

Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2023: West Midlands

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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 West Midlands. It should be noted that there is a difference between the West Midlands region as a whole and the geographical area covered by the West Midlands Combined Authority, which has responsibility for the devolved adult education budget.

Key findings for the West Midlands

In the West Midlands, just over half of adults (51 per cent) said they have learned over the past three years, which is consistent with the UK and England averages. **The West Midlands has the fourth highest participation in learning rate of the nine English regions.** However, the proportion of current or recent learners in this region is only significantly higher than the proportions of two other regions: East of England (44 per cent) and the North East (42 per cent). Adults in the West Midlands are also significantly less likely to participate in learning than adults Greater London (64 per cent), which is significantly higher than all of the other regions.

The higher participation rate in the West Midlands could be partly explained by demographic differences. For example, the West Midlands is the second most diverse region in the UK in terms of ethnicity. The survey finds that people from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely to take part in learning than White people. In the survey sample, there is also a higher proportion of people aged 19 to 24 than in the rest of the UK, and younger adults are more likely to participate in learning than older adults. However, qualification levels across the West Midlands are below the UK average

and the employment rate is below the national average.¹ The survey finds that people out of work and those who leave full time education younger are less likely to take part in learning later on. This could explain why the participation rate for people in the West Midlands is only significantly higher than two other English regions, despite its young and ethnically diverse population.

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

- Adults in the highest social grade (AB²) are significantly more likely to participate in learning than adults in other social grades.
- Younger adults are significantly more likely to take up learning than older adults.
- The longer individuals remain in full-time education, the more likely they are to learn as an adult. In the West Midlands people who full time education aged 17 or 18 are more likely to take part in learning than the rest of the UK.

These inequalities are fairly similar in the other regions: the demographic groups that are less likely to participate in learning in the West Midlands are also those that are less likely to learn in the other regions. However, there are some differences:

- **Adults in the lowest social grade (DE³) in the West Midlands are significantly more likely to participate in learning compared to the rest of the UK.**
- **Younger adults aged 17-24 in the West Midlands are significantly more likely to participate in learning than in the rest of the UK. However, older adults aged 65 and above in the West Midlands are significantly less likely to participate in learning than in other regions.**

In the West Midlands, 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 three in ten learners are accessing provision (32 per cent) for free or their employer is covering the cost (28 per cent).

Despite relatively high levels of participation in learning, 71 per cent of recent or current learners in the West Midlands said they have experienced at least one challenge while learning. This is similar to the UK as a whole, where 68 per cent of learners identified at least one challenge. The most commonly cited challenge was work and other time pressures. The challenges experienced by learners in the West Midlands are similar to

¹ <https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/wtwpjng2/wmca-employment-and-skills-strategy-2024-2027.pdf>

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

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

those identified by learners in other UK regions. However, in the West Midlands, learners are significantly more likely to identify illness or disability compared to the rest of the UK. This may relate to a higher proportion of people in the West Midlands reporting either bad or very health compared to the UK average⁴.

Survey respondents who say they haven't engaged with learning in the past three years were most likely to cite cost as a barrier to learning. These adults without recent experience of learning were also more likely to identify dispositional barriers, such as a lack of confidence, compared to the rest of the UK. This could be associated with lower educational attainment.

The survey included questions about career change. More than two in five (45 per cent) would like or need to change their career/industry/occupation in the next one or two years. 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 barriers⁵ 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 (37 per cent).

⁴ In the West Midlands, there was a higher proportion of people who were disabled and limited a lot in their day to day activities (8 per cent) than the UK average (7.5 per cent) on Census day, 2021.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censushealthdisabilitycare/>

⁵ 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 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.

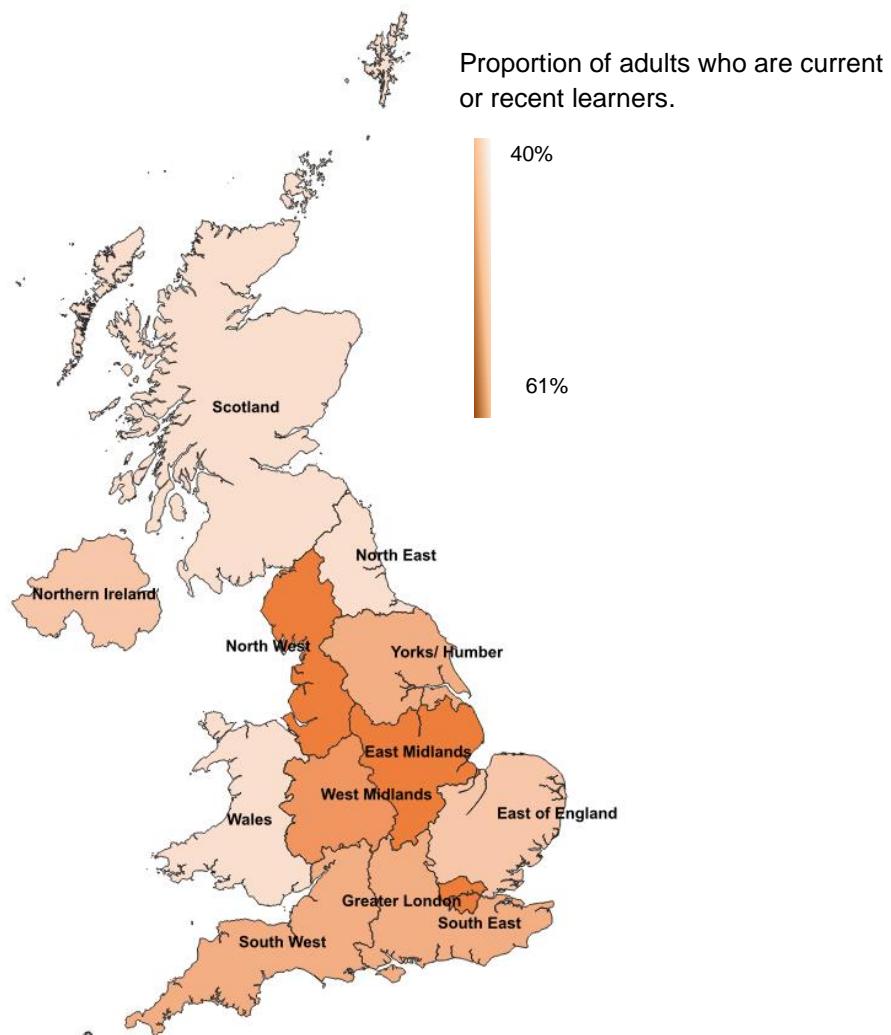
Growth in learning participation since 2019 shows an innate interest in learning among adults. However, fewer opportunities to learn at work or take part in formal learning or courses means people face limits in the types of learning they can pursue. Learning in all its forms has value and benefits.

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 2017.⁶ For example, while more than three in five adults in London have learned within the past three years, only two in five adults say are either a current or recent learners in the North East. Furthermore, participation rates are also lower for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales than for England.

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



Source: Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2023.

However, there are also important inequalities within regions and nations, with some groups less likely to take part in learning than others. With greater devolution of learning

⁶ Hall, S., Jones E., Evans, S. (2023) [Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2023](#), Learning and Work Institute.

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.

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.⁷ 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 834 adults in the West Midlands took part in the survey (782 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.

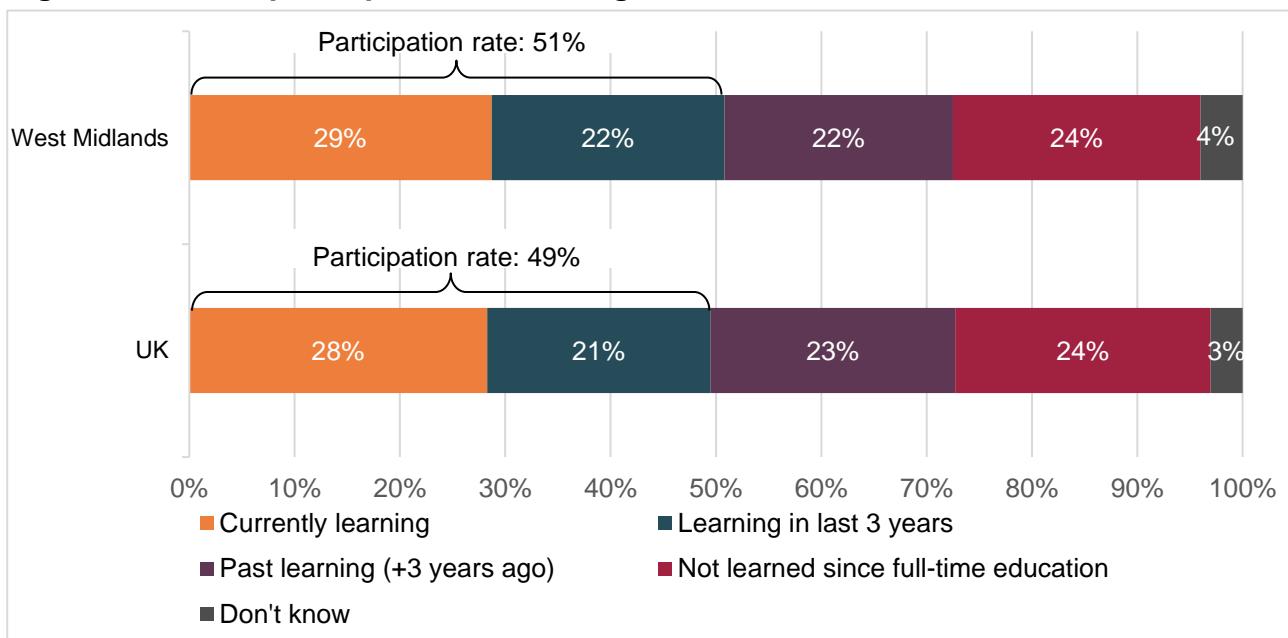
⁷ Surveys were undertaken annually from 1996 except in three years: 1997, 1998 and 2016.

Adult participation in learning in the West Midlands

Participation in learning is slightly higher in the West Midlands compared to the UK overall. Just over one half (51 per cent) of adults in the West Midlands 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.

Almost three in ten adults in the West Midlands said they are currently learning (29 per cent), with a further one in five (22 per cent) saying they have done some learning over the past three years (Figure 2). Just under one in four adults (24 per cent) said they have not done any learning since full-time education, while just over one in five (22 per cent) said they have been in learning over three years ago.

