

# Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2022

November 2022

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**Learning and Work Institute**

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## Introduction

For more than 25 years, the Adult Participation in Learning Survey has provided a unique insight into adult learning across the UK. It adopts a deliberately broad definition of learning, reflecting the fact that learning is about so much more than formal courses and qualifications.

The good news is that, after a decade of declines during the 2010s, participation in learning remains back at levels last seen in the early 2000s: around two in five adults (42 per cent) say they have taken part in learning at some point in the last three years.

The survey also demonstrates a shift in the number of adults learning independently and informally, with interest sparked during the pandemic and the rise of lockdown learning and helping to fill the gap as formal and publicly-funded learning fell over the previous decade. In the same way, the step change during the pandemic in learning at least partly online has sustained: 68 per cent of adults said at least part of their learning took place online.

However, that doesn't mean we don't need to see increases in formal learning – qualifications can give people currency in the labour market where this is their reason for learning, and our research has shown employer investment in training has fallen 28 per cent since 2005, holding back productivity.<sup>1</sup>

Our survey also highlights stark inequalities in participation in learning. You are more likely to participate in learning if you are younger, from a higher socioeconomic group, already highly qualified, or in work. These inequalities are large and persistent. Tackling them needs to be at the heart of efforts to widen opportunity, reduce disparities, and increase prosperity.

Learning throughout life is only going to become more important. Working lives are lengthening, combined with economic change, this means more need to update our skills and change careers – 57 per cent of adults said that they took up their main learning for their work or career. We are living longer, emphasising the benefits of lifelong learning for health and wellbeing – 35 per cent of learners said their learning had benefited their health and wellbeing. Learning can help us build connections in our community, and many enjoy learning for its own sake or the love of the subject – 22 per cent of learners said their self-confidence had improved, 13 per cent that they are more understanding of other people and cultures, and 29 per cent they now enjoy learning more.

How do we widen participation in learning? Our survey provides some clues. Adults who have not taken part in learning cite a range of situational barriers, factors like cost and time. But so too do adults who took part in learning. The main difference is

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<sup>1</sup> Evans, S. (2022) [Raising the bar: increasing employer investment in skills](#), Learning and Work Institute.

the number of non-learners citing dispositional barriers, things like feeling they are too old, lacking confidence, or simply not wanting to learn.

This suggests that making learning more flexible, accessible and affordable is important, but not enough. We also need to make sure learning is relevant to people's lives, communicate the benefits, and build a culture of learning.

The Adult Participation in Learning Survey provides a treasure trove of information and insight that can help guide policy and practice in widening and deepening participation in learning.

## About the Adult Participation in Learning Survey

Since 1996, Learning and Work Institute has been undertaking the Adult Participation in Learning Survey on an almost annual basis<sup>2</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 25 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 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 addition to overall participation, the 2022 survey explores who participates in learning; motivations and barriers; how learning is undertaken; and benefits experienced as a result of learning.

The 2022 Adult Participation in Learning Survey includes 5,139 adults aged 17 and over across the UK. Fieldwork was conducted in September 2021 by a market research company via their UK online omnibus survey. The sample has been weighted to provide a nationally representative dataset.

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

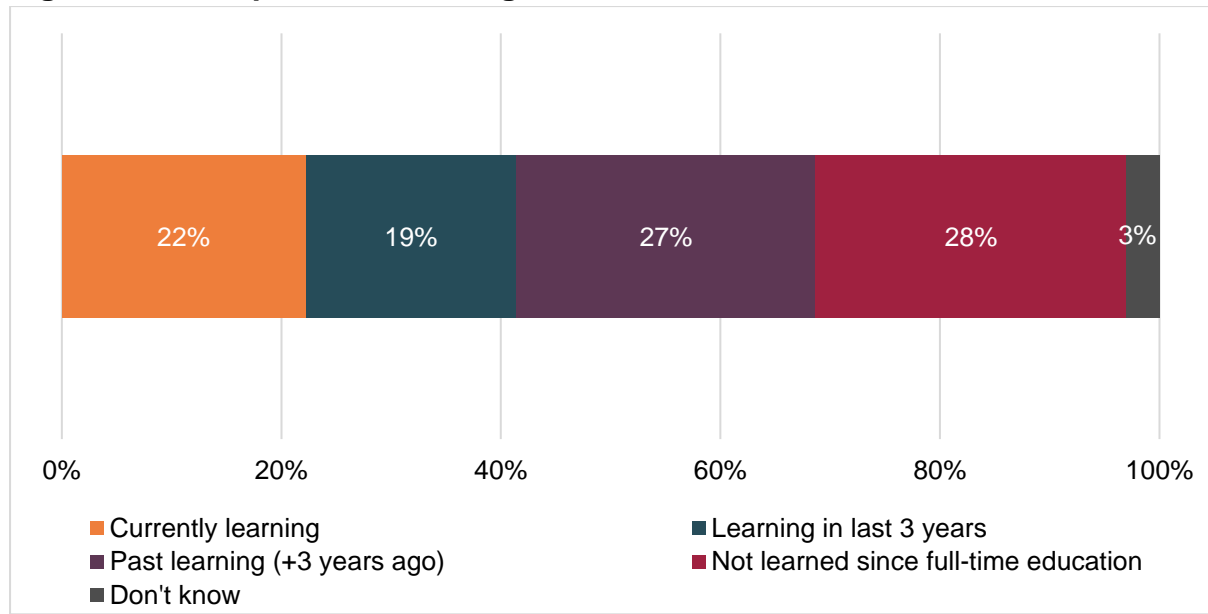
## Participation in learning

### Key chapter findings:

- The 2022 survey shows that just over two fifths (42 per cent) of adults are currently learning or have done so in the last three years. This is a slightly lower participation rate than 2021 (-3 percentage points), but in line with rates seen in the early 2000s after recent years of much lower participation.
- In line with previous surveys, social grade, working status, age, and the age at which respondents completed full-time education are all significant predictors of participation in learning. For social grade and working status, participation in learning has declined for the groups most likely to participate, but has not increased for those least likely to participate. This means that gaps in participation have narrowed, but not as a result of a positive increase in engagement. For age and age completed full-time education, participation has declined across all groups. For age completed full-time education, this decline has been bigger for the groups least likely to learn, resulting in a widening of the participation gap.
- As in previous years, the survey findings indicate that respondents from BAME backgrounds are more likely to take part in learning than those from white backgrounds.
- Compared to 2021, participation has increased in Wales (+4 percentage points) and Northern Ireland (+3 percentage points), and declined in England (-3 percentage points) and Scotland (-2 percentage points).
- By English region, London has by far the highest participation rate (56 per cent). The gap between the highest and lowest performing regions continues to increase from 17 percentage points in 2019 and 19 percentage points in 2021, to 21 percentage points in 2022.

The 2022 survey shows that just over one in five adults (22 per cent) say they are currently learning, with a further one in five (19 per cent) saying they have done some learning within the last three years (see Figure 1). Almost three in ten adults (28 per cent) say they have not taken part in learning since leaving full-time education, while a similar proportion (27 per cent) say that they have done so, but that this learning took place more than three years ago.

**Figure 1: Participation in learning**

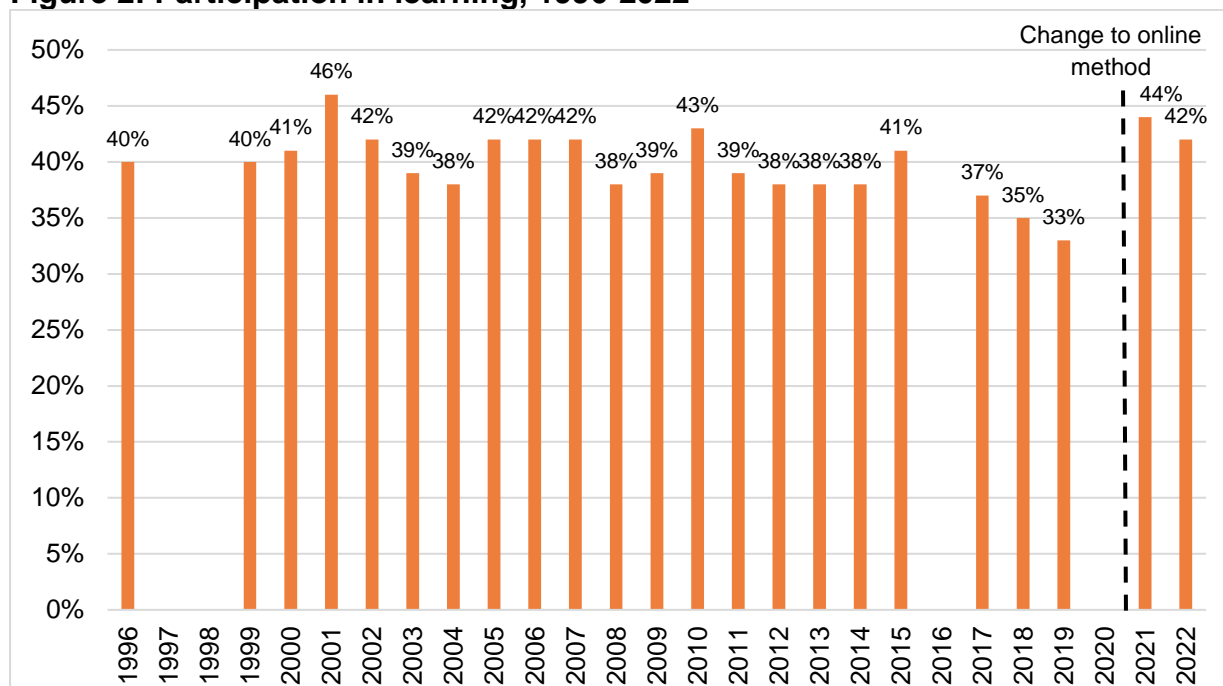


Base: all respondents. Weighted base = 5,139, unweighted base = 5,139.

The 2022 survey shows a slightly lower participation rate (current or recent learning) than 2021 (-3 percentage points), although at 42 per cent, this is still one of the highest participation rates in recent years, and more in line with figures from the early 2000s (see Figure 2). The change in method from face-to-face to online means that comparisons to surveys pre-2021 should be treated with caution, however, this finding may indicate a sustained interest in learning post-pandemic.



**Figure 2: Participation in learning, 1996-2022<sup>3</sup>**



Base: all respondents to each survey. Weighted base for 2022 = 5,139, unweighted base for 2022 = 5,139.

