

# Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2019

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**Learning and Work Institute**

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## About Learning and Work Institute

Learning and Work Institute is an independent policy, research and development organisation dedicated to lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion.

We research what works, develop new ways of thinking and implement new approaches. Working with partners, we transform people's experiences of learning and employment. What we do benefits individuals, families, communities and the wider economy.

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## Introduction

Since 1996, Learning and Work Institute (L&W) has undertaken an annual survey of adult participation in learning. The survey, which draws on data from a nationally representative sample of 5,000 adults across the UK, provides a rich evidence base on who participates in learning, their motivations, barriers and benefits experienced.

There is a growing recognition of the need for adults to learn throughout their lives, enabling them to respond to the changing economy and society in which we live. Participation in learning benefits individuals, families, communities, employers and society. It is associated with better labour market outcomes, and there is strong evidence too of the impact of learning on health and well-being, as well as on promoting social justice and supporting active and inclusive communities.

Despite the growing importance of lifelong learning, we have seen a decade of decline in the number of adults participating in learning. This is perhaps unsurprising given the significant decline in investment over the last decade; between 2009/10 and 2018/19 government spending on adult learning in England (excluding apprenticeships) fell by 47 per cent<sup>1</sup>, and employer investment in skills in the UK is low compared with other advanced economies. If we are to engage more adults in learning and realise the benefits of doing so, then we as well as reversing the decline in investment, it is vital that we understand who learns, how they do so, and their motivations and barriers to learning.

## Survey findings

This report presents the findings from the 2019 Adult Participation in Learning Survey, including patterns of participation in learning across demographic groups, the nature of learning undertaken, motivations for and barriers to participation, and the benefits of engaging in adult learning.

The 2019 Adult Participation in Learning Survey records the **lowest participation rate in the 23-year history of the survey**. It is the third year in a row in which the participation rate has fallen to a record low. Just one third (33 per cent) of adults say that they have participated in learning during the previous three years, while 38 per cent say that they have not done any learning since leaving full time education.

There are persistent inequalities in learning, with the adults who could most benefit from participating in learning being the least likely to do so. Those in lower social grades, those with fewer years of initial education, and those furthest from the labour market remain under-represented in learning. Participation declines with age, with older adults being significantly less likely to participate in learning.

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<sup>1</sup> Institute for Fiscal Studies (2019) Annual report on education spending in England  
<https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14369>

There are stark gaps in participation between the nations and regions of the UK. The gap between the best and worst performing English regions has widened, with thirty-nine per cent of adults in the south east of England participating in education compared to twenty-four per cent in the north east. Participation in Scotland (38 per cent) is much higher than in England (33 per cent), Wales (30 per cent) or Northern Ireland (22 per cent).

The continuing decline in participation in learning is not equally spread across the adult population. Most notably, participation has fallen by five percentage points among retired adults and those aged 65+. This is a cause for concern given our rapidly ageing population, and the evidence of the benefits of learning for health, mental health and wellbeing. Although participation among unemployed adults has increased by six points, the decline among working adults, particularly those aged 35-55, has continued. This is of particular concern given the growing need for adults to upskill and retrain throughout their working lives in response to technological and economic change.

Although social grade continues to be the most important predictor of whether adults engage in learning, this year's survey shows a decline in participation among adults who have historically been most likely to learn, with a seven-point decline in learning among ABs and a five-point decline among those who left education aged 21 or older.

Current participation remains a strong predictor of future learning. More than three in four learners (77 per cent) say that they are likely to engage in learning again in the next three years, compared with just 17 per cent of those who have done no learning since leaving full time education. Age and social grade are important too – with younger adults and those in higher social grades much more likely to anticipate learning in the future. With 61 per cent of all adults saying that they are unlikely learn over the next three years, a substantial challenge remains if we are to reverse the decline in participation and encourage more people to invest in the development of their skills and knowledge.

There is variation too in where and how people learn. Twenty-six per cent of learners in the survey are studying at a university or higher education institution, while 21 per cent are on a training course at work. Sixteen per cent are learning independently and 14 per cent are learning on the job. Thirteen per cent are learning online while 12 per cent are learning with a further education college.

While just 16 per cent of learners say their current learning is predominantly online, roughly half (47 per cent) say that they have engaged in online learning at some point. Learners in higher social grades, those with more years of initial education, and those aged 55-64 are most likely to have engaged in online learning.

The survey shows a wide range of motivations for, barriers to, and benefits of, learning. Eighty per cent of learners are learning for their work or career – up from 72

per cent in 2018. Of these, 62 per cent anticipate that their learning will benefit them in their current job, while 13 per cent are seeking to retrain into a substantially different role. However, work and career are only part of the story. Around a quarter of all learners are motivated for personal development reasons (27 per cent), to achieve a recognised qualification (25 per cent), and or out of interest in the subject (23 per cent). One-fifth (19 per cent) of learners say they learn simply because they enjoy it. This diversity in motivation highlights the importance of ensuring access to both work-related and non-work related opportunities relevant to the interests and aspirations of a broad range of adults.

Demonstrating how learning can help adults achieve their aspirations and ambitions is critical in raising levels of participation. In a change from the 2018 survey, the most frequently cited barrier among those who have not have not engaged in learning during the previous three years is now lack of interest (18 per cent), although work and time pressures remain a significant factor (15 per cent). Among those with more recent experience of learning, the most frequently cited barriers continue to be associated with work and other time pressures (12 per cent), cost (seven per cent) and caring responsibilities (five per cent). Twenty-eight per cent of those who have not done any learning in the previous three years say that nothing is prevent them from learning, illustrating the importance of not only removing barriers, but also actively promoting the relevance and benefits of learning to encourage participation.

The benefits of learning for individuals are wide ranging and include improvements in subject knowledge (36 per cent) and the skills needed for their current job (29 per cent). Twenty-three per cent report improvements in self-confidence, with 21 per cent saying that they are enjoying learning more and that they feel more confident at work as a result. Seventeen per cent say that their learning has helped them to be more productive at work or to produce work of a higher quality. Other work-related benefits include greater job security and satisfaction, securing a new job or promotion, and improving working relationships. The survey also highlights the wider benefits of learning; one in eight learners say they have met new people and made new friends, that they have more understanding of other people and cultures; and that they feel they have more control of their life.

## About the Adult Participation in Learning Survey

Since 1996, Learning and Work Institute (then NIACE<sup>2</sup>) has been undertaking the Adult Participation in Learning Survey on an almost annual basis<sup>3</sup>. The survey provides a unique overview of the level of participation in learning by adults, with a detailed breakdown of who participates and who does not, over a span of more than 20 years.

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. 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, 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 2019 Adult Participation in Learning Survey includes 5,244 adults aged 17 and over across the UK, with fieldwork conducted in September 2019. This sample has been weighted (generating an effective sample of 5,011) to provide a nationally representative dataset. In addition to overall participation in learning, the 2019 survey includes questions to identify barriers to learning and motivations for learning. The survey also explores issues such as who participates and what they are learning, how learning is undertaken, whether learning leads to a qualification, benefits or changes from learning and investment in learning. In 2019, the survey was part-funded by the Department for Education.

Further information about the methodology and the definitions used in this report can be found in the Annex. To find out more about the survey series and explore trend data through our interactive charts, visit [www.learningandwork.org.uk](http://www.learningandwork.org.uk)

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<sup>2</sup> National Institute of Adult Continuing Education

<sup>3</sup> Surveys were undertaken annually from 1996 except in three years: 1997, 1998 and 2016.

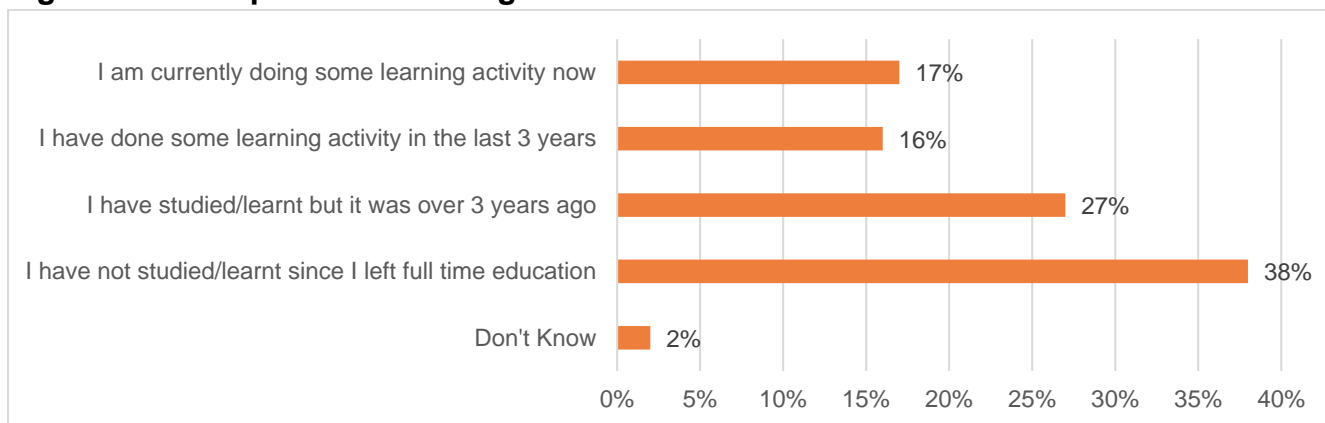


# Results and analysis

## Participation in learning

The 2019 survey shows that 17 per cent of adults are currently learning, with a further 16 per cent having done so in the previous three years (see Figure 1). While 38 per cent of adults have not learnt since leaving full-time education, 27 per cent have done so, but over three years ago.

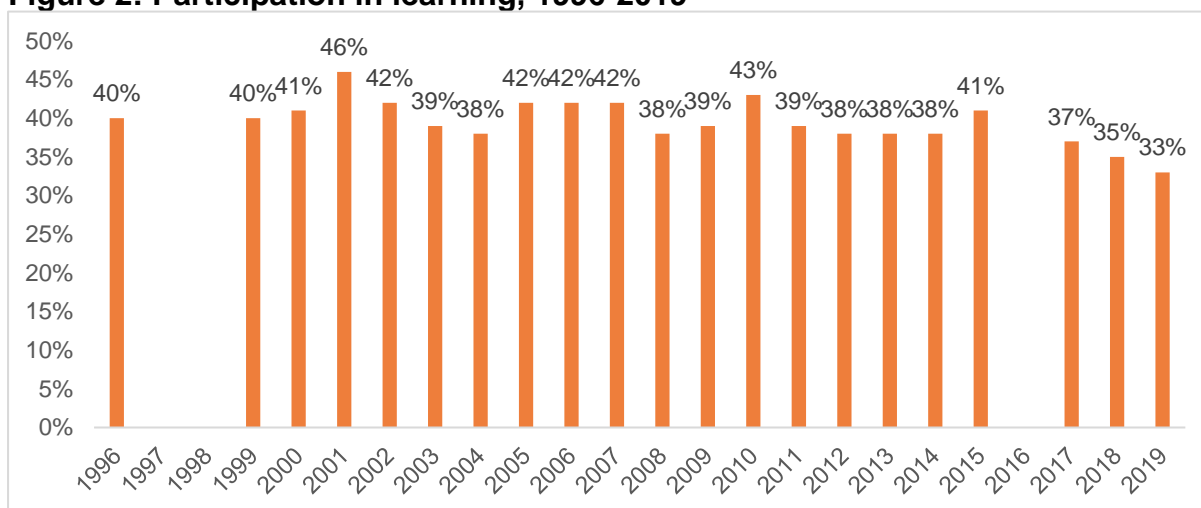
**Figure 1: Participation in learning**



Base: all respondents. Weighted base = 5011. Unweighted base = 5,314.