Figure 2: Overall participation in learning in the West Midlands



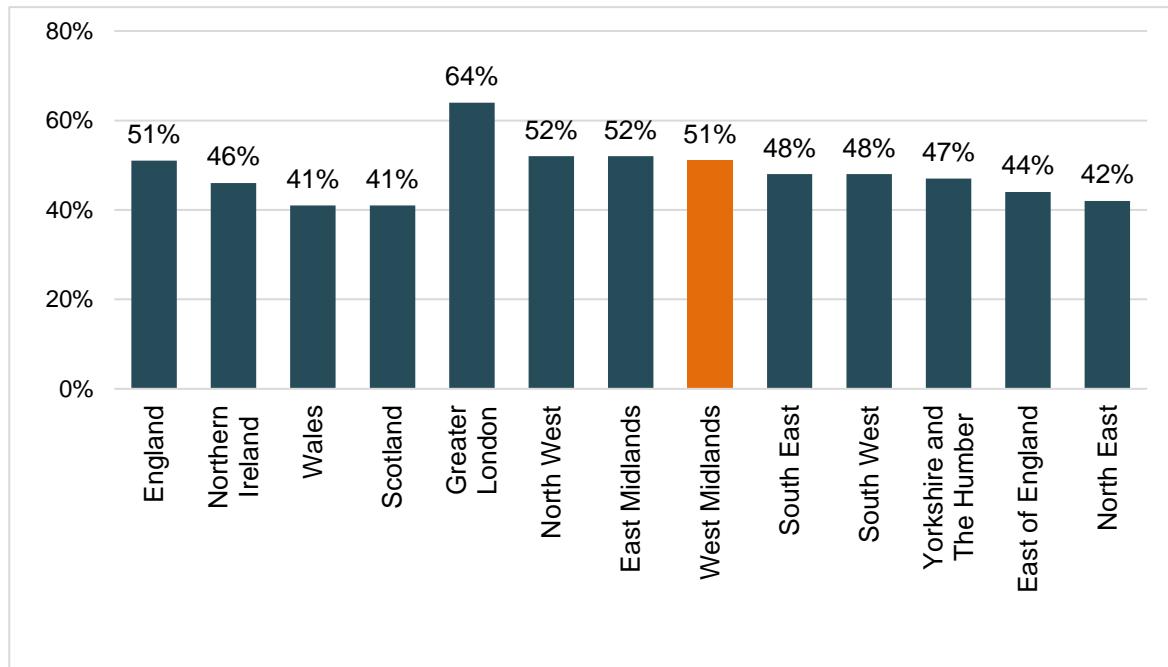
Base: West Midlands respondents. Weighted base = 782, unweighted base = 834. UK: all respondents. Weighted base = 8906, unweighted base = 9506.

When comparing levels of participation in learning across the UK in 2023, the survey shows that the participation rate in the West Midlands 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 West Midlands has the fourth highest participation in learning rate in England, the proportion of current or recent learners is only significantly higher than the proportions of two other regions: East of England (44 per cent) and the North East (42 per cent). Adults in the West Midlands 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. These regional differences can be partly explained by

compositional factors – who lives in this region – as some demographic groups are more likely to participate in learning than others.

Figure 2: Participation in learning by region and nation

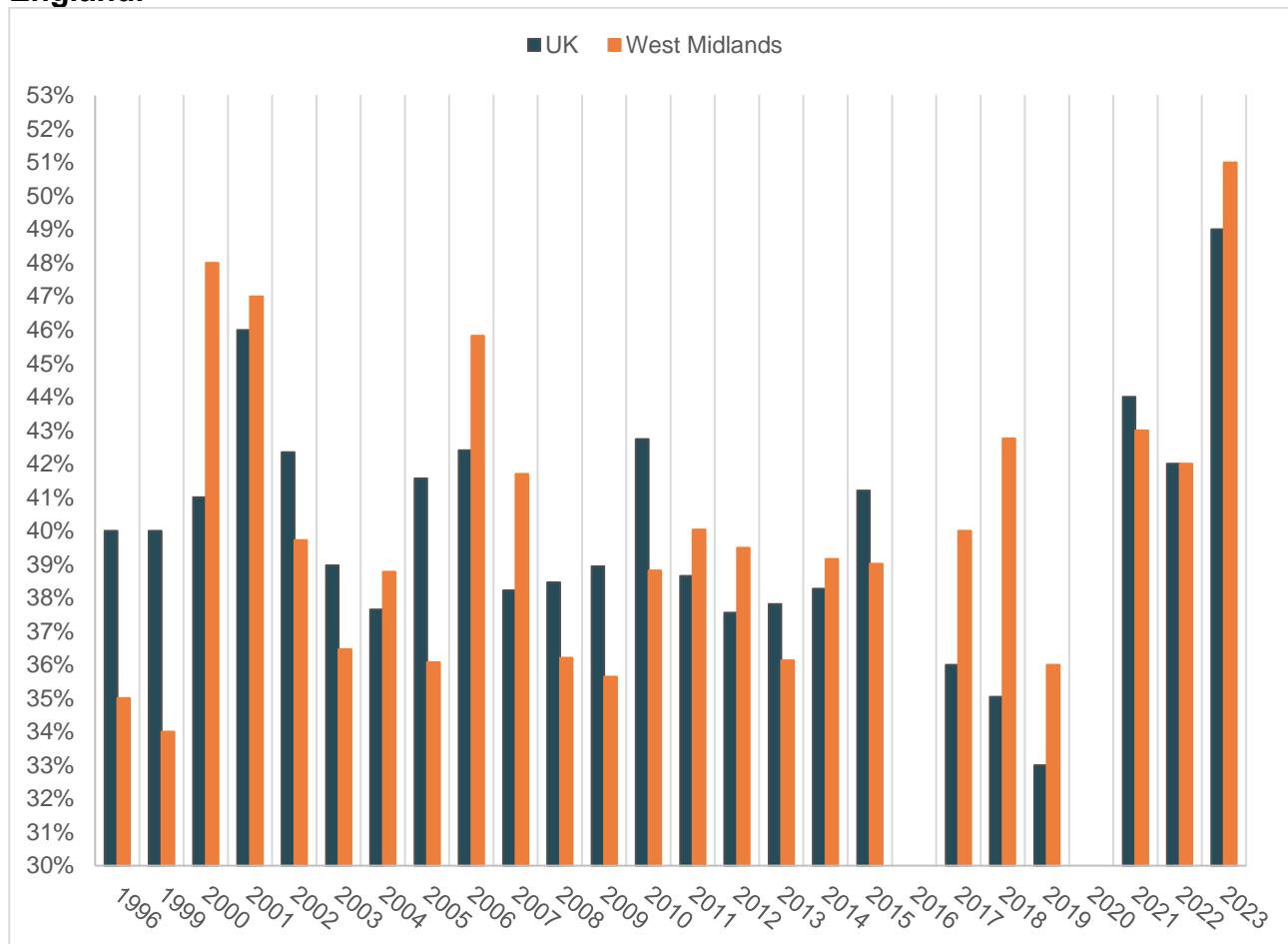


Base: all respondents. Total weighted base = 8,906, North East = 359, North West = 975, Yorkshire and The Humber = 730, East Midlands = 651, West Midlands = 782, East of England = 832, Greater London = 1,173, South East = 1,216, South West = 772, England = 7,491, Northern Ireland = 249, Scotland = 744, 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 West Midlands has been higher than the UK average in 12 years (Figure 4).⁸ While there are some variations in the rates, the trend follows broadly the trend in the UK. 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.

⁸ 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 3: Participation rates over time in the West Midlands, in the UK and in England.



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

Demographic breakdown

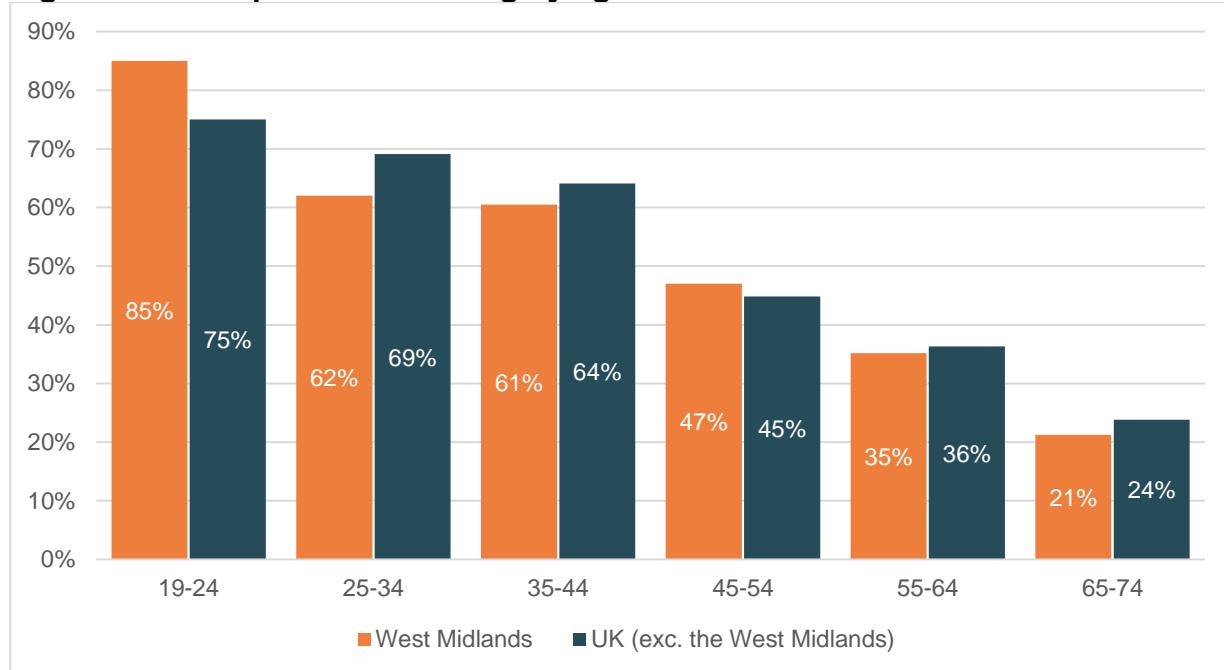
Age

The UK survey consistently shows that participation in learning decreases with age. In the West Midlands, younger adults aged 19 to 24 are significantly more likely to say they are current or recent learners than all the other age groups (Figure 5). More than four in five younger adults (85 per cent) said they are current or recent learners, compared with three in five adults aged 25-43 (62 per cent) and 35-44 (61 per cent). Participation falls to under one half (47 per cent) of adults aged 45-54, just over one third aged 55-64 (35 per cent) and only one in five (21 per cent) of adults aged 65-74.

