

# Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2023: Scotland

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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.

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

### Key findings for Scotland

In the Scotland, just over two in five adults (41 per cent) said they have learned over the past three years, which is lower than the UK average (49 per cent), and **significantly lower than the England average (51 per cent). Scotland has the lowest participation in learning out of the 12 English regions and UK nations.** However, the proportion of current or recent learners in this region is only significantly lower than the proportions of six other regions: Greater London (64 per cent), North West (52 per cent), West Midlands (51 per cent), South East (48 per cent) and South West (48 per cent).

The lower participation rate in Scotland could be partly explained by demographic differences. For example, in Scotland there is also a higher proportion of people aged 55 to 64 than in the rest of the UK, and older adults are less likely to participate in learning than older adults.

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

- Adults in the highest social grade (AB<sup>1</sup>) 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 to the other nations and regions: the demographic groups that are less likely to participate in learning in Scotland are also those that are less likely to learn in the other nations and regions. However, there are some differences:

- **Adults aged 17-24 or 25-49 in Scotland are significantly less likely to participate in learning than their peers in the rest of the UK.**
- **Adults in the lowest social grade (DE<sup>2</sup>) in Scotland are significantly less likely to take part in learning than in the rest of the UK.**
- **People who stayed in full-time education for longer are less likely to participated in learning in Scotland than in the rest of the UK.** Only half (50 per cent) of the people who stayed in education aged 19 or above say they have taken up learning in the last three years compared to 65 per cent for their peers in the rest of the UK.
- **Full-time employees are also less likely to take part in learning than those in the rest of the UK,** with 53 per cent of full-time employees in Scotland said they have learned over the past three years compared to 65 per cent in the rest of the UK.

In Scotland, 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. Around two in four learners are accessing provision (39 per cent) for free or their employer is covering the cost (27 per cent).

Just under two in three (64 per cent) of recent or current learners in Scotland said they have experienced at least one challenge while learning. The challenges experienced by learners in Scotland are similar to those identified by learners in other UK regions, with work and other time pressures being most commonly cited. Survey respondents who

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<sup>1</sup> AB social grade corresponds to adults in higher and intermediate managerial, administrative, and professional occupations.

<sup>2</sup> DE social grade corresponds to people in semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations, unemployed, economically inactive or retired.

say they haven't engaged with learning in the past three years were most likely to report cost as a barrier to learning, as seen in the rest of the UK.

The survey included questions about career change. Two in five (40 per cent) would like or need to change their career/industry/occupation in the next one or two years. The main reason cited was to earn more money, followed by a desire to feel happier at work. Respondents were most likely to cite dispositional barriers<sup>3</sup> to changing job or career, including a lack of self-confidence and fear of applying for jobs. Most commonly, respondents said that if they wanted to change career, they would find learning or training helpful and they would search online to find information and advice (39 per cent). **Adults in Scotland were significantly more likely to say they wouldn't know where to go for advice on career change (15 per cent), compared to the UK average (12 per cent).**

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<sup>3</sup> Dispositional barriers relate to the attitudes, perceptions and expectations of adult. They include barriers such as feeling too old to learn, being put off by tests and exams, not feeling confident enough to learn.

## 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 follows a decade of declines in adult education budgets across the UK nations as austerity hit services.

The increase in participation in the UK 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 as employer and government investment have declined.

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 in the UK 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.

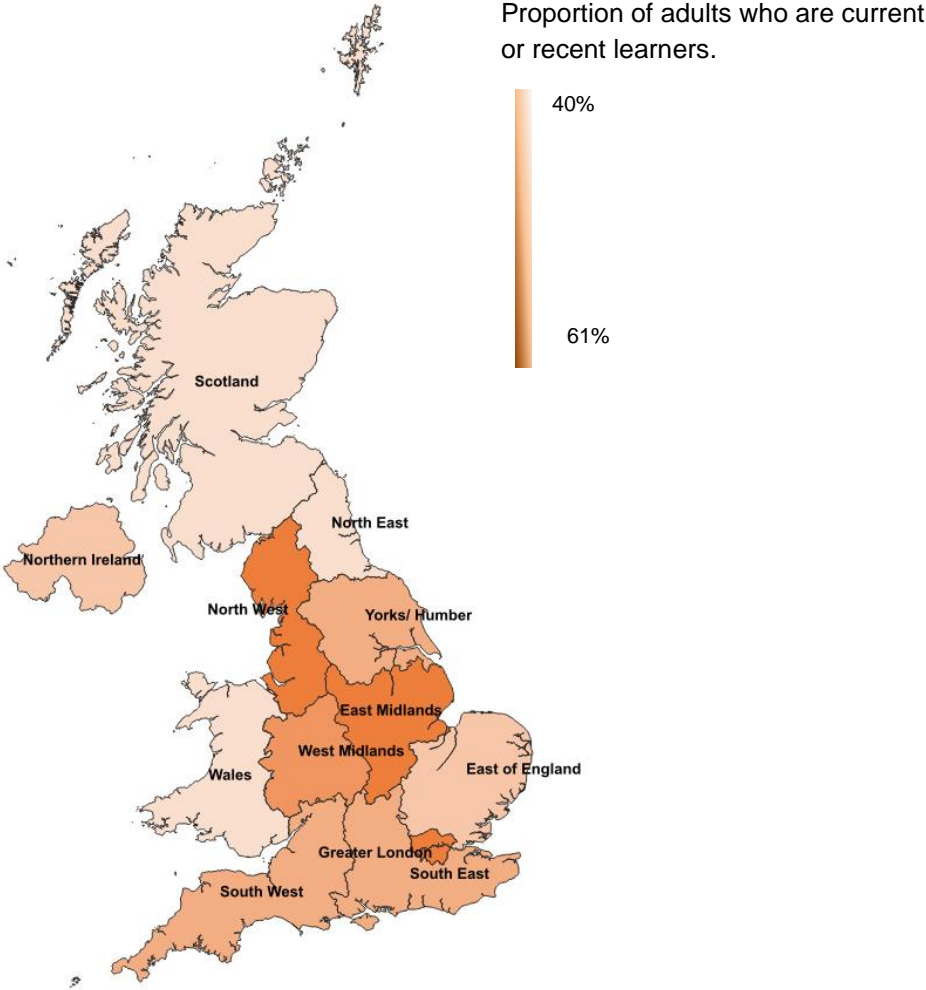
To engage more adults in learning, policymakers, commissioners and those working in learning providers need to look at people's motivations for learning. The biggest reasons adults give for not taking part in learning are cost, feeling too old, time pressures and also not wanting to / not seeing the benefits. That points to the need to build a culture of learning and offer people a range of flexible learning options.

## Analysing UK's nations and regions

While increased participation in learning is encouraging, there are stark differences between the nations and regions of the UK and the survey indicates that these

inequalities have been growing since 2017.<sup>4</sup> 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 of England. 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 policy variation across the UK, and devolution to areas of England in skills policy and funding, it is important to better understand patterns of participation across the UK nations and regions. This can help inform where interventions and support are best targeted and may make the greatest impact.

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



## About the Adult Participation in Learning Survey

Since 1996, Learning and Work Institute has been undertaking the Adult Participation in Learning Survey on an almost annual basis.<sup>5</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.

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 nation and 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 600 adults in the Scotland took part in the survey (744 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 UK representative dataset, but this was not weighted to be representative of Scotland population.

To find out more about the survey series and explore trend data through our interactive charts, visit [www.learningandwork.org.uk](http://www.learningandwork.org.uk).

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

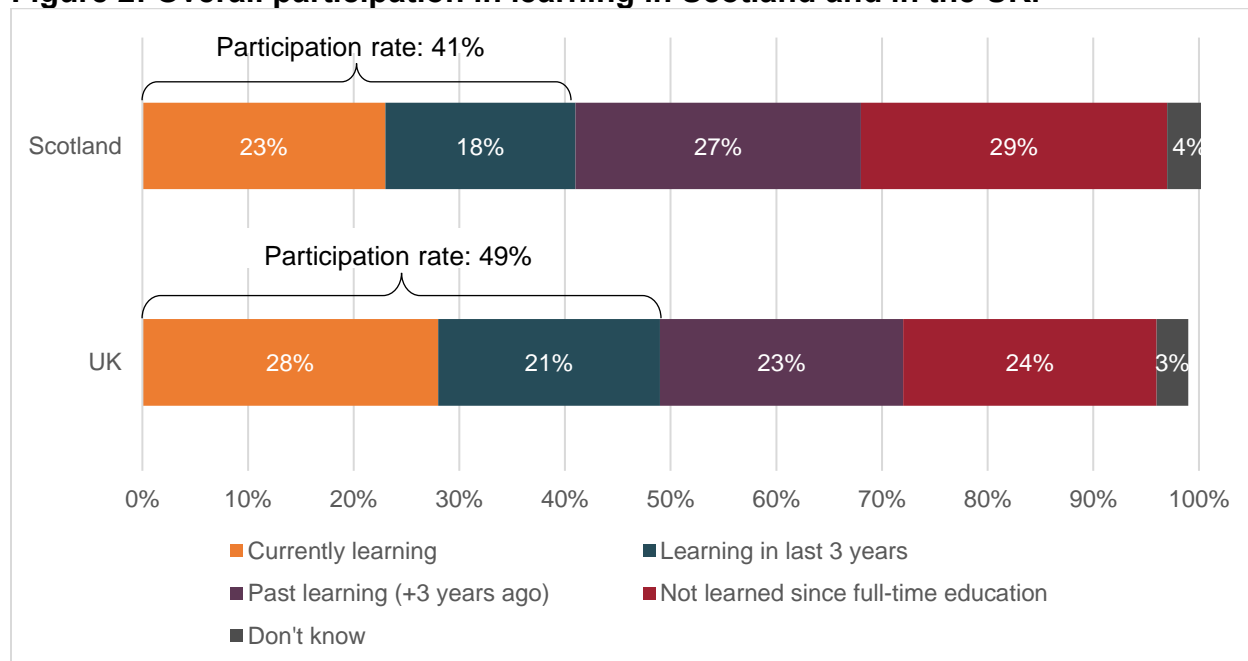
## Adult Participation in Learning in Scotland

Adult participation in learning is statistically significantly lower in Scotland compared to the UK overall (Figure 2). Two in five adults (41 per cent) in Scotland 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.

