

2013 NIACE Adult Participation in Learning Survey Headline Findings

This briefing provides an overview of the headline findings from the 2013 NIACE Adult Participation in Learning Survey. NIACE has been conducting this annual survey since 1996, providing a unique overview of the proportion of adults taking part in learning and a detailed breakdown of who participates and who does not.

Who participates?

In the 2013 survey, around one in five adults (19%) say that they are currently learning, with just under two-fifths (38%) saying they have taken part in some form of learning in the previous three years.

There has been little variation in the overall level of participation since the survey series began in 1996. While there has been a gradual decline in participation in recent years (see Figure 1), the 2013 figure remains unchanged from that reported in 2012.

Nearly two-fifths of adults (39%) say they have not participated in learning since leaving full-time education, an increase on previous years.

Figure 1: Participation in learning, 1996–2013



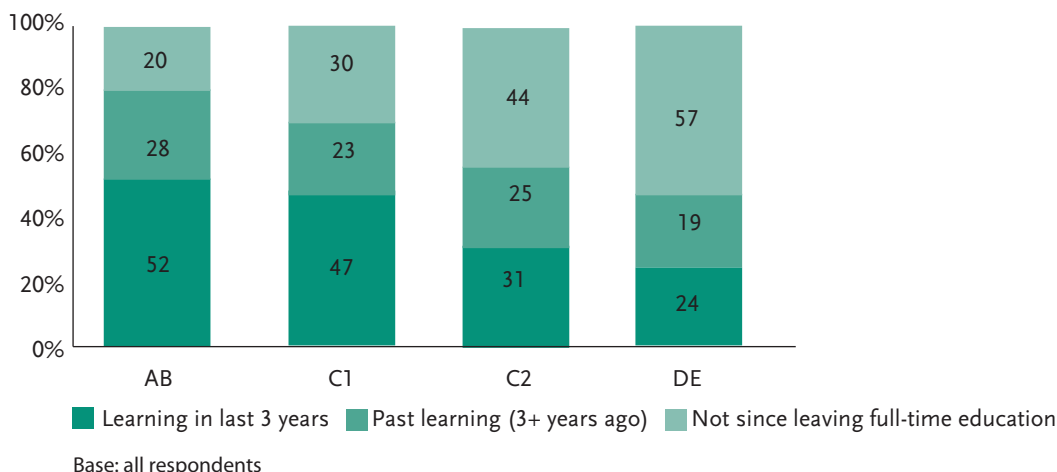
Base: all respondents

Engagement in learning is not evenly distributed across society. In 2013, as in all previous years, the survey clearly shows that participation in learning is determined by class, employment status, age and prior learning.

Socio-economic class¹ remains a key predictor of participation in learning (see Figure 2). Around one-half of those in the highest classes (52% of ABs; 47% of C1s) report taking part in learning during the previous three years, compared with 31% of skilled manual workers (C2s) and 24% of unskilled workers and people on limited incomes (DEs). Since 2012, the class divide has widened with a greater proportion of ABC1s, and fewer C2s, taking part in learning.