## Demographic breakdowns

### Gender

Men and women are almost equally likely to say they are current or recent learners (42 per cent and 41 per cent respectively). This is consistent with findings from previous years.

### Social grade

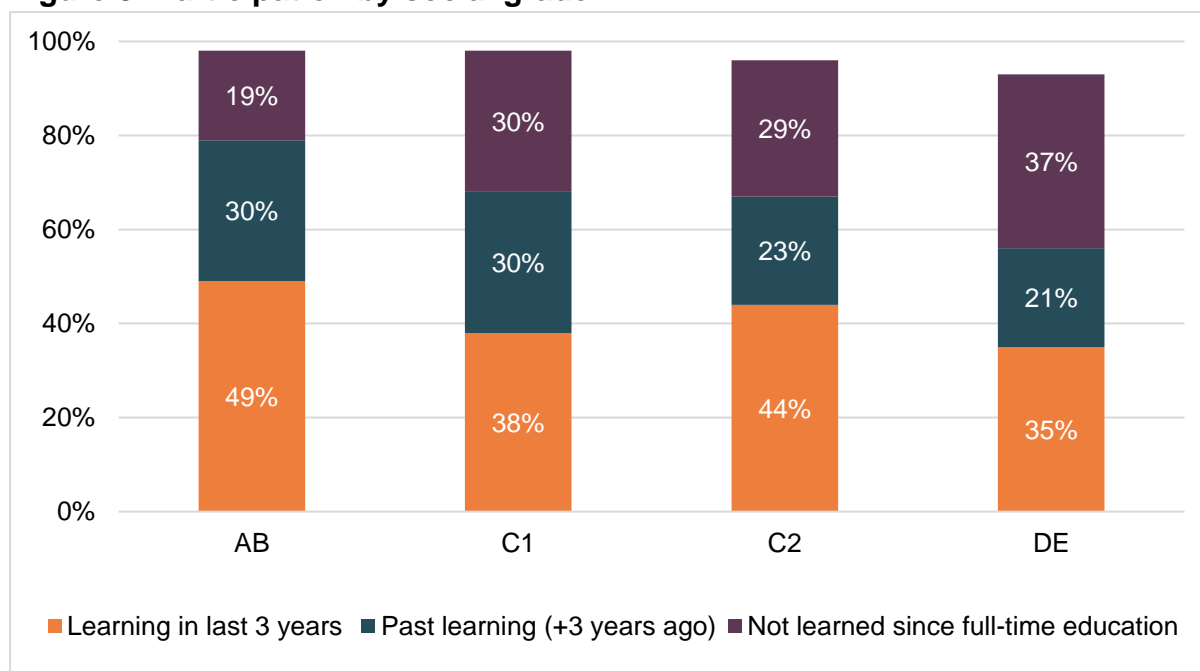
In line with previous surveys, social grade<sup>4</sup> is a key predictor of participation in learning (see Figure 3). Those in the AB social grade are significantly more likely to say they are current or recent learners when compared to all other social grades. Almost half (49 per cent) of adults in the AB social grade are current or recent learners, compared to 38 per cent of those in the C1, 44 per cent in the C2, and 35 per cent in the DE social grades. Almost twice as many adults in the DE grade have not participated in learning since leaving full-time education when compared to those in the AB grade (37 per cent compared to 19 per cent).

<sup>3</sup> Figures for 2020 have been excluded. This is because the unique context of the Coronavirus lockdown restrictions, coupled with the use of a telephone survey approach, means that findings are not directly comparable to those from other years.

<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.

When compared to 2021, the gap in participation between higher and lower social grades has slightly narrowed, although this is not statistically significant. The difference is due to a decline for adults in the AB (-5 percentage points) and C1 (-3 percentage points) social grades, while participation rates for adults in the C2 and DE grades have remained largely consistent.

**Figure 3: Participation by social grade**



Base: all respondents. 'Don't know' responses are not shown, meaning that bars do not total 100 per cent. Total weighted base = 5,139, AB = 1,377, C1 = 1,706, C2 = 996, DE = 1,060. Total unweighted base = 5,139, AB = 1,449, C1 = 1,275, C2 = 896, DE = 1,519.

### Working status

Another key predictor of adult participation in learning is working status; closer proximity to the labour market is associated with higher participation rates (see Figure 4). This is consistent with previous years. Full and part-time workers<sup>5</sup> are the most likely to participate in learning, with respective figures of 52 per cent and 49 per cent. The participation rate drops to 46 per cent for respondents who are unemployed and seeking work, 22 per cent for those who are not working and not seeking work, and 17 per cent for those who are retired. Respondents who are not seeking work are most likely to have not taken part in learning since leaving full-time education (45 per cent). With rising economic inactivity creating challenges in the labour market<sup>6</sup>, it is important that employment support is available to people out of work and not on benefits, and that this includes learning provision.

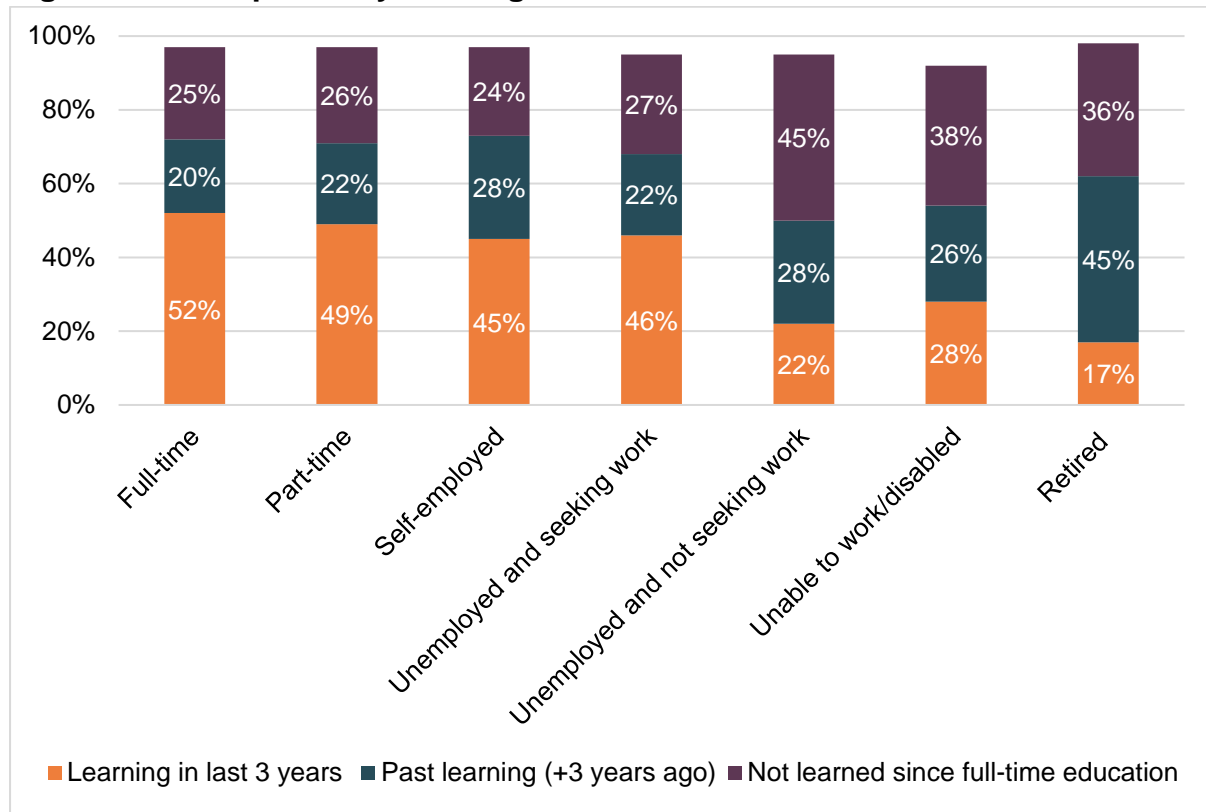
Reflecting the findings for social grade, comparisons with 2021 show a slight decline in participation across the categories of working status associated with higher rates

<sup>5</sup> Part-time workers are defined as those employed for fewer than 30 hours per week.

<sup>6</sup> Learning and Work Institute (October 2022) [Labour market analysis](#)

of learning (-3 percentage points each for full-time, part time, and self-employed respondents). Participation has remained relatively consistent for those unemployed and unable to work/disabled, although it has declined slightly for retired respondents (-2 percentage points). As such, while the gap in participation has slightly narrowed, participation has not increased for those groups less likely to take part in learning.

**Figure 4: Participation by working status**



Base: all respondents excluding those at school and in higher education. ‘Don’t know’ responses are not shown, meaning that bars do not total 100 per cent. Total weighted base = 5,139, full-time = 1,957, part-time = 721, self-employed = 262, unemployed and seeking work = 222, not working and not seeking work = 218, unable to work/disabled = 161, retired = 1,211. Total unweighted base = 5,139, full-time = 2,006, part-time = 735, self-employed = 268, unemployed and seeking work = 251, not working and not seeking work = 361, unable to work/disabled = 116, retired = 1,020.

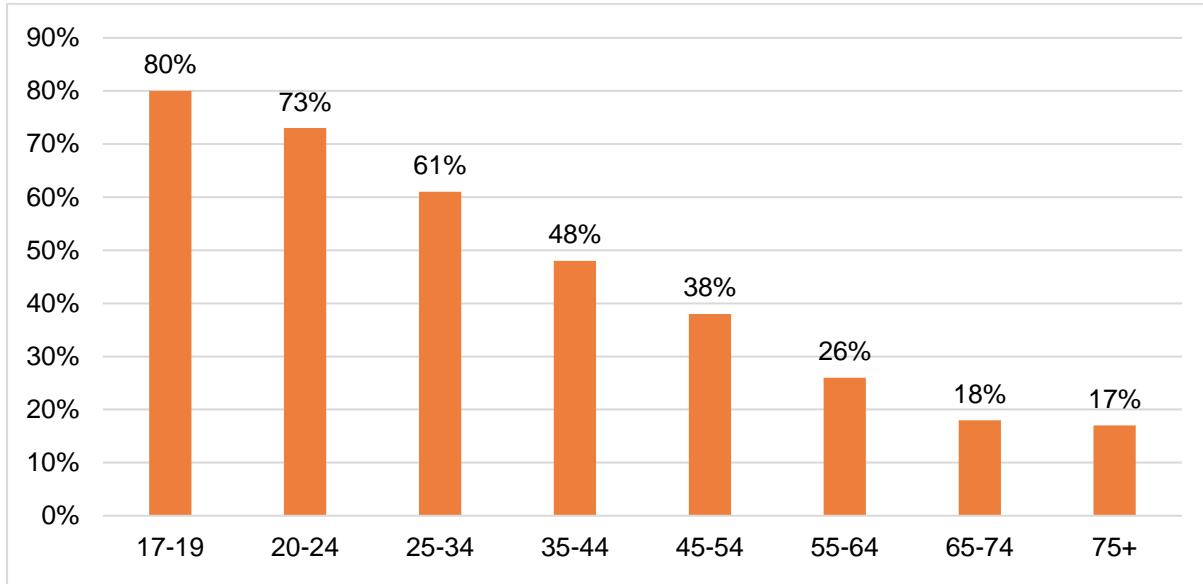
### Age

As in previous surveys, participation in learning decreases with age (see Figure 5). Seventeen to 19-year-olds are the most likely to participate in learning, with a rate of 80 per cent. As age increases the participation rate drops, to 73 per cent of 20-24-year-olds and 61 per cent of adults aged 25-34. This falls to just under one half (48 per cent) of adults aged 35-44, just under two fifths (38 per cent) of adults aged 45-54, one quarter (26 per cent) of adults aged 55-64, and just under one fifth of adults aged 65 and over.