Just under one in four (23 per cent) adults in Scotland said they are currently learning and nearly one in five (18 per cent) saying they have done some learning over the past three years (Figure 2). Almost three in ten adults (29 per cent) said they have not done any learning since full-time education, while just over one in four (27 per cent) said they have been in learning over three years ago.

Participants in Scotland were significantly less likely to say they are currently learning than the rest of the UK (28 per cent). **Adults in Scotland were also significantly more likely to say they have not learned since completing full-time education (29 per cent) than in the rest of the UK (24 per cent).**

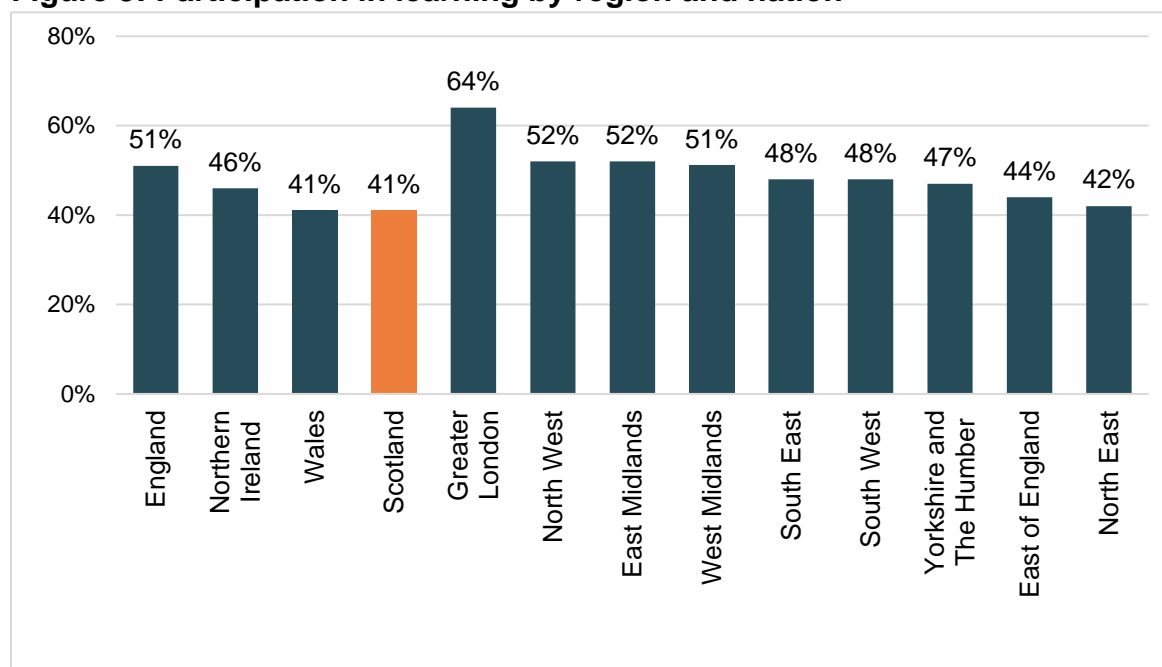
**Figure 2: Overall participation in learning in Scotland and in the UK.**



Base: Scotland respondents. Weighted base = 744, unweighted base = 600. UK all respondents. Weighted base = 8,906, unweighted base = 9,506.

**The survey shows that the participation rate in Scotland was significantly lower than England (51 per cent) (Figure 3).** The participation rate is also lower than in Northern Ireland (46 per cent), although this is not statistically. The participation rate of Wales is also 41 per cent.

**Figure 3: Participation in learning by region and nation**

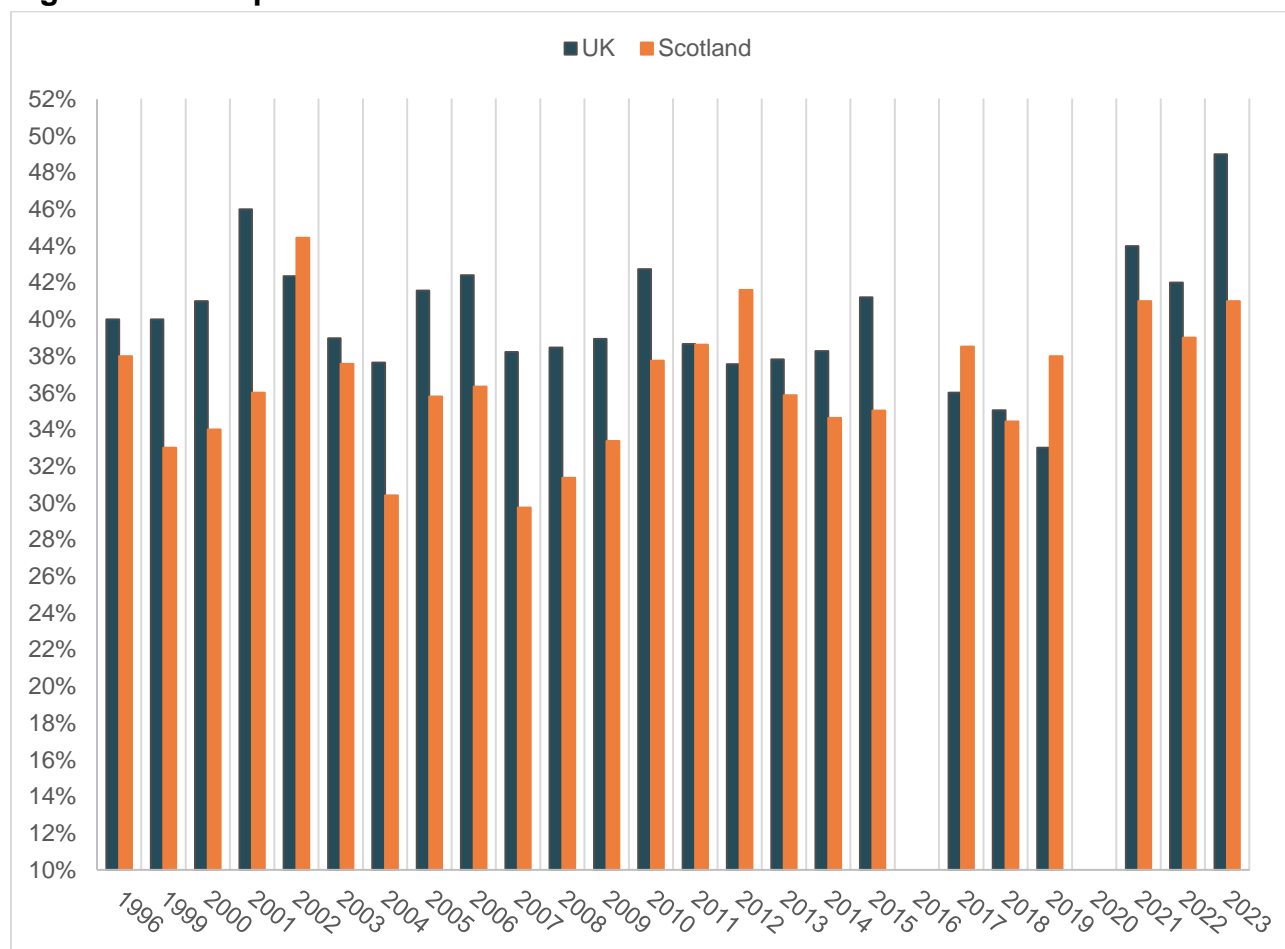


Base: all respondents. Total weighted base = 8,906, North East = 359, North West = 975, Yorkshire and The Humber = 730, East Midlands = 651, West Midlands = 782, East of England = 832, Greater London = 1,173, South East = 1,216, South West = 772, England = 7,491, Northern Ireland = 249, Scotland = 744, 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 Scotland has been higher than the UK average in only four years: 2002, 2012, 2017 and 2018 (Figure 4).<sup>6</sup> The data also indicates that Scotland did not have a decline in adult participation in learning in 2017-2019 seen in the UK overall. 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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 Scotland and in the UK**



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

## Demographic breakdown

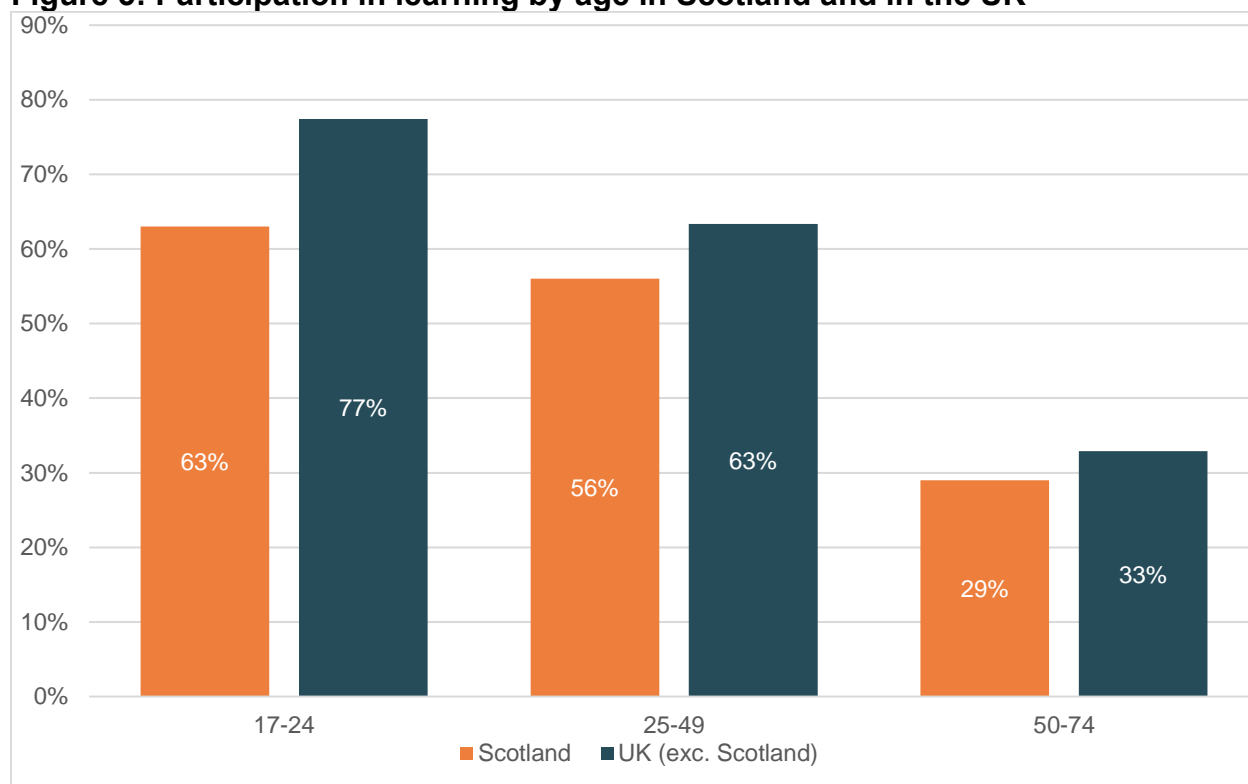
### Age

The survey consistently shows that participation in learning decreases with age, particularly after the age of 50. In Scotland, adults aged 17 to 24 are significantly more likely to say they are current or recent learners (63 per cent) than people aged 25-49 (56 per cent) and people aged 50 and older (29 per cent) (Figure 5). However, these findings need to be taken with caution due to the small number of respondents aged 17-24.<sup>7</sup>

