

Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2023: North West

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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 West.

Key findings for the North West

In the North West, just over one in two adults (52 per cent) said they have learned over the past three years. This is fairly similar to the UK average (49 per cent) and the England average (51 per cent). **The North West has the joint second highest participation in learning rate in the England.** However, the proportion of current or recent learners is only significantly higher than the proportions of four other regions: North East (42 per cent), Yorkshire and the Humber (47 per cent) and East of England (44 per cent). The higher participation rate than some of the regions in the North West could be partly explained by demographic differences. **In the North West, there was a higher proportion of respondents aged 25-49 and a lower proportion of people aged 50 to 64.** The survey shows that the younger people are, the more likely they are to take part in learning.

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

- Adults in the highest social grade (AB¹) 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.

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

- 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 West are also those that are less likely to learn in the other regions. However, there are two main differences:

- **In the North West, adults in the C2² social grade are significantly more likely to participate in learning compared to the rest of the UK.**
- **People who left full-time education aged 17-18 are significantly more likely to take part in learning than in the rest of the UK.**

In the North West, 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 in the North West are significantly more likely to say they have done an apprenticeship (9 per cent) than the UK average (6 per cent).** Despite the small sample size, this figure is consistent with Government data on apprenticeships in England.³

Despite relatively high levels of participation in learning, 73 per cent of recent or current learners in the North West said they have experienced at least one challenge while learning. This is similar to the rest of the UK, where 69 per cent of learners identified at least one challenge. The challenges experienced by learners in the North West are similar to those identified by learners in other UK regions. However, in the West East, learners are significantly more likely to identify difficulties with reading, writing or numbers (10 per cent) than the UK average (7 per cent). This is consistent with wider research that found that Greater Manchester Combined Authority has the third highest essential skills needs among the combined authorities.⁴ 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 overall.

The survey included questions about career change. Nearly half (49 per cent) of respondents said they 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. **Adults in the North West were significantly less 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 (38 per cent compared 43 per cent).**

² C2 social grade corresponds to skilled manual occupations.

³ The government data shows that the North West has the largest number of apprenticeships in 2017/2018, with more than 16 per cent of the total apprenticeships.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships#apprenticeship-and-traineeships-current-data>

⁴ Learning and Work Institute (2023) [Modelling essential skills needs across England](#)

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.

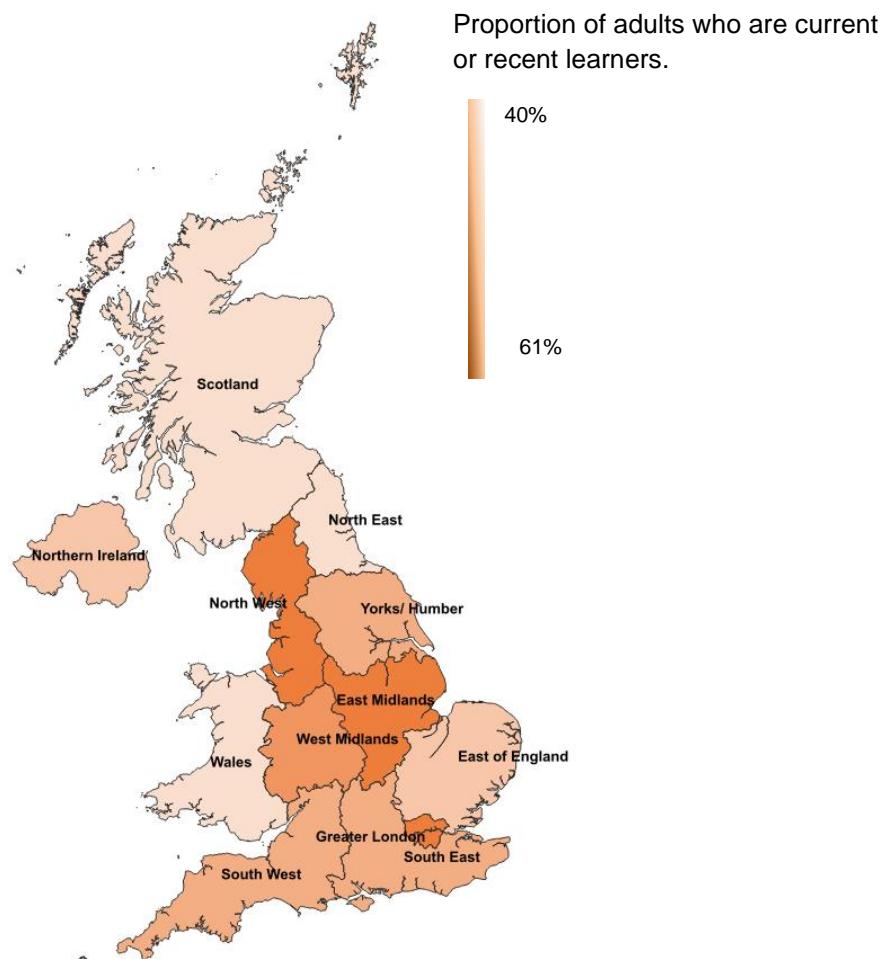
Growth in learning participation since 2019 shows an innate interest in learning among adults. However, fewer opportunities to learn at work or take part in formal learning or courses means people face limits in the types of learning they can pursue. Learning in all its forms has value and benefits.

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 2017.⁵ For example, while more than three in five adults in Greater London have learned within the past three years, only two in five adults say are either a current or recent learners in the North West. 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 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.

⁵ 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.⁶ 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 1045 adults in the North West took part in the survey (975 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.

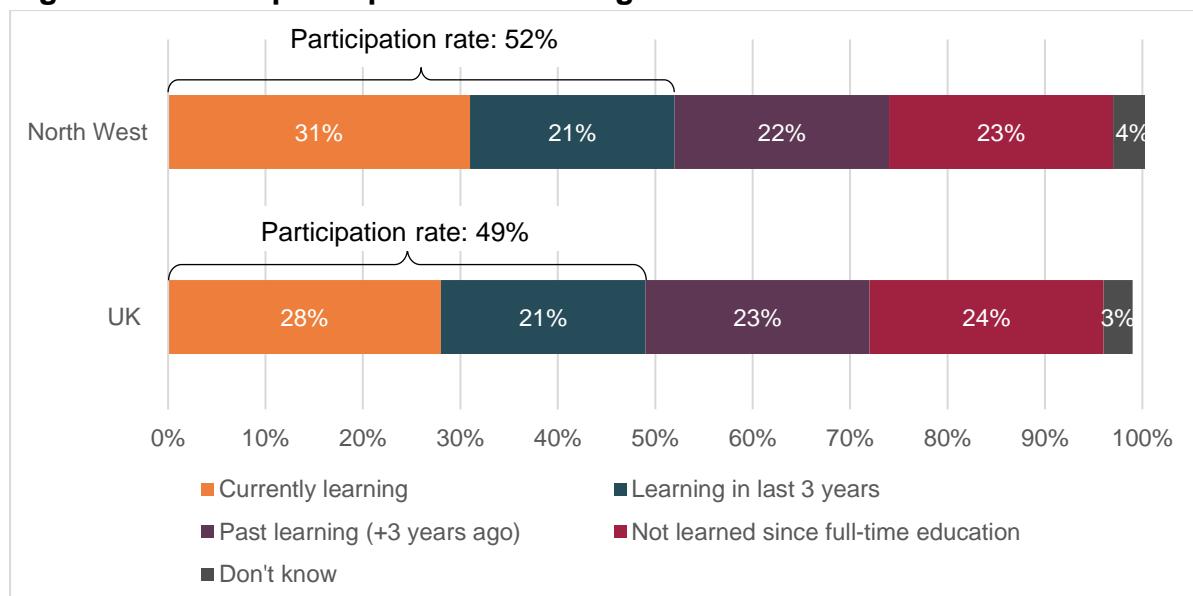
⁶ Surveys were undertaken annually from 1996 except in three years: 1997, 1998 and 2016.

Adult participation in learning in the North West

Participation in learning is slightly higher in the North West compared to the UK overall. Just over half (52 per cent) of adults in the North West 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. However, the difference is not statistically significant.

In the North West, the higher rate of participation in learning is driven by adults being significantly more likely to say they are currently learning (31 per cent) than in the rest of the UK (28 per cent) (Figure 2). Around one in five adults in the North West said they have done some learning over the past three years (21 per cent) or have not done any learning since full-time education (22 per cent) or last took part in learning over three years ago (23 per cent).

Figure 2: Overall participation in learning in the North West



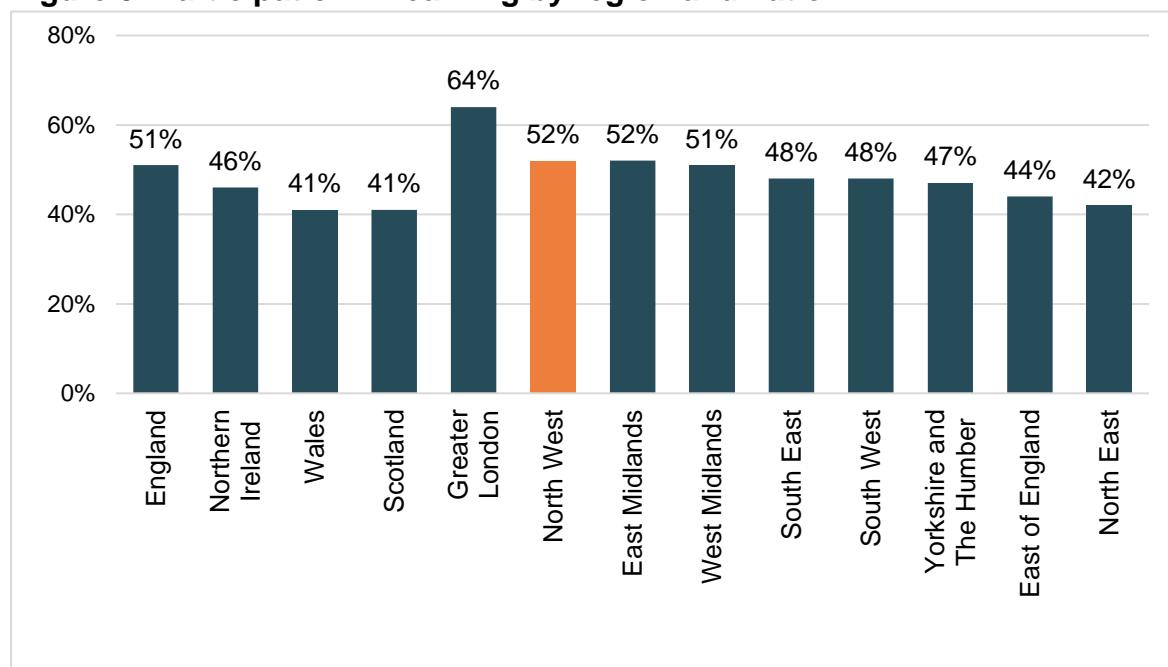
Base: North West respondents. Weighted base: = 975, unweighted base = 1045. UK: all respondents. Weighted base = 8906, unweighted base = 9506.