When compared to 2021, there has been a decline in participation for most age categories. The largest decline has been for those aged 55-64 (-7 percentage points), a statistically significant drop. Other age categories where participation has

declined are 17-19 (-5 percentage points), 35-44 (-2 percentage points), 45-54 (-2 percentage points), 65-74 (-3 percentage points), and 75+ (-2 percentage points), although none of these differences are statistically significant. Participation rates have remained relatively consistent for respondents aged 25-34, and increased slightly for those aged 20-24 (+3 percentage points).

**Figure 5: Participation by age**



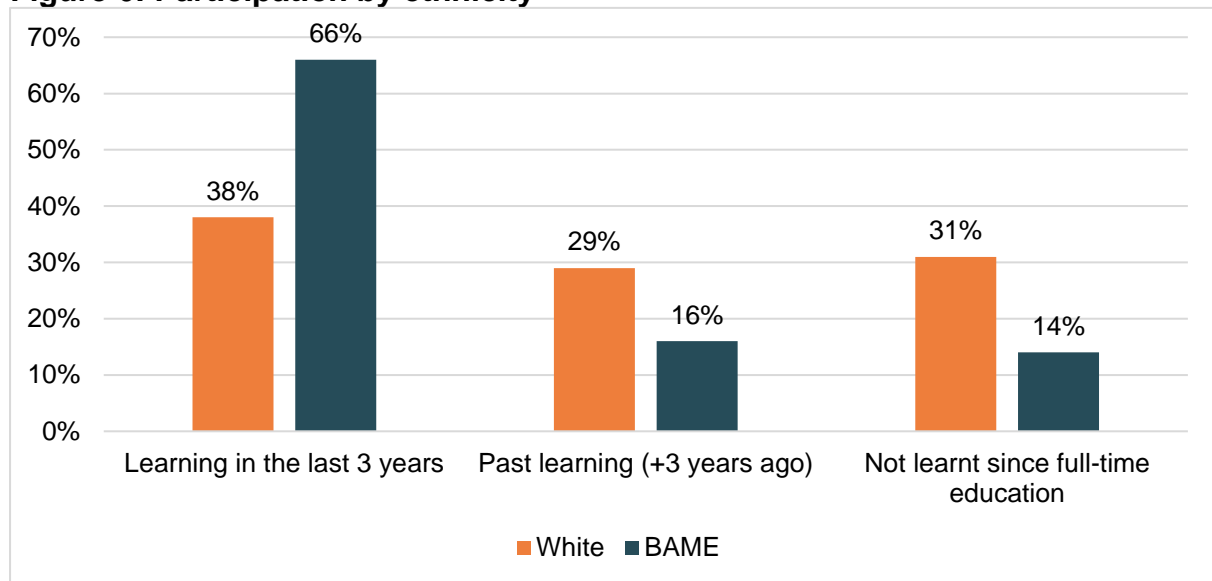
Base: all respondents. Total weighted base = 5,139, 17-19 = 218, 20-24 = 444, 25-34 = 851, 35-44 = 806, 45-54 = 835, 55-64 = 794, 65-74 = 861, 75+ = 329. Total unweighted base = 5,139, 17-19 = 213, 20-24 = 492, 25-34 = 899, 35-44 = 858, 45-54 = 877, 55-64 = 851, 65-74 = 689, 75+ = 260.

### Ethnicity

In line with previous years, respondents from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds are significantly more likely to say they are current or recent learners when compared to respondents from white backgrounds (66 per cent compared to 38 per cent) (see Figure 6)<sup>7</sup>. This difference is accounted for mostly by those who are currently learning, with respondents from BAME backgrounds twice as likely as those from white backgrounds to say they are current learners (40 per cent compared to 19 per cent). When compared to the findings for 2021, participation has declined slightly for respondents from white backgrounds (-3 percentage points) and remained relatively consistent for those from BAME backgrounds.

<sup>7</sup> We recognise that grouping respondents into two categories masks differences between individual ethnic groups. The size of the respondent base does not allow for more detailed analysis.

**Figure 6: Participation by ethnicity**



Base: all respondents. Total weighted base = 5,139, white = 4,212, BAME = 661. Total unweighted base = 5,139, white = 4,224, BAME = 640.

Further analysis of these findings indicates that ethnicity is a key driver of participation in learning:

- Participation rates for white men and white women are similar (37 per cent and 38 per cent respectively), with both groups being less likely than respondents from BAME backgrounds to have participated in learning in the last three years. Men from BAME backgrounds are more likely to be participating in learning than women from BAME backgrounds (70 per cent and 62 per cent respectively).
- Across all social grades, respondents from BAME backgrounds demonstrate higher than average participation rates. These are: AB (65 per cent), C1 (63 per cent), C2 (79 per cent), and DE (61 per cent). This compares to 46 per cent of white respondents in the AB grade, 35 per cent in the C1 grade, 38 per cent in the C2 grade, and 31 per cent in the DE grade who have participated in learning in the last three years. The pattern of participation declining by social grade only applies to white respondents. These findings may suggest that social class is more likely to be an indicator of participation among white adults, although this should be treated with caution due to lower numbers of BAME respondents and that the use of a 'BAME' category can mask differences between individual ethnic groups.
- Younger adults (aged 17-44) are significantly more likely than older adults to participate in learning across both white and BAME ethnic groups, but there is a substantial difference in participation rates between white and BAME respondents – 58 per cent of white 17–44-year-olds say that they are current or recent learners, compared to 73 per cent of BAME 17–44-year-olds. This finding shows that disparities in participation between white and BAME respondents

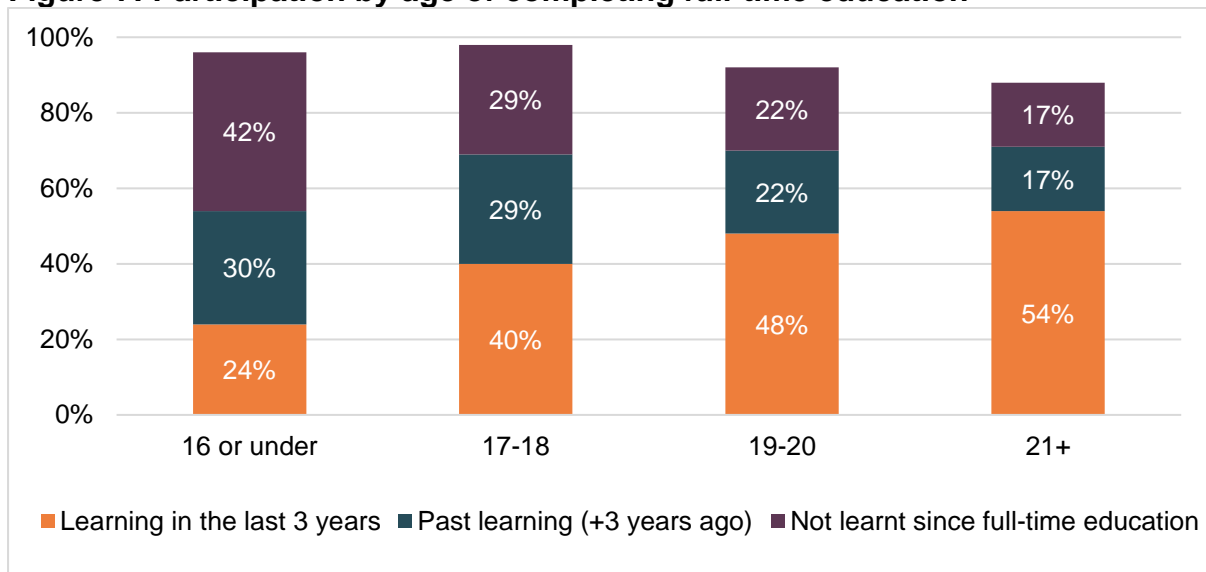
cannot be attributed solely to differences in age profile between the two groups (BAME survey respondents are younger on average).

### Age completed full-time education

The age at which respondents completed full-time education is also strongly associated with participation in learning; the longer individuals remain in full-time education the more likely they are to learn as an adult (see Figure 7). This is consistent with previous years. Just under one quarter of adults (24 per cent) who left education aged 16 or under are current or recent learners. This figure increases significantly for those who stayed in education until age 17-18 (40 per cent), and further still for those who stayed in education until age 19-20 (48 per cent). Respondents who stayed in education until at least the age of 21 are more than twice as likely to say they are learners than those who left aged 16 or under, with a participation rate of 54 per cent.

Compared to 2021, participation rates have slightly (although not significantly) declined for all of these respondent groups. This decrease is biggest for those for left education aged 16 or under (-4 percentage points) or 17-18 (-6 percentage points), and smaller for those who left education aged 19-20 (-3 percentage points) or 21 plus (-2 percentage points).

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



Base: all respondents. 'Don't know' responses are not shown, meaning that bars do not total 100 per cent. Total weighted base = 5,139, 16 or under = 1,513, 17-18 = 1,254, 19-20 = 559, 21+ = 1,514. Total unweighted base = 5,139, 16 or under = 1,854, 17-18 = 1,004, 19-20 = 470, 21+ = 1,489.