The participation rates by age in the West Midlands are similar to the UK overall for most of the age groups (adults aged 25-64). However, **participation among younger adults (aged 19-24) is significantly higher in the West Midlands than in the UK**. The participation rates of adults aged 65 and over are significantly lower in the West Midlands

than in the UK. However, the difference in proportions needs to be taken with caution due to the small sample size of younger adults and older adults in the West Midlands.⁹

Figure 4: Participation in learning by age in the West Midlands and in the UK



Base: West Midlands respondents. Total weighted base = 698, 19-24 = 111, 25-34 = 129, 35-44 = 119, 45-54 = 134, 55-64 = 108, 65-74 = 94. Total unweighted base = 754, 19-24 = 112, 25-34 = 144, 35-44 = 138, 45-54 = 148, 55-64 = 128, 65-74 = 84. UK respondents. Total weighted base = 7528, 19-24 = 969, 25-34 = 1359, 35-44 = 1265, 45-54 = 1351, 55-64 = 1239, 65-74 = 1345. Total unweighted base = 8144, 19-24 = 990, 25-34 = 1536, 35-44 = 1498, 45-54 = 1506, 55-64 = 1489, 65-74 = 1173.

Social grade

The Adult Participation in Learning Survey consistently shows that social grade¹⁰ is a key predictor of participation in learning. In the West Midlands, those in the AB social grade are significantly more likely to say they are current or recent learners compared to all other social grades (Figure 6). Three in five adults (61 per cent) in the AB social grade said they are current or recent learners, compared to 53 per cent in the C2 and 46 per cent in the DE grades. Respondents in the C1 grade were the least likely to say they are current or recent learners (43 per cent). Both DE and C1 social grades have significantly lower participation rates when compared to other groups.

The participation rates by social grades are fairly similar to the rates in the UK (excluding the West Midlands) for those in the AB grade, C1 grade and C2 grade. However, **the participation rate for adults in the DE grade is significantly higher in the West Midlands than for the rest of the UK**, with 38 per cent of adults in the UK saying they are

⁹ Only 94 participants in the West Midlands were aged 65-74.

¹⁰ 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.

current or recent learners. This could be due to demographic factors in the sample, with more adults aged under 50 years old and people employed part time within the DE social grade than in the UK sample. Younger adults and people in work are more likely to take part in learning than other groups.

Figure 5: Participant in learning by social grade in the West Midlands and in the UK



Base: West Midlands respondents. Total weighted base = 781, AB = 217, C1 = 168, C2 = 148, DE = 248.

Total unweighted base = 834, AB = 231, C1 = 179, C2 = 159, DE = 265. Base: UK (excluding West Midlands) respondents. Total weighted base = 8125, AB = 2521, C1 = 1855, C2 = 1358, DE = 2391. Total unweighted base = 8672, AB = 2672, C1 = 2001, C2 = 1464, DE = 2535.

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 West Midlands, 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). Nearly three in ten adults (29 per cent) who left education aged 16 or under are current or recent learners. This figure increases for those who stayed in education until age 17-18 to more than one half of adults (54 per cent). The participation rates increase further for people who left education aged 19 or 20 (55 per cent) and those who left education aged 21 or over (64 per cent). 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.

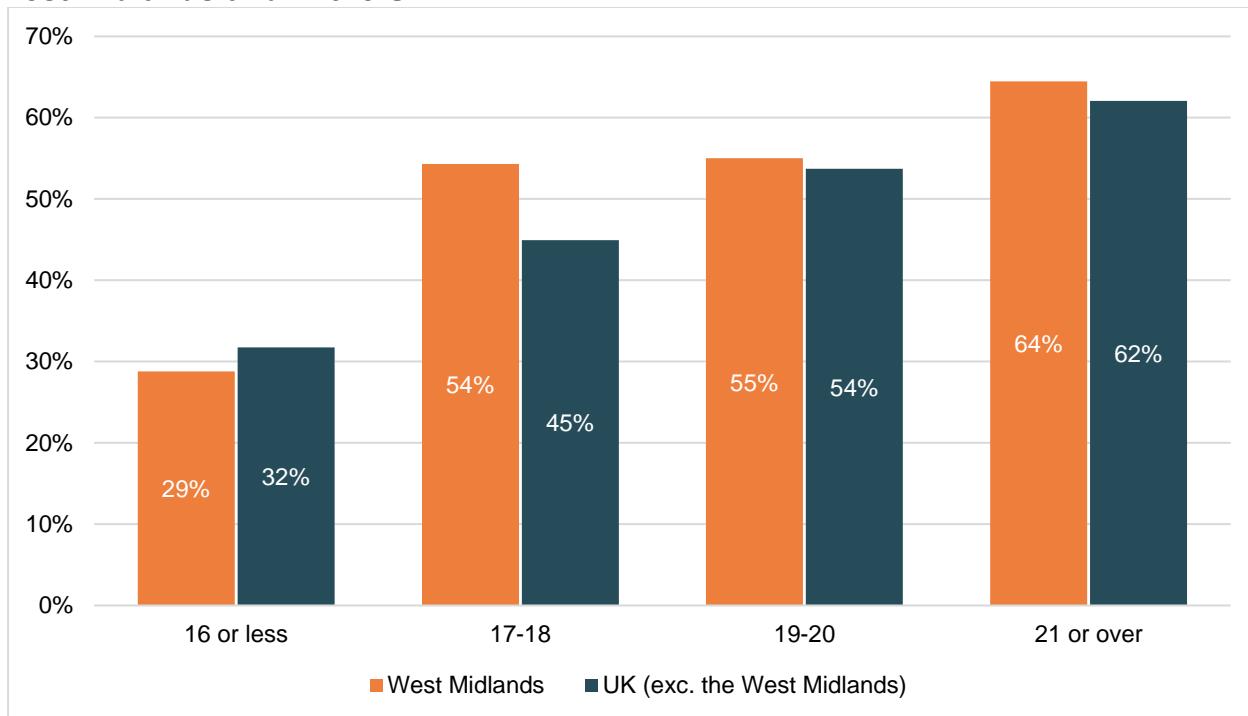
In the West Midlands, the participation rates are fairly similar to the rates for the UK overall for people who left full-time education aged 16 or under and 19 or 20. **However, the rates are significantly higher for those left education aged 17 or 18 and 21 or over.**

The participation gap between adults who left full-time education aged 16 or under and those who left aged 21 or over is larger in the West Midlands than in the UK.

The gap in participation in learning between adults who left full-time education aged 16

and those who left school aged 21 or over is 30 percentage points in the UK overall. In the West Midlands the gap is equal to 35 percentage points.

Figure 6: Participation in learning by age of completing full-time education in the West Midlands and in the UK



Base: West Midlands respondents. Total weighted base = 731, 16 or less = 243, 17-18 = 197, 19-20 = 80, 21 or over = 211. Total unweighted base = 834, 16 or less = 255, 17-18 = 209, 19-20 = 86, 21 or over = 230.

Base: UK respondents. Total weighted base = 7710, 16 or less = 2382, 17-18 = 1822, 19-20 = 914, 21 or over = 2592. Total unweighted base = 8191, 16 or less = 2489, 17-18 = 1947, 19-20 = 991, 21 or over = 2818.

Gender

In the West Midlands, men (51 per cent) are more likely than women (49 per cent) to say they are current or recent learners. However, this difference is not statistically significant. Furthermore, the rates are similar to the UK overall, with 51 per cent of men and 47 per cent of women in the UK saying they are current or recent learners.

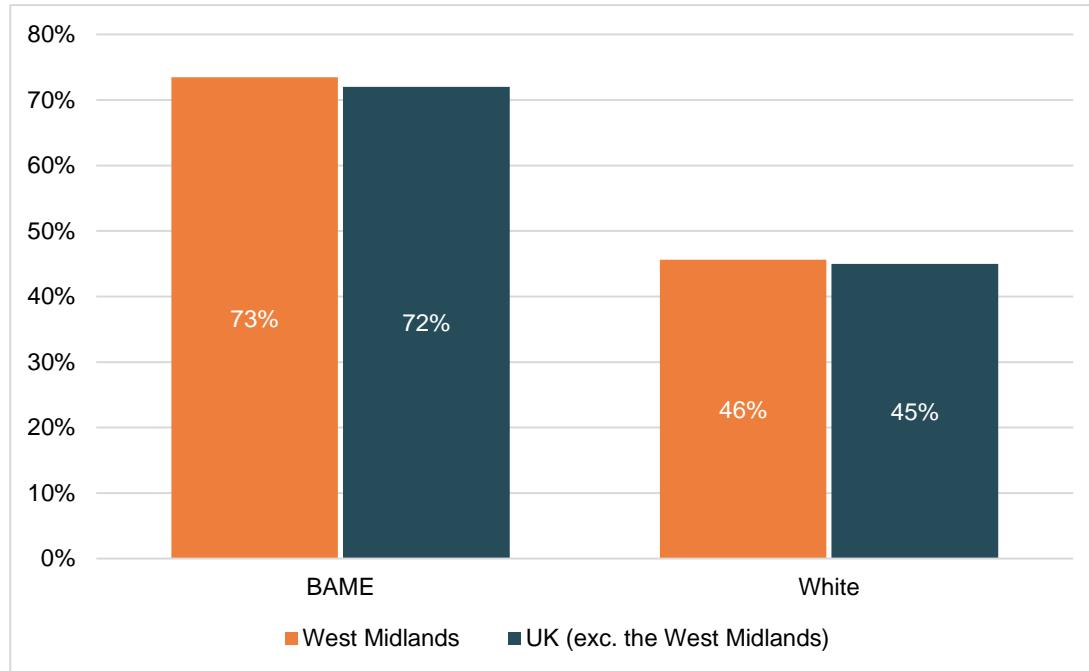
Ethnicity

The national survey indicates that people from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds are more likely to say they have taken part in learning than White respondents. This is also the case in the West Midlands, with nearly three quarters (73 per cent) of adults from BAME backgrounds saying they are current or recent learners, compared with 46 per cent of White respondents (Figure 8). The participation rates for both groups are fairly similar to the rates in the rest of the UK. This may also be driven partly by demographic factors in the sample: adults from BAME groups are more likely

than the sample average to be under the age of 35, to have finished full-time education aged 21 or above and to have completed a university degree or postgraduate course.¹¹

The high proportion of respondents from BAME backgrounds who say they are current or recent learners can partly explain why the West Midlands has one of the highest participation rates in the UK. The region is the second most ethnically diverse region in England after Greater London region, which also has the highest participation rate in the UK.¹²

Figure 7: Participation in learning by ethnicity in the West Midlands and in the UK



Base: West Midlands respondents. Total weighted base = 553, BAME = 132, White = 421. Total unweighted base = 591, BAME = 141, White = 450. Base: UK respondents. Total weighted base = 5308, BAME = 843, White = 4464. Total unweighted base = 5529, BAME = 901, White = 4628.

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 West Midlands analysis includes only two working statuses: working full-time and working part-time (Figure 9).

