

# Learning through lockdown:

Findings from the 2020 Adult Participation in Learning Survey

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## About Learning and Work Institute

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# Introduction

## Summary of findings

There may have never been a more important time for adults to engage in learning. Faced with unprecedented economic and technological change, many adults will need to upskill or retrain to find new work; others will need to develop their skills and adapt to new ways of working within existing roles. There is strong evidence of wider benefits too: adult learning has an important role to play in supporting health and wellbeing, in tackling inequalities and 'levelling up', and in connecting people and tackling social isolation.

In March 2020, the UK Government implemented a lockdown in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Many millions of people worked from home or were furloughed, and parents home-schooled their children. Adult learning providers suspended in-person teaching, and where possible, learning was delivered online instead.

The 2020 Adult Participation in Learning Survey shows that many adults (43%) embraced this opportunity to learn through lockdown, significantly accelerating previous steady growth in online learning: 90% of lockdown learners went online to do some or all of their learning; 44% said they did more learning online as a result of lockdown. And with institutions and workplaces closed or operating remotely, 55% of lockdown learners learned independently, with 24% learning through apps, websites and social media.

While many adults were learning for professional or work-related reasons, others were doing so for personal development (14%) or to pursue a personal interest or hobby (12%). Around one in ten said that reduced time and work pressures encouraged them to learn, with a similar proportion taking up learning to help fill their time.

Lockdown brought significant challenges too. One in five learners found their previously planned learning was postponed or cancelled. Others struggled to balance lockdown learning with work pressures (11%) and childcare or home-schooling (11%), or faced challenges around consistent access to technology (8%). One in ten learners struggled with motivation and one in eight found the lack of face-to-face contact with other learners difficult. Despite these challenges, 91% of lockdown learners said that they were likely to continue to engage in online learning in the future.

The survey highlighted stark inequalities in who engaged with learning during lockdown. Younger adults, full-time workers, those in higher socio-economic grades and with more years of initial education were all more likely to be learning. Among full time employees, those who continued to work during lockdown were more likely to learn than those who were furloughed. While these patterns of participation are not entirely unexpected, they are of serious cause for concern given the unequal impact of the pandemic on the labour market. We know that workers with fewer qualifications and those in lower skilled or lower paid roles were more likely to have been furloughed or to have lost their jobs. Despite

facing a greater need to upskill and retrain to find work in the post-covid economy, these workers are least likely to be accessing learning opportunities.

The 2020 Adult Participation in Learning Survey is part of a wider survey series that has collected a unique and rich evidence base on patterns and trends in adult learning across the UK since 1996. Over the past decade, the survey series has highlighted a staggering decline in adult participation of 10 percentage points – an estimated 3.8 million fewer adult learners at the close of the decade than at its start. Indeed the most recent surveys have highlighted a year-on-year decline in participation, with the 2019 survey reporting that just one in three UK adults (33%) have taken part in any form of learning or training in the past three years, the lowest figure on record.

Covid-related changes to the methodology and sampling for the 2020 survey means that this year's figures are not directly comparable to those recorded in previous years. Nonetheless, the 2020 survey shows much higher levels of engagement in learning than previously seen – with 60% of adults reporting that they have taken part in learning over the previous three years – reflecting wider reports from learning providers, recruitment agencies and digital platforms of an increased interest and engagement with learning and training.

Despite higher levels of participation, persistent patterns of inequality seen across the survey series continue to exist, with older adults, those in lower social grades, those with fewer years of initial education and those furthest from the labour market remaining under-represented in learning. There are differences too between the nations and regions of the UK, with participation higher in England (61%) than in Scotland (56%), Wales (51%) or Northern Ireland (44%). Within England, adults living in London (69%) and the South are more likely to be learning than those living elsewhere.

While engagement in online learning accelerated during lockdown, there has been a growing interest and appetite prior to this. Thirty-eight percent of adults who have engaged in learning over the last three years said that they have done some or all of this learning online. While nearly half of online learners were doing so without support, others benefited from an online tutor, chat room support, or from combining their online learning with in-person teaching.

Online learners say that they particularly value being able to learn in their own time and at their own pace, valuing the flexibility, ease of access and convenience that it offers. But there are challenges too, with one in eight struggling with poor internet connection and in finding the time to learn. But the benefits are clear – ensuring that the growth in online learning is set to continue even as our economy and society opens up again. Four-fifths of online learners identify that they have benefited from being able to access learning at a convenient time, with three-quarters saying that learning online has enabled them to learn at their own pace and been more convenient than having to travel to a learning venue.

## About the survey

The 2020 Adult Participation in Learning Survey explores people's experiences of learning since the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic and the national lockdown introduced on 23 March 2020. This includes why people chose to learn through lockdown, how they learnt, the barriers they experienced, and their intentions to continue learning in the future.

The survey includes 5,190 adults aged 18 and over across the UK, with fieldwork conducted in August to September 2020. This sample has been weighted to provide a nationally representative dataset. The survey was part-funded by the Department for Education.

Learning and Work Institute has been undertaking the Adult Participation in Learning Survey on an almost annual basis for over 20 years<sup>1</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. 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)

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.'*

In previous years, the survey has been conducted face to face. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the 2020 survey was conducted via telephone. The results of the 2020 survey are therefore not directly comparable with previous years.

Further information about the methodology can be found in the Annex.

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<sup>1</sup> Surveys were undertaken annually from 1996 except in three years: 1997, 1998 and 2016.

## Learning through lockdown

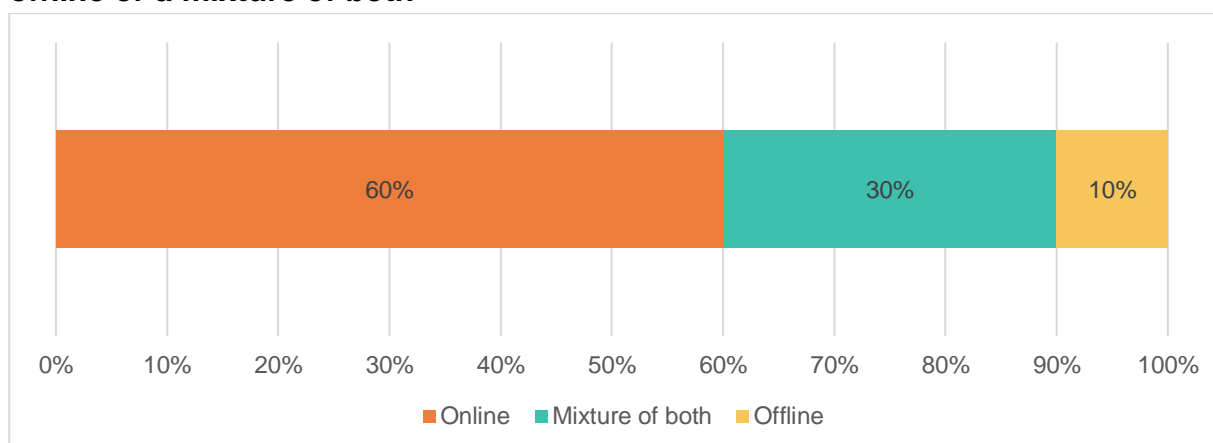
In March 2020, the UK Government implemented a lockdown in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Many millions of people worked from home or were furloughed, and parents home-schooled their children. Adult learning providers suspended in-person teaching, and where possible, learning was delivered online instead. This year's Adult Participation in Learning Survey sought to understand whether people used this time at home for learning.

The survey shows that just over two fifths (43 per cent) of adults have engaged in learning since the beginning of lockdown.

### How adults learnt in lockdown

As Figure 1 shows, 60 per cent of adult learners did their learning online. Just 10 per cent were learning offline, while 30 per cent combined the two. Just over two fifths (44 per cent) of adults said they did more online learning as a result of the lockdown.

**Figure 1: Whether learning since the beginning of lockdown has been mostly online, offline or a mixture of both**

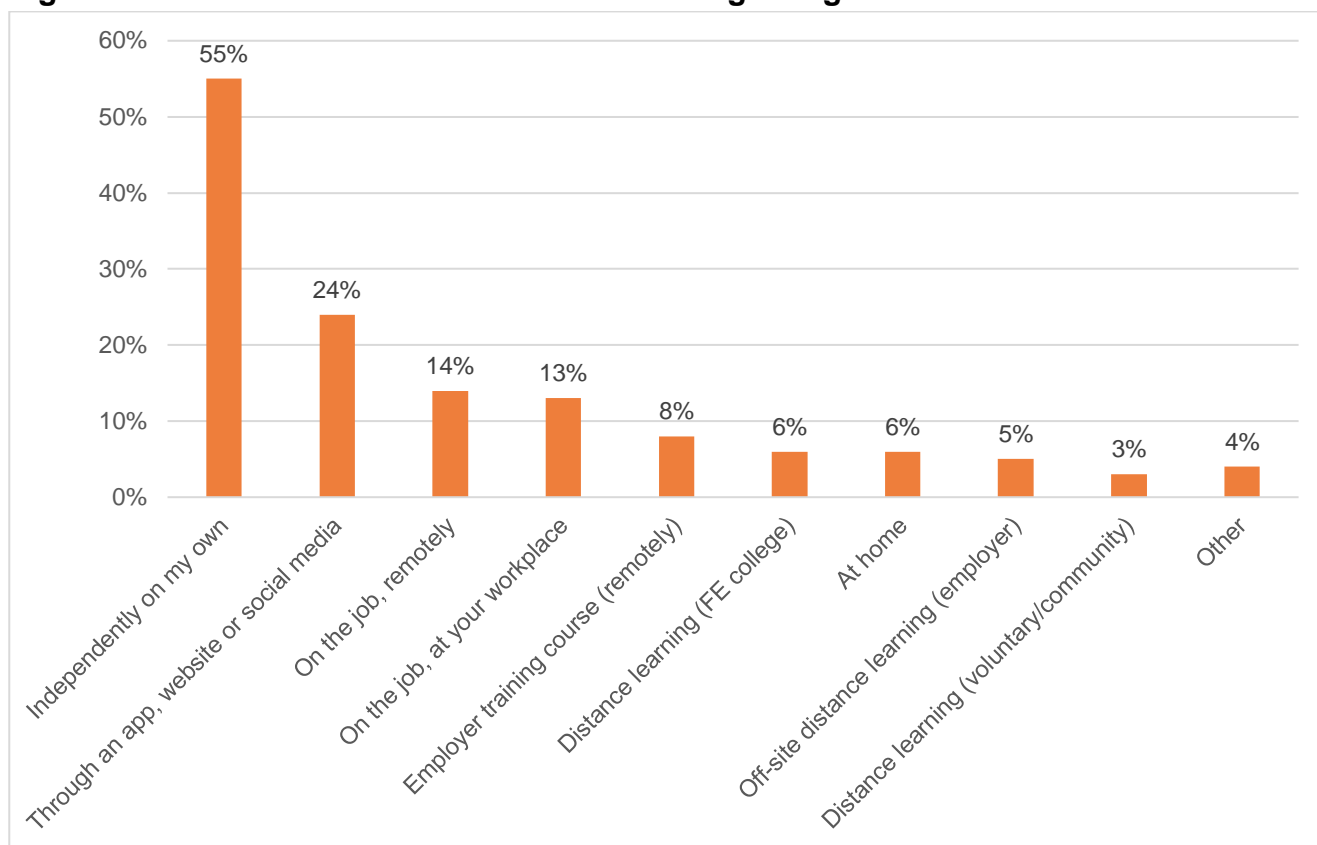


Base: all respondents who have engaged in learning since lockdown. Weighted base = 2,228

Learners were asked how they did their learning and the results are shown in Figure 2 below (respondents could select more than one option). Just over half (55 per cent) of adults who have engaged in learning since the lockdown did so independently and around a quarter (24 per cent) were learning through an app, website or social media. Some people did their learning on the job, either remotely (14 per cent) and/or at their workplace (13 per cent), while some accessed distance learning through a college (six per cent) and/or through a voluntary or community organisation (three per cent).