When comparing levels of participation in learning across the UK in 2023, the survey shows that the participation rate in the North West is consistent with the average in England (51 per cent) (Figure 3). This compares to 46 per cent in Northern Ireland, and 41 per cent in both Scotland and Wales.

While the North West has the joint second highest participation in learning rate in England, the proportion of current or recent learners is only significantly higher than the proportions of four other regions: North East (42 per cent), Yorkshire and the Humber (47 per cent) and East of England (44 per cent). Adults in the North West are significantly less likely to participate in learning than adults in Greater

London (64 per cent), where the proportion of adult learners is significantly higher than all of the other regions.

Figure 3: Participation in learning by region and nation

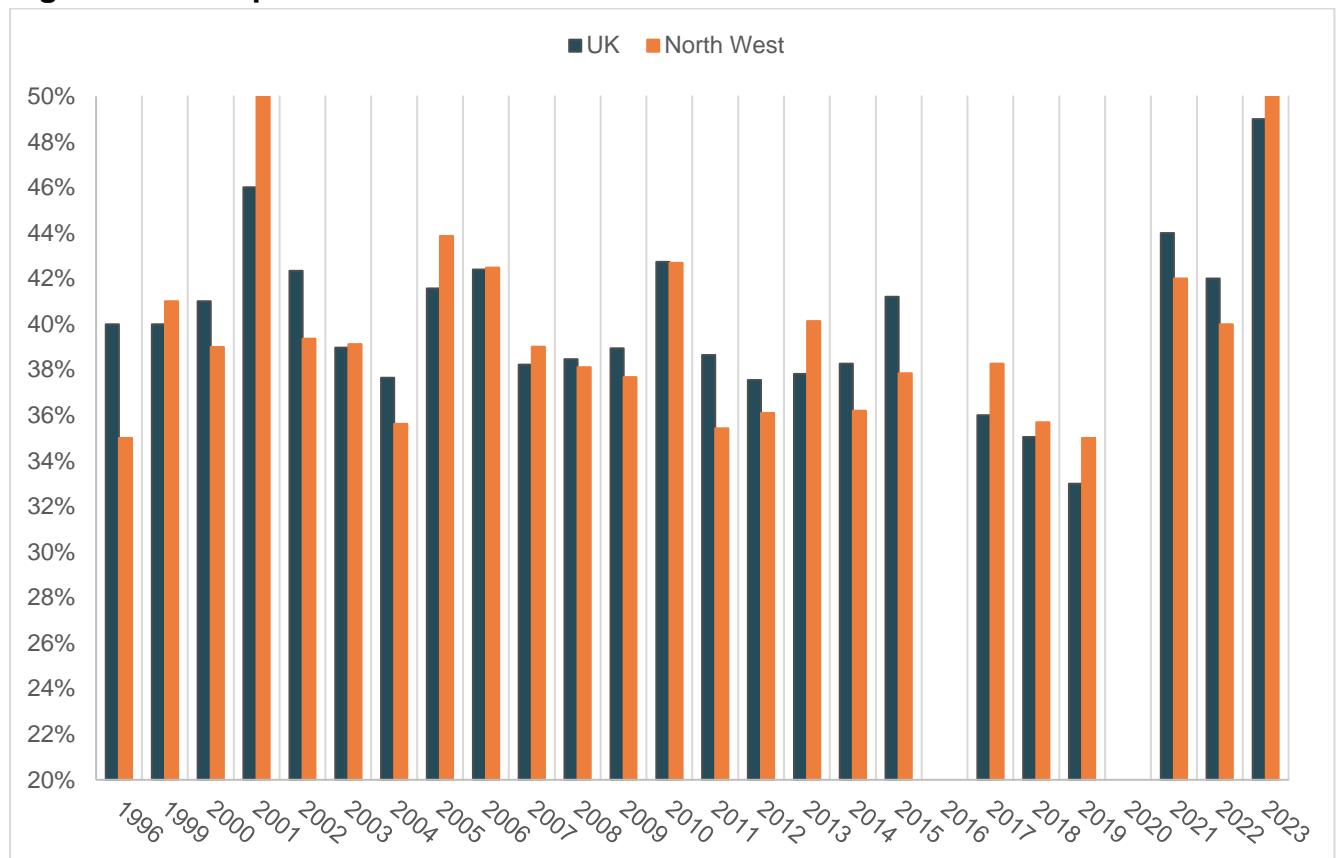


Base: all respondents. Total weighted base = 8,906, North East = 359, North West = 975, Yorkshire and The Humber = 730, East Midlands = 651, West Midlands = 782, East of England = 832, Greater London = 1,173, South East = 1,216, South West = 772, England = 7,491, Northern Ireland = 249, Scotland = 744, 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 West has fluctuated. Pre-pandemic in 2017-2019, the North West participation rate was higher than the UK average (Figure 4).⁷ In 2021 and 2022, the participation rate fell below 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.

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 West and in the UK



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

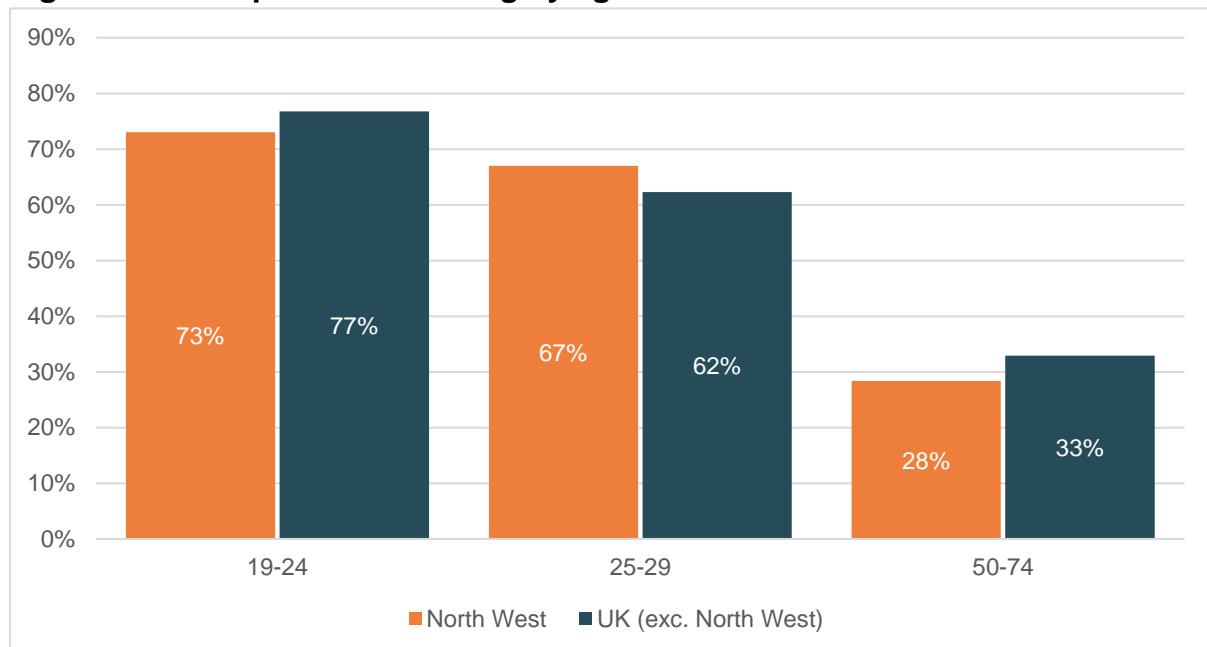
Demographic breakdown

Age

The UK survey consistently shows that participation in learning decreases with age. In the North West, adults aged 19-24 are significantly more likely to say they are current or recent learners than older adults aged 50-74 (Figure 5).

Just under three in four adults aged 19-24 (73 per cent) said they are current or recent learners, compared with just over two in three adults aged 25-49 (67 per cent), and nearly three in ten adults aged 50-74 (28 per cent). Despite some differences between the participation rates by age in the North West and in the rest of the UK, none of the differences are statistically significant.

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



Base: North West respondents. Total weighted base = 888, 19-24 = 115, 25-49 = 424, 50-74 = 349. Total unweighted base = 992, 19-24 = 118, 25-49 = 479, 50-74 = 366. UK respondents. Total weighted base = 7153, 19-24 = 784, 25-49 = 3132, 50-74 = 3237. Total unweighted base = 7753, 19-24 = 802, 25-49 = 3559, 50-74 = 3382.

