 2025 sample, with a weighted base of 422 in 2023 compared to 851 in 2025. <https://www.learningandwork.wales/news-and-policy/participation-in-learning-in-wales/>

First, it could be partly explained by the small rise in employees receiving training at work in Wales, with 36,300 more employees having received training in the last 12 months between 2023 and 2024. However, this does not indicate higher investment in learning by employers, as the average number of training days per trainee was smaller in 2022 than in 2024. It is therefore more likely that this increase was driven by more employees receiving shorter training and specific types of training, such as health and safety or first aid, as well as extensive induction.<sup>4</sup>

Second, the recent increase in the number of part-time learners in further education could help explain part of the increase. The rise followed a long-term decline that was attributed to funding cuts and disruption caused by the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> Data from the Lifelong Learning Wales Record shows that the number of part-time learners increased in the academic year up to July 2024, while the number of full-time learners remained relatively stable.

**Figure 2: Participation in learning has increased significantly in Wales since 2023.**

Participation rates in Wales and in the UK, 2025 and 2023



Base: Wales respondents in 2025. Weighted base = 851. Unweighted base = 851. Whole of UK respondents in 2025. Weighted base = 5,186. Unweighted base = 1,366. Wales respondents in 2023. Weighted base = 422. Unweighted base = 597. Whole of UK respondents in 2023. Weighted base = 8,906. Unweighted base = 9,506.

<sup>4</sup> The Employer Skills Survey shows that in 2022, 63% of employees had received a training in the past 12 months compared to 64% in 2024 (+ 36,300). However, the average number of training days per trainee has decreased from 6.8 days to 6.6 days in line with the recent rise in short term training and courses. Furthermore, the type of training which had the largest increase in proportion of sites was among the health and safety or first aid training. 71% of sites provided this training in 2022 compared to 75%.

<sup>5</sup> Medr statistics (2025) Further education, work-based learning and community learning, August 2023 to July 2024.

## There are significant socio-demographic inequalities

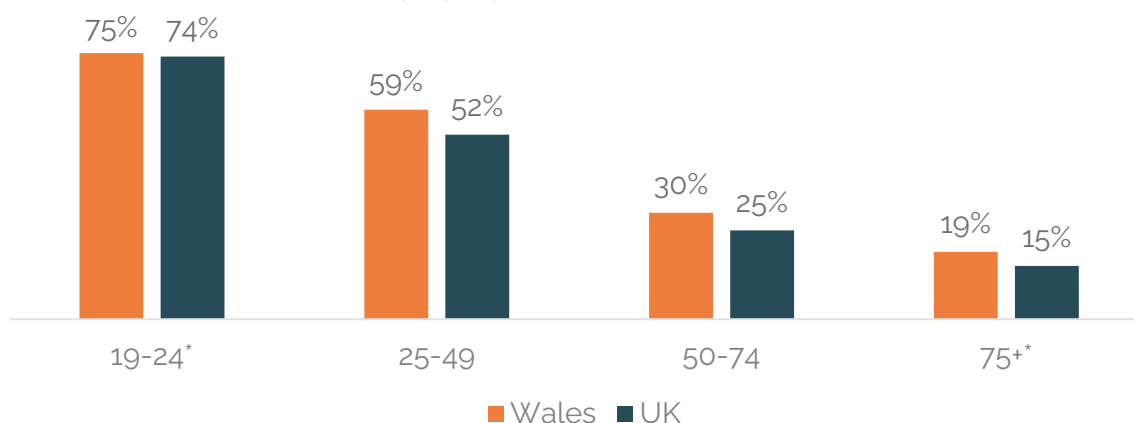
### Participation in learning decreases with age

The survey consistently shows that participation in learning decreases with age, with the likelihood of learning falling by 4% for each additional year of life in the UK.<sup>6</sup> In Wales, 75% of adults aged 19-24 years report that they have participated in learning in the last three years. This decreases to 59% for those aged 25-49, 30% for those aged 50-74, and 19% for those aged 75 or over. The proportions are fairly similar to those observed in the UK among people aged 19-24 (74%) and 75 or older (15%). However, people aged 25-49 and 50-74 in Wales are significantly more likely to report participation in learning than in the UK (respectively 52% and 25%).

The decline in participation in learning with age should be a cause of concern for two major reasons. As the population is ageing – it is projected that one in four people in Wales will be aged 65 or over by 2034<sup>7</sup> – and retirement age is increasing, lifelong learning has never been so important to ensure that people gain new skills throughout their careers. Learning is also associated with health and wellbeing benefits, particularly for older adults, such as a reduced likelihood of developing dementia or feeling lonely.<sup>8</sup> However, people aged 50-74 are half as likely to have participated in learning in the last three years than adults aged 25-49 (30% vs 59%).

**Figure 3: People aged 25–49 are twice as likely to take part in learning as those aged 50–74.**

Adult participation in learning by age in Wales and in the UK, 2025



\*Note: the base for this group is below 100. Base: Wales respondents. Weighted base = 851. 19-24 = 75, 25-49 = 376, 50-74 = 318, 75+ = 65. Unweighted base = 851. 19-24 = 75, 25-49 = 376, 50-74 = 318, 75+ = 65. Whole of UK respondents. Weighted base = 5,186. 19-24 = 557, 25-49 = 2,114, 50-75 = 2,068, 75+ = 335. Unweighted base = 851. 19-24 = 586, 25-49 = 2,250, 50-74 = 1,996, 75+ = 268.

<sup>6</sup> Phipps, B., Nermond, O., Revel, A., Egglestone, C., Jones, E., Evans, S. (2025) [The workforce learning slowdown?](#)

<sup>7</sup> Welsh Government (2025) [National population projections: 2022-based](#).

<sup>8</sup> Welsh Government (2017) [Adult Learning in Wales](#).

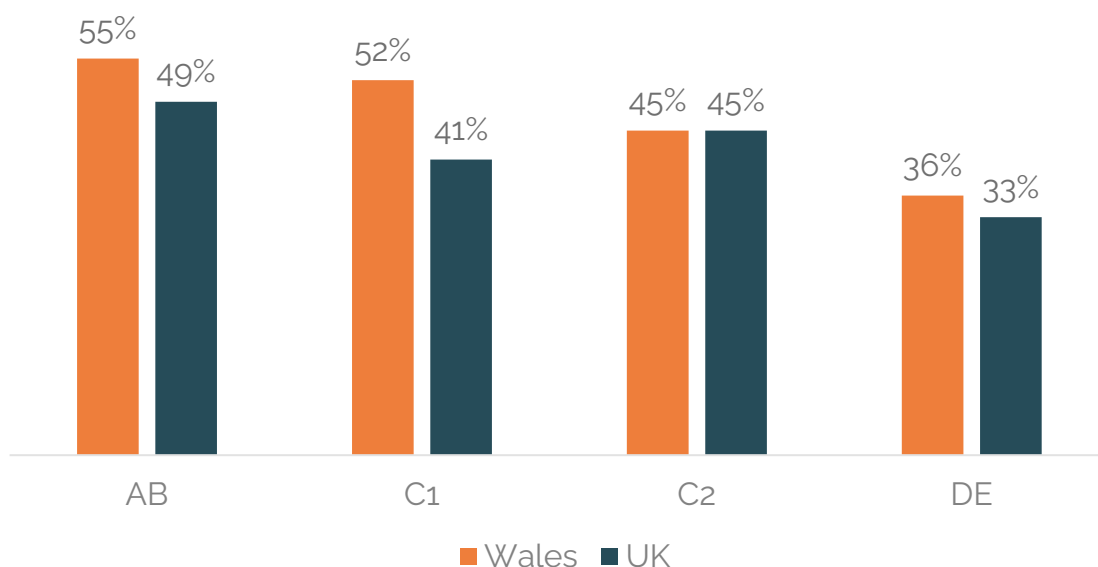
## Social grade is a key predictor of participation in learning

People in higher social grades are more likely than those in lower grades to report recent participation in learning (Figure 4).<sup>9</sup> In Wales, participation is significantly higher among people in the AB (55%) and C1 (52%) grades than among those in the DE grade (36%). Individuals in the AB grade are also statistically significantly more likely than people in the C2 grade (45%) to report learning. When comparing to the UK as a whole, people in Wales in the C1 social grade are significantly more likely to report that they have participated in learning in the last three years.