**Figure 2: How learners have learnt since the beginning of lockdown**

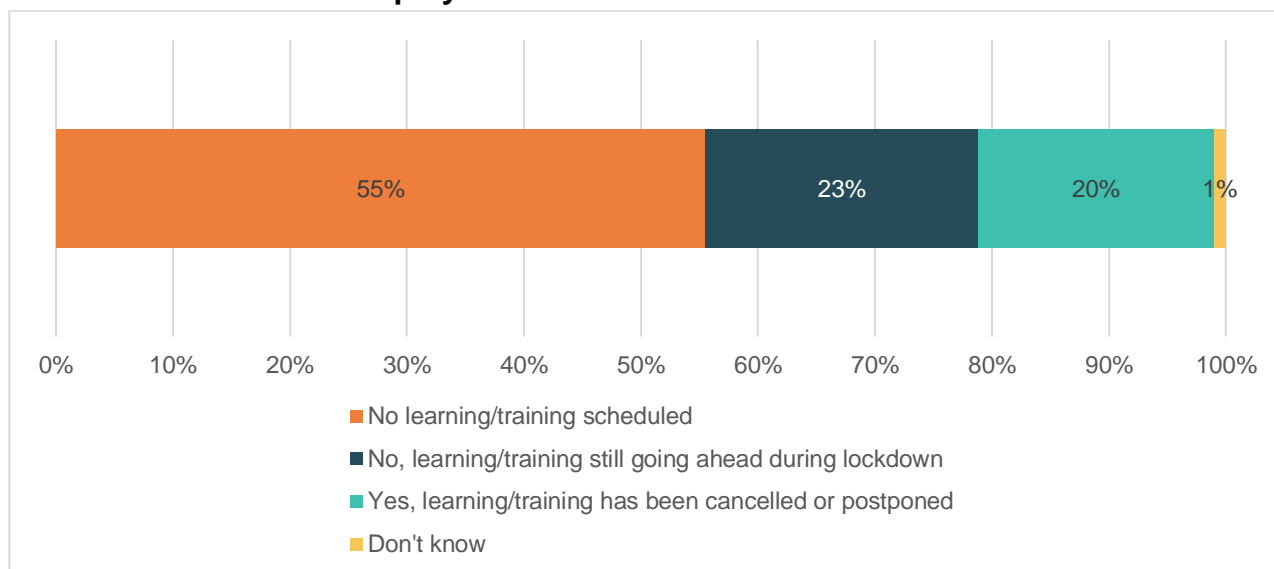


Base: all respondents who have engaged in learning since lockdown. Weighted base = 2,228

Note: Respondents could give more than one answer

The national lockdown was implemented quickly, affecting people’s plans at short notice. This led to some learning activities being cancelled or postponed, while some activities moved online. Respondents were therefore asked whether lockdown had affected any previously planned learning or training related to their current or future employment. While 23 per cent said that their training has still gone ahead, 20 per cent said it had been postponed or cancelled (Figure 3). Just over half (55 per cent) did not have any learning or training scheduled.

**Figure 3: Whether coronavirus affected any scheduled learning/training related to their current or future employment**



Base: all respondents. Weighted base = 5,190

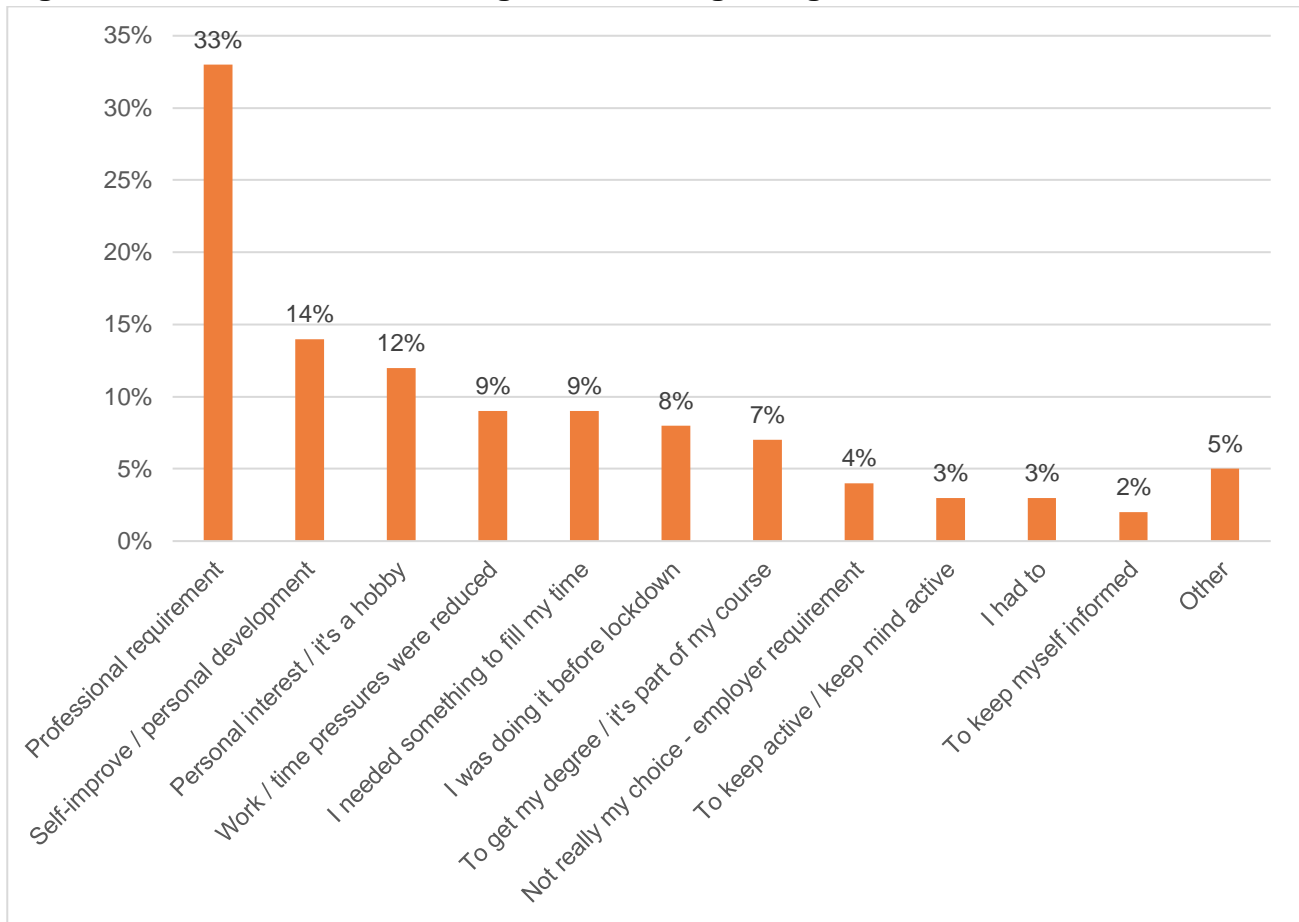
Note: Percentages do not equal 100 per cent due to rounding

### Motivations to learn in lockdown

In previous years, the Adult Participation in Learning Survey has shown that work is a key motivator for learning. The economic impact of the pandemic means that people will need to develop their skills or retrain for new jobs, as well as to adapt to new ways of working. The survey series has also shown that people learn for more personal reasons too. The lockdown is likely to have resulted in more time at home, potentially providing an opportunity to pursue personal interests.

One third (33 per cent) of adult learners said they have engaged in learning since the beginning of lockdown due to “professional requirements”, demonstrating that work was a key motivator (Figure 4). Respondents also cited wanting to learn for personal development (14 per cent) and to pursue a personal interest or hobby (12 per cent). Nine per cent said that they engaged in learning because work/time pressures were reduced and nine per cent took up learning to help fill their time.

**Figure 4: Motivations for learning since the beginning of lockdown**



Base: all respondents who have engaged in learning since lockdown. Weighted base = 2,228

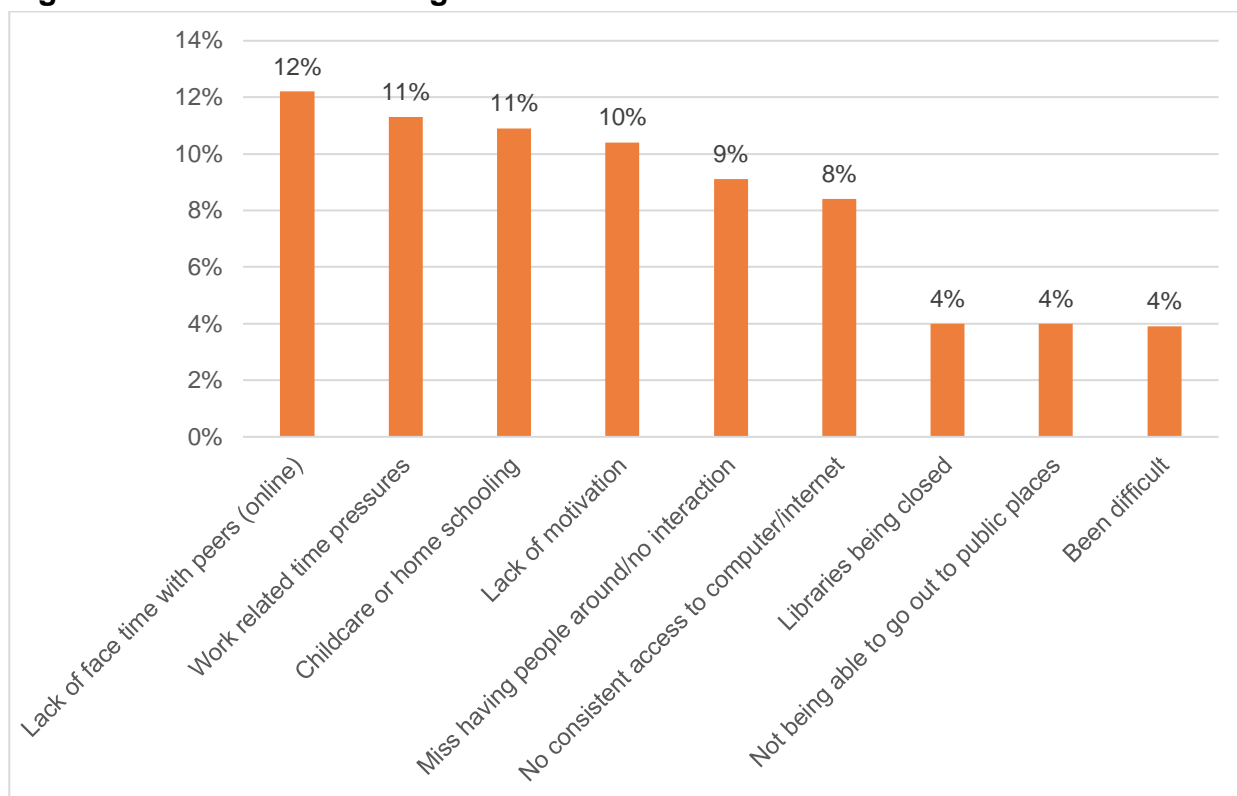
Note: Respondents could give more than one answer

### Barriers to learning in lockdown

While lockdown enabled some adults to overcome the challenges of learning, others experienced additional challenges, or found that the lockdown exacerbated barriers to learning. Of those who experienced difficulties, 11 per cent cited work related pressures, 11 per cent said childcare or home schooling arrangements and 10 per cent experienced a lack of motivation (Figure 5). Other difficulties related to online learning, including a lack of face to face contact with peers being off-putting (12 cent) and a lack of consistent access to technology (eight per cent). Some respondents identified difficulties relating to social distancing measures, including missing interaction with other people (nine per cent), libraries being closed (four per cent) and not being able to go out in public places (four per cent).

One third (33 per cent) of adults said that nothing has made their learning difficult and nine per cent said that nothing has prevented them from continuing with their learning.

**Figure 5: Barriers to learning since lockdown**



Base: all who have engaged in learning since lockdown and have identified a challenge to learning during lockdown. Multi-choice open answer question. Weighted base = 1,264

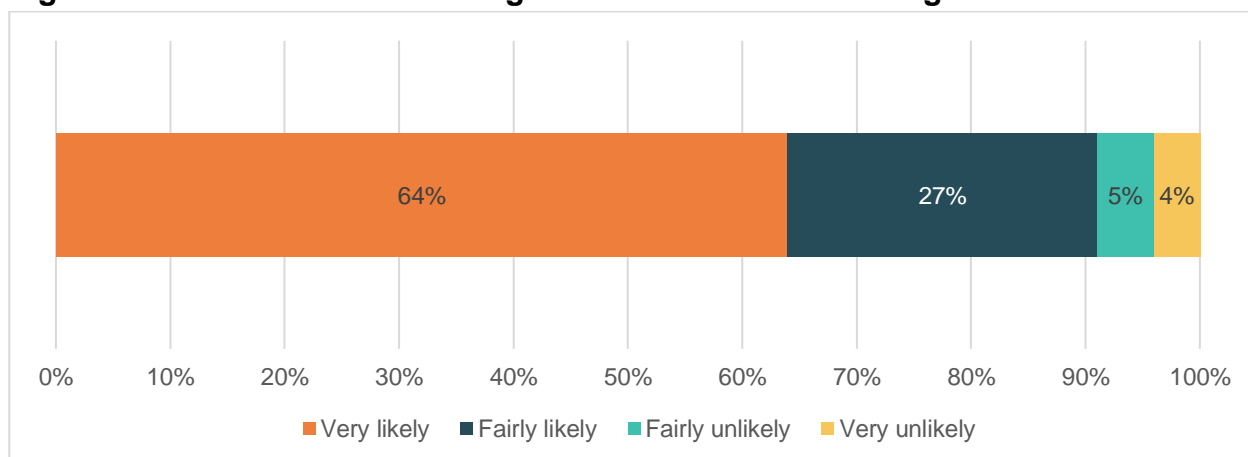
Note: Respondents could give more than one answer.

### Future intentions to learn

The pandemic accelerated the move to more online learning, and this was the first time some adults had accessed learning in this way. As the pandemic is not yet over, online learning will continue to be important. Based on their experience of learning online since the beginning of the coronavirus lockdown, nearly two thirds (64 per cent) of adult learners said they are *very* likely to continue to use online methods of learning in the future, with a further 27 per cent saying they are *fairly* likely to do so (Figure 6). Only nine per cent of those who have learnt since lockdown said they would be unlikely to continue online learning in the future.

Further analysis shows that this intention to continue to learn online in the future is more prevalent among men than women, among adults age 25+ than younger adults, among those in the highest socio-economic group (ABs), and among those in full-time employment.