Social grade

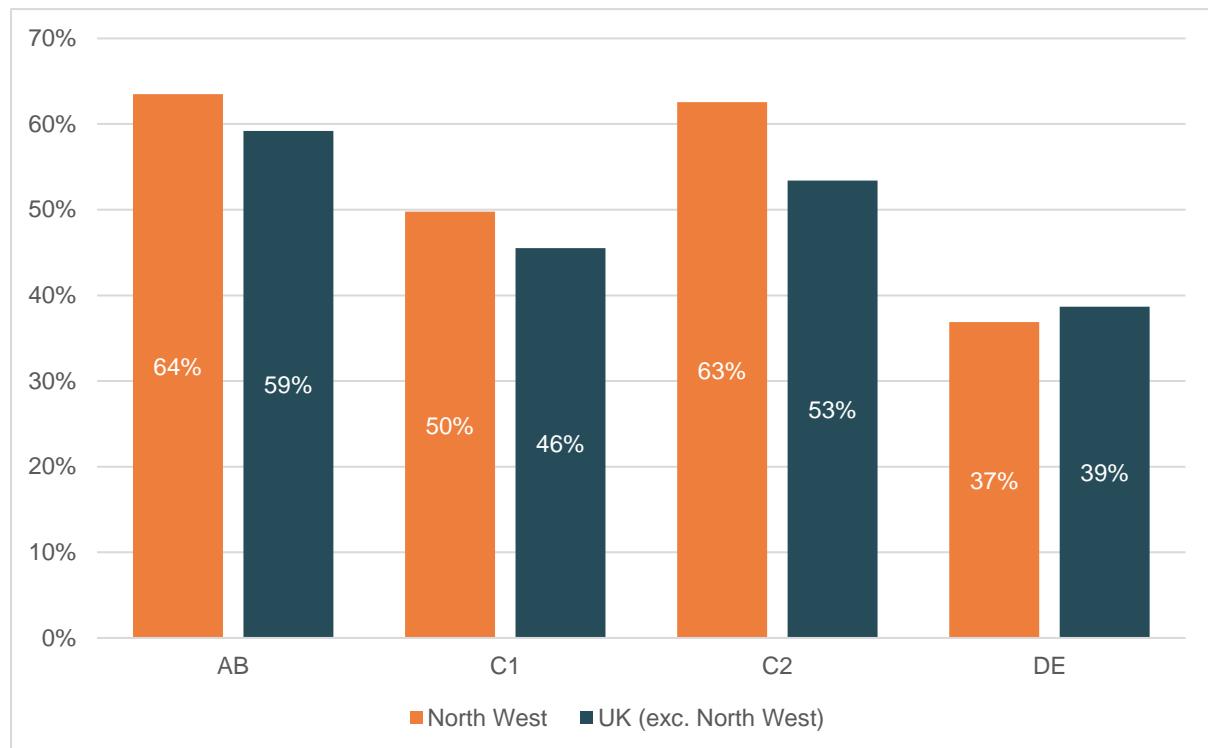
The Adult Participation in Learning Survey consistently shows that social grade⁸ is a key predictor of participation in learning. In the North West those in the AB social grade are significantly more likely to say they are current or recent learners compared to people in the DE social grade (Figure 6). Just under two in three adults (64 per cent) in the AB social grade said they are current or recent learners, compared to 50 per cent in the C1 and 63 per cent in the C2 grades. Respondents in the DE grade were the least likely to say they are current or recent learners (37 per cent).

The participation rates by social grades are fairly similar to the rates in the UK (excluding the North West) for those in the AB grade, C1 grade and DE grade. However, **the participation rate for adults in the C2 grade is significantly higher in the North West than for the rest of the UK**, with 53 per cent of adults in the UK saying they are current or recent learners. This could be due to demographic factors in the sample; in the North West people in the C2 social grade were younger than in the rest of the UK, and younger people are more likely to participate in learning. More than half (54 per cent) of adults in C2 social grade in the North West were

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.

aged 25-49, which is significantly higher than the proportion of adults in the rest of the UK sample (45 per cent).

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



Base: North West respondents. Total weighted base = 976, AB = 274, C1 = 211, C2 = 163, DE = 328. Total unweighted base = 1045, AB = 293, C1 = 226, C2 = 177, DE = 349. Base: UK (excluding the North West) respondents. Total weighted base = 7930, AB = 2464, C1 = 1812, C2 = 1343, DE = 2311. Total unweighted base = 8461, AB = 2610, C1 = 1954, C2 = 1446, DE = 2451.

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 West, adults who left full-time education aged 16 or under are significantly less likely to learn as an adult than the other groups (Figure 7). Three in ten adults (30 per cent) who left full-time education aged 16 or under are current or recent learners. This figure rises substantially to 50 per cent for those who stayed in full-time education until age 17-18 and to 54 per cent for people who left education aged 19 or 20. Nearly two in three people (64 per cent) who stayed in full-time until aged 21 or over said they have taken part in learning in the last three years. People who stayed in education until at least 21 years old are more than twice as likely to learn as an adult than those who left education aged 16 or under.

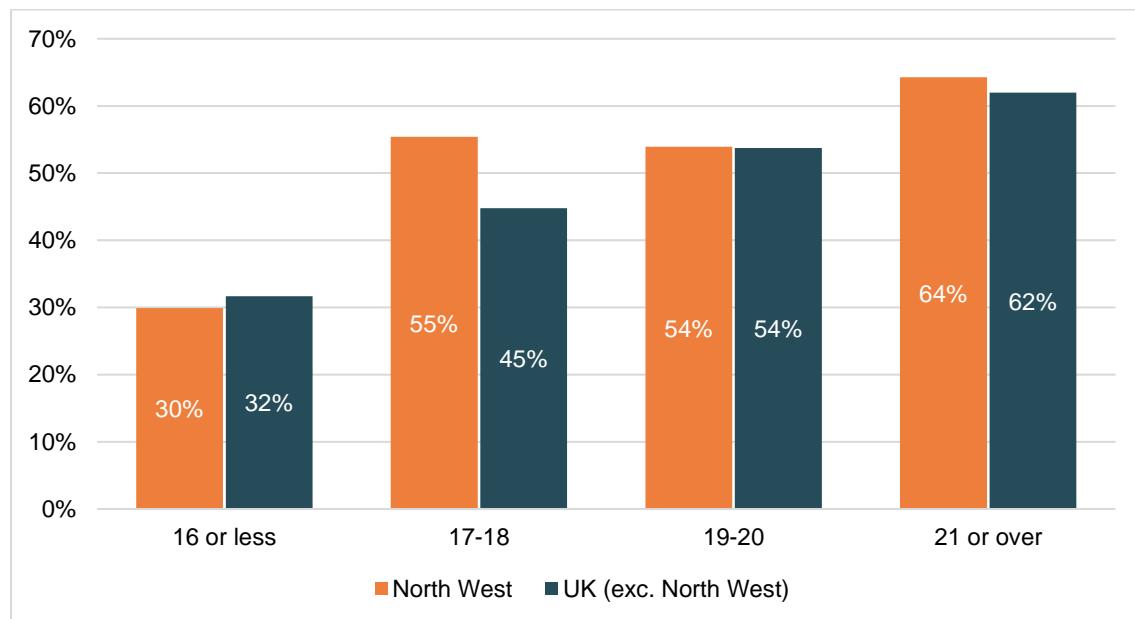
In the North West, the participation rates are fairly similar to the rates for the UK overall for people who left full-time education aged 16 or under, 19-20, or 21 and over. **However, the rate is significantly higher for those who left full-time**

education aged 17 to 18 (55 per cent in the North West compared to 45 per cent in the rest of the UK).

This could also be due to demographic factors in the sample; in the North West people who left education aged 17 to 18 were younger than in the rest of the UK and younger people are more likely to participate in learning. Nearly half (48 per cent) of adults who left education aged 17-18 in the North West were aged 25-49, which is significantly higher than the proportion of adults in the rest of the UK sample (36 per cent).

The gap in participation in learning between adults who left full-time education aged 16 and those who left education aged 21 or over, is 30 percentage points for the rest of the UK. In the North West, the gap is slightly wider at 34 percentage points.

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



Base: North West respondents. 'Don't know' responses have been taken out. Total weighted base = 916, 16 or less = 301, 17-18 = 195, 19-20 = 115, 21 or over = 305. Total unweighted base = 982, 16 or less = 315, 17-18 = 210, 19-20 = 125, 21 or over = 332. Base: UK respondents (excluding the North West). Total weighted base = 8040, 16 or less = 2483, 17-18 = 1919, 19-20 = 959, 21 or over = 2679. Total unweighted base = 8043, 16 or less = 2429, 17-18 = 1946, 19-20 = 952, 21 or over = 2716. Note

Gender

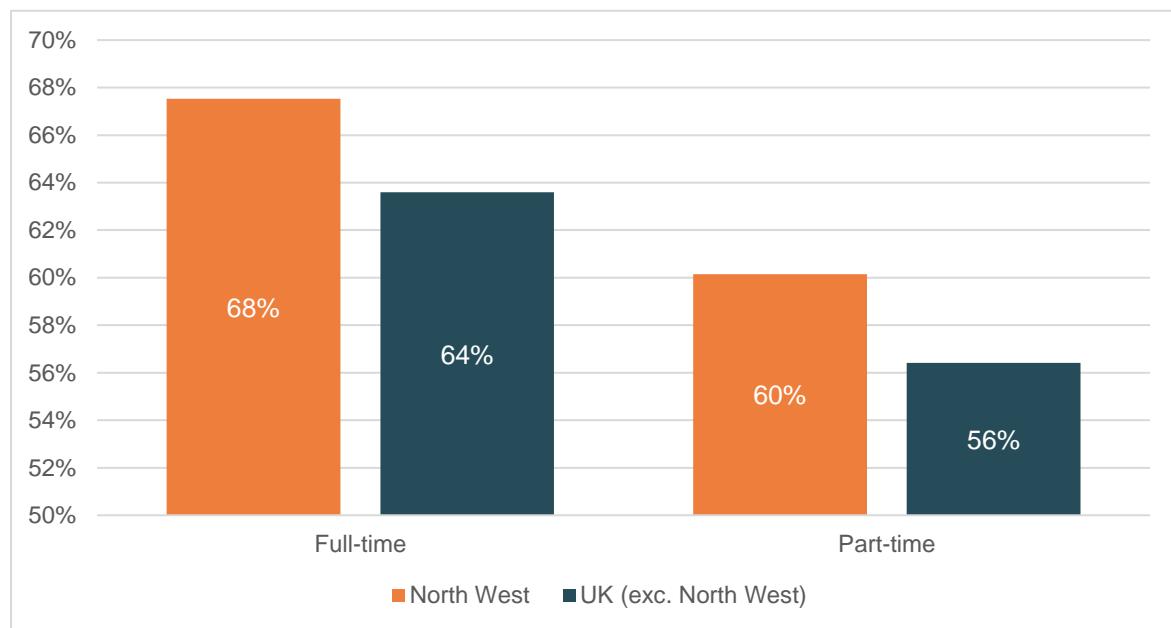
In the North West, men (56 per cent) are more likely than women (44 per cent) to say they are current or recent learners. However, this difference is not statistically different. While the rates for the UK overall are slightly different, none of the differences are statistically significant, with 51 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 West analysis includes only two working statuses: working full-time and working part-time (Figure 8).