The inequality between the highest and lowest grade appears to be greater in Wales than in the UK. The difference in participation between the AB and DE grades is 19 percentage points in Wales, compared to 16 percentage points in the UK as a whole.

**Figure 4: Participation in learning for people in the C1 grade is significantly higher in Wales than in the UK.**

Participation in learning by social grade, 2025



Base: Wales respondents. Weighted base = 851. AB = 232, C1 = 208, C2 = 160, DE = 250. Unweighted base = 851. AB = 227, C1 = 208, C2 = 162, DE = 254. Whole of UK respondents. Weighted base = 5,186. AB = 1,520, C1 = 1,195, C2 = 949, DE = 1,522. Unweighted base = 5,186. AB = 1,531, C1 = 1,183, C2 = 966, DE = 1,506.

<sup>9</sup> Social grade groups are a way of categorising people by social and financial situation. The categories are: AB: higher and intermediate managerial, administrative and professional occupations; C1: supervisory, clerical, and junior managerial, administrative and professional occupations; C2: skilled manual occupations; DE: semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations, unemployed and lowest grade occupations.

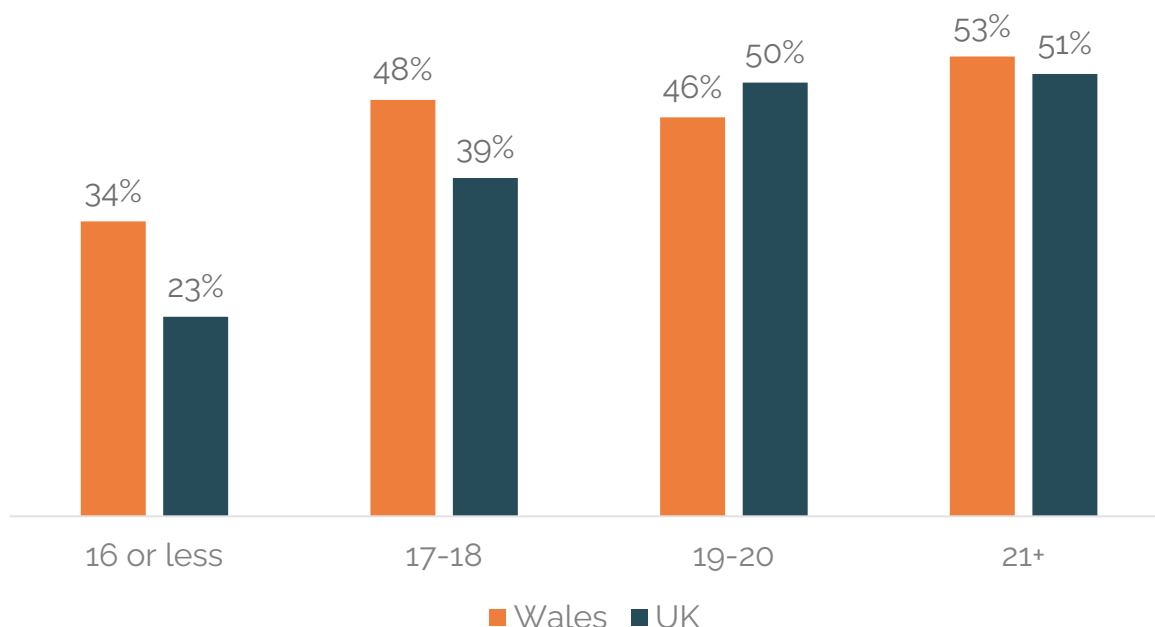
## The longer people stay in full-time education, the more likely they are to learn as an adult

The survey uses the age at which people leave FTE as a proxy for educational attainment. Participation in learning increases the longer individuals stay in education (Figure 5). In Wales, 53% of the people who left FTE aged 21 or above report that they have recently learned, compared to 34% of people who left FTE aged 16 or under.

However, people in Wales who left FTE aged 16 or under, or at 17-18 are significantly more likely to report that they have engaged in learning recently than in the whole of the UK (respectively 34% vs 23% and 48% vs 39%).

### Figure 5: People who left full-time education aged 18 or younger are significantly more likely to engage with learning as an adult in Wales than in the UK.

Participation in learning by age leaving full-time education in Wales and in the UK, 2025



Base: Wales respondents. Weighted base = 851. 16 or less = 252, 17-18 = 154, 19-20 = 102, 21+ = 313. Unweighted base = 851. 16 or less = 252, 17-18 = 156, 19-20 = 103, 21+ = 309. Whole of UK respondents. Weighted base = 5,186. 16 or less = 1,423, 17-18 = 1,048, 19-20 = 696, 21+ = 1,765. Unweighted base = 5,186. 16 or less = 1,366, 17-18 = 1,038, 19-20 = 712, 21+ = 1,806.

## People in work are more likely to participate in learning

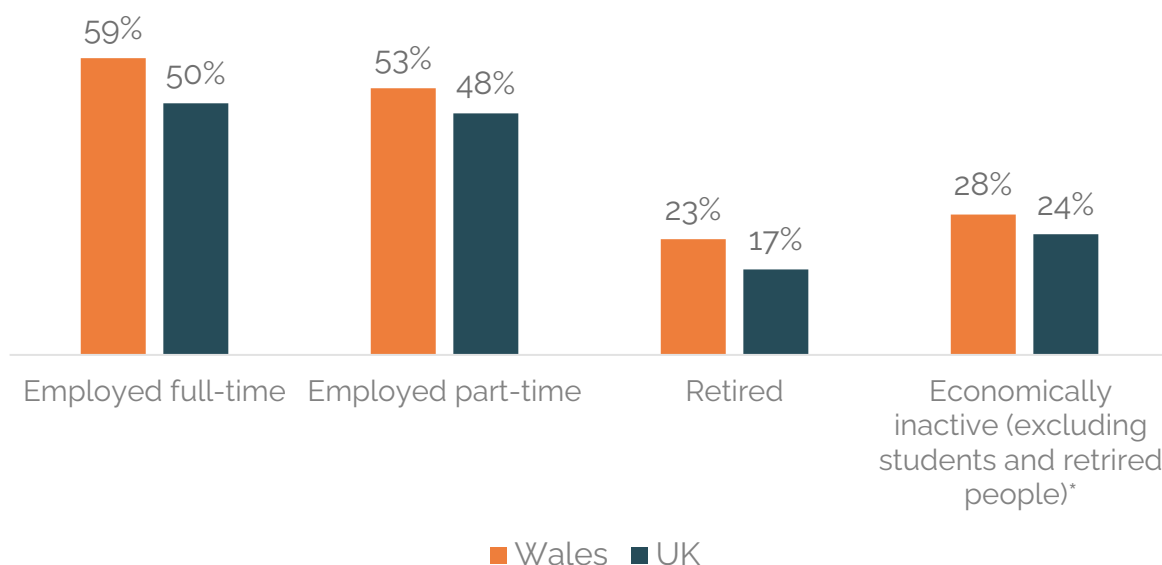
Reported participation in learning is higher among people in employment (both full- and part-time) than among retired or economically inactive people (Figure 6). In Wales, 59% of full-time employees and 53% of part-time employees report that they have participated in learning in the last three years. This compares to 23% of retired people and 28% of economically inactive people (excluding students and retired people).

In Wales, full-time employees are statistically significantly more likely to say they have taken part in learning than in the UK as a whole (59% vs 50%).

However, the inequality by working status appears to be wider in Wales than in the UK. The difference in participation rate between people employed full-time and economically inactive is 31 percentage points in Wales, compared to 26 percentage points in the UK.

