

Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2023: North East

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Learning and Work Institute

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Summary

Learning is crucial for life, work and society. It can help people find work, progress in or change careers, support health and wellbeing, promote social integration, and many more benefits besides. Lifelong learning will only grow in importance as the UK's population ages, people have longer working lives, and our economy and society changes.

Since 1996, Learning and Work Institute has been undertaking the Adult Participation in Learning Survey on an almost annual basis. 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.

Year-on-year the survey finds stark and persistent inequalities, with some groups more likely to learn as an adult than others. The 2023 survey also indicated that differences between geographical regions may be widening. With greater devolution of learning and skills policy and funding, it is important to better understand patterns of participation at a regional level.

Regional differences in adult participation in learning can be explained by demographical differences, in other words, who lives in the region. But other factors, such as policy interventions, can also result in these differences. This report provides insights on adult participation in learning in the North East.

Key findings for the North East

In the North East, just over two in five adults (43 per cent) said they have learned over the past three years. This is statistically significantly lower than the UK average (49 per cent) and the England average (51 per cent).

The North East has the lowest participation in learning rate among all the English regions. However, the proportion of current or recent learners is only significantly lower than the proportions of five other regions: Greater London (64 per cent), North West (52 per cent), East Midlands (52 per cent), West Midlands (51 per cent) and South East (48 per cent).

The lower participation rate in the North East could be partly explained by demographic differences. **In the North East, there was a higher proportion of older individuals (aged 50-74 years old), retired people¹, and people who left full-time education aged 16 or younger than in the rest of the UK sample. These demographic characteristics are associated with lower participation in learning.**

Within the North East, and as seen in the UK as a whole, there are significant inequalities between demographic groups:

¹ There was only 93 retired individuals in the sample.

- Adults in the highest social grade (AB²) are significantly more likely to participate in learning than adults in other social grades.
- Younger adults are significantly more likely to take up learning than older adults.
- The longer individuals remain in full-time education, the more likely they are to learn as an adult.

These inequalities are fairly similar in the other regions: the demographic groups that are less likely to participate in learning in the North East are also those that are less likely to learn in the other regions. However, there are two main differences:

- **People aged 50 to 74 years old are significantly less likely to take part in learning than in the UK.**
- **Adults in the lowest social grade (DE³) in the North East are significantly less likely to participate in learning compared to the rest of the UK.**

In the North East, adults' motivations for learning and their method of learning are similar to the UK overall: they are more likely to be learning for work than for leisure; they are mainly learning independently or through work; and most are doing at least some of their learning online. However, adults are significantly more likely to report there was no fee attached to their learning than in the North East (37 per cent) the rest of the UK (31 per cent).

More than two in three (68 per cent) of recent or current learners in the North East said they have experienced at least one challenge while learning. This is similar to the rest of the UK, where 70 per cent of learners identified at least one challenge. The challenges experienced by learners in the North East are similar to those identified by learners in other UK regions. However, in the North East, learners are significantly more likely to cite work and other time pressures as a challenge compared to the rest of the UK. Survey respondents who said they haven't engaged with learning in the past three years were most likely to cite feeling too old as a barrier, which is similar to the UK.

The survey included questions about career change. More than two in five (45 per cent) would like or need to change their career/industry/occupation in the next one or two years. **However, adults in the North East are significantly more likely to say that they do not want or need to change their career in the next one or two years, than the UK average.** The main reason cited was to earn more money, followed by a desire to feel happier at work.

² AB social grade corresponds to adults in higher and intermediate managerial, administrative, and professional occupations.

³ DE social grade corresponds to people in semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations, unemployed, economically inactive or retired.

Introduction

Learning is crucial for life, work and society. It can help people find work, progress in or change careers, support health and wellbeing, promote social integration, and many more benefits besides. Lifelong learning will only grow in importance as the UK's population ages, people have longer working lives, and our economy and society changes.

The Adult Participation in Learning Survey provides a unique insight into how many adults are taking part in learning each year, the benefits people see from learning, and the reasons why some adults say they have not taken part in learning. It does so based on a broad definition of learning, including but not limited to formal learning, courses and qualifications.

The 2023 survey shows almost one in two adults in the UK took part in learning in the last three years, the highest rate since the survey started in 1996. This continues the step change in learning participation seen since the pandemic, which followed a decade of declines as the Government cut adult education budgets in England and austerity hit services.

The increase in participation since the pandemic has been driven by a rise in self-directed learning, including online. This is often for personal or leisure reasons or general interest. This is clearly positive, but other opportunities to learn have become more limited over time: employer and Government investment in England are down in the last decade.

There is more positive news in the narrowing over time of some inequalities in learning participation between groups. This includes by age, important given our aging population. Nonetheless, these inequalities remain stark and persistent and, in the case of regional differences, may in fact have widened in recent years.

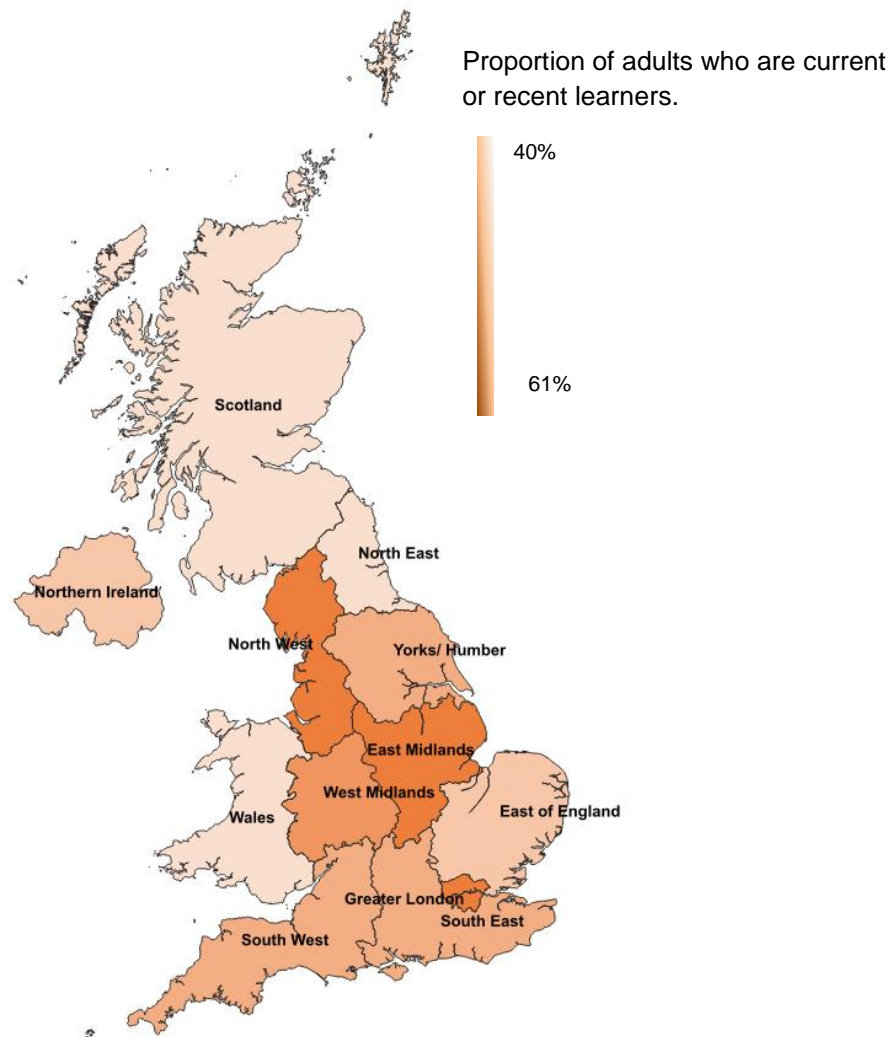
Growth in learning participation since 2019 shows an innate interest in learning among adults. However, fewer opportunities to learn at work or take part in formal learning or courses means people face limits in the types of learning they can pursue. Learning in all its forms has value and benefits.

To engage more adults in learning, policymakers, commissioners and those working in learning providers need to look at people's motivations for learning. The biggest reasons adults give for not taking part in learning are cost, feeling too old, time pressures and also not wanting to / not seeing the benefits. That points to the need to build a culture of learning and offer people a range of flexible learning options. Learning and Work Institute has called for an expanded Lifelong Learning Entitlement to provide more help with the course and living costs of learning at all levels and through life. Along with better incentives for employers to invest more in training, such as a new Skills Tax Credit, this can help us make that step change.

Analysing UK's nations and regions

While increased participation in learning is encouraging, there are stark regional differences and the survey indicates that these inequalities have been growing since 2017.⁴ For example, while more than three in five adults in London have learned within the past three years, only two in five adults say are either a current or recent learners in the North East. Furthermore, participation rates are also lower for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales than for England.

Figure 1: Adult participation in learning by English regions and UK nations



Source: Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2023.

However, there are also important inequalities within regions and nations, with some groups less likely to take part in learning than others. With greater devolution of learning and skills policy and funding, it is important to better understand patterns of

⁴ Hall, S., Jones E., Evans, S. (2023) [Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2023](#), Learning and Work Institute.

participation at a regional level. This can help inform where interventions and support are best targeted and may make the greatest impact. It should be noted that combined authorities, who manage devolved adult education budgets, cover sub regional areas rather than a region as a whole.

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.⁵ 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.

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.’

Like most of our surveys in recent years, the 2023 survey explores who participates in learning; motivations and barriers; how learning is undertaken; and benefits experienced as a result of learning. It also includes questions on learning for career change.

Unlike previous years, the 2023 survey sample includes regional boosts to achieve a minimum sample size in each UK region (600 for all regions apart from Northern Ireland, where the sample was boosted to 400 respondents). The boosted sample consists of 9,506 adults aged 17 and over (8,906 weighted). A total of 598 adults in the North East took part in the survey (359 weighted).

Fieldwork was conducted between August and September 2023 by a market research company via their UK online omnibus survey. The sample has been weighted to provide a nationally representative dataset.

To find out more about the survey series and explore trend data through our interactive charts, visit www.learningandwork.org.uk.