### Geography

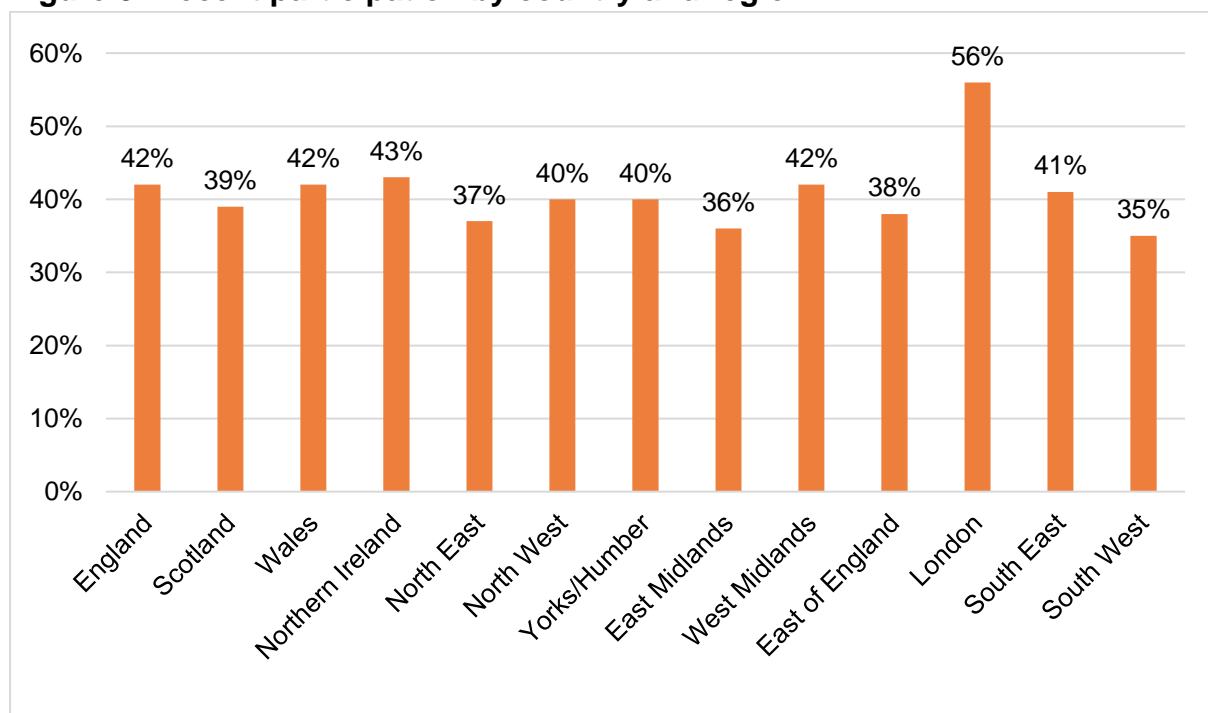
When comparing levels of participation in learning across the UK, the survey shows that 42 per cent of adults in England are either currently learning or have done so in the last three years, compared with 39 per cent of adults in Scotland, 43 per cent in Northern Ireland and 42 per cent in Wales (see Figure 8). Compared to 2021, participation has increased in Wales (+4 percentage points) and Northern Ireland (+3

percentage points), and declined in England (-3 percentage points) and Scotland (-2 percentage points), although none of these differences are statistically significant.

By English region, London has by far the highest participation rate (56 per cent). This is consistent with findings from 2021, although the overall participation rate for London has slightly declined (-3 percentage points). This is likely to relate to the age profile and qualification level of respondents: respondents based in London are significantly more likely than the sample average to be aged under 44 and to have completed a degree or postgraduate degree.

The South West (35 per cent) and East Midlands (36 per cent) have the lowest participation rates. This differs from the 2021 survey findings, where participation was lowest in the North East and East of England. This finding is the result of substantial declines in participation in both the East Midlands (-10 percentage points) and South West (-8 percentage points). The gap between the highest and lowest performing regions continues to increase from 17 percentage points in 2019 and 19 percentage points in 2021, to 21 percentage points in 2022, although this increase is not statistically significant.

**Figure 8: Recent participation by country and region**



Base: all respondents. Total weighted base = 5,139. England = 4,323, Scotland = 430, Wales = 244, Northern Ireland = 142, North East = 207, North West = 567, Yorkshire and the Humber = 423, East Midlands = 374, West Midlands = 453, East of England = 478, London = 677, South East = 702, South West = 442. Total unweighted base = 5,139. England = 4,328, Scotland = 410, Wales = 275, Northern Ireland = 126, North East = 272, North West = 593, Yorkshire and the Humber = 443, East Midlands = 418, West Midlands = 538, East of England = 468, London = 513, South East = 635, South West = 448.

## Regression analysis of participation in learning

A regression analysis shows that when social grade, age group, age group at which full-time education was completed, and working status<sup>8</sup> are all taken into account, all four variables are significant predictors of participation in learning. With each 'step up' in social grade (i.e. from DE to C2, C2 to C1, and C1 to AB), the probability of participating in learning increases by an average of 2.4 per cent. With each step up in age group at which full-time education was completed (e.g. from 17-18 to 19-20), the probability of participating in learning increases by 5.5 per cent. With each step up in age group (e.g. from 17-19 to 20-24), the probability of participating in learning decreases by 7.7 per cent.

Certain working status factors are also associated with the probability of participating in learning. The regression analysis shows that retirement, not working and not seeking work, and being unable to work are all significant predictors of participation, with these factors being associated with a lower likelihood to participate in learning. Working status factors that were deemed not to have a significant association with the probability of participating in learning were part-time employment, self-employment, and unemployment (defined as unemployed and seeking work).

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<sup>8</sup> The regression analysis excluded respondents still in school or higher education



## Future intentions to learn

### Key chapter findings:

- Two in five adults (40 per cent) say that they are either very (18 per cent) or fairly (22 per cent) likely to take up learning in the next three years. These findings are broadly consistent with the 2021 survey results, where 41 per cent of adults said that they would be likely to take up learning in the next three years.
- In line with previous surveys, current or recent participation in learning is a key indicator of future intentions to learn – more than four in five current learners (83 per cent) say that they are likely to take up learning again in the next three years, compared to fewer than one in ten adults (eight per cent) who have not taken part in learning since leaving full-time education.
- A regression analysis shows that social grade, age, and age at which full-time education was completed are significant predictors of future likelihood 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.

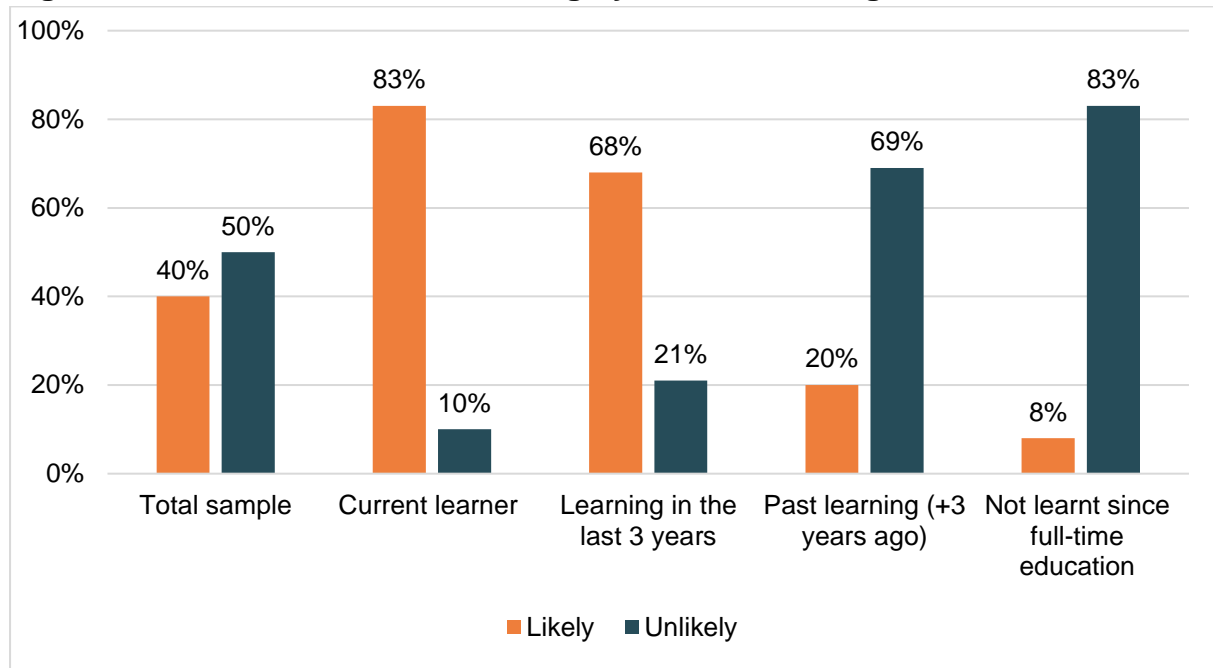
Two in five adults (40 per cent) say that they are either very (18 per cent) or fairly (22 per cent) likely to take up learning in the next three years, while half (50 per cent) say that they are fairly (17 per cent) or very (33 per cent) unlikely to do so. These figures are broadly consistent with the past five years<sup>9</sup>, where around two in five adults have indicated that they are likely to take up learning in the future. Eleven per cent of respondents indicated that they do not know whether they are likely to take up learning.

In line with previous surveys, current or recent participation in learning is a key indicator of future intentions to learn (see Figure 9). The more time since adults have participated in learning, the less likely they are to consider doing so in the future. More than four in five current learners (83 per cent) say that they are likely to take up learning again in the next three years, compared to fewer than one in ten adults (eight per cent) who have not taken part in learning since leaving full-time education. The more time since adults have participated in learning, the less likely they are to consider doing so in the future. This emphasises the importance of encouraging adults to try out learning and providing support for them to continue doing so throughout their lives.

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<sup>9</sup> Since 2017, excluding 2020 where results are not directly comparable owing to a change in methodology

**Figure 9: Future likelihood of learning by current learning status**



Base: all respondents. 'Don't know' responses are not shown. Total weighted base = 5,139, Current learners = 1,134, learned in last 3 years = 1,002, studied/learned over 3 years ago = 1,371, have not studied/learned since leaving full-time education = 1,453. Total unweighted base = 5,139, Current learners = 1,149, learned in last 3 years = 1,021, studied/learned over 3 years ago = 1,340, have not studied/learned since leaving full-time education = 1,436.