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

Figure 2: Participation in learning by socio-economic class, 2013

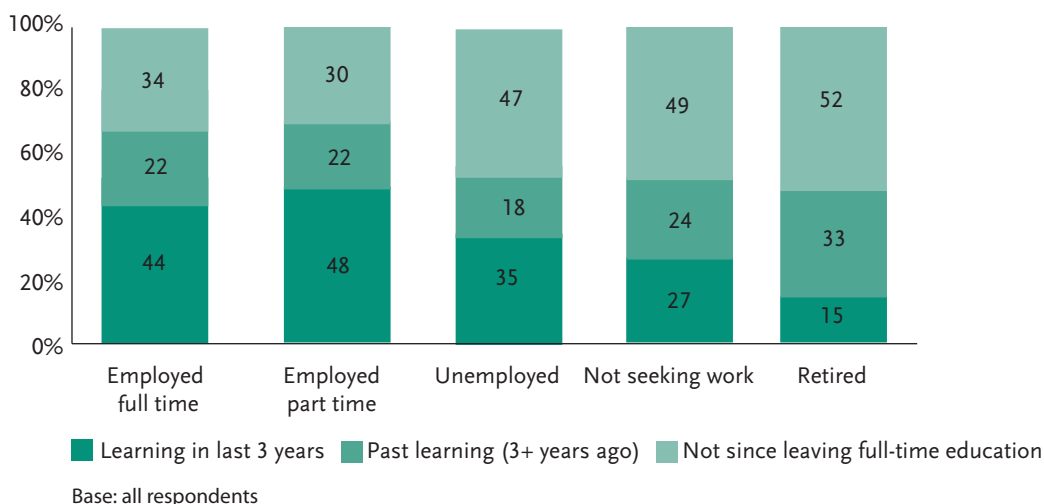


Nearly four-fifths (77%) of all learners say that they started their learning for work or career-related reasons. It is unsurprising, therefore, that significant differences exist between the participation rates of workers, unemployed adults and those outside of the workforce.

Levels of participation in learning are significantly higher among adults in employment (44% of full-time workers; 48% of part-time workers) than among those who are either registered as unemployed or not currently seeking work. Retired adults (15%) are least likely to have taken part in learning in the previous three years.

Since 2012, there has been a substantial increase in the proportion of part-time workers who are taking part in learning (from 42% to 48%), while the proportion of unemployed adults learning has fallen from 41% to 35%.

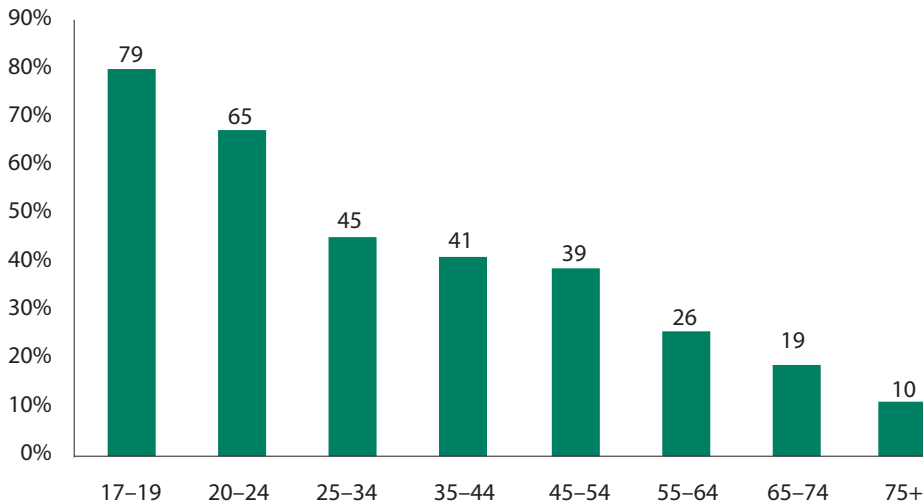
Figure 3: Participation in learning by employment status, 2013



In general, the older people are, the less likely they are to take part in learning (see Figure 4). Seventy-nine per cent of 17–19 year olds and 65% of 20–24 year olds are learning, compared with less than one-half of the rest of the working age population. The decline in participation is particularly steep for those aged 55 and over, with only 26% of those aged 55–64, 19% of those aged 65–74 and 10% of those aged 75+ regarding themselves as learners.

Since 2012, there has been a statistically significant decline in the proportion of young adults who report taking part in learning (9 percentage points among those aged 17–19 and 5 percentage points among 20–24 year olds). Most other age groups have seen small increases in levels of participation, although among those aged 55–64, the proportion of adults learning has fallen from 29% to 26%.