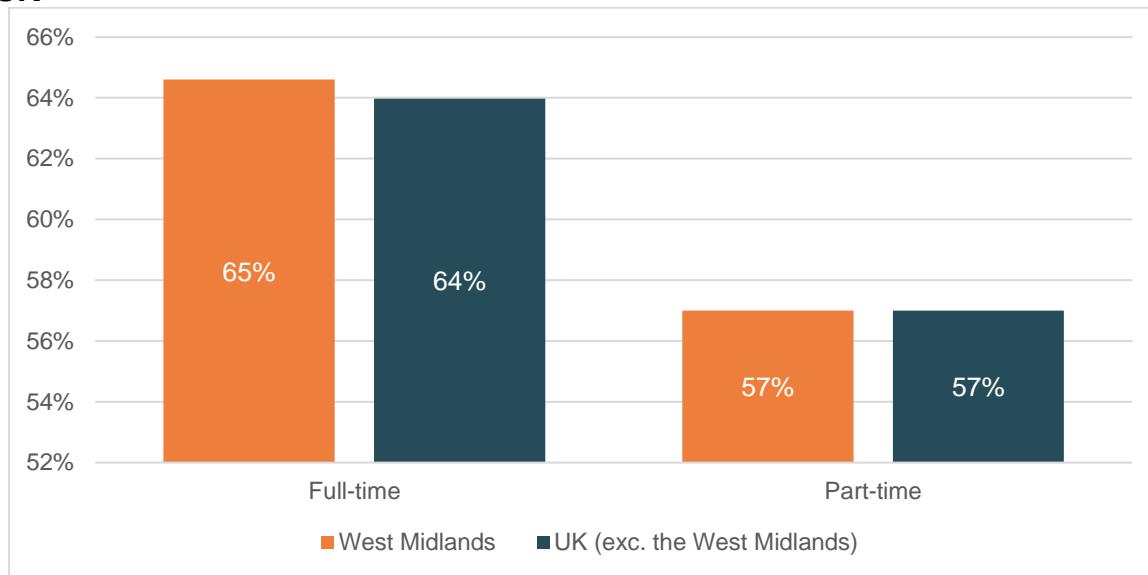
¹¹ Hall, S., Jones E., Evans, S. (2023) Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2023, Learning and Work Institute.

¹² Gov.UK (2022) Regional ethnic diversity. Retrieved from: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/regional-ethnic-diversity/latest/>

Adults in full-time employment are significantly more likely to say they are currently learning or have done so in the last three years (65 per cent), compared to those working part-time (57 per cent).

The participation rates by working status in the West Midlands are similar to the UK overall.

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



Base: West Midlands respondents. Total weighted base = 773, Full-time = 285, Part-time = 135. Total unweighted base = 834, Full-time = 314, Part-time = 149. Base: UK (excluding the West Midlands) respondents. Total weighted base = 8125, Full-time = 3198, Part-time = 1120. Total unweighted base = 8672, Full-time = 3574, Part-time = 1242.

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

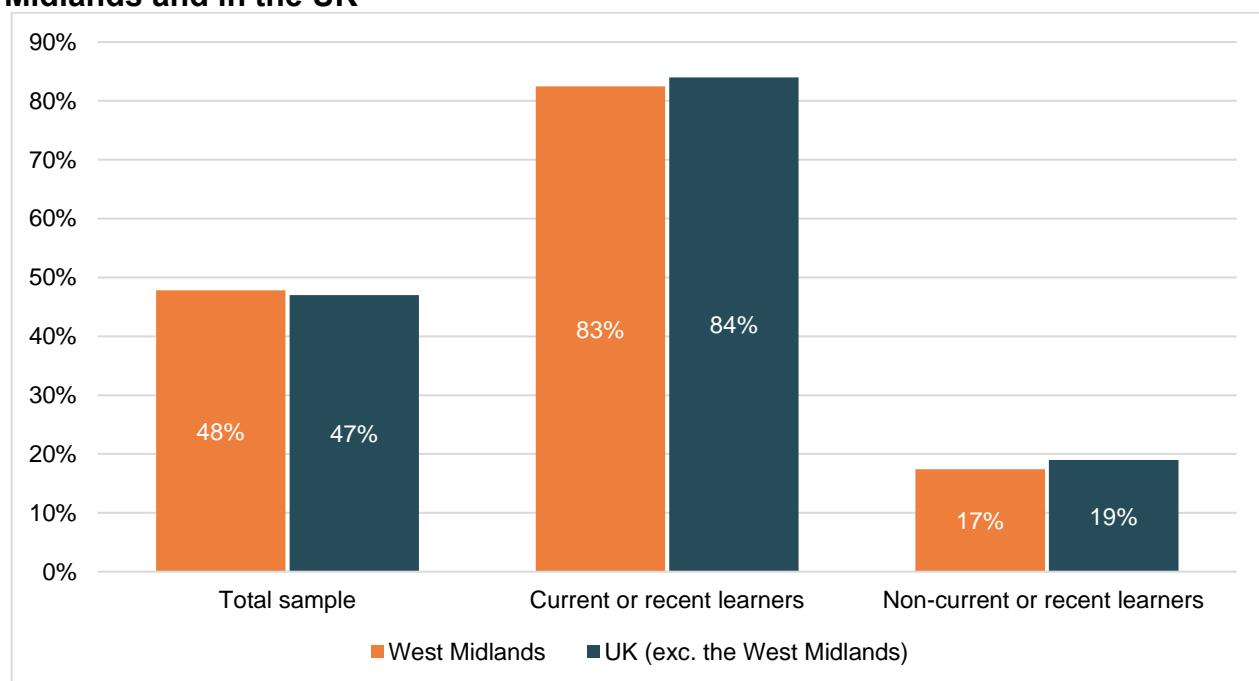
Future intentions to learn

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 West Midlands, almost half (48 per cent) of adults 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. More than four in five (83 per cent) current or recent learners said they are likely or very likely to learn in the future, compared with less than one in five (17 per cent) of adults who haven't engaged with learning in the past three years.

These proportions are fairly similar to the UK overall: 84 per cent of the current or recent learners said they are likely to learn in the future compared with only 19 per cent of adults who have not taken up learning over the last three years.

Figure 9: Future likelihood of learning by current learning status in the West Midlands and in the UK



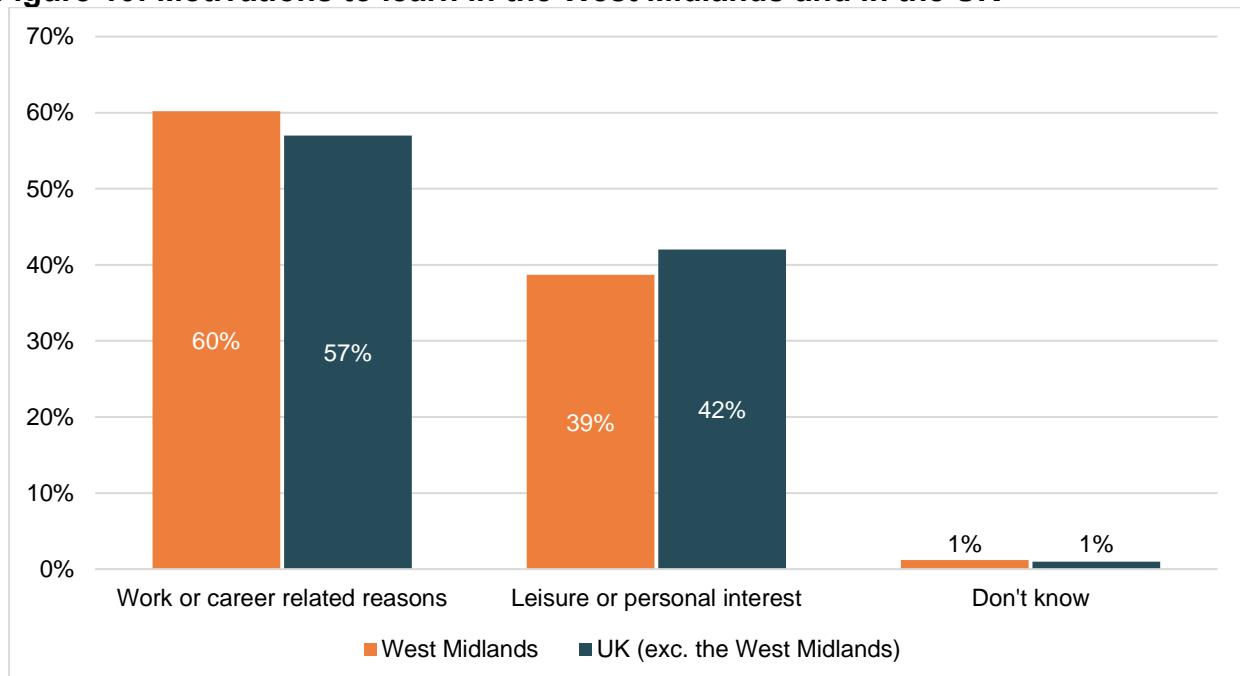
Base: West Midlands respondents. 'Don't know' responses have been taken out. Weighted base = 723, Current or recent learner = 375, Not current or recent learner = 348. Unweighted base = 772, Current or recent learner = 406, Not current or recent learner = 366. Base: UK (excluding the West Midlands) respondents. Weighted base = 8183, Current or recent learner = 2144, Not current or recent learner = 6039. Unweighted base = 8784, Current or recent learner = 2319, Not current or recent learner = 6415.

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 West Midlands, three in five adults (60 per cent) said they took up learning for work or career related reasons, while two in five (39 per cent) say they took up learning for leisure or personal interests (Figure 11).

These proportions are similar to the rest of the UK: 57 per cent of respondents in the rest of the UK said they took up learning for work or career related reasons compared 42 per cent who say they did it for leisure or personal interest.

Figure 10: Motivations to learn in the West Midlands and in the UK



Base: all current or recent learners in West Midlands. Weighted base = 397, unweighted base = 429. Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding the West Midlands). Weighted base = 3999, unweighted base = 4349.

