

2014 NIACE Adult Participation in Learning Survey

Headline Findings

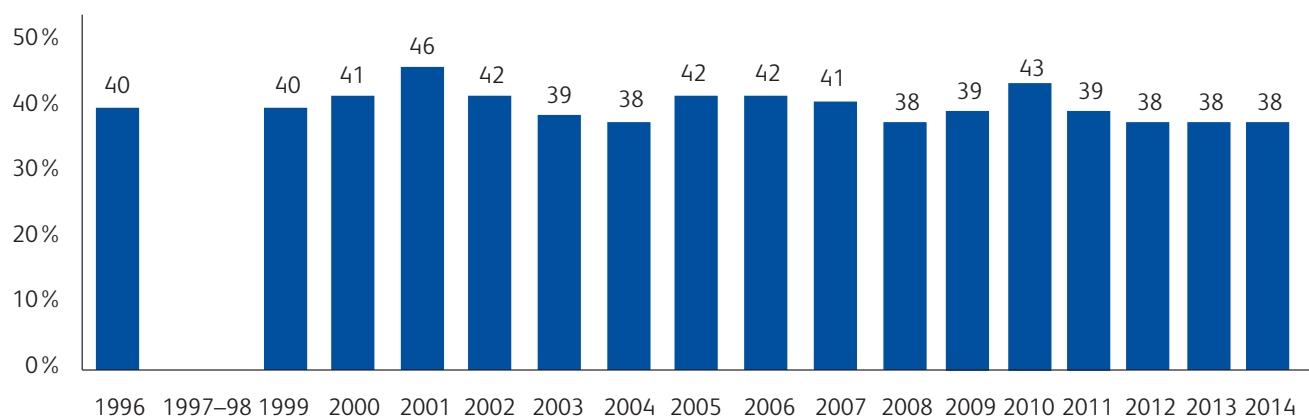
This briefing provides an overview of the findings from the 2014 NIACE Adult Participation in Learning Survey. The survey series, which began in 1996, provides a unique overview of the level of adult participation in learning, with a detailed breakdown of who participates and who does not. A more detailed analysis of the survey findings will be published later in the year.

Who learns?

The 2014 survey suggests that around one in five adults (19%) is currently learning, while just under two-fifths (38%) have taken part in some form of learning in the previous three years. Thirty-five per cent of adults have not participated in learning since leaving full-time education, down from 39% in 2013.

There has been little variation in the overall level of participation in learning since the survey series began in 1996. With the exception of a peak in 2010, participation levels have remained unchanged in recent years (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Participation in learning, 1996–2014



Base: all respondents

Engagement in learning is not evenly distributed across society. In 2014, as in all previous years, the survey clearly shows that participation in learning is determined by social class, employment status, age and prior learning.

Socio-economic class remains a key predictor of participation in learning (Figure 2). Around one-half of those in the highest classes (47% of ABs; 48% of C1s) have taken part in learning during the previous three years, compared with 34% of skilled manual workers (C2s) and 25% of unskilled workers and people on limited incomes (DEs). Since 2013, the proportion of ABs taking part in learning has fallen from 52% to 47%, with small increases among all other groups. Encouragingly, in all but the highest classes, fewer adults report not taking part in learning since leaving full-time education.

Nearly four-fifths (79%) of all learners started their learning for work- or career-related reasons. It is unsurprising, therefore, that significant differences exist between the participation rates of workers, unemployed adults and those outside of the workforce (Figure 3). Levels of participation in learning are significantly higher among adults in employment (46% of full-time workers; 45% of part-time workers) and those who are registered as unemployed (41%), than among those who are not currently seeking work (21%). Retired adults (14%) are least likely to have taken part in learning in the previous three years.

Since 2013, the proportion of adults 'not seeking work' who are taking part in learning has fallen from 27% to 21%. In contrast, the proportion of unemployed adults learning has increased from 35% to 41%, reversing the decline found in 2013. Furthermore, the proportion of unemployed adults who have not taken part in learning since leaving full-time education has fallen from 49% to 32%.