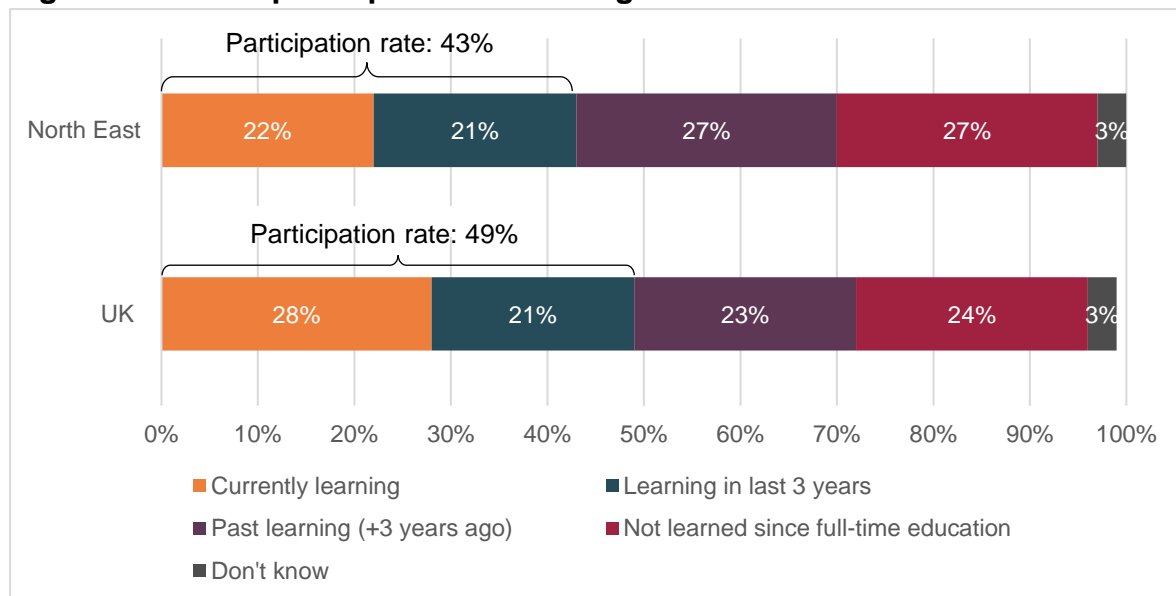
⁵ Surveys were undertaken annually from 1996 except in three years: 1997, 1998 and 2016.

Adult participation in learning in the North East

Adult participation in learning is statistically significantly lower in the North East compared to the UK overall (Figure 2). Just over two in five adults (43 per cent) in the North East stated they are currently learning or that they have taken up learning within the past three years, compared to 49 per cent in the UK.

In the North East, the lower rate of participation in learning is driven by adults being significantly less likely to say they are currently learning (22 per cent) compared to the rest of the UK (28 per cent). People in the North East were just as likely to say they have done some learning over the past three years compared to the rest of the UK (both 21 per cent). Participants in the North East were significantly more likely to say they have not done any learning since full-time education or that they have not been learning since full time education (both 27 per cent), compared to the UK (23 per cent and 24 per cent respectively).

Figure 2: Overall participation in learning in the North East



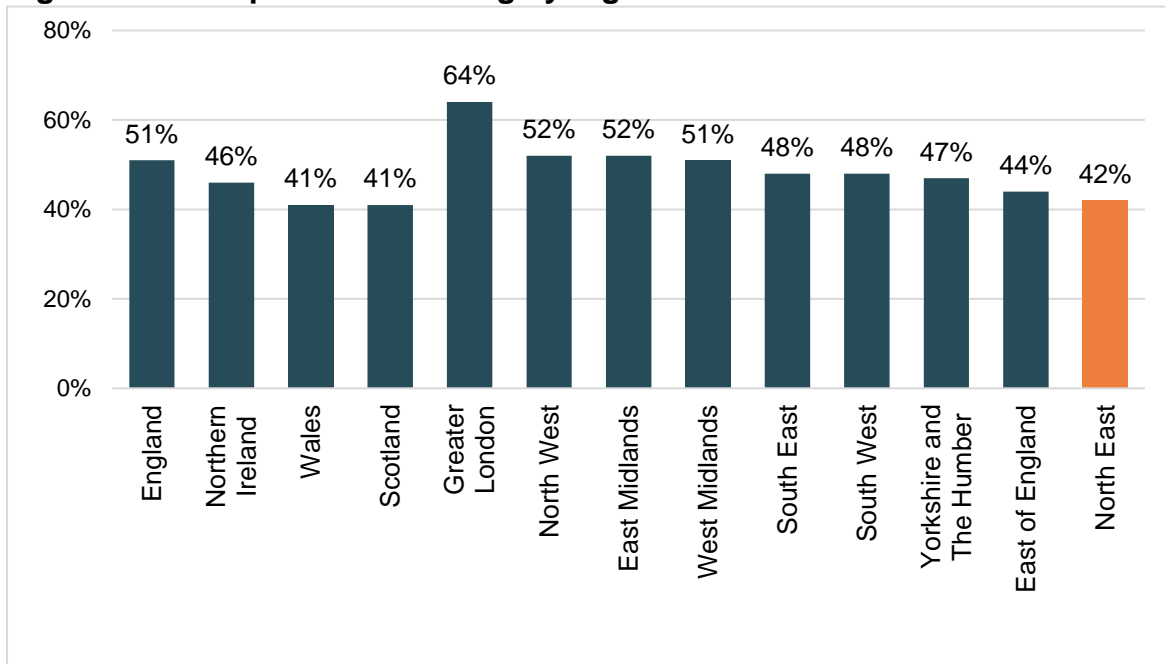
Base: North East respondents. Weighted base = 359, unweighted base = 598. UK: all respondents. Weighted base = 8906, unweighted base = 9506.

When comparing levels of participation in learning across the UK in 2023, the survey shows that the participation rate in the North East is below the average in England (51 per cent) and in Northern Ireland (46 per cent) (Figure 3). Participation is slightly higher in the North East than in Wales or Northern Ireland (both 41 per cent), although this difference is not significant.

The North East has the lowest participation in learning rate among all the English regions. However, the proportion of current or recent learners is only significantly statistically lower than five regions: Greater London (64 per cent), North West (52 per cent), East Midlands (52 per cent), West Midlands (51 per cent) and South East (48 per cent). These regional differences can be partly explained by compositional factors – who lives in this region – as some demographic groups are

more likely to participate in learning than others. In the North East, there was a higher proportion of older individuals (aged 50-74 years old), retired people⁶, and people who left full-time education aged 16 or younger than in the rest of the UK sample. These demographic characteristics are associated with lower participation in adult learning.

Figure 3: Participation in learning by region and nation



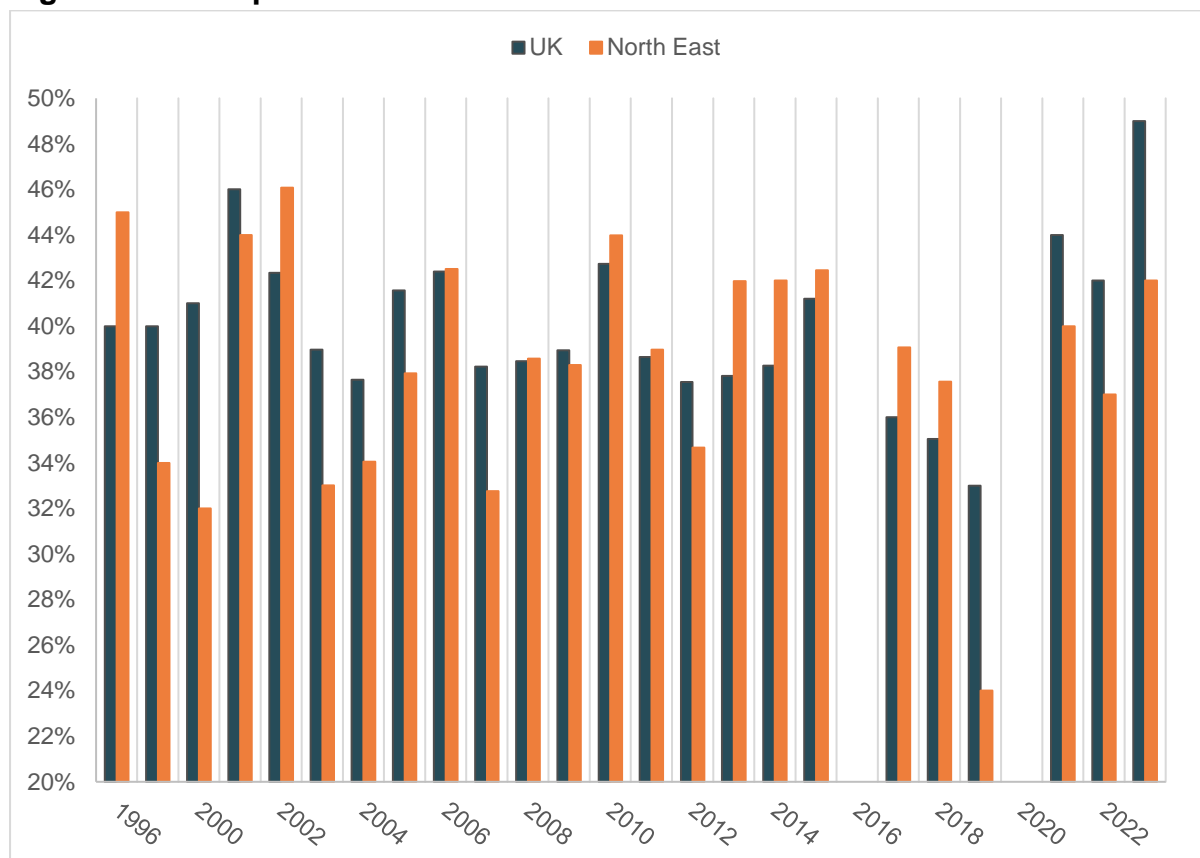
Base: all respondents. Total weighted base = 8,906, North East = 359, North West = 975, Yorkshire and The Humber = 730, East Midlands = 651, West Midlands = 782, East of England = 832, Greater London = 1,173, South East = 1,216, South West = 772, England = 7,491, Northern Ireland = 249, Scotland = 744, Wales = 422. Total unweighted base = 9,506, North East = 598, North West = 1,045, Yorkshire and The Humber = 786, East Midlands = 709, West Midlands = 834, East of England = 814, Greater London = 1,328, South East = 1,083, South West = 711, England = 7,908, Northern Ireland = 401, Scotland = 600, Wales = 597.

In the 27-year history of the survey, the participation rate in the North East has been higher than the UK average in nine years: in 2002, 2006, 2008, 2010 and spanning between the years of 2013-2018 (Figure 4)⁷. Since 2019, participation in the North East has been lower than the UK average. However, the year-on-year changes need to be interpreted with caution as the volatility of the estimates are partly due to the smaller sample size at a regional level.

⁶ There was only 93 retired individuals in the sample.

⁷ Note that data is available for 23 out of 27 years. The survey did not run in 1996, 1997 or 2016. The survey in 2020 was carried out using a different methodology and is therefore not comparable.

Figure 4: Participation rates over time in the North East and in the UK



Base: all respondents to each survey. Weighted base for 2023 = 8,906, unweighted base for 2023 = 9,506.