Adults working part-time are less likely to say they are currently learning or have done so in the last three years (60 per cent), compared to those working full-time (68 per cent). However, this difference is not significant.

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



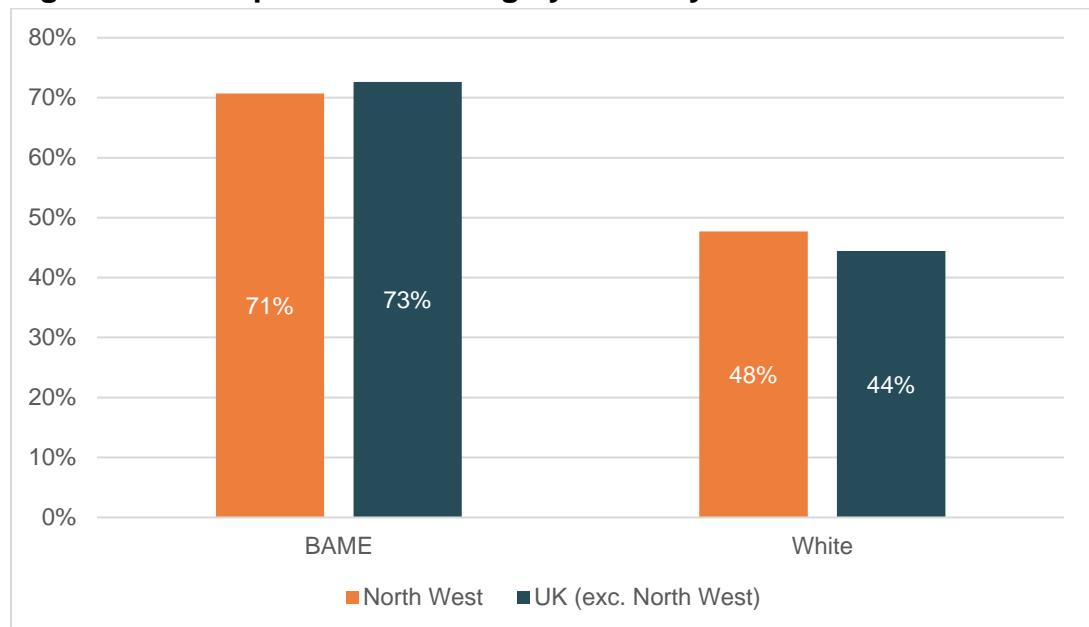
Base: North West respondents. Total weighted base = 963, Full-time = 385, Part-time = 133. Total unweighted base = 1034, Full-time = 428, Part-time = 147. Base: UK (excluding the North West) respondents. Total weighted base = 7943, Full-time = 3098, Part-time = 1122. Total unweighted base = 8353, Full-time = 3460, Part-time = 1244.

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

Ethnicity

In the North West, respondents from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds are significantly more likely to say they are current or recent learners than White respondents (Figure 9). Seven in ten (71 per cent) adults from BAME backgrounds are current or recent learners, compared to 48 per cent of White respondents. These rates are in line with the rest of the UK (73 per cent and 44 per cent respectively).

Figure 9: Participation in learning by ethnicity in the North West and in the UK



Base: North West respondents. Total weighted base = 661, BAME = 99, White = 562. Total unweighted base = 706, BAME = 107, White = 599. Base: UK respondents (excluding the North West). Total weighted base = 5666, BAME = 960, White = 4706. Total unweighted base = 5414, BAME = 935, White = 4479.

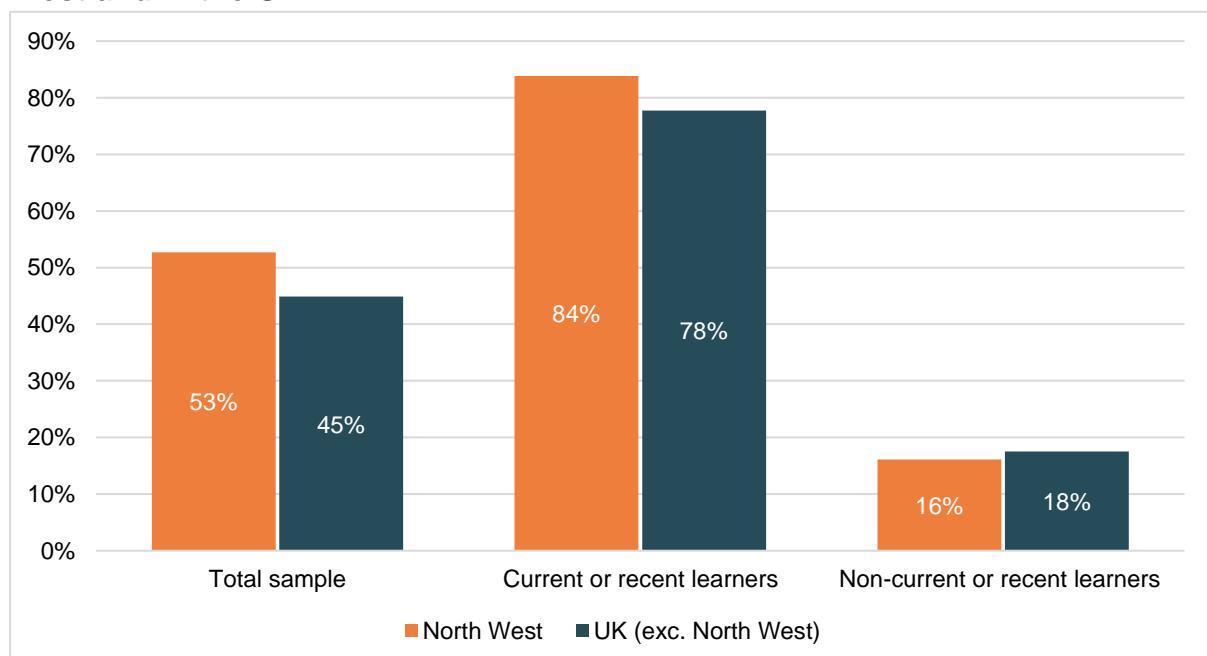
Future intentions to learn

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 West, just over one half of adults (53 per cent) said that they are either very likely or likely to take up learning in the next three years (Figure 10). 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 over four in five (84 per cent) current or recent learners said they are likely or very likely to learn in the future compare with under one in five (16 per cent) of adults who haven't engaged in 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 18 per cent of adults who have not taken up learning over the last three years.

Figure 8: Future likelihood of learning by current learning status in the North West and in the UK



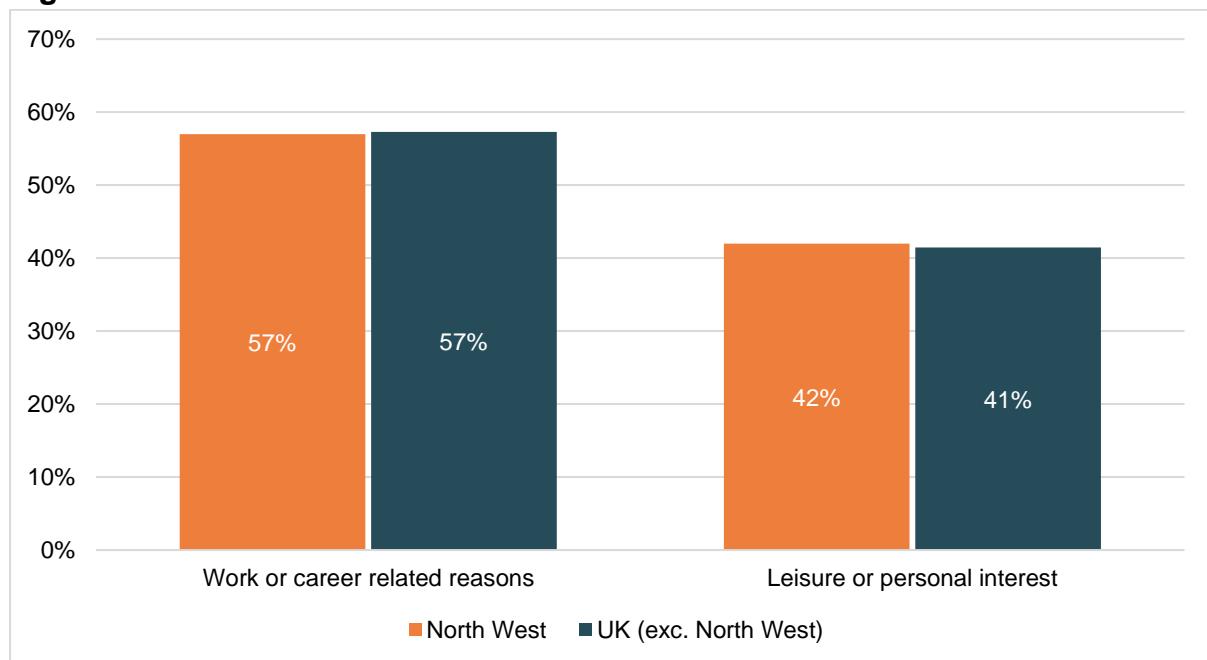
Base: North West respondents. 'Don't know' responses have been taken out. Weighted base = 898, Current or recent learner = 473, Not current or recent learner = 425. Unweighted base = 1045, Current or recent learner = 548, Not current or recent learner = 497. Base: UK (excluding the North West) respondents. Weighted base = 8008, Current or recent learner = 3923, Not current or recent learner = 3774. Unweighted base = 8461, Current or recent learner = 4230, Not current or recent learner = 4231.

