LEARNING AND WORK INSTITUTE

Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2024

Oriane Nermond, Corin Egglestone, Lorenzo Manetti and Emily Jones

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Foreword

Learning matters. It can help people with their work and careers, to support health and wellbeing, to promote integration and reduce loneliness, and so much more including personal fulfilment. The Adult Participation in Learning Survey gives a helpful insight into who takes part in all kinds of learning across the UK, the reasons people do and don't take part in learning, and the types of learning take place.

This year's survey finds a record proportion of adults, 52%, say they are taking part in learning. That's good news and shows the intrinsic desire to learn that most of us have. This might come as a surprise to many people working in learning and skills. After all there have been significant funding cuts and drops in learner numbers.

What's happened is people have found informal, self-directed ways to learn, including online. That's good and positive, but we also need to ensure people have routes to more formal learning and accreditation where they want to and where that would be of benefit to them. Austerity has meant people have far too few routes through which to engage with learning; that needs to change.

We hope all of this will help provoke debate and promote change. We encourage employers to invest in training for staff at all levels and to offer opportunities for non-work learning. And community groups to think about how they can encourage and promote learning.

Local and national governments need to set a clear goal to reduce inequalities in access to lifelong learning and promote a lifelong learning culture. That requires increased investment – public investment in learning and skills in England is £1 billion lower than in 2010 – but is much more than that. In Wales, Medr (the new post-16 learning and skills body) has a statutory duty to promote lifelong learning in a variety of forms; we hope Skills England, being introduced by the new Government for England, will have a similar focus.

Beyond this, we want to see lifelong learning built into other policy plans. Lifelong learning needs to be part of promoting health and wellbeing, our survey shows the benefits it can bring. It needs to be part of plans to deliver clean energy and increased homebuilding, our survey shows most people learn for their work and career. And lifelong learning needs to be part of our approach for delivering broad-based growth.

Lifelong learning is essential for so many reasons. People clearly have an interest in it, but access is unequal. That needs to change, and the Adult Participation in Learning Survey has insights that can inform our plans for change.

S. Evans

Stephen Evans, Chief Executive at Learning and Work Institute

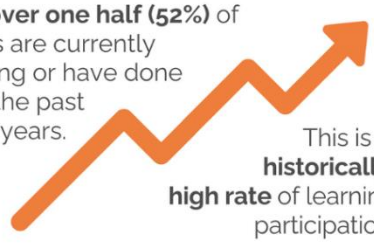
Executive summary

Since 1996, Learning and Work Institute has been undertaking the Adult Participation in Learning Survey. The survey adopts a broad definition of learning and provides a unique overview of who participates in learning and who does not. This report presents the results of the 2024 survey. Alongside detailed sociodemographic analysis of adults who participate in learning, the 2024 survey also explores motivations for learning, how learning is delivered, benefits of learning, barriers to learning, and the use of technology in learning.

Adult participation in learning is at its highest since the survey began

In 2024, just over one half (52%) of adults in the UK report that they are either currently learning or have done so within the past three years. This is the highest participation in learning in the history of the survey and continues a post-pandemic trend of increased participation.

Just **over one half (52%)** of adults are currently learning or have done so in the past three years.



This is a **historically high rate** of learning participation.

Participation is unequal with substantial differences between geographies and groups

In England, regional inequalities remain high, with two thirds (66%) of adults in London reporting taking part in learning, compared to only two fifths (43%) in the South West.

The gap in participation between the best and worst performing regions has steadily increased to **23 percentage points**.

Closer proximity to the labour market is associated with higher participation rates. The increase in participation rate has been driven by those who are in work or are looking for work, rather than people who are economically inactive.[1] Less than one half of those who are economically inactive report having participated in learning in the last three years: 30% of adults who are out of work and not looking for work and 29% of those who are unable to work are participating in learning, compared with 65% of people employed full-time.

30% of adults out of work and not looking for work and **29%** of those unable to work are **participating in learning.**

This compares with **65%** of people employed full-time.

[1] Excluding students.

Social grade remains a key predictor of learning, with individuals in the highest social grade (AB)[2] one and a half times more likely to participate in learning than those in the lowest (DE)[3] (60% compared to 39%). Similarly, the results continue to show that the longer individuals remain in full-time education the more likely they are to learn as an adult, with 62% of adults who left education aged 19+ participating in learning compared to 34% of adults who left at 16 or younger. Participation also decreases with age: the likelihood of participating in learning decreases by 4% for each additional year of age.

The rise in independent and online learning post-pandemic are the main component of increased participation rates

Learners most commonly reported learning independently on their own (34%), followed by work (21%), on the job (17%) and through a higher education institution (16%). Almost two thirds (63%) of learners say that at least some of their main learning has been online.

Adults in the AB group are **one and a half times** more likely to participate in learning than the DE group.

62% of adults who left education aged 19+ are participating in learning compared to **34%** of adults who left at 16 or younger.

The likelihood to of participating in learning decreases by **4% for each additional year of age.**

Most learners (56%) say their main motivation to learn is **work-related.**

However, the proportion of adults **learning for leisure or personal interest** remains twice as high as pre-pandemic levels.

The proportion of adults learning for leisure or personal interest remains twice as high as it was before the pandemic

Most learners (56%) report that their main motivation to learn is work-related. However, the proportion of adults learning for leisure or personal interest remains twice as high as pre-pandemic levels (43% compared to 20% in 2019).

Wider motivations for learning include to develop as a person (38%), because of an interest in the subject (37%) and for work-related development (30%).

Adults report a range of benefits from learning, including increased enjoyment of learning (30%), increased self-confidence (26%) and improved skills needed to do their job (25%).

[2] People in AB grade are those who live in a household where the Chief Income Earner is in Intermediate or Higher managerial/professional/administrative occupations or has retired from one of these occupations.

[3] People in DE grade are those who live in a household where the Chief Income Earner is a semi or unskilled manual worker (or has retired from a semi or unskilled occupation), student, retired and living on state pension only, or unemployed (for over 6 months) or not working due to long-term sickness.

Despite high levels of participation in learning, seven in ten adults report barriers to learning

Seven in ten (70%) learners report experiencing at least one challenge while learning. Work or time pressure alongside the cost of learning are the most common challenges (23% and 18% respectively).

Additionally, 69% of those who have not recently engaged with learning report at least one barrier preventing them from doing so.

Women (30%) and people in the DE social grade (31%) are significantly more likely to report financial barriers than men (16%) or people in the AB (20%) grade. Around three in ten adults (29%) who haven't learned within the last three years said that nothing is preventing them from learning or simply that they don't want to do so.

Most adults see technology as an enabler

Almost all learners (95%) report that they have used technology as part of their learning, including online videos (43%), online assessments (36%), emails, search engine and video calls (30%).

Nearly nine in ten learners (86%) identify technology as an enabler, such as allowing them to learn at home (42%), learn at their own level and pace (39%), and learn at a convenient time (38%).

Most adults (79%) who have not learned in the previous three years (or have not used technology to do so) could identify at least one benefit technology could bring to learning.

Although most adults are confident in using technology for learning (93%), older learners, those who left education aged 20 or below and people in the lowest (DE) social grade are less so.

The **cost of learning**, **work** and **time pressures**, and **feeling too old** are top barriers to learning.

3 in 10 adults without recent experience of learning say nothing is preventing them from learning or they just don't want to.

Nearly nine in ten learners identify technology as an enabler.

They say it allows them to **learn at home** (48%), **at a convenient time** (43%) **or at a convenient pace** (40%).

Although **most adults** are confident in using technology for learning (93%), **older learners**, **those who left education aged 20 or below** and **people in the lowest (DE) social grade** are less so.

Introduction

Since 1996, Learning and Work Institute has been undertaking the Adult Participation in Learning Survey. 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, over a span of 29 years.

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 previous years, the 2024 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 using technology to support learning.

Fieldwork was conducted in August 2024 by a market research company via their UK online omnibus survey. The sample has been weighted to provide a dataset representative of the UK.

Further information about the methodology and the definitions used in this report can be found in the Annex. To find out more about the survey series and explore trend data through our interactive charts, visit www.learningandwork.org.uk.

Participation in learning

Key findings

In 2024, the survey shows that just over one half (52%) of adults in the UK say they are either currently learning or have done so in the last three years. This is the highest participation rate recorded since the survey began, and builds on the substantial increase identified in the 2023 survey. However, this historically high figure masks persistent and, in some cases, widening inequalities between places and people.

In England, regional inequalities remain high. Since 2019, the gap in participation between the best and worst performing regions has steadily increased, and has widened to 23 percentage points in 2024. Two thirds (66%) of adults in London report having taken part in learning, compared to only two fifths (43%) in the South West. In contrast, the gap between UK nations appears to have narrowed.

Age, social grade, labour market status and the age at which people completed full-time education are all strongly associated with adult participation in learning.

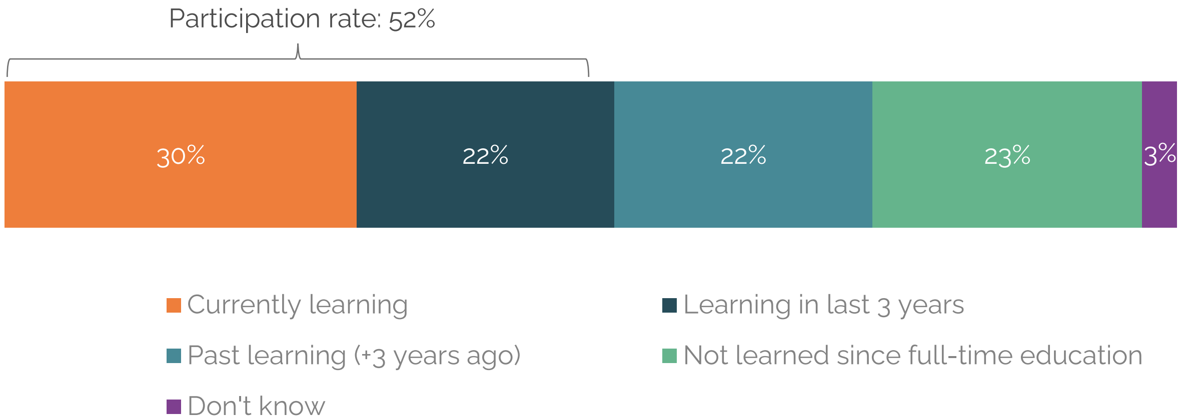
- **Participation in learning decreases with age**; more than four out of five (85%) 17-24 year olds have participated in learning within the previous three years, compared to only 16% of those aged 75 or older. Analysis shows that, controlling for other characteristics, the likelihood of participating in learning decreases by 4% for each additional year of age.
- **Stark inequalities in participation by social grade remain**. The highest social grade (AB) has the highest participation rate (60%), and the lowest social grade (DE) has the lowest rate of participation (39%).
- **People out of work (and not looking for work) or those unable to work are the least likely to report participating in learning** (30% and 29% respectively). Conversely, people in full-time employment are the most likely to report participating in learning (65%). The rise in learning participation in recent years has been concentrated among those in work, with little change for those out of work and not looking for work. Although the participation of people out of work and not looking for work has increased significantly since last year, the gap in learning participation between those in work and those out of work and not looking for work are still significantly higher than pre-pandemic level.
- **People who left full-time education at 21 or older are almost twice as likely as those who left at age 16 or younger to report participating in learning in the past three years** (62% compared with 34%).

Participation in learning over time

The 2024 survey shows that just over one half of adults (52%) say they are either currently learning (30%) or have done so within the past three years (22%) (Figure 1). Nearly one in four adults (23%) reported that they have not taken part in learning since leaving full-time education. A further 22% say that they were involved in learning more than three years ago.

Figure 1: Just over one half of adults say they have taken part in learning in the last three years.

Adult participation in learning, 2024



Base: all respondents. Weighted base = 5,102, unweighted base = 5,103.