**Figure 6: Likelihood of continuing online methods of learning in the future**

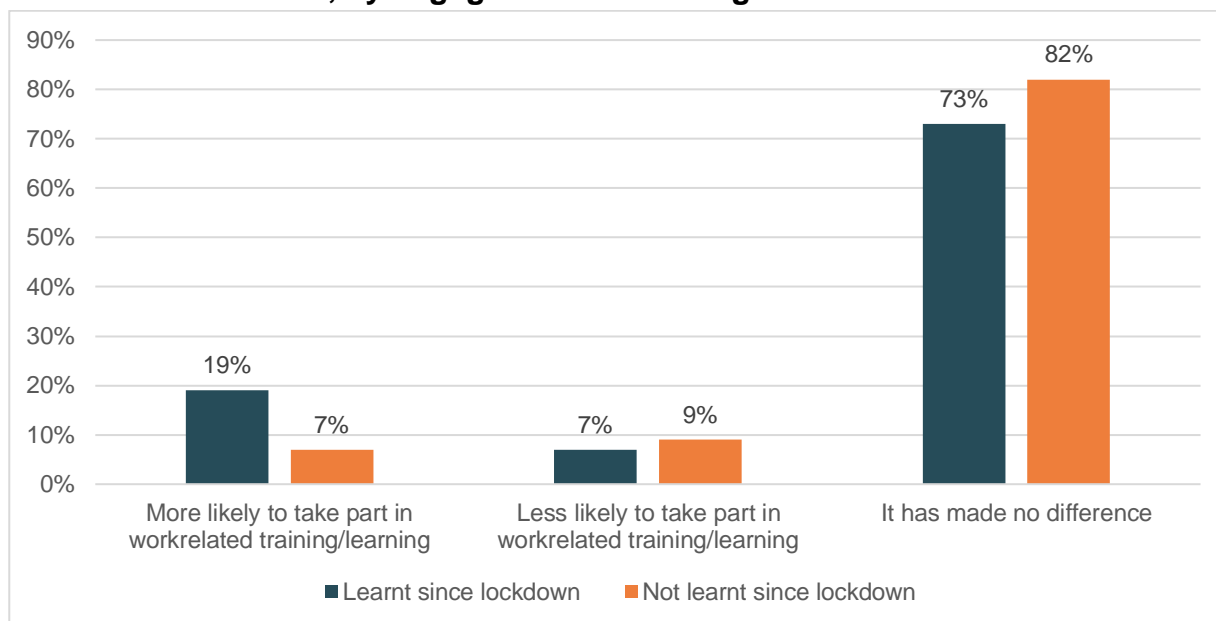


Base: all respondents who have engaged in online learning since lockdown. Weighted base = 2,004

Given the economic impact of the pandemic, there is a growing need for people to learn and develop new skills for work. All respondents, regardless of whether they had engaged with learning during lockdown, were asked whether they think they are more or less likely to take part in work-related training and learning as a result of the coronavirus situation. While just over three quarters (78 per cent) of respondents said that coronavirus has made no difference to their likelihood of engaging in work-related training or learning, 12 per cent of adults said they are now *more* likely to take part in work-related training and learning (Figure 7). However, eight per cent said they are now *less* likely to do so.

Those who have taken part in learning since the beginning of lockdown are more likely to learn in the future than those who have not. Around one in five (19 per cent) people who learnt in lockdown said they are now more likely to take part in work-related training and learning, compared to seven per cent of those who did not learn during lockdown. When comparing those who have and have not learnt since the beginning of lockdown, the latter were more likely to say that the pandemic has made no difference to their intention to take up learning in the future (73 per cent compared to 82 per cent). This difference is statistically significant.

**Figure 7: Future intentions to take part in work-related training and learning as a result of coronavirus, by engagement in learning since the start of lockdown**



Base: all respondents. Weighted base = all respondents = 5,190, learnt since lockdown = 2,228, not learnt since lockdown = 2,945.

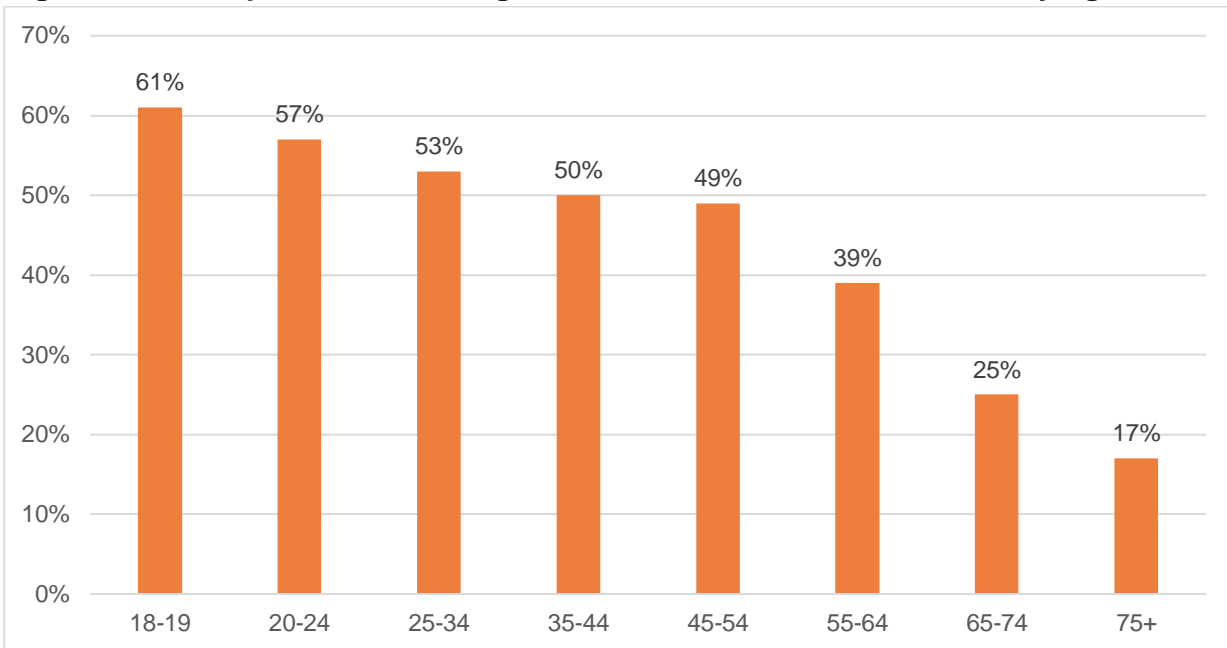
Note: Percentages do not equal 100 per cent due to rounding.

### Who engaged in learning in lockdown

As reflected more broadly in the Adult Participation in Learning Survey series, engagement in learning is not evenly spread across the population, with learners more likely to be young, in work, from higher social grades and with more years of initial education. In the same way, learning in lockdown declined with age, social grade, and also varied by working status, ethnicity and geography.

Figure 8 shows that younger adults were most likely to have engaged in learning since the beginning of lockdown, with 61 per cent of 18-19 year olds doing so, compared to 17 per cent of those aged 75+. Participation in learning steadily declines in age until 55 years old when it substantially falls. These differences are statistically significant.

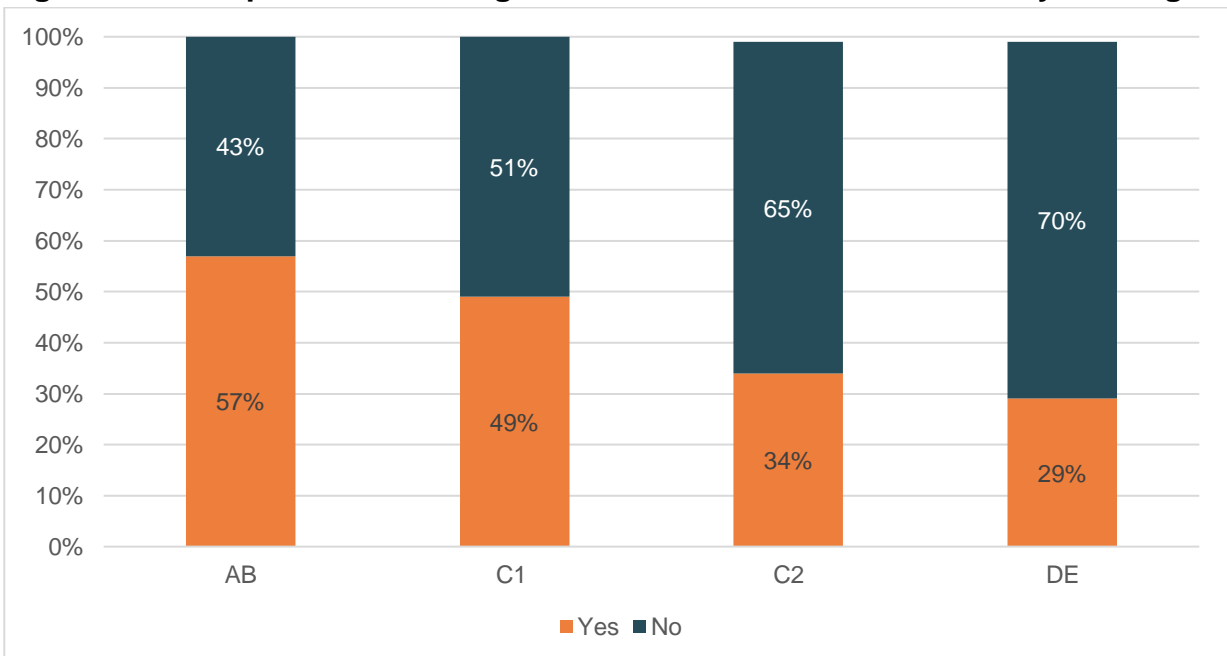
**Figure 8: Participation in learning since the coronavirus lockdown by age**



Base: all respondents. Weighted Base = 18-19 = 135, 20-24 = 416, 25-34 = 890, 35-44 = 827, 45-54 = 886, 55-64 = 801, 65-74 = 722, 75+ = 496.

Participation in learning declines with social grade, with adults in the AB group nearly twice as likely to have engaged in learning in lockdown than those in DE (57 per cent compared to 29 per cent) (Figure 9). These differences are statistically significant.

**Figure 9: Participation in learning since the coronavirus lockdown by social grade**

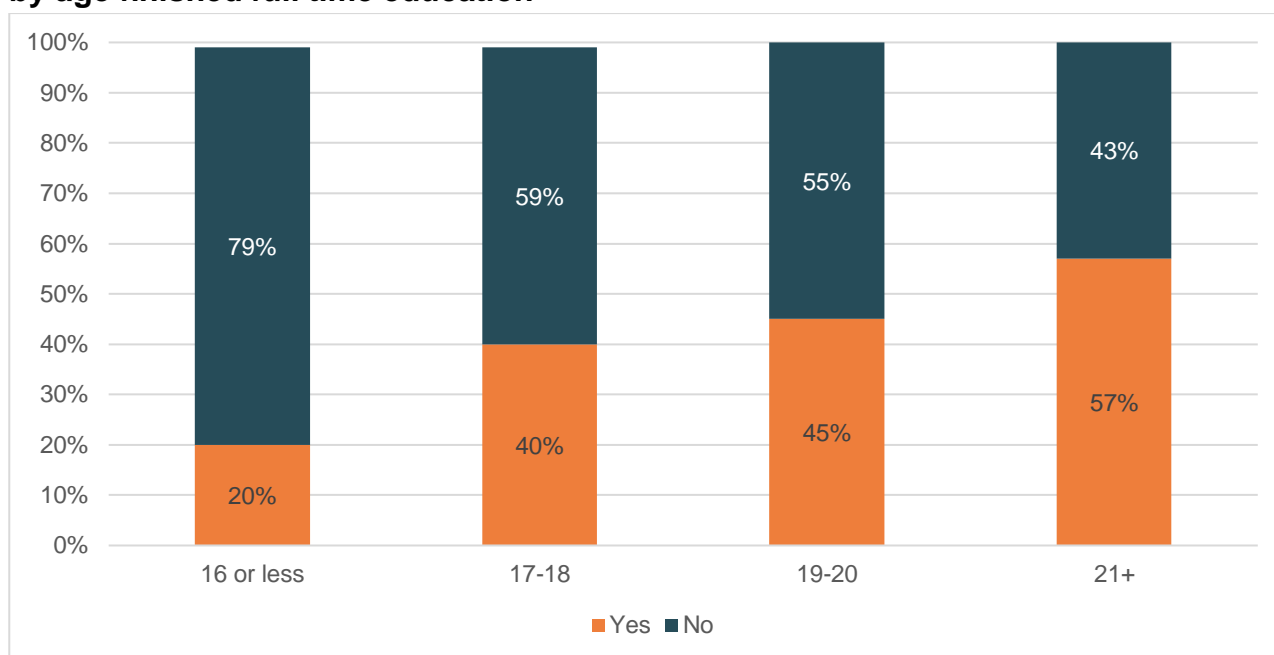


Base: all respondents. Weighted Base = AB = 1,357, C1 = 1,356, C2 = 1,079, DE = 1,228.

Note: Percentages do not equal 100 per cent due to rounding.

The later adults left full time education, the more likely they are to have engaged in learning since the beginning of lockdown. Adults who left full time education aged 21+ were almost three times as likely to have learnt since the beginning of lockdown than those who left aged 16 or under (57 per cent compared to 20 per cent) (Figure 10). This difference is statistically significant.

**Figure 10: Participation in learning since the beginning of the coronavirus lockdown by age finished full time education**



Base: all respondents. Weighted Base = 16 or less = 1,458, 17-18 = 988, 19-20 = 417, 21+ = 2,061.