2014 NIACE Adult Participation in Learning Survey: Headline Findings

Figure 2: Participation in learning by socio-economic class, 2014¹

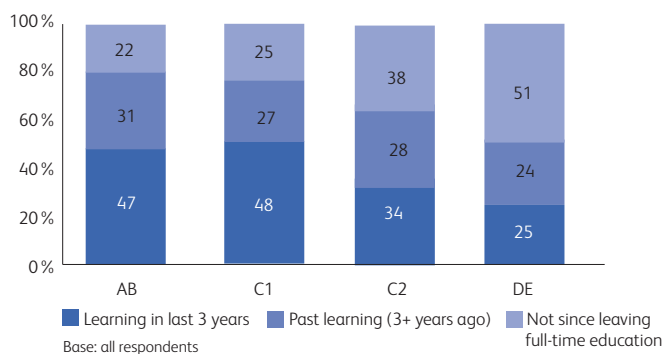
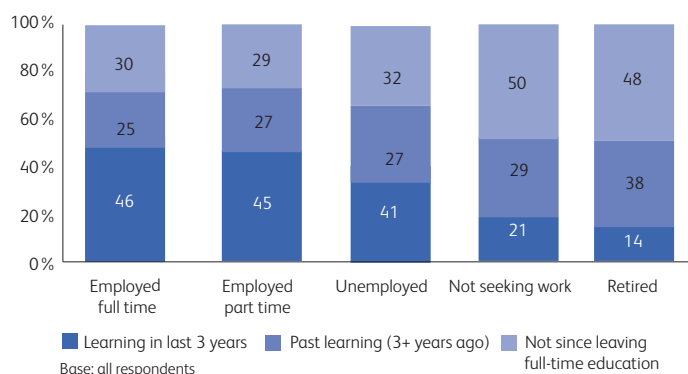
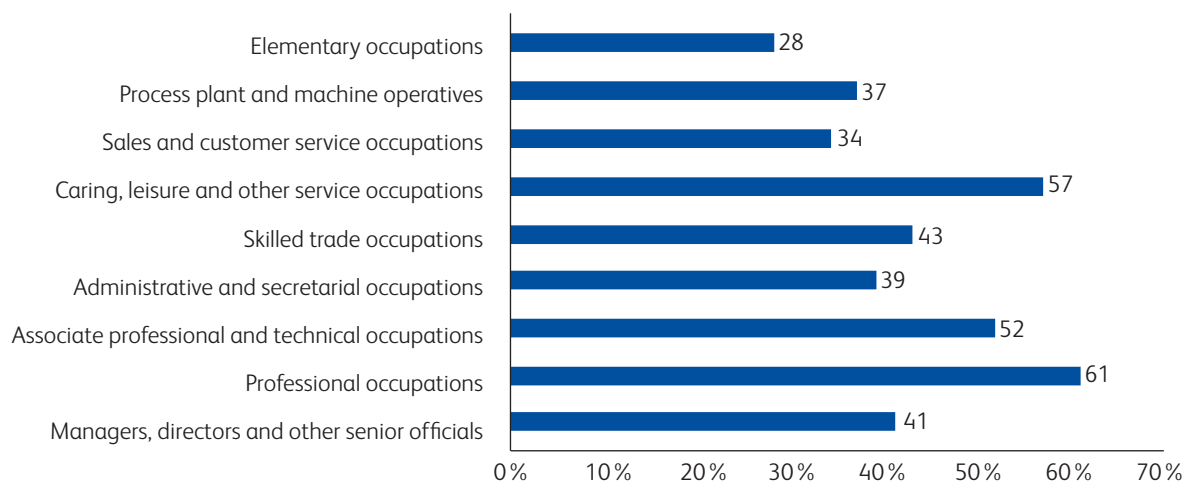


Figure 3: Participation in learning by employment status, 2014



Among those in employment, inequalities exist in the participation rates of those working in different occupations (Figure 4). Sixty-one per cent of adults in professional occupations and 57% of those in service occupations² have taken part in learning in the previous three years, compared with just 28% of those in elementary occupations.