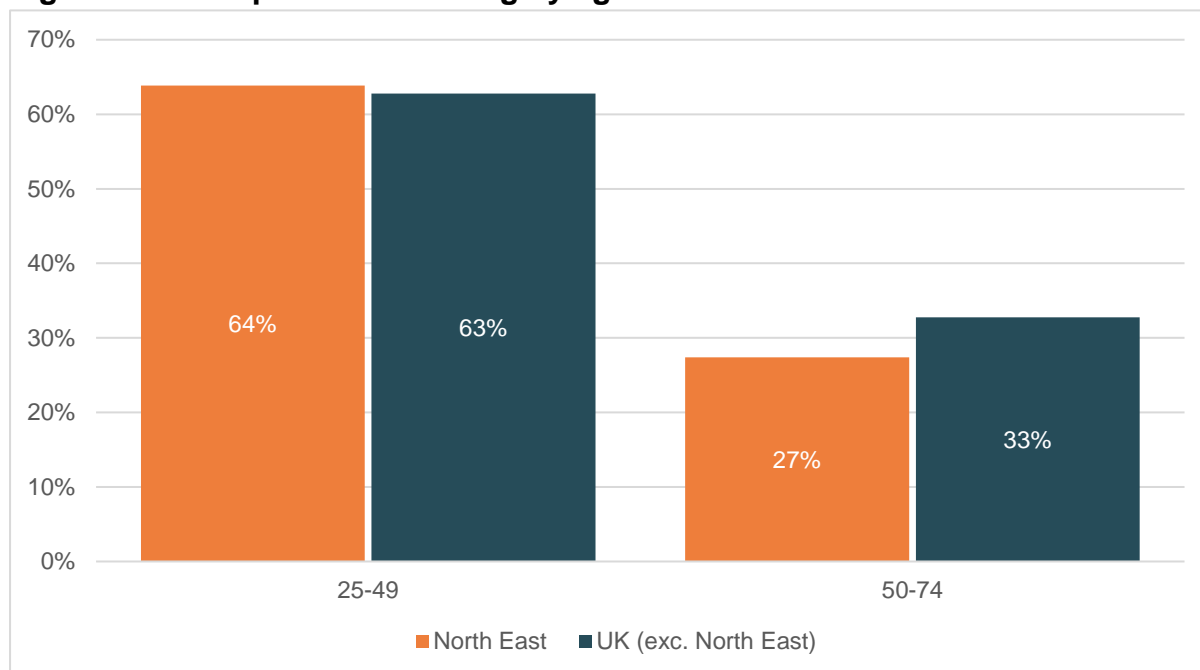
Demographic breakdown

Age

The UK survey consistently shows that participation in learning decreases with age. In the North East, adults aged 25-49 are significantly more likely to say they are current or recent learners than older adults aged 50-74 (Figure 5). Nearly two thirds of adults aged 25-49 (64 per cent) said they are current or recent learners, compared to just over one quarter aged 50-74 (27 per cent).

In the North East, people aged 25-49 are as likely in the rest of the UK to take part in learning. **However, people aged 50 to 74 years old are significantly less likely to take part in learning than in the UK.**

Figure 5: Participation in learning by age in the North East and in the UK



Note: 19-24 and 75+ categories were removed due to small sample size. Base: North East respondents. Total weighted base = 354, 25-49 = 130, 50-74 = 168. Total unweighted base = 540, 25-49 = 231, 50-74 = 278. UK respondents. Total weighted base = 8286, 25-49 = 3426, 50-74 = 3418. Total unweighted base = 8908, 25-49 = 3908, 50-74 = 3580.

Social grade

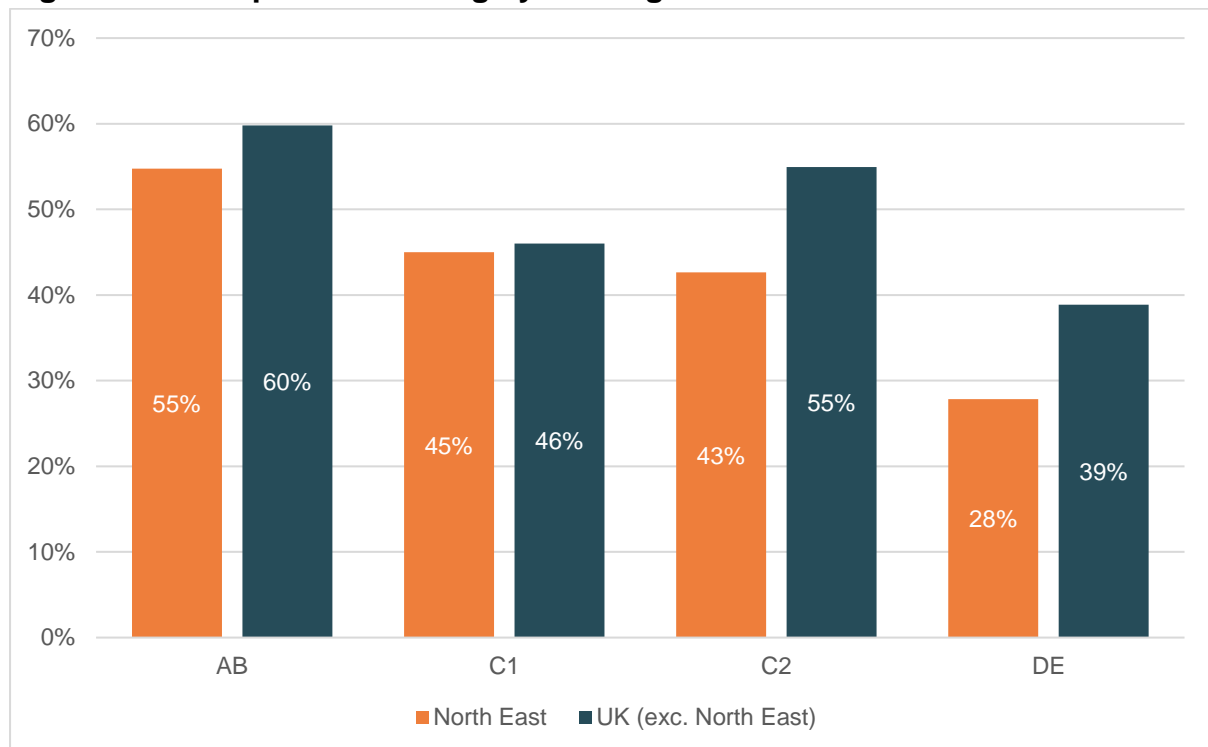
The Adult Participation in Learning Survey consistently shows that social grade⁸ is a key predictor of participation in learning. In the North East, people in the DE social grade were significantly less likely to say they are current or recent learners compared to people in all the other grades (28 per cent) (Figure 6).

Over half of adults (55 per cent) in the AB social grade said they are current or recent learners, compared to 45 per cent in the C1 and 43 per cent in the C2 grades. None of the differences in participation rate between AB, C1 and C2 were statistically significant. Differences in proportions needs to be taken with caution due to the small sample size in the North East.

The participation rates by social grades in North East are not statistically significantly different from the rest of the UK for those in the AB grade, C1 grade and C2 grade. However, **the participation rate for adults in the DE grade is significantly lower in the North East than for the rest of the UK (28 per cent compared to 39 per cent).**

⁸ Social Grade: AB: Higher and intermediate managerial, administrative, and professional occupations. C1: Supervisory, clerical, and junior managerial, administrative, and professional occupations. C2: Skilled manual occupations. DE: Semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations; unemployed and lowest grade occupations plus economically inactive and retired.

Figure 6: Participant in learning by social grade in the North East and in the UK



Base: North East respondents. Total weighted base = 360, AB = 95, C1 = 100, C2 = 68, DE = 97. Total unweighted base = 598, AB = 158, C1 = 168, C2 = 112, DE = 160. Base: UK (excluding the North East) respondents. Total weighted base = 8309, AB = 2588, C1 = 1868, C2 = 1414, DE = 2439. Total unweighted base = 8909, AB = 2745, C1 = 2012, C2 = 1511, DE = 2640.

Age completed full-time education

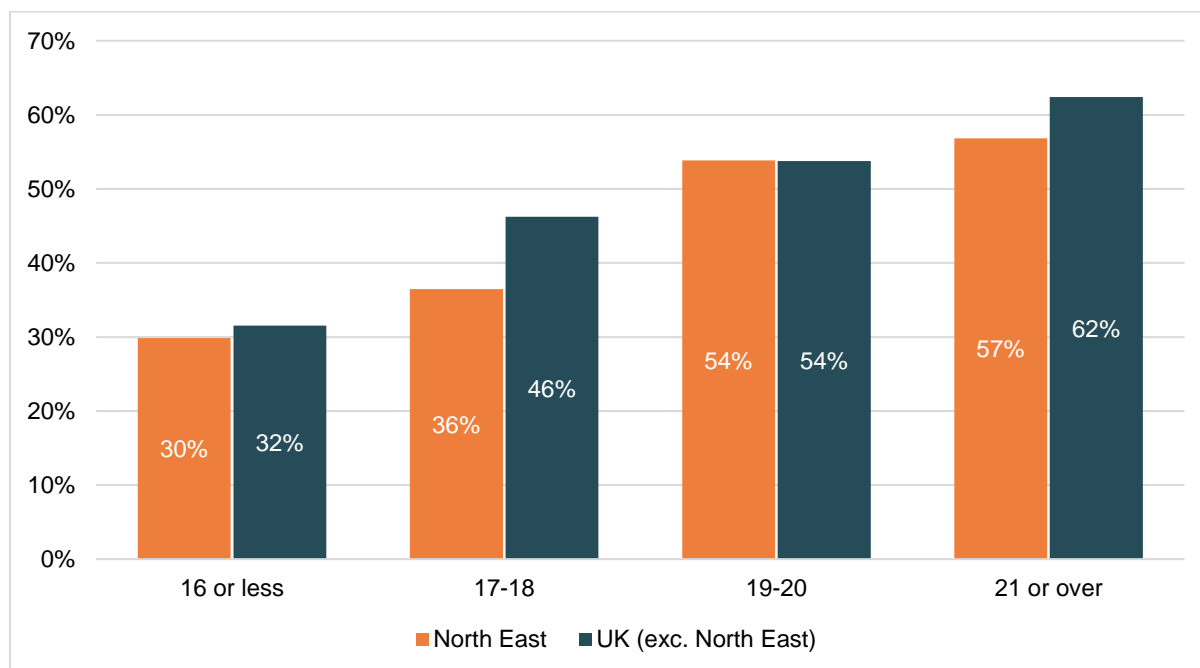
The survey uses the age someone left full-time education as a proxy for highest level of qualification. The UK survey shows that the longer individuals remain in full-time education, the more likely they are to learn as an adult. In the North East, adults who left full-time education aged 16 or under are significantly less likely to learn as an adult than people who stayed in full-time education for longer (Figure 7).