### Regression analysis of future participation in learning

A regression analysis shows that social grade, age, age at which full-time education was completed and some aspects of working status are significant predictors of future likelihood to learn. With each step up in social grade, the average likelihood of participating in learning in the future increases by 2.6 per cent. With each step up in age group at which full-time education was completed, future likelihood of participating in learning increases by an average of 6.5 per cent. With each step up in age group, future likelihood of participating in learning declines by an average of 6.5 per cent.

Certain working status factors are also associated with the future likelihood of participating in learning. Retirement, not working or seeking work, and being unable to work are all associated with being less likely to participate in learning in the future. Working status factors that were deemed not to have a significant association with the probability of future participation in learning were part-time employment, self-employment, and unemployment (defined as unemployed and seeking work).

## Motivations to learn

### Key chapter findings:

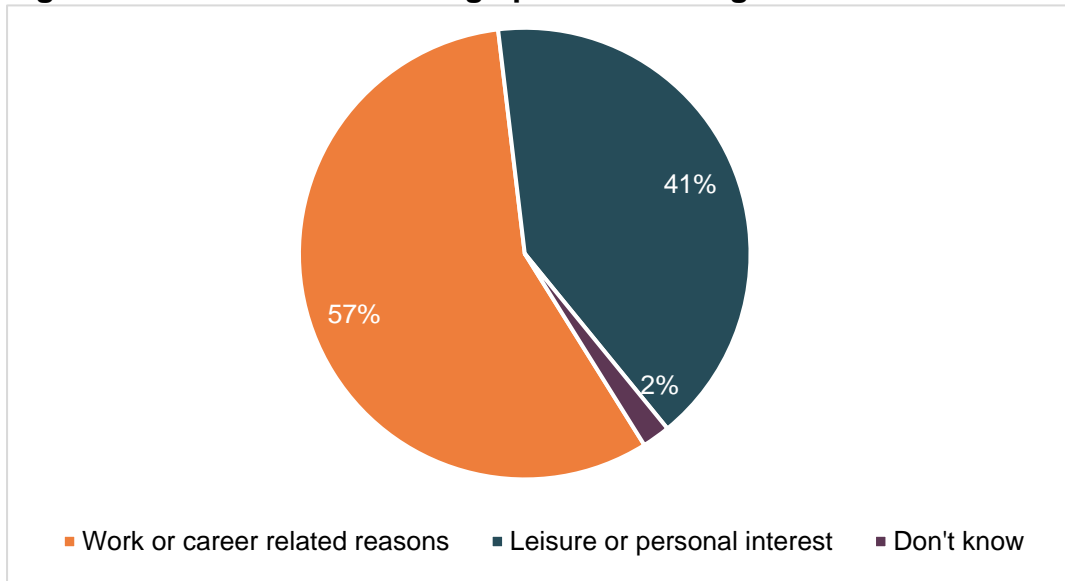
- Most (57 per cent) learners have taken up their main learning for work and/or their career, while around two in five (41) per cent have taken this up for leisure or personal interest. This is a slight decline in learning for leisure or personal interest when compared to 2021 (-3 percentage points), although still markedly higher than previous years.
- Some groups of adults are more likely to learn for their work or career, including younger adults, adults in full-time employment, parents, and adults qualified at A Level or above. The most common reason adults cite for taking part in learning for work is to develop or improve in their current job role (48 per cent).
- When asked about their broader motivations for learning, adults were most likely to identify motivations related to their personal interests or development – 37 per cent said that they are motivated to learn because they are interested in the subject, while 36 per cent stated that they want to develop themselves as a person. This finding is consistent with the 2021 survey.
- When motivations for learning are grouped, the majority of respondents (57 per cent) indicated that they are motivated by factors related to learning and knowledge. Learners are equally likely to be motivated by work-related and personal/social reasons (51 per cent each), highlighting the importance of ensuring a broad range of learning opportunities are available to adults.

### Work-related motivations

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' (see Figure 10).

Most learners (57 per cent) of learners have taken up their main learning for work and/or their career, while around two in five (41) per cent have taken this up for leisure or personal interest. This is a slight decline in learning for leisure or personal interest when compared to 2021 (-3 percentage points), although still markedly higher than pre-pandemic – only around one in five learners said this in 2019 (20 per cent), 2018 (23 per cent) or 2017 (24 per cent).

**Figure 10: Motivation for taking up main learning**



Base: all current or recent learners. Weighted base = 2,136. Unweighted base = 2,170.

Some groups of adults are more likely to learn for work and/or career related reasons than others, including:

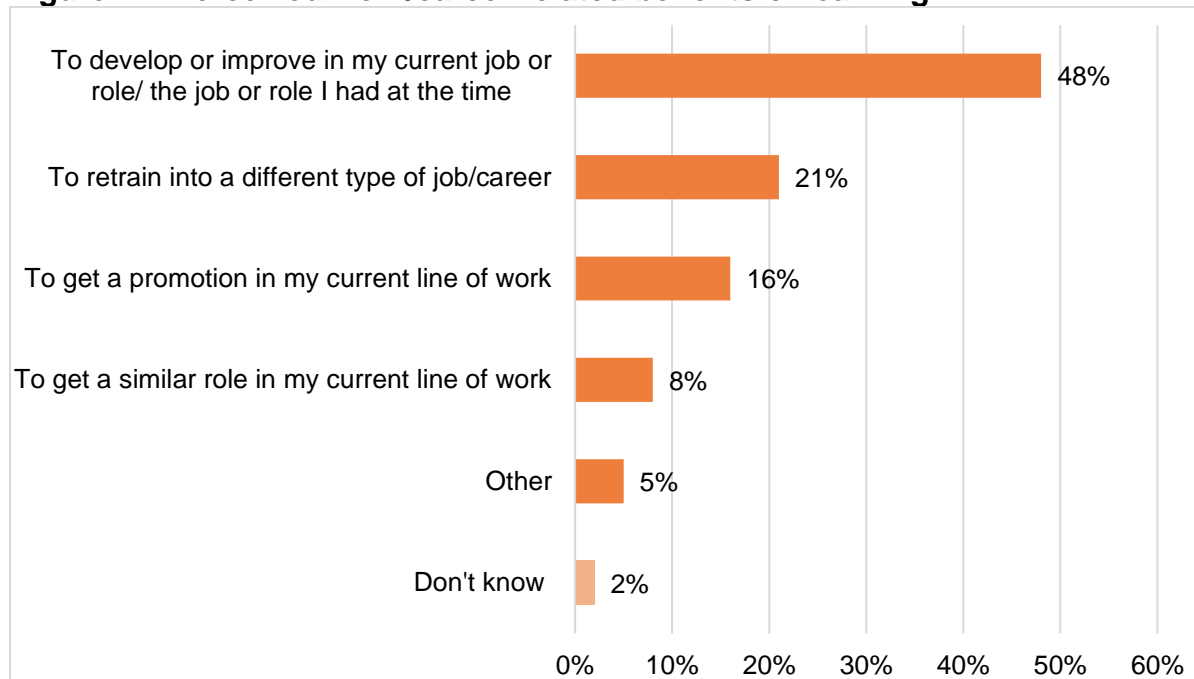
- Younger adults, particularly those aged 17-19 (71 per cent), 20-24 (66 per cent) and 25-34 (63 per cent). By contrast, older adults are more likely to learn for leisure or personal interest, with over one half (54 per cent) of respondents aged 55-64 and four in five (80 per cent) of those aged 65-74 saying this.
- Adults in full-time employment, with around two thirds (67 per cent) learning for their work or career.
- Parents, who are more likely to learn for work or career-related reasons than respondents without parenting responsibilities (62 per cent compared to 54 per cent).
- Adults qualified at A Level and above, with 64 per cent of those qualified at A Level and 62 per cent of those qualified to degree/postgraduate degree level learning for their work or career. This compares to 52 per cent of respondents qualified at GCSE/O-Level and 53 per cent of those with other college qualifications (e.g. BTEC, City and Guilds)<sup>10</sup>.

Adults whose main learning was for work or career-related reasons were asked how they think this learning might help their work or career prospects (see Figure 11). By far the most common response, cited by almost half (48 per cent) of learners, is that it will help them to develop or improve in their current job role. Around one in five respondents (21 per cent) say that it will help them to retrain into a different job or

<sup>10</sup> The base size for adults with no qualifications is too low for comparison with other groups.

career. Sixteen per cent believe that their learning will help them to gain a promotion in their current line of work, while eight per cent hope that their learning will support them to get a similar role in their current line of work. These findings are broadly similar to those from 2021, although respondents to the 2022 survey are slightly more likely to cite gaining a promotion as a motivating factor (+3 percentage points), and less likely to cite gaining a similar role in their current line of work (-2 percentage points).

**Figure 11: Perceived work/career related benefits of learning**



Base: all respondents who have recently or are currently learning for work and/or career related reasons. Weighted base = 1,214; unweighted base = 1,223.

### Broader motivations

All adults with current or recent experience of learning were asked to identify their broader motivations for starting their *main* learning (see Table 1). Respondents were most likely to identify motivations related to their personal interests or development – 37 per cent said that they are motivated to learn because they are interested in the subject, while 36 per cent stated that they want to develop themselves as a person. A quarter of respondents (25 per cent) are motivated to learn to do their current job better/improve their job skills, 14 per cent are motivated by the desire to get a new job or get a promotion/better pay, and 11 per cent want to change the type of work they do/their career. Other common motivating factors are gaining a recognised qualification (22 per cent), improving self-confidence (17 per cent) and improving health and wellbeing (16 per cent).

**Table 1: Motivations to learn**

Motivation	Percentage
I am interested in the subject	37%
To develop myself as a person	36%
To help me do my current job better/improve job skills	25%
To get a recognised qualification	22%
To improve my self-confidence	17%
To improve my health and wellbeing	16%
To get a new or different job	14%
To get a promotion or better pay	14%
To change the type of work I do/change career	11%
To help me get onto a future course of learning	11%
To make my work more satisfying	10%
To meet people	8%
Not really my choice – Employer/professional/benefit requirement	8%
To support my children's schooling	3%
Other	1%
Don't know	1%

Base: all current or recent learners. Weighted base = 2,136; unweighted base = 2,170.