The 2024 participation rate (current and recent learning combined) is the highest since the survey began, and is a statistically significant increase of three percentage points on last year's survey (Figure 2). It builds on the substantial increase identified in the 2023 survey (from 42% to 49%) and continues an upward trend since 2021, following historical lows in 2017 to 2019.[4] The change in survey method from face-to-face to online means that comparisons to surveys pre-2021 should be treated with caution. However, the continuing increase in participation rate appears to indicate a sustained and growing interest in learning post-pandemic. This is further supported by an equivalent post-pandemic increase in adult learning across Europe.[5]

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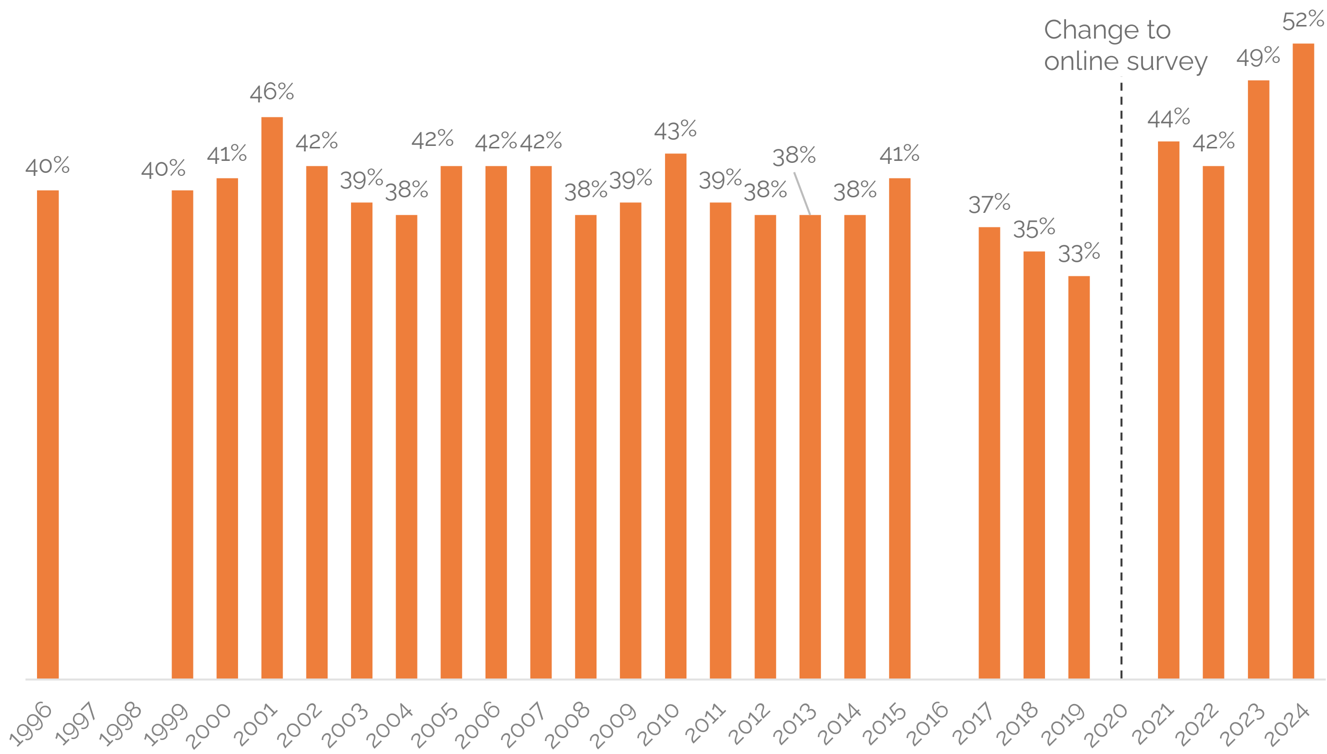
[4] Hall, S. Jones, E. Evans, S (2023) Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2023 (p.7).

[5] Eurostat provides data on adult learning across Europe, although using different age category and definitions. In 2016, across the 27 European countries 44% of adults aged 25-64 took part in formal education and training, 60% in informal training and 35% in job-related non-formal education. These proportions increased to respectively 49%, 64% and 38% in 2022. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/explore/all/popul?lang=en&subtheme=educ.educ_part.trng&display=list&sort=category

Figure 2: Participation in learning is at its highest since the survey began.
Participation in learning, 1996-2024



Base: all respondents to each survey. Weighted base for 2024 = 5,102, unweighted base for 2024= 5,103

This historically high level of participation masks stark and persistent disparities between nations, regions, and sociodemographic groups in the UK. The following sections delve into these inequalities and highlight how they are changing over time.

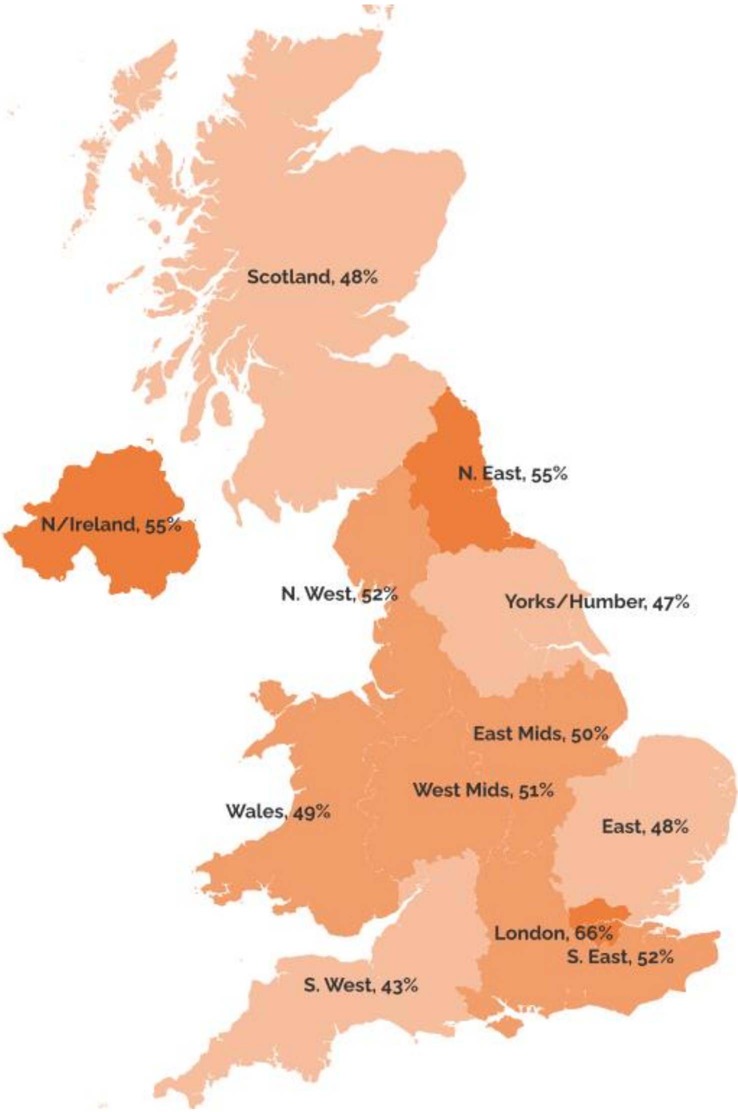
Geographical differences

When comparing levels of participation in learning across the UK, the survey shows some variation between the UK nations and English regions (Figure 3).

In 2024, Northern Ireland is the nation with the highest participation rate (55%), followed by England (52%), Wales (49%) and Scotland (48%). However, **none of the differences between UK nations are statistically significant**.

In 2024, participation in learning is significantly higher in London than other English regions, with two thirds of adults (66%) reporting that they have taken part in learning in the past three years. Conversely, participation in Yorkshire and the Humber (47%) and the South West (43%) are significantly lower than the rest of the UK. Although there are some variations across the other regions, none of the differences are statistically significant.

Figure 3: London has the highest participation rate of any regions or nations.
Participation in learning by UK nations and English regions



Base: all respondents. Weighted base = 5,102, unweighted base = 5,103. Weighted base: Scotland = 431, Wales = 242, Northern Ireland = 141, North East = 207, North West = 563, Yorkshire and the Humber = 417, East Midlands = 370, West Midlands = 452, East of England = 476, London = 673, South East = 697, South West = 434. Unweighted base: Scotland = 324, Wales = 222, Northern Ireland = 121, North East = 274, North West = 610, Yorkshire and the Humber = 419, East Midlands = 363, West Midlands = 473, East of England = 443, London = 841, South East = 677, South West = 336.

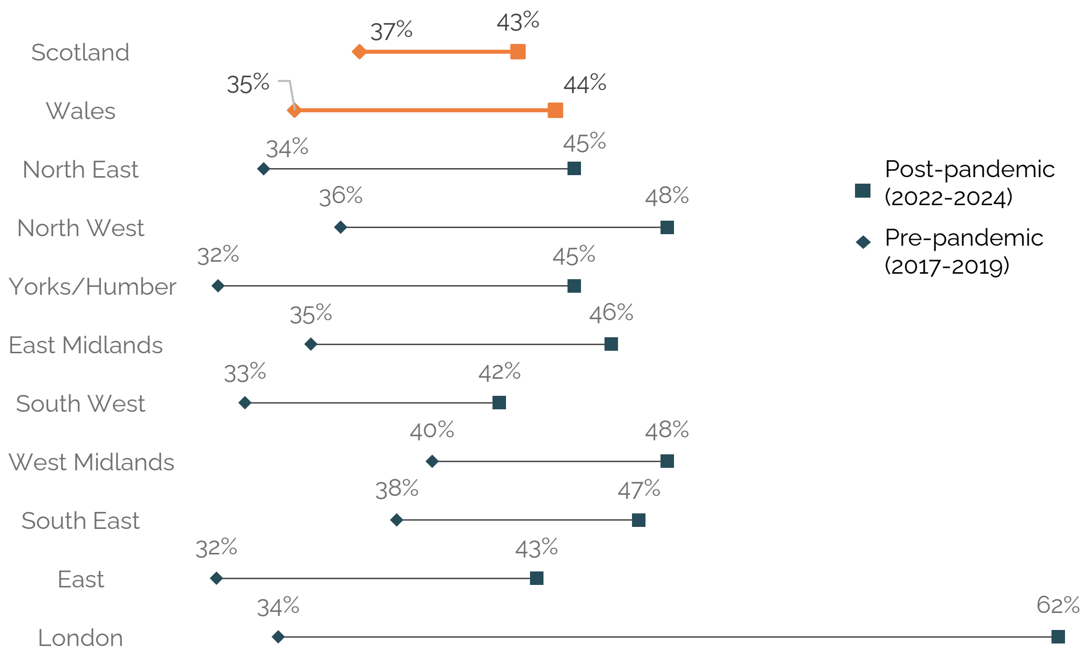
Participation in learning has increased across all English regions and nations in the UK post-pandemic.[6] Figure 4 shows the three-year average participation rates immediately before (2017-2019) and after the pandemic (2022-2024).[7] Over this time period participation has increased by roughly 10 percentage points for most nations and regions, varying from six percentage points in Scotland to 13 in Yorkshire and the Humber. However, the exception is London where there has been an increase of 28

[6] Northern Ireland is not included in the analysis due to small sample sizes.
[7] Three-year average rates have been used due to small regional sample sizes

percentage points. This suggests a substantial post-pandemic rise in learning in London, although it should be noted that it may be partly due to effects of the change in survey methods.[8]

Figure 4: Participation has increased for all regions and nations post-pandemic, but to varying level.

Participation in learning by English regions and nations pre-pandemic and post-pandemic



Base: Average of the regional participation rates over three-year: 2017-2019 and 2022-2024.

In England, regional inequalities remain historically high. Between 2002 and 2015, the gap between regions was relatively constant, ranging from 10 to 14 percentage points. The gap dropped to only 7 percentage points in 2017, but rose again to 14 percentage points in 2018. The gap has risen gradually since then: to 17 percentage points in 2019, 21 percentage points in 2021 and 2022 and 23 percentage points in 2023. In 2024, the gap has remained similar to last year's survey, with a 23 percentage point difference between the regions with the highest and lowest participation rates. Over the years, the regions with the highest and lowest participation rates have varied – this could be

[8] Fieldwork for the survey was first conducted online in 2021. Prior to this, fieldwork was conducted via a face-to-face omnibus, however, a shift in how people are communicating, with more households online than ever before, coupled with the Coronavirus pandemic creating challenges for face-to-face fieldwork, has led to market research agencies shifting to an online approach. This raises some potential issues regarding representation of older, disabled and digitally excluded adults, who we know from previous surveys are less likely to participate in learning. Weighting has been applied to mitigate this impact and to ensure a representative sample; however, year on year comparisons with surveys pre-2021 should be treated with some caution.

explained by the high volatility of survey data at a regional level. However, since 2021 London has consistently been the region with the highest level of participation in learning.

However, regression analysis found that there is generally no evidence of a place effect when other characteristics are taken into account, with the exception of Northern Ireland (associated with a 65% increased likelihood of learning), the North East (49%) and the South East (30%).[9] This suggests that, aside from volatility in survey data, differences between nations and regions are largely driven by the different characteristics of people living there.

The survey data do not allow further exploration of these regional differences. This highlights the need for research to further explore the effect of place on lifelong learning, and how regional and local governments, as well as local employers, providers and other stakeholders, can further support adult participation in learning.

Demographic differences

Participation in learning varies considerably between sociodemographic groups. **Age, social grade, the age people left full-time education, employment status, and ethnicity are strongly associated with adult participation in learning.**

Social grade

Adults in the DE grade[10] are significantly less likely to report having taken part in learning within the last three years than those in all the other grades (Figure 5). Nearly two fifths (39%) of people in the DE grade say they have done some learning within the last three years, compared to 60% of those in AB,[11] 50% of those in C1[12] and 57% of those in C2.[13] **People in the DE grade are also over twice as likely to report that**

[9] See annex for a full description of the methods used in the regression analysis. Regions were compared against London as a reference category. Findings for Northern Ireland and the North East should be interpreted with caution given relatively small sample sizes.