Figure 4: Participation in learning by occupation, 2014



Base: all respondents

In general, the older people are, the less likely they are to take part in learning (Figure 5). Eighty-nine per cent of 17–19 year olds and 67% of 20–24 year olds are learning, compared with around two-fifths of the rest of the working age population. The decline in participation is particularly steep for those aged 55 and over, with only 30% of those aged 55–64, 17% of those aged 65–74 and 8% of those aged 75+ regarding themselves as learners.

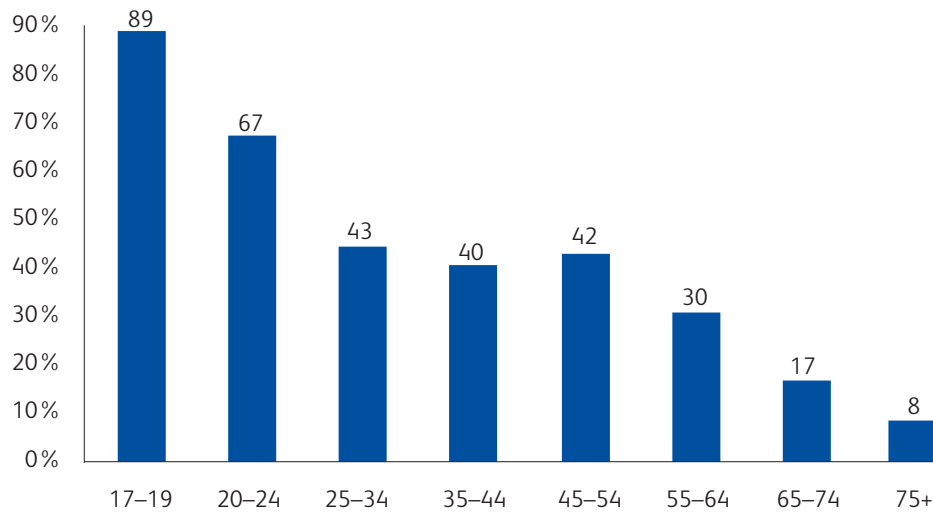
Since 2013 there has been a substantial increase in the proportion of young adults taking part in learning (from 79% to 89% among those aged 17–19), reversing the decline seen in the previous year. Smaller increases in participation were also found among those aged 20–24, aged 45–54 and aged 55–64.

As with all previous surveys, the 2014 survey confirms the key divide between those who left school at the earliest opportunity and those who stayed on for even a short while. Around one-half (47%) of those who left full-time education aged 21+ are learning, compared with just one-quarter (25%) of those who left school at or before the age of 16.

¹ Social Grade A includes the upper and upper-middle classes and is generally grouped with Grade B, the middle classes. Grade C1 includes the lower-middle class, often called white-collar workers. Grade C2 mainly consists of skilled manual workers. Grade D comprises the semi-skilled and unskilled working class, and is usually linked with Grade E, those on the lowest levels of subsistence such as old age pensioners and those dependent upon welfare benefits.