Note: Respondents could give more than one answer

To enable comparisons with previous surveys, motivations were grouped into four categories<sup>11</sup>:

- **Work-related**, including: To get a new or different job; To change the type of work I do/change career; To help me do my current job better/improve job skills; To get a promotion or better pay; 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 am interested in the subject; To support my children's schooling
- **Personal and social**, including: To develop myself as a person; To improve my self-confidence; To improve my health and wellbeing; To meet people
- **Requirements**, including: Not really my choice - Employer/professional/benefit requirement

The majority of respondents (57 per cent) indicated that they are motivated by factors related to learning and knowledge and around half (51 per cent) said they

<sup>11</sup> The list of answer options for this question was reduced for the 2021 survey, and the same answer options were then used in 2022. As such, while motivations can be categorised in a similar way, there are some slight differences to these groupings when compared to 2018 and 2019. A key difference is that in 2018 and 2019, there were two separate groups for 'health and wellbeing' and 'social and community' motivations. These have now been combined into one 'personal and social' category. The figures for 2018 and 2019 are the figures for 'health and wellbeing' and 'social and community' combined.

were motivated to learn for work-related reasons (see Table 2). This is similar to the 2018 and 2021 results but contrasts with the findings from the 2019 survey, where work-related motives were more prevalent.

As in previous years, there is a prevalence of non-career related motivations for learning, with around one half of learners (51 per cent) taking up their main learning for personal or social reasons. This figure is higher than 2018 and broadly in line with 2021, although lower than for 2019. Overall, this highlights the importance of ensuring a broad range of learning opportunities are available; both work and non-work-related opportunities are vital to encourage adults to engage with learning.

**Table 2: Grouped motivations for learning**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Percentage 2018</b>	<b>Percentage 2019</b>	<b>Percentage 2021</b>	<b>Percentage 2022</b>
Learning and knowledge	53%	78%	60%	57%
Work-related	52%	81%	52%	51%
Personal and social	45%	61%	53%	51%
Requirement	16%	20%	9%	8%

Base: all current or recent learners. Weighted base 2018 = 1,747; unweighted base 2018 = 1,702. Weighted base 2019 = 1,659; unweighted base 2019 = 1,515. Weighted base = 2021 = 2,228; unweighted base 2021 = 2,322. Weighted base 2022 = 2,136; unweighted base 2022 = 2,170.

## Learning delivery

### Key chapter findings:

- The most common methods of learning for adults were independently on their own (30 per cent), at a university/higher education institution/Open University (19 per cent), through a training course at work (14 per cent), or on the job (13 per cent).
- Over two thirds of learners (68 per cent) said that at least some of their main learning has been online. This is broadly consistent with 2021 (69 per cent), reflecting the acceleration in online learning in recent years. Women, adults in higher social grades, adults learning for leisure/personal interest, and those who left education aged 21 or above/are educated to degree level are more likely to learn online.
- For most learners (63 per cent), there was a fee attached to their learning. Most commonly, this was paid for in part or full by their employer (24 per cent) and/or paid directly by the learner (23 per cent). Younger adults, adults in the AB social grade, in full-time employment or higher education, and who took up learning for their work/career are more likely to have participated in learning with a fee attached.

### Method of learning

Learners were asked how they did or are doing their *main* learning, which provides insights into where adults are most likely to access learning (see Table 3). Nearly one in three (30 per cent) said they learned independently on their own. This is followed by around one in five (19 per cent) who learned through a University/higher education institution/Open University, 14 per cent who learned on a training course at work, and 13 per cent who learned on the job.

Where and how adults learn remains broadly similar to previous years, although respondents to the 2022 survey are slightly less likely to say that they learned independently on their own (-4 percentage points) and more likely to say they learned through a University/higher education institution/Open University (+3 percentage points). However, respondents are still far more likely to say that they learned independently on their own when compared to pre-2021 (for example, this figure was 16 per cent in 2019 and 21 per cent in 2018). This change may relate to shifts in learning behaviours as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic.



**Table 3: Method of learning**

Location	Percentage
Independently on my own	30%
Through a university/higher education institution/Open University	19%
On a training course at work	14%
On the job	13%
On an external training course arranged by my employer	10%
Through a further education college/tertiary/6th form college	8%
Through a local adult education centre or class	6%
Independently with others	6%
On an apprenticeship	5%
Through a voluntary organisation	5%
Through a local school	4%
Through local community facilities e.g. library, museum, place of worship, bookshop etc.	4%
Through a leisure or health club	3%
Other	4%
Don't know	1%

Base: Current or recent learners. Weighted base = 2,136; unweighted base = 2,170.

Note: Respondents could give more than one answer

To compare with the results from previous surveys<sup>12</sup>, 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
- **Independently**<sup>13</sup>, including: 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 or 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

Overall, the figures for those learning through work (34 per cent) and through a formal educational establishment (34 per cent) remain consistent with the 2021 survey (see Table 4). Learning through work has declined when compared to pre-2021, which can be explained by the declined in learning for work-related reasons as

<sup>12</sup> There were some changes in the answer options included in 2018 and 2019, but these were minor.

<sup>13</sup> In the 2018 and 2019 survey, this group included the answer option "Online including through an app e.g. websites, forums, YouTube." This was removed from the 2021 and 2022 survey, and instead respondents were asked about online learning in a separate question.

opposed to leisure or personal interest. Learning through a formal education establishment is lower than for 2019, and closer to the figures seen in 2018. The figure for adults learning independently (35 per cent) is lower than for 2021, although on par with previous years. The reason this figure remains consistent despite an increase in adults saying they learned independently on their own is that pre-2021, this group also included an online learning option, which has now been removed from this question and is asked as a separate question (analysis of this question features later in this report).

There has been a slight decline in adults learning through community or voluntary organisations (11 per cent) when compared to 2021, although this figure is still higher than for previous years. This may reflect the sustained increase in learning for leisure or personal interest when compared to pre-2021 surveys; the data shows that more than three in five respondents (61 per cent) who learned through a voluntary or community organisation were learning for leisure or personal interest.

**Table 4: Grouped locations of learning**

Group	Percentage 2018	Percentage 2019	Percentage 2021	Percentage 2022
Work-related	43%	45%	34%	34%
Independently	36%	36%	40%	35%
Formal educational establishment	29%	43%	33%	34%
Community or voluntary	8%	5%	15%	11%

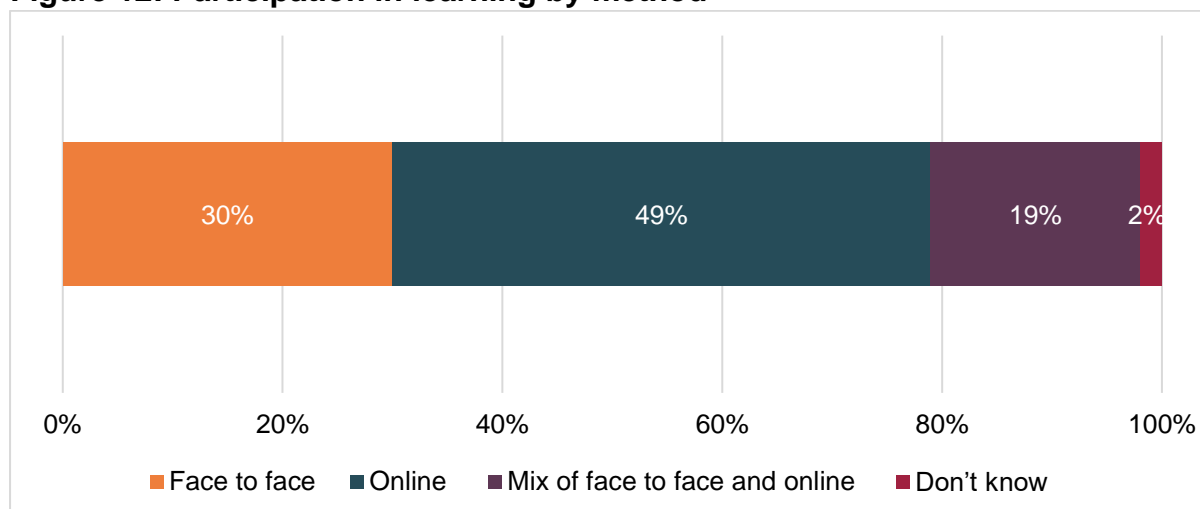
Base: all current or recent learners. Weighted base 2018 = 1,747; unweighted base 2018 = 1,702. Weighted base 2019 = 1,659; unweighted base 2019 = 1,515. Weighted base 2021 = 2,228; unweighted base 2021 = 2,322. Weighted base 2022 = 2,136; unweighted base 2022 = 2,170.

### Online learning

Learners were asked whether their main learning took place online or face-to-face (see Figure 12). Just over two thirds of learners (68 per cent) said that at least some of their main learning has been online. This is broadly consistent with 2021 (69 per cent) and an increase from 47 per cent in 2019, reflecting the acceleration in online learning as a result of the pandemic. This year, around one half (49 per cent) of learners said that their learning has been fully online and 19 per cent said that their learning has involved a mix of online and face-to-face learning. Three in ten learners (30 per cent) stated that their learning has been entirely face-to-face.

Current and recent learners are almost equally likely to say they are learning fully face-to-face (31 per cent and 29 per cent respectively). This contrasts with the 2021 findings, where current learners were more likely to be learning fully face-to-face when compared to respondents who have learned in the last three years, who were likely to have been affected by social distancing measures during the pandemic.

**Figure 12: Participation in learning by method**



Base: all current or recent learners. Weighted base = 2,136; unweighted base = 2,170.

The data indicates that some groups of adults are more likely to learn online than others. These include:

- **Women**, of whom 71 per cent have learned at least partly online, and 52 per cent fully online. This compares to 65 per cent of men who have learned at least partly online, and less than half (46 per cent) who learned fully online. This is consistent with findings for the 2021 survey.
- Adults who learn for **leisure or personal interest**, of whom more than seven in ten (72 per cent) have learned online and six in ten (60 per cent) have learned fully online. This compares to two thirds (66 per cent) of adults who have learned for their work or career learning online, and just over two in five (42 per cent) learning fully online. These findings are consistent with the 2021 survey findings.
- Adults in **higher social grades**, with almost three quarters of those in the AB and C1 social grades (both 73 per cent) having learned online, and over half having learned fully online (54 per cent in AB and 53 per cent in C1). This compares to three in five respondents in the C2 (61 per cent) and DE (60 per cent) social grades who have learned online, and 43 per cent and 39 per cent respectively who have learned fully online. These findings may be reflective of higher levels of digital poverty among those in lower social grades.
- Those who **left education later/are educated to a higher level**, with three quarters learning online (76 per cent of those who left education aged 21 or above and 75 per cent of respondents with a degree/postgraduate degree), and over one half learning fully online (55 per cent of those who left education aged 21 or above and 53 per cent of respondents with a degree/postgraduate degree). This finding relates to social grade – the data indicates that adults who left education age 21 and above and who are educated to degree/postgraduate degree level are more likely to fall within the AB social grade.