Learning delivery

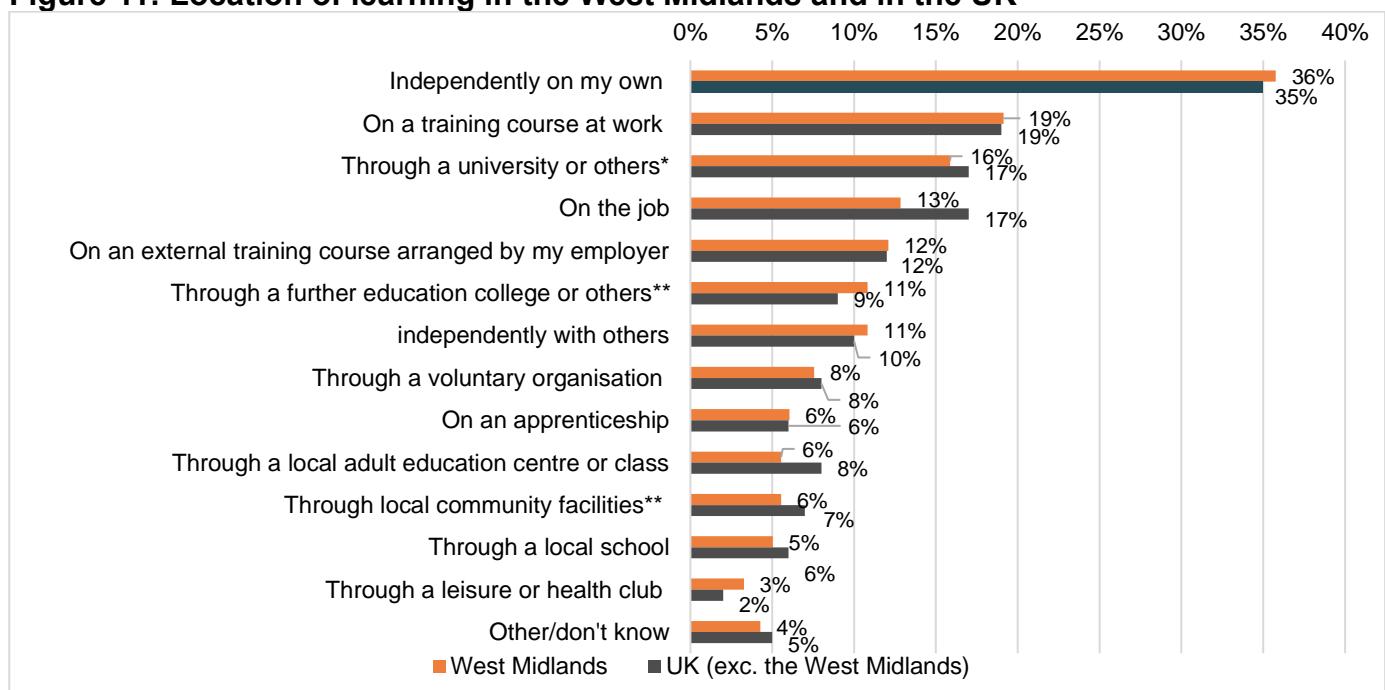
Adults who reported that they are currently learning or have done so in the last three years were asked how they did or are doing their main learning. In the West Midlands, over one third (36 per cent) current and recent learners said they learned independently on their own (Figure 12).

Work related learning was also commonly reported, with one in five adults learning through a training course at work (19 per cent) and around one in ten learning on the job (13 per cent) or through an external training course arranged by their employers (12 per cent). Only six per cent reported doing an apprenticeship.

The third most commonly reported type of provision was a course with a university higher education institution (16 per cent). Just over one in ten learners (11 per cent) said they did this through a further education college.

Other provision reported by learners included voluntary organisation (8 per cent), local adult education centre (6 per cent), community facilities (6 per cent), local school (5 per cent), or leisure or health club (3 per cent).

Figure 11: Location of learning in the West Midlands and in the UK



Base: All current or recent learners in the West Midlands. Weighted base = 397, unweighted base = 429. To note: the sample sizes are small for some of these categories, so they need to be interpreted with caution.

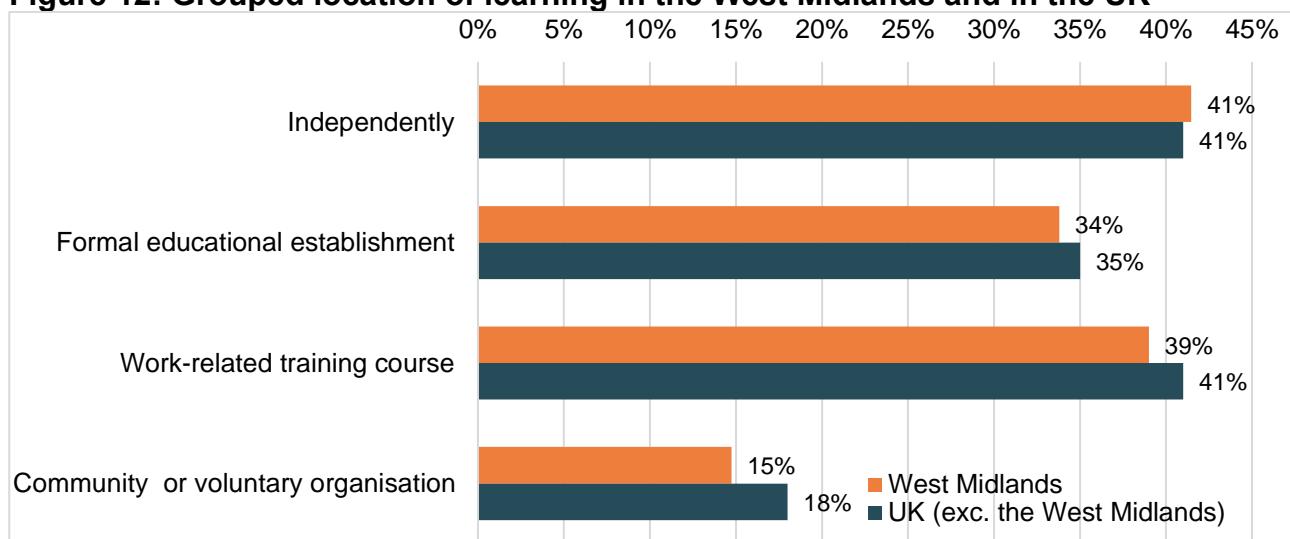
Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding the West Midlands). Weighted base = 3999, unweighted base = 4349. *higher education institution/Open University **tertiary/6th Form college *** such as a library, museum, place of worship, bookshop etc.

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.¹³ In the West Midlands, two in five participants said they have done their learning independently (41 per cent) or on a work-related training course (39 per cent), one in three (34 per cent) said they have done their training through a formal establishment and 15 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 41 per cent of current or recent learners in the other regions doing their learning either independently or through a work related course, 35 per cent doing it through a formal educational establishment and 18 per cent through a community or voluntary organisation. There are no statistical differences in the method of learning between adults in the West Midlands and the rest of the UK.

Figure 12: Grouped location of learning in the West Midlands and in the UK



Base: all current or recent learners in the West Midlands. Weighted base = 397, unweighted base = 429.

Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding the West Midlands). Weighted base = 3999, unweighted base = 4349.

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 West Midlands, just over one half (52 per cent) of current or recent learners said they completed

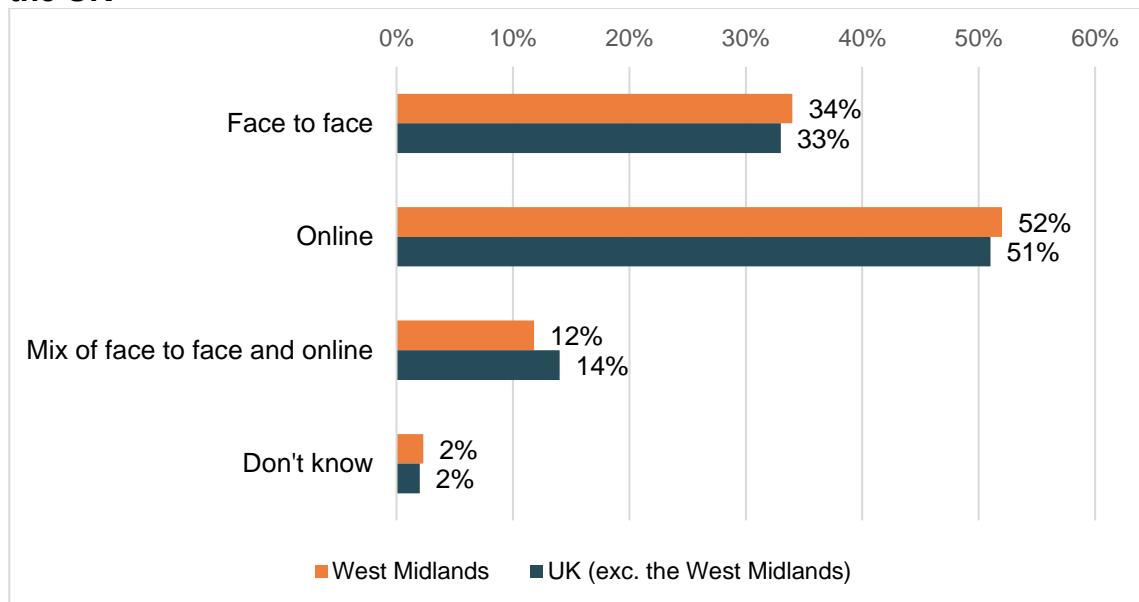
¹³ The response options were categorised as follows:

- 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.

at least one of their learning online (Figure 14). One in three (34 per cent) said they have taken up their learning face to face and one in ten (12 per cent) said their learning has involved a mix of online and face to face learning.

The proportions are similar to the UK overall: 51 per cent of learners in the rest of the UK said they have done their learning online, 33 per cent said they have done it face to face and 14 per cent said it involved a mix of online and face to face learning.

Figure 13: Participation in learning by mode of delivery in the West Midlands and in the UK



Base: all current or recent learners in the West Midlands. Weighted base = 397, unweighted base = 429.