² Includes caring, leisure and other service occupations

Figure 5: Participation in learning by age, 2014



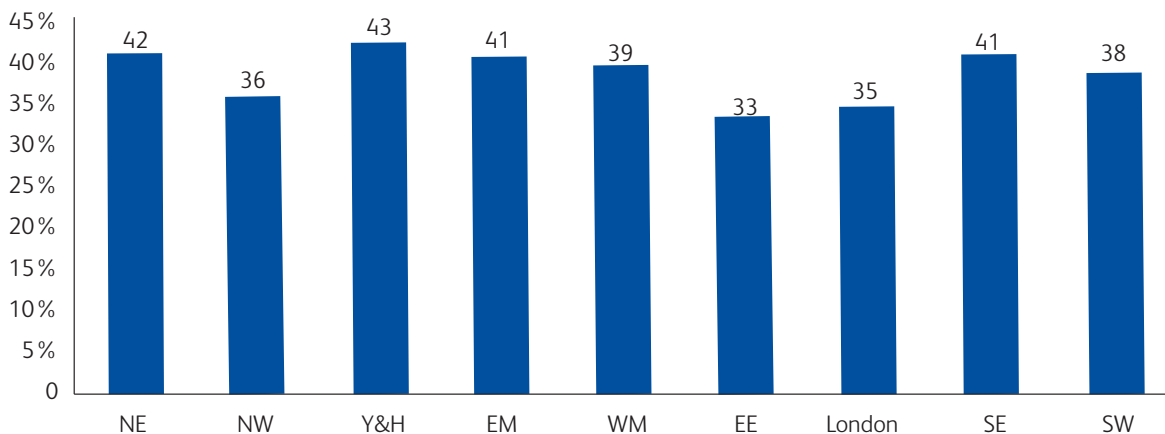
Base: all respondents

The digital divide continues to reinforce the learning divide, with 43% of adults with internet access having taken part in learning in the previous three years, compared with just 12% of those without access. Nearly two-thirds (58%) of adults without regular access to the internet have not taken part in learning since leaving full-time education.

When comparing levels of participation in learning across the four UK nations, the survey shows that 38% of adults in England are learning, compared with 41% of adults in Wales, 35% in Scotland and 43% in Northern Ireland³.

While generally there is little variation in levels of participation within the English regions, adults living in Yorkshire and the Humber, the North East, the East Midlands and the South East are most likely to be learning, while those living in the East of England are least likely to participate (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Participation in learning by English region, 2014



Base: all respondents

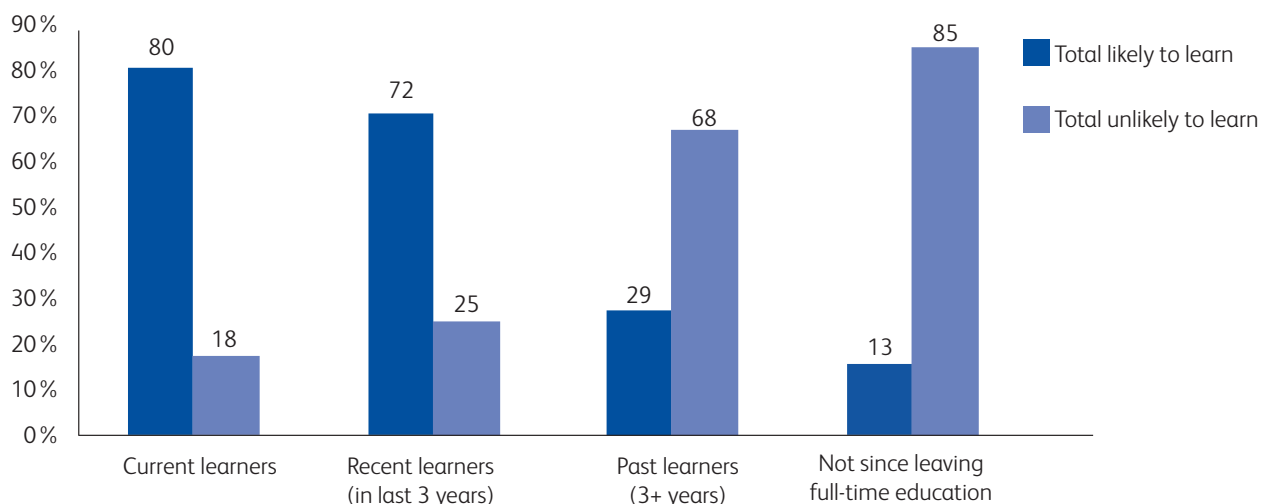
³ The Northern Ireland sample is small and therefore this figure should be treated with caution.

Who intends to be learning in the next three years?

When asked about their intentions to take up learning in the next three years, 41 % of adults say that they are likely to do so, and 56 % say that they are unlikely to learn.

As in previous years, current participation in learning is a key indicator of future intentions to learn. In the 2014 survey, 80% of current learners say that they are likely to take up learning in the next three years, compared with just 13 % of those who have done no learning since leaving full-time education (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Future intentions to take up learning, by learning status, 2014



Base: all respondents

The survey

Each year, 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 learning, 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 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.



For more information about the survey, please contact
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