The 2019 survey has the lowest participation rate (current or recent learning) in the history of the survey series, at 33 per cent of adults (see Figure 2). This figure is two percentage points lower than that of the 2018 survey, which itself had the lowest participation rate to date. This is the third consecutive drop in participation recorded by the survey, with the current rate eight percentage points lower than the 41 per cent recorded in 2015.

**Figure 2: Participation in learning, 1996-2019**



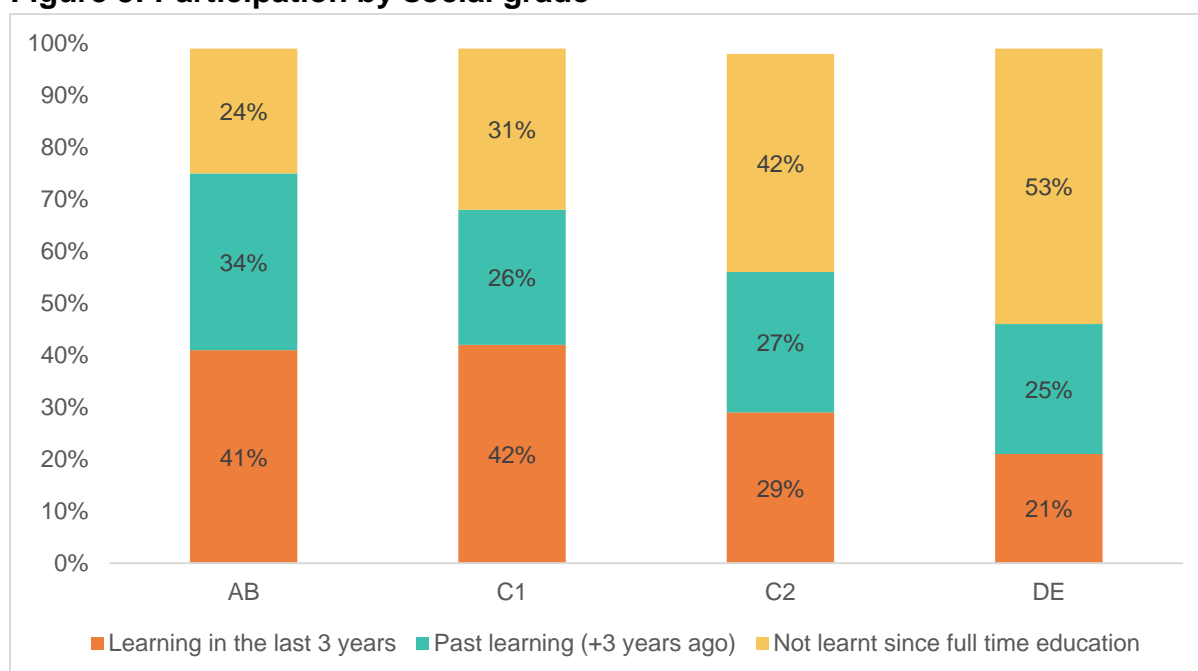
Base: all respondents to each survey. Weighted base for 2019 = 5011. Unweighted base for 2019 = 5,314.

## Demographic breakdowns

Men and women are equally likely to be current or recent learners. This is slightly different to previous surveys where small variations in gender have been found.

However, social grade<sup>4</sup> remains a key predictor of participation; respondents from higher social grades are more likely to be participating in learning than those from lower grades (see Figure 3). Just over two fifths of adults in the AB social grade (41 per cent) and in the C1 grade (42 per cent) are current or recent learners, compared with 29 per cent of adults in C2, and 21 per cent in DE. Although the difference in participation rates between the AB and C1 grades is small and not significant, both have significantly higher participation rates than the C2 and DE grades; the C2 grade also has a significantly higher rate than DE. In addition, more than twice as many adults in the DE grade have not participated in learning since leaving full-time education as those in AB, with respective figures of 53 per cent and 24 per cent. This gap has decreased by five percentage points since 2018, however this is mainly due to an increase in the proportion of people in the AB social grade who have not learnt since they left school.

**Figure 3: Participation by social grade**



Base: all respondents. Total weighted base = 5011, AB = 949, C1 = 1542, C2 = 1032, DE = 1488. Total unweighted base = 5244, AB = 851, C1 = 1350, C2 = 1103, DE = 1940.

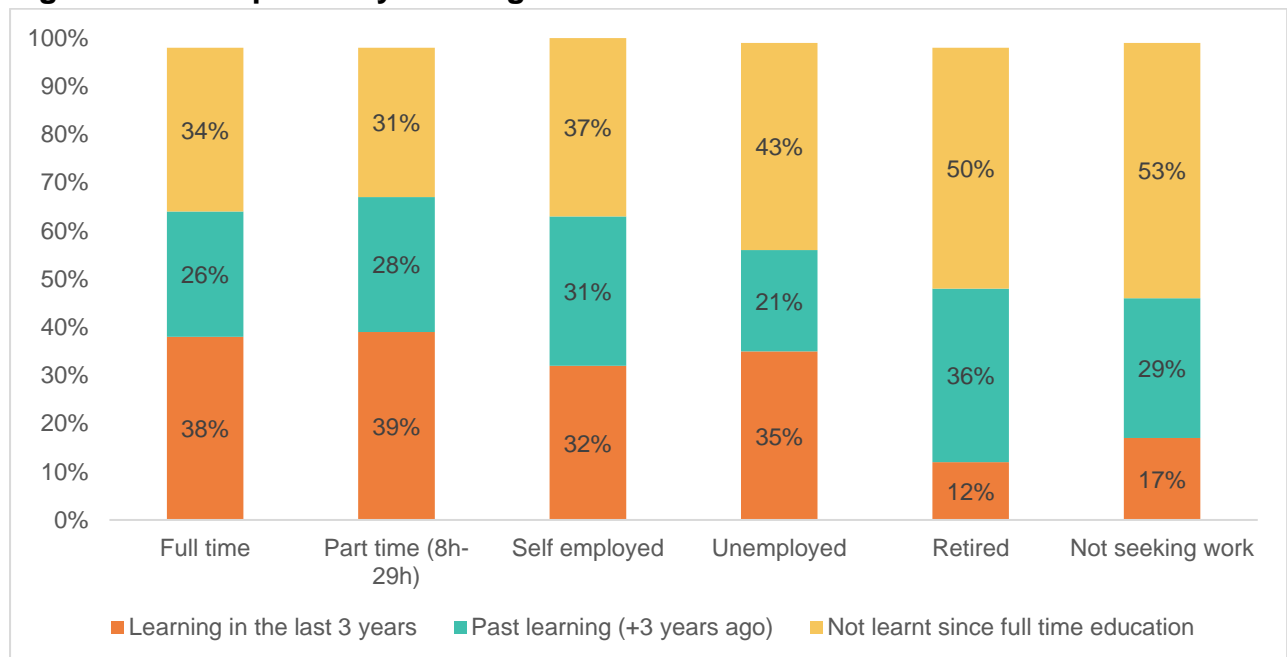
Working status is a key predictor of participation; closer proximity to the labour market is associated with higher participation rates (see Figure 4). Full and part-time

<sup>4</sup> 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 in the lowest grade occupations or who are unemployed.

workers are the most likely to be participating in learning, with respective figures of 38 and 39 per cent. Although part-time workers have slightly higher participation rates than full-time workers, this is not statistically significant. The participation rate drops significantly to 35 per cent of unemployed respondents, with a further significant drop to respondents who are out of work but not seeking it (17 per cent) or are retired (12 per cent).

Comparisons with 2018 show that participation has decreased across several categories of working status. The largest drop has been for retired adults, which decreased from 17 per cent in 2018 to 12 per cent in 2019. Small drops have also occurred for people working full time (38 per cent in 2018 compared to 40 per cent in 2019) and part time employees (39 per cent in 2019 compared with 41 per cent in 2018). There has been no change in the proportion of those who are not seeking work who have participated in learning. In contrast, learning amongst people who are unemployed and those who are self-employed has risen in comparison to 2018. The self-employed are slightly more likely to have undertaken learning in the last three years (32 per cent in 2019 compared with 31 per cent in 2018) and participation amongst the unemployed is substantially up by 6 percentage points (from 29 per cent in 2018 to 35 per cent in 2019).