Note: Percentages do not equal 100 per cent due to rounding.

One in three (34 per cent) adults who were out of work took part in lockdown learning, compared to over half (52 per cent) of those who were in employment.

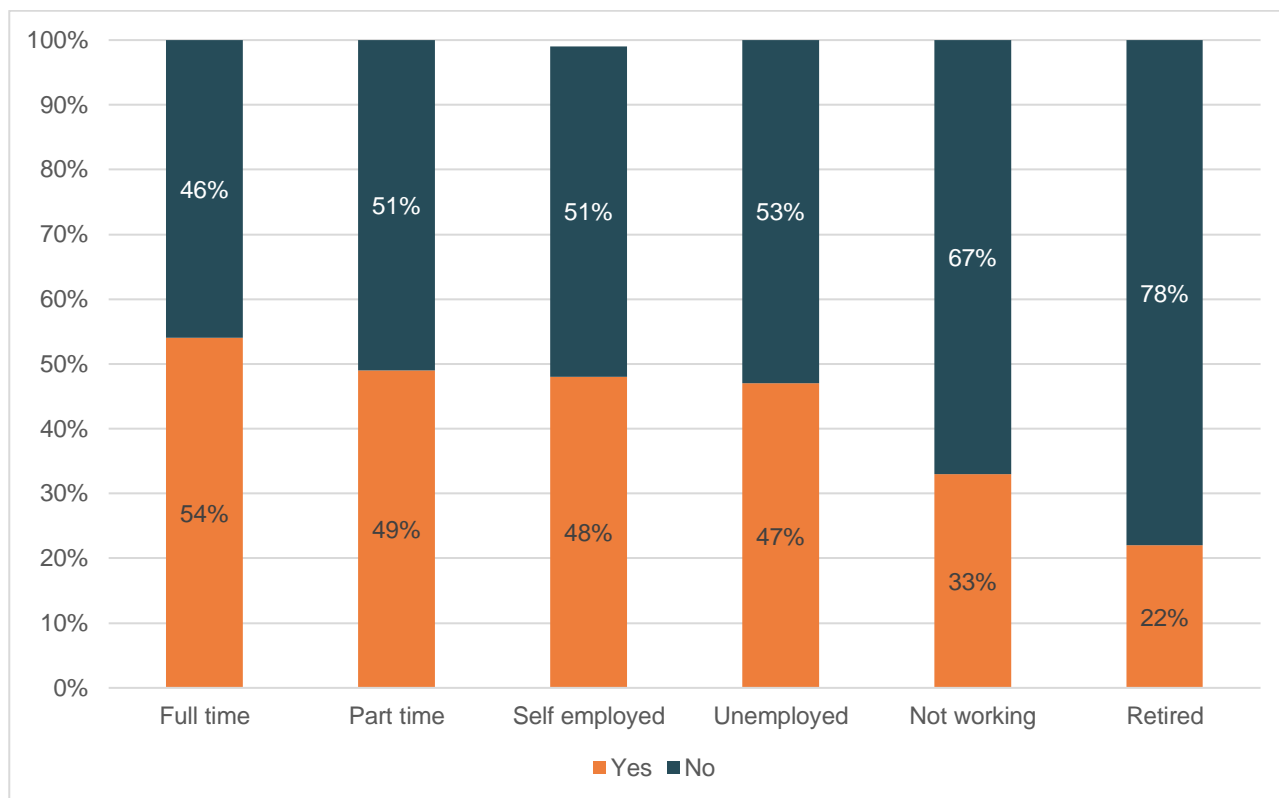
Full time workers were most likely to have engaged in learning since lockdown (54 per cent), compared with just under half of part-time workers (49 per cent), self-employed people (48 per cent) and unemployed adults (47 per cent). Just one third (33 per cent) of adults who are not working and 22 per cent of those who are retired engaged in learning in this period (Figure 11).

Overall, furloughed workers<sup>2</sup> (44 per cent) were just as likely as those who continued to work during lockdown (43 per cent) to engage in learning. However, among full-time employees, 42 per cent of those on furlough engaged in learning, compared with 54 per cent of those who were not furloughed.

<sup>2</sup> Both full time and part time employees



**Figure 11: Participation in learning since the coronavirus lockdown by employment status**



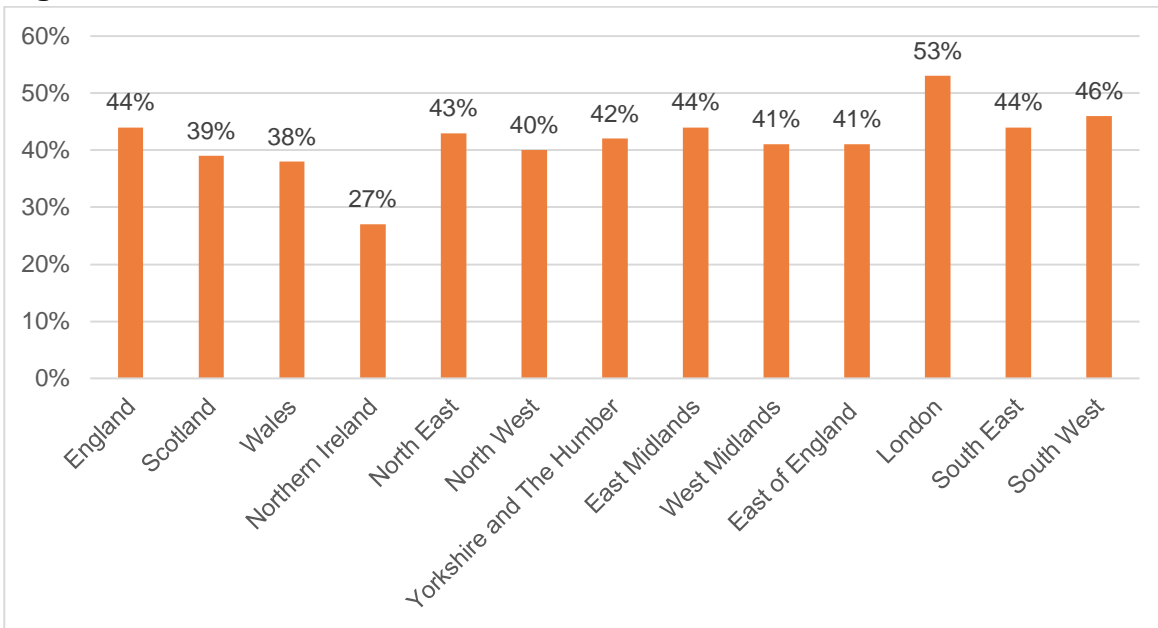
Base: all respondents. Weighted base = Full time = 2,003, Part time = 562, Self employed = 494, Unemployed = 225, Not working = 154, Retired = 1,275.

Note: Percentages do not equal 100 per cent due to rounding.

There is a variation in learning by country, with 44 per cent of adults in England learning since the start of lockdown, compared to 39 per cent in Scotland, 38 per cent in Wales and 27 per cent in Northern Ireland (Figure 12).

In England, participation was highest in London (53 per cent) and lowest in the North West (40 per cent).

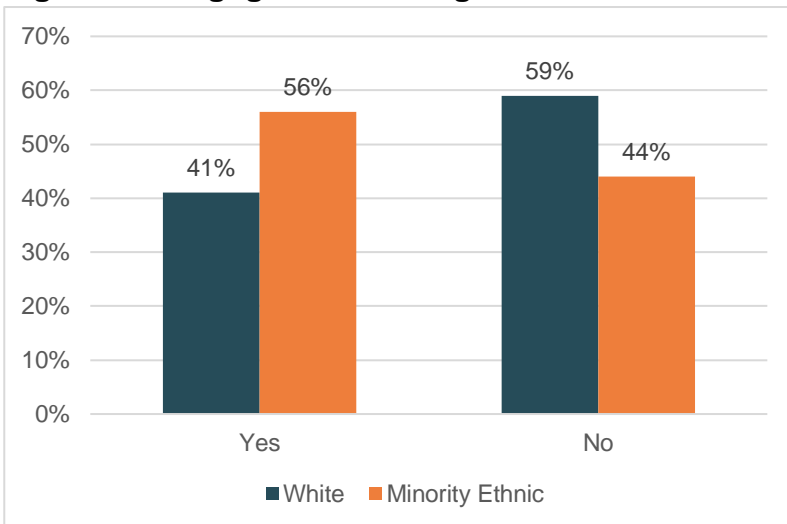
**Figure 12: Participation in learning since the coronavirus lockdown by country and region**



Base: all respondents. Weighted Base = East Midlands = 376, East of England = 486, London = 677, North East = 208, North West = 569, Scotland = 436, South East = 708, South West = 450, Wales = 248, West Midlands = 458, Yorkshire and the Humber = 422, Northern Ireland = 151.

Adults from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds were more likely than adults from white backgrounds to have learnt since the beginning of lockdown (Figure 13). This difference is statistically significant.

**Figure 13: Engaged in learning since the the start of lockdown, by ethnicity**



Base: all respondents. Weighted Base = White = 4,484, Minority Ethnic = 675.

## Results from the wider survey

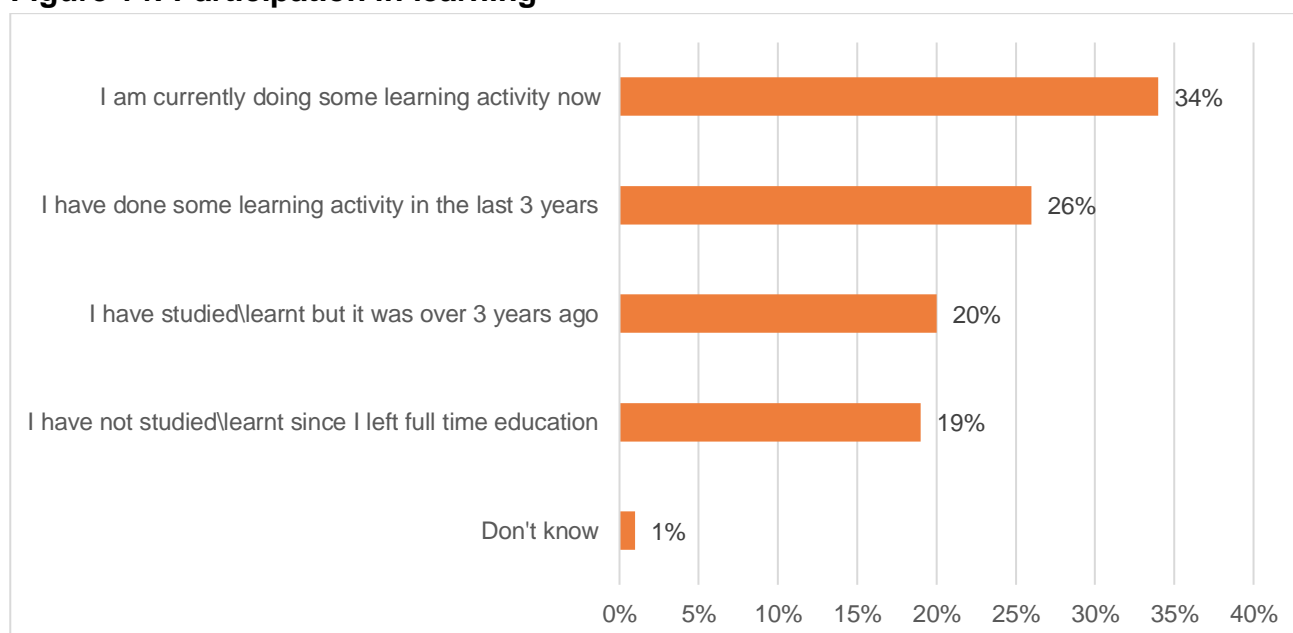
The Adult Participation in Learning Survey has been running on an almost annual basis since 1996<sup>3</sup>. In addition to questions on learning since the beginning of the coronavirus lockdown, the 2020 survey included questions on adult participation in learning more widely and the results are presented in this chapter. It should be noted that the methodology for the 2020 survey was changed due to the coronavirus pandemic (see annex for details). The results are therefore not directly comparable with those from previous years.

### Participation in learning

The 2020 survey shows that 34 per cent of adults are currently learning, with a further 26 per cent having done so in the previous three years (see Figure 14). While 19 per cent of adults have not learnt since leaving full-time education, 20 per cent have done so, but over three years ago.

Although the two surveys are not directly comparable, in 2020 a greater proportion of respondents said they were currently learning than in the 2019 survey, while a smaller proportion of respondents have said that they have not done any learning since leaving full time education.