**Figure 6: Full-time employees are twice as likely to participate in learning in the last three years than people who are economically inactive.**

Participation in learning by working status in Wales and in the UK, 2025



\*Note: the base for this group is below 50. Base: Wales respondents. Weighted base = 851. Full-time = 335, Part-time = 118, Retired = 195, Economically inactive (exc. students and retired people) = 82. Unweighted base = 851. Full-time = 336, Part-time = 122, Retired = 185, Economically inactive (exc. students and retired people) = 86. Whole of UK respondents. Weighted base = 5,186. Full-time = 2,025, Part-time = 796, Retired = 1,128, Economically inactive (exc. students and retired people) = 429. Unweighted base = 5,186. Full-time = 2,126, Part-time = 827, Retired = 943, Economically inactive (exc. students and retired people) = 449.

**Men and women are equally as likely to report learning**

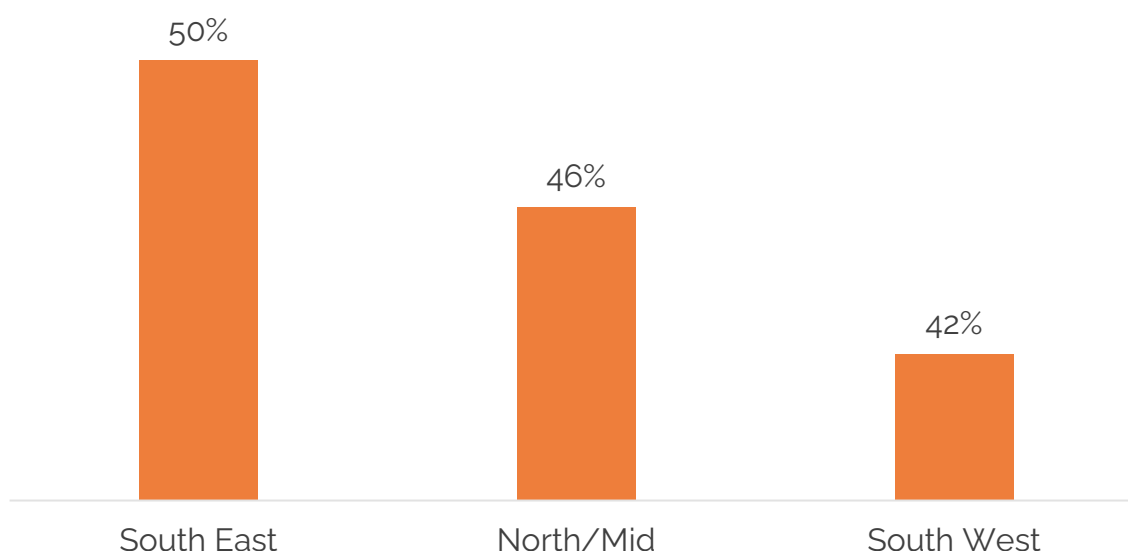
Participation level does not tend to vary significantly by gender. In Wales, the participation rate for men is 48% and 46% for women. The difference is not statistically significant.

## Differences by region and ethnicity can be partially explained by other factors

Participation in learning is significantly higher in the South East (50%) than in the South West (42%) of Wales (Figure 7).<sup>10</sup> This difference can be attributed to the demographic composition of the two regions. The South West has a higher proportion of people economically inactive and on low incomes than the South East.<sup>11</sup> The population is also older than the average in Wales, with all but two local authorities in the South West having a higher than average (10.5%) proportion of people aged 75 and older.<sup>12</sup> Older people, people who are economically inactive and people in low-income households are statistically less likely to engage with learning. Participation in North and Mid Wales (46%) is also lower than in the South East and higher than in the South West, but the differences are not statistically significantly different.

### Figure 7: Residents in the South East are significantly more likely to report learning than in the South West.

Participation in learning by regions in Wales, 2025



Base: Wales respondents. Weighted base = 851. Unweighted base = 851. Whole of UK respondents. South East respondents. Weighted base = 392. Unweighted base = 393. North/Mid respondents. Weighted base = 242. Unweighted base = 242. South West respondents. Weighted base = 217. Unweighted base = 216.

<sup>10</sup> Wales has been divided as follow for statistical purposes: **North:** Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham, Powys, Ceredigion; **South West:** Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Swansea, Neath Port Talbot; **South East:** Bridgend, Vale of Glamorgan, Cardiff, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Monmouthshire, Newport

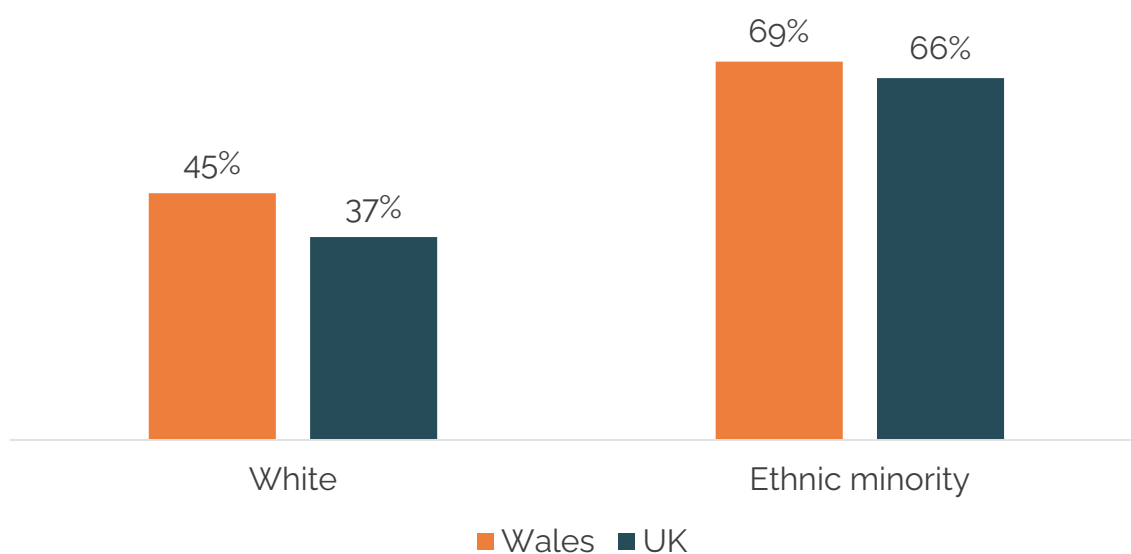
<sup>11</sup> Welsh Government (2020) [Statistical Bulletin: Regional economic and labour market profiles](#).

<sup>12</sup> Both Swansea and Neath Port Talbot had 10.2% of adults aged 75 and over, just 0.3% lower than the average and well above the proportion in Cardiff (6.7%) and Newport (8.2%). [StatsWales](#).

In line with the UK survey, people from ethnic minority groups in Wales are more likely to report that they have taken part in learning in the last three years than those from white backgrounds (69% vs 45%).<sup>13</sup> Combining people from different ethnic groups masks differences between individual ethnic groups. However, the survey does not allow a breakdown by ethnic minority groups due to the small sample size. The relatively high participation in learning among ethnic minorities can be attributed to the fact that respondents from ethnic minority groups are on average younger.<sup>14</sup>

**Figure 8: People from ethnic minority groups are more likely to participate in learning than people from white backgrounds.**

Participation in learning ethnicity in Wales and in the UK, 2025



Base: Wales respondents. Weighted base = 851. White = 761, Ethnic minority = 71. Unweighted base = 851. White = 762, Ethnic minority = 70. Whole of UK respondents. Weighted base = 5,186. White = 4,100, Ethnic minority = 869. Unweighted base = 5,186. White = 4,043, Ethnic minority = 921.

**Inequalities are at risk of becoming self-perpetuating**

Respondents who have recently taken part in learning are significantly more likely to expect to engage with future learning. Over half (54%) of respondents say they are either very likely (28%) or fairly likely (26%) to take up learning in the next three years. Just above nine in ten current learners (92%) and 78% of recent learners expect to take part in learning in the future. These proportions are significantly higher than the proportions of adults who took part in learning over three years ago (31%) and of those

<sup>13</sup> Only 70 people from an ethnic minority background responded to the survey (71 weighted). This means that the analysis is very limited. In the weighted survey sample, 90% of the respondents identified as white. This compares to 81% of the whole of the Welsh population according to the [2021 Census](#).