**Figure 4: Participation by working status**



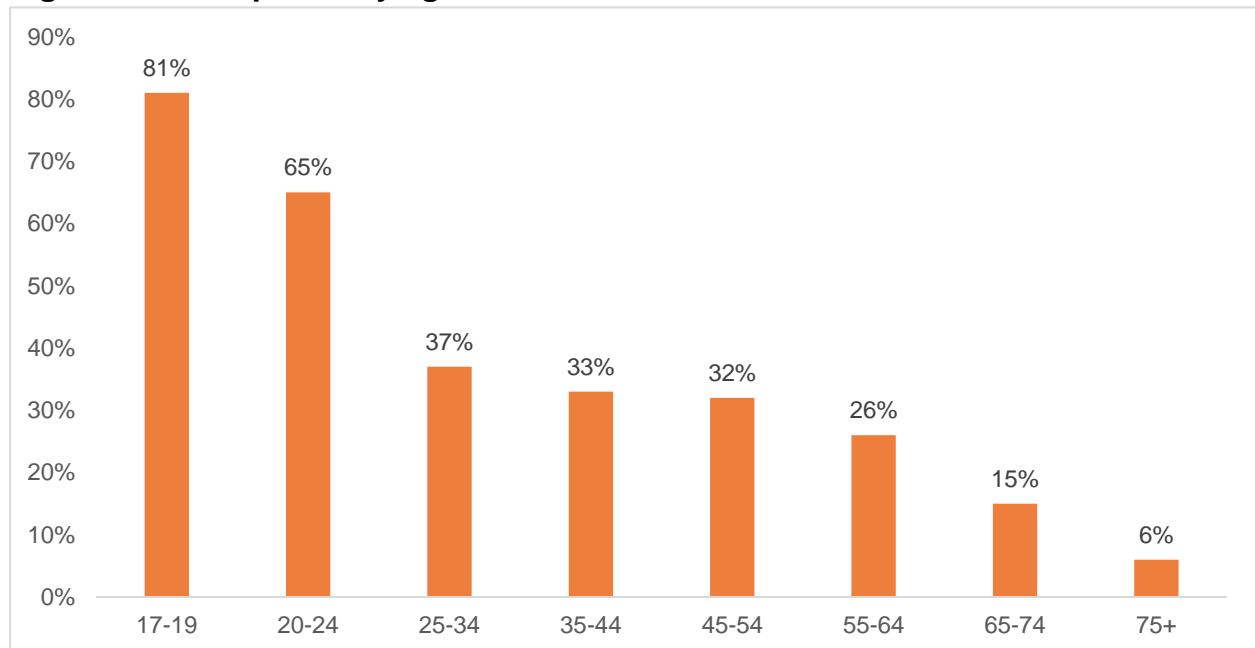
Base: all respondents excluding part time (under 8 hours)<sup>5</sup>, at school, in higher education and not seeking work. Total weighted base = 5,011, full time = 1,863, part time (8-29) = 589, self-employed = 173, retired = 1,135, unemployed = 266, not seeking work = 608. Total unweighted base = 5,244, full time = 1,538, part time (8-29) = 553, self-employed = 155, retired = 1,726, unemployed = 275, not seeking work = 648

<sup>5</sup> Due to small sample size

There is a strong effect of age on likelihood of participating in learning (see Figure 5). As in previous surveys, participation decreases with age. Seventeen to 19-year-olds are the most likely to participate in learning, with a rate of 81 per cent. As age increases the participation rate drops substantially, to 65 per cent of 20-24-year-olds and 37 per cent of 25-34-year-olds. The participation rate remains relatively stable between the ages of 25-34 and 45-54, before dropping with each subsequent increase in age. Adults aged 17-19 and 20-24 have significantly higher levels of participation than older age groups. Those aged between 25 and 54 are also significantly more likely than people over the age of 55 to have taken part in learning during the previous 3 years.

People between the ages of 20 and 35 are equally as likely to be participating in learning as they were in 2018. Learning amongst all other age groups has fallen. The largest drop has been for people aged 65 and over, down five percentage points since 2018.

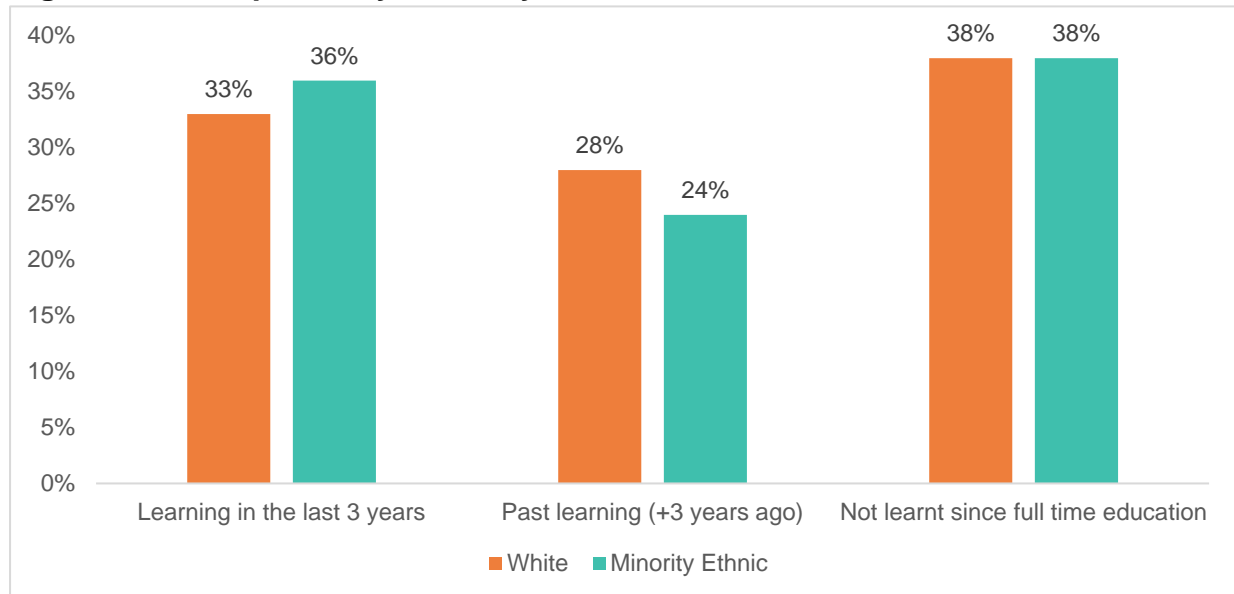
**Figure 5: Participation by age**



**Base: all respondents. Total weighted base = 5,011, 17-19 = 207, 20-24 = 476, 25-34 = 905, 35-44 = 865, 45-54 = 789, 55-64 = 801, 65-74 = 522, 75+ = 445. Total unweighted base = 5,244, 17-19 = 192, 20-24 = 450, 25-34 = 766, 35-44 = 730, 45-54 = 728, 55-64 = 759, 65-74 = 880, 75+ = 739.**

Although respondents from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds are more likely to be participating in learning than respondents from White backgrounds (36 per cent compared with 33 percent respectively), this difference is not significant. However, respondents from White backgrounds are significantly more likely to say that they have learnt since full-time education, but over three years ago (28 per cent compared to 24 per cent respectively). There is no difference in the proportion of the two groups who have not learnt since leaving full time education, with this figure standing at 38 per cent for everyone.

**Figure 6: Participation by Ethnicity**

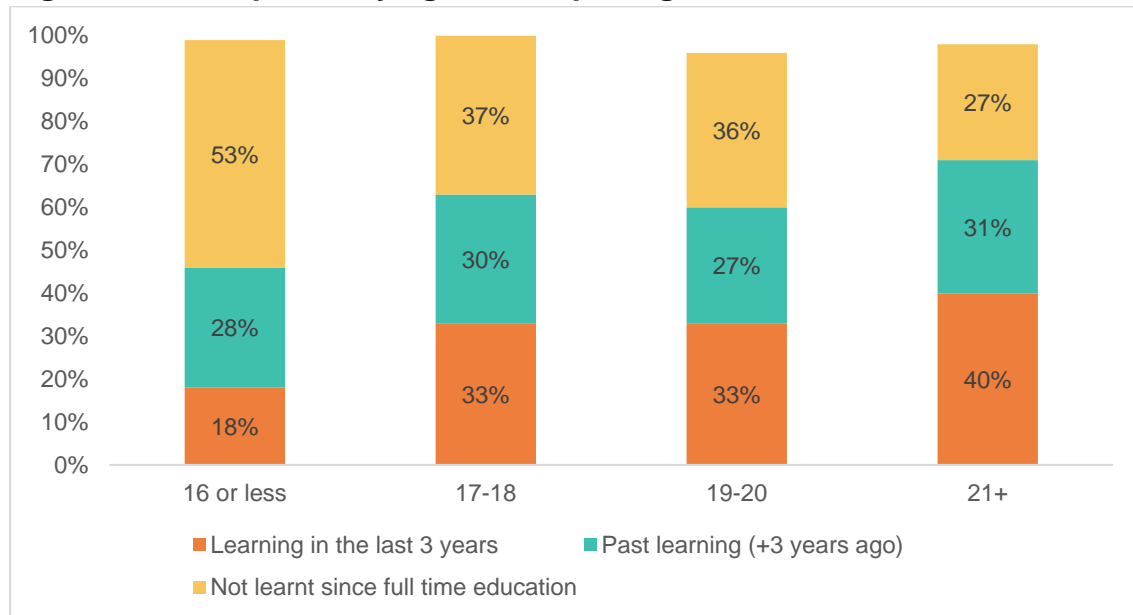


Base: all respondents. Total weighted base = 5011, White = 4261, Minority Ethnic = 707. Total unweighted base = 5244, White = 4527, Minority Ethnic = 673.

The age at which respondents completed full-time education is strongly associated with participation in learning. Fewer than one in five adults (18 per cent) who left education at 16 or under are participating in learning or have done so within the previous three years (see Figure 7). This figure increases substantially for those who stayed in education for a short while longer, with significantly higher figures of 33 per cent for both respondents who left education at the age of 17-18 and those who left aged 19-20. Respondents who stayed in education until at least the age of 21 are more than twice as likely to be learners than those who left aged 16 or under, with a participation rate of 40 per cent.

Compared with the 2018 survey, participation rates have dropped for respondents who left education at an older age. For people who left full time education aged 19 to 20, there has been a drop of three percentage points from 36 per cent in 2018 to 33 per cent in 2017; for people who left education aged 21 and above, there has been a decrease of five percentage points from 45 per cent in 2018 to 40 per cent in 2019.

**Figure 7: Participation by age of completing full-time education**

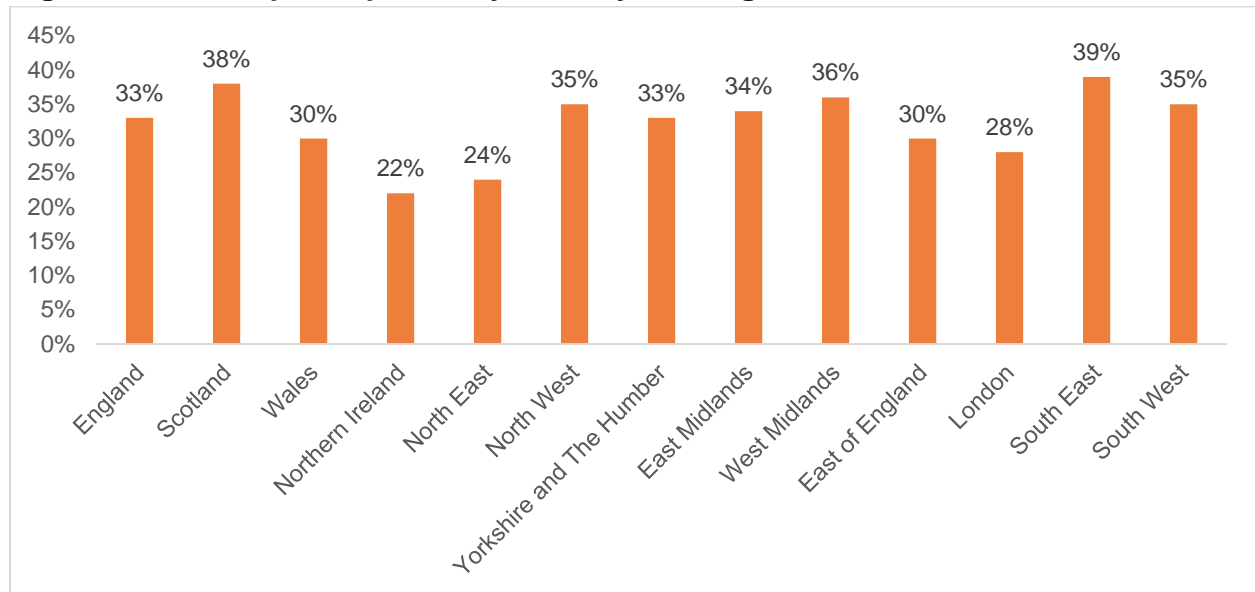


Base: all respondents. Total weighted base = 5,011, 16 or under = 1,949, 17-18 = 996, 19-20 = 401, 21+ = 1,295. Total unweighted base = 5,244, 16 or under = 2,354, 17-18 = 992, 19-20 = 392, 21+ = 1,159.