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 West, nearly three in five adults (57 per cent) said they took up learning for work or career related reasons, while two in five (42 per cent) said they took up learning for leisure or personal interests (Figure 11).

These proportions are equal 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 where similarly 41 per cent who say they did it for leisure or personal interest.

Figure 9: Motivations to learn in the North West and in the UK



Base: all current or recent learners in the North West. Weighted base = 503, unweighted base = 548.

Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding the North West). Weighted base = 3893, unweighted base = 4230.

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 West, three in ten (30 per cent) current and recent learners said they learned independently on their own (Figure 12).

Work related learning was also commonly reported, with one in five adults learning through a training course at work (21 per cent) and similarly nearly one in five learning on the job (18 per cent) and 13 per cent through external training course arranged by their employers.

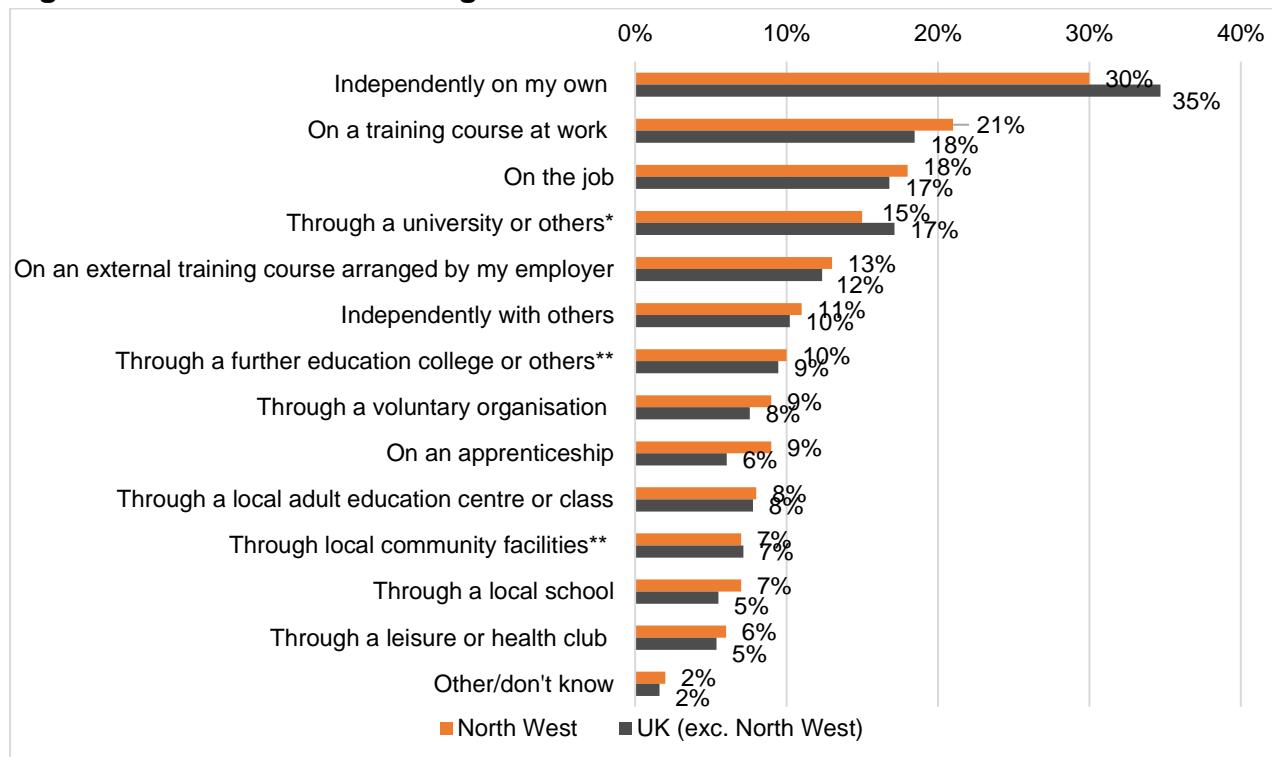
Fifteen per cent of learners said they accessed this through a university or higher education institute (15 per cent). One in ten adults reported learning independently with others (11 per cent), through further education (10 per cent) or through a voluntary organisation (9 per cent).

Other provision reported by learners included on an apprenticeship (9 per cent), through a local adult education centre (8 per cent), community facilities (7 per cent), a local school (7 per cent) or a leisure or health club (6 per cent).

These proportions are similar to the UK overall. However, **adults in the North West are significantly more likely to say they have done an apprenticeship (9 per cent) than the UK average (6 per cent)**. Despite the small sample size, this figure is consistent with Government data on apprenticeships in England.⁹

⁹ The government data shows that the North West has the largest number of apprenticeships in 2017/2018, with more than 16 per cent of the total apprenticeships.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships#apprenticeship-and-traineeships-current-data>

Figure 10: Location of learning in the North West and in the UK



Base: All current or recent learners in the North West. Weighted base = 503, unweighted base = 548.

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 West). Weighted base = 3893, unweighted base = 4230. *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.¹⁰ In the North West, around two in five participants said they have done their learning on a work-related training course (45 per cent) or independently (39 per cent). Just over one in three (35 per cent) said they have done their training through a formal establishment and one in five (18 per cent) said they have done their training through a community or voluntary organisation (Figure 13).

The delivery methods are fairly similar to the rest of the UK, with 42 per cent of current or recent learners in the other regions and nations doing their learning independently. **However, adults in the North West are significantly more likely**

¹⁰ 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.

to say their learning was through a work related course (45 per cent) than the UK average (41 per cent).

Figure 11: Grouped location of learning in the North West and in the UK



Base: all current or recent learners in the North West. Weighted base = 503, Unweighted base = 548.

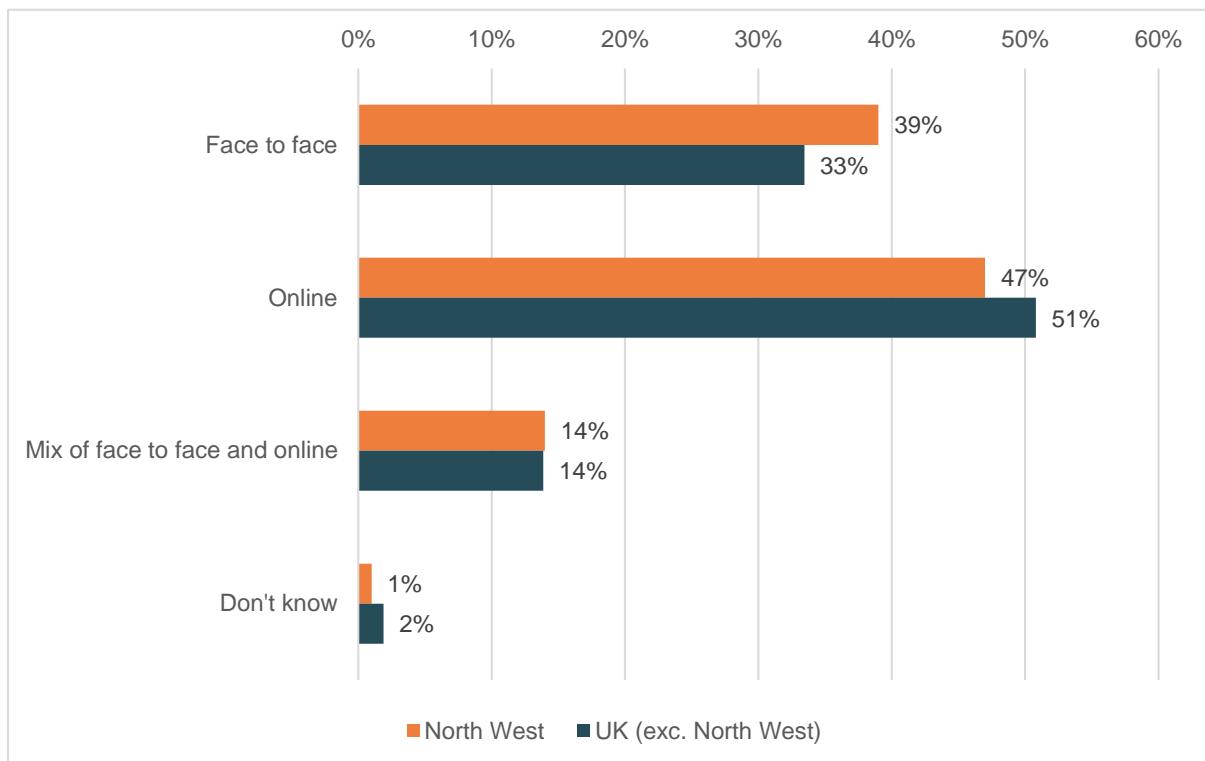
Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding the North West). Weighted base = 3893, unweighted base = 4230.

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 West, just under one half (47 per cent) of current or recent learners said they completed at least one of their learning online (Figure 14). Two in five (39 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 with 51 per cent of learners in the rest of the UK said they have done their learning online and 14 per cent said a mix of face to face and online. However, **adults in the North West were significantly more likely to say their learning was face to face (39 per cent) than the UK average (34 per cent).**

Figure 12: Participation in learning by mode of delivery in the North West and in the UK



Base: all current or recent learners in the North West. Weighted base = 503, unweighted base = 548.