<sup>14</sup> In the weighted survey sample, 96% of the respondents from an ethnic minority background are under the age of 50 compared to 48% of white respondents.

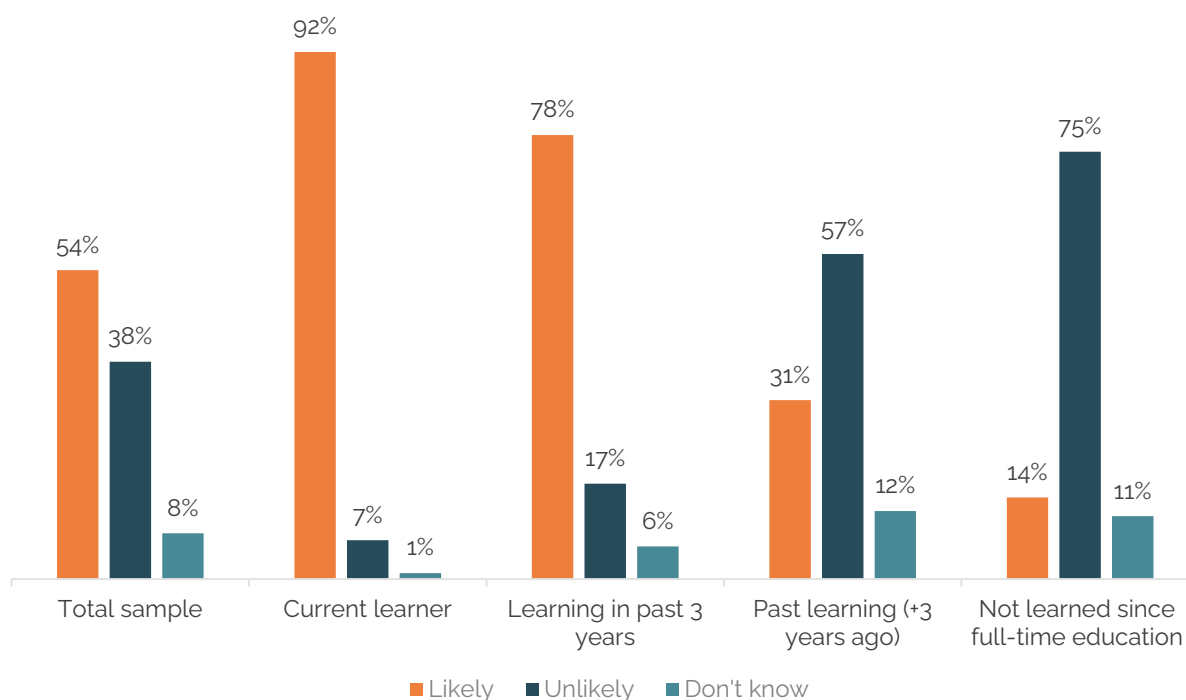
who have not taken part in learning since leaving FTE (14%). These proportions are in line with the UK.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> The proportions reporting they are likely to learn in the future are: 86% of current learners; 79% of learners in the past three years; 30% of people who learned over three years ago; 16% of people who have not learned since leaving full-time education.

**Figure 9: Adults who have taken part in learning in the last three years are more likely to learn in future compared to those without recent experience.**

Likely to engage in learning in the next three years.



Base: Wales respondents. Weighted base = 851. Current or recent learner = 401, Not current or recent learner = 408. Unweighted base = 851. Current or recent learner = 401, Not current or recent learner = 408. Whole of UK respondents. Weighted base = 5,186. Current or recent learner = 2,171, Not current or recent learner = 2,778. Unweighted base = 1366. Current or recent learner = 2,253, Not current or recent learner = 2,696.

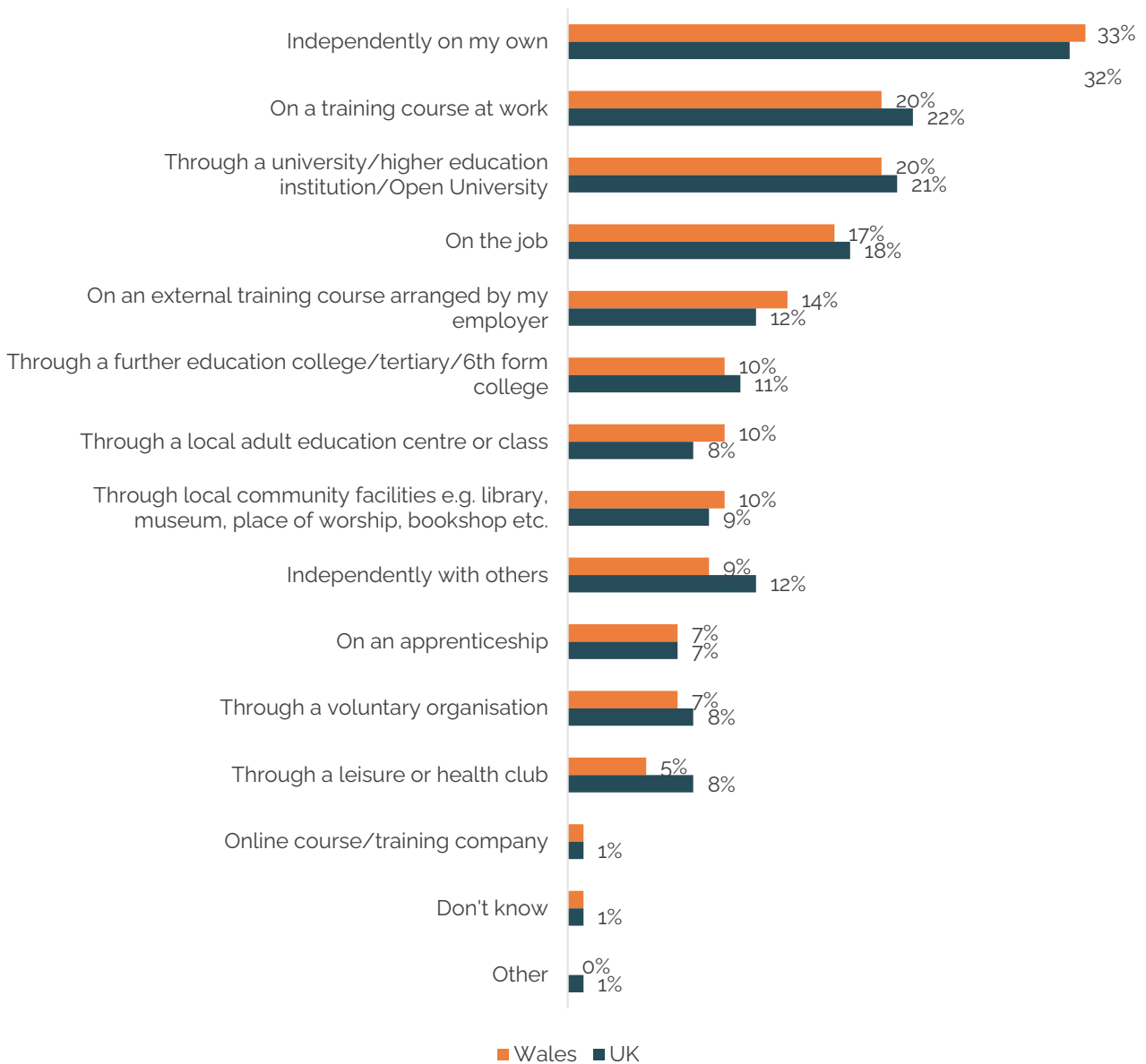
# How adults are learning

## One in three learners report learning independently on their own

Adults in Wales are most likely to be learning independently on their own (33%); on a training course at work (20%); through a university, higher education institution or open university (20%); and on the job (17%) (Figure 10). Adults in Wales are significantly less likely to report learning through a leisure or health club (5%) than in the UK as a whole (8%). The other proportions are broadly in line with the UK.