**In Scotland, people aged 17-24 or 25-49 are significantly less likely to participate in learning than their peers in the rest of the UK.**

<sup>7</sup> Only 60 individuals aged 17 to 24 responded to the 2023 survey in Scotland.

**Figure 5: Participation in learning by age in Scotland and in the UK**



Base: Scotland respondents. Total weighted base = 693, 17-24 = 60, 25-49 = 270, 50-74 = 363. Total unweighted base = 578, 17-24 = 59, 25-49 = 231, 50-74 = 288. UK respondents (excluding Scotland). Total weighted base = 7612, 17-24 = 1103, 25-49 = 3286, 50-74 = 3223. Total unweighted base = 8394, 17-24 = 1127, 25-49 = 3807, 50-74 = 3460.

### Social grade

The Adult Participation in Learning Survey consistently shows that social grade<sup>8</sup> is a key predictor of participation in learning. In Scotland, those in the AB grade (43 per cent) are statistically as likely as people in the C1 (47 per cent) and C2 (48 per cent) social grades to say they have participated in learning (Figure 6). However, people in the DE grade are significantly less likely than those in the other grades to say they have taken part in learning in the last three years (30 per cent).

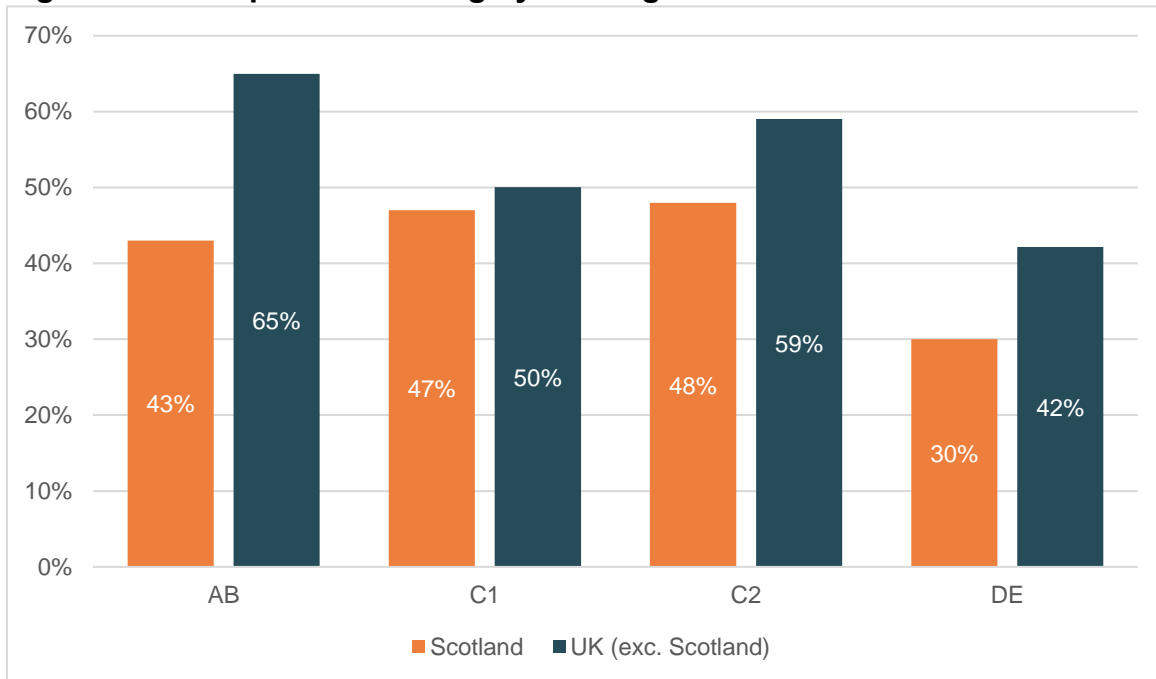
**In Scotland, people in DE grade were significantly less likely to say they have taken part in learning than in the rest of the UK.** Despite a large difference in the

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/aboutcensus/censusproducts/approximatedsocialgradedata#:~:text=A%20Higher%20and%20intermediate%20managerial,unemployed%20and%20lowest%20grade%20occupations>

proportions of people in other social grades, none of the differences between people in Scotland and in the rest of the UK saying are statistically significant.

**Figure 6: Participant in learning by social grade in Scotland and in the UK**



Base: Scotland respondents. Total weighted base = 744, AB = 227, C1 = 164, C2 = 120, DE = 233. Total unweighted base = 600, AB = 180, C1 = 135, C2 = 98, DE = 187.

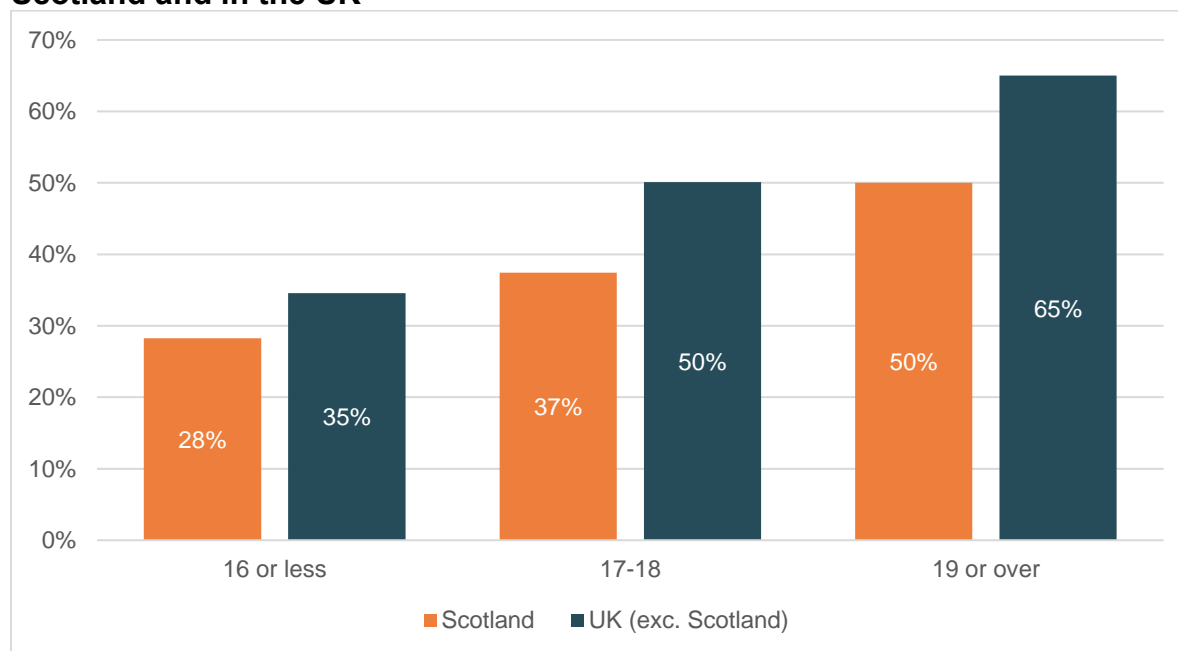
Total weighted base = 8125, AB = 2521, C1 = 1855, C2 = 1358, DE = 2391. Total unweighted base = 8906, AB = 2723, C1 = 2045, C2 = 1525, DE = 2613.

### Age completed full-time education

The survey uses the age someone left full-time education as a proxy for highest level of qualification. The longer individuals remain in full-time education, the more likely they are to learn as an adult. In Scotland, 28 per cent of adults who left education by age 16 or under said there are either current or recent learners, compared to 37 per cent for those staying until 17-18, and 50 per cent for those aged 19 or over (Figure 7).

In Scotland, the participation rate is fairly similar to the UK overall for those people who left full-time education aged 16 or less (35 per cent). **However, the rates are significantly lower for those left education aged 17 or 18 and 19 or over.**

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



Base: Scotland respondents. Total weighted base = 706, 16 or less = 237, 17-18 = 171, 19 or over = 297. Total unweighted base = 569, 16 or less = 190, 17-18 = 137, 19 or over = 242. Base: UK respondents. Total weighted base = 7738, 16 or less = 2388, 17-18 = 1848, 19 or over = 3500. Total unweighted base = 8456, 16 or less = 2544, 17-18 = 2019, 19 or over = 3883.