[10] People in DE grade are those who live in a household where the Chief Income Earner is a semi or unskilled manual worker (or has retired from a semi or unskilled occupation), student, retired and living on state pension only, or unemployed (for over 6 months) or not working due to long-term sickness. The Census 2021 recorded that 22.6% of the working age population of England and Wales are in DE grade.

[11] People in AB grade are those who live in a household where the Chief Income Earner is in Intermediate or Higher managerial/professional/administrative occupations or has retired from one of these occupations. The Census 2021 recorded that 23.3% of the working age population of England and Wales are in AB grade

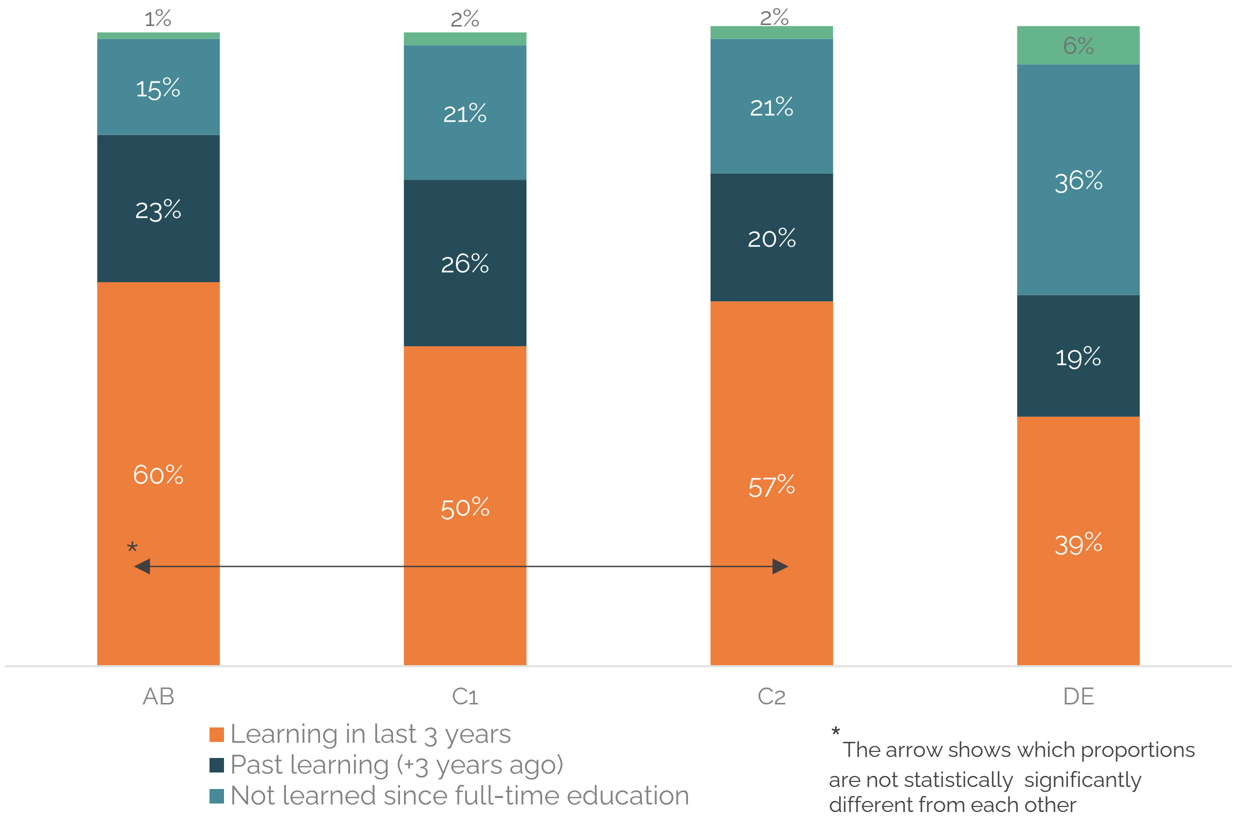
[12] People in C1 grade are those who live in a household where the Chief Income Earner is in a Supervisory or clerical/Junior managerial/professional/administrator occupations or is retired from one of these occupations. The Census 2021 recorded that 32.8% of the working age population of England and Wales are in C1 grade

[13] People in C2 grade are those who live in a household where the Chief Income Earner is in a skilled manual worker or has retired from a semi or unskilled occupation. The weighted sample for this subgroup is 929. The Census 2021 recorded that 21.3% of the working age population of England and Wales are in C2 grade

they have not taken part in learning since full-time education (36%) compared to people in AB grade (15%).

Compared to the 2023 survey, participation in learning has significantly increased for people in the C1 grade (+ four percentage points). There have been smaller increases for C2 (+ three percentage points) and DE grades (+ one percentage point), although these are not statistically significant. The participation rate of people in the AB grade is unchanged (60%).

Figure 5: Adults in DE grade are significantly less likely to participate in learning.
Participation in learning by social grades



Base: all respondents. Weighted base = 5,102, AB = 1645, C1 = 1171, C2 = 929, DE = 1357, unweighted base = 5,103, AB = 1667, C1 = 1176, C2 = 928, DE 1332.

Since the survey began in 1996, findings have consistently shown people in the AB grade are most likely to say they have taken up learning and people in the DE grade are the least likely to say this (Figure 6).

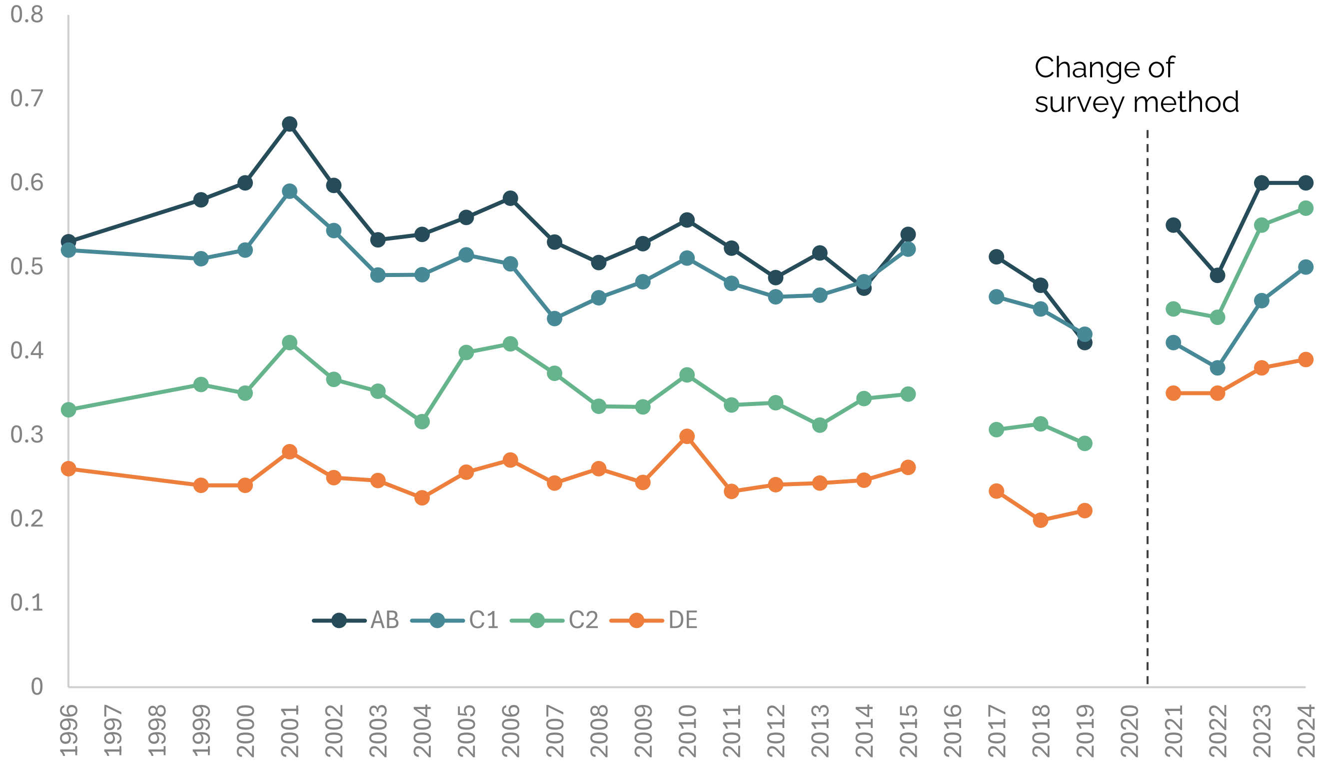
The 2023 report described trends in the gap between these two grades over time. [14] This showed that the gap remained relatively consistent between 2003 and 2018, ranging between 24 and 31 percentage points. The gap narrowed from 2019 onwards, although it increased from 14 percentage points in 2022 to 22 percentage points in 2023. There

[14] Hall, S. Jones, E. Evans, S (2023) Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2023. (p.9 to p.11).

has been a slight drop in 2024 to a gap of 21 percentage points. This is equal to the gap in 2019 and remains narrower than pre-2018.

The narrowing of the gap since 2019 was initially due to a decrease in AB participation (from 48% in 2018 to 42% in 2019). However, although AB participation has recovered post-pandemic there has been a corresponding and larger **post-pandemic increase in DE participation** (from 21% in 2019 to 35% in 2021 and 2022 and 38% in 2023). **The 2024 and 2023 survey records the highest participation level of people in the DE grade since it began**.

Figure 6: The participation in learning of people in C2 and DE grades have increased post pandemic to reach their highest levels since the survey began.
Participation in learning by social grade, 1996-2024



Base: all respondents to each survey. Weighted base for 2024 = 5,102, AB = 1645, C1 = 1171, C2 = 929, DE = 1357, unweighted base for 2024 = 5,103, AB = 1667, C1 = 1176, C2 = 928, DE 1332

Regression analysis shows that social grade is among the strongest predictors of learning, when all other characteristics are taken into account. When compared with AB, the DE social grade was associated with a 36% decreased likelihood of learning.

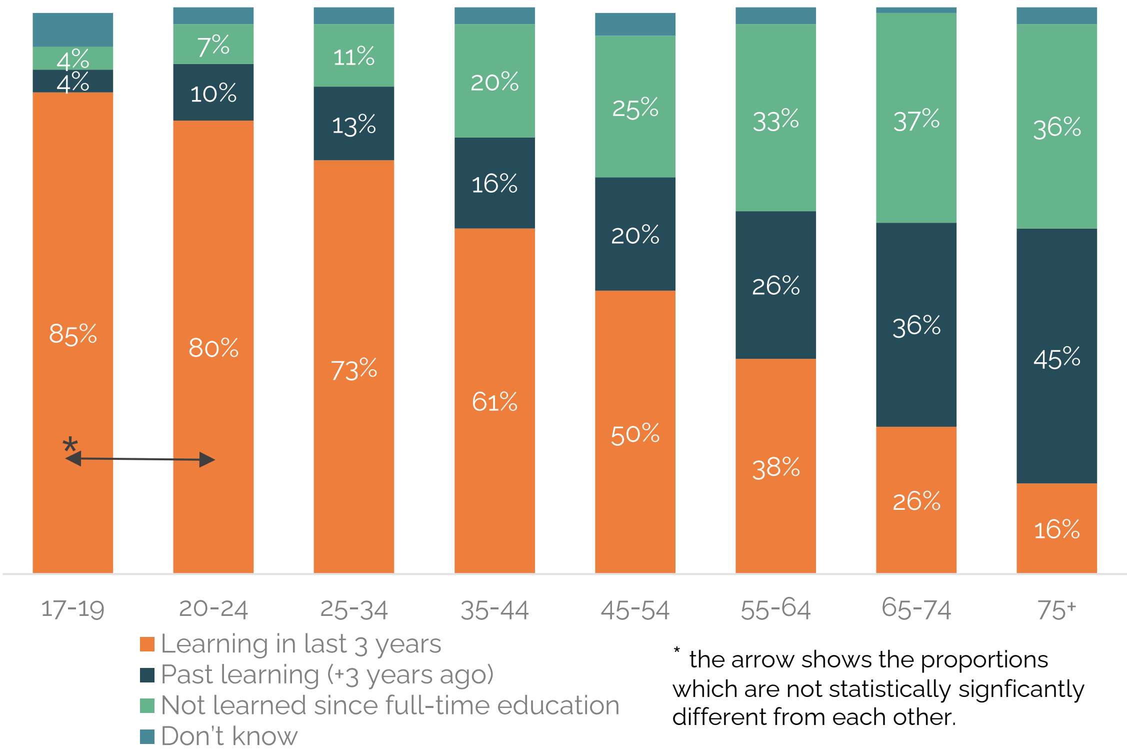
Additional analysis shows that the DE social grade has a substantially stronger impact on older people. Being in the DE social grade is associated with a 40% decreased likelihood of learning for people aged 50+ compared to only 11% for people aged 17-49.