**Figure 10: Adults learn in a range of settings.**

Adult learning location in Wales and in the UK, 2025



Base: Wales respondents (all who have recently or are currently doing some learning). Weighted base = 401. Unweighted base = 400. UK respondents (all who have recently or are currently doing some learning). Weighted base = 2,171. Unweighted base = 2,253.

## Adults are most likely to be undertaking work-related learning

In this report, the locations of learning are classified into four main categories:

- Work-related, which includes adults who are learning in at least one of the following settings: 'on the job,' 'on a training course at work,' 'on an external training course arranged by my employer' and 'on an apprenticeship'.
- Independently, which includes 'independently on my own' and 'independently with others'.
- Formal educational establishment, which includes 'through a university/higher education institution/Open University,' 'through a further education college/tertiary/6th form college' and 'through a local adult education centre or class'.
- Community or voluntary organisations, which includes 'through a voluntary organisation,' 'through local community facilities' and 'through a leisure or health club'.

In Wales, two fifths of learners report that they have done so at work (43%) or independently (39%) (Figure 11). This is followed by learning undertaken in formal educational establishments (36%) and through a community or voluntary organisation (29%). These are broadly in line with those stated in the UK.

This also appears to be in line with a trend observed across many OECD countries, whereby learners are more likely to report undertaking non-formal job-related activities than formal learning.<sup>16</sup> It has been recognised that job-related learning is increasingly dominated by compliance-based training and very short courses across OECD countries. This poses the risk of undermining the longer-term development of skills among the population.

---

<sup>16</sup> OECD (2025) Trends in Adult Learning, New Data from the 2023 Survey of Adult Skills.

**Figure 11: Adults are most likely to participate in work-related learning.**

Location of learning, 2025



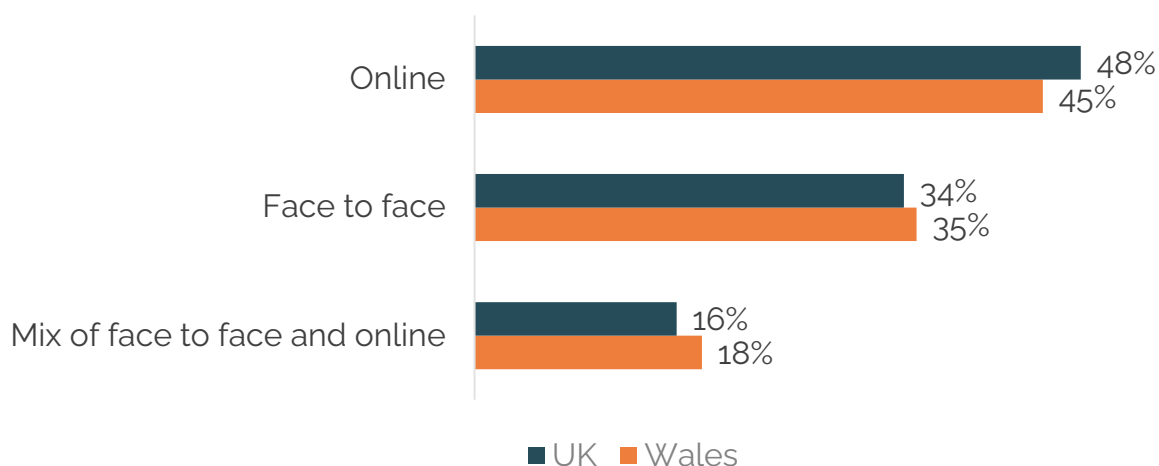
Base: Wales respondents (all who have recently or are currently doing some learning). Weighted base = 401. Unweighted base = 400. UK respondents (all who have recently or are currently doing some learning). Weighted base = 2,171. Unweighted base = 2,253.

### Just under two thirds of learners say that at least some of their learning has been online

Learners in Wales are more likely to learn online than face to face (48% vs 34%) (Figure 12). A further 18% report that they have undertaken blended learning – a mix of face to face and online learning.

**Figure 12: Online learning is the most common delivery method.**

Delivery method of learning in Wales and in the UK, 2025



Base: Wales respondents (all who have recently or are currently doing some learning). Weighted base = 401. Unweighted base = 400. UK respondents (all who have recently or are currently doing some learning). Weighted base = 2,171. Unweighted base = 2,253.

# Motivations for learning

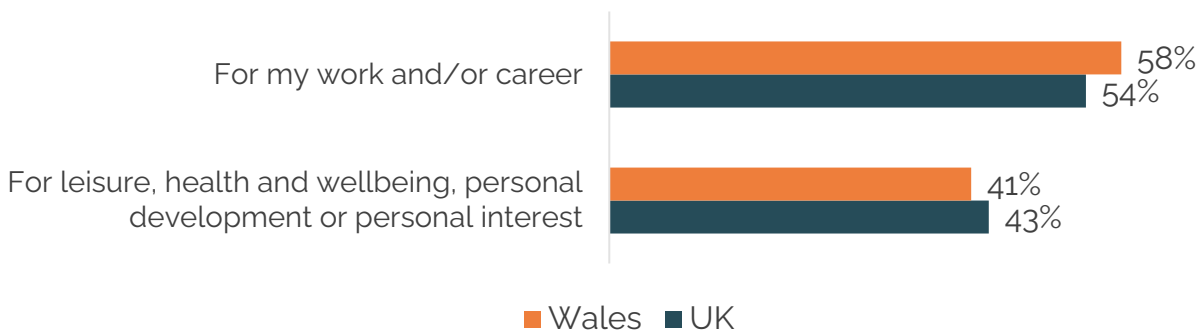
## Work and careers are learners' primary motivation

In Wales, 58% of learners report their main motivation for learning is their work or career, and 41% report their main motivation is leisure and personal interest (Figure 13). These proportions are similar to respondents in the whole of the UK.

In Wales, people aged 25-49 are the most likely to report being motivated to learn for work (63% compared to the average of 58%). Conversely, people aged 65-74 are significantly more likely to report learning for leisure (63% compared to the average of 41%).

**Figure 13: Learners are more likely to be motivated to learn for work than leisure.**

Learners' main motivation, 2025



Base: Wales respondents (all who have recently or are currently doing some learning). Weighted base = 401. Unweighted base = 400. UK respondents (all who have recently or are currently doing some learning). Weighted base = 2,171. Unweighted base = 2,253.

## However, learners' broad motivations are more varied

Respondents are also asked about their broad motivations for learning (Figure 14). The top three motivations among respondents in Wales are: to develop myself as a person (44%), to help me do my current job better/improve job skills (32%), and to get a recognised qualification (30%). These proportions of learners are slightly higher than the proportions in the UK, but none of the differences are statistically significant.

**Figure 14: Learners have a wide range of motivations.**

Learners' broader motivations for learning, 2025



Base: Wales respondents (all who have recently or are currently doing some learning). Weighted base = 401. Unweighted base = 400. UK respondents (all who have recently or are currently doing some learning). Weighted base = 2,171. Unweighted base = 2,253.