**Figure 14: Participation in learning**



Base: all respondents. Weighted base = 5,190

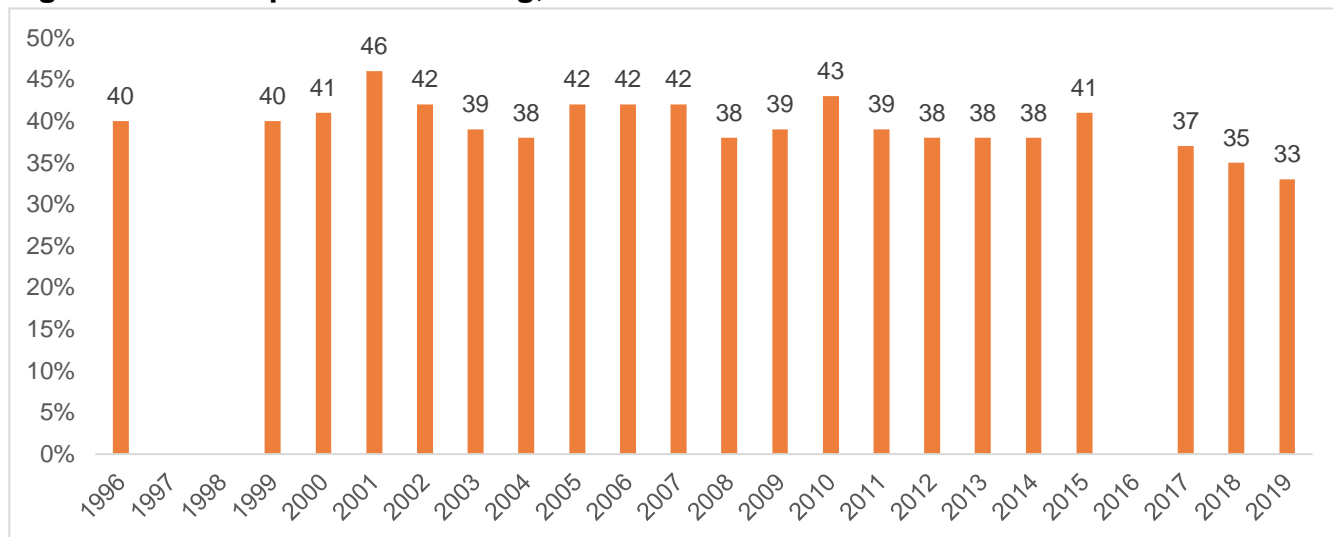
Over the survey series around two fifths of adults say that they are either currently learning or have done so in the last three years (see Figure 15). More recently, the survey has measured a year on year decline in participation, and in 2019, just one third (33 per cent)

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

of adults said that they had engaged in learning, the lowest rate in the history of the survey series.

Although the different methodology used for the 2020 survey means that this year's figures are not directly comparable, at 60 per cent<sup>4</sup>, the 2020 survey indicates a substantially higher level of engagement with learning than we have seen in previous years.

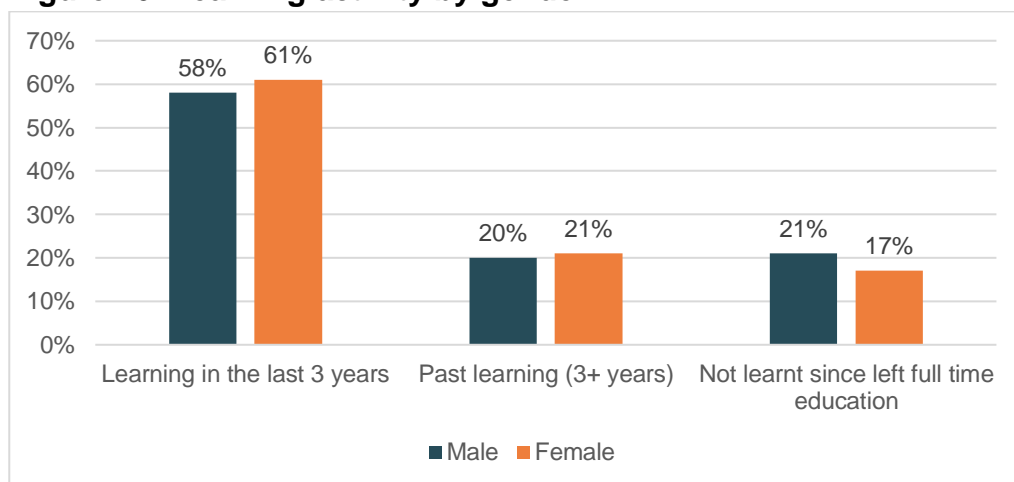
**Figure 15: Participation in learning, 1996-2019**



### Demographic breakdowns

Women are more likely than men to have taken part in learning in the last three years (61 per cent compared to 58 per cent) (Figure 16), and less likely not to have been engaged in learning since leaving full time education) (21 per cent compared to 17 per cent). These differences are statistically significant.

**Figure 16: Learning activity by gender**



Base: all respondents. Weighted Base = Male = 2,524, Female = 2,638

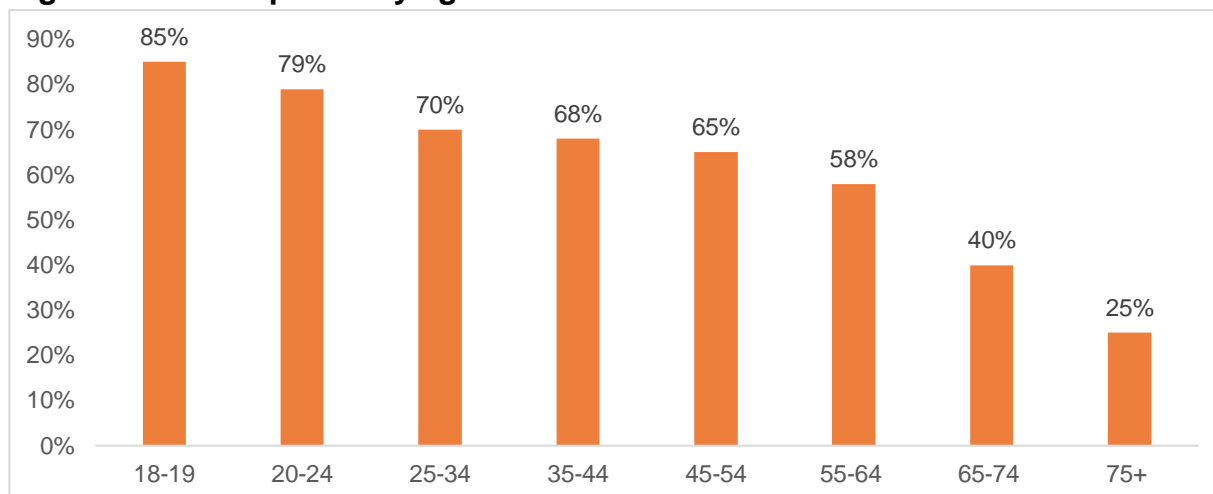
Note: Percentages do not equal 100 per cent due to rounding.

<sup>4</sup> This figures includes adults who are currently learning or have done so in the last three years

As Figure 17 shows, adult participation in learning declines with age; a trend that is consistent with previous surveys. Adults aged 18-19 are most likely to have taken part in learning in the last three years (85 per cent). The participation rate declines around age 25 and then is relatively stable up to when people reach their 50s, after which it steeply declines. These differences are statistically significant.

Although not directly comparable, participation among adults of working age is relatively higher than in previous surveys.

**Figure 17: Participation by age**



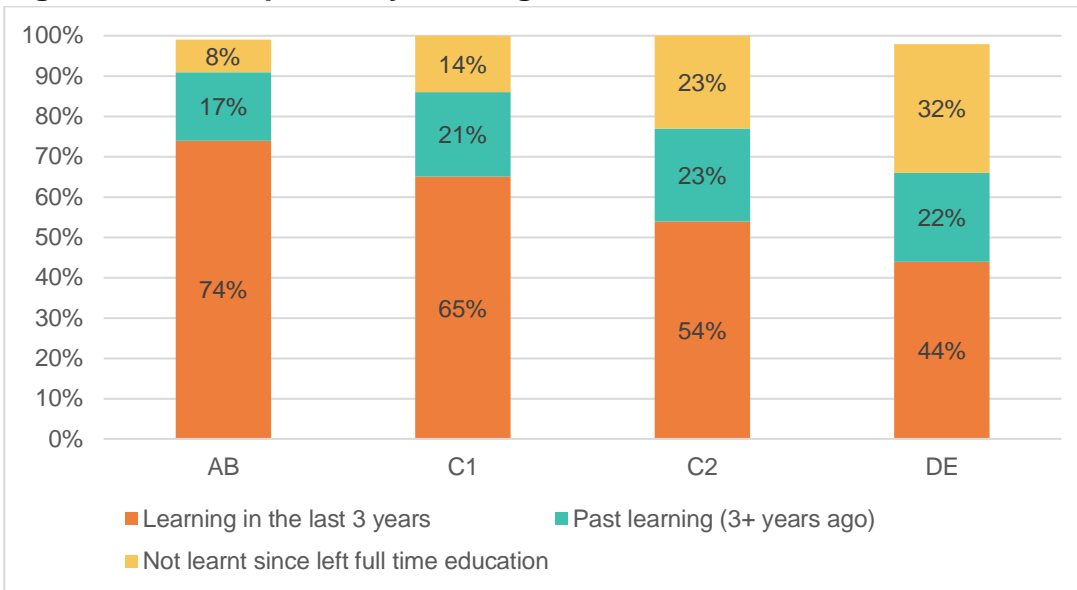
Base: all respondents. Weighted base = 18-19 = 135, 20-24 = 416, 25-34 = 890, 35-44 = 827, 45-54 = 886, 55-64 = 801, 65-74 = 722, 75+ = 496.

As with previous surveys, social grade<sup>5</sup> remains a predictor of participation in learning; participation declines with social grade (see Figure 18). Nearly three quarters (74 per cent) of adults in the AB social grade are current or recent learners, compared to 44 per cent of adults in DE. Adults in DE are four times more likely to not have done any learning since leaving full time education than adults in AB (32 per cent compared to eight per cent). These differences are statistically significant.

Compared to previous surveys, the proportion of adults in the AB grade who have taken part in learning has grown more than any other social grade.

<sup>5</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.

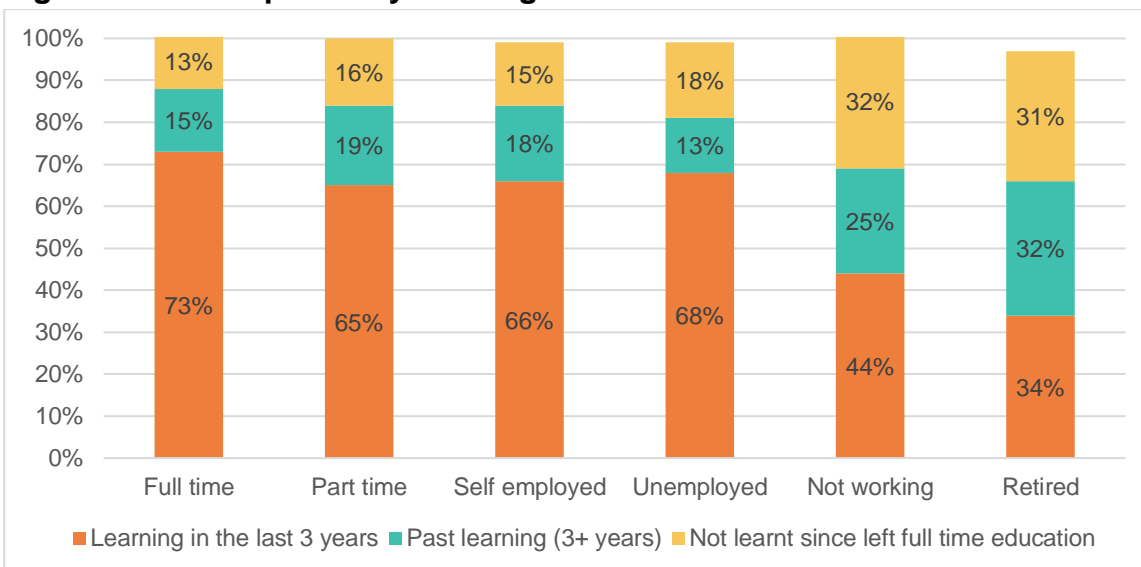
**Figure 18: Participation by social grade**



Base: all respondents. Weighted base = AB = 1,357, C1 = 1,356, C2 = 1,079, DE = 1,228.  
 Note: Percentages do not equal 100 per cent due to rounding.

Previous surveys have shown working status to be a key predictor of participation, with those closest to the labour market also more likely to engage in learning. In the 2020 survey, full time workers have the highest rate of participation in learning at 73 per cent, followed by unemployed adults (68 per cent) (Figure 19). Two thirds (66 per cent) of self employed adults and 65 per cent of part time workers have taken part in learning in the last three years, compared to just 44 per cent of respondents out of work (who are economically inactive). Nearly a third (31 per cent) of those who have retired say they have not engaged in learning since leaving full time education.