Age

In line with previous surveys, **participation in learning decreases with age** (Figure 7). Younger people (aged 17-24) are significantly more likely to say they have done some learning within the last three years than all other age groups (25-75+). The highest rate is for 17-19 year olds, where 85% say they have taken up learning in the previous three years, followed by 20-24 year olds (80%). The participation rate decreases significantly by around 10 percentage points for each age group thereafter, with a rate of 73% for those aged 25-34, 61% for 35-44, 50% for 45-54, 38% for 55-64, 26% for 65-74 and 16% for 75 or over.

The participation rate has increased for most age groups since 2023. The largest increase is for the 17-19 age group (+ eight percentage points), followed by the 45-54 age group (+ five percentage points) and 25-34 age group (+ four percentage points) – these are all statistically significant differences. It has also increased by four percentage points for those aged 20-24 and two percentage points for those aged 55-64 and 65-74, although these are not statistically significant. The participation rate decreased marginally for 35-44 year olds (- three percentage points) and by two percentage points for those aged 75 or over, although these are not statistically significant. It should be noted that due to small sample sizes for individual age groups, some of these changes may be due to random variation. Analysis of longer term trends suggests that changes for the 17-19 age group may simply be reversion of previous random fluctuations. However, changes for the 25-34 and 45-54 age groups appear to continue longer term trends.

Figure 7: Participation in learning decreases with age.
Participation in learning by age



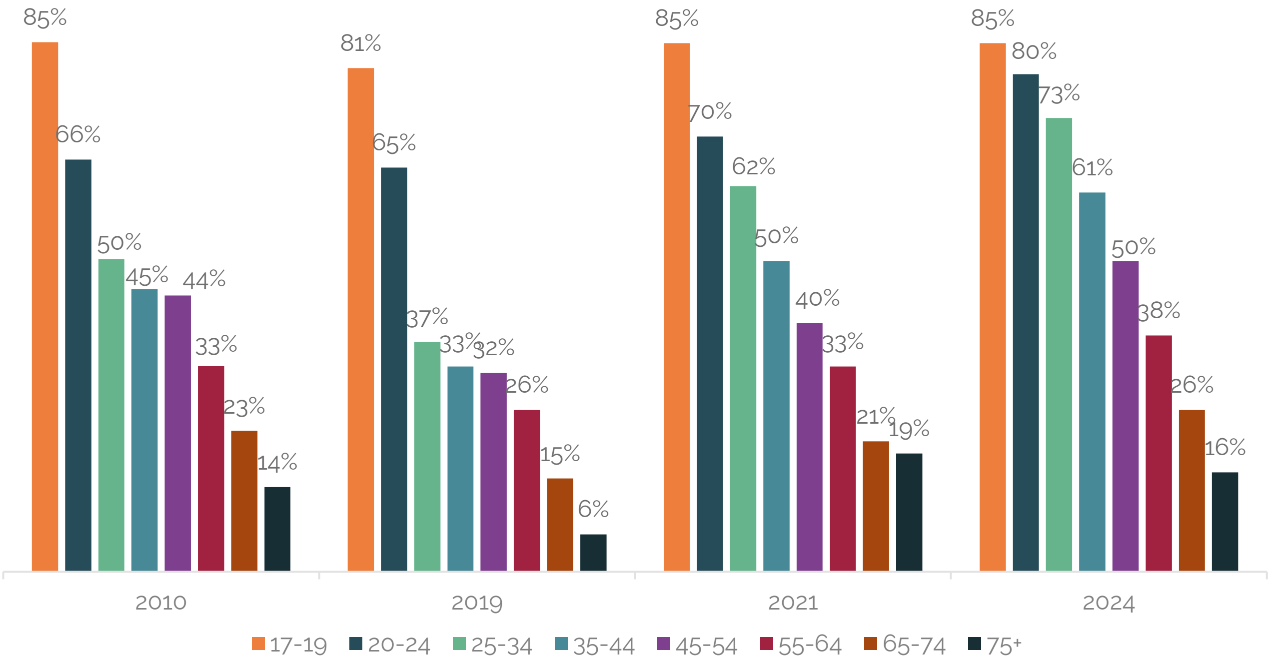
Base: all respondents 17-19 = 182, 20-24 = 486, 25-34 = 851, 35-44 = 794, 45-54 = 847, 55-64 = 771, 65-74 = 815, 75 or older = 355. unweighted base, 17-19 = 183, 20-24 = 491, 25-34 = 897, 35-44 = 854, 45-54 = 875, 55-64 = 843, 65-74 = 668, 75 or older = 292.

Participation in learning has increased for all age groups since 2010, except for those aged 17-19 years old (Figure 8). There have been particularly large and significant increases post pandemic among people aged 25-34 (+ 36 percentage points since 2019), 35-44 (+ 28 percentage points) and 45-54 (+ 18 percentage points). However, it is important to note that these changes may be exaggerated due to effects of the change in survey method in 2021 (see methodology in Annex). Participation in learning for people aged 55 and older has also increased since 2019, but to a smaller degree (+ 10 percentage points). Since 2019, there has only been a four percentage point increase for people aged 17-19.

The 2023 report described how the gap between the youngest adults (17-19) and the oldest adults (75 or over) narrowed from 80 percentage points in 2014 to 60 percentage points in 2023 - the smallest gap in the history of survey.[15] This gap has subsequently widened by nine percentage points in 2024 (69 percentage points) to be the largest since 2021. This has been driven by the large increase in learning among 17-19 year olds in 2024 compared to 2023.

[15] Hall, S. Jones, E. Evans, S (2023) Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2023. (p.13).

Figure 8: Participation in learning has increased for most age groups since 2010, except for those aged 17-19.
Participation in learning by age, 2010 - 2024



Base: all respondents 17-19 = 182, 20-24 = 486, 25-34 = 851, 35-44 = 794, 45-54 = 847, 55-64 = 771, 65-74 = 815, 75 or older = 355. unweighted base, 17-19 = 183, 20-24 = 491, 25-34 = 897, 35-44 = 854, 45-54 = 875, 55-64 = 843, 65-74 = 668, 75 or older = 292.

While younger people are more likely to learn, there are significant variations in their participation by social grade. **The participation of younger people aged 19-24 in the AB social grade is 87%, compared to 81% for those in C1 and only 74% for DE.**[16]

Regression analysis found that age is among the strongest predictors of learning. Age has a linear relationship with learning, with likelihood of participation decreasing by 4% for each additional year older.

Employment status

Closer proximity to the labour market is associated with higher participation rates (Figure 9). In 2024, full-time workers[17] and self-employed people have the highest participation rates (65% and 64% respectively). These groups are significantly more likely to report taking up learning in the past three years than part-time workers (61%). This is a slight change compared to 2023, where part-time workers were more likely to have participated in learning than self-employed people.

[16] The participation of adults in C1 social grade aged 19-24 needs to be taken with caution as there were only 74 individuals in this age bracket and social grade.

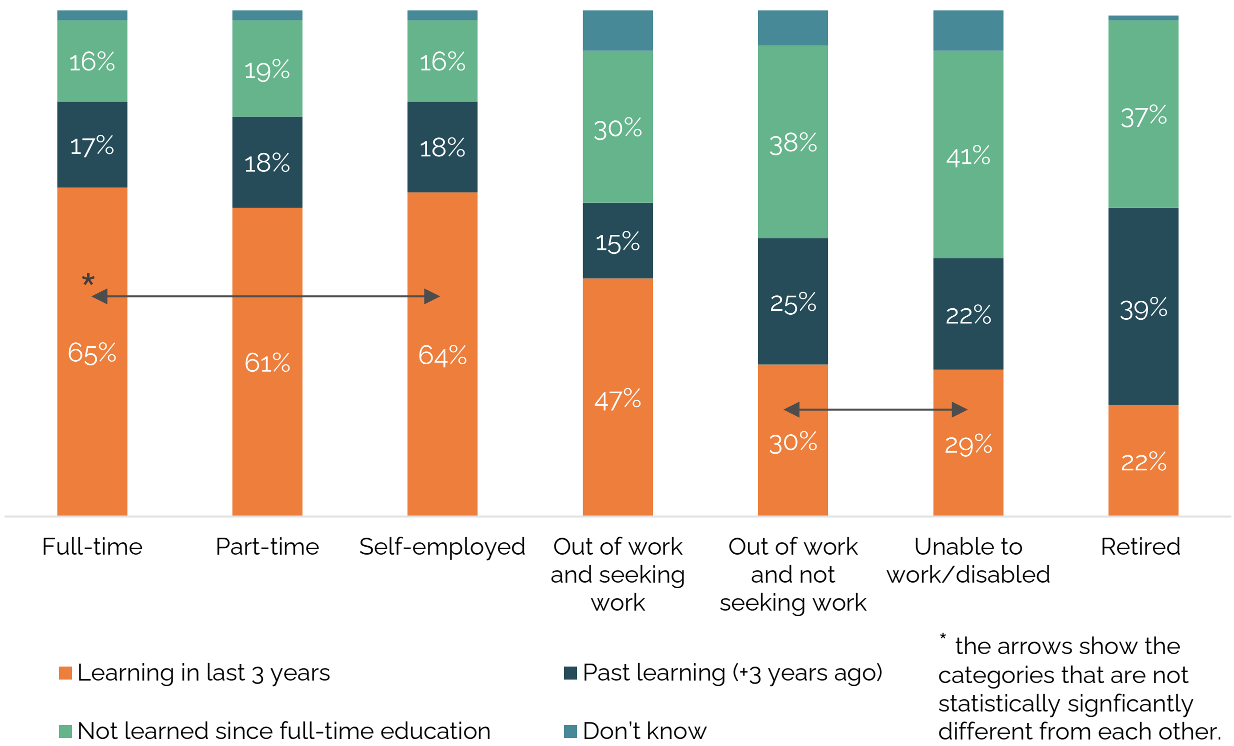
[17] Full-time part-time employment is defined, respectively, as 30 or more and fewer than 30 hours per week

People who are out of work are significantly less likely to say they have done some learning in the last three years, although those who are seeking work (47%) are more likely to be learning than those who are not looking for work (30%) or are unable to work (29%). Retired people (22%) are significantly less likely to say they have taken up learning than all the other groups.[18]

Since 2023, participation rates have significantly increased across employment for self-employed people (+ eight percentage points) and individuals out of work and not seeking work (+ seven percentage points). While there have been small increases for part-time workers (+ four percentage points), people who are out of work and seeking work (+ two percentage points), individuals who are unable to work or disabled (+ two percentage points), and full-time workers (+ one percentage points), the differences are not statistically significant. The rate for retired people is consistent with 2023.

Figure 9: Closer proximity to the labour market is associated with higher participation rates.

Participation in learning by working status



Base = all respondents. Weighted base = 5,102, Full-time = 2129, Part-time = 704, Self-employed = 270, Unemployed and seeking work = 195, Out of work and not seeking work = 263, Unable to work = 176, unweighted base = 5,103, Full-time = 2246, Part-time = 727, Self-employed = 280, Unemployed and seeking work = 205, Unemployed and not seeking work = 267, Unable to work = 183.

[18] Retired people have the lowest participation in learning, with only one in five reporting having learned in the past three years, but this group has not been included in Figure 7.

Regression analysis shows that **working status is among the strongest predictors of learning**, when all other characteristics are taken into account. Compared with full-time employment, the following work statuses are all associated with a decreased likelihood of learning: being unable to work or disabled (by 68%); out of work and not seeking work (by 64%); out of work and seeking work (by 42%); and retired (by 40%). In contrast, self-employment was associated with a 40% increased likelihood of learning compared to full-time employment.