## Fees

Since 2011, there have been a range of changes to the funding of adult education provision. While 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 a course fee. The introduction of advanced learner loans in England in 2013 enabled individuals studying at Level 3 or above to borrow for the cost of the course, where for many this had been free before, and to pay back only once their income had exceeded an earnings threshold. The Government's Lifetime Skills Guarantee, introduced in 2021, enables eligible adults<sup>14</sup> aged 19 and over to access free, fully-funded level 3 qualifications.

In the context of changes such as these, a question has been included in the survey to investigate adults' investment in their learning. This question was also asked in the 2018 and 2019 surveys.

The 2022 survey shows that, for 63 per cent of respondents, a fee was attached to their main learning (see Table 5). This is a substantially lower proportion of adults paying a fee for their learning when compared to 2018 and 2019. This could be as a result of changes to government funding, but most likely reflects an increase in learning for leisure or personal interest – only around one half (49 per cent) of respondents who learned for leisure or personal interest in 2022 indicated that a fee was attached to this learning.

Most commonly, fees were paid by employers (24 per cent) and/or the learner (23 per cent). Fewer than one in ten respondents had taken out a loan (seven per cent), accessed government funding (six per cent), received help from their institution (five per cent), received support from friends or family members (three per cent), or received support from charities or non-government organisations (one per cent). For just over a third of learners (35 per cent), no fee was attached to their main learning. When compared to previous years, learners are less likely to say that their fee was paid by their employer or that they took out a loan. Again, this could reflect increased learning for leisure or indicate that employers are investing less in workforce learning or training. However, it should be noted that there were changes to these answer categories for the 2022 survey, with some categories being combined (see table footnotes).

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<sup>14</sup> Eligible adults include adults without two full A-Levels or equivalent qualifications and adults who earn below the National Living Wage annually or are unemployed, regardless of their prior qualifications.

**Table 5: How learning is paid for**

Location	Percentage 2018	Percentage 2019	Percentage 2022
My employer paid/is paying <sup>15</sup>	34%	32%	24%
I paid the fee directly	24%	23%	23%
I paid the fee by taking out a loan <sup>16</sup>	13%	13%	7%
Other government funding	8%	9%	6%
Help from my institution e.g. access funds, grants, bursaries etc.	2%	3%	5%
The fee was/is paid by a friend or family member as a gift	2%	2%	3%
Charity or other non-government organisation	1%	1%	1%
Don't know	1%	2%	2%
Prefer not to say	-	-	1%
<b>Net: Any fee</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>63%</b>
<b>There was no fee</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>35%</b>

Base: Current or recent learners. Weighted base = 2,136; unweighted base = 2,170.

Note: Respondents could give more than one answer

The following respondent groups were more likely to say there was a fee for their learning when compared to the sample average:

- **Younger adults**, specifically those aged 20-24 (71 per cent), 25-34 (69 per cent) and 35-44 (68 per cent). Respondents aged 20-24 are more likely than the sample average to say that they paid their fee by taking out a loan (19 per cent), that they received other government funding (13 per cent), that they received help from their institution (nine per cent), and/or that the fee was paid by a friend or family member as a gift (five per cent). These findings reflect the fact that respondents aged 20-24 are more likely to be in full-time higher education.
- Adults in the **AB social grade** (67 per cent). These respondents are most likely to say that their employer paid their fee (29 per cent) and/or that they paid their fee directly (28 per cent).
- Adults in **full-time employment** (71 per cent) or **higher education** (74 per cent). Respondents employed full-time are most likely to say their employer paid towards the fees (39 per cent), while those in full-time higher education are most

<sup>15</sup> In the 2018 and 2019 survey, there were two separate answer options: "It was internal training provided by employer" and "My employer paid". These figures have been combined in the table to align with the 2022 survey answer categories.

<sup>16</sup> In the 2018 and 2019 survey, there were two separate answer options: "I paid the fee by taking out a formal learning loan e.g. Student Loan, Advanced Learner Loan, Career Development Loan" and "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". These figures have been combined in the table to align with the 2022 survey answer categories.

likely to have taken out a loan (25 per cent). Reflecting the findings for age, adults in full-time higher education are also more likely than the sample average to say that they received other government funding (19 per cent), that they received help from their institution (15 per cent), and that the fee was paid by a friend or family member as a gift (seven per cent).

- Adults who took up learning for their **work or career** (73 per cent, compared to 49 per cent who learned for leisure or personal interest). These respondents are most likely to say that their employer paid their fees (37 per cent).

## Benefits of learning

### Key chapter findings:

- The most common benefit of learning identified by respondents is enjoying learning more (29 per cent). Just over one in five adults believe that they have improved the skills needed to do their job (23 per cent) and that their self-confidence has improved (22 per cent).
- When benefits of learning are grouped, the most common benefits experienced by learners are work-related, with almost three fifths (57 per cent) of respondents citing these. Forty-two per cent of learners have experienced benefits related to learning and knowledge, 35 per cent have experienced benefits related to their health and wellbeing, and 16 per cent have experienced social or community-related benefits. These figures are in line with the 2021 survey, and further emphasise the wide-ranging benefits of learning for individuals and communities.

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 with current or recent experience of learning are asked to identify the benefits or changes that they have experienced as a result. In the 2022 survey, the most common benefit identified by respondents is enjoying learning more (29 per cent) (see Table 6). Just over one in five adults believe that they have improved the skills needed to do their job (23 per cent) and that their self-confidence has improved (22 per cent). These reflect the findings from the 2021 survey, with almost the same proportion of respondents identifying each of these responses.

Other benefits frequently cited by respondents include increased confidence at work (18 per cent), getting a recognised qualification (16 per cent), higher productivity at work/improved work quality (13 per cent), improved health and wellbeing (13 per cent), having more control over their life (13 per cent), and improved understanding of other people and cultures (13 per cent). Just under one in ten learners (nine per cent) said that they are yet to experience any benefits of learning. These findings demonstrate the wide-ranging benefits experienced by learners in both their personal and working lives.



**Table 6: Changes or benefits experienced as a result of learning**

Benefits	Percentage
I enjoy learning more	29%
I have improved the skills needed to do my job	23%
My self-confidence has improved	22%
I am more confident at work	18%
I have got/expect to get a recognised qualification	16%
I am more productive at work/work is of a higher quality	13%
My health and wellbeing have improved	13%
I have more control of my life	13%
I am more understanding of other people and cultures	13%
I have met new people/made new friends/found a new partner	11%
My work has become/I expect my work to become more satisfying	10%
I have got/expect to get a new or different job	9%
I have changed/expect to change the type of work I do/my career	9%
I have got/expect to get a promotion or a rise in earnings	8%
My working relationships with colleagues/my employer have improved	8%
I have moved/expect to move onto a further course of learning	7%
I am more involved in my local community (e.g. through attending events, volunteering)	6%
I have a greater understanding of my child's/children's schooling	4%
Other	1%
Don't know	3%
I have not yet experienced any benefits or changes	9%

Base: all current or recent learners. Weighted base = 2,136; unweighted base = 2,170.

Note: Respondents could give more than one answer

To enable comparisons with previous surveys, benefits were grouped into four categories<sup>17</sup>:

- **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 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 satisfying; I am more confident at work; my working relationships with colleagues/my employer have improved; I have improved the skills needed to do my job; I am more productive at work/work is of a higher quality
- **Health and wellbeing**, including: My self-confidence has improved; My health and wellbeing have improved; I have more control of my life

<sup>17</sup> The list of answer options for this question was reduced for the 2021 survey, and the same answer options were then used in 2022. As such, while motivations can be categorised in a similar way, there are some slight differences to these groupings when compared to 2018 and 2019.



- **Learning and knowledge**, including: I have moved/expect to move onto a further course of learning; I enjoy learning more; I have a greater understanding of my child's/children's schooling; I am more understanding of other people and cultures
- **Social and community**, including: I have met new people/made new friends/found a new partner; I am more involved in my local community (e.g. through attending events, volunteering)

In line with previous years, the most common benefits experienced by learners are work-related, with almost three fifths (57 per cent) of respondents citing these (see Table 7). Forty-two per cent of learners have experienced benefits related to learning and knowledge, which is consistent with 2021 although lower than for years prior to this. Just over a third (35 per cent) have experienced benefits related to their health and wellbeing, a figure broadly consistent to previous years. Sixteen per cent of learners have experienced social or community-related benefits, which is in line with figures from previous years. These findings further emphasise the wide-ranging benefits of learning for individuals and communities.

**Table 7: Grouped changes or benefits experienced as a result of learning**

Group	Percentage 2018	Percentage 2019	Percentage 2021	Percentage 2022
Work-related	57%	59%	58%	57%
Learning and knowledge	53%	54%	43%	42%
Health and wellbeing	31%	34%	37%	35%
Social and community	18%	18%	17%	16%

Base: all current or recent learners. Weighted base 2018 = 1,747; unweighted base 2018 = 1,702. Weighted based 2019 = 1,659; unweighted base 2019 = 1,515. Weighted base 2021 = 2,228, unweighted base 2021 = 2,322. Weighted base 2022 = 2,136; unweighted base 2022 = 2,170.

## Barriers to learning

### Key chapter findings:

- Nearly two thirds (65 per cent) of current or recent learners indicated that they have encountered at least one challenge while learning. Learners are most likely to identify work and time pressures as a challenge, with almost one quarter (24 per cent) doing so. This is followed by lacking the confidence to learn (14 per cent), cost (13 per cent), and being put off by tests and exams (12 per cent).
- Seven in ten respondents (70 per cent) who have not engaged in learning in the last three years identified a barrier that has prevented them from doing so. The most commonly cited barriers to participating in learning are cost/affordability and feeling too old, with almost three in ten respondents (29 per cent) citing each of these reasons. Other common barriers to learning include work/other time pressures (16 per cent), being put off by tests and exams (12 per cent) and not feeling confident enough (10 per cent). Almost three in ten adults (29 per cent) who have not recently taken part in learning also said that nothing is preventing them from doing so and they don't want to.
- Current and recent learners are more likely to experience situational barriers to learning (arising from an adult's personal and family situation), while those who have not learned recently are more likely to cite dispositional barriers (relating to the attitudes, perceptions and expectations of adults). This finding is consistent with previous surveys and wider research, indicating that those who are furthest away from learning may benefit from support to understand the value of learning and to increase their confidence to learn.

Each year, respondents are asked to identify the barriers to learning that they have experienced. Current or recent learners are asked to state any challenges that they have encountered while learning, and 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.