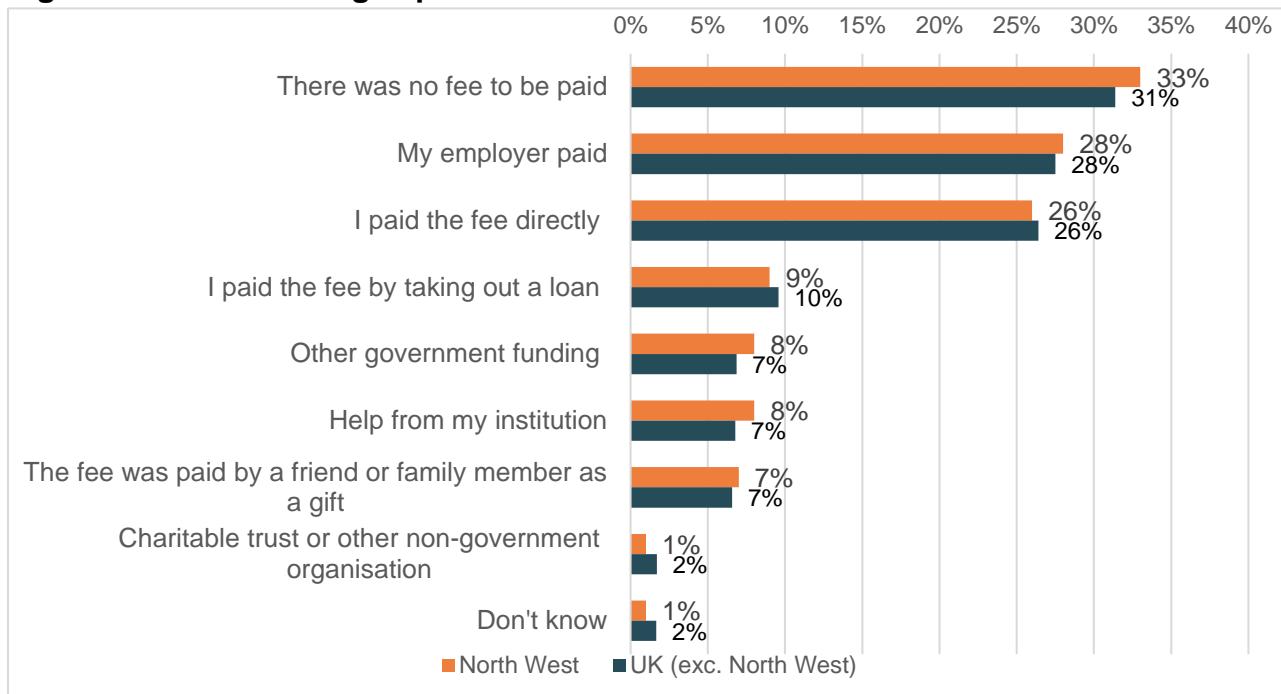
Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding the North West). Weighted base = 3893, unweighted base = 4230.

Fees

In the North West, just over two in three (67 per cent) of current or recent learners said a fee was attached to their main learning (Figure 15). Most commonly, learners reported their fee was paid by their employer (28 per cent). One in four (26 per cent) of learners said they paid their fee directly. One in ten learners said they paid their fee by taking out a loan (9 per cent). A minority of learners said they paid their fee with other government funding (8 per cent), with help from their institution (8 per cent), support from their friend or family member (7 per cent) or with support by charities or non-governmental organisation (2 per cent).

The proportions are fairly similar to the rest of the UK.

Figure 13: How learning is paid for in the North West and in the UK



Base: all current or recent learners in the North West. Weighted base = 503, unweighted base = 548.

Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding the North West). Weighted base = 3893, unweighted base = 4230.

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 West, nearly three in four (73 per cent) current or recent learners identified at least one challenge while learning. This is fairly similar to the rest of the UK (69 per cent).

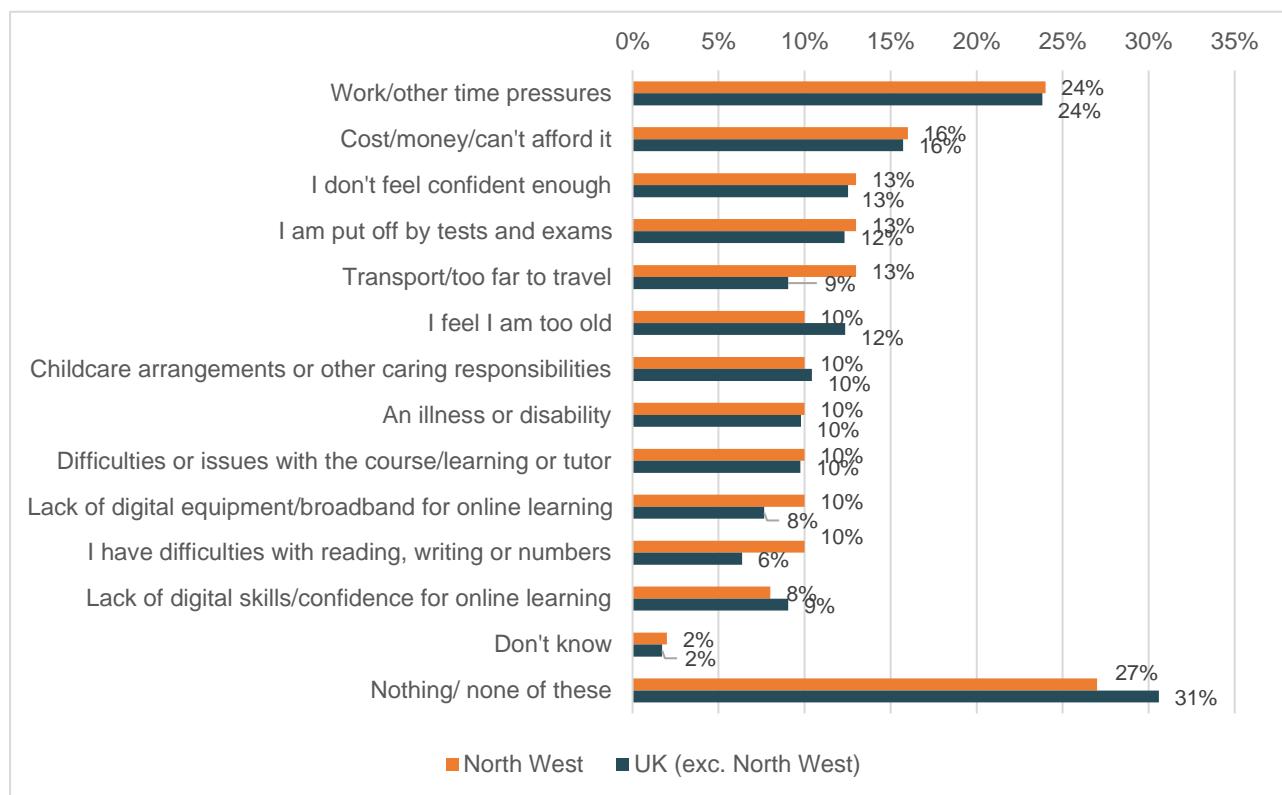
Most commonly, current or recent learners in the North West identified work and other time pressures as a challenge (24 per cent) (Figure 16).

Respondents identified challenges related to their situation, including the cost of learning (16 per cent), transport (13 per cent), childcare arrangements or other caring responsibilities (10 per cent), illness or disability (10 per cent), difficulties or issues with the course, learning or tutor (10 per cent) or they have difficulties with reading, writing or numbers (10 per cent). Other common challenges relate to people's attitudes or perceptions of learning, such as a lack of confidence to learn (13 per cent), being put off by tests/exams (13 per cent) or feeling too old (10 per cent). Participants also said they experienced digital barriers while learning due to a lack of digital equipment (10 per cent) or lack of digital skills or confidence for online working (8 per cent).

Learners in the North West are significantly more likely to report transport (13 per cent) as a challenge than the UK average (10 per cent). In addition, **adults in the North West are significantly more likely to identify difficulties with reading, writing or numbers (10 per cent) than the UK average (7 per cent)**. This is consistent with wider research which shows that Greater Manchester Combined Authority has the third highest proportion of essential skills needs of all the combined authorities.¹¹

¹¹ Learning and Work Institute (2023) [Modelling essential skills needs across England](#)

Figure 14: Challenges experienced when learning in the North West and in the UK



Base: all current or recent learners in the North West. Weighted base = 503, unweighted base = 548.

Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding the North West). Weighted base = 3893, unweighted base = 4230.

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 West, just over one half of adult learners (55 per cent) said they have experienced situational challenges (Table 1). Just over two in five (44 per cent) said they are facing dispositional challenges and a further 10 per cent said they are facing institutional challenges.

Adults in the North West are significantly more likely to face situational challenges (55 per cent) than of the UK regions and nations except Greater London (47 per cent).

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

Group	North West	The UK (excluding the North West)
Situational	55%	47%
Dispositional	44%	41%
Institutional	10%	10%
No challenges encountered	27%	32%

Base: all current or recent learners in the North West. Weighted base = 503, unweighted base = 548.

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 West, seven in ten (72 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).