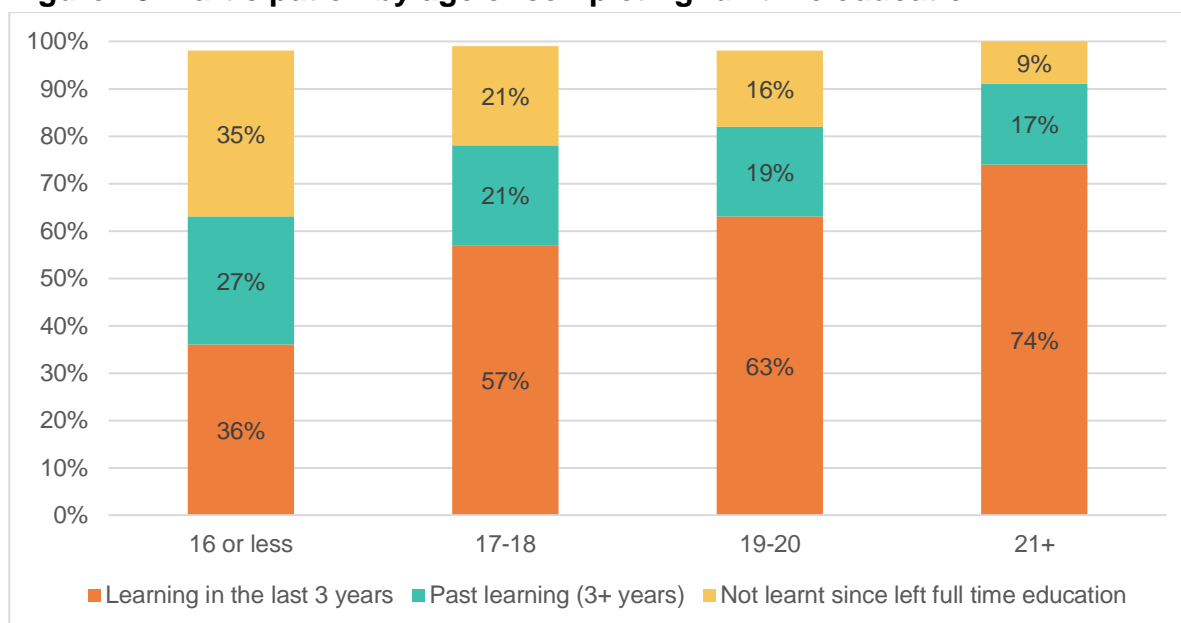
**Figure 19: Participation by working status**



Base: all respondents. Weighted base = Full time = 2,003, Part time = 562, Self employed = 494, Unemployed = 225, Not working = 154, Retired = 1,275  
 Note: Percentages do not equal 100 per cent due to rounding.

The age at which respondents completed full-time education is associated with participation in learning. People who stay in education are more likely to learn as an adult – the longer they stay on the greater their likelihood of doing so. Adults who left education aged 21 or above are more than twice as likely to have taken part in learning the last three years than those who left education aged 16 or under (74 per cent compared to 36 per cent) (Figure 20). Adults who left full time education aged 16 or under are just as likely to not have done any learning since leaving full time education (35 per cent) as they are to have learnt in the last three years (36 per cent). These differences are statistically significant.

**Figure 20: Participation by age of completing full time education**



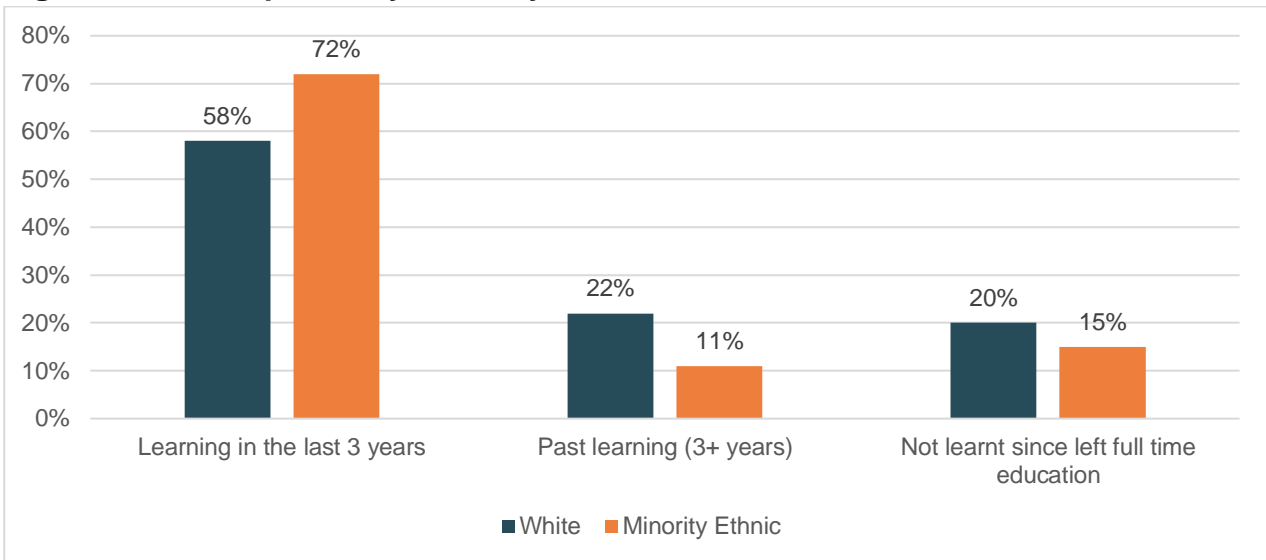
Base: all respondents. Weighted base = 16 or less = 1458, 17-18 = 988, 19-20 = 417, 21+ = 2061.

Note: Percentages do not equal 100 per cent due to rounding.

Adults from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds are more likely than those from white backgrounds to have participated in learning in the last three years (72 per cent compared to 58 per cent) (Figure 21).<sup>6</sup> Respondents from white backgrounds are more likely than those from BAME backgrounds to say that they last participated in learning over three years ago or have not learnt since leaving full time education. These results are statistically significant and are in line with previous years.

<sup>6</sup> We recognise that grouping respondents into two categories masks differences between individual ethnic groups, however the size of the respondent base does not allow for more detailed analysis.

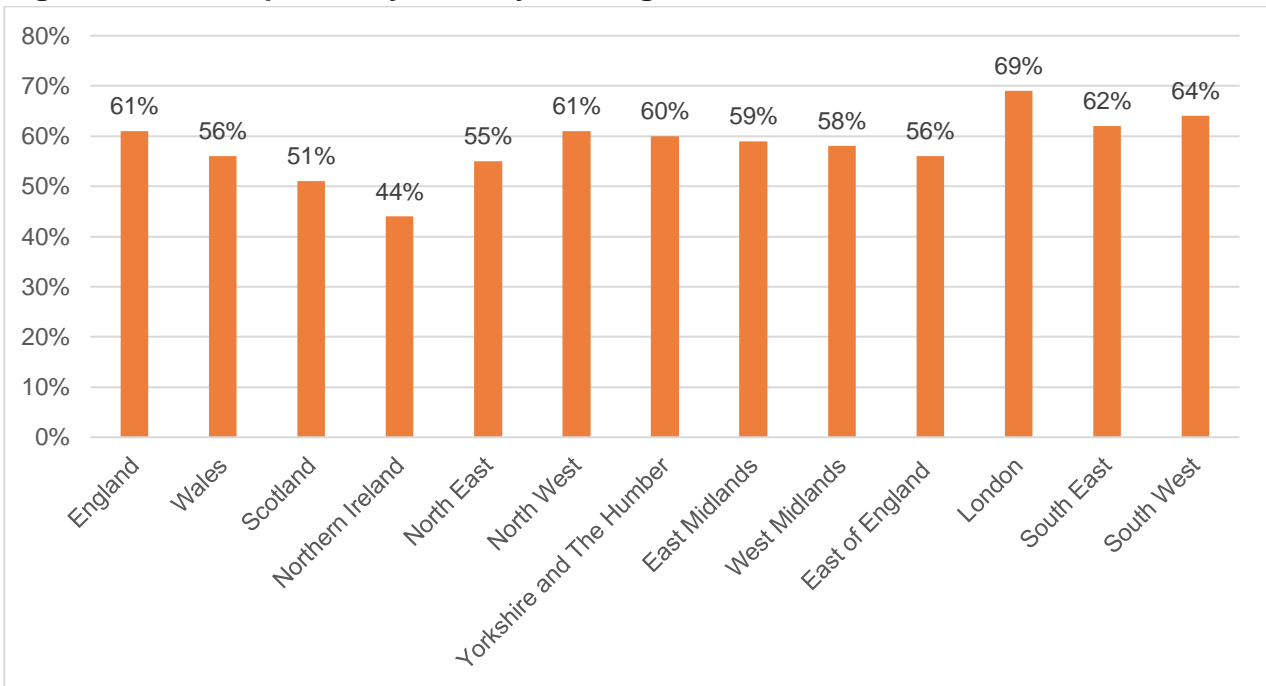
**Figure 21: Participation by ethnicity**



Base: all respondents. Weighted base = White = 4,484, Minority Ethnic = 675.  
 Note: Percentages do not equal 100 per cent due to rounding.

When comparing levels of participation in learning across the UK, the survey shows considerable variation between countries. Three fifths (61 per cent) of adults in England are either currently learning or have done so in the past three years, compared with 56 per cent of adults in Wales, 51 per cent in Scotland and 44 per cent in Northern Ireland (Figure 22). By English region, London has the highest proportion of learners, at 69 per cent. The North East has the lowest participation rate at 55 per cent.

**Figure 22: Participation by country and region**



Base: all respondents. Weighted base = East Mid = 376, East of Eng = 486, London = 677, North East = 208, North West = 569, Scotland = 436, South East = 708, South West = 450, Wales = 248, West Mid = 458, Yorks and Hum = 422, Northern Ireland = 151.



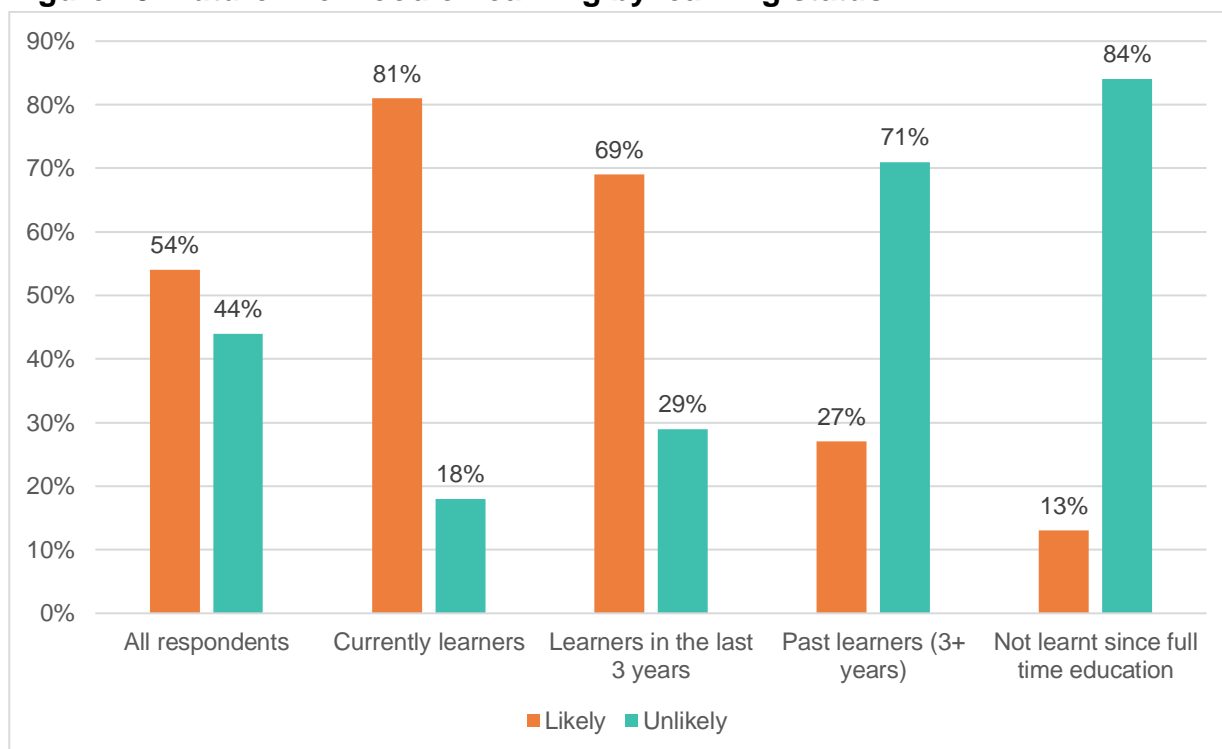
## Future intentions to learn

As well as patterns and experiences of current/recent learning, the survey captures future intentions to learn and how these vary across the adult population. All respondents were asked how likely they were to participate in the next three years.

Just over half of adults (54 per cent) say that they are either fairly or very likely to, while 44 per cent say they would be fairly or very unlikely to participate in learning within the next three years (Figure 23). While not directly comparable, this is higher than surveys in previous years, when around two fifths said they were fairly or very likely to learn in the next three years.

As in previous years, the 2020 survey suggests that current or recent participation in learning is a key indicator of future intentions to learn. Four in five current learners (81 per cent) say that they are likely to take up learning again in the next three years, compared with just 13 per cent of adults who have done no learning since leaving full-time education. This difference is statistically significant and illustrates the importance of providing adults with first step opportunities to learn, as this is often the gateway to helping people become lifelong learners.

**Figure 23: Future likelihood of learning by learning status**



Base: all respondents. Weighted base = all respondents = 5,190, currently learners = 1,765, learners in the last 3 years = 1,330, past learners (3+ years) = 1,049, not learnt since full time education = 988.