When comparing levels of participation in learning across the UK, the survey shows that 33 per cent of adults in England are either currently learning or have done so in the past three years, compared with 38 per cent of adults in Scotland, 30 per cent in Wales and 22 per cent in Northern Ireland (Figure 8). Participation levels in Scotland are significantly higher than other countries in the United Kingdom. These results differ considerably from the previous year, when recent participation levels stood at 40 per cent in Wales and 30 per cent in Northern Ireland.

By English region, the South East has the highest proportion of learners, at 39 per cent; an increase for the region of one percentage point since 2018. The North East has seen the largest decrease in participation rate since 2018, dropping 14 percentage points to 24 per cent and making it the region with the lowest proportion of learners in 2019. The gap between the best and worst performing regions has increased from 14 per cent in 2018 to 17 per cent in 2019, suggesting an exacerbation of regional differences in learning participation.

**Figure 6: Recent participation by country and region**



Base: all respondents. Total weighted base = 5,011. England = 4,150, Scotland = 444, Wales = 240, Northern Ireland = 176, North East = 201, North West = 564, Yorkshire and the Humber = 396, East Midlands = 370, West Midlands = 402, East of England = 505, London = 598, South East = 703, South West = 410. Total unweighted base = 5,244. England = 4,329, Scotland = 463, Wales = 267, Northern Ireland = 185, North East = 216, North West = 585, Yorkshire and the Humber = 415, East Midlands = 391, West Midlands = 441, East of England = 494, London = 614, South East = 731, South West = 442.

### **Regression analysis of participation in learning**

A regression analysis shows that when social grade, age, terminal age of education and working status are all taken into account, all four variables are significant predictors of participation in learning. Of the variables included in the analysis, social grade emerged as the most important predictor of current or recent participation in learning. In comparison with social grade AB, each subsequent grade is around a fifth less likely to be engaged in current learning, with DE between a half to two thirds less likely than those in AB to have recently done some learning.

Age is shown in the regression analysis to influence likelihood of current participation in learning. People between the ages of 25 and 64 are between two thirds and half as likely as young people aged 17 to 24 are to be currently learning. Older people aged over 65 are four fifths less likely to be learning than adults aged under 24.

Age of leaving full-time education is a significant factor in determining whether someone has done any recent learning. Compared with people who left full time education aged 21 or above, people who left education aged 17 to 20 are a quarter less likely to have recently done some learning; those who left education aged 16 and under are around half as likely.

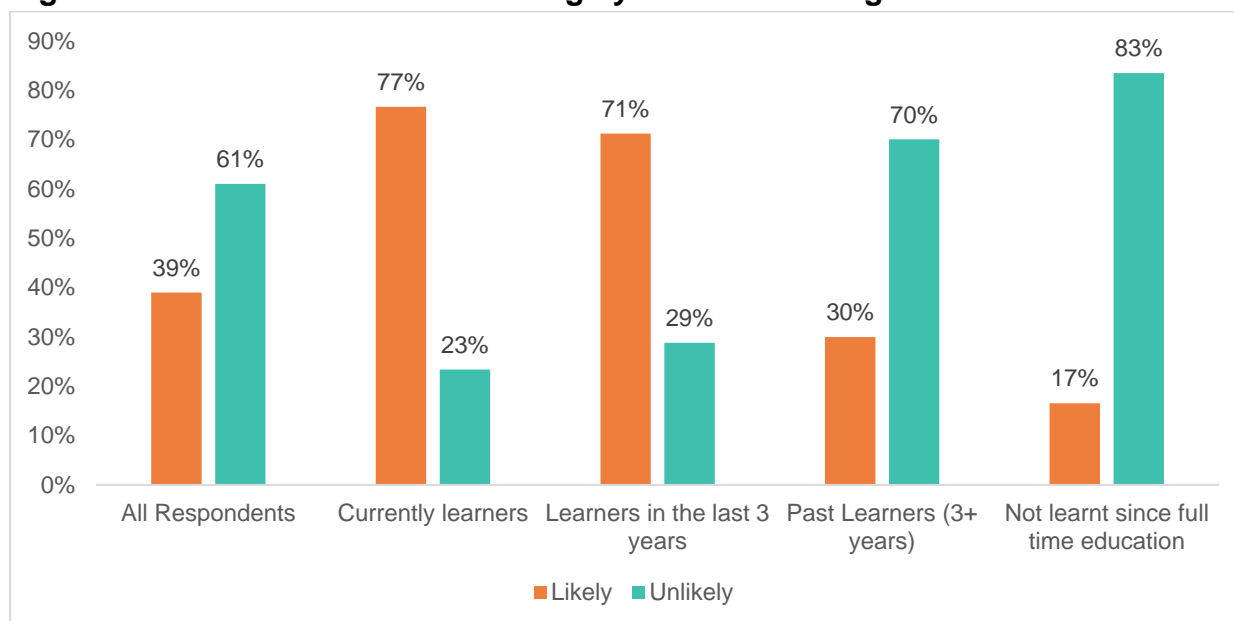
In terms of working status, only retirement seems to have a significant effect on current participation in learning, with retired people being around half as likely as people working full time to be in learning or to have learnt in the past three years.

## Future intentions to learn

As well as patterns and experiences of current/recent learning, the survey captures future intentions to learn and how these vary by demographics. All respondents were asked their likelihood of taking up learning in the next three years. Nearly two in five adults (39 per cent) say that they are either fairly or very likely to, while 61 per cent say they would be fairly or very unlikely to take up learning within the next three years. These proportions are very similar to those found in 2018; this illustrates that although participation in learning is declining, intentions to learn in the future have remained stable.

As in previous years, the 2019 survey suggests that current or recent participation in learning is a key indicator of future intentions to learn. Over three quarters of learners (77 per cent) say that they are likely to take up learning again in the next three years, compared with just 17 per cent of adults who have done no learning since leaving full-time education (see Figure 10). The more time since adults have participated in learning, the less likely they are to consider doing so in the future; emphasising the importance of encouraging adults to try out learning and providing support for them to continue to do so throughout their lives.

**Figure 7: Future likelihood of learning by current learning status**



Base: all respondents who gave a likelihood of future learning. Weighted base = 4,920. Current learners = 841, learners in last 3 years = 785, past learners (3+ years) = 1,344, not since leaving full-time education = 1,893. Unweighted base = 5,155. Current learners = 778, learners in last 3 years = 703, past learners (3+ years) = 1,461, not since leaving full-time education = 2,152.

## Regression analysis of future participation in learning

A regression analysis shows that when social grade, age, terminal age of education and working status are all taken into account, social grade and age are both significant predictors of future intention to participate in learning. As with current participation in learning, social grade emerged as the most important predictor future participation in learning. In comparison with the AB grade, people in C1 are a third



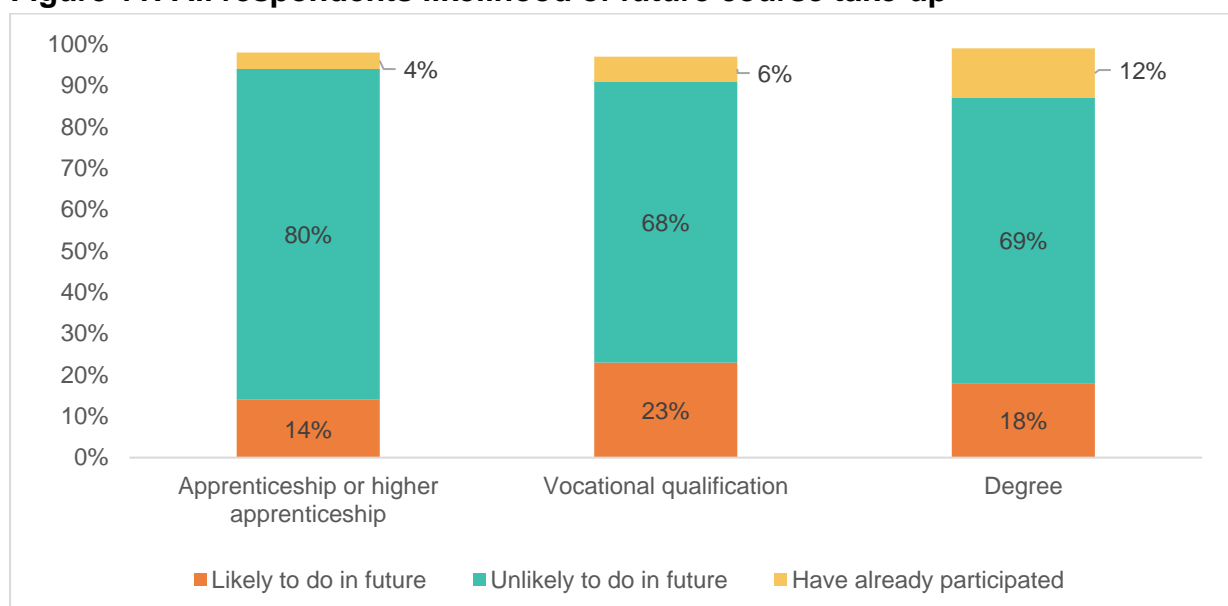
less likely to believe that they will do learning in future, people in C2 are half as likely and DE are three fifths less likely.

A similar pattern occurs for age; the older individuals are the less likely they are to think that they will take up future learning. Those aged between 35 and 44 are a third less likely say they will future learning than younger people aged 17 to 24. This pattern continues with people aged over 65 being fourth fifths as likely to plan on doing any learning in future as people aged under 24.