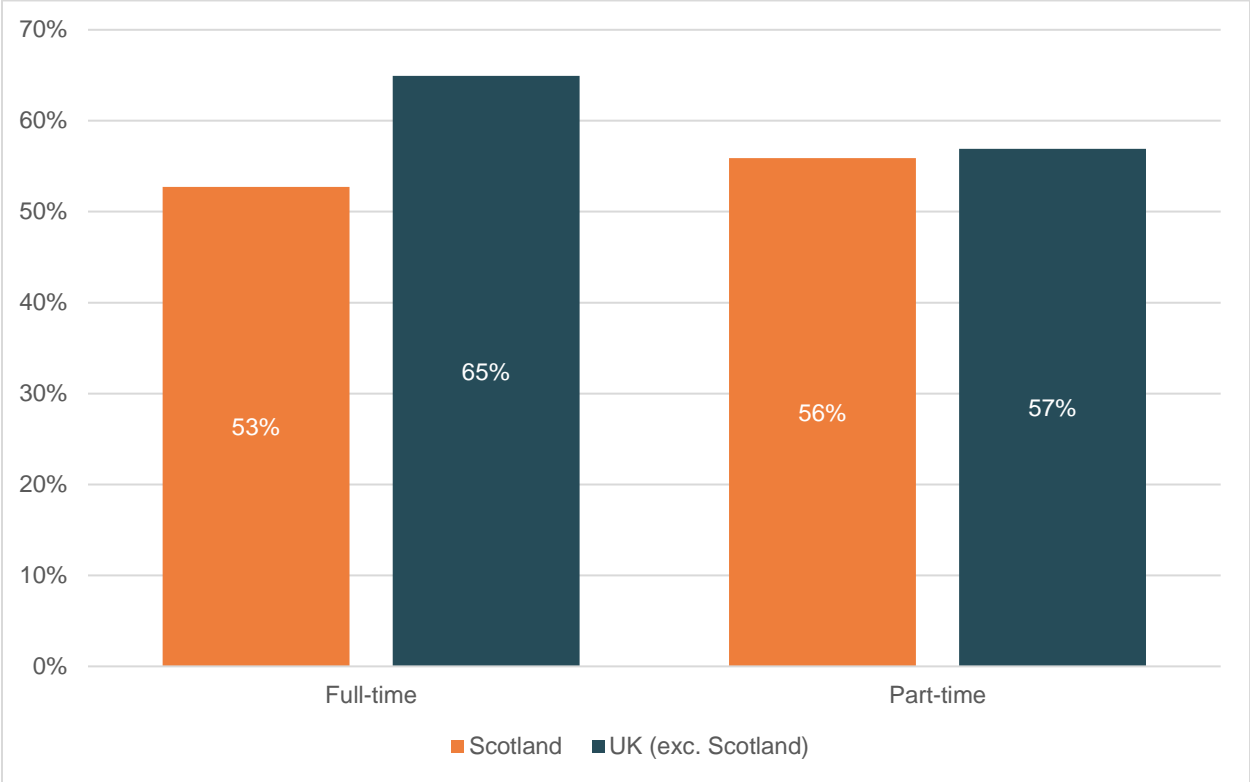
### Gender

In Scotland, men and women are equally likely to say they are current or recent learners, with men and women both at 50 per cent. These rates are comparable to the overall figures in the UK, where 51 per cent of men and 47 per cent of women report being 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 Scotland analysis includes only three working statuses: working full-time, working part-time and retired. In Scotland, 53 per cent of people working full-time and 56 per cent of part-time workers said they have taken part in learning in the last three years (Figure 8). The difference between these two groups is not statistically significant. Compared to the rest of the UK (65 per cent), full-time employees in Scotland are significantly less likely to take part in learning.

**Figure 8: Participation in learning by working status Scotland and in the UK**



Base: Scotland respondents. Total weighted base = 422, Full-time = 256, Part-time = 103. Total unweighted base = 592, Full-time = 216, Part-time = 86. Base: UK (excluding Scotland) respondents. Total weighted base = 8162, Full-time = 3227, Part-time = 1152. Total unweighted base = 8906, Full-time = 3672, Part-time = 1305.

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



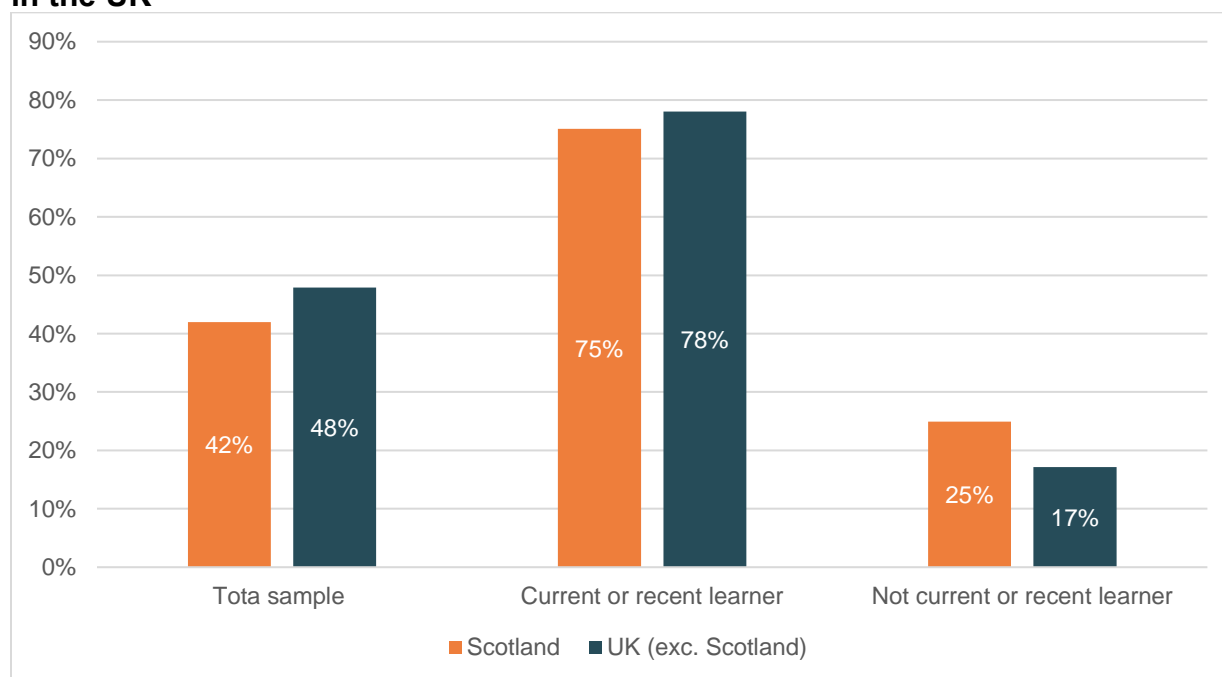
## Future intentions to learn

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 Scotland, just over two in five (42 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 four in five (75 per cent) current or recent learners said they are likely or very likely to learn in the future, compared with just over one in five (25 per cent) of adults who haven't engaged with learning in the past three years.

These proportions are fairly similar to the UK overall: 78 per cent of the current or recent learners said they are likely to learn in the future compared with only 17 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 Scotland and in the UK**



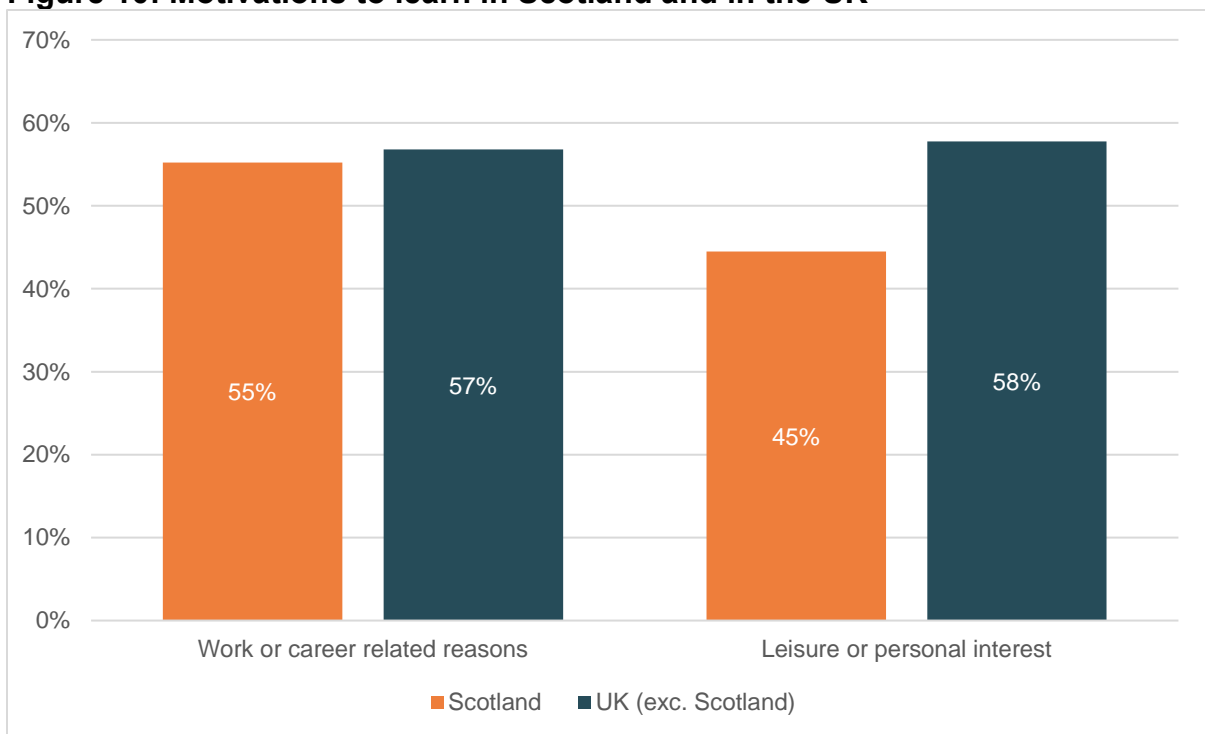
Base: Scotland respondents. 'Don't know' responses have been taken out. Weighted base = 745, Current or recent learner = 303, Not current or recent learner = 442. Unweighted base = 600, Current or recent learner = 250, Not current or recent learner = 350. Base: UK (excluding Scotland) respondents. Weighted base = 8162, Current or recent learner = 4097, Not current or recent learner = 4068. Unweighted base = 8906, Current or recent learner = 4528, Not current or recent learner = 4378.

## 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 Scotland, most adults (55 per cent) said they took up learning for work or career related reasons, while 45 per cent said they took up learning for leisure or personal interests (Figure 10).

These proportions are similar to the rest of the UK (excluding Scotland): 57 per cent of respondents in the rest of the UK said they took up learning for work or career related reasons compared with 58 per cent who say they did it for leisure or personal interest.