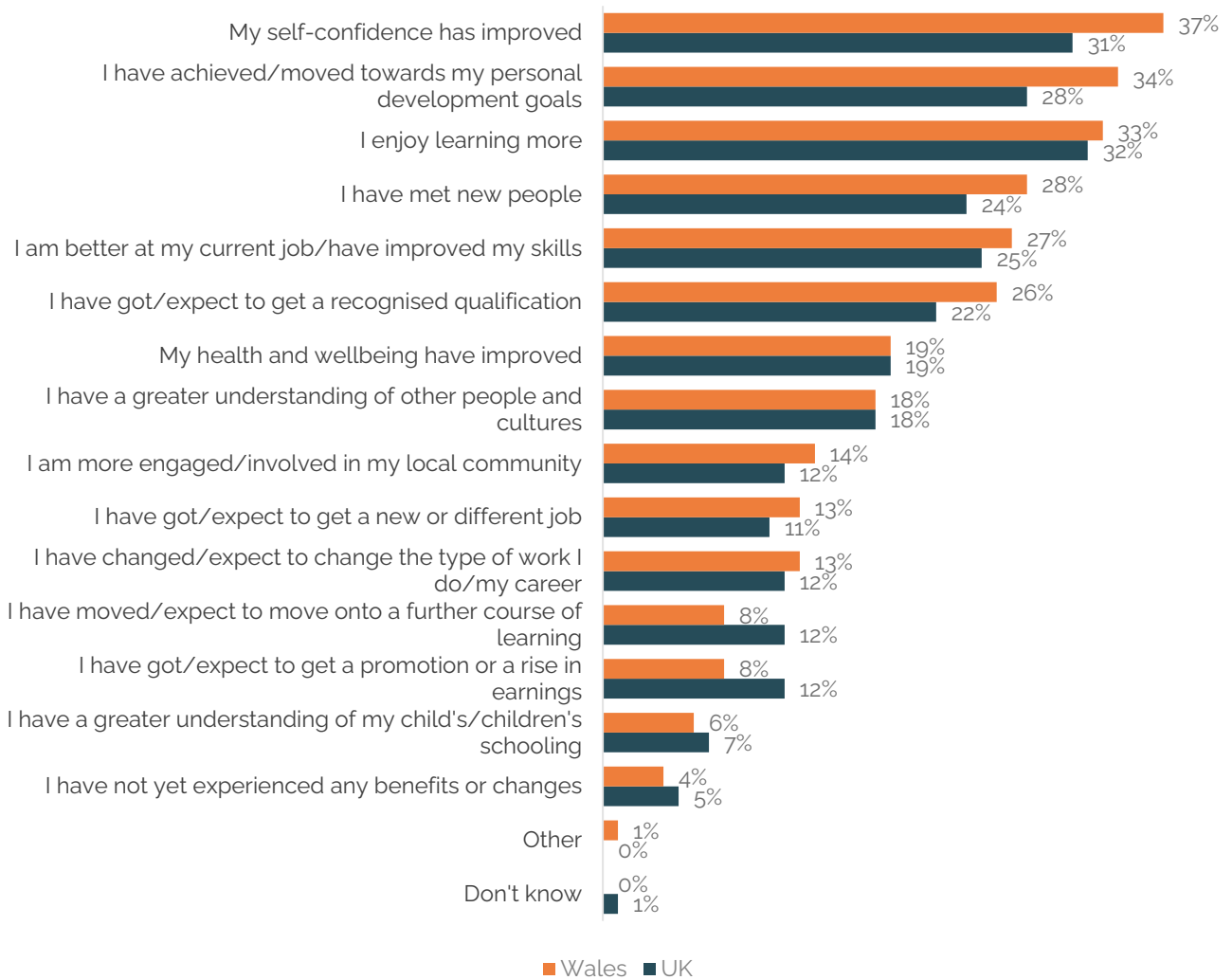
# Benefits of learning

## The benefits of learning are many

People who have engaged in learning in the last three years report a range of positive changes as a result, with 96% identifying at least one benefit. Most commonly, learners in Wales report improved self-confidence (37%), followed by achieving or moving closer to personal development goals (34%), greater enjoyment of learning (33%), meeting new people (28%), and being better at their current job or improving their skills (27%). Learners in Wales are significantly more likely than respondents in the UK to report that they have experienced improved self-confidence (37% vs 31%) and achieving their personal development goals (34% vs 28%) as a result of their learning.

**Figure 15: Learners experience a variety of benefits from learning, with improved self-confidence being the most common.**

Benefits of learning among recent learners, 2025



Base: Wales respondents (all who have recently or are currently doing some learning). Weighted base =

401. Unweighted base = 400. UK respondents (all who have recently or are currently doing some learning). Weighted base = 2,171. Unweighted base = 2,253.

## **The benefits of learning relate to the motivation of the learner**

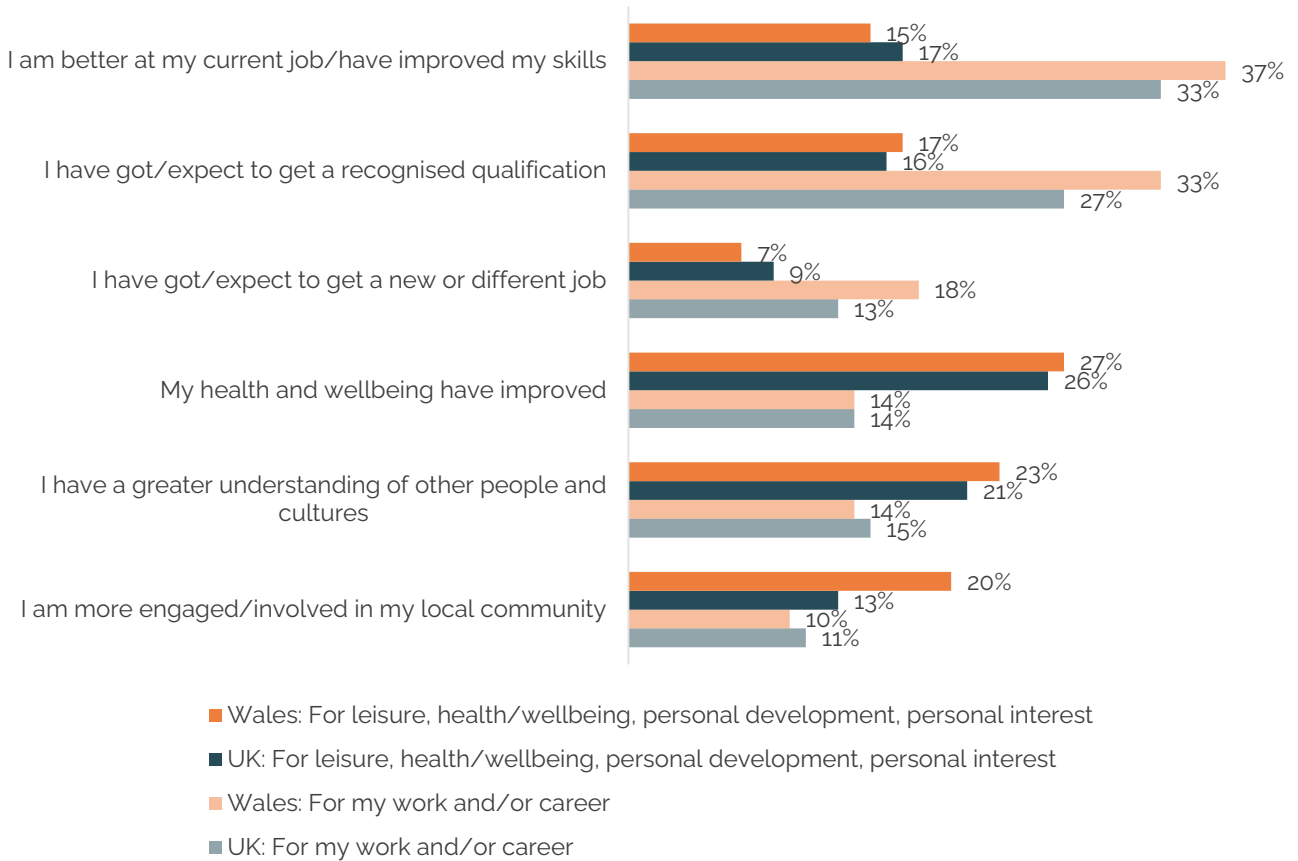
Learners whose primary motivation for learning is for work or careers are significantly more likely to report at least one work-related benefit:

- 70% of work-motivated learners report at least one work-related benefit, compared to 38% of learners whose primary reason is for leisure, health and wellbeing, or personal development.
- 33% of learners whose primary motivation is work or careers say they have received or expecting to receive a qualification, compared to 17% of learners whose primary motivation is leisure.
- 18% of work-motivated learners report either having got, or expecting to get, a new job, compared to just 7% of leisure-motivated learners.
- 37% of work-motivated learners report the benefit of being better at their current job, compared to 15% of leisure-motivated learners.

Conversely, leisure-motivated learners are significantly more likely to report having experienced:

- a benefit to their health and wellbeing than work-motivated learners (27% vs 14%);
- a greater understanding of other people and culture (23% vs 14%);
- more engagement in their local community (20% vs 10%).