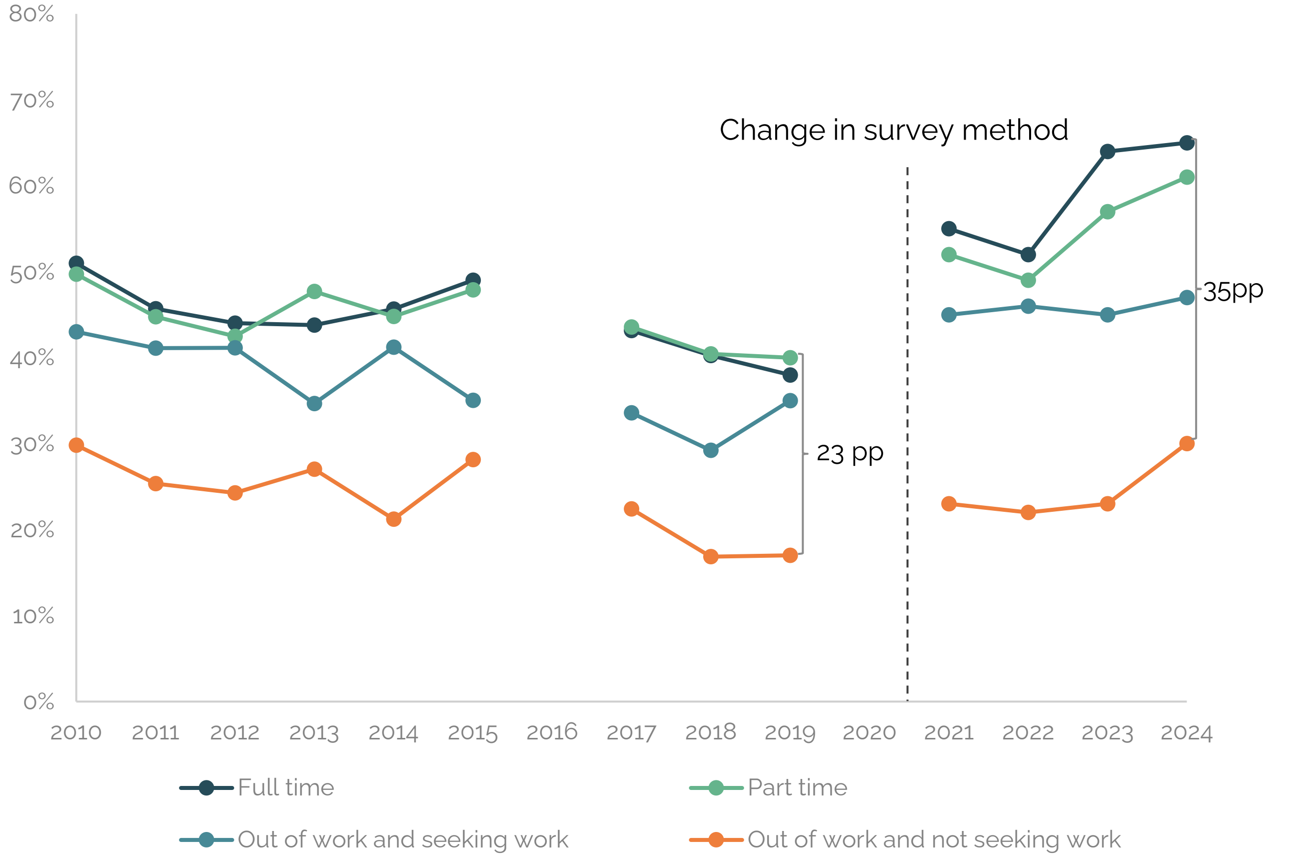
The gap in participation in learning between people in work and those who are out of work and not looking for work (excluding students, retired people and people who reported they are unable to work) has widened since the start of the pandemic (Figure 10). Prior to the pandemic it remained relatively stable, with a gap of 23 percentage points in 2019. However, this increased to 32 percentage points in 2021 and 41 percentage points in 2023. Although it has dropped to 35 percentage points in 2024, **the gap remains substantially wider than pre-pandemic levels**. This post-pandemic increase is driven by two factors:

- A rise in the participation rates of people who are in work and unemployed from 2021 onwards. While these have varied slightly between 2021 and 2024, they have remained consistently higher than the pre-pandemic rates.
- A relatively stable and consistently low participation rate for individuals who are out of work and not seeking work. The participation rate of people not in work and not looking for work has remained consistent with pre-pandemic levels (around 30%).

This shows that, **despite the recent increase in the overall participation rate, many people are still missing out on learning opportunities**.

Figure 10: People further from the labour market are less likely to participate in learning, and the gap has increased post- pandemic.

Participation rates by working status, 2010 and 2024



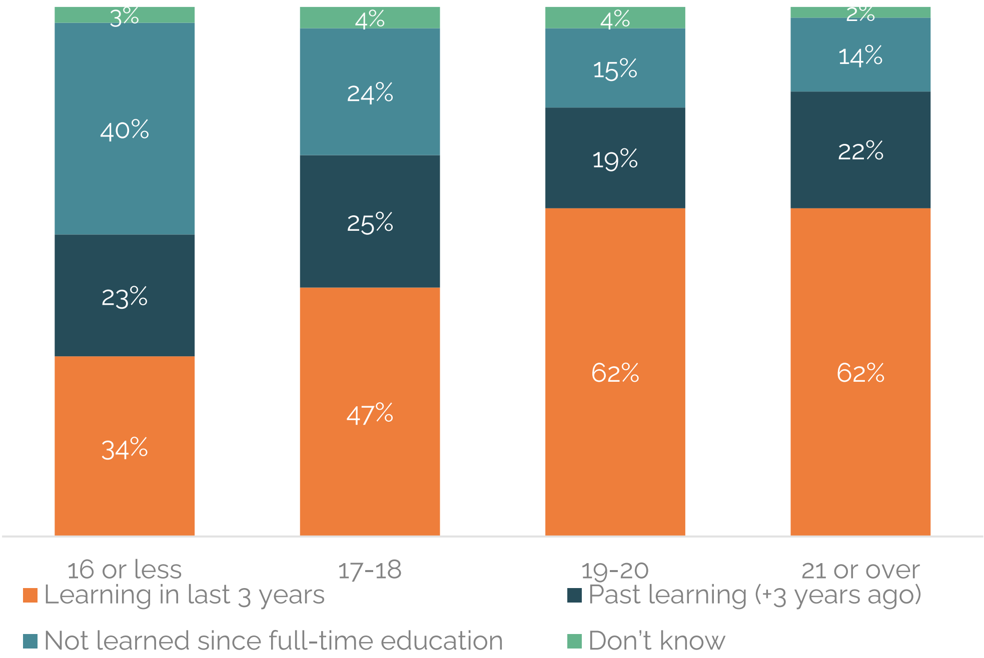
NOTE: not able to work/disabled was not included due to small sample sizes. Base = all respondents. Weighted base = 5,102, Full-time = 2129, Part-time = 704, Self-employed = 270, Unemployed and seeking work = 195, Unemployed and not seeking work = 263, Unable to work = 176, unweighted base = 5,103, Full-time = 2246, Part-time = 727, Self-employed = 280, Unemployed and seeking work = 205, Unemployed and not seeking work = 267, Unable to work = 183.

Educational attainment

As in previous years, **the longer individuals remain in full-time education the more likely they are to learn as an adult** (Figure 11). Just over one in three (34%) adults who say they left education aged 16 or under say they are currently learning or have done so in the last three years. This figure significantly increases for those who stayed in education until age 17-18 (47%), and further still for those who stayed in education until age 19 or older (62%). However, unlike previous years, there is no difference between those who left education aged 19-20 and those who left aged 21 or above.

Compared to the 2023 survey, the participation rate of those who left full-time education aged 19-20 has increased significantly (+ eight percentage points). While participation rates have also increased for those who left full-time education aged 17-18 (+ one percentage point) and 16 or under (+ three percentage points), the differences are not statistically significant. The participation rate for those who left full-time education aged 21 or over has remained the same (62%).

Figure 11: People who stayed in full-time education until 19 are significantly more likely to participate in learning than those who left by 18.
Participation in learning by age of completing full-time education



Base: all respondents. Weighted base = 5,102, 16 or less = 1474, 17-18 = 1117, 19-20 = 625, 21 or older = 1670. Unweighted base = 5,103, 16 or less = 1432, 17-18 = 1100, 19-20 = 644, 21 or older = 1711

Regression analysis shows that age of leaving full-time education is one of the strongest predictors of learning, when all other characteristics are taken into account. Likelihood of participation increases by 20% for each step up in age of leaving.

The 2023 report described trends in the gap between those who left education at 16 or under and 21 or above.[19] This gap narrowed between 2002 and 2006 (from a difference of 36 to 25 percentage points) and remained relatively stable until 2018. It started to widen from 2021 onwards. However, **it has narrowed in 2024, from 31 percentage points in 2023 to 28 percentage points.** This is driven by the increase in participation among those who left education aged 16 or under.

Ethnicity

In line with previous survey findings, respondents from ethnic minority groups (77%) are more likely to report that they are current or recent learners than those from white backgrounds (47%) (Figure 12). Just over four in five (82%) people from black backgrounds report having taken part in learning over the past three years, compared to

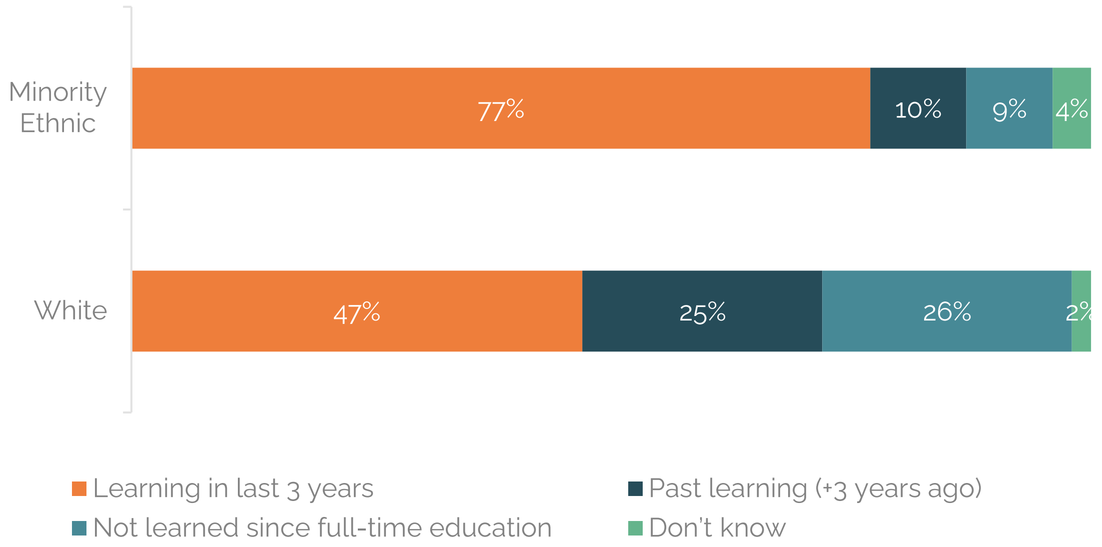
[19] Hall, S. Jones, E. Evans, S (2023) Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2023. (p.13).

75% from mixed ethnic backgrounds, 72% from Asian backgrounds, and 75% from other backgrounds. The participation rates for separate ethnic groups should be treated with caution, due to small sample sizes.

This relatively high participation in learning could be attributed to the fact that people from ethnic minority groups are on average younger than white people, which is associated with higher rates of participation.[20] In the survey sample, 79% of the individuals from an ethnic minority group were under the age of 50, compared to only 46% of white people.

Figure 12: People from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely to participate in learning than those from white backgrounds.

Participation in learning by ethnicity



Base: all respondents. Minority ethnic. Weighted = 814, unweighted base = 861. White. Weighted = 4,112, unweighted = 4,060. Note: While participate rates (learning in the last 3 years) are available for more granular analysis, the sample size for the subgroups for 'past learning' and not learned since full-time education were below 100 individuals so we have not reported on this statistic in this report.

Analysis of trends over time in participation by ethnic group has not been included due to the relatively small sample sizes for separate ethnic groups, leading to unreliability in year-to-year comparisons.

Gender

The 2024 survey shows that participation in learning does not vary significantly by gender, with a nearly equal proportion of men (53%) and women (51%) reporting having learned in the past three years. Regression analysis confirmed that gender is not a significant predictor of learning even when taking other characteristics into account.

[20] Census data on ethnicity (2021)

Future intentions to learn

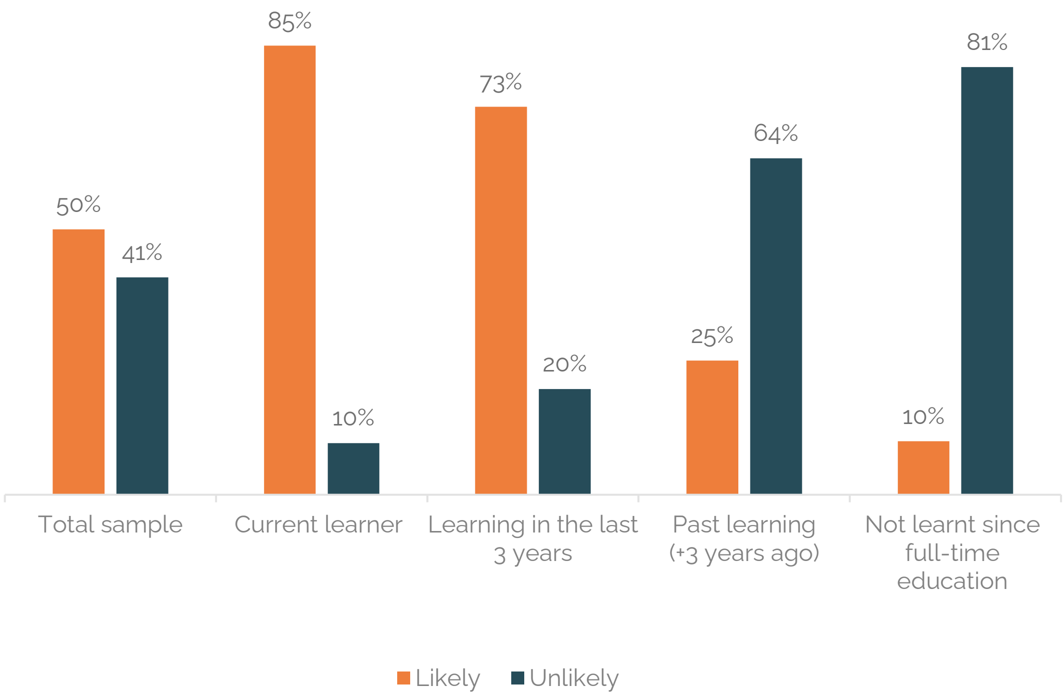
In addition to patterns and experiences of current/recent learning, the survey captures future intentions to learn. All respondents were asked about their likelihood of taking up learning in the next three years.