Three in ten adults (30 per cent) who left education aged 16 or under are current or recent learners. This increases to 36 per cent for those who stayed in education until age 17-18, to 54 per cent for those who left education aged 19 or 20 (54 per cent) and to 57 per cent for those who left education aged 21 or over. People who stayed in education until at least 21 years old are nearly twice as likely to learn as an adult than those who left education aged 16 or under.

In the North East, the participation rates are fairly similar to the rates for the UK overall for people who left full-time education aged 16 or under, 19-20, or 21 and over. Despite a lower participation in learning for those left education aged 17 to 18 in the North East compared to the UK overall, the difference is not statistically significant.

The participation gap between adults who left full-time education aged 16 or under and those who left aged 21 or over is lower in the North East (27 percentage points) than in the other UK regions (31 percentage points).

Figure 7: Participation in learning by age of completing full-time education in the North East and in the UK



Base: North East respondents. Total weighted base = 346, 16 or less = 134, 17-18 = 85, 19-20 = 39, 21 or over = 88. Total unweighted base = 576, 16 or less = 217, 17-18 = 142, 19-20 = 67, 21 or over = 150. Base: UK respondents. Total weighted base = 8040, 16 or less = 2483, 17-18 = 1919, 19-20 = 959, 21 or over = 2679. Total unweighted base = 8449, 16 or less = 2527, 17-18 = 2014, 19-20 = 1010, 21 or over = 2898.

Gender

In the North East, women (54 per cent) are more likely than men (45 per cent) to say they are current or recent learners. However, the differences between the two proportions are not statistically different. While the rates for the UK overall are slightly different, none of the difference are statistically significant, with 51 per cent of men and 47 per cent of women in the UK who said they are current or recent learners.

Working status

The survey shows that working status is a key predictor of participation in learning, with closer proximity to the labour market associated with higher participation rates. Due to small sample sizes, the North East analysis includes only two working statuses: working full-time and working part-time (Figure 8).

Adults working part-time are significantly less likely to say they are currently learning or have done so in the last three years (48 per cent), compared to those working full-time (63 per cent).

Despite some small differences between participation in learning by working status in the North East and in the rest of the UK, the differences are not statistically significant.

Figure 8: Participation in learning by working status in the North East and in the UK



Base: North East respondents. Total weighted base = 356, Full-time = 138, Part-time = 50. Total unweighted base = 594, Full-time = 239, Part-time = 88. Base: UK (excluding the North East) respondents. Total weighted base = 8550, Full-time = 3345, Part-time = 1205. Total unweighted base = 8793, Full-time = 3649, Part-time = 1303.

Note: Respondents in other working status are not shown in this chart due to small sample sizes in the North East.

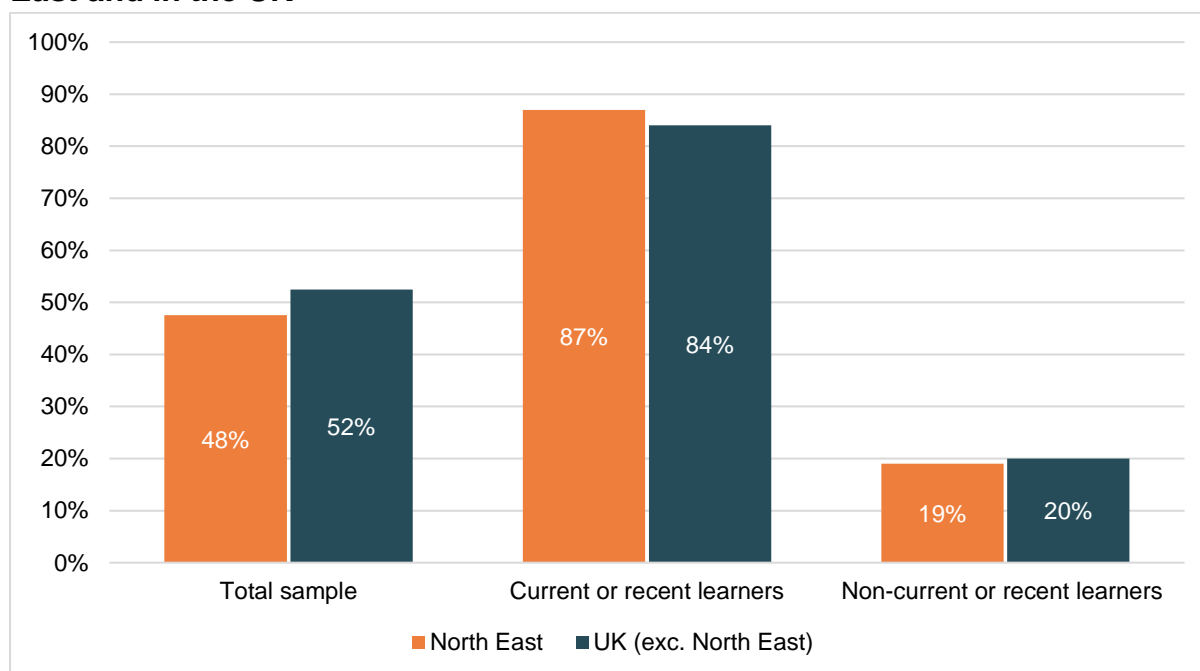
Future intentions to learn

As well as patterns and experiences of current/recent learning, the survey captures future intentions to learn. Respondents were asked about their likelihood of taking up learning in the next three years.

In the North East, just under half of adults (48 per cent) of adults said that they are either very likely or likely to take up learning in the next three years (Figure 9). However, adults' intention to learn is highly influenced by their current learning status. Recent and current learners are significantly more likely to say they are likely to learn in the future than adults who haven't engaged with learning in the past three years. Just under nine in ten (87 per cent) current or recent learners said they are likely or very likely to learn in the future, compared with one in five (19 per cent) of adults who haven't engaged with learning in the past three years.

These proportions are fairly similar to the UK overall: 84 per cent of the current or recent learners said they are likely to learn in the future compared with only 20 per cent of adults who have not taken up learning over the last three years.

Figure 9: Future likelihood of learning by current learning status in the North East and in the UK



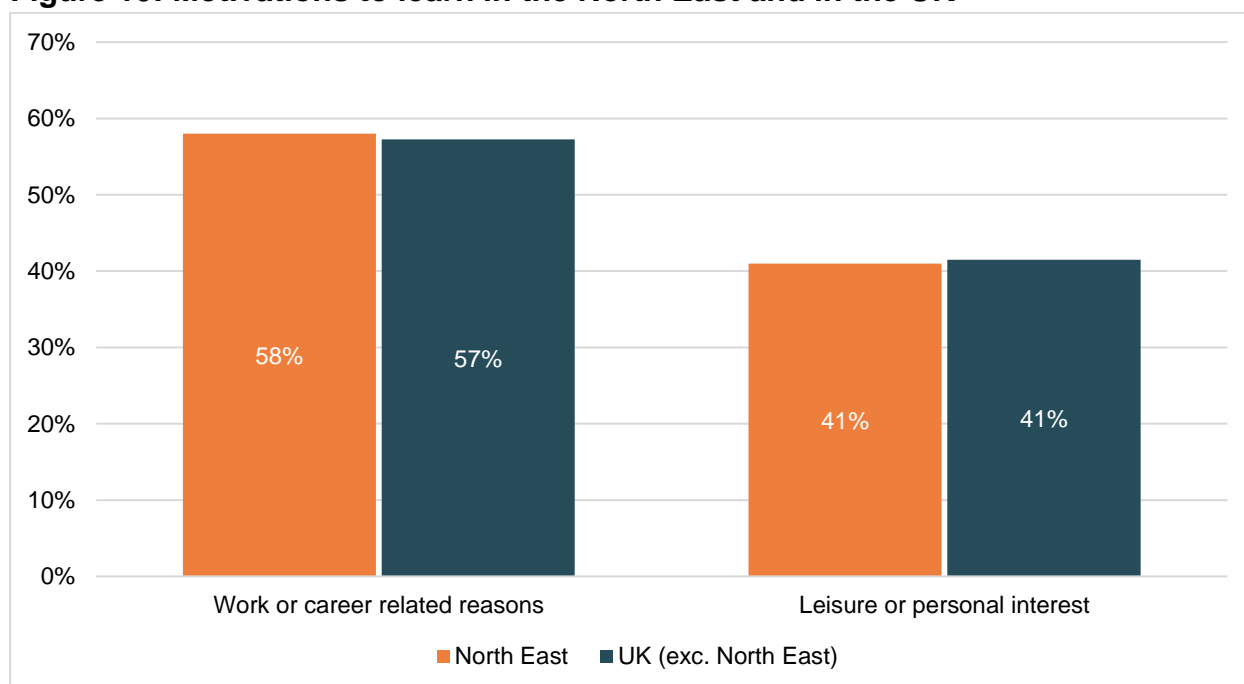
Base: North East respondents. 'Don't know' responses have been taken out. Weighted base = 326, Current or recent learner = 142, Not current or recent learner = 183. Unweighted base = 598, Current or recent learner = 262, Not current or recent learner = 366. Base: UK (excluding the North East) respondents. Weighted base = 7810, Current or recent learner = 3967, Not current or recent learner = 3843. Unweighted base = 8908, Current or recent learner = 4516, Not current or recent learner = 4392.

Motivations to learn

Respondents who have engaged with learning within the previous three years were asked to state whether they started their main learning for work or career related reasons. In the North East, nearly three in five adults (58 per cent) said they took up learning for work or career related reasons, while two in five (41 per cent) said they took up learning for leisure or personal interests (Figure 10).

These proportions are similar to the rest of the UK: 57 per cent of respondents in the rest of the UK said they took up learning for work or career related reasons compared 41 per cent who say they did it for leisure or personal interest.

Figure 10: Motivations to learn in the North East and in the UK



Base: all current or recent learners in the North East. Weighted base = 153, unweighted base = 262.
Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding the North East). Weighted base = 4243, unweighted base = 4516.

Learning delivery

Adults who reported that they are currently learning or have done so in the last three years were asked how they did or are doing their main learning. In the North East, just over one third (35 per cent) current and recent learners said they learned independently on their own (Figure 11).