**Figure 16: The benefits experienced by learners relate to their primary motivation.**  
Benefits from learning, by reason for learning, 2025



Base: Wales respondents (recent learners). Weighted base = 401. Unweighted base = 400. Stated motivation of work and/or career. Weighted base = 231. Unweighted base = 231. Stated motivation of leisure, health/wellbeing, personal development, personal interest. Weighted base = 166. Unweighted based = 166.

## Barriers to learning

### Age, cost and inclination prevent people from engaging in learning

More than four in five (84%) respondents who have not taken part in learning in the past three years identified at least one barrier that prevented them from doing so. This is in line with the 82% of UK-wide respondents who reported at least one barrier.

Just over one third (34%) of people in Wales who say they haven't engaged in learning in the last three years report feeling 'too old' (Figure 17). The older people get, the more likely they are to feel this way. One fifth (21%) of respondents aged 25-49 report this as a barrier, rising to 39% of 50-64-year-olds, 41% of 65-74-year-olds and 47% of respondents aged 75 or over. With five-decade careers becoming the norm, and with social isolation and loneliness challenges for many groups including those above state pension age, it's important we empower people of all ages to engage in learning of all forms.

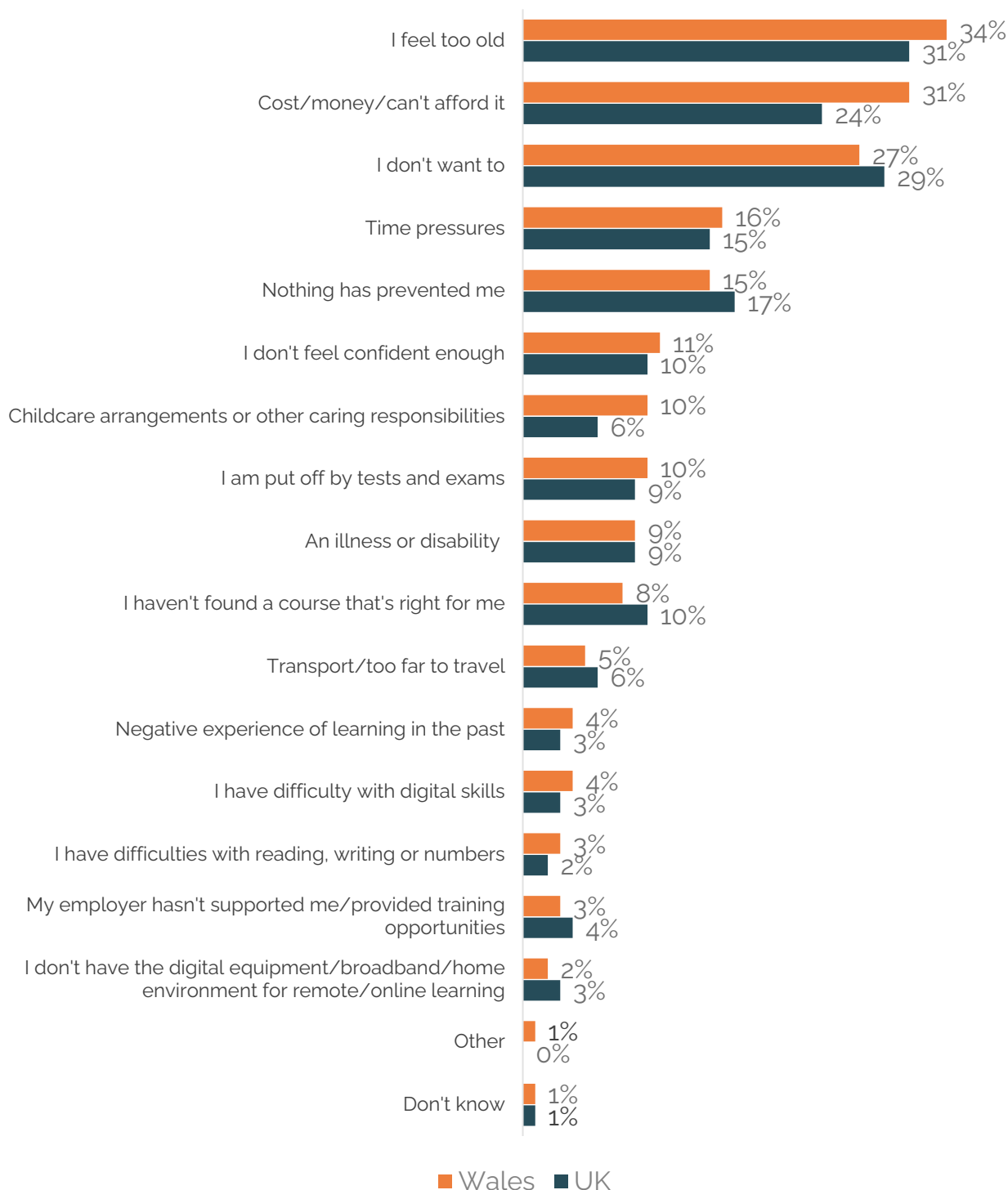
Cost or affordability is the second most commonly reported barrier preventing people from learning. It is reported by nearly one third (31%) of all respondents without recent experience of learning. This is significantly higher than in the UK as a whole (24%).

Just over one quarter (27%) of respondents in Wales who say they have not taken part in learning in the last three years say they don't want to. This is a similar proportion to the whole of the UK (29%). Increasing adults' perceived value of learning and making it relevant to them is therefore an important goal, alongside removing barriers.

On average, adults who have not engaged with learning in the last three years report more than two barriers preventing them from taking part. Interventions aimed at encouraging participation in learning therefore need to account for the range of barriers people face rather than focusing on one aspect.

**Figure 17: Adults without recent experience of learning most commonly report feeling too old and the cost of learning as barriers.**

Barriers faced by non-learners, 2025



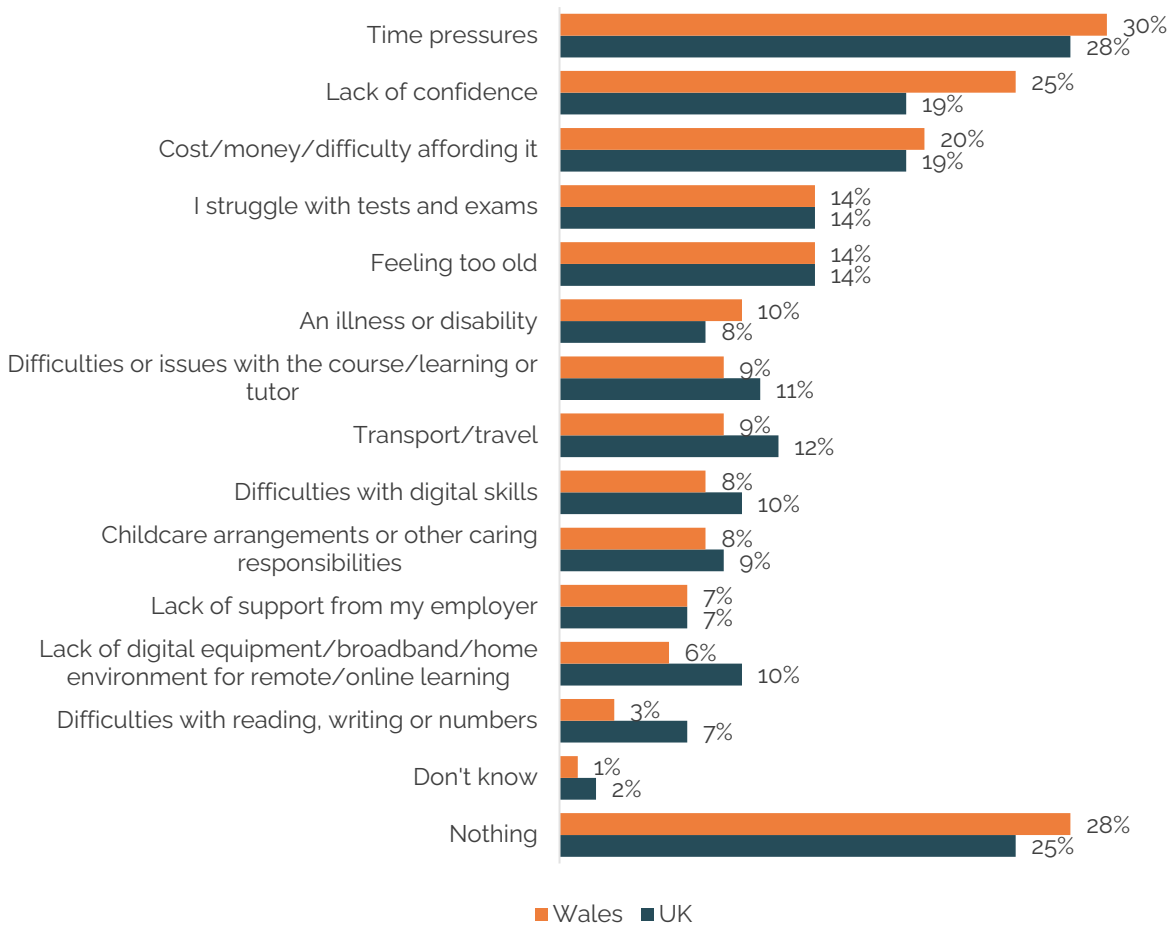
Base: Wales respondents (all who have not studied in the last 3 years). Unweighted base = 408. Weighted base = 408. UK (all who have not studied in the last 3 years). Unweighted base = 2,696. Weighted base = 2,778.