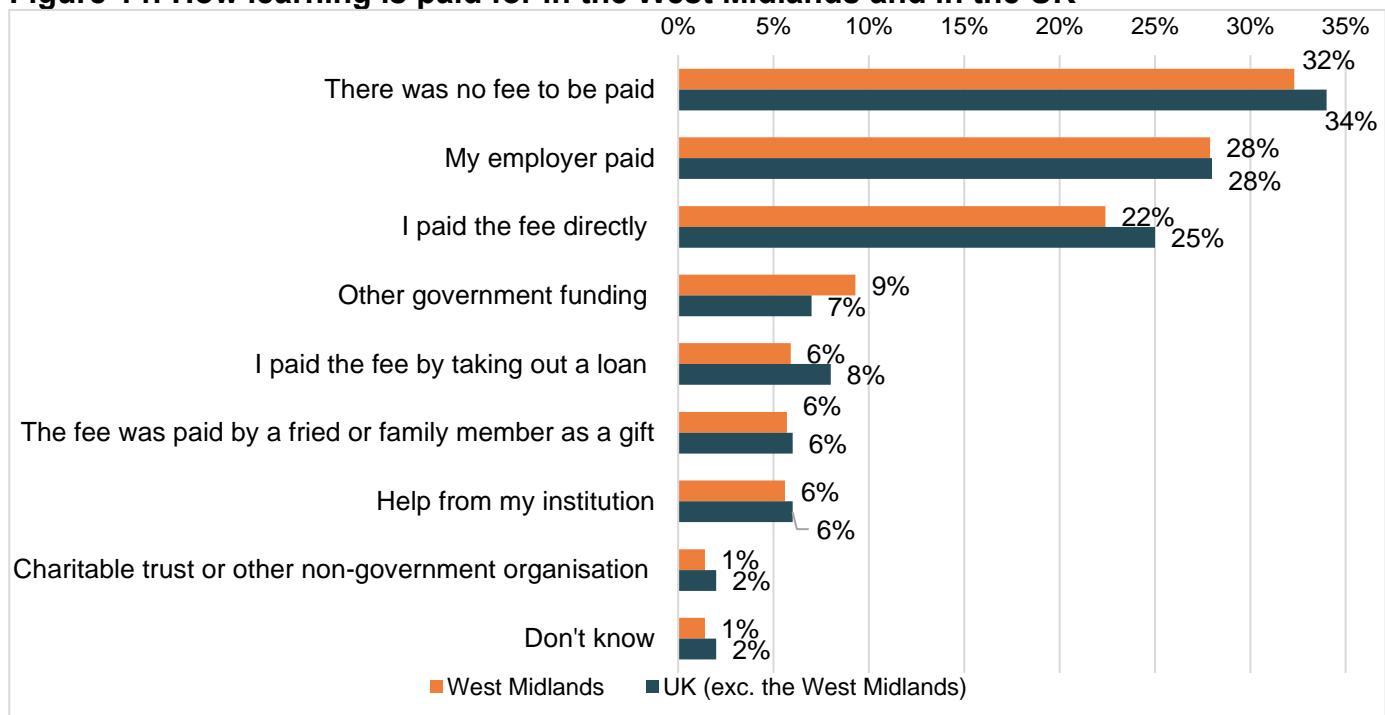
Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding the West Midlands). Weighted base = 3999, unweighted base = 4349.

Fees

In the West Midlands, nearly seven in ten (68 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 five (22 per cent) of learners said they paid their fee directly. Less than one in ten learners said they paid their fee with other government funding (9 per cent), by taking out a loan (6 per cent), with support from their friend or family member (6 per cent), with help from institution (6 per cent). Support by charities or non-governmental organisation was reported by just one per cent of learners.

The proportions of people who reported paying for their learning in the West Midlands was similar to the rest of the UK (66 per cent). Although the proportions of learners in the West Midlands are marginally different from some of the ways participants reported paying for their learning, none of the differences are statistically significant.

Figure 14: How learning is paid for in the West Midlands and in the UK



Base: all current or recent learners in the West Midlands. Weighted base = 397, unweighted base = 429.

Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding the West Midlands). Weighted base = 3999, unweighted base = 4349.

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 West Midlands, just over seven in ten (73 per cent) current or recent learners identified at least one challenge while learning. While this proportion is not significantly different from the rest of the UK, the proportion of learners who identified at least one challenge is significantly higher than four English regions (East Midlands, East of England, South East and South West) and significantly higher than Wales and Scotland.

Most commonly, current or recent learners identified work and other time pressures as a challenge, with nearly one in four (24 per cent) of adults in the West Midlands identifying these as a challenge (Figure 16).

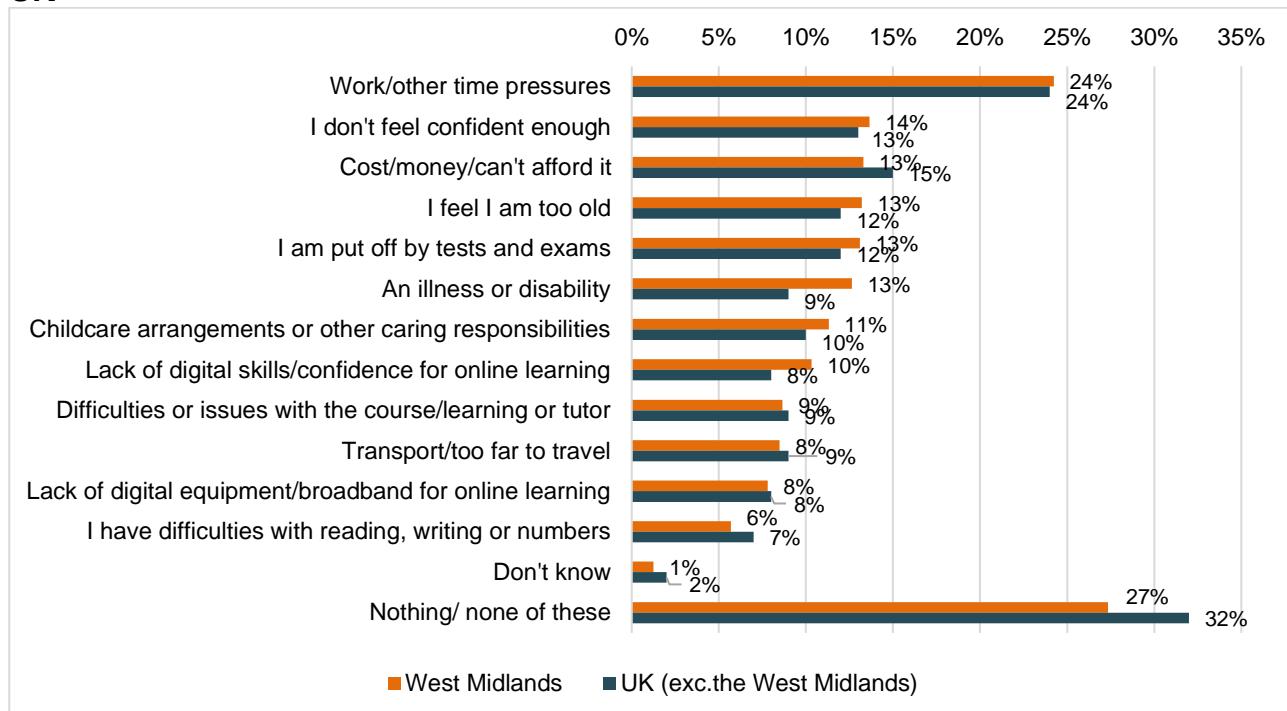
Other common challenges relate to people's attitudes or perceptions of learning, such as lack of confidence to learn (14 per cent), feeling too old (13 per cent), or being put off by tests/exams (13 per cent). Respondents identified challenges related to their situation, including the cost of learning (13 per cent), illness or disability (13 per cent), childcare arrangements or other caring responsibilities (11 per cent), or transport (8 per cent). Participants also said they experienced digital barriers while learning due to a lack of digital skills or confidence for online working (10 per cent) or lack of digital equipment (8 per cent).

The challenges experienced by learners in the West Midlands are similar to those identified by learners in other UK regions. However, in the West Midlands, learners are significantly more likely to report illness or disability as a challenge than in the rest of the UK (9 per cent). This could be explained by the general health of the population in the West Midlands, with higher proportion of people reporting being in bad or very bad health in West Midlands than in the UK average.¹⁴

¹⁴ In the West Midlands, there was a higher proportion of people who were disabled and limited a lot in their day to day activities (8 per cent) than the UK average (7.5 per cent) on Census day, 2021.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censushealthdisabilitycare/>

Figure 15: Challenges experienced when learning in the West Midlands and in the UK



Base: all current or recent learners in the West Midlands. Weighted base = 397, unweighted base = 429.

Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding the West Midlands). Weighted base = 3999, unweighted base = 4349.

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 West Midlands, nearly one half (48 per cent) of learners said they have experienced situational challenges (Table 1). Around two in five (41 per cent) said they are facing dispositional challenges and a further 7 per cent said they are facing institutional challenges. These proportions are fairly similar to the UK overall (see Table 1).

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

| Group | The West Midlands | The UK (excluding the West Midlands) |
|---------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Situational | 48% | 46% |
| Dispositional | 41% | 40% |
| Institutional | 9% | 10% |
| No challenges encountered | 27% | 34% |

Base: all current or recent learners in the West Midlands. Weighted base = 397, unweighted base = 429.

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

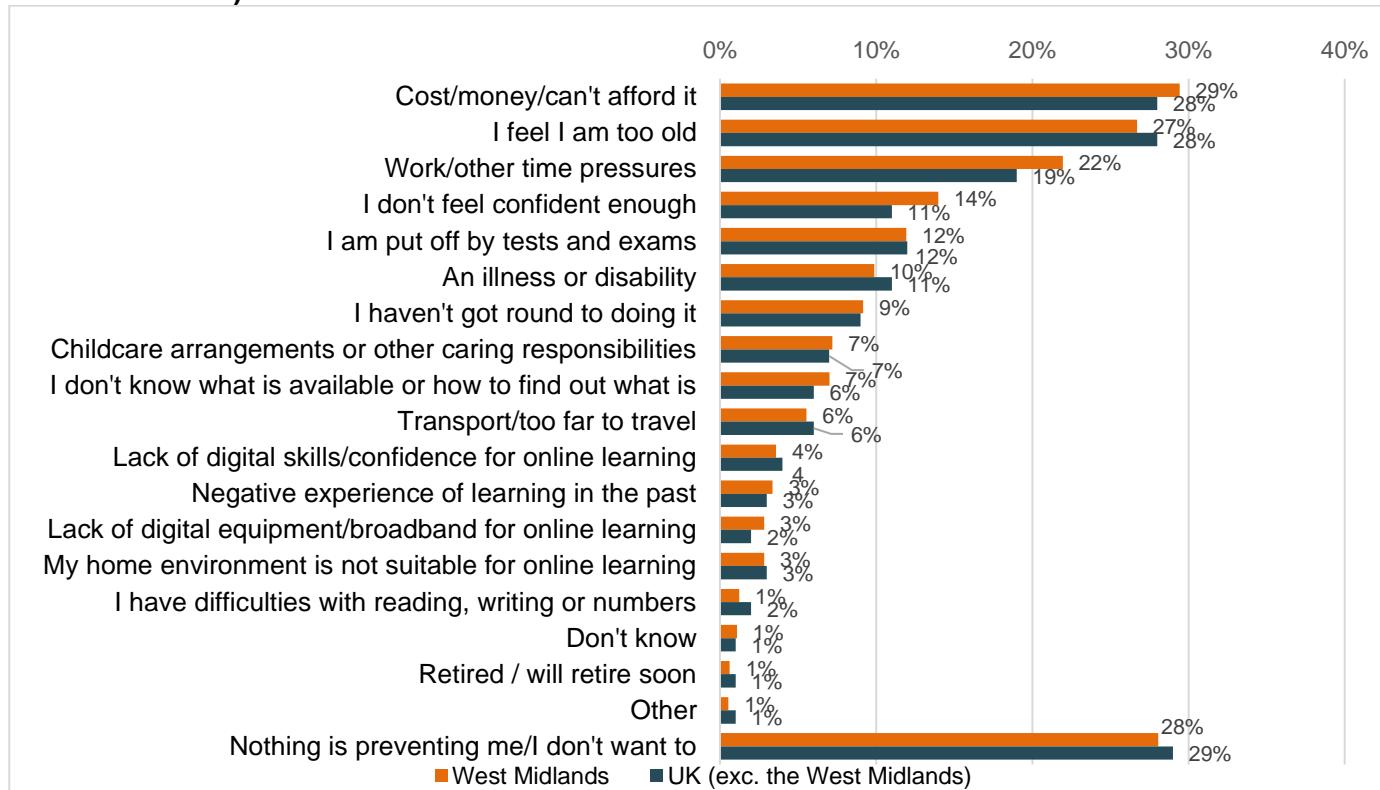
In the West Midlands, seven in ten (72 per cent) of adults who say they have not engaged in learning within the past three years identified at least one barrier. This proportion is similar to the rest of the UK (71 per cent).