**Figure 10: Motivations to learn in Scotland and in the UK**



Base: all current or recent learners in Scotland. Weighted base = 303, unweighted base = 250. Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding Scotland). Weighted base = 4093, unweighted base = 4528.

## Learning delivery

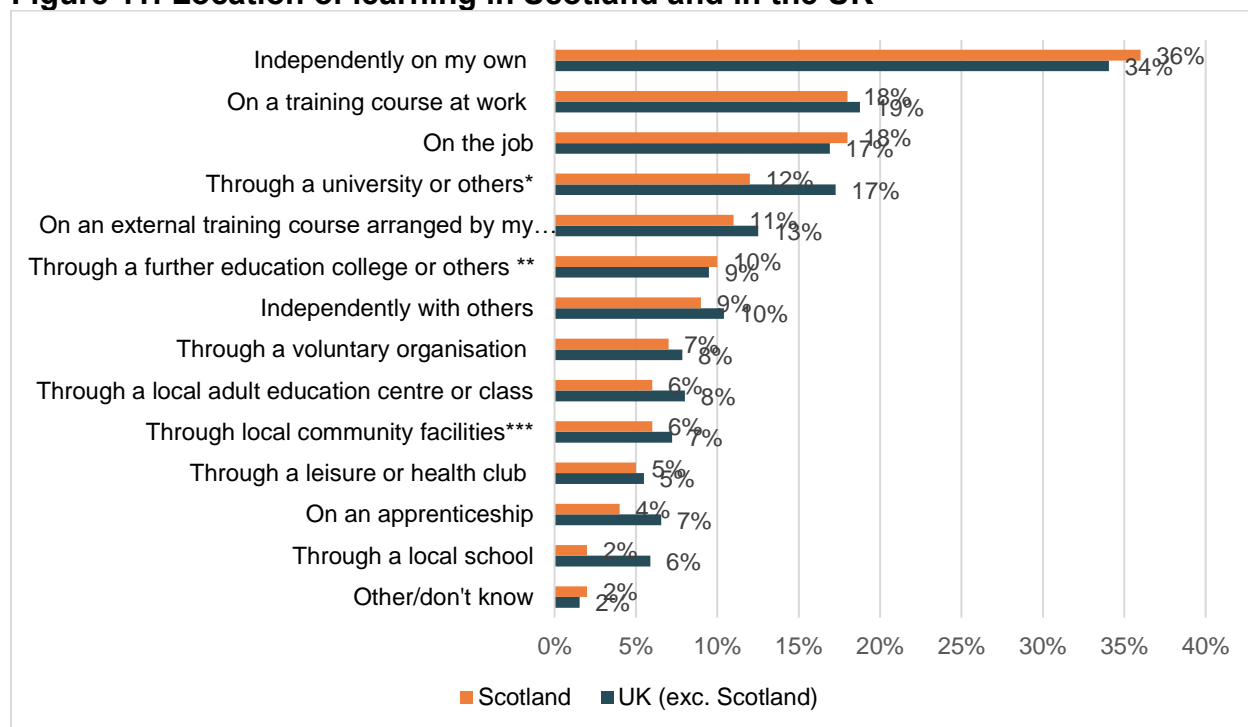
Adults who reported that they are currently learning or have done so in the last three years were asked how they did or are doing their main learning. In Scotland, 36 per cent of current and recent learners said they learned independently on their own (Figure 111).

Work related learning was also commonly reported, with 18 per cent reported learning through a training course at work or on the job and 11 per cent through an external training course arranged by their employers. Only three per cent reported doing an apprenticeship.

The fourth most commonly reported type of provision was a course with a university higher education institution (12 per cent). One in ten learners (10 per cent) said they did this through a further education college. Other provision reported by learners included voluntary organisation (7 per cent), local adult education centre (6 per cent), community facilities (6 per cent), leisure or health club (5 per cent), or a local school (2 per cent).

People in Scotland reported they have learned in similar places to learners in the rest of the UK.

**Figure 11: Location of learning in Scotland and in the UK**



Base: All current or recent learners in Scotland. Weighted base = 303, unweighted base = 250. 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 Scotland). Weighted base = 4093, unweighted

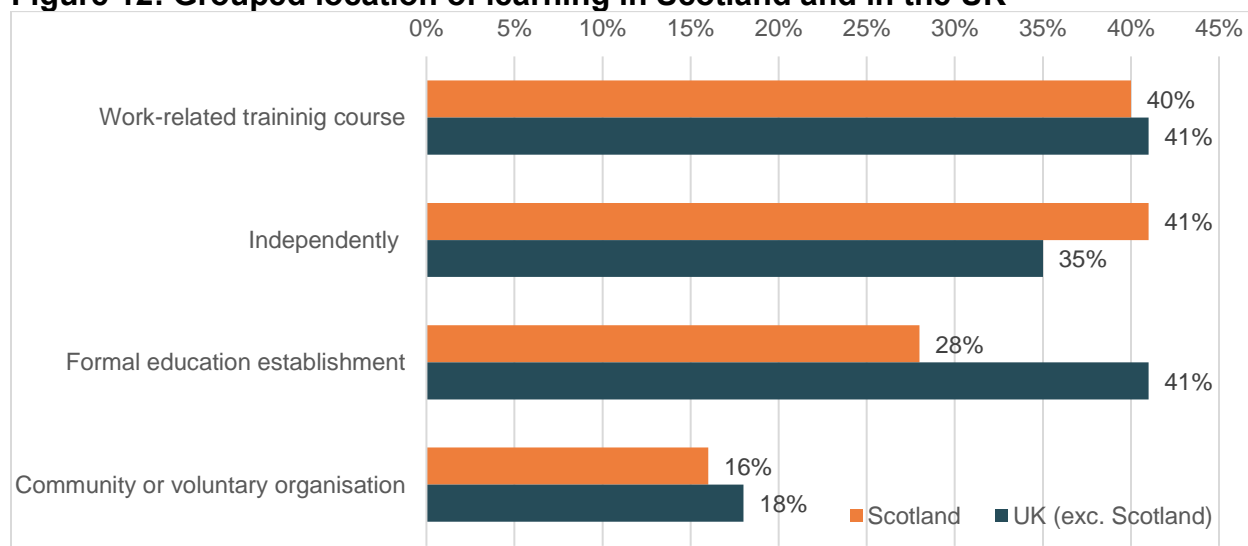
base = 4528 \*higher education institution/Open University \*\*tertiary/6th Form college \*\*\* such as a library, museum, place of worship, bookshop etc.

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.<sup>9</sup>

In Scotland, two in five participants said they have done their learning independently or on a work-related training course (41 per cent), 28 per cent said they have done their training through a formal establishment and 16 per cent said they have done their training through a community or voluntary organisation (Figure 12).

While there is a difference between methods in formal education establishments (28 per cent) compared to the UK (41 per cent), this difference is not statistically significant.

**Figure 12: Grouped location of learning in Scotland and in the UK**



Base: all current or recent learners in Scotland. Weighted base = 303, Unweighted base = 250. Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding Scotland) Weighted base = 4093, unweighted base = 4528.

<sup>9</sup> The response options were categorised as follows:

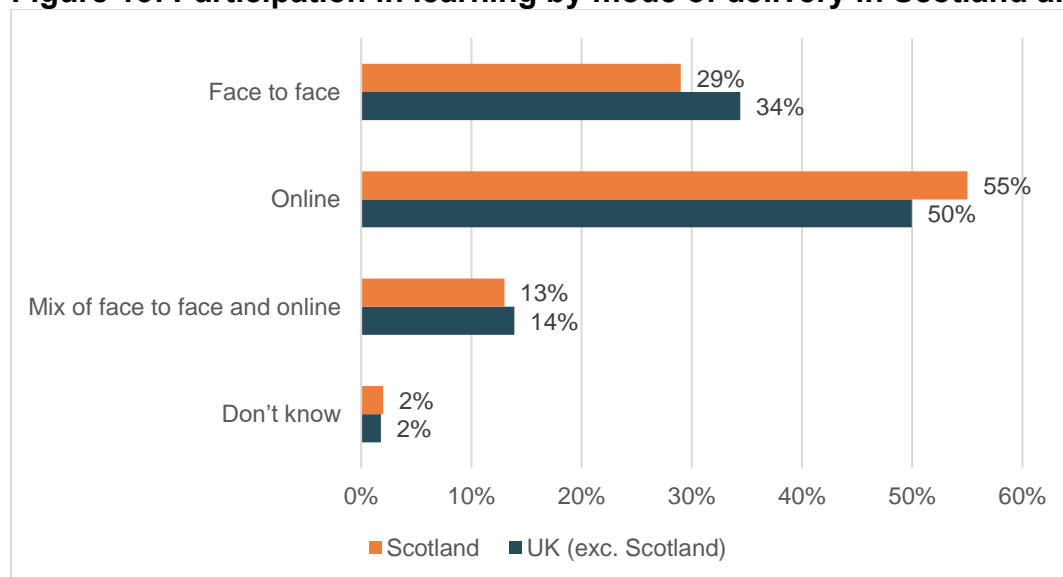
- Work-related, including: On the job; On a training course at work; On an external training course arranged by my employer; On an apprenticeship
- Independently, including: Independently on my own; Independently with others
- Formal educational establishment, including: Through a university/higher education 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.

## 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 Scotland over one half (55 per cent) of current or recent learners said they completed at least some of their learning online (Figure 13). One in three (29 per cent) said they have taken up their learning face to face and just over one in ten (13 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. However, adults in Scotland are significantly more likely to have done learning online (55 per cent), compared to the North West, East Midlands and Greater London.

**Figure 13: Participation in learning by mode of delivery in Scotland and in the UK**



Base: all current or recent learners in Scotland. Weighted base = 303, unweighted base = 250.