## Motivations and barriers to learn

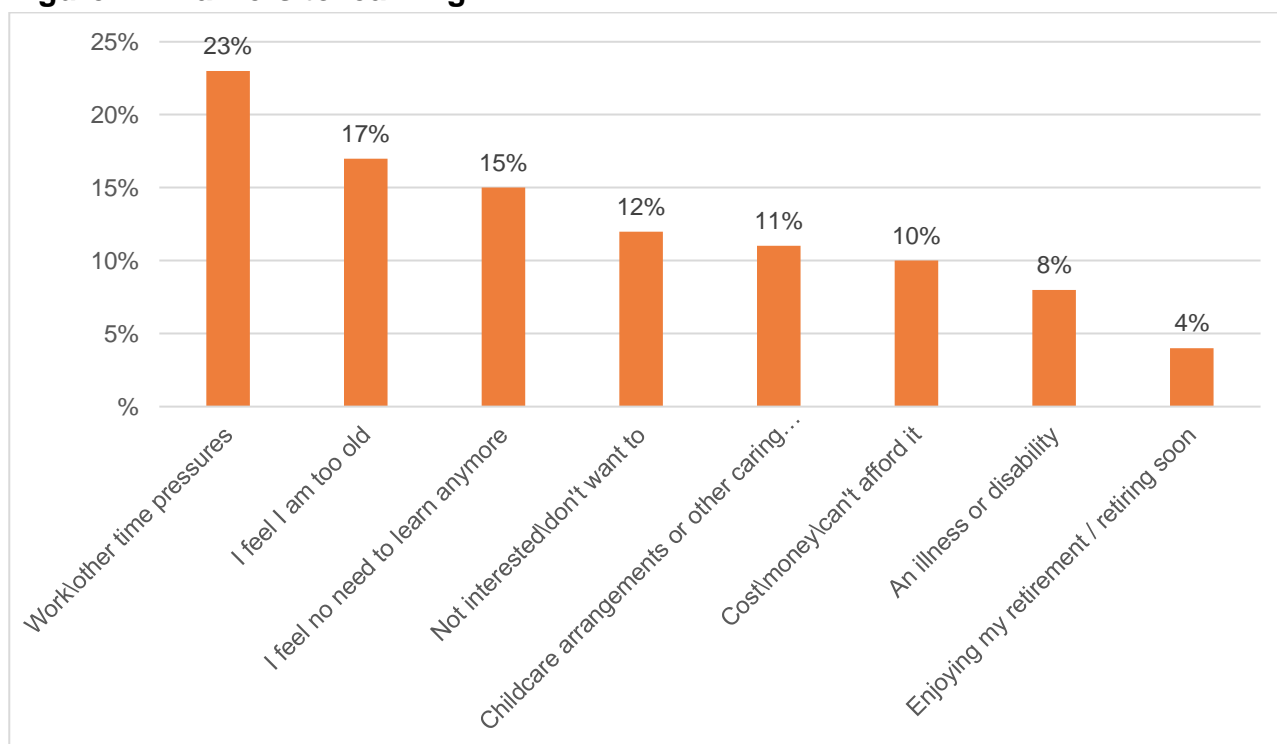
When asked about their motivations for learning, nearly two thirds (65 per cent) of learners said they were learning for work or career related reasons, while one third (35 per cent)

said they were learning for leisure or personal interest.

Each year, respondents who have not participated in learning for at least three years are asked to identify the factors that prevent them from doing so. This provides insights on the types of obstacles that policy and practice can seek to remove to ensure that more and more diverse groups of adults are able to engage in learning throughout their lives.

Nearly a quarter (23 per cent) of adults who have not taken part in learning in the last three years identified work and other time pressures as a barrier (Figure 24). Other practical barriers identified by respondents include childcare or caring responsibilities (11 per cent) and the financial cost (10 per cent). Other barriers relate to adults' attitudes towards learning including feeling too old to learn (17 per cent), not feeling the need to learn anymore (15 per cent) and not being interested in learning (12 per cent). One in ten learners (10 per cent) said nothing is preventing them from learning.

**Figure 24: Barriers to learning**



Base: all who have not studied in the last 3 years. Weighted base = 2,037.

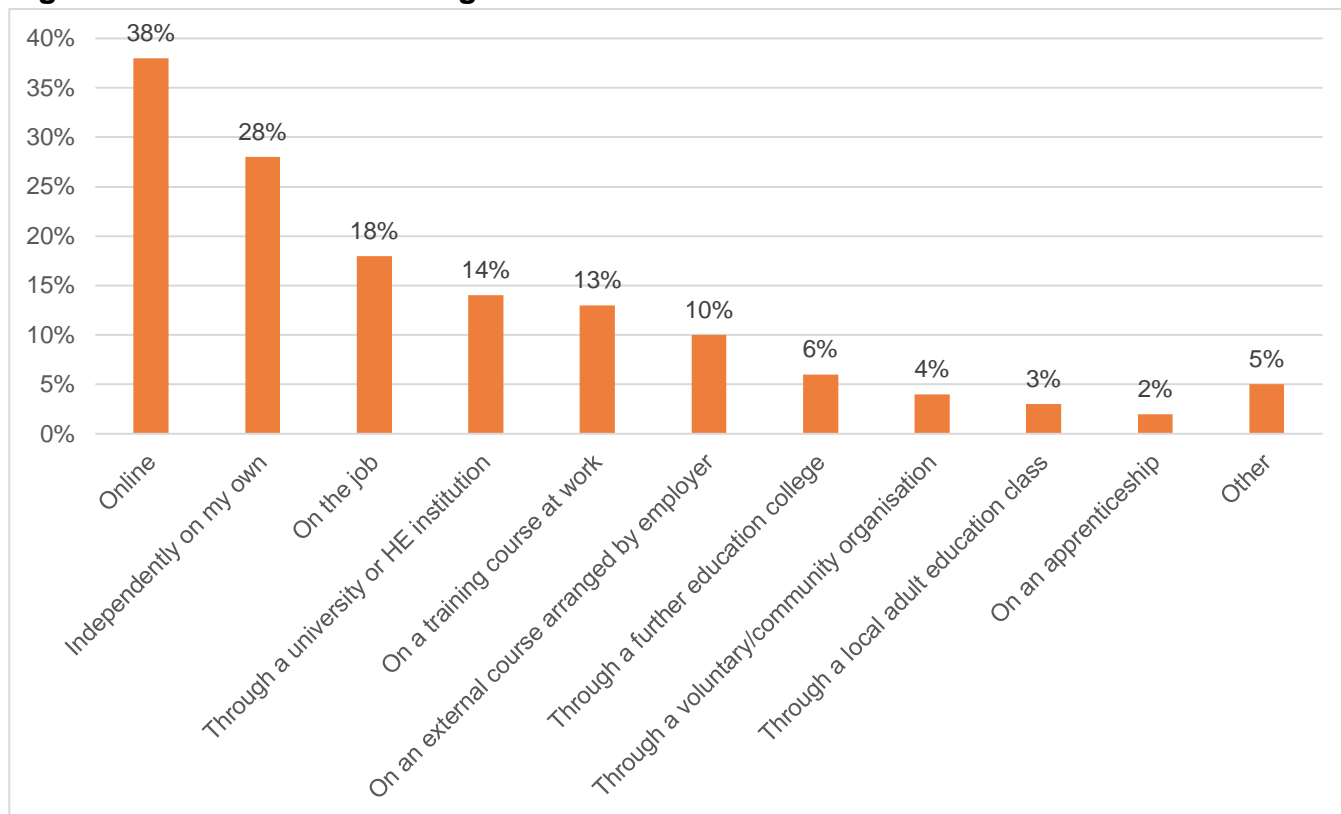
### How adults are learning

In the 2020 survey, just over two fifths (44 per cent) of current/recent learners were working towards a qualification.

When asked about how they were learning, 38 per cent of learners said that they were doing this online, a much higher figure than in previous surveys, although not directly comparable (Figure 25). Just over a quarter (28 per cent) were learning independently. Nearly a fifth (18 per cent) were learning on the job, 13 per cent undertook a training course at work, while 10 per cent were on an external course arranged by their employer.

Learners were more likely to learn through a university or higher education institution (14 per cent) than through a further education college (six per cent) or a voluntary/community organisation (four per cent).

**Figure 25: Location of learning**

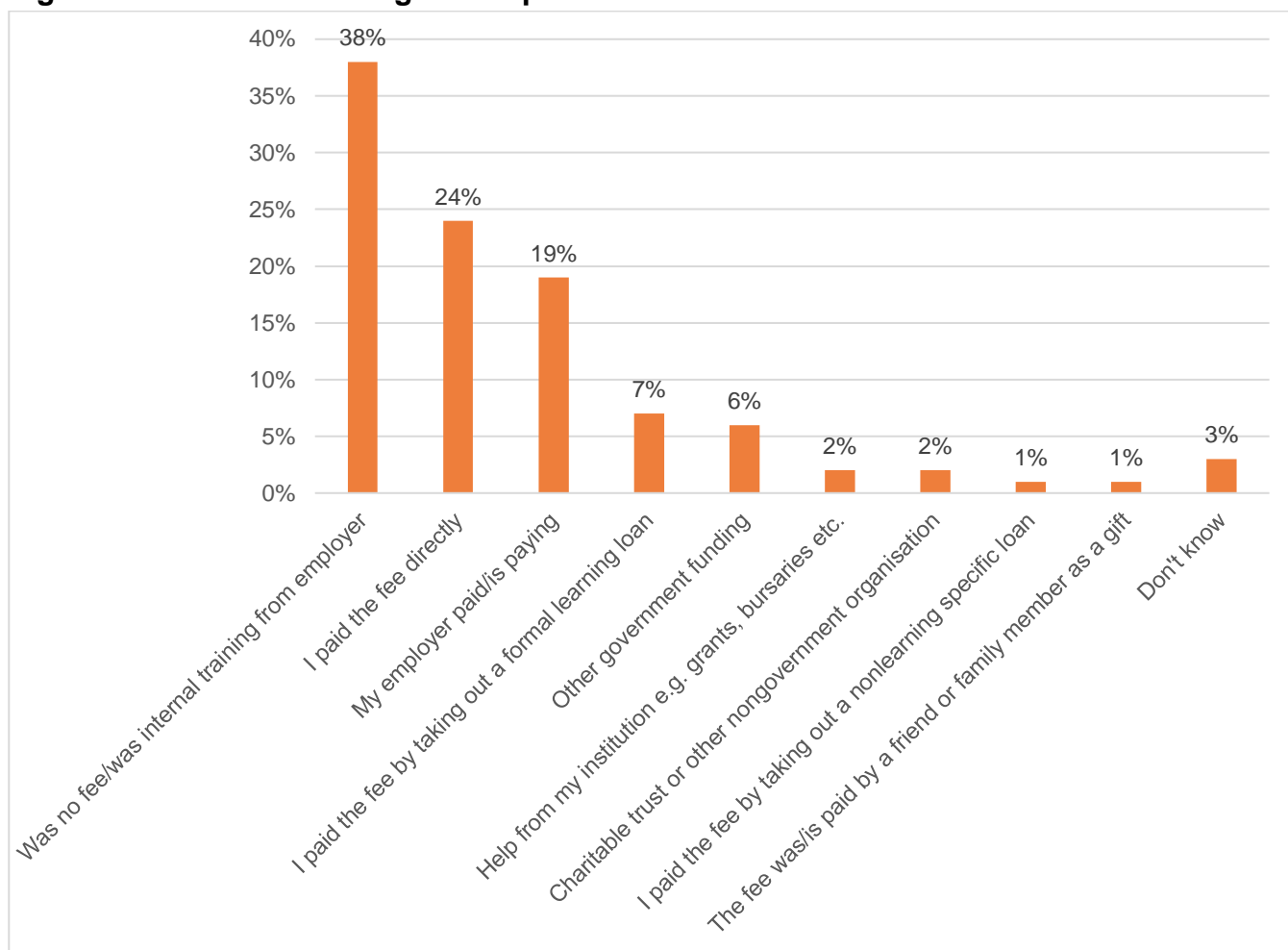


Base: current or recent learners. Weighted base = 3,094.

Note: Respondents could give more than one answer

Adult learning and skills provision is funded in a range of ways, involving investment from the government, employers and/or individuals. Learners were therefore asked how their course had been paid for. As Figure 26 shows, for most learners, their employers paid (38 per cent of learners took part in internal training and 19 per cent said their employer paid). Nearly a quarter (24 per cent) paid the course fee directly themselves and seven per cent took out a formal learning loan to pay for their learning.

**Figure 26: How the learning is/was paid for**

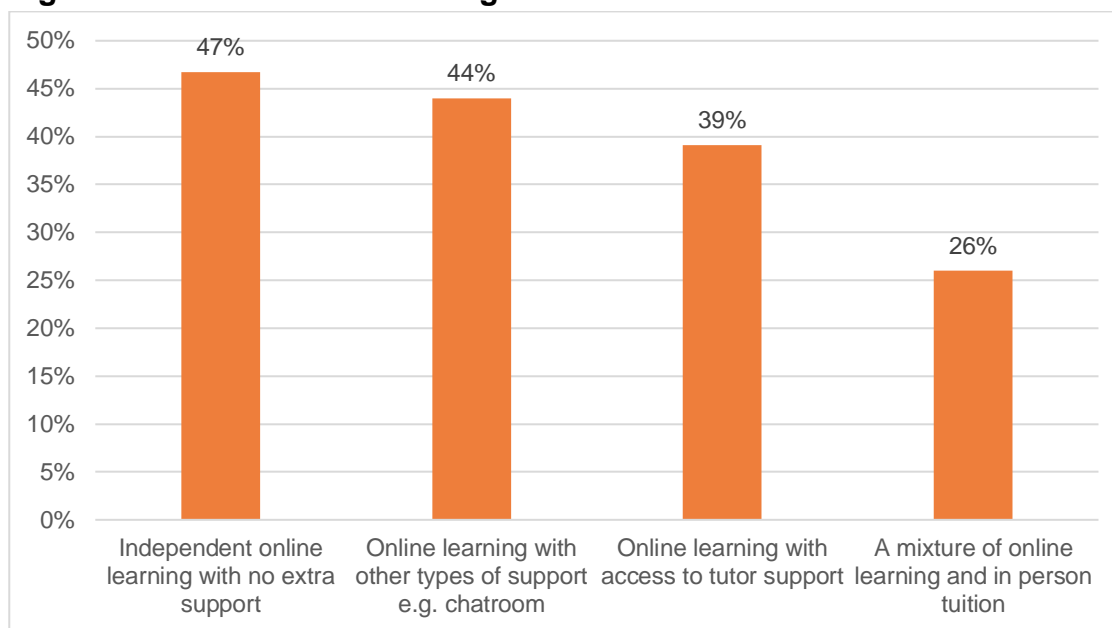


Base: all adults 18+ who have recently done or are currently doing some learning. Weighted base = 3,094.