### Likelihood of participating in formal learning courses

The survey also asked respondents their likelihood of participating in formal learning courses; specifically, an apprenticeship or higher apprenticeship, a vocational qualification, or a degree. Nearly a quarter of respondents (23 per cent) consider themselves likely to do a vocational qualification in the future. Eighteen per cent of people said that they are likely to take up a degree programme and 14 per cent are likely to do an apprenticeship or higher apprenticeship. However, four in five people (80 per cent) consider themselves unlikely to do an apprenticeship. Sixty-eight per cent of respondents indicate that they are unlikely to do a vocational qualification and 69 per cent said they are unlikely to do a degree (although 12 per cent had already undertaken a degree qualification).

**Figure 11: All respondents likelihood of future course take-up**



Base: all respondents. Weighted base = 5011, unweighted base = 5244.

Several demographic groups are more likely to consider doing further formal qualifications in future.

**Younger adults** are substantially and significantly more likely to say they may do a formal learning course in future. For apprenticeships the likelihood decreases with each age group from 47 per cent of those aged 17-19 and 32 per cent of 20-24 year olds, to seven per cent of 45-54 year olds and five per cent of over 55s. Nearly two

thirds (63 per cent) of respondents aged 17-19 reported that they are likely to pursue a degree. However, vocational qualifications hold the greatest appeal across different age groups, with interest in doing one remaining above a fifth (23 per cent) of respondents in the 45-54 age group.

**People from BAME backgrounds** are significantly more likely to say that they will do formal qualifications at all levels. More than a quarter (26 per cent) of BAME respondents reported that they are likely to do an apprenticeship or higher apprenticeship, compared to 12 per cent of White respondents. Respondents from BAME backgrounds are also 9 percentage points more likely to say they may do a vocational qualification (31 per cent of BAME respondents compared to 22 per cent of White respondents), and 17 percentage points more likely to say they are likely to do a degree in future, with a third (33 per cent) saying they may do so.

Respondents who were significantly more likely to report they will do an apprenticeship or higher apprenticeship in future are (Table 1):

**Adults in the DE social grade.** Sixteen per cent of respondents in this social grade said they are likely to do an apprenticeship in future, compared to 11 per cent of adults in the AB grade and 13 per cent of adults in C2.

**Respondents who are unemployed and seeking work.** Nearly a third (31 per cent) of adults who are unemployed and seeking work said they are likely to do an apprenticeship, compared to 19 per cent of part-time workers under 8 hours a week.

**Table 1 Likelihood of doing an apprenticeship or higher apprenticeship in future**

Demographic Group		Likely	Unlikely
TOTAL		14%	80%
Gender	Male	14%	78%
	Female	14%	82%
Age*	17-19	47%	48%
	20-24	32%	60%
	25-34	21%	73%
	35-44	17%	78%
	45-54	7%	89%
	55-64	5%	89%
	65-74	3%	92%
Social Grade*	75+	2%	93%
	AB	11%	84%
	C1	14%	80%
	C2	13%	81%
	DE	16%	78%
Ethnicity*	White	12%	82%
	Minority Ethnic	26%	69%
Working Status*	Full-time (30+ hrs)	13%	81%
	Part-time (8-29 hrs)	18%	76%
	Part-time (under 8 hrs)	19%	75%
	Self-employed	9%	85%
	Retired	2%	92%
	Unemployed (seeking work)	31%	65%
	Not in paid employment (not seeking work)	14%	78%
Participation in learning*	Learning in last 3 years	24%	70%
	No learning in last 3 years	9%	86%
Terminal Age of Education*	16 or less	8%	86%
	17-18	13%	81%
	19-20	21%	73%
	21+	15%	81%
Weighted Base		699	4029

Different patterns emerge when respondents are asked about their likelihood of doing a vocational qualification in future (Table 2):

**Unemployed respondents** are more likely than respondents with all other types of working status to say that they might do a vocational qualification in future, with a figure of 38 per cent.

**Respondents who continued in education beyond age 16.** People who left education aged 16 or below are significantly less likely to think they will pursue a vocational qualification than other respondents, with only 15 per cent responding that they are likely to.

**Women** are more likely to say they may do a vocational qualification in the future than men (respectively 25 per cent and 21 per cent).

**Table 2 Likelihood of doing a vocational qualification in future**

Demographic Group		Likely	Unlikely
TOTAL		23%	68%
Gender	Male	21%	70%
	Female	25%	67%
Age*	17-19	45%	44%
	20-24	40%	49%
	25-34	32%	58%
	35-44	31%	61%
	45-54	23%	70%
	55-64	13%	78%
	65-74	6%	87%
Social Grade*	75+	2%	93%
	AB	25%	65%
	C1	26%	65%
	C2	21%	72%
	DE	20%	72%
Ethnicity*	White	22%	70%
	Minority Ethnic	31%	61%
Working Status*	Full-time (30+ hrs)	27%	64%
	Part-time (8-29 hrs)	30%	62%
	Part-time (under 8 hrs)	30%	51%
	Self-employed	20%	73%
	Retired	4%	89%
	Unemployed (seeking work)	38%	54%
	Not in paid employment (not seeking work)	22%	69%
Participation in learning*	Learning in last 3 years	39%	49%
	No learning in last 3 years	15%	78%
Terminal Age of Education*	16 or less	15%	79%
	17-18	26%	65%
	19-20	29%	65%
	21+	27%	63%
Weighted Base		1161	3427

Lastly, respondents were asked about their likelihood of taking up a degree in future. (Table 3).

**Respondents from social grade C1** are significantly more likely than respondents from C2, AB or DE to consider themselves likely to do a degree in future (with respective figures of 24, 17, 15 and 15 per cent respectively).

**Table 3 Likelihood of doing a degree in future**

Demographic Group		Likely	Unlikely
TOTAL		18%	69%
Gender	Male	17%	70%
	Female	19%	67%
Age*	17-19	63%	28%
	20-24	43%	39%
	25-34	27%	57%
	35-44	21%	64%
	45-54	10%	73%
	55-64	5%	83%
	65-74	2%	90%
	75+	2%	93%
Social Grade*	AB	15%	57%
	C1	24%	61%
	C2	17%	77%
	DE	15%	78%
Ethnicity*	White	16%	72%
	Minority Ethnic	33%	52%
Working Status*	Full-time (30+ hrs)	19%	64%
	Part-time (8-29 hrs)	21%	66%
	Part-time (under 8 hrs)	32%	53%
	Self-employed	8%	70%
	Retired	3%	90%
	Unemployed (seeking work)	24%	68%
	Not in paid employment (not seeking work)	16%	75%
Participation in learning*	Learning in last 3 years	33%	45%
	No learning in last 3 years	11%	80%
Terminal Age of Education*	16 or less	8%	89%
	17-18	17%	76%
	19-20	23%	70%
	21+	19%	48%
Weighted Base		902	3440

### Motivations to learn

Each year, those who have engaged with learning within the previous three years are asked to state whether they started their main learning for 'work or career related reasons', or whether they have taken up learning for 'leisure or personal interest'.

Four fifths (80 per cent) of learners have taken up their *main* learning for work or

career related reasons, and just one fifth (20 per cent) for leisure or personal interest. Some groups of adults are more likely to learn for work or career related reasons than others (see Table 4), including:

- **Adults of working age**, with those aged 54 and under significantly more likely to do so than learners over the age of 55.
- **Adults in the C1 social grade**, who are the most likely to learn for work and/or career reasons (83 per cent) and are significantly more likely to do so than individuals in the DE grade (76 per cent).
- **Respondents from BAME backgrounds**, who are slightly more likely to learn for work and/or career reasons (81 per cent) than respondents from White backgrounds (80 per cent) but not significantly so.

In contrast, adults who are more likely to be motivated to learn by leisure or personal interest are more likely to be:

- **Older respondents**, with more than eight out of 10 (81 per cent) learners aged 75 or above and 69 per cent of those aged 65-74 identifying this as their reason for learning. This drops significantly to 16 per cent of 45-54-year-olds.
- **Retired adults**, with almost three quarters (73 per cent) learning for leisure or personal interest compared to just 9 per cent of full-time workers and 18 per cent of part-time workers (8-29 hours).

**Table 4: Reason for taking up main learning**

Demographic Group		For leisure or personal interest	For my work and/or career
Total		20%	80%
Gender	Male	19%	80%
	Female	20%	80%
Age*	17-19	14%	85%
	20-24	14%	85%
	25-34	13%	86%
	35-44	12%	88%
	45-54	16%	84%
	55-64	30%	70%
	65-74	69%	30%
	75+	81%	15%
Social Grade*	AB	22%	78%
	C1	17%	83%
	C2	18%	82%
	DE	23%	76%
Ethnicity	White	20%	80%
	Minority Ethnic	17%	81%
Terminal Age of education	Under 16	23%	76%
	17-18	21%	79%
	19-20	15%	85%
	21+	21%	79%
Working status*	Full-time (30+ hrs)	9%	91%
	Part-time (8-29 hrs)	18%	82%
	Part-time (under 8 hrs)	44%	56%
	Self-employed	23%	77%
	Retired	73%	26%
Weighted base		324	1326

The survey asked adults who have learnt for work or career related reasons how they think it might help their work or career prospects. By far the most common response is that it will help them to 'develop or improve in their current role', cited by three fifths (60 per cent) of learners (see Table 5). An additional eight per cent state that it will help them to 'gain a promotion in their current line of work'. Thirteen per cent of those learning for work related reasons indicated that they are learning to retrain into a substantially different type of job.

**Table 5: Perceived work/career related benefits of learning**

How learning might help my work and/or career	Percentage
To develop or improve in my current job or role/the job or role I had at the time	60%
To retrain into a substantially different type of job	13%
To get a promotion in my current line of work	8%
To get a similar role in your current line of work	7%
To get a job	3%
To gain a qualification	2%
Education/University	1%
For my career	1%
To get a better job	1%

Base: all respondents who have recently or are currently learning for work and/or career related reasons. Weighted base = 1326; unweighted base = 1156.

All learners were asked to identify their broader motivations for starting their *main* learning. Just over a quarter (27 per cent) say that they are motivated to learn to develop themselves as a person (27 per cent). Similar proportions are motivated to learn to achieve a recognised qualification (25 per cent), to help them improve in their job (24 per cent), or by an interest in the subject (23 per cent) (see Table 6). One fifth (19 per cent) simply state that they learn because they enjoy it. These findings are much the same as in 2018. The continued prevalence of non-career related motivations highlights the importance of ensuring a broad range of learning opportunities are available. Both work-related and non work-related opportunities are vital to encourage adults to engage with learning.