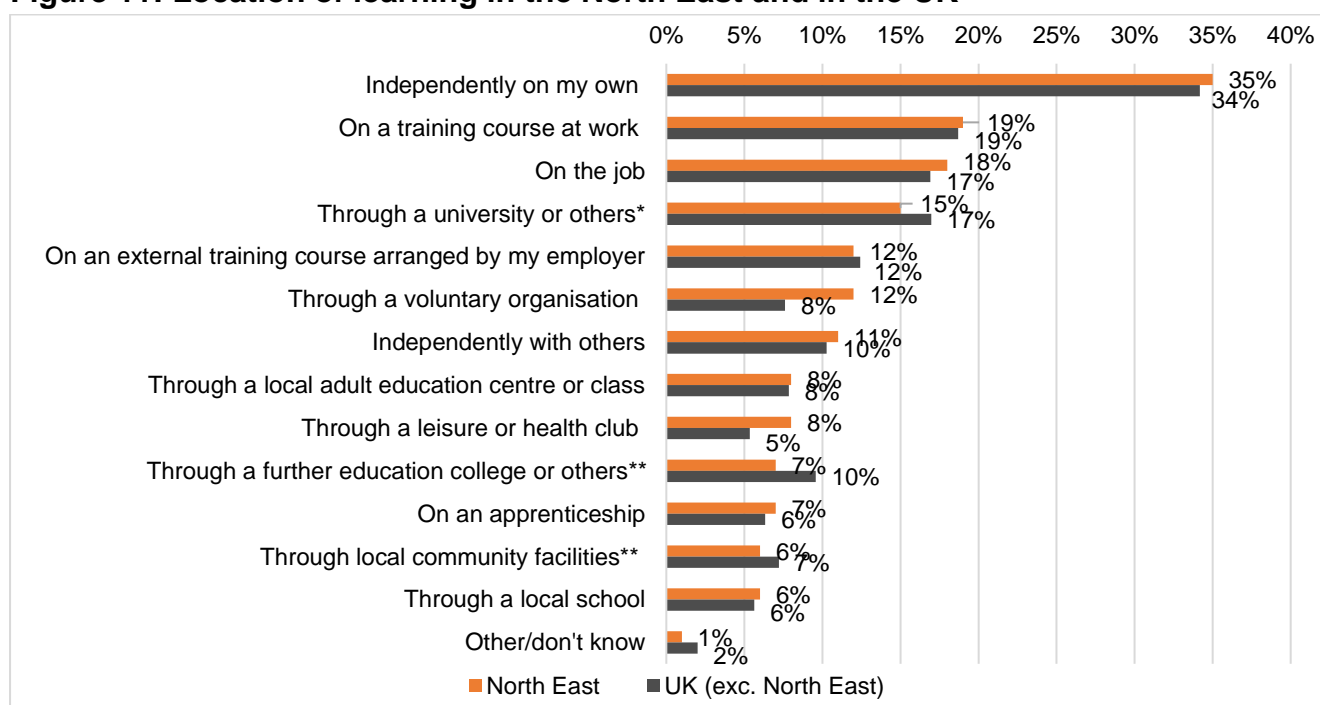
Work related learning was also commonly reported, with one in five adults learning through a training course at work (19 per cent) and around two in ten learning on the job (18 per cent) and 12 per cent learning through an external training course arranged by their employers.

Fifteen per cent of learners said they accessed this through a university or higher education institute (15 per cent). One in ten adults reported learning through a voluntary organisation (12 per cent) or independently with others (11 per cent).

Other provision reported by learners included a local adult education centre (8 per cent), on an apprenticeship (7 per cent), a leisure or health club (8 per cent), further education (7 per cent), community facilities (6 per cent), or a local school (6 per cent).

These proportions are similar to the UK overall.

Figure 11: Location of learning in the North East and in the UK

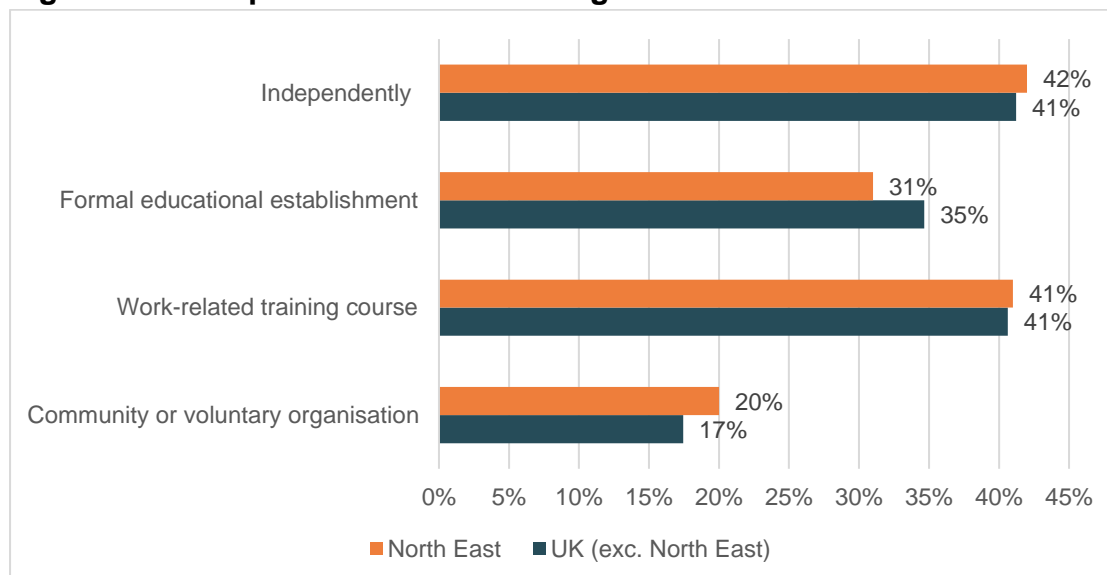


Base: All current or recent learners in the North East. Weighted base = 153, unweighted base = 262. To note: the sample sizes are small for some of these categories, so they need to be interpreted with caution. Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding the North East). Weighted base = 4243, unweighted base = 4516. *higher education institution/Open University **tertiary/6th Form college *** such as a library, museum, place of worship, bookshop etc.

To help with comparison, these delivery methods could be grouped in four categories: independently; formal education establishment; work-related training course and community or voluntary organisation.⁹ In the North East, two in five participants said they have done their learning independently (42 per cent) or on a work-related training course (41 per cent). Nearly one in three (31 per cent) said they have done their training through a formal establishment and one in five (20 per cent) said they have done their training through a community or voluntary organisation (Figure 12).

The delivery methods are fairly similar to the rest of the UK, with 41 per cent of current or recent learners in the other regions doing their learning either independently or through a work related course and 35 per cent doing it through a formal educational establishment.

Figure 12: Grouped location of learning in the North East and in the UK



Base: all current or recent learners in the North East. Weighted base = 153, Unweighted base = 262.
 Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding the North East). Weighted base = 4243, unweighted base = 4516.

Online and face to face

Adults who reported that they are currently learning or have done so in the last three years were asked whether their main learning took place online or face-to-face. In the North East, just under one half (48 per cent) of current or recent learners said

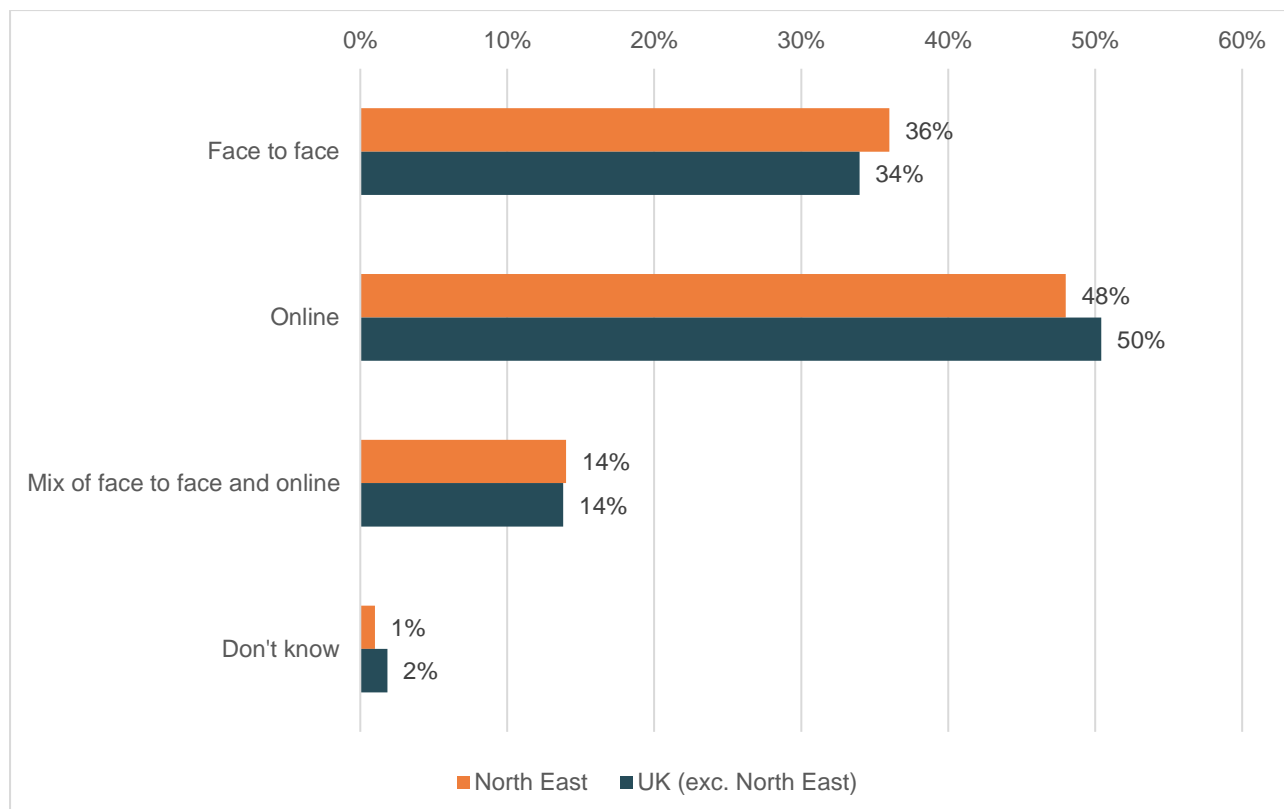
⁹ The response options were categorised as follows:

- 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, 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.

they completed at least one of their learning online (Figure 13). Over one in three (36 per cent) said they have taken up their learning face to face and 14 per cent said their learning has involved a mix of online and face to face learning.

The proportions are similar to the UK overall: 50 per cent of learners in the rest of the UK said they have done their learning online and 34 per cent said they have done it face to face.

Figure 13: Participation in learning by mode of delivery in the North East and in the UK



Base: all current or recent learners in the North East. Weighted base = 153, unweighted base = 262.
 Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding the North East). Weighted base = 4243, unweighted base = 4516.