In 2024, 50% of respondents say they are likely to learn in the future and 41% say they are unlikely to learn in the future. Reflecting previous survey findings, **current or recent participation in learning is a key indicator of future intentions to learn** (Figure 13). In 2024, 85% of current learners and 73% of recent learners say they are likely to learn in the future, compared to only 25% of those who say they have not learned within the past three years and 10% of those who say they have not learned since full-time education.

These proportions are fairly aligned with previous surveys. In 2023, 84% of current learners and 71% of recent learners said they were likely to learn in the future, compared to 24% of people who had participated in learning more than three years ago and 11% of those who had not learnt since full-time education.

Figure 13: Current or recent learners are significantly more likely to report they will take up learning in the future than others.

Proportion of adults who report they are likely to take up any learning in the next three years.



Base: Total sample: all respondents. Weighted base = 5,102, unweighted base = 5,103. All recent or current learners. Weighted base = 2,641; unweighted base = 2,719. Past learning (+ 3 years ago). Weighted base =1,122, unweighted base = 1,112. Not learnt since full-time education. Weighted base = 1,187, unweighted base =1,187. Don't know. Weighted base = 152, unweighted base = 152.

Learning delivery

Key findings

Current or recent learners most commonly report learning independently on their own (34%); this has remained substantially higher than the proportion who learnt independently pre-pandemic (16% in 2019). This is followed by work-related learning, either on a training course at work (21%) or on the job (17%).

Almost two thirds (63%) of learners say that at least some of their main learning has been online. This indicates that the post-pandemic increase in online learning (compared to 47% in 2019) has been largely maintained. The rise in independent and online learning are the main components of the overall rise in participation in learning observed post-pandemic.

Some groups are more likely to learn online than others including people in higher social grades, those who stayed in full-time education longer and younger adults.

Consistent with trends in recent years, **learners most commonly report learning independently on their own (34%)** (Figure 14).This is followed by at work (21%), on the job (17%) and through a higher education institution (16%).

Figure 14: Adults are most likely to have done their learning independently on their own, followed by learning at work.
How have they done their main learning?

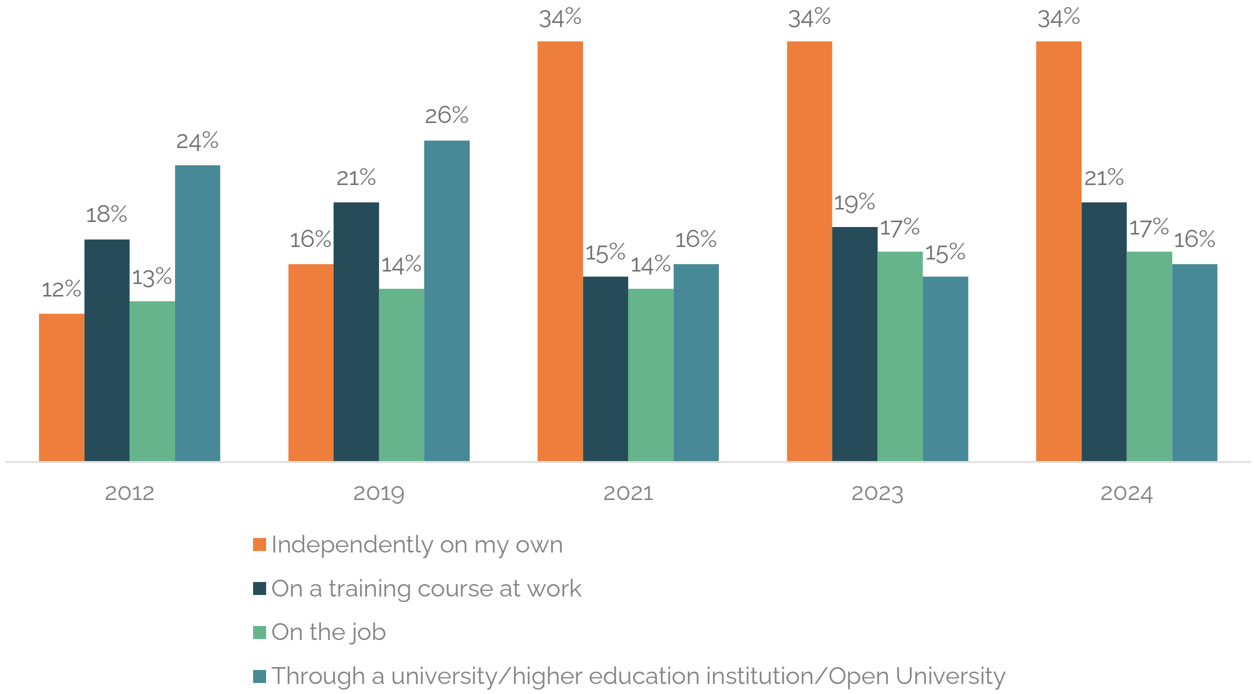
Base: all recent or current learners. Weighted base = 2,641; unweighted base = 2,719. Note: Respondents could give more than one answer. * such as a library, museum, place of worship, bookshop etc.

Compared to 2023, a similar proportion report learning independently on their own (34%) and on the job (17%), but the proportion of adults learning on a training course at work increased significantly by two percentage points (Figure 15). In contrast, the proportion who have learned through a higher education institution has decreased by one percentage point (although this is not statistically significantly different).

Looking at longer term trends for these responses shows that the rate of independent learning more than doubled post-pandemic from 16% in 2019 to 34% in 2021. It has since remained stable at this higher level. In contrast, the proportion of adults who report learning through a training course at work or on the job have remained fairly consistent over time. The proportion of adults who report learning through a university or higher education institution dropped significantly post-pandemic, from 26% in 2019 to 16% in 2021; it has since remained stable. However, this may be due to the change in survey methods.

Figure 15: The proportion of adults who report learning independently on their own has nearly tripled since 2012.

Location of learning over time for the top four most commonly reported response option in 2024



Base: all recent or current learners. Weighted base = 2,641; unweighted base = 2,719. Note: Respondents could give more than one answer

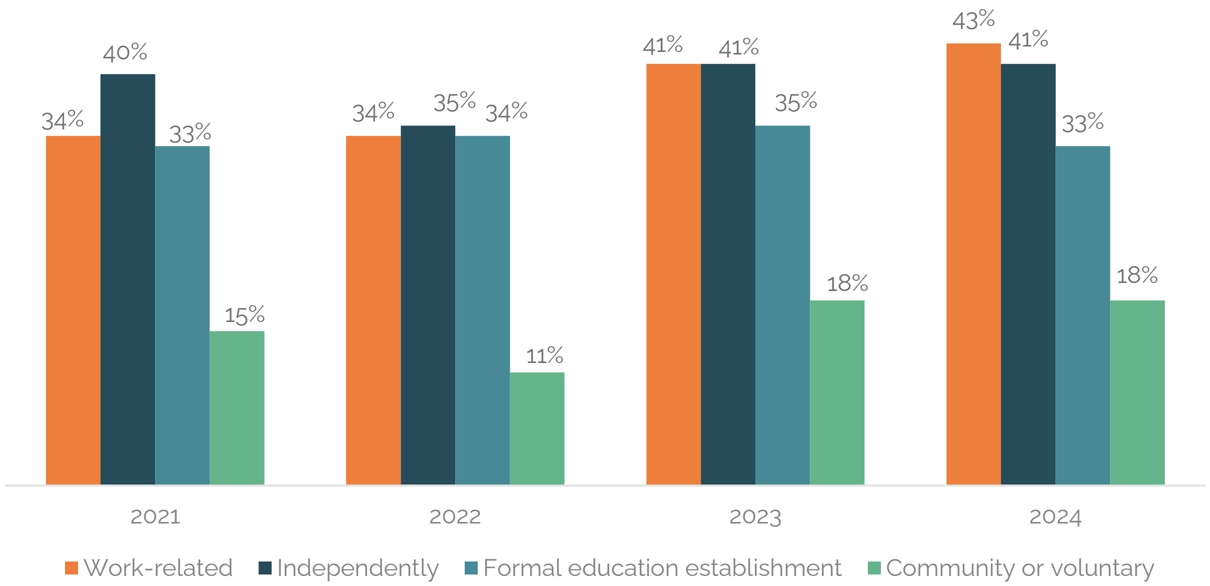
To compare with results from previous surveys, these response options have been grouped into four categories: Independently[21], Community or voluntary organisations[22], Work related[23] and Formal educational establishments[24].

In 2024, the proportions of adults who report learning independently (41%) or through community or voluntary organisations (18%) are the same as 2023, but remain higher than 2022 (35% and 11% in 2022 respectively) (Figure 16).

Although there has been a significant increase in the proportion of participants who report learning through work-related settings (43% in 2024, compared to 41% in 2023 and 34% in 2022), it is still lower than 2019 (45%). The proportion of adults who have learnt through formal education also remains substantially below the 2019 rate (33% compared to 43%) and has dropped two percentage points since 2023.

Figure 16: The proportions of people reporting learning independently or through community or voluntary organisations have increased since 2019.

How are they doing their main learning?

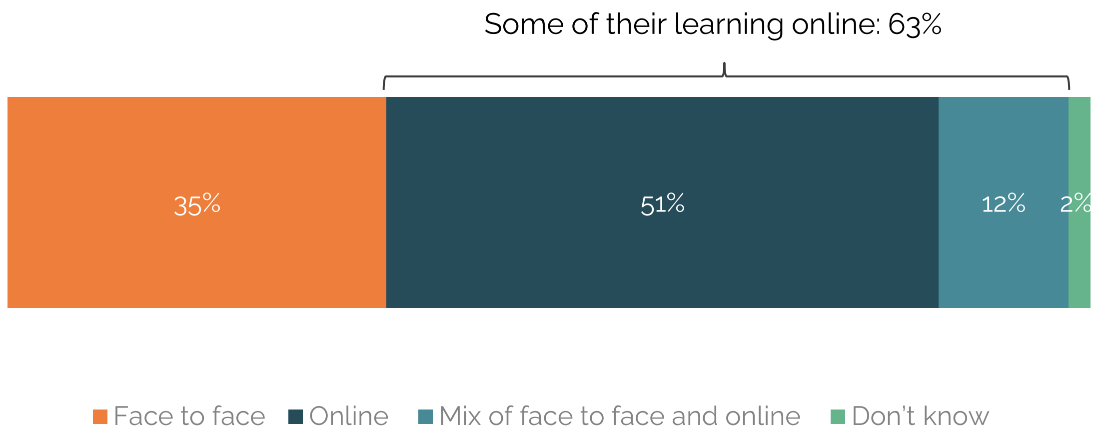


Base: all current or recent learners. Weighted base 2018 = 1,747; unweighted base 2018 = 1,702. Weighted base 2019 = 1,659; unweighted base 2019 = 1,515. Weighted base 2021 = 2,228; unweighted base 2021 = 2,322. Weighted base 2022 = 2,136; unweighted base 2022 = 2,170. Weighted base 2023 = 4,396; unweighted base 2023 = 4,778. Weighted base 2024 = 2,641; unweighted base 2024 = 2,719.

[21] This includes people who report learning 'Independently on my own', 'Independently with others'
[22] This includes people who report learning 'Through a voluntary organisation', 'Through local community facilities e.g. library, museum, place of worship, bookshop etc', 'Through a leisure or health club.'
[23] This includes all people who report learning 'On the job', 'On a training course at work', 'On an external training course arranged by my employer', 'On an apprenticeship'.
[24] This includes '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'

Almost two thirds (63%) of learners said that at least some of their main learning has been online (Figure 17). The 2023 report described the substantial shift towards online learning since the pandemic, from 47% in 2019 to 64% in 2023.[25] Although the proportion has dropped by one percentage point in 2024, the results show that this post-pandemic increase has been largely maintained.

Figure 17: Most adults have done some of their main learning online.
Proportion of recent or current learners who have learned online or face-to-face



Base: All recent or current learners. Weighted base = 2,641; unweighted base = 2,719.