## Most learners experience challenges while learning

In Wales, 71% of learners report encountering at least one challenge while learning. This is in line with the 73% of learners in the whole of the UK reporting the same. Most commonly, learners report time pressures (30%), followed by a lack of confidence (25%), and cost (20%) (Figure 18). A significantly larger proportion of learners in Wales report confidence as a challenge compared to the UK as a whole (25% vs 19%).

**Figure 18: Learners face a range of challenges while learning.**

Challenges faced by recent learners, 2025



Base: Wales respondents (all who have recently or are currently doing some learning). Weighted base = 401. Unweighted base = 400. UK respondents (all who have recently or are currently doing some learning). Weighted base = 2,171. Unweighted base = 2,253.

Some groups of learners are more likely to experience challenges:

- Learners aged 19-24 (91%) and 25-49 (78%) are significantly more likely to report at least one challenge while learning than the average (71%). Learners aged 19-24 are significantly more likely to report a lack of confidence (44%) than learners aged 25-49 (25%) or 50-74 (15%).
- Learners in the DE social grade are significantly more likely than average to report a challenge (81% vs 71%).

- People in South West Wales are more likely to report that lack of digital equipment, broadband, or remote environment for learning was a challenge than learners in the South East Wales (10% vs 4%).<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Sample size for people in the South West is small (90) so this finding should be treated with caution.

## Conclusion

Findings from the Adult Participation in Learning Survey can inform Medr's future strategy, as well as decision-making about adult learning by policymakers, businesses, learning providers and community organisations. The survey shows that 47% of adults in Wales have engaged in learning of some kind in the last three years. However, there are significant inequalities by socio-economic characteristics, including age, social grade, educational attainment and working status. While learning participation appears to be higher in Wales than the UK as a whole in 2025, some inequalities are more pronounced in Wales.

People are less likely to engage with learning as they get older. As population ageing is affecting Wales even more than the rest of the UK, improving learning opportunities for older people should be a focus for policymakers, employers and learning providers.<sup>18</sup> A report from the Older People's Commissioner emphasises the need to focus on improving opportunities for retraining or learning new skills to address ageism within employment in Wales.<sup>19</sup>

Participation in learning is low among people in semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations, those who are unemployed, in the lowest grade occupations, or retired on a state pension. People who are out of work due to ill health or with caring responsibilities are also less likely to report engaging in learning. Medr, employers, Jobcentres and employment support providers can help to make the case for lifelong learning and provide support to facilitate participation for people from every walk of life. This can be done by addressing the barriers preventing adults from taking part, as well as demonstrating the benefits and relevance of lifelong learning.

The survey shows that when adults learn, they thrive. This includes increased confidence, better skills to do their work or progress at work, meeting new people, or improved health and wellbeing. However, the quality of the learning matters. As wider evidence indicates that non-formal and short-term learning grows in proportion, it is important for commissioners, employers and adults to understand the quality of these types of learning and to encourage the delivery and take up of provision that is the most likely to benefit people. Policy and practice also need to address the challenges adults face while learning, including situational barriers such as cost and time, as well as dispositional barriers such as confidence.

---

<sup>18</sup> By 2032, the number of people aged 65 years or older is projected to account for 24.3% of the total population in Wales. This is compared with 23.6% in Scotland, 21.8% in Northern Ireland, and 20.9% in England. [National population projections: 2022-based \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

<sup>19</sup> The Older People's Commissioner for Wales (2025) [Growing older in Wales: A snapshot of older people's experiences](#).

## Annex: Survey method

The Adult Participation in Learning 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. Each year, a representative sample of approximately 5,000 adults aged 17 and over across the UK are provided with the following definition of learning and asked when they last took part in any, as well as how likely they are to take part in learning during the next three years:

'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 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 2025 Adult Participation in Learning Survey included 5,186 adults aged 17 and over across the UK, including 851 in Wales. This sample has been weighted (generating an effective sample of 5,186 UK-wide and 851 in Wales) to provide a UK and Wales representative dataset. In addition to overall participation, the 2025 survey explores who participates in learning; motivations and barriers; how learning is undertaken; benefits experienced as a result of learning; use of technology to support learning; and confidence in and future expectations of technology in careers.

In 2025, the UK survey was part-funded by Ufi VocTech Trust, with a Wales boost funded by Medr. Fieldwork was conducted by Kantar via their UK online omnibus survey, running from 23 June 2025 to 14 July 2025.

### Analysis

Analysis of the survey results predominately involved a mixture of descriptive statistics and the significance testing of demographic and key variable breakdowns. It should be noted that all figures, breakdowns and analyses throughout the report are based on weighted data.

### Measuring participation

The survey uses a deliberately broad definition of learning to capture as wide an array of learners as possible, which goes beyond participation in publicly funded provision. The interpretation of the definition is subjective and some individuals with similar experiences may classify themselves differently. The National Adult Learner Survey

(NALS)<sup>20</sup> adopted an alternative approach, which uses a different definition and a series of questions to classify respondents into formal learners, non-formal learners, informal learners, and non-learners. Participation rates measured through NALS are higher than those captured by the Adult Participation in Learning Survey.

While respondents are given a definition of learning, the self-reported nature of the survey relies on individuals to make a judgement about how it relates to them. This can be influenced by their existing understanding of what learning is, which can relate to a range of factors such as the formality of the learning, duration, and/or method of delivery. Respondents may therefore interpret questions differently, and they may provide incorrect information (either deliberately or through misremembering details). However, this risk is mitigated by the large sample size and by the general consistency of responses over the survey's 30-year history. An alternative approach would be through use of nationally collected statistics on adult education such as in DfE and ESFA statistical releases.<sup>21</sup> However, such statistics are limited to publicly funded provision and are unable to identify qualitative issues such as barriers to learning or motivations.

## Definitions

The following definitions are used throughout the report:

**Current learners:** respondents who are currently learning.

**Recent learners:** respondents who are not currently learning but have done so within the three years prior to interview.

**Participation in learning:** respondents who are currently learning or who have done so in the three years prior to interview (current and recent learners).

**Participation rate:** the proportion of respondents who are current or recent learners.

**Main learning:** the primary item of learning in which respondents are engaged, or have been within the previous three years, as self-defined by respondents.

**Social grade:** is based on the occupation of the Chief Income Earner in the household. If they have retired, they are asked to provide their previous occupation.

**Regions:** regional analysis is based on three groupings: North and mid-Wales, South West Wales, and South East Wales.

---

<sup>20</sup> Department for Business Innovation & Skills (2012) [National Adult Learner Survey 2010](#)

<sup>21</sup> Department for Education (2016) [Statistics: further education and skills](#)