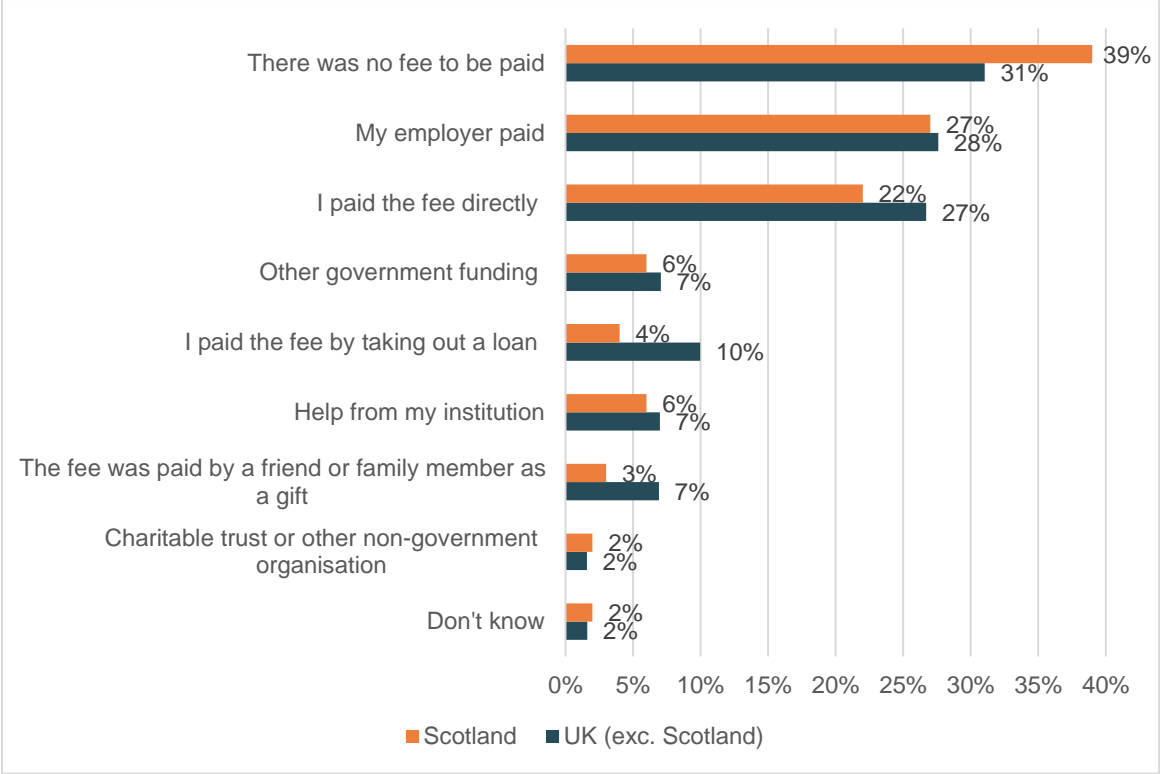
Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding Scotland). Weighted base = 4093, unweighted base = 4528.

## Fees

In Scotland, around three in five (61 per cent) current or recent learners said a fee was attached to their main learning (Figure 14). Most commonly, learners reported that their employer paid the fee (27 per cent). Just over one in five (22 per cent) of learners said that they paid the fee directly. Less than one in ten learners said they paid their fee with other government funding (6 per cent), with help from their institution (6 per cent), by taking out a loan (4 per cent) and with support from their friend or family member (3 per cent). Support by charities or non-government organisations was reported by just 2 per cent of learners.

While there is a difference in proportions of people who reported paying for their learning in Scotland (61 per cent), compared to the rest of the UK (69 per cent), this difference is not statistically different. However, **respondents in Scotland were significantly more likely to say that there was no fee to be paid for their learning (39 per cent), compared to the overall UK average (32 per cent).**

**Figure 14: How learning is paid for in Scotland and in the UK (excluding Scotland)**



Base: all current or recent learners in Scotland. Weighted base = 303, unweighted base = 250. Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding Scotland). Weighted base = 4903, unweighted base = 4528.

## 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

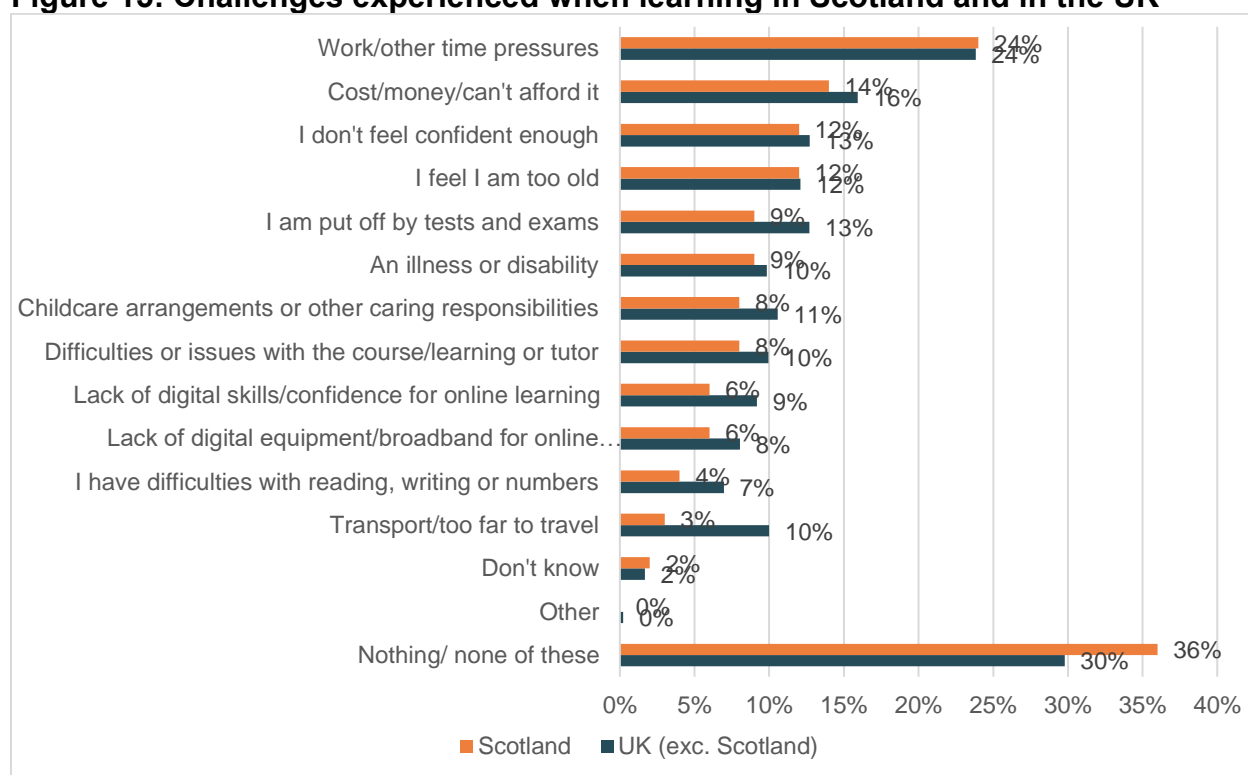
In Scotland, just under two in three (64 per cent) current or recent learners identified at least one challenge while learning, compared with seven in ten (70 per cent) in the UK.

Most commonly, current or recent learners identified work and other time pressures as a challenge, with one in four (24 per cent) of adults in Scotland identifying these as a challenge (Figure 15).

Other common challenges relate to people's attitudes or perceptions of learning, such as lack of confidence to learn (12 per cent), feeling too old (12 per cent) or being put off by tests/exams (9 per cent). Respondents identified challenges related to their situation, including the cost of learning/not being able to afford learning (14 per cent), childcare arrangements or other caring responsibilities (8 per cent), illness or disability (9 per cent) or transport (3 per cent). Participants also said they experienced digital barriers while learning due to a lack of digital skills or confidence for online working (6 per cent) or lack of digital equipment (6 per cent).

Participants in Scotland reported fairly similar challenges to those identified by learners in other UK regions. However, in Scotland people were significantly less likely to report transport as a challenge while learning than in the rest of the UK.

**Figure 15: Challenges experienced when learning in Scotland and in the UK**



Base: all current or recent learners in Scotland. Weighted base = 303, unweighted base = 250.

Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding Scotland). Weighted base = 4903, unweighted base = 4528.

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 Scotland two in five adults (42 per cent) learners said they have experienced situational challenges (Table 1). Just under two in five (37 per cent) said they are facing dispositional challenges and a further 8 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 Scotland and in the UK**

Group	Scotland	The UK (excluding Scotland)
Situational	42%	49%
Dispositional	37%	42%
Institutional	8%	10%
No challenges encountered	36%	30%

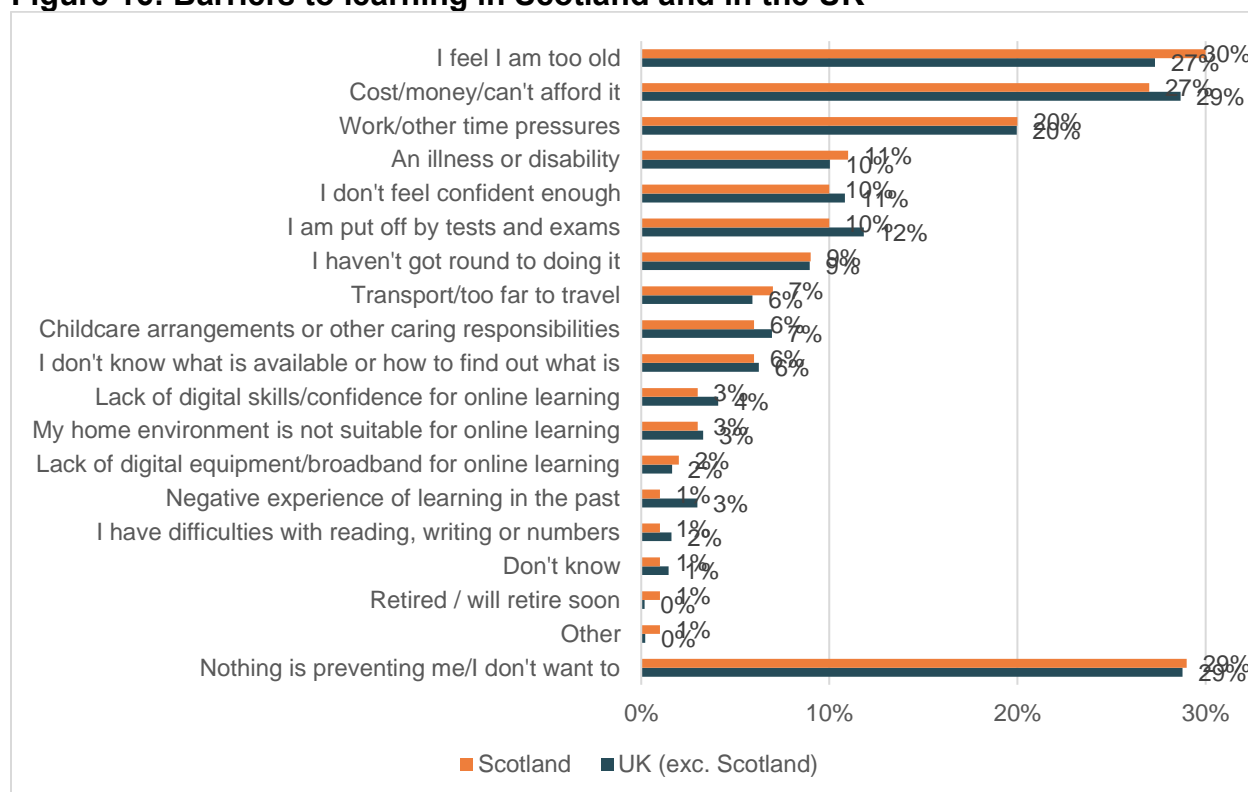
Base: all current or recent learners in Scotland. Weighted base = 303, unweighted base = 250. Base: all current or recent learners in the UK. Weighted base = 4396, unweighted base = 4778.