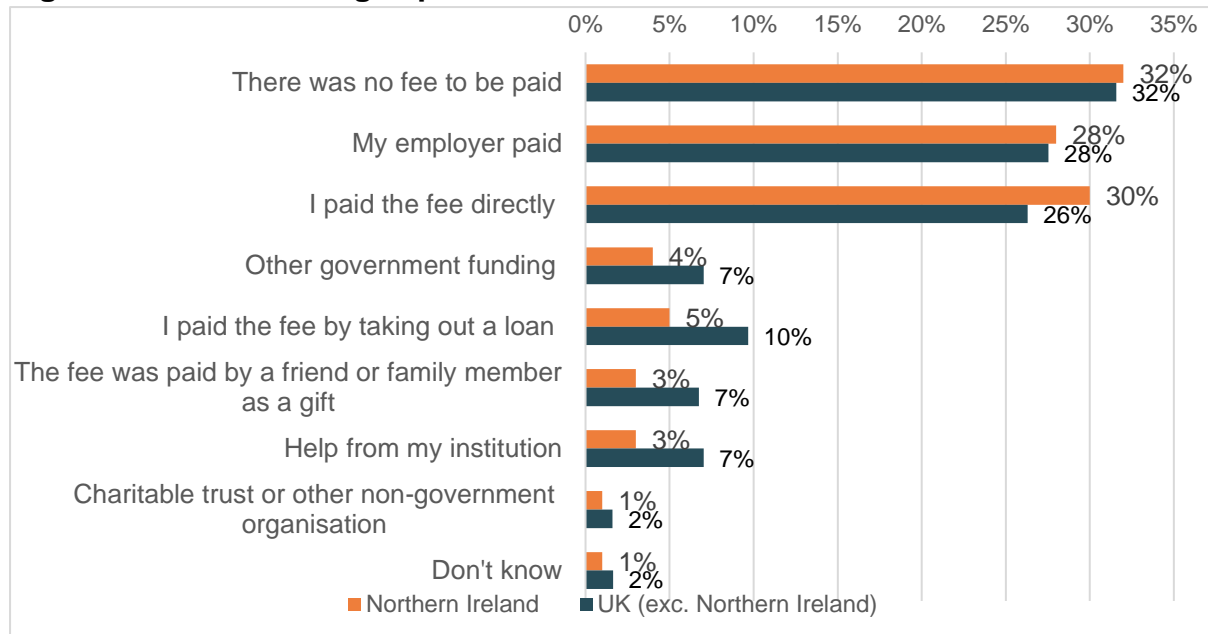
Fees

In the North East, just over three in five (63 per cent) of current or recent learners said a fee was attached to their main learning (Figure 14). Most commonly, learners reported their fee was paid by their employer (30 per cent). One in five (22 per cent) of learners said they paid their fee directly. One in ten learners said they paid their fee by taking out a loan (10 per cent). A minority of learners said they paid their fee with other government funding (6 per cent), with support from their friend or family member (5 per cent), with help from institution (5 per cent) or with support from a charitable trust or non-governmental organisation (2 per cent).

The proportions of people who reported paying for their learning in the North East was statistically lower than the UK average (63 per cent compared to 68

per cent). Although the proportions of learners in the North East are marginally different from some of the ways participants reported paying for their learning, none of the differences are statistically significant.

Figure 14: How learning is paid for in the North East and in the UK



Base: all current or recent learners in the North East. Weighted base = 153, unweighted base = 262.

Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding the North East). Weighted base = 4243, unweighted base = 4516.

Barriers to learning

Each year, 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 barriers that prevent them from doing so. 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.

Challenges current or recent learners have experienced

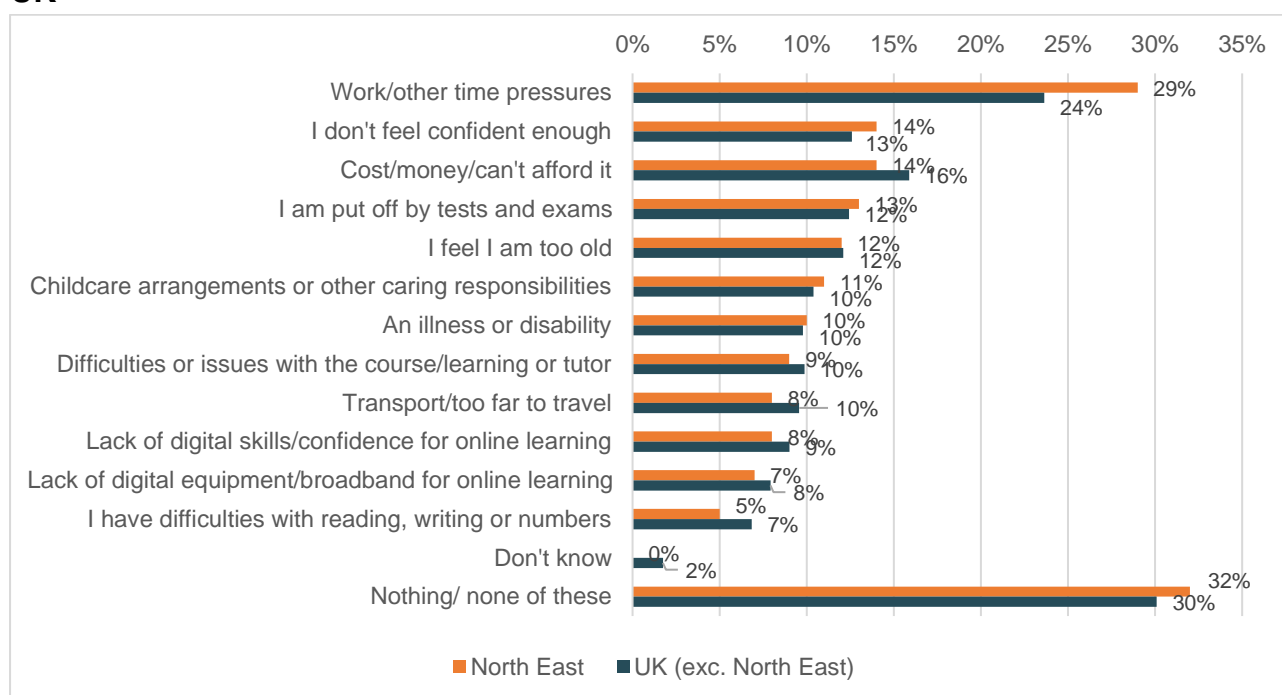
In the North East, just under seven in ten (68 per cent) current or recent learners identified at least one challenge while learning. This is similar to the rest of the UK (70 per cent).

Most commonly, current or recent learners in the North East identified work and other time pressures as a challenge (29 per cent) (Figure 15). This is significantly higher than the UK average (24 per cent).

Other common challenges relate to people's attitudes or perceptions of learning, such as a lack of confidence to learn (14 per cent), being put off by tests/exams (13 per cent) or feeling too old (12 per cent). Respondents identified challenges related to their situation, including the cost of learning (14 per cent), childcare arrangements or other caring responsibilities (11 per cent), illness or disability (10 per cent), difficulties or issues with the course, learning or tutor (9 per cent), transport (8 per cent) or they have difficulties with reading, writing or numbers (5 per cent).

Participants also said they experienced digital barriers while learning due to a lack of digital skills or confidence for online working (8 per cent) or lack of digital equipment (7 per cent).

Figure 15: Challenges experienced when learning in the North East and in the UK



Base: all current or recent learners in the North East. Weighted base = 153, unweighted base = 262.
 Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding the North East). Weighted base = 4243, unweighted base = 4516.

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.

In the North East, almost half of adult learners (49 per cent) said they have experienced situational challenges (Table 1). Just over two in five (42 per cent) said they are facing dispositional challenges and a further 9 per cent said they are facing institutional challenges. These proportions are fairly similar to the UK overall (see Table 1).

Table 1: Grouped challenges experienced by current or recent learners in the North East and in the UK

Group	The North East	The UK (excluding the North East)
Situational	49%	48%
Dispositional	42%	42%
Institutional	9%	10%
No challenges encountered	32%	30%

Base: all current or recent learners in the North East. Weighted base = 153, unweighted base = 262.
 Base: all current or recent learners in the UK. Weighted base = 4396, unweighted base = 4778.

Barriers faced by people who haven't engaged with learning within the past three years

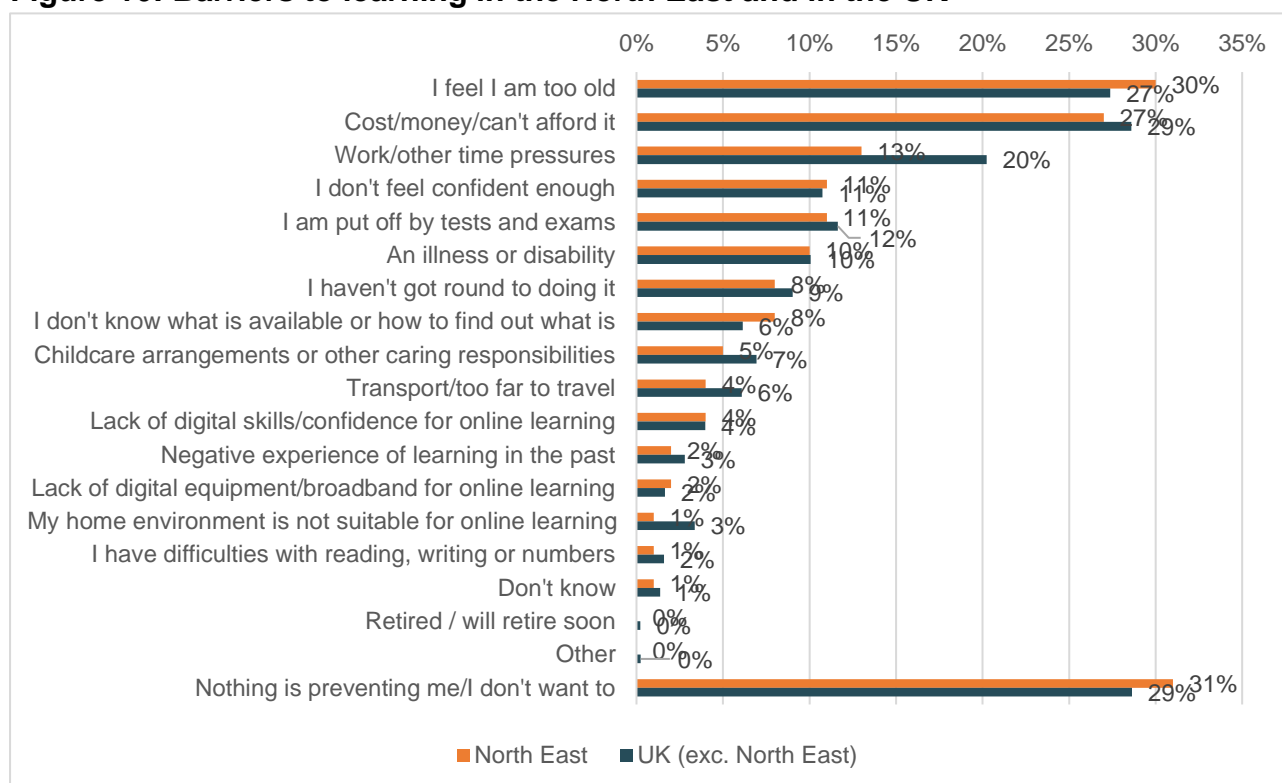
In the North East, almost seven in ten (69 per cent) adults who say they have not engaged in learning within the past three years identified at least one barrier. This proportion is similar to the rest of the UK (71 per cent).