The top barrier identified by the adults who haven't taken up learning within three years is the cost of learning (29 per cent) (Figure 17). This was followed by one in four adults (27 per cent) saying they feel too old to take up learning.

Other barriers that were reported by more than one in ten adults in the West Midlands related to people's perception including not feeling confident enough (14 per cent) or being put off by test and exams (12 per cent). One in ten adults (10 per cent) identified a disability or illness preventing them from taking part in learning.

The barriers people faced in the West Midlands are similar to the barriers experienced in the other regions. However, respondents in the West Midlands were more likely to report not feeling confident than in the rest of the UK (11 per cent).

Figure 16: Barriers to learning in the West Midlands and in the UK (excluding the West Midlands)



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

Weighted base = 354, unweighted base = 371. Base: respondents who have not participated in learning within the last three years in the UK (excluding the West Midlands) Weighted base = 3845, unweighted base = 4027.

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.

Almost half of the respondents (48 per cent) who have not taken part in learning recently said situational barriers preventing them from doing so. 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. These findings are fairly similar to the UK overall (see Table 2). However, in the West Midlands, a higher proportion of adults identified dispositional barriers.

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

| Group | The West Midlands | The UK (excluding the West Midlands) |
|---------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Situational | 48% | 46% |
| Dispositional | 53% | 51% |
| No challenges encountered | 28% | 30% |

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

Weighted base = 354, unweighted base = 371. Base: respondents who have not participated in learning within the last three years in the UK (excluding the West Midlands) Weighted base = 4199, unweighted base = 4398.

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.

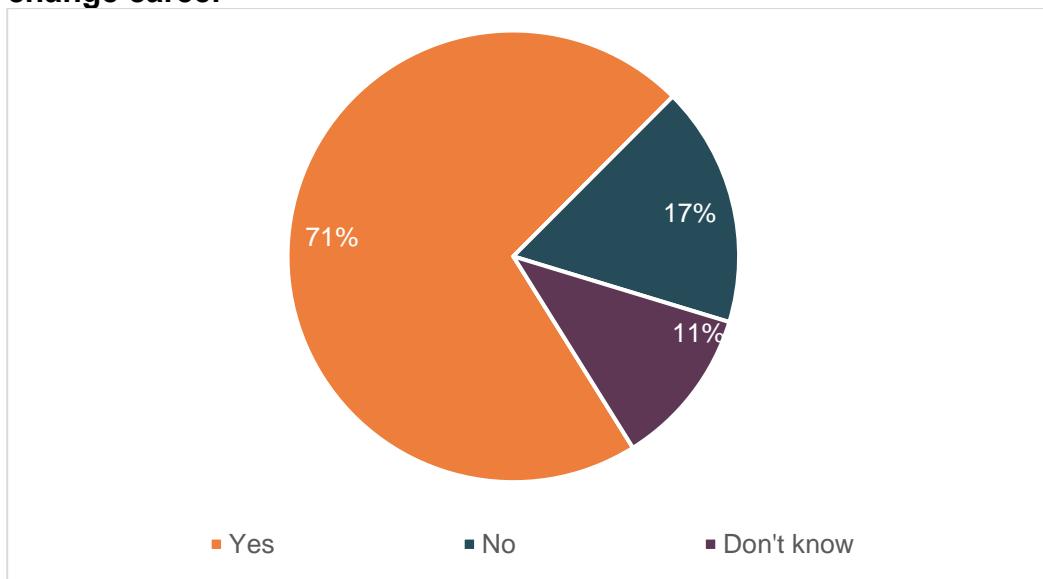
Many workers will therefore need to reskill into different careers to ensure they can make the most of the opportunities ahead. Within this context, this year's survey asked adults whether they are planning to change job or career in the near future. The survey also explored motivations to change career, 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 West Midlands, around three in ten adults (71 per cent) believe that people like them can change career (Figure 18). Nearly two in five (17 per cent) said they did not think that people like them could change careers and one in ten (11 per cent) said they don't know.

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

Figure 17: Respondents in the West Midlands who believe people like them can change career



Base: respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the West Midlands. Weighted base = 535, unweighted base = 587.

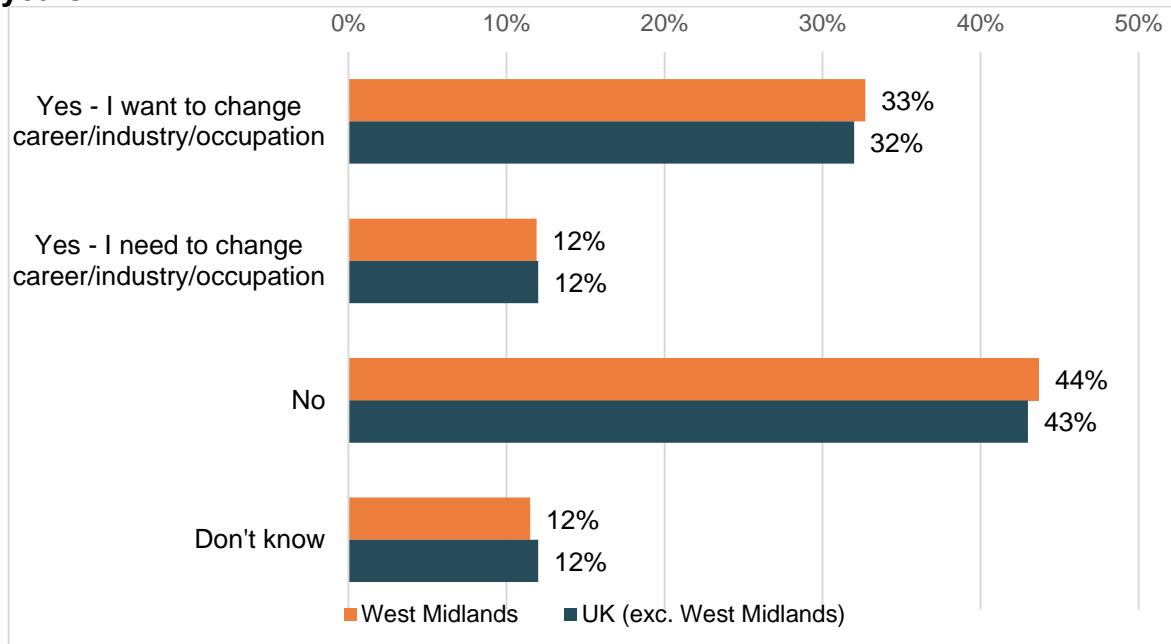
In the West Midlands, more than two in five adults (45 per cent) want (33 per cent) or need (12 per cent) to change their career/industry/occupation in the next one or two years

(Figure 19). Over two in five (44 per cent) said they do not need or want to change career and 12 per cent don't know.

These figures are similar to the rest of the UK, with 32 per cent of adults who said they want to change career/industry/occupation in the next one of two years, 12 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 year¹⁵.

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



Base: respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the West Midlands. Weighted base = 535, unweighted base = 587. Base respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the UK (excluding the West Midlands). Weighted base = 6002, unweighted base = 5431.

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 West Midlands, the main reason cited was to earn more money (52 per cent). This was followed by wanting to feel happier at work (43 per cent).

Respondents also reported wanting to get a job that would be more fulfilling or worthwhile (33 per cent), more flexible (33 per cent), wanting a new challenge (32 per cent), more

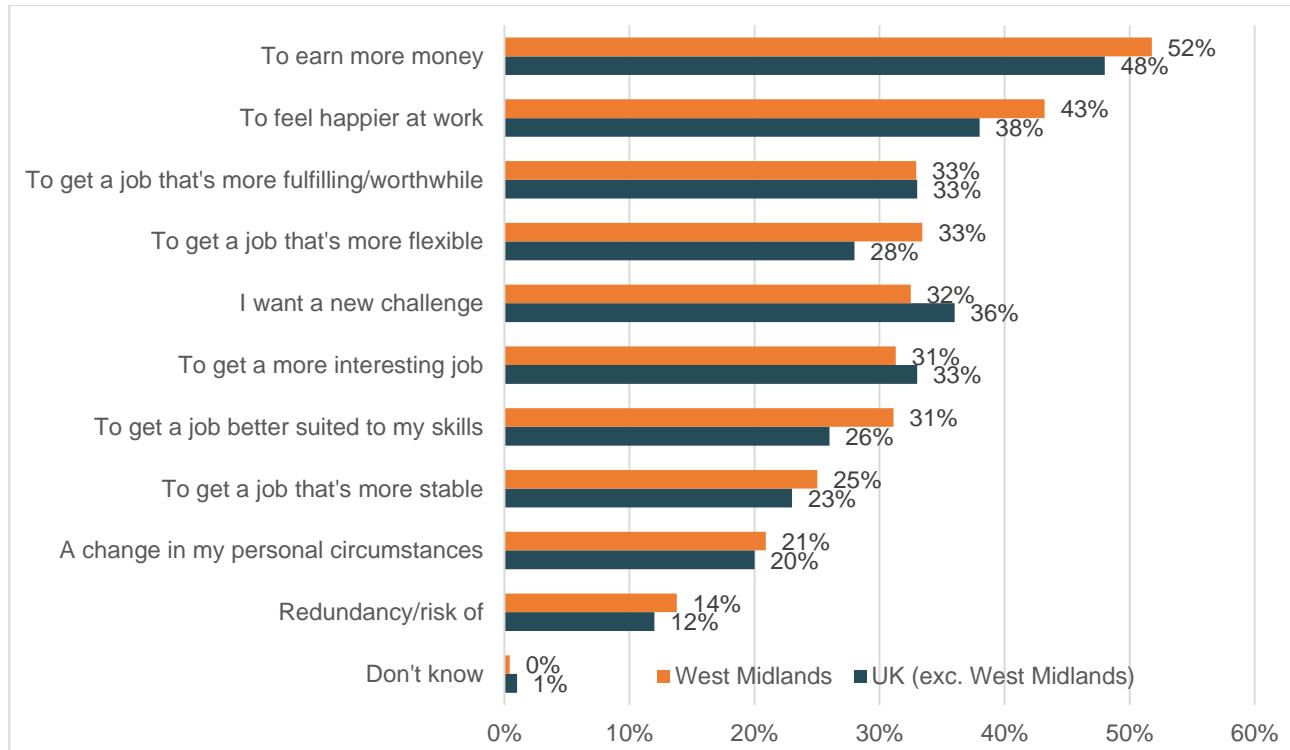
¹⁵ Evans, S. and Vaid, L. (2023) [All change: Understanding and supporting retraining and career change](#)

interesting (31 per cent), better suited to their skills (31 per cent) or more stable (25 per cent).