### Experiences of online learning

Of those who learnt online, nearly half (47 per cent) did so independently without extra support (Figure 27). Nearly two fifths (39 per cent) undertook their learning online with access to tutor support and 44 per cent had access to other types of support. Just over a quarter of learners (26 per cent) accessed a mix of online and in person learning.

**Figure 27: Whether and learning is/was delivered online**

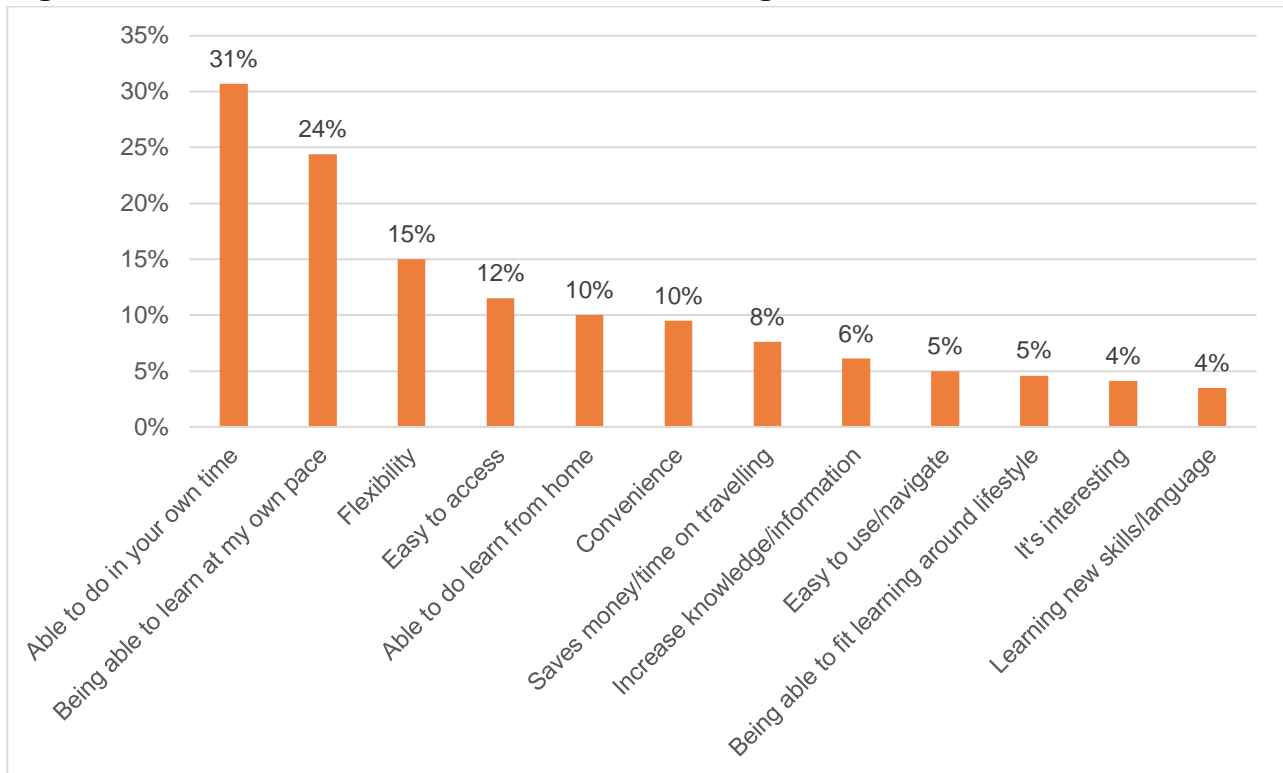


Base: all adults 18+ who have recently done or are currently doing some learning and have taken part in a course involving online learning. Weighted base = 2,077.

Note: Respondents could give more than one answer

When asked what they liked about online learning, learners most commonly liked being able to learn in their own time (31 per cent), followed by being able to learn at their own pace (24 per cent) (Figure 28). Other responses included flexibility (15 per cent), ease of access (12 per cent), being able to do it from home (10 per cent) and convenience (10 per cent). Only five per cent of learners said they did not like anything about learning online.

**Figure 28: What learners like about online learning**

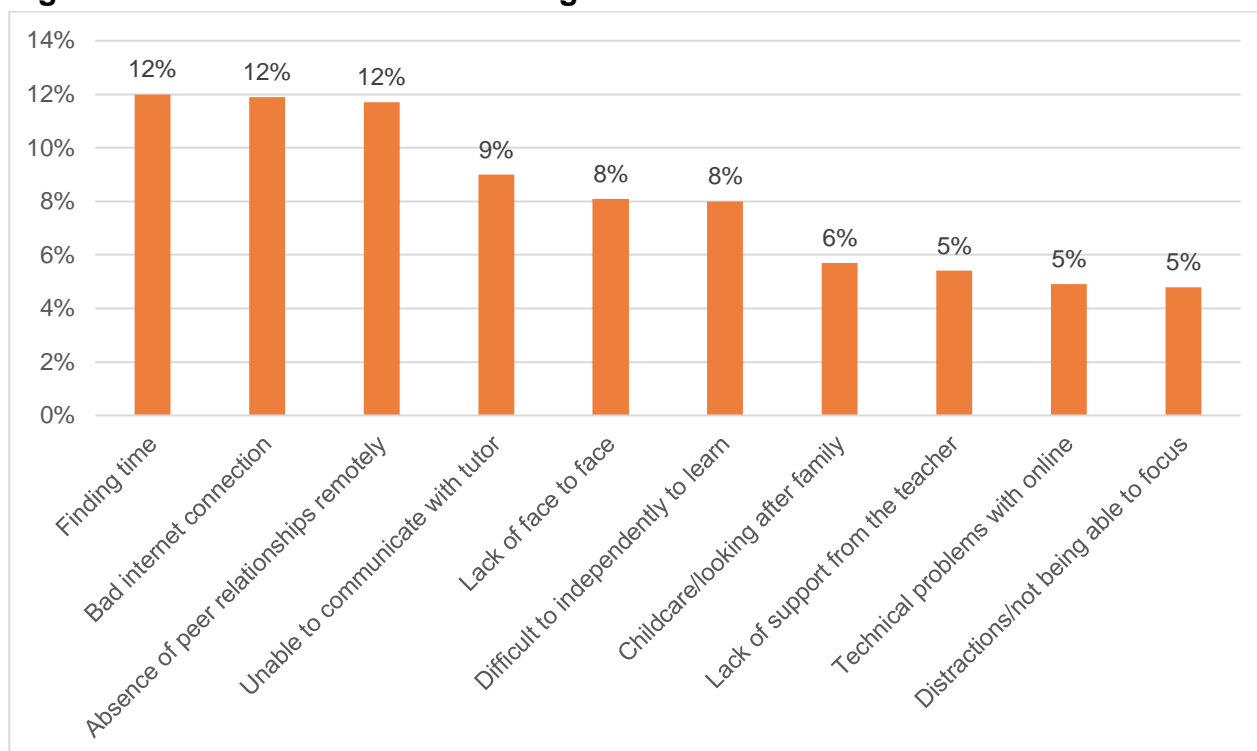


Base: all who have participated in a course involving online learning and mentioned something they like about online learning. Weighted base = 1,968.

Note: Respondents could give more than one answer

Online learning also has its challenges. Challenges identified by learners included finding time, having a poor internet connection and finding it difficult to build relationships with peers (all 12 per cent) (Figure 29). Nearly one third of learners (31 per cent) said that nothing made online learning difficult.

**Figure 29: What made online learning difficult**

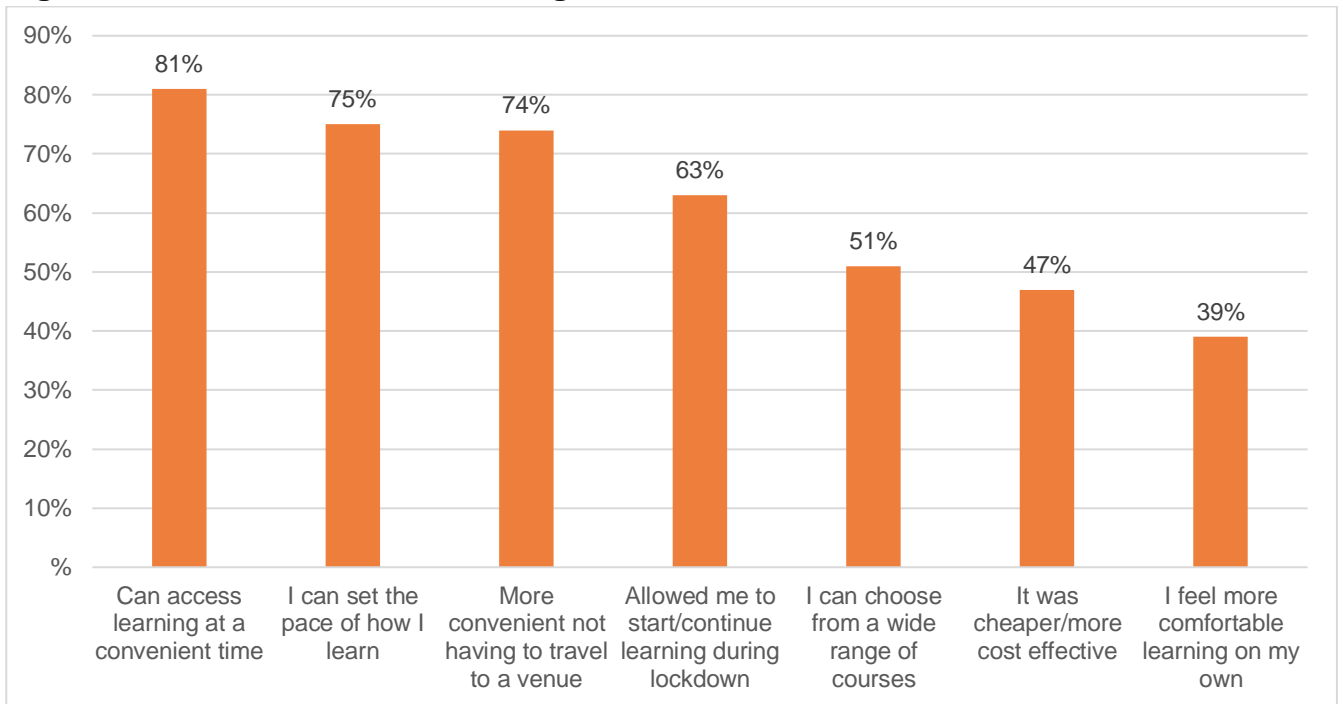


Base: all who have participated in a course involving online learning and experienced difficulties. Weighted base = 1,441

Note: Respondents could give more than one answer

Despite these challenges, learners were also able to identify a range of benefits of online learning. Linked to the things they liked about online learning, the majority of learners said they benefited from the convenience of learning online, with 81 per cent saying said that they benefited from being able to access learning at a convenient time and 74 per cent stating that it was more convenient than travelling to a learning venue (Figure 30). Some benefits related to respondents' learning styles or preferences, including learning at their own pace (75 per cent) and feeling more comfortable learning on their own (39 per cent). Sixty-three per cent of learners said that learning online enabled them to start or continue their learning during lockdown. Only a small minority (three per cent) of learners could not identify any benefits of online learning.

**Figure 30: Benefits of online learning**



Base: all who have participated in a course involving online learning. Weighted base = 2,126.

Note: Respondents could give more than one answer



## 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 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.'*

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 misremembering details). However, this risk is mitigated by the large sample size and by the general consistency of responses over the surveys' 20-year history.

The 2020 Adult Participation in Learning Survey included 5,190 adults aged 18 and over across the UK, with fieldwork conducted in August to September 2020. This sample has been weighted to provide a nationally representative dataset.

In 2020, the survey was funded by the Department for Education. Fieldwork was conducted by Ipsos MORI via their UK telephone omnibus survey. Ipsos MORI interview a nationally representative sample of UK adults (18+) using random digit dialling (a blend of landline and mobile phones to ensure representation). Quotas are set on age, gender, working status, education and government office region. The survey is carried out using computerassisted telephone interviewing (CATI).

In previous years, the survey has been conducted by Kantar TNS via their face to face omnibus survey. The methodology for the 2020 survey was changed due to suspension of the face to face omnibus during the Covid-19 pandemic, and some questions were changed from closed to open questions. The results of the 2020 survey are therefore not directly comparable with previous years.