The top barrier identified by the adults who haven't taken up learning within three years is that they feel too old to take up learning (30 per cent) (Figure 16). This was followed by the cost of learning (27 per cent).

Other barriers that were reported by around one in ten adults in the North East included work or other time pressures (13 per cent), not feeling confident enough (11 per cent) or being put off by test and exams (11 per cent), or an illness or disability (10 per cent) preventing them from taking part in learning.

The barriers people faced in the North East are similar to the barriers experienced in the other regions. However, adults in the North East were statistically more likely to report feeling too old (30 per cent) or an illness or disability (10 per cent) than adults in Greater London.

Figure 16: Barriers to learning in the North East and in the UK



Base: respondents who have not participated in learning within the last three years in the North East. Weighted base = 196, unweighted base = 318. Base: respondents who have not participated in learning within the last three years in the UK (excluding the North East) Weighted base = 4003, unweighted base = 4080.

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; Transport/too far to travel
- **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.

Just over half of five adults (54 per cent) who said they have not taken part in learning in the last three years identified dispositional barriers to doing so. Situational barriers were reported by nearly two in five (38 per cent). Three in ten (31 per cent) said they did not want to engage with learning or that nothing was preventing them from doing so. These findings are fairly similar to the UK overall (see Table 2).

Table 2: Grouped barriers faced by adults who haven't engaged with learning within the past three years in the North East and in the UK

Group	North East	The UK (excluding the North East)
Situational	38%	47%
Dispositional	54%	51%
No challenges encountered	31%	29%

Base: respondents who have not participated in learning within the last three years in the North East. Weighted base = 196, unweighted base = 318. Base: respondents who have not participated in learning within the last three years in the UK (excluding the North East Weighted base = 4003, unweighted base = 4080.

Learning for career change

Advances in technology, including Artificial Intelligence, alongside longer working lives will see more people needing to change jobs and careers. The Coronavirus pandemic also had a profound effect on the labour market, with an increase in the number of people who are economically inactive and job vacancies at record levels.

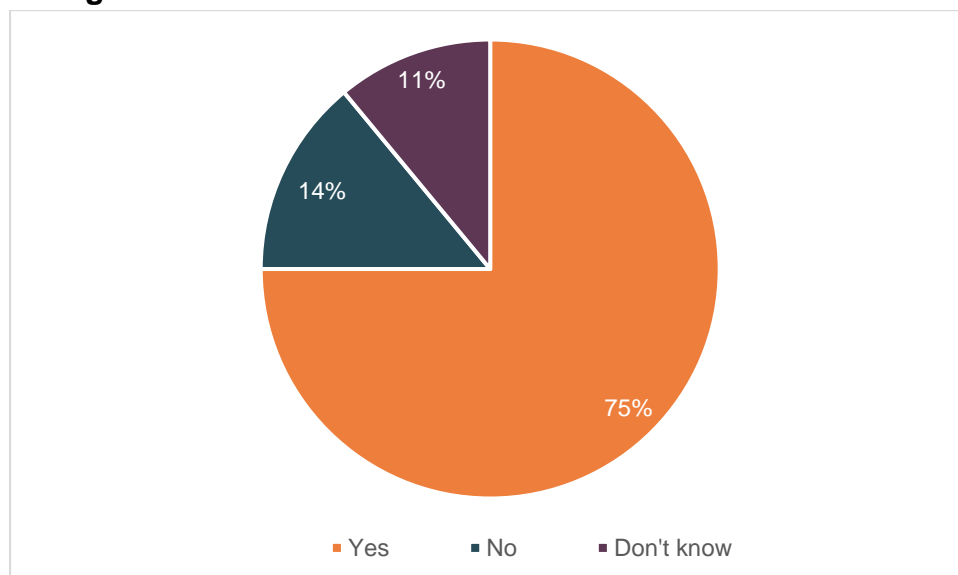
Many workers will therefore need to reskill into different careers to ensure they can make the most of the opportunities ahead. Within this context, this year's survey asked adults whether they are planning to change job or career in the near future. The survey also explored motivations to change career, barriers to changing career and what support people would find helpful.

Changing job or career

All respondents who are working or unemployed and seeking work were asked whether they thought people like them could change careers or change the occupation/industry they were in. In the North East, three quarters of respondents (75 per cent) believe that people like them can change career (Figure 17). Fourteen per cent said they did not think that people like them could change careers and one in ten (11 per cent) said they don't know.

This is fairly similar to the UK overall with 71 per cent of respondents who believe that people like them are able to change careers, 16 per cent who did not think so and 12 per cent did not know.

Figure 17: Respondents in the North East who believe people like them can change career



Base: respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the North East. Weighted base = 225, unweighted base = 390.

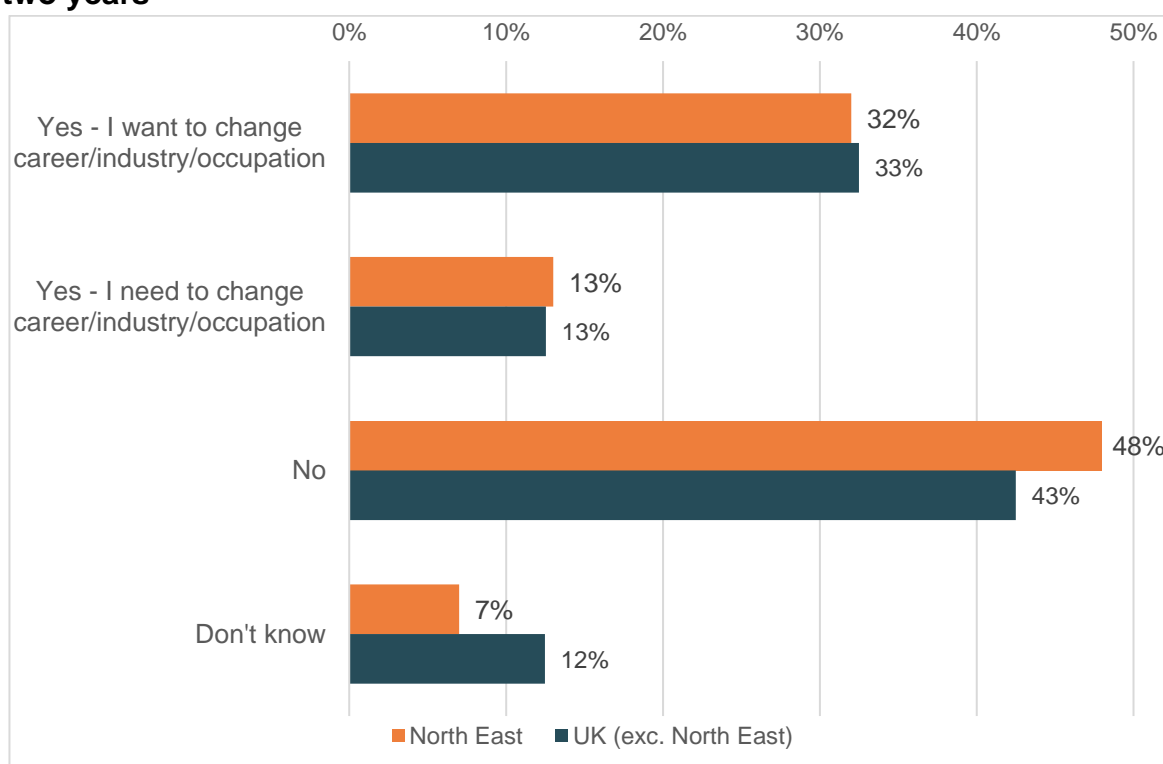
In the North East, 45 per cent of respondents said they want (32 per cent) or need (13 per cent) to change their career/industry/occupation in the next one or two years

(Figure 18). Just under one half (48 per cent) said they do not need or want to change career and 7 per cent don't know.

The proportion of adults in the North East who said they want or need to change their career is similar to the rest of the UK, with 46 per cent of adults saying this. **However, adults in the North East are significantly more likely to say that they do not want or need to change their career in the next one or two years than the UK average (48 per cent compared to 43 per cent).**

Wider research indicates that around six per cent of adults change occupation or sector each year¹⁰.

Figure 18: Whether adults want or needs to change career in the next one or two years



Base: respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the North East. Weighted base = 225, unweighted base = 390. Base respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the UK (excluding the North East). Weighted base = 5741, unweighted base = 6199.

¹⁰ Evans, S. and Vaid, L. (2023) [All change: Understanding and supporting retraining and career change](#)

Motivations for career change

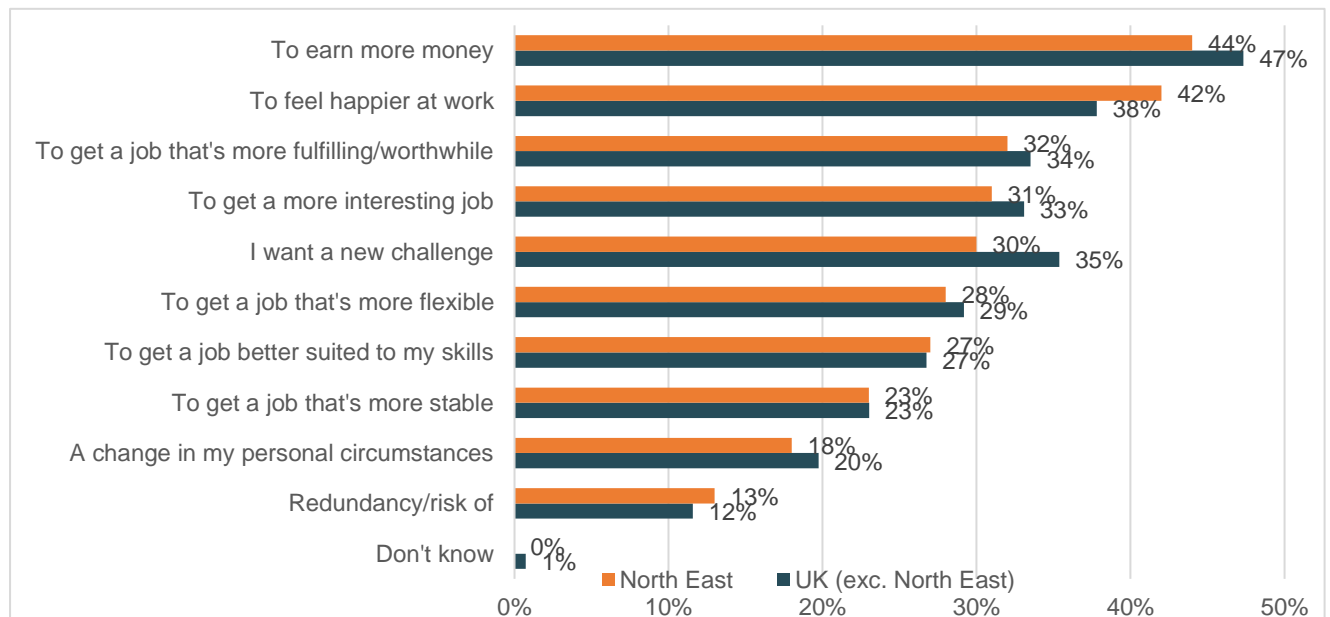
Respondents who indicated that they either want to or need to change career in the next one to two years were asked the reason for this change (Figure 19). In the North East, the main reason cited was to earn more money (44 per cent). This was followed by wanting to feel happier at work (42 per cent).