Figure 4: Participation in learning by age, 2013



Base: all respondents

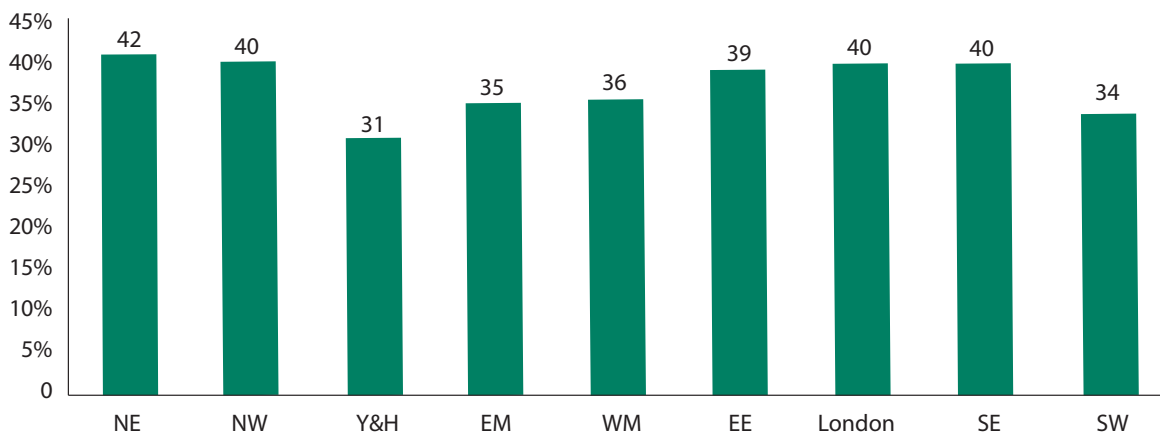
As with all previous surveys, the 2013 survey confirms the key divide between those who left school at the earliest opportunity and those who stayed on for even a short while. Around one-half (49%) of those who left full-time education aged 21+ are learning, compared with just one-quarter (25%) of those who left school at or before the age of 16.

The survey data also show that the digital divide continues to reinforce the learning divide, with 43% of adults with internet access having taken part in learning in the previous three years, compared with just 13% of those without access. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of adults without regular access to the internet say that they have not taken part in learning since leaving full-time education.

Across the four UK nations, the survey shows that, at 44%, adults in Wales are the most likely to be learning. This compares with 38% of adults in England, 37% in Northern Ireland and 36% in Scotland.

While generally there is little variation within the English regions, adults living in the North, London and the South East are most likely to be learning, while those living in Yorkshire and the Humber are least likely to participate (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Participation in learning by English region, 2013



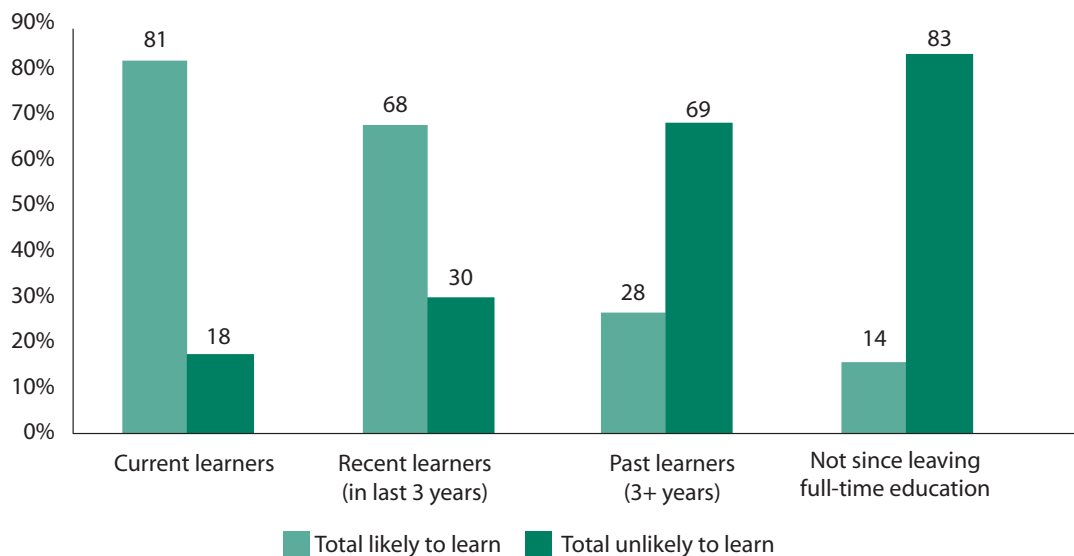
Base: all respondents

Who intends to be learning in the next three years?

When asked about their intentions to take up learning in the next three years, 40% of adults say that they are likely to do so, with 57% saying that they are unlikely to learn.

As in previous years, current participation in learning is a key indicator of future intentions to learn. In the 2013 survey, 81% of current learners say that they are likely to take up learning in the next three years, compared with just 14% of those who have done no learning since leaving full-time education (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Future intentions to take up learning, by learning status, 2013




Base: all adults

The survey


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

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


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




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promoting adult learning



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