**Table 6: Motivations to learn**

Motivation	Percentage
To develop myself as a person	27%
To get a recognised qualification	25%
To help me do my current job better/improve job skills	24%
I am interested in the subject/personal interest/gain knowledge of the subject	23%
I enjoy learning\it gives me pleasure	19%
To get a new or different job	15%
To improve my self-confidence	15%
To get a promotion or better pay	12%
To give me greater job security	12%
To make my work more satisfying	12%
Not really my choice - employer requirement	10%
Not really my choice - professional requirement	9%
To help me get onto a future course of learning	8%
To meet people	8%
To keep active\pass the time	7%
In order to set up a business	4%
Don't know	4%
To support my children's schooling	3%
To help me increase my working hours	2%
To improve my health/help with a disability	2%
To enable me to volunteer	2%
Not really my choice - benefit requirement	1%
Not really my choice - education requirement	0%
Other	0%

Base: all current or recent learners. Weighted base = 1659; unweighted base = 1515.

To compare with the results from the 2018 survey, motivations were grouped into five categories:

- **Work-related**, including: To get a new or different job; To help me do my current job better\improve job skills; In order to set up a business; To help me increase my working hours; To get a promotion or better pay; To give me greater job security; To make my work more satisfying
- **Learning and knowledge**, including: To get a recognised qualification; To help me get onto a future course of learning; I enjoy learning\it gives me pleasure; I am interested in the subject\personal interest\gain knowledge of the subject; To support my children's schooling
- **Health and wellbeing**, including: To develop myself as a person; To improve my self-confidence; To keep active\pass the time; To improve my health\help with a disability

- **Social and community**, including: To meet people; To enable me to volunteer
- **Requirements**, including: Not really my choice - employer requirement; Not really my choice -- professional requirement; Not really my choice - benefit requirement

The majority of respondents indicate that they are motivated by reasons related to learning and knowledge (78 per cent) and work-related reasons (81 per cent) (see Table 7). These are followed by health and wellbeing (51 per cent), requirements (20 per cent) and social and community (10 per cent)<sup>6</sup>.

A comparison with 2018<sup>7</sup> shows that the most frequently cited motivations remain respondents' top reasons for taking up learning (see Table 7). This indicates a strong level of consistency in learners' motivations for learning.

**Table 7: Grouped motivations for learning, 2018 and 2019**

Group	Percentage 2018	Percentage 2019
Learning and knowledge	53%	78%
Work-related	52%	81%
Health and wellbeing	36%	51%
Requirement	16%	20%
Social and community	9%	10%

Base: all learners who cited a motivation. Weighted base 2018 = 1,747; unweighted base 2018 = 1,702. Weighted base 2019 = 1,659; unweighted base 2019 = 1,515.

### Locations, methods and characteristics of learning

Learners were asked where they did or are doing their *main* learning, which provides insights on where adults are most likely to access learning. Learners are most likely to say that they are learning through a university or higher education institution (26 per cent) or on a training course at work (21 per cent). Learners also commonly cite independent learning (16 per cent), learning on the job (14 per cent), learning online (13 per cent) or through a further education or sixth form college (12 per cent).

Where and how adults learn has remained largely the same as the 2018 survey, with one key difference. In 2019, the most common place to learn was through a university or higher education institute, at 26 per cent, which is a 10 percentage point increase on 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Since groups were developed post-hoc, differences may be partly or wholly due to unequal representation or coverage of groups amongst answer options.

<sup>7</sup> There were some small changes in the answer options included in 2017 and 2018, but these were minor.

**Table 8: Location of Learning<sup>8</sup>**

Location	Percentage
Through a university/higher education/Open University	26%
On a training course at work	21%
Independently on my own	16%
On the job	14%
Online including through an app e.g. websites, forums, YouTube	13%
Through a further education college/tertiary/6th form college	12%
On an external training course arranged by my employer	8%
Independently with others	7%
Through a local adult education centre/evening institute/Workers Education Association class	3%
On an apprenticeship or higher apprenticeship	2%
Through a local school	2%
Through a voluntary organisation	2%
Through local community facilities e.g. library, museum, place of worship, bookshop, etc.	2%
Through a leisure or health club	1%
Other	1%

Base: Current or recent learners. Weighted base = 1659; unweighted base = 1,515.

To compare with the results from 2018, responses about the location of learning were split into four categories:

- **Work-related**, including: On the job; On a training course at work; On an external training course arranged by my employer; On an apprenticeship or higher apprenticeship
- **Independently**, including: Online including through an app e.g. websites, forums, YouTube; Independently on my own; Independently with others
- **Formal educational establishment**, including: Through a university\higher education institution\Open University; Through a further education college\tertiary\6th form college; Through a local adult education centre\evening institute\Workers' Educational Association class; Through a local school
- **Community or voluntary organisation**, including: Through a voluntary organisation; Through local community facilities e.g. library, museum, place of worship, bookshop etc.; Through a leisure or health club

Over two fifths (45 per cent) of learners are participating in work-related learning (see Table 9). This is followed by learning through a formal educational

<sup>8</sup> Respondents could give more than one answer

establishment (43 per cent) and independent learning (36 per cent). The least common category is community or voluntary learning (5 per cent)<sup>9</sup>. These results have some similarities to the 2018 survey, however, participation in formal learning environments has increased in 2019.

**Table 9: Grouped locations of learning, 2018 and 2019**

Group	Percentage 2018	Percentage 2019
Work-related	43%	45%
Independently	36%	36%
Formal educational establishment	29%	43%
Community or voluntary	8%	5%

Base: all respondents who cited a factor or stated 'none'. Weighted base 2018 = 1,747; unweighted base 2018 = 1,702. Weighted base 2019 = 1,659; unweighted base 2019 = 1,515.

### Online learning

Learners were specifically asked if they have participated in any online learning (see Table 10). Just under half (47 per cent) of learners have done so, with the most common type being independent online learning with no extra support (19 per cent), followed by a mixture of online learning and in person tuition (15 per cent). Ten per cent of learners have also accessed online learning with other types of support.

**Table 10: Take up of online learning<sup>10</sup>**

Type of learning	Percentage
Independent online learning with no extra support	19%
A mixture of online learning and in person tuition	15%
Online learning with access to tutor support	10%
Online learning with other types of support e.g. peer forum/chatroom, access to learning materials online	9%
Online learning (no further detail)	0%
School/university (no further detail)	0%
I have not taken part in any courses involving online learning	53%

Base: all respondents who have recently completed or are currently learning. Weighted base = 1,659; unweighted base = 1,515.

The survey results suggest that some groups of adults are more likely to learn online. Learners in the AB social grade are the most likely to learn online (57 per cent), followed by those in C2 (48 per cent) and C1 (44 per cent). Learners in the DE social grade are the least likely to participate in online learning (36 per cent) and are significantly less likely than other social groups to do so.

Likelihood of participating in online learning peaks in the 55-64 age group (57 per cent). The lowest proportion participating in online learning are the 75 plus age group

<sup>9</sup> Since groups were developed post-hoc, differences may be partly or wholly due to unequal representation or coverage of groups amongst answer options.

<sup>10</sup> Respondents could give more than one answer

(22 per cent), followed by 17-19 (24 per cent), 20-24 (34 per cent) and 65-74 (50 per cent).

Adults who left full-time education aged 19+ are the most likely to learn online, at 56 per cent. This is followed by individuals who left education at 17 to 18 (52 per cent), and those who left at 16 or under are the least likely to participate in online learning (47 per cent). The proportion of women who are participating in online learning (48 per cent) is slightly higher than for men (45 per cent).

Three fifths (60 per cent) of learners who received tutor support received this via email (see Table 11). Almost a third received support via a forum or chatroom (31 per cent), 23 per cent received this over the phone, 22 per cent received video conferencing support, and 20 per cent received it via webchat. Only seven per cent of online learners received face-to-face support from a tutor.

**Table 11: Mode of tutor support for online learners<sup>11</sup>**

Mode	Percentage
Email	60%
Forum/chatroom	31%
Telephone	23%
Video conferencing	22%
Webchat	20%
Face to face/in person	7%
Don't know	2%
Other	1%

Base: all respondents who received tutor support for online learning. Weighted base = 172; unweighted base = 157.

The most commonly reported benefit of online learning is being able to fit learning around the learner's lifestyle (51 per cent) (see Table 12). Other commonly cited benefits include being able to use online learning materials (32 per cent), being able to access an online learning platform or website (28 per cent) and being able to learn on a mobile or tablet (25 per cent).

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<sup>11</sup> Respondents could give more than one answer

**Table 12: Benefits of online learning<sup>12</sup>**

<b>Benefit</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Being able to fit the learning around my lifestyle	51%
Using online materials as part of my learning	32%
Using an online learning platform/website as part of my learning	28%
Being able to learn on my mobile or tablet	25%
Being able to access tutor support remotely	16%
Being able to collaborate with other learners online	12%
None of the above	11%
Being able to webchat/live chat with tutors	8%
Using video-conferencing as part of my learning	8%
Access to a student forum	7%
Being able to webchat/live chat with other learners	7%
Flexible/personal to me/individual	1%
Other	1%

Base: all respondents who have participated in an online learning course. Weighted base = 739; unweighted base = 659.

Over half of online learners (53 per cent) stated that they have not experienced any difficulties learning online (see Table 13). The most common difficulty relates to motivation for learning independently without class time (10 per cent), followed by technical problems (8 per cent), feeling isolated (7 per cent), delays in teacher feedback (5 per cent), lack of technical support (5 per cent) and a bad internet connection (5 per cent).

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<sup>12</sup> Respondents could give more than one answer

**Table 13: Difficulties encountered in learning online<sup>13</sup>**

Factor making online learning difficult	Percentage
I find/found it difficult to be motivated to do the learning independently without class time	10%
There are/were technical problems with online learning	8%
I feel/have felt isolated when learning online	7%
There is/has been a delay in teacher feedback	5%
There is/was a lack of technical support	5%
The experience is/was affected by a bad internet connection	5%
There is/has been a lack of support from the teacher	4%
I am not/was not able to build relationships with other classmates due to the remote nature of the course	4%
The quality of the online materials (videos, lecture slides, etc.) is/was poor	4%
The platform/website is/was difficult to use	4%
My IT skills aren't/weren't good enough to get the best out of the course	4%
Tasks, resources or materials don't/didn't work well on my mobile	3%
There is/was a lack of or no access to other resources (e.g. such as through a library)	3%
Finding the time to do it	2%
Health issues	2%
The student forum is/was not helpful	1%
The student forum is/was affected by complaints of other learners	1%
Found the course academically difficult	0%
Nothing is making/made it difficult	53%
Don't know	3%
Other	1%

Base: all respondents who have participated in an online learning course. Weighted base = 739; unweighted base = 659.

### Qualifications

The majority of all respondents who are currently learning or have done so in the previous three years stated that their main learning led or is leading towards a qualification (63 per cent). Seventy-two per cent of respondents who studied Maths, 71 per cent who studied English and 75 per cent of those who have done other academic subjects were studying towards a qualification (Figure 12). The least likely group to study towards a qualification are those studying an informal or leisure related subject (27 per cent).