The proportions of people reporting learning online and face to face vary by sociodemographic group. In line with previous surveys, women are significantly more likely to report learning online (55%) than men (47%). Furthermore, the proportions of people learning online increases with age, with only 21% of people aged 17-19 doing so, compared with 67% of those aged 75 plus. Similarly, people in the highest social grades (54% of people in AB and 55% of people in C1) are significantly more likely to report learning online than people in C2 (44%) and DE (48%). Adults who left full-time education aged 21 or over are also significantly more likely to report learning online (57%), compared to 50% of those who left full-time education aged 20 or below.

[25] Hall, S. Jones, E. Evans, S (2023) Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2023. (p.31).

Motivations to learn

Key findings

Learners are more likely to report that their *main* motivation to learn is work-related (56%) rather than for leisure or personal interest (43%). However, the 2024 survey maintains the substantial post-pandemic increase in learning for leisure or personal interest (it has more than doubled compared to 20% in 2019). Older people aged 65 or over are significantly more likely to report learning for leisure or personal interest than for work.

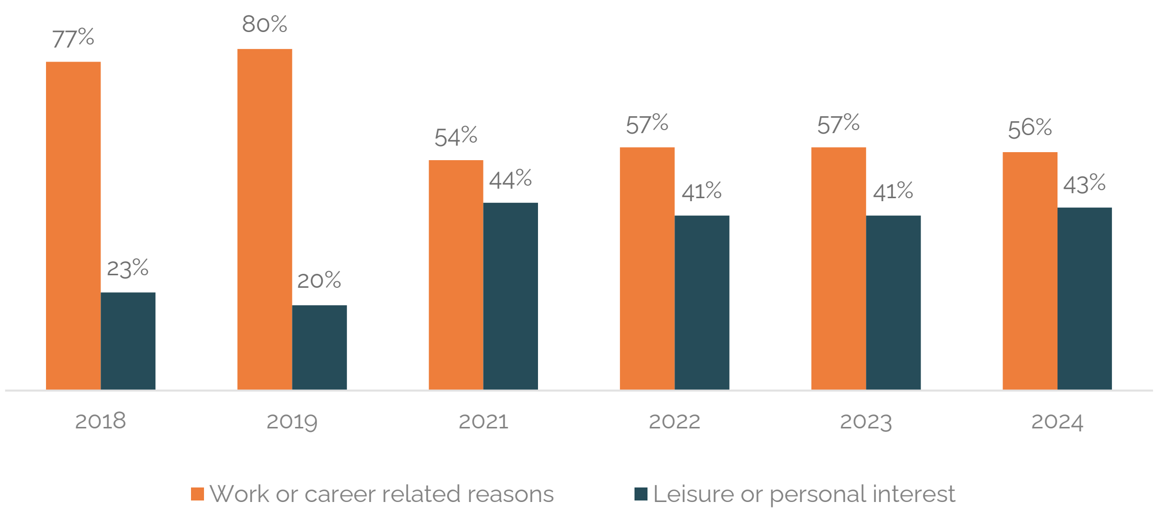
As in the 2023 survey, the most common motivations for learning in 2024 are to develop as a person (38%), because of an interest in the subject (37%) and for work-related development (30%).

The survey explores adults' motivations to learn. In line with previous surveys, **current and recent learners are significantly more likely to report that they started their *main* learning for work or career related reasons (56%) than for leisure or personal interest (43%)** (Figure 18). Learning for work or career related reasons has dropped by one percentage point since 2023, but the difference is not statistically significant.

As described in the 2023 report, there has been a substantial increase in adults learning for leisure or personal interest post-pandemic, with levels more than doubling between 2019 (20%) and 2021 (41%).[26] The 2024 survey shows a further two percentage point increase compared to 2023, but the difference is not statistically significant.

Figure 18: The proportion of adults learning for leisure or personal interest remains twice as high as it was before the pandemic.

Current and recent learners' motivation for learning



Base: All recent or current learners. Weighted base = 2,641; unweighted base = 2,719.

[26] Hall, S. Jones, E. Evans, S (2023) Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2023. (p.24)

Responses vary by groups:

- **The likelihood of reporting learning for leisure or personal interest increases with age**. People aged 65 or older are significantly more likely to report learning for leisure or personal interest than the sample average. Nearly three in four (72%) 65-74 years-olds and nine in ten (90%) people aged 75 or over report learning for leisure or personal interest. This compares to 37% of 19-24 years-olds, 38% of those aged 25-54 and 47% of those aged 55-64. Conversely, younger people are significantly more likely to report learning for work and/or career. Nearly two thirds (64%) of people aged 17-19, 60% of those aged 20-24 and 60% of those aged 25-49 say that they started their main learning for work and/or career reasons.
- **People from white backgrounds are more likely to learn for leisure or personal interest** (47%) than people from ethnic minority groups (31%). Conversely, people from ethnic minority groups are significantly more likely to report learning for their work/career (67%) than white people (52%). However, this is likely to be linked to the age-related findings as people from ethnic minority backgrounds in the UK are on average younger than white people.

All adults with current or recent experience of learning were asked to identify their broader motivations for starting their main learning. Respondents reported a range of motivations for taking up learning (Figure 19). It is therefore important to ensure that a wide range of learning opportunities are available; both work and non-work-related opportunities are vital to encourage adults to engage with learning.

Nearly two in five adults report learning to develop themselves as a person (38%) and because they are interested in the subject (37%). Three in ten (30%) report learning to help do their current job better or to improve their job skills. These figures are similar to the 2023 survey.

The broad motivations for learning are also related to the respondents' *main* motivation:

- People who say their main motivation for taking up learning is leisure/personal interest are significantly more likely to report learning to develop themselves (43%) or being interested in the subject (49%) than those who report learning for work-related reasons (respectively 35% and 28%).
- People who report learning for work-related reasons are significantly more likely to report having taken up learning to help with their current job (42%) than those who identify leisure/personal reasons as their main reason for taking up learning (13%).

Figure 19: Adults most commonly report personal development and interest in a subject as motivations to learn.

Motivation to learn

* Employer/professional/benefit requirement. Base: All recent or current learners. Weighted base = 2,641; unweighted base = 2,719.

In this report, we also explore how these reasons have changed over time. To enable comparisons with previous years, motivations were grouped into four categories: work-related; learning and knowledge; personal and social; and requirements.[27]

[27] **Work-related** included: To get a new or different job; To change the type of work I do/change career; To help me do my current job better/improve job skills; To get a promotion or better pay; To make my work more satisfying. **Learning and knowledge** included: To get a recognised qualification; To help me get onto a future course of learning; I am interested in the subject; To support my children's schooling. **Personal and social** included: To develop myself as a person; To improve my self-confidence; To improve my health and wellbeing; To meet people. **Requirements** included: Not really my choice - Employer/professional/benefit requirement.
The list of answer options for this question was reduced for the 2021 survey, and the same answer options were then used in 2022 and 2023. As such, while motivations have been categorised in a similar way, there are some slight differences to these groupings when compared to 2018 and 2019. A key difference is that in 2018 and 2019, there were two separate groups for 'health and wellbeing' and 'social and community' motivations. These have now been combined into one 'personal and social' category. The figures for 2018 and 2019 are the figures for 'health and wellbeing' and 'social and community' combined.

Adults' motivations for learning have remained fairly consistent since 2021, with adults most likely to report learning and knowledge (61%), followed by personal and social reasons (59%) and work-related reasons (57%) (Figure 20).[28]

There are no clear trends for learning and knowledge since 2021, although the proportion of learners reporting this as a motivation has increased by two percentage points since 2023 (a statistically significant increase). However, personal and social and work-related reasons have both significantly increased since 2021 (by six and five percentage points respectively), with personal and social two percentage points higher than 2023.

Similar to 2023, only one in ten (10%) of respondents say their learning was a requirement. This has remained fairly consistent since 2021.

Figure 20: Motivations for learning have remained consistent since 2021.
Grouped motivations for learning

Base: all current or recent learners. Weighted base 2018 = 1,747; unweighted base 2018 = 1,702. Weighted base 2019 = 1,659; unweighted base 2019 = 1,515. Weighted base = 2021 = 2,228; unweighted base 2021 = 2,322. Weighted base 2022 = 2,136; unweighted base 2022 = 2,170; Weighted base 2023 = 4,396; unweighted base 2023 = 4,778. Weighted base for 2024 = 2,641; unweighted base for 2024 = 2,719.

[28] Comparisons with pre-2021 data have not been included due to changes in answer categories between the 2019 and 2021 surveys.

Benefits of learning

Key findings

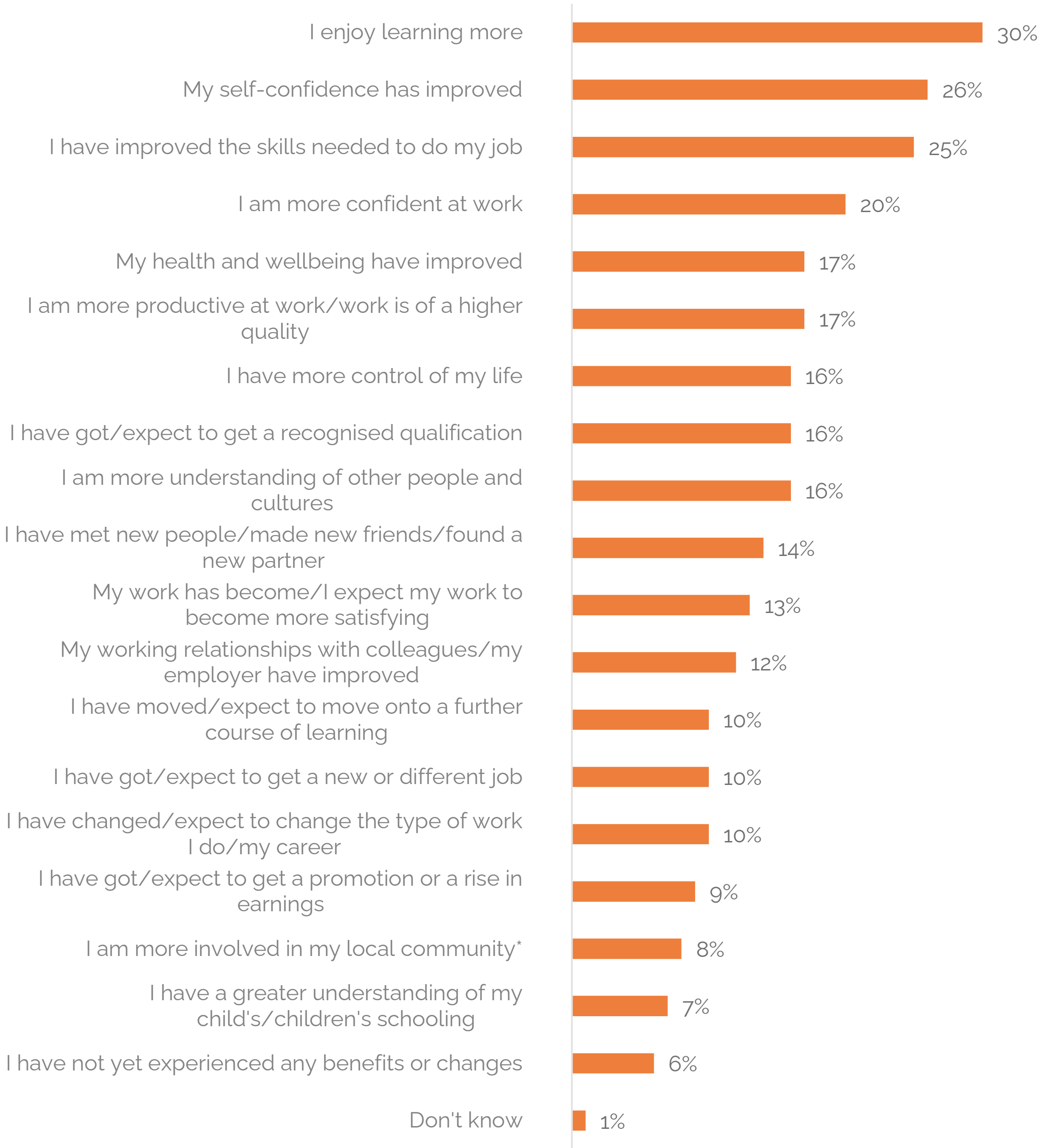
Consistent with the 2023 survey, the benefits most commonly identified by adults who have recently taken part in learning are increased enjoyment of learning (30%), increased self-confidence (26%) and improved skills needed to do their job (25%).

Nearly two thirds (65%) of learners report at least one work-related benefit in 2024. This maintains the gradual increase in reporting of work-related benefits since 2021. This is followed by benefits relating to health and wellbeing (47%), which has increased by seven percentage points since 2023.

Learning as an adult can have substantial benefits for individuals, including those related to health, employment, and social life and community. **Adults who have recently taken part in learning identified a range of benefits or changes as a result of it** (Figure 21). Three in ten (30%) adults report that they enjoy learning more, and one in four report that learning improved their self-confidence (26%) or their skills to do their jobs (25%). This is consistent with the 2023 survey.

Figure 21: Enjoying learning more, increased self-confidence and improved skills needed to do the job are the three most commonly cited benefits.