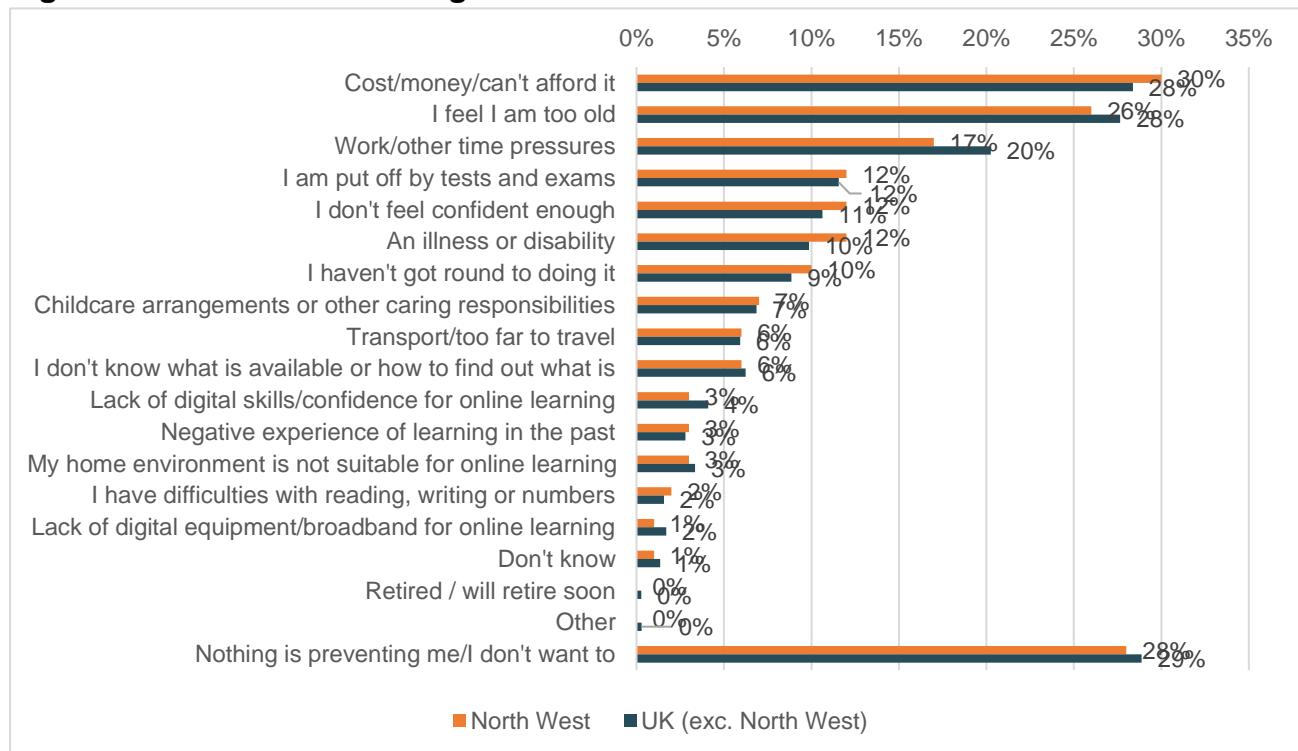
The top barrier identified by the adults who haven't taken up learning within three years is that they can't afford the cost of learning (30 per cent) (Figure 16). This was followed by adults feeling too old (26 per cent).

Nearly one in five adults (17 per cent) reported work or other time pressures as a barrier to learning. Other barriers that were reported by around one in ten adults in the North West included being put off by tests and exams (12 per cent), not feeling confident enough (12 per cent), an illness or disability (12 per cent) or that they haven't got round to doing it (10 per cent).

Three in ten adults (28 per cent) said they did not want to engage with learning or that nothing was preventing them from doing so.

The barriers people faced in the North West are similar to the barriers experienced in the other regions and nations.

Figure 15: Barriers to learning in the North West and in the UK



Base: respondents who have not participated in learning within the last three years in the North West.

Weighted base = 438, unweighted base = 460. Base: respondents who have not participated in

learning within the last three years in the UK (excluding the North West) Weighted base = 3761,

unweighted base = 3938.

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.

Dispositional factors were reported by over half of adults (53 per cent). Nearly half of adults (46 per cent) who said they have not taken part in learning in the last three years identified situational barriers 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 West and in the UK

Group	North West	The UK (excluding the North West)
Situational	46%	46%
Dispositional	53%	51%
No challenges encountered	28%	29%

Base: respondents who have not participated in learning within the last three years in the North West. Weighted base = 438, unweighted base = 460. Base: respondents who have not participated in learning within the last three years in the UK (excluding the North West) Weighted base = 3761, unweighted base = 3938.

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.

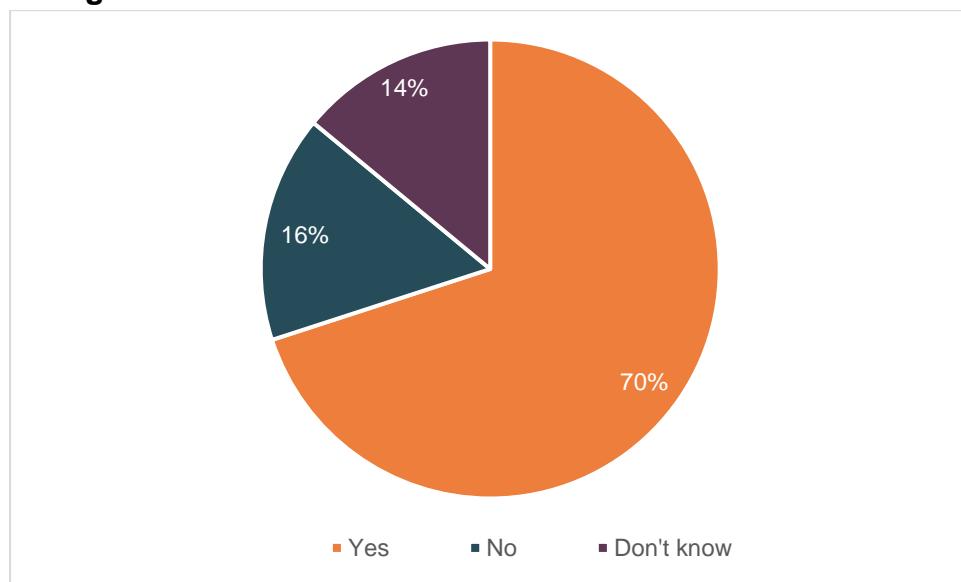
Many workers will therefore need to reskill into different careers to ensure they can make the most of the opportunities ahead. Within this context, this year's survey asked adults whether they are planning to change job or career in the near future. The survey also explored motivations to change career, 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 West, seven in ten (70 per cent) believe that people like them can change career (Figure 18). Sixteen per cent said they did not think that people like them could change careers and 14 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 16: Respondents in the North West 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 West. Weighted base = 658, unweighted base = 725.

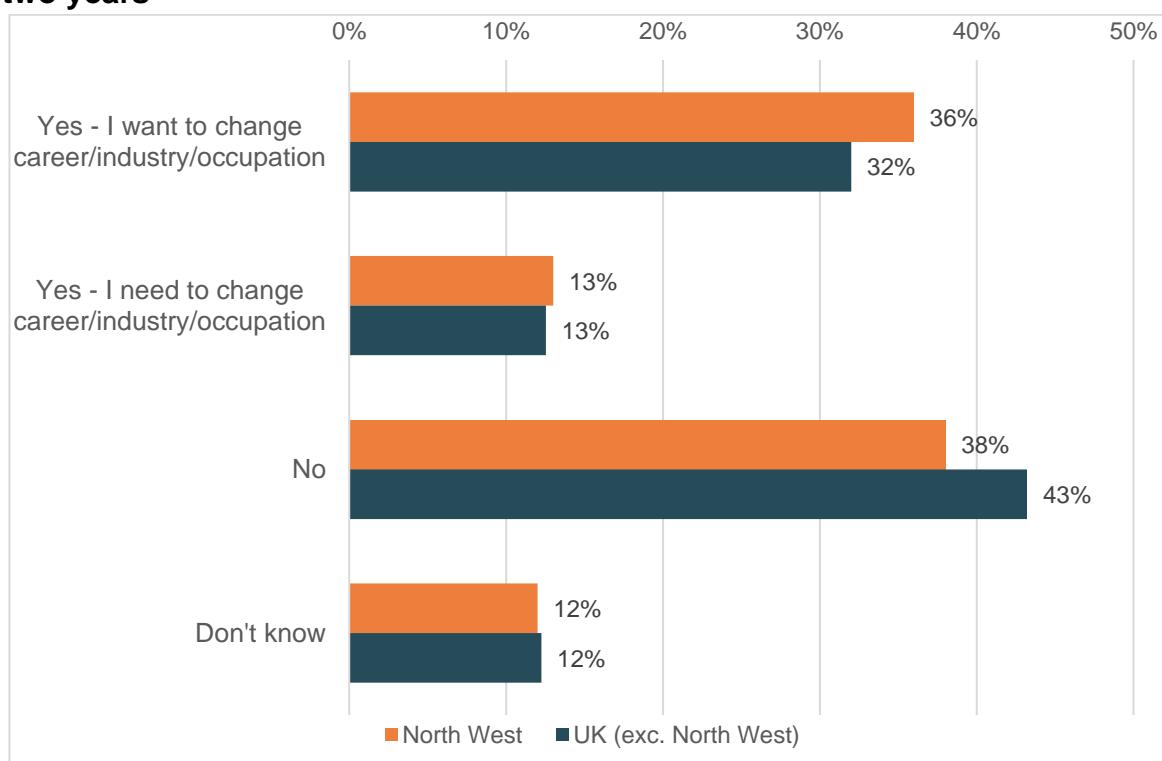
In the North West, 49 per cent of respondents said they want (36 per cent) or need to (13 per cent) to change their career/industry/occupation in the next one or two

years (Figure 19). Nearly two in five (38 per cent) said they do not need or want to change career and 12 per cent don't know.

The proportions of adults in the North West who said they want or need to change their career is fairly similar to the rest of the UK. However, **adults in the North West were significantly less 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 (38 per cent compared to 43 per cent).**

Wider research indicates that around six per cent of adults change occupation or sector each year¹².

Figure 17: 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 West. Weighted base = 658, unweighted base = 725. Base respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the UK (excluding the North West). Weighted base = 5308, unweighted base = 5864.

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 the North West, the main reason cited was to earn more money (43 per cent). This was followed by wanting a new challenge (34 per cent).