One in five respondents (21 per cent) reported that a change in personal circumstances was the reason for wanting a career change. A further one in ten (14 per cent) said they feared or were at risk of redundancy.

The motivations for career change in the West Midlands are fairly similar to the rest of the UK (Figure 20).

Figure 19: Reasons for wanting or needing career change in the West Midlands and in the UK



Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in the West Midlands. Weighted base = 239, unweighted base = 261. Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in the UK (excluding the West Midlands). Weighted base = 2447, unweighted base = 2720.

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 West Midlands, the most cited barrier was a lack of self-confidence (27 per cent). Other dispositional barriers include fear of applying for jobs/job interviews (23 per cent), feeling too old (20 per cent), having always done the same job (18 per cent) or not wanting to start a new career from the bottom (16 per cent).

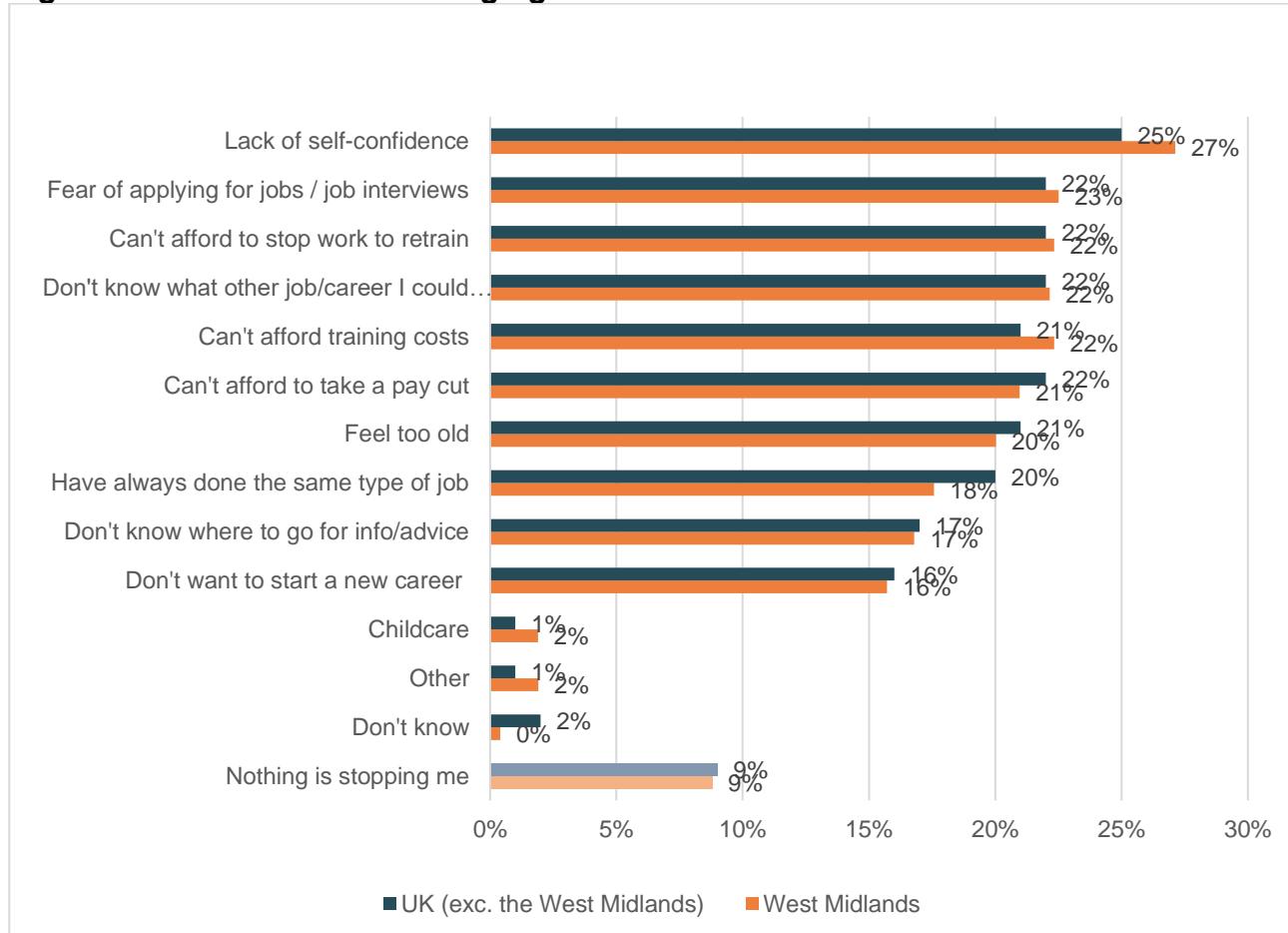
Other barriers related to finance including not being able to afford to retrain (22 per cent), not being able to afford training costs (22 per cent) and/or not being able to afford a pay cut (21 per cent).

Some barriers relate to a lack of awareness of opportunities or guidance, with nearly one in five (17 per cent) identifying either that they don't know what other job or career they could do or that don't know where to go for information and advice.

Nearly one in ten respondents (9 per cent) 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 the West Midlands are fairly similar to the ones identified in the rest of the UK (see Figure 21). While some of the figures are slightly different, none of the differences are statistically significant.

Figure 20: Reason for not changing career in the West Midlands



Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in the West Midlands. Weighted base = 239, unweighted base = 261. Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in the UK (excluding the West Midlands). Weighted base = 2447, unweighted base = 2721.

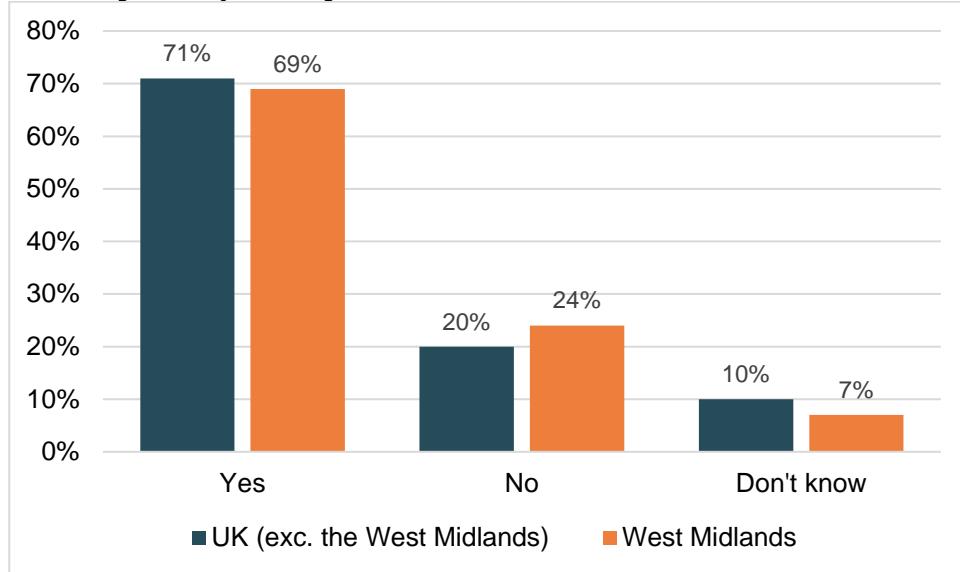
Developing skills for career change

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 West Midlands, seven in ten adults (69 per cent) said they need to develop their skills, while 24 per cent said they don't and 7 per cent said they don't know. These figures

are fairly similar to the UK. However, participants in the West Midlands were more likely to say they do not need to develop their skills than in the rest of the UK, with almost one quarter saying that in the West Midlands (24 per cent), compared with one fifth (20 per cent) in the rest of the UK.

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



Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in the West Midlands. Weighted base = 239, unweighted base = 261. Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in the UK (excluding the West Midlands). Weighted base = 2447, unweighted base = 2721.

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 West Midlands, respondents most commonly indicated that they would find learning or training helpful (32 per cent). This was followed by financial support, with 25 per cent selecting financial support towards living costs and 24 per cent indicating they would find financial support towards the cost of learning helpful.

Respondents also stated that they would find advice useful – on their transferable skills (26 per cent), to choose the right job/career for them (24 per cent), to choose the learning or training they need (22 per cent) or coaching to help them get a job (22 per cent). One in five respondents (21 per cent) said that they would like coaching and support when they first start a job.

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

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



Base: respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the West Midlands. Weighted base = 535, unweighted base = 587. Base respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the UK (excluding the West Midlands). Weighted base = 6002, unweighted base = 5431.

Respondents were asked where they would go for information and advice if they wished to change career (Table 3). In the West Midlands, nearly two in five respondents (37 per cent) said they would use a general online search to find information and advice. This was followed by friends, family and colleagues (26 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 social media (17 per cent), education providers and recruitment agency/consultant (both 16 per cent), as well as a professional, sector or trade organisation, Jobcentre Plus or National Career Service (all 14 per cent). Only 12 per cent of respondents said they would go to a prospective employer, and 10 per cent said they would go to their current employer. Just over one in ten adults (11 per cent) do not know where they would go for information or advice about changing job or career. This demonstrates a need to raise awareness of sources of careers information, advice and guidance for adults.

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

Table 3: Where respondents go for advice on career change

| Source of information/advice | West Midlands | UK (excluding the West Midlands) |
|--|---------------|----------------------------------|
| General online search | 37% | 37% |
| Friends, family or colleagues | 26% | 23% |
| Education provider such as a college or university | 16% | 16% |
| Social media | 17% | 16% |
| Recruitment consultant/agency | 16% | 16% |
| Professional, sector or trade organisation | 14% | 16% |
| Jobcentre Plus | 14% | 15% |
| National Careers Service | 14% | 12% |
| Prospective employers | 12% | 12% |
| Your current employer (e.g. HR, line manager) | 10% | 11% |
| Citizens' Advice | 10% | 8% |
| Local community, voluntary or religious centre | 5% | 5% |
| Local or national charity | 5% | 5% |
| Unionlearn representative or Workplace Learning Advocate | 5% | 5% |
| Don't know | 11% | 12% |

Base: respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the West Midlands. Weighted base = 535, unweighted base = 587. Base respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the UK (excluding the West Midlands). Weighted base = 6002, unweighted base = 5431.