Respondents also reported wanting to get a job that would be more fulfilling or worthwhile (32 per cent), more interesting (31 per cent), wanting a new challenge (30 per cent), more flexible (28 per cent), better suited to their skills (27 per cent) or more stable (23 per cent).

One in five respondents (18 per cent) reported that a change in personal circumstances was the reason for wanting a career change. A further one in ten (13 per cent) said they feared or were at risk of redundancy.

The motivations for career change in the North East are fairly similar to the rest of the UK (Figure 19). Although adults in the North East are significantly more likely to say they want or need a career change to earn feel happier at work (42 per cent) than in the North West.

Figure 19: Reasons for wanting or needing career change in the North East and in the UK



Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in the North East. Weighted base = 102, unweighted base = 176. Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in the UK (excluding the North East). Weighted base = 2584, unweighted base = 2805.

Barriers to career change

Respondents who indicated that they want or need to change career were then asked what was stopping them from doing this (Figure 20). In the North East, the most cited barrier was a lack of self-confidence (28 per cent). Other dispositional barriers included feeling too old (22 per cent), having always done the same job (21 per cent), or a fear of applying for jobs/job interviews (19 per cent).

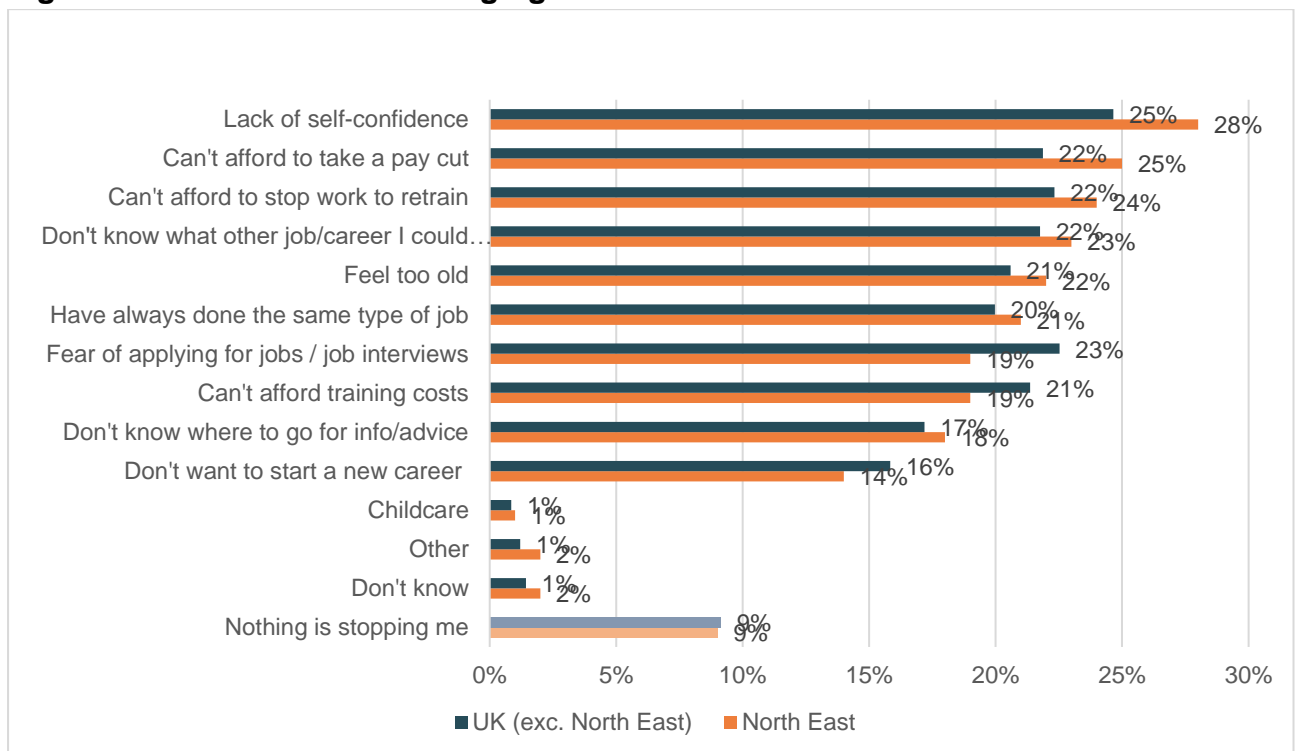
Some barriers related to finance, including not being able to afford to take a pay cut (25 per cent), and not being able to afford to stop work to retrain (24 per cent) and not being able to afford training costs (19 per cent).

Nearly one quarter of adults (23 per cent) said that they did not know what other job/career they could do and 18 per cent said they don't know where to go for advice. Childcare was only reported by 1 per cent of adults in the North East.

Only nine per cent of respondents who said they want or need to change career say that nothing is stopping them from doing this.

The barriers to career change identified by respondents in the North East are fairly similar to the ones identified in the rest of the UK.

Figure 20: Reason for not changing career in the North East and in the UK



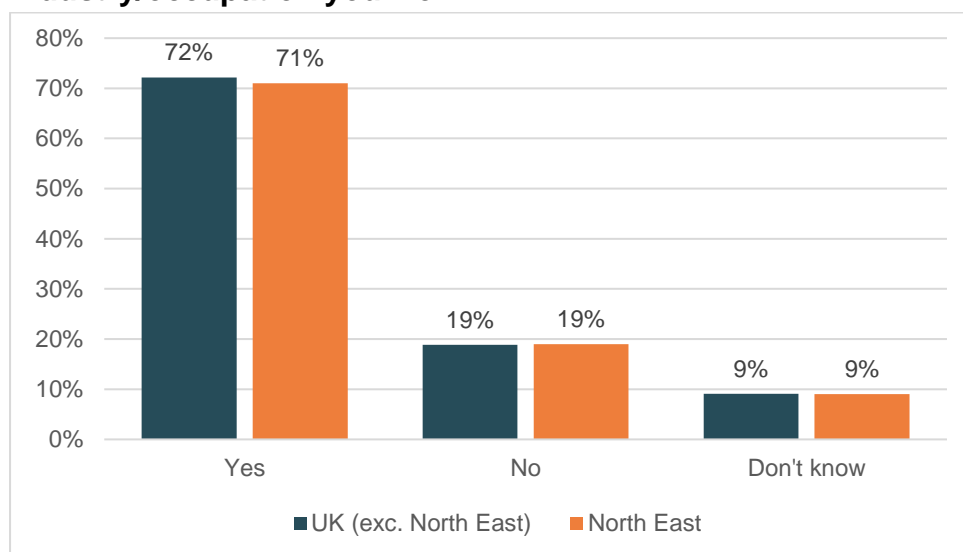
Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in the North East. Weighted base = 102, unweighted base = 176. Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in the UK (excluding the North East). Weighted base = 2584, unweighted base = 2805.

Developing skills for career change

Respondents who indicated that they want or need to change career were asked if they need to develop their skills in order to change career or the industry/occupation they are in (Figure 21).

In the North East, seven in ten adults (71 per cent) said they need to develop their skills, while 19 per cent said they don't and 9 per cent said they don't know. These figures are fairly similar to the UK.

Figure 21: Do you need to develop your skills to change career or change the industry/occupation you work in?



Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in the North East. Weighted base = 102, unweighted base = 176. Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in the UK (excluding the North East). Weighted base = 2584, unweighted base = 2805.

Support for career change

Respondents were asked to select, from a list of options, what support they would find helpful if they wanted/needed to change career (Figure 22). In the North East, respondents most commonly indicated that they would need learning or training (31 per cent).

This was followed by advice, including on what transferable skills they might have (27 per cent) or to help choose the right job/career (26 per cent). Around one in five adults said coaching and support when they first start a new job (24 per cent), advice to help them choose the learning or training needed to change job/career (21 per cent) or advice and coaching to help them get a job (17 per cent) would be helpful.

Around one in four respondents said that they would find financial support useful, either towards costs of learning/training (26 per cent) or towards living costs while learning/training (25 per cent).

Respondents in the North East identified similar support to the rest of the UK (see Figure 22).

Figure 22: What would be the most helpful for changing career



Base: respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the North East. Weighted base = 225, unweighted base = 390. Base respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the UK (excluding the North East). Weighted base = 5741, unweighted base = 6199.

Respondents were asked where they would go for information and advice if they wished to change career (Table 3). In the North East, nearly two in five respondents (39 per cent) said they would use a general online search to find information and advice. This was followed by friends, family and colleagues (24 per cent). These findings highlight the need for credible and trustworthy information being available and easy to find online, as well as the importance of social networks in providing information.

Other sources of information and advice include an education provider such as a college or university (18 per cent), a recruitment agency/consultant (17 per cent), Jobcentre Plus (17 per cent) a professional sector or trade organisation (13 per cent), National Career Service (12 per cent) or social media (12 per cent). Respondents said they would go to their current employer (12 per cent) or a prospective employer (11 per cent).

A minority of respondents said they would go to a Unionlearn representative (7 per cent), Citizens' Advice (6 per cent) or a local community, voluntary or religious centre for advice (6 per cent). Only three per cent of adults in the North East would go to a local or national charity. One in ten adults (10 per cent) do not know where they would go for information or advice about changing job or career.

These figures are similar to the rest of the UK (see Table 3).

Table 3: Where respondents go for advice on career change

Source of information/advice	North East	UK (excluding the North East)
General online search	39%	37%
Friends, family or colleagues	24%	23%
Education provider such as a college or university	18%	16%
Social media	12%	16%
Recruitment consultant/agency	17%	16%
Professional, sector or trade organisation	13%	15%
Jobcentre Plus	17%	15%
National Careers Service	12%	12%
Prospective employers	11%	12%
Your current employer (e.g. HR, line manager)	12%	11%
Citizens' Advice	6%	8%
Local community, voluntary or religious centre	6%	5%
Local or national charity	3%	5%
Unionlearn representative or Workplace Learning Advocate	7%	5%
Don't know	10%	12%

Base: respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the North East. Weighted base = 225, unweighted base = 390. Base respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the UK (excluding the North East). Weighted base = 5741, unweighted base = 6199.