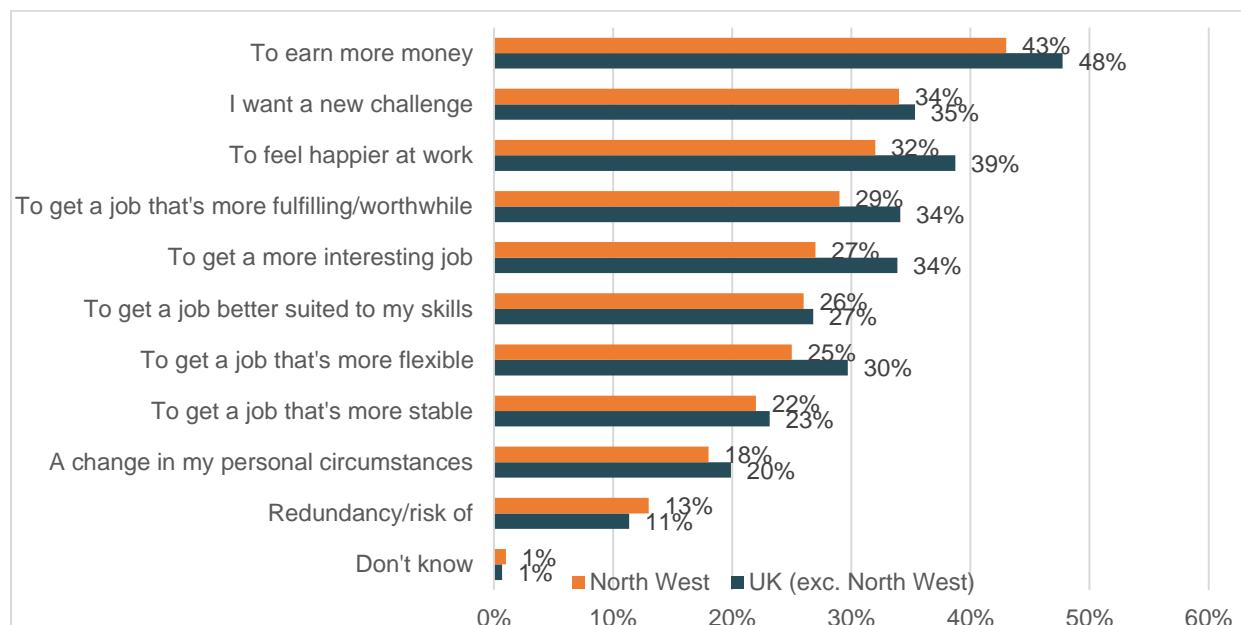
¹² Evans, S. and Vaid, L. (2023) [All change: Understanding and supporting retraining and career change](#)

Respondents also reported wanting to feel happier at work (32 per cent), to get a job that would be more fulfilling or worthwhile (29 per cent), more interesting (27 per cent), better suited to their skills (26 per cent), more flexible (25 per cent) or more stable (22 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 West are fairly similar to the rest of the UK (Figure 20).

Figure 18: Reasons for wanting or needing career change in the North West and in the UK



Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in the North West. Weighted base = 323, unweighted base = 356. Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in the UK (excluding the North West). Weighted base = 2363, unweighted base = 2625.

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 the North West, the most cited barrier was a lack of self-confidence (23 per cent). Other dispositional barriers included a fear of applying for jobs/job interviews (22 per cent), having always done the same type of job (22 per cent) and feeling too old (17 per cent).

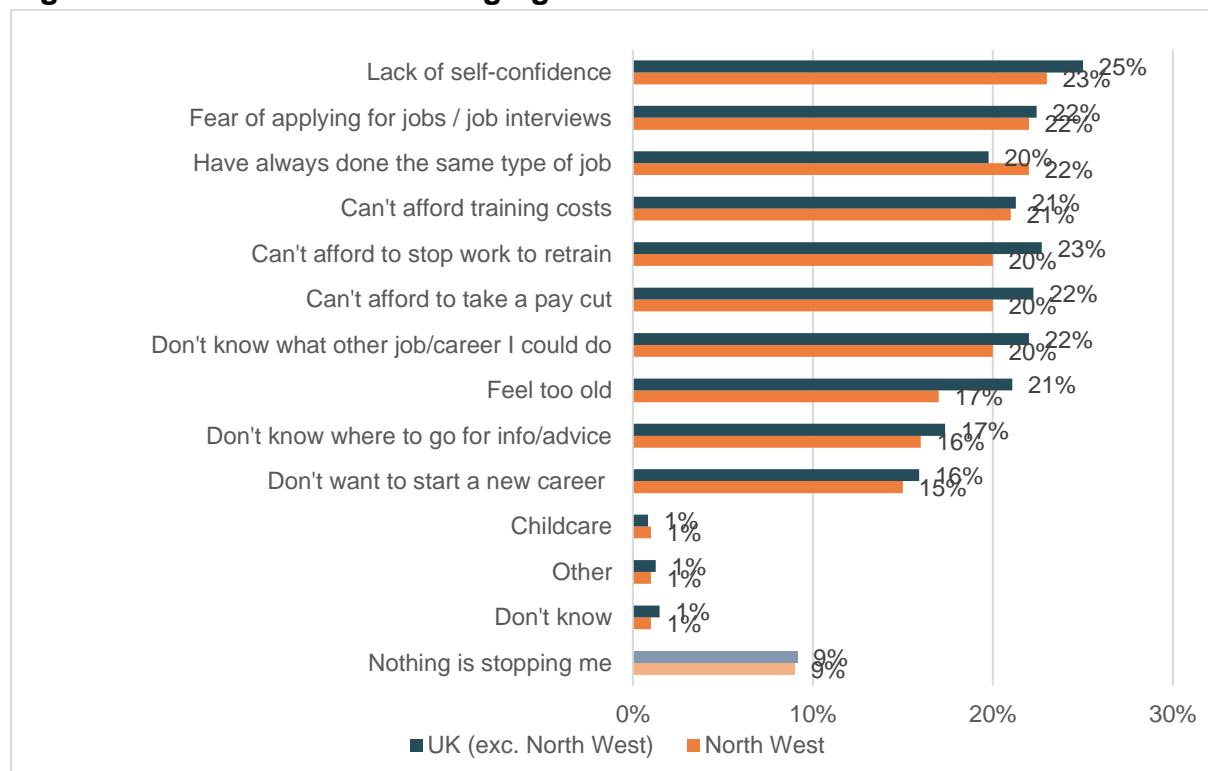
Some barriers related to finance, including not being able to afford training cost (21 per cent), not being able to stop work to retrain (20 per cent), and not being able to afford a pay cut (20 per cent).

One in five (20 per cent) adults said that they did not know what other job/career they could do, 16 per cent said they did not know where to go for information or advice and 15 per cent said they did not want to start a new career.

Only 9 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 West are fairly similar to the ones identified in the rest of the UK (see Figure 21).

Figure 19: Reason for not changing career in the North West and in the UK



Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in the North West. Weighted base = 323, unweighted base = 356. Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in the UK (excluding the North West). Weighted base = 2363, unweighted base = 2625.

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 22).

In the North West, seven in ten adults (72 per cent) said they need to develop their skills, while 20 per cent said they don't and 8 per cent said they don't know. These figures are fairly similar to the UK.

Figure 20: 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 West. Weighted base = 323, unweighted base = 356. Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in the UK (excluding the North West). Weighted base = 2363, unweighted base = 2625.

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 23). In the North West, respondents most commonly indicated that they would need learning or training (29 per cent).

Respondents commonly said financial support towards would be helpful, including towards the costs of learning/training (26 per cent) or living costs while learning/training helpful (25 per cent).

Many respondents also said they would find advice, support or coaching useful, including: advice on what transferable skills they might have (26 per cent), advice to help them choose the right job/career for them (23 per cent) or help them choose the learning or training needed to change job/career (21 per cent), coaching and support when they first start a new job (23 per cent), advice and coaching to help them get a job (19 per cent).

Respondents in the North West identified similar support to the rest of the UK (see Figure 23).

Figure 21: 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 West. Weighted base = 658, unweighted base = 725. Base respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the UK (excluding the North West). Weighted base = 5308, unweighted base = 5864.

Respondents were asked where they would go for information and advice if they wished to change career (Table 3). In the North West, three in ten respondents (31 per cent) said they would use a general online search to find information and advice. This was followed by friends, family and colleagues (23 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 (16 per cent), social media (16 per cent), a recruitment agency/consultant (16 per cent), Jobcentre Plus (16 per cent), prospective employers (14 per cent), a professional sector or trade organisation (13 per cent), Citizens' Advice (11 per cent), the National Career Service (10 per cent) or their current manager (9 per cent).

A minority of respondents said they would go to a Unionlearn representative (7 per cent), local community, voluntary or religious centre (5 per cent) or a local or national charity (5 per cent) for advice.

One in ten adults (11 per cent) do not know where they would go for information or advice about changing job or career. These figures are fairly similar to the rest of the UK (see Table 3). **However, adults in the North West are significantly more likely to say that they would go to Citizens' Advice (11 per cent) for advice than the UK average (8 per cent).**

Table 3: Where respondents go for advice on career change

Source of information/advice	North West	UK (excluding the North West)
General online search	31%	38%
Friends, family or colleagues	23%	23%
Education provider such as a college or university	16%	16%
Social media	16%	16%
Recruitment consultant/agency	16%	16%
Professional, sector or trade organisation	13%	16%
Jobcentre Plus	16%	15%
National Careers Service	10%	12%
Prospective employers	14%	12%
Your current employer (e.g. HR, line manager)	9%	12%
Citizens' Advice	11%	8%
Local community, voluntary or religious centre	5%	5%
Local or national charity	5%	5%
Unionlearn representative or Workplace Learning Advocate	7%	4%
Don't know	11%	12%

Base: respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the North West. Weighted base = 658, unweighted base = 725. Base respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the UK (excluding the North West). Weighted base = 5308, unweighted base = 5864.