### Current and recent learners

Nearly two thirds (65 per cent) of current or recent learners indicated that they have encountered at least one challenge while learning (see Table 8). This is consistent with the 2021 survey (66 per cent).

Learners are most likely to identify work and time pressures as a challenge, with almost a quarter (24 per cent) doing so. This is followed by lacking the confidence to learn (14 per cent), cost (13 per cent), and being put off by tests and exams (12 per cent). These were also the most commonly-cited barriers in the 2021 survey,

although respondents to the 2021 survey were slightly more likely to mention cost as a barrier (17 per cent).

Nearly one in ten adults cited feeling too old (nine per cent), transport (eight per cent) and difficulties or issues with the course/learning or tutor (eight per cent) as challenges. Just under one third of learners (32 per cent) indicated that they have not encountered any challenges while learning, the same proportion as in 2021.

**Table 8: Challenges experienced while learning**

Barrier	Percentage
Work/other time pressures	24%
I don't feel confident enough	14%
Cost/money/can't afford it	13%
I am put off by tests and exams	12%
I feel I am too old	9%
Transport/too far to travel	8%
Difficulties or issues with the course/learning or tutor	8%
Childcare arrangements or other caring responsibilities	7%
An illness or disability	7%
Lack of digital skills/confidence for online learning	7%
Lack of digital equipment/broadband for online learning	6%
I have difficulties with reading, writing or numbers	5%
Other	1%
Don't know	2%
Nothing/ none of these	32%
<b>Net: Any challenge</b>	<b>65%</b>

Base: all current or recent learners. Weighted base = 2,136; unweighted base = 2,170.

Note: Respondents could give more than one answer

Challenges encountered by learners can be grouped into those that are:

- **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; lack of digital equipment/broadband for online learning
- **Dispositional**, relating to the attitudes, perceptions and expectations of adults, 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; lack of digital skills/confidence for online learning
- **Institutional**, arising from the unresponsiveness of educational institutions, including: Difficulties or issues with the course/learning or tutor.

As in previous years, learners are slightly more likely to have experienced situational challenges while learning than dispositional ones (43 per cent compared to 39 per cent). This is a slightly bigger difference when compared to last year's findings (see

Table 9). Only eight per cent of learners cited institutional challenges, similar to last year's survey.

**Table 9: Grouped challenges experienced while learning**

Group	Percentage 2021	Percentage 2022
Situational	45%	43%
Dispositional	43%	39%
Institutional	9%	8%
No challenges encountered	32%	32%

Base: all current or recent learners. Weighted base 2021 = 2,228, unweighted base 2021 = 2,322. Weighted base 2022 = 2,136; unweighted base 2022 = 2,170.

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

Seven in ten respondents (70 per cent) who have not engaged in learning in the last three years identified a barrier that has prevented them from doing so (see Table 10). This is consistent with the 2021 survey findings (69 per cent).

Almost three in ten adults (29 per cent) who have not recently taken part in learning said that nothing is preventing them from doing so and they don't want to. This is consistent with the 2021 and 2019 survey findings and points to the importance of not only removing barriers to learning, but actively promoting the benefits of learning to encourage participation.

Cost/affordability and feeling too old are also cited as reasons for not learning by almost three in ten respondents (29 per cent). When compared to last year's findings, the proportion of respondents citing age remains consistent, while the proportion citing cost/affordability has increased by five percentage points – potentially due to the rise in the cost of living. Other common barriers to learning include work/other time pressures (16 per cent), being put off by tests and exams (12 per cent) and not feeling confident enough (10 per cent).

**Table 10: Barriers to learning**

Barrier	Percentage
Cost/money/can't afford it	29%
I feel I am too old	29%
Work/other time pressures	16%
I am put off by tests and exams	12%
I don't feel confident enough	10%
I haven't got round to doing it	9%
An illness or disability	8%
Childcare arrangements or other caring responsibilities	7%
I don't know what is available or how to find out what is	5%
Transport/too far to travel	5%
Lack of digital skills/confidence for online learning	3%
My home environment is not suitable for online learning	3%
Negative experience of learning in the past	3%
Lack of digital equipment/broadband for online learning	2%
I have difficulties with reading, writing or numbers	1%
Other	1%
Don't know	1%
Nothing is preventing me/I don't want to	29%
<b>Net: Any barrier</b>	<b>70%</b>

Base: respondents who had not participated in learning in the previous three years or since full-time education. Weighted base = 2,823; unweighted base = 2,776.

Note: Respondents could give more than one answer

Barriers can be grouped into those that are:

- **Situational**, including: Cost/money/can't afford it; Childcare arrangements or other caring responsibilities; Work/other time pressures; Lack of digital equipment/broadband for online learning; My home environment is not suitable for online learning<sup>18</sup>; Transport/too far to travel<sup>19</sup>.
- **Dispositional**, 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 am put off by tests and exams; I have difficulties with reading, writing or numbers; I don't feel confident enough; Lack of digital skills/confidence for online learning; Negative experiences of learning in the past<sup>20</sup>.

Around one half (49 per cent) of respondents who have not participated in learning recently cited dispositional barriers that have prevented them from doing so, compared to two in five (40 per cent) who identified situational barriers (see Table 11). The prevalence of dispositional barriers is consistent with previous surveys, although the overall proportion of respondents citing dispositional barriers has continued to decline since 2019, coupled with an increase in the proportion of adults

<sup>18</sup> This is a new variable added for the 2022 survey

<sup>19</sup> This is a new variable added for the 2022 survey

<sup>20</sup> This is a new variable added for the 2022 survey

citing situational barriers. This finding may reflect the rising cost of living and other practical and financial pressures resulting from the Coronavirus pandemic.

When compared to the findings for adults who have taken part in learning in the last three years, we can see that those without recent experience of learning are more likely to raise dispositional barriers. This finding is consistent with previous surveys and wider research<sup>21</sup>, indicating that those who are furthest away from learning may benefit from action to effectively communicate the value of learning and to increase their confidence to learn.

**Table 11: Grouped barriers to learning**

Group	Percentage 2018	Percentage 2019	Percentage 2021	Percentage 2022
Dispositional	42%	59%	52%	49%
Situational	31%	35%	40%	40%
Nothing preventing	33%	28%	29%	29%

Base: respondents who had not participated in learning in the previous three years or since full-time education. Weighted base 2018 = 3,162; unweighted base 2018 = 3,528. Weighted base 2019 = 3,286; unweighted base 2019 = 3,660. Weighted base 2021 = 2,657; unweighted base 2021 = 2,566.

A demographic breakdown of grouped barriers indicates that:

- Dispositional barriers are more likely to be cited by:
  - Adults who left education aged 16 or under, with 53 per cent doing so, compared to 46 per cent of those who left aged over 16. Those who left full-time education aged 21 or over are significantly less likely to identify dispositional barriers when compared to those who left earlier, with just 42 per cent doing so.
  - Respondents aged 55-64 (53 per cent), 65-74 (53 per cent) and 75+ (58 per cent), compared to respondents in younger age groups.
  - Respondents in social grade DE (53 per cent, compared to 48 per cent of adults in other social grades). Those in grade AB are significantly less likely to cite dispositional barriers (44 per cent, compared to 51 per cent of adults in other social grades).
  - Respondents who are retired (55 per cent, compared to 46 per cent non-retired) or unable to work/disabled (71 per cent, compared to 48 per cent able to work), highlighting the importance of ensuring that learning feels both relevant and accessible to all.
  
- Situational barriers are more likely to be cited by:

<sup>21</sup> Learning and Work Institute (February 2021) [Decision making of adult learners below Level 2](#)

- Women (43 per cent, compared to 38 per cent of men). This was also true for last year's survey, although in 2021 women were more likely than men to raise both situational and dispositional barriers.
- Those aged 25-34 (55 per cent), 35-44 (56 per cent), and 45 to 54 (52 per cent), perhaps as these age groups are more likely to be balancing working and parenting responsibilities.
- Respondents who left full-time education after age 16 (44 per cent for those who left aged 17-18, 47 per cent for those who left aged 19-20, and 48 per cent for those who left aged 21 and over, compared to just 35 per cent for those who left aged 16 or under).
- Respondents in social grade C1, compared to those in other social grades (44 per cent compared to 38 per cent).
- Respondents who are employed full-time (50 per cent), employed part-time (51 per cent), unemployed and seeking work (59 per cent) and not working and not seeking work (47 per cent) compared to those who are retired, unable to work or still in full-time education. This finding highlights how both employed and unemployed adults can face practical barriers to learning, and may therefore require appropriate support to engage with these opportunities.



## 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 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 2022 Adult Participation in Learning Survey included 5,139 adults aged 17 and over across the UK. This sample has been weighted to provide a nationally representative dataset (the weighted sample is also 5,139). In addition to overall participation, the 2022 survey explores who participates in learning; motivations and barriers; how learning is undertaken; and benefits experienced as a result of learning.

In 2022, the survey was part-funded by the Department for Education. Fieldwork was conducted by a market research agency via their UK online omnibus survey, running from September 13 to September 26 2022.

Fieldwork for the survey was first conducted online in 2021. Prior to this, fieldwork was conducted via a face-to-face omnibus, however, a shift in how people are communicating, with more households online than ever before, coupled with the Coronavirus pandemic creating challenges for face-to-face fieldwork, has led to market research agencies shifting to an online approach. This raises some potential issues regarding representation of older, disabled and digitally excluded adults, who we know from previous surveys are less likely to participate in learning. Weighting has been applied to mitigate this impact and to ensure a representative sample; however, year on year comparisons with surveys pre-2021 should be treated with some caution.

### 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: [Emily.Jones@learningandwork.org.uk](mailto:Emily.Jones@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>22</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 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 mis-remembering details). However, this risk is mitigated by the large sample size and by the general consistency of responses over the surveys' 26-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>23</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 (i.e., participation status and likelihood to participate in future learning). Predictor variables are variables found to influence an outcome once other variables have been controlled for. Therefore, a regression analysis helps to identify whether or not differences between demographic groups can be explained by differences in underlying variables. For the 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 since working status is a categorical variable, it was necessary to choose one answer option as a reference point for other answers to be compared against. As the most common working status, full-time employment was chosen as the reference point.

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<sup>22</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>23</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. The level of model fits is given by the Nagelkerke R squared statistic, which shows that the chosen explanatory variables account for 14.7 per cent of the variation in participation status and 15.6 per cent of the variation in likelihood to learn.

## 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** – 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.