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

In Scotland, seven in ten (71 per cent) adults identified at least one barrier preventing them from engaging with learning over the past three years (Figure 16). The most common barrier was feeling too old (30 per cent). This was followed by the cost of learning (27 per cent) and work and time pressure (20 per cent). Around one in ten adults in Scotland identified an illness or disability (11 per cent), lack of confidence (10 per cent) and being put off by tests and exams (10 per cent) as barriers. Other barriers people included transport (7 per cent), childcare arrangements or other caring responsibilities (6 per cent), and not knowing what is available or how to find out what is (6 per cent).

The barriers people faced in Scotland were similar to the barriers experienced in the other nations and regions.

**Figure 16: Barriers to learning in Scotland and in the UK**



Base: respondents who have not participated in learning within the last three years in Scotland. Weighted base = 419, unweighted base = 324. Base: respondents who have not participated in learning within the last three years in the UK (excluding Scotland) Weighted base = 3789, unweighted base = 4074.

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.

In Scotland, 44 per cent said situational barriers prevented them from learning and 51 per cent said dispositional barriers prevented them from engaging with learning. This is similar the rest of the UK.

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

<b>Group</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>The UK (excluding Scotland)</b>
Situational	44%	46%
Dispositional	51%	51%
No challenges encountered	29%	29%

Base: respondents who have not participated in learning within the last three years in Scotland. Weighted base = 410, unweighted base = 324. Base: respondents who have not participated in learning within the last three years in the UK (excluding Scotland) Weighted base = 3789, unweighted base = 4074.

## Learning for career change

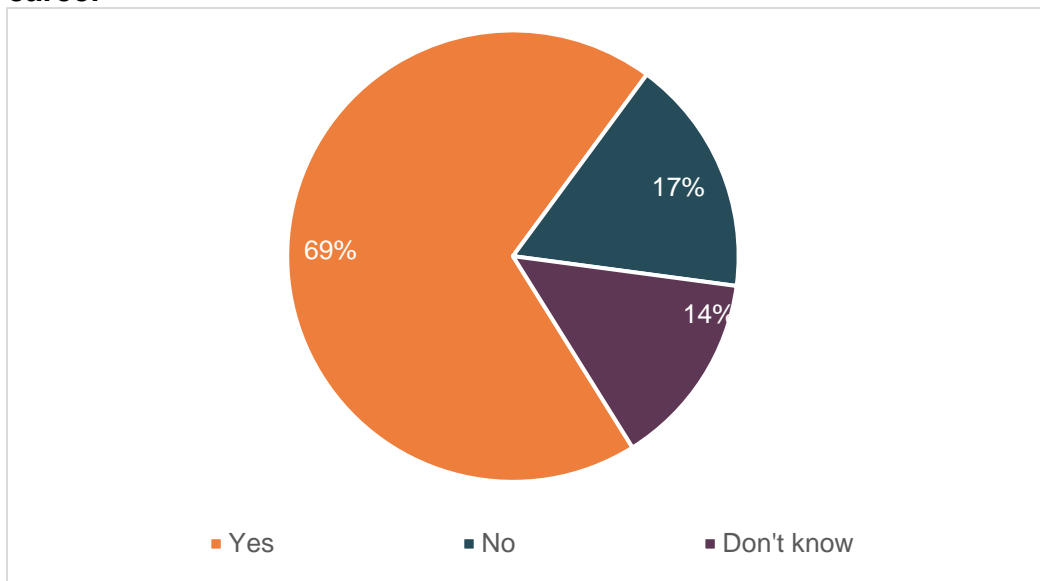
Advances in technology, including Artificial Intelligence, alongside longer working lives will see more people needing to change jobs and careers. The Coronavirus pandemic also had a profound effect on the labour market, with an increase in the number of people who are economically inactive and job vacancies 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 Scotland, seven in ten adults (69 per cent) believe that people like them can change career, 17 per cent said they did not think that they could and 14 per cent said they don't know (Figure 17). This is fairly similar to the UK overall, with 71 per cent of respondents saying they believe people like them can change career.

**Figure 17: Respondents in Scotland who believe people like them can change career**



Base: respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in Scotland. Weighted base = 451, unweighted base = 379.

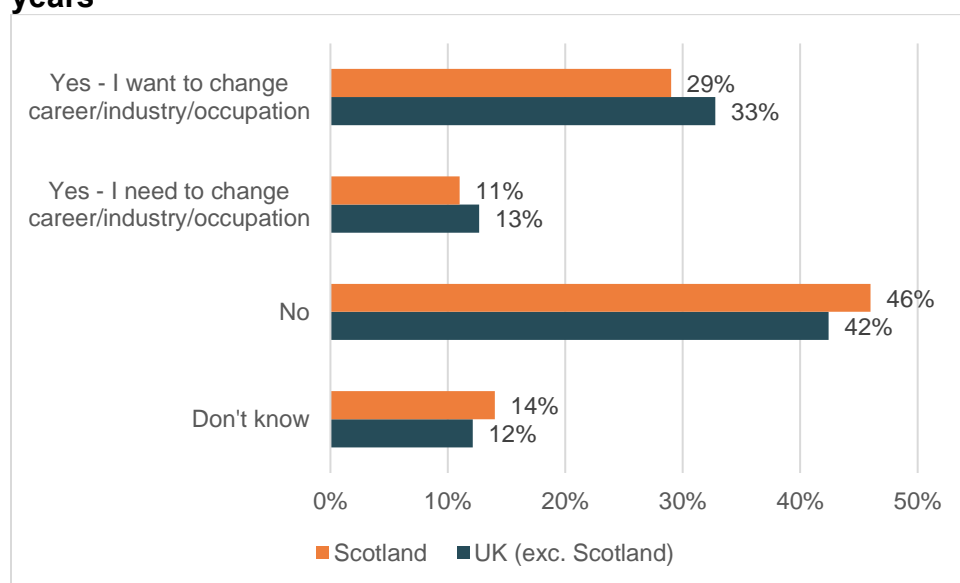
In Scotland, 29 per cent of adults said they want to change their career, industry or occupation and 11 per cent said they need to (Figure 18). Nearly half of adult

respondents (46 per cent) said they do not need or want to change career and 14 per cent don't know.

These figures are similar to the UK average, with 33 per cent of adults who said they want to change career, industry or occupation in the next one of two years, 13 per cent who said they need to, 43 per cent who said they do not want or need to and 12 per cent saying they don't know.

Wider research indicates that around six per cent of adults change occupation or sector each year<sup>10</sup>.

**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 Scotland. Weighted base = 451, unweighted base = 379. Base respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the UK (excluding Scotland). Weighted base = 5515, unweighted base = 6210.

### 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 20). In Scotland, the main reason cited was to earn more money (49 per cent). This was followed by to feel happier at work (39 per cent) and getting a job that would be more fulfilling or worthwhile (38 per cent).

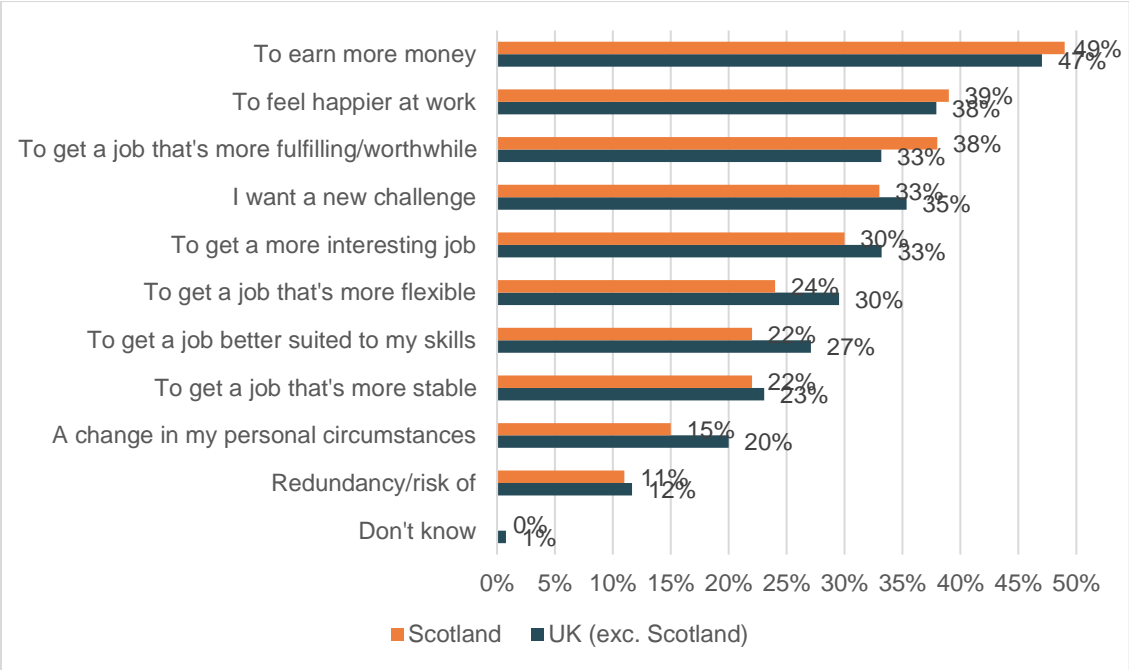
Respondents also reported wanting a new challenge (33 per cent), a more interesting job (30 per cent) or a job that's more flexible (24 per cent). Just over one in five adults want a job that is better suited to their skills (22 per cent) or more stable (22 per cent).