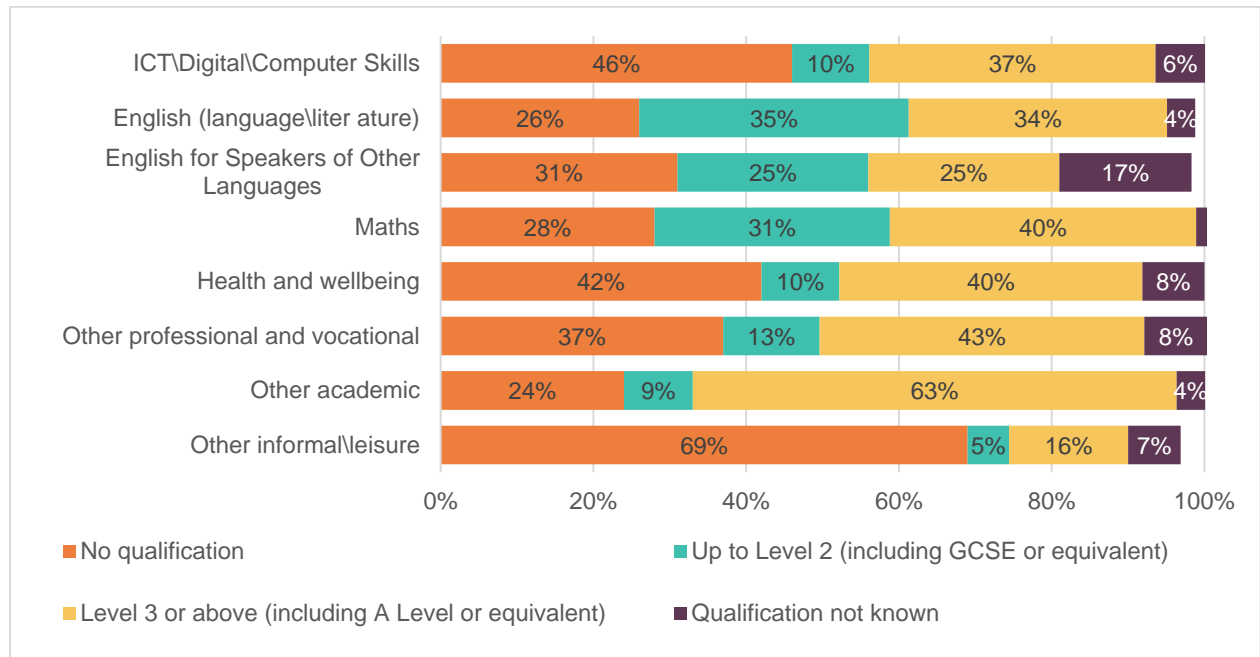
Just over a third (35 per cent) of current or recent learners who are studying or studied English were working towards a level 2 qualification, as were 31 per cent of respondents who studied maths. In comparison with 'other academic subjects' where three quarters of people study for a qualification, only nine per cent study at level 2. Between one third and two thirds of those who studied maths, health & wellbeing,

<sup>13</sup> Respondents could give more than one answer



other professional and vocational subjects, and other academic subjects were studying at level 3. This is the most popular level to study at according to the survey, for all subjects except English where the number of people studying towards level 2 is slightly higher (35 percent at level 2 and 34 per cent at level 3).

**Figure 12: Proportion of respondent studying for qualifications by subject studied.**



Base: all respondents who are learning or have learnt about one of the subjects. Weighted base = 1,659; unweighted base = 1,515.

### Investment in learning

Since 2011, there have been a range of changes to the funding of adult education provision. Whilst entitlements to fully-funded or co-funded provision remain for some learners, dependent on age, course subject and prior attainment, others are required to pay the full course fee. The introduction of advanced learner loans in 2013/14 enabled individuals studying level 3 or above to borrow for the cost of the course and to pay back only once their income had exceeded an earnings threshold.

In the context of these changes, a question has been included in the survey to investigate adults' investment in their learning<sup>14</sup>. This question was also asked in the 2018 survey.

The 2019 survey shows that, for 23 per cent of adult learners, no fee is attached to their *main* learning (see Table 12). Twenty-five per cent of learners indicate that their employer paid for some or all of their learning; 23 per cent paid the fee directly. Twelve per cent have taken out a formal learning loan to pay for their learning; the

<sup>14</sup> Respondents could give more than one answer



same figure as last year. Nine per cent of learners stated that they receive other government funding.

Table 14 compares these figures with those from the 2018 survey. The results are broadly similar, indicating that funding sources have remained consistent. However, employer funding has decreased slightly and the take up of free courses has increased.

**Table 14: Method of funding current or most recent learning, 2018 and 2019**

Method of funding	2018	2019
My employer paid	28%	25%
I paid the fee directly	24%	23%
I paid the fee by taking out a formal learning loan e.g. Student Loan, Advanced Learner Loan, Career Development Loan	12%	12%
Other government funding	8%	9%
It was internal training provided by my employer	6%	7%
The fee was paid by a friend or family member as a gift	2%	2%
Help from my institution e.g. access funds, grants, bursaries etc.	2%	3%
I paid the fee by taking out a non-learning specific loan e.g. loan from a bank or building society, loan from a friend or family member	1%	1%
Charitable trust or other non-government organisation	1%	1%
There was no fee to be paid	19%	23%

Base: all respondents who have recently completed or are currently learning. Weighted base 2018 = 1,746; unweighted base 2018 = 1,702. Weighted base 2019 = 1,659; unweighted base 2019 = 1,515.

## Barriers to learning

Each year, respondents are asked to identify the barriers to learning that they have experienced. Adults who are currently, or have recent experience of, learning are asked to state the factors that made their learning difficult; adults who have not participated in learning for at least three years are asked to identify the factors that prevent them from doing so. Together, these provide insights on the types of obstacles that policy and practice can seek to remove to ensure that more and different adults are able to engage in learning throughout their lives.

### Adults who have not participated in learning within the last three years

The most commonly cited barrier to learning for adults who have not taken part in learning for at least three years is a lack of interest (18 per cent) (see Table 13). This is followed by work or other time pressures (15 per cent) and feeling too old (14 per cent). More than a quarter of adults who have not learnt recently (28 per cent) say that nothing is preventing them from taking part in learning in the next three years. This points to the importance of not only removing barriers to learning, but actively promoting the benefits of learning and encouraging participation.

**Table 15: Barriers to learning<sup>15</sup>**

Barrier	Percentage
Not interested\don't want to	18%
Work\other time pressures	15%
I feel I am too old	14%
Childcare arrangements or other caring responsibilities	11%
I feel no need to learn anymore	10%
Cost\money\can't afford it	8%
An illness or disability	7%
I haven't got round to doing it	4%
I don't feel confident enough	3%
Transport\too far to travel	1%
I don't know what is available or how to find out what is	1%
I am put off by tests and exams	1%
I have difficulties with reading, writing or numbers	1%
No suitable courses are available	1%
Language barrier	0%
Prefer to work/enjoy job	0%
Nothing is preventing me	28%

Base: respondents who had not learnt in the previous three years or since full-time education.

Weighted base = 3286; unweighted base = 3,660.

To enable comparisons and to compare with the results from the 2018 survey, responses were split into four categories:

- **Situational** - arising from an adult's personal and family situation, including: Cost\money\can't afford it; Childcare arrangements or other caring responsibilities; Transport\too far to travel; Work\other time pressures
- **Dispositional** - relating to the attitudes, perceptions and expectations of adults, including: I don't know what is available or how to find out what is; I feel I am too old; An illness or disability; I haven't got round to doing it; I feel no need to learn anymore; I am put off by tests and exams; I have difficulties with reading, writing or numbers; I don't feel confident enough; Not interested\don't want to
- **Institutional** - arising from the unresponsiveness of educational institutions, including: No suitable courses are available
- **Nothing preventing**

The most common type of barrier is dispositional (59 per cent), followed by situational (35 per cent) (see Table 14)<sup>16</sup>. The order of categories is the same in

<sup>15</sup> Respondents could give more than one answer

<sup>16</sup> Since groups were developed post-hoc, differences may be partly or wholly due to unequal representation or coverage of groups amongst answer options.

2019 as in 2018, with a similar pattern of results. This indicates a strong level of consistency in barriers to learning.

**Table 16: Grouped barriers to learning, 2018 and 2019**

Group	Percentage 2018	Percentage 2019
Dispositional	42%	59%
Situational	31%	35%
Institutional	2%	1%
Nothing preventing	33%	28%

Base: all respondents who cited a factor or stated 'none'. Weighted base 2018 = 3,162; unweighted base 2018 = 3,528. Weighted base 2019 = 3286; unweighted base 2019= 3,660.

A demographic breakdown of grouped barriers to learning indicates that:

- Younger respondents, aged under 24, are slightly more likely to cite dispositional barriers to learning (30 per cent) than those aged between 25 and 44 (25 per cent). However, for respondents aged over 45, dispositional factors increase with each age group, with 71 per cent of the 75 plus age category citing them.
- Dispositional barriers are also more common amongst respondents from lower social grades (cited by 52 per cent of respondents in DE, compared to 35 per cent in C2, 37 per cent in C1 and 35 per cent in AB) and amongst respondents from White backgrounds (cited by 43 per cent compared to 32 per cent of respondents from BAME backgrounds). Dispositional barriers are also more likely to be cited by those furthest from the labour market (cited by 60 per cent of retired respondents and 48 per cent of those not looking for work, compared to 28 per cent of full-time workers).
- Situational barriers are more likely to be cited by women than men (with respective figures of 38 per cent and 30 per cent). They are less prevalent amongst older respondents (cited by five per cent of respondents aged 75 plus compared to 62 per cent of 25 to 34 year olds) and amongst respondents from White backgrounds (cited by 30 per cent compared to 40 per cent of respondents from BAME backgrounds).
- There is little variation in the prevalence of institutional barriers, although the comparison is limited by the small sample size.

### Current and recent learners

Learners are also most likely to identify work and time pressures as something that makes their learning difficult (12 per cent) (see Table 15). This is followed by cost (7 per cent) and childcare or caring responsibilities (five per cent). These continue to be the top three barriers to learning reported by learners in 2018 and 2019.

**Table 17: What has made learning difficult for learners<sup>17</sup>**

Barrier	Percentage
Work\other time pressures	12%
Cost\money\can't afford it	7%
Childcare arrangements or other caring responsibilities	5%
An illness or disability	4%
I am put off by tests and exams	4%
Don't know	4%
Transport\too far to travel	3%
I have difficulties with reading, writing or numbers	3%
Difficulties or issues with the course/learning or tutor	3%
I feel I am too old	2%
I don't feel confident enough	2%
I could not get time off work	2%
Other	1%
Nothing prevented me from continuing	61%

Base: Current or recent learners. Weighted base = 1,659; unweighted base = 1,515.