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

Over one in ten respondents (15 per cent) reported that a change in personal circumstances was the reason for wanting a career change. A further one in ten (11 per cent) said they feared or were at risk of redundancy.

The motivations for career change in Scotland are fairly similar to the other UK nations and regions (Figure 20). However, adults in Scotland are significantly more likely to say their motivation for a career change is to get a job that’s more fulfilling/worthwhile, than adults in North West England, Yorkshire and the Humber and Greater London. In addition, adults in Scotland are significantly more likely to say that they want to get that is more stable , than adults in Wales. Redundancy, or a risk of, is significantly higher in Scotland than adults in the East of England.

**Figure 19: Reasons for wanting or needing career change in Scotland and in the UK**



Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in Scotland. Weighted base = 180, unweighted base = 152. Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in the UK (excluding Scotland). Weighted base = 2506, unweighted base = 2829.

**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 21). In Scotland, the most cited barriers related to dispositional factors, including a lack of self-confidence (29 per cent), a fear of applying for jobs/job interviews (27 per cent) and feeling too old (23 per cent). More than one fifth of respondents said that they have always done the same job (23 per cent) or they don’t know what other job/career they could do (22 per cent).

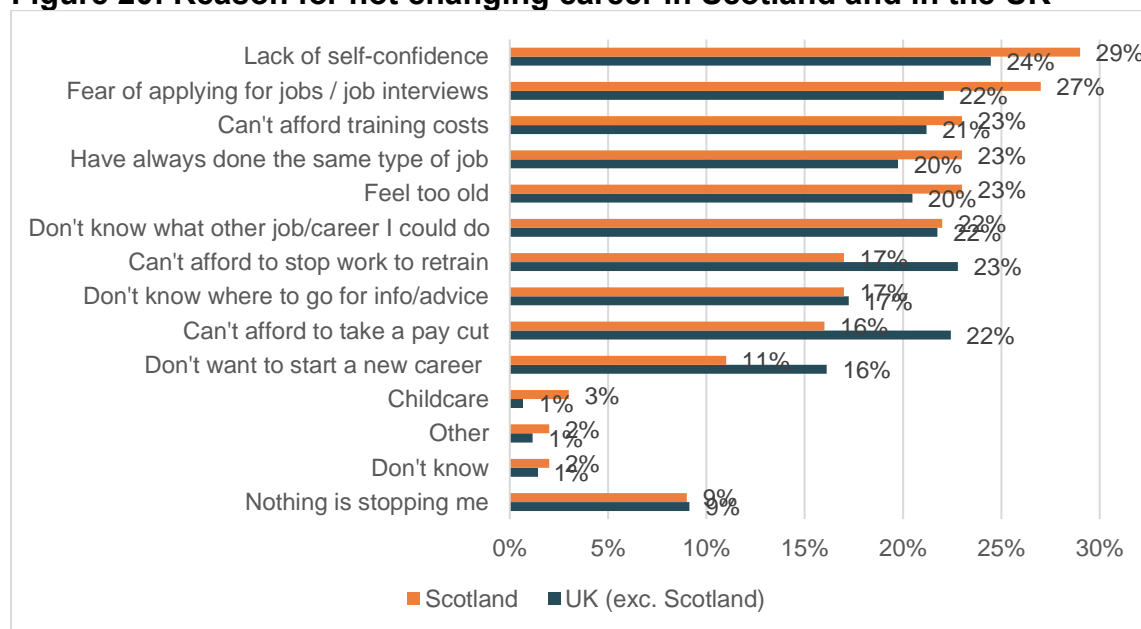
Barriers relating to finance included not being able to afford training costs (23 per cent), not being able to afford to stop work to retrain (17 per cent), or not being able to afford to take a pay cut (16 per cent).

Some barriers relate to a lack of awareness of opportunities or guidance, including not knowing where to go for information and advice (17 per cent).

Only nine 9 per cent of respondents who say 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 Scotland are fairly similar to the ones identified in the rest of the UK (see Figure 20). However, adults in Scotland are significantly more likely to cite childcare as a barrier to learning (3 per cent), than the UK average. Adults in Scotland are significantly more likely than Yorkshire and the Humber, to cite a fear of applying for jobs/job interviews (27 per cent) and that they have always done the same type of job (23 per cent). In addition, adults in Scotland are significantly more likely to feel a lack of self-confidence (29 per cent), compared to adults in Greater London and Yorkshire and the Humber.

**Figure 20: Reason for not changing career in Scotland and in the UK**



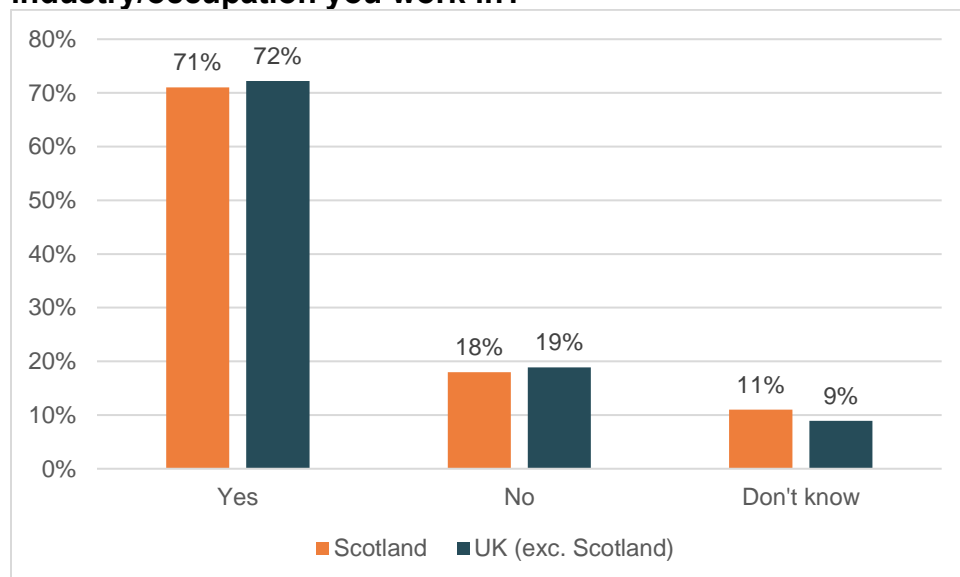
Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in Scotland. Weighted base = 180, unweighted base = 152. Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in the UK (excluding Scotland). Weighted base = 2506, unweighted base = 2829.

### 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 Scotland, seven in ten adults (71 per cent) said they need to develop

their skills, while 18 per cent said they don't and 11 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 Scotland. Weighted base = 180, unweighted base = 152. Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in the UK (excluding Scotland). Weighted base = 2506, unweighted base = 2829.

### 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 Scotland, respondents most commonly indicated that they would find learning or training (29 per cent) helpful if they wanted/need to change career. The second most commonly reported support related to financial support towards costs of learning/training (27 per cent) or towards living costs while learning/training (26 per cent)

This was followed by respondents stating that they would find advice useful – on their transferable skills (25 per cent), to help them choose the right job/career (22 per cent) and coaching and support when they first start a new job (20 per cent). Nearly one in five respondents said they would like help to choose the learning or training needed (18 per cent), and advice and coaching to help them get a job (18 per cent). Over one in ten adults (15 per cent) said they didn't know what they would find helpful.

Responses in Scotland were similar to the rest of the UK (see Figure 23). However, adults in Scotland are significantly more likely than Greater London and Northern Ireland to say they don't know what they would find helpful. This indicates that there may need to be more proactive signposting to support.



**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 Scotland. Weighted base = 451, unweighted base = 379. Base respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the UK (excluding Scotland). Weighted base = 5515, unweighted base = 6210.

Respondents were asked where they would go for information and advice if they wished to change career (Table 3). In Scotland, 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 (19 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 employment support and education providers, such as Jobcentre Plus (19 per cent) or a college or university (17 per cent). Over one in ten adults in Scotland responded with a recruitment consultant/agency (14 per cent), their current employer (14 per cent), a professional, sector or trade organisation (13 per cent) or prospective employers (12 per cent). Just under one in ten adults said that they would go to social media for advice (9 per cent) or Citizens' Advice (7 per cent). In addition, 15 per cent of respondents said they 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). **However, adults in Scotland are significantly more likely to say they would go to Jobcentre Plus for advice (19 per cent) than the UK overall (15 per cent).**

**Adults in Scotland were significantly more likely to say they wouldn't know where to go for advice on career change (15 per cent), compared to the UK average (12 per cent).** This demonstrates a need to raise awareness on easily accessible sources of careers information, advice and guidance for adults, if they want or need to change careers.

**Table 3: Where respondents go for advice on career change**

Source of information/advice	Scotland	UK (excluding Scotland)
General online search	39%	37%
Friends, family or colleagues	19%	24%
Education provider such as a college or university	17%	16%
Social media	9%	16%
Recruitment consultant/agency	14%	16%
Professional, sector or trade organisation	13%	16%
Jobcentre Plus	19%	15%
Prospective employers	12%	12%
Your current employer (e.g. HR, line manager)	14%	11%
Citizens' Advice	7%	8%
Local community, voluntary or religious centre	4%	5%
Local or national charity	4%	5%
Unionlearn representative or Workplace Learning Advocate	4%	5%
Don't know	15%	11%

Base: respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in Scotland. Weighted base = 451, unweighted base = 379. Base respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the UK (excluding Scotland). Weighted base = 5515, unweighted base = 6210.