Barriers for current learners were grouped into:

- **Situational**, including: Cost\money\can't afford it; Childcare arrangements or other caring responsibilities; Transport\too far to travel; Work\other time pressures; I could not get time off work; Too busy/lack of time
- **Dispositional**, including: I feel I am too old; An illness or disability; I am put off by tests and exams; I have difficulties with reading, writing or numbers; I don't feel confident enough
- **Institutional**, including: Difficulties or issues with the course/learning or tutor
- Nothing preventing

The most commonly cited category of barriers is situational (29 per cent), followed by dispositional barriers (15 per cent) (see Table 16)<sup>18</sup>. This is the same order as in 2018, indicating consistency in the pattern of barriers for learners over time.

A comparison with the barriers of respondents who have not taken part in learning within the previous three years (as described above) shows that current or recent learners are most likely to cite situational barriers, whilst those who have not learnt recently are most likely to say that dispositional barriers are preventing them from learning.

<sup>17</sup> Respondents could give more than one answer

<sup>18</sup> Since groups were developed post-hoc, differences may be partly or wholly due to unequal representation or coverage of groups amongst answer options.

**Table 18: Grouped what has made learning difficult for learners, 2018 and 2019**

Group	Percentage 2018	Percentage 2019
Situational	26%	29%
Dispositional	11%	15%
Institutional	3%	3%
Nothing preventing	62%	61%

Base: all respondents who cited a factor or stated 'none'. Weighted base 2017 = 1304; unweighted base 2017 = 1311. Weighted base 2018 = 1,747; unweighted base 2018 = 1,702. Weighted base 2019 = 1,659; unweighted base 2019 = 1,515.

## Benefits of learning

Learning as an adult can have significant benefits for individuals, including those related to health, employment, and social life and community. Each year, survey respondents are asked to identify the benefits or changes that they have experienced as a result of participating in learning.

In the 2019 survey, 36 per cent of learners identify an improvement in knowledge of the subject as a change or benefit of their learning (See Table 17). More than a quarter (29 per cent) feel that they have improved the skills needed to do their job. Over a fifth of respondents report improved self-confidence (23 per cent), that they are more confident at work (21 per cent) and that they are enjoying learning more (21 per cent). Only thirteen per cent of learners state that they have not yet experienced any changes or benefits. The pattern of results is similar to that of the 2018 survey, demonstrating the consistency of benefits experienced by learners.

**Table 29: Changes or benefits experienced as a result of learning<sup>19</sup>**

Benefits	Percentage
I have improved knowledge of the subject	36%
I have improved the skills needed in my job	29%
My self-confidence has improved	23%
I am more confident at work	21%
I enjoy learning more	21%
I am more productive at work/work is of a higher quality	17%
I have got\expect to get a recognised qualification	16%
I have improved my general life skills e.g. budgeting, time management, communication	14%
I have greater job security	12%
I have met new people/made new friends/found a new partner	12%
I have more control of my life	12%
I am more understanding of other people and cultures	12%
I have kept active/filled the time	11%
My work has become\I expect my work to become more satisfying	9%
I have got\expect to get a new or different job	8%
My working relationships with colleagues have improved	7%
My working relationship with my employer has improved	7%
I have moved\expect to move onto a further course of learning	7%
I have changed\expect to change the type of work I do	6%
I have got\expect to get a promotion or a rise in earning	5%
I am more involved in local events and issues	5%
Family relationships have improved	4%
I have started volunteering/increased levels of volunteering	4%
Don't know	4%
My health has improved/it has helped my disability	3%
My children\family have become more interested in learning	3%
I have a greater understanding of my child's/children's schooling	3%
I have set up a business	2%
I am less likely to take time off sick	1%
Other	0%
I have not yet experienced any benefits or changes	13%

Base: all respondents who have recently completed or are currently learning. Weighted base = 1659; unweighted base = 1,515.

To enable comparisons with the results from the 2018 survey, benefits or changes were grouped into four categories:

- **work-related**, including: I have got\expect to get a new or different job; I have changed\expect to change the type of work I do; I have set up a business; I have got\expect to get a recognised qualification; I have got\expect to get a promotion or a rise in earnings; my work has become\I expect my work to become more

<sup>19</sup> Respondents could give more than one answer

satisfying; I am more confident at work; I have greater job security; my working relationships with colleagues have improved; my working relationship with my employer has improved; I have improved the skills needed to do my job; I am more productive at work\work is of a higher quality; I am less likely to take time off sick;

- **health and wellbeing**, including: My self-confidence has improved; My health has improved\it has helped with a disability; I have more control of my life; I have kept active\filled the time;
- **learning and knowledge**, including: I have moved\expect to move onto a further course of learning; I enjoy learning more; my children\family have become more interested in learning; I have a greater understanding of my child's\children's schooling; I have improved my general life skills e.g. budgeting, time management, communication; I am more understanding of other people and cultures; I have improved knowledge of the subject;
- **social and community**, including: I have met new people\made new friends\found a new partner; Family relationships have improved; I am more involved in local events and issues; I have started volunteering\increased levels of volunteering

The most common type of benefit experienced by learners are work-related benefits, experienced by almost three fifths of learners (59 per cent) (see Table 20). Fifty-four per cent of learners experience benefits related to learning and knowledge, 34 per cent experience benefits related to health and wellbeing and 18 per cent experience social or community related benefits<sup>20</sup>. The pattern of the results is similar to 2018, with the same order of categories; this emphasises the consistency of reported benefits of learning.

**Table 20: Grouped changes or benefits experienced as a result of learning, 2018 and 2019**

Group	Percentage 2018	Percentage 2019
Work-related	57%	59%
Learning and knowledge	53%	54%
Health and wellbeing	31%	34%
Social and community	18%	18%

Base: all respondents who cited a factor or stated 'none'. Weighted base 2018 = 1,747; unweighted base 2018 = 1,702. Weighted based 2019 = 1,659; unweighted base 2019 = 1,515.

A demographic breakdown of grouped benefits indicates that:

<sup>20</sup> Since groups were developed post-hoc, differences may be partly or wholly due to unequal representation or coverage of groups amongst answer options.



- Work-related benefits are more common amongst respondents between the ages of 20 and 54; over 60 per cent of respondents in each age group within this range experience work-related benefits, compared to 50 per cent of 17-19-year-olds, 49 per cent of 55-64-year-olds, 25 per cent of 65-74-year-olds and 11 per cent of respondents aged 75 plus. The prevalence of work-related benefits is similar amongst respondents in the top three social grades (61 per cent in AB, 60 per cent in C1 and 61 per cent in C2), but substantially lower in the DE grade (40 per cent). Work-related benefits are also more likely to be cited by respondents from BAME backgrounds (63 per cent) compared to respondents from White backgrounds (56 per cent).
- Benefits relating to health and wellbeing are more common amongst women than men (33 per cent compared to 28 per cent) and amongst respondents from BAME backgrounds (42 per cent compared to 29 per cent of respondents from White backgrounds).
- Benefits relating to learning and knowledge are more common amongst women than men (55 per cent compared to 51 per cent) and amongst respondents from BAME backgrounds (62 per cent compared to 51 per cent of respondents from White backgrounds).
- Social and community-related benefits are more common amongst women than men (20 per cent compared to 15 per cent) and amongst respondents from BAME backgrounds (24 per cent compared to 16 per cent of respondents from White backgrounds). They are least common amongst respondents in full-time work (8 per cent) compared to other working statuses.



## Annex: Methodology

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 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 2019 Adult Participation in Learning Survey included 5,244 adults aged 17 and over across the UK, with fieldwork conducted in September 2019. This sample has been weighted (generating an effective sample of 5,011) to provide a nationally representative dataset. In addition to overall participation in learning, the 2019 survey includes questions to identify barriers to learning for different groups of adults and motivations for learning. The survey also explores issues such as who participates and what they are learning, how learning is undertaken, whether learning leads to a qualification, benefits or changes from learning and investment in learning.

In 2019, the survey was part-funded by the Department for Education. Fieldwork was conducted by Kantar TNS via their UK omnibus survey. Kantar TNS use 2011 Census small area statistics and the Postcode Address File to define sample points – areas of similar population size within a region, with the entire sampling frame representative of the country’s geographical and socio-economic profile. Each week, a number of these points are chosen as locations for the fieldwork. Quotas are set for gender and working status. The survey is carried out face to face using computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI).

### 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 due to space limitations not all results have been included in this report. It should also be noted that all figures, breakdowns and analyses throughout the report are based on weighted data. For further analysis and access to the dataset, please email: [Fiona.Aldridge@learningandwork.org.uk](mailto:Fiona.Aldridge@learningandwork.org.uk)

## 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. An alternative approach was adopted by the National Adult Learner Survey (NALS),<sup>21</sup> 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 Participation Survey.

While respondents are given a definition of learning, the self-reported nature of the Participation 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 mis-remembering details). However, this risk is mitigated by the large sample size and by the general consistency of responses over the surveys' 20-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>22</sup> However, such statistics are limited to publicly-funded provision and are unable to identify qualitative issues such as barriers to learning or motivations.

## Regression analysis

Binary logistic regression analyses were conducted to identify which demographic variables are significant predictors of certain binary outcomes (e.g. participation status). Predictor variables are variables found to influence an outcome once other variables have been taken into account. Therefore, a regression analysis helps to identify whether or not differences between demographic groups can be explained by differences in underlying variables. For the majority of regression analyses described in this report, the variables tested were age, social class, working status and age of leaving full-time education.

It should be noted that the independent variables were classed as categorical variables and it was therefore necessary to choose one answer option as a reference point for other answers to be compared against. Age 16 to 24 was chosen as the age reference category. Full-time employment was chosen as the reference point for working status. Terminal age of education reference was chosen as aged 21 and above. Social grade reference category was group AB. These categories are reflected in the results.

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<sup>21</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/34798/12-p164-national-adult-learner-survey-2010.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/34798/12-p164-national-adult-learner-survey-2010.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/further-education-and-skills-statistical-first-release-sfr>

A regression analysis produces a model of predictor variables for a particular outcome. The strength of the model is indicated by the proportion of the variance in answers that the model predicts i.e. how accurately a respondent's answer can be predicted from their demographic variables.

## 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.
- **Any learning** – any item of learning in which respondents are engaged, or have been within the three years prior to interview.
- **Social grade** – based on Office for National Statistics' occupational classification, derived from a set of questions to identify features of respondents' occupation and workplace. 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 in the lowest grade occupations or who are unemployed.