Changes or benefits experienced as a result of learning



*e.g. through attending events, volunteering. Base: All recent or current learners. Weighted base = 2,641; unweighted base = 2,719.

To enable comparisons with previous surveys, benefits were grouped into four categories: Work-related benefits, [29] Health and wellbeing[30], Learning and knowledge, [31] Social or community. [32]

Work-related benefits have consistently been the most commonly reported by learners (Figure 22). In 2024, 65% of learners reported at least one work-related benefit as a result of learning. This proportion has increased steadily over time, with a significant seven percentage point increase compared to 2021.[33] The proportion of adults reporting health and wellbeing benefits has also increased significantly, rising from 37% in 2021 to 42%.

The proportion of adults reporting benefits related to learning and knowledge (47%) has increased by one percentage point since 2023, but is broadly consistent with trends since 2021.

In 2024, around one in five adults (19%) reported social or community benefits as a result of learning. This proportion is consistent with previous years.

[29] This includes: I have got/expect to get a new or different job; I have changed/expect to change the type of work I do; I have got/expect to get a recognised qualification; I have got/expect to get a promotion or a rise in earnings; my work has become/I expect my work to become more satisfying; I am more confident at work; my working relationships with colleagues/my employer have improved; I have improved the skills needed to do my job; I am more productive at work/work is of a higher quality

[30] This includes: My self-confidence has improved; My health and wellbeing have improved; I have more control of my life.

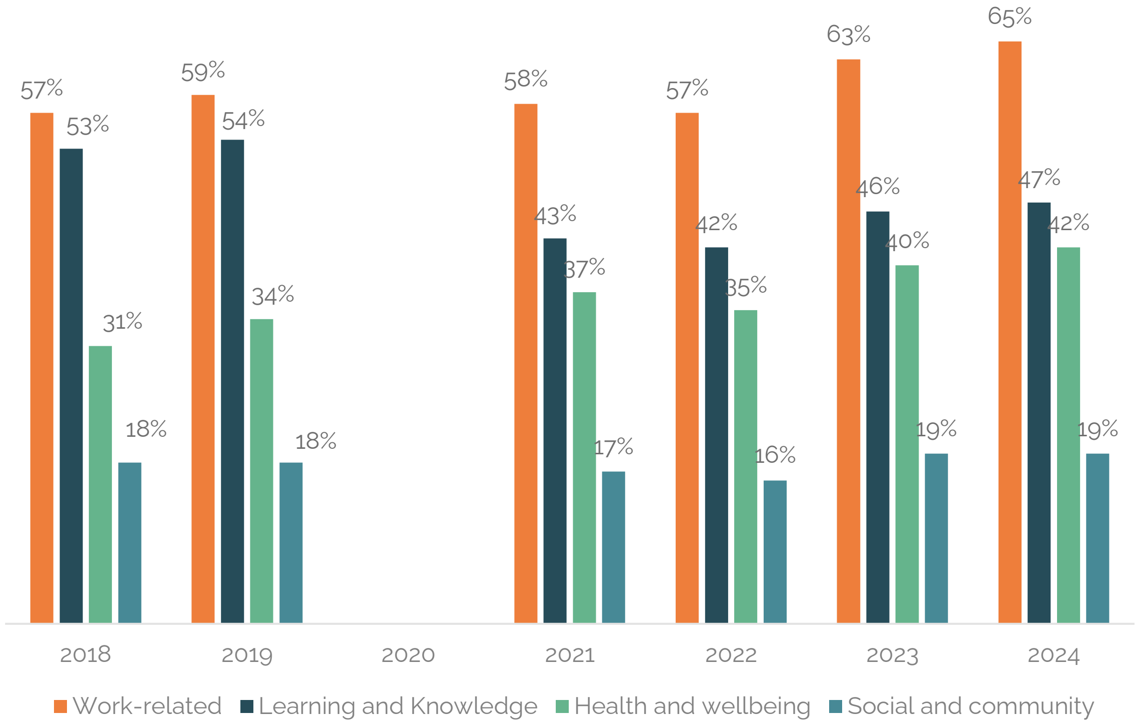
[31] This includes: I have moved/expect to move onto a further course of learning; I enjoy learning more; I have a greater understanding of my child's/children's schooling; I am more understanding of other people and cultures

[32] This includes: I have met new people/made new friends/found a new partner; I am more involved in my local community (e.g. through attending events, volunteering).

[33] Comparisons with pre-2021 data have not been included due to changes in answer categories between the 2019 and 2021 surveys.

Figure 22: The proportion of adults reporting work-related and health-related benefits as a result of learning has increased since 2021.

Grouped changed or benefits experienced as a result of learning



Base: All recent or current learners. Weighted base = 2,641; unweighted base = 2,719.

Barriers to learning

Key findings

Despite high levels of participation in learning, seven in ten current or recent learners report experiencing at least one challenge while learning. Some groups are more likely to report that they have experienced challenges, such as people from ethnic minority groups (76%) and people aged 19-24 (83%).

Current or recent learners are most likely to cite work or time pressure (23%) alongside the cost of learning (18%) as challenges. There has been a statistically significant increase since 2023 (two percentage points) in the proportion who report cost, continuing its substantial rise post-pandemic (from 8% in 2019). Cost/affordability is significantly more likely to be reported by learners in lower social grades and by adults aged up to 49.

Nearly one in seven adults (69%) who have not recently engaged with learning report at least one barrier preventing them from doing so. Younger people (19-24) are significantly more likely to report at least one barrier (83%) compared to the sample average. The most commonly reported barriers are feeling too old (30%) and cost (27%). Women (30%) and people in the DE social grade (31%) are significantly more likely to report cost/affordability than men (23%) or people in the AB (20%) grade.

Understanding the challenges learners experience and the barriers preventing adults from learning is critical to inform and remove obstacles in policy and practice design.

Challenges while learning

Despite high levels of participation in learning, seven in ten current or recent learners (70%) report that they have experienced at least one challenge while learning. This is two percentage points higher than the 2023 survey (68%) although the difference is not statistically significant. People from some sociodemographic groups are significantly more likely to report having experienced at least one challenge while learning, including:

- **Younger people**: 19-24 year olds are significantly more likely to identify at least one challenge (83%) than all other age groups. People aged 25-49 are also significantly more likely to do so than the sample average (77%). In comparison, just under one half of people aged 50-74 (49%) and 75 or older (46%) say they have experienced a challenge while learning.
- **People from minority ethnic backgrounds**: 76% identify at least one challenge compared to 68% of white people.[34]

[34] This could be related to the age of people from ethnic minority backgrounds who are younger on average than white people.

In line with previous years, learners in 2024 are most likely to cite work or time pressure (23%) alongside cost/affordability (18%) as challenges (Figure 23). These figures are broadly similar to 2023, with a statistically significant increase for cost/affordability (+ two percentage points).

The proportion of learners identifying cost/affordability has increased substantially post-pandemic (from 8% in 2019 to 17% in 2021, 13% in 2022 and 16% in 2023). The increase in 2024 continues this trend, suggesting continuing impact of financial pressures such as the rise in the cost of living.

Learners also identify a range of other challenges they have experienced while learning. These include dispositional challenges,[35] such as being put off by tests and exams or not feeling confident enough (both 13%), situational challenges,[36] such as transport (11%), or institutional challenges,[37] such as difficulties or issues with the course/learning or tutors (11%).

Figure 23: Learners have experienced a range of challenges while learning.
Challenges experienced while learning

Note: Other was removed because less than 0.5% of the adults reported other barriers. Base: All recent or current learners. Weighted base = 2,641; unweighted base = 2,719.

[35] Challenges that relate to the attitudes, perceptions and expectations of adults.
[36] Challenges that arise from an adult's personal and family situation.
[37] Challenges that arise from the unresponsiveness of educational institutions.

Some of the challenges experienced by learners vary significantly by sociodemographic group, including:

- **Social grade**. Cost/affordability is reported by more than one in five adults in DE (22%) and C2 (21%) compared to only 14% and 19% of adults in AB and C1 grades. Conversely, people in the AB social grade were significantly more likely to identify work and other time pressures (26%) compared to people in the DE grade.

- **Age.** Adults aged 19-49 were significantly more likely than older adults to report cost/affordability as a challenge while learning (23% of those aged 19-24 and 20% of 25-49 compared to 11% of 50-74 and 13% of 75 plus).

To enable comparisons with previous surveys, barriers were grouped into four categories: Situational,[38] Dispositional,[39] Institutional,[40] and No challenges encountered.

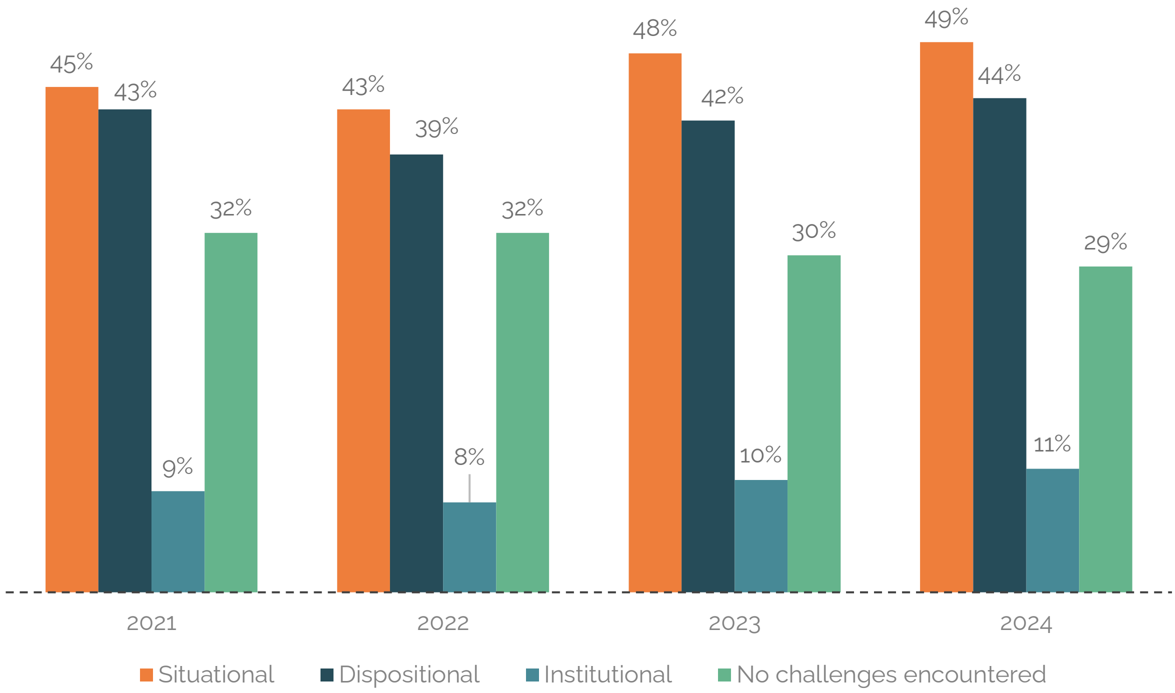
In 2024, learners are most likely to identify situational barriers to learning, with nearly one in two (49%) doing so. This proportion has increased slightly since 2021 (+ four percentage points). There has been a one percentage point increase in the past year, although this is not statistically significant.[41]

More than two fifths (44%) of learners reported experiencing dispositional challenges. Although there are no clear trends in the figures for this group since 2021, it has increased significantly since 2023 (+ two percentage points).

Learners are least likely to cite institutional challenges, with 11% of learners reporting difficulties with the course/learning or tutor. Figures for this group have remained fairly consistent since 2021, with an increase of only two percentage points to 2024. There has been a slight increase (+ one percentage point) in the last year, but this is not statistically significant.

[38] This includes the following challenges: 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.
[39] This includes the following challenges: 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.
[40] Institutional group only includes the challenge: difficulties with the course/learning or tutor.
[41] Comparisons with pre-2021 data have not been included due to changes in answer categories between the 2019 and 2021 surveys.

Figure 24: The proportion of adults reporting at least one situational challenge has increased gradually since 2021.
Challenges encountered while learning



Base: All recent or current learners. Weighted base = 2,641; unweighted base = 2,719.

Barriers to participate in learning

Seven in ten respondents (69%) who say that they have not engaged in learning in the last three years identified at least one barrier that has prevented them from doing so. This is consistent with the 2023 and 2022 surveys (both 70%) and 2021 (69%). Younger people are significantly more likely to identify at least one barrier: 83% of people aged 19-24 and 80% of 25-49 years old identified at least one barrier preventing them from learning, compared to 65% of people aged 50-74 and 55% of 75 plus.

People who have not taken up learning within the last three years most commonly site feeling too old (30%) and cost/affordability (27%) as barriers to learning (Figure 25). These are broadly consistent with the 2023 survey, with a statistically significant increase (+ two percentage points) for feeling too old and a slight decrease (- one percentage point) for cost/affordability, although this is not statistically significant.

Respondents reported a wide range of additional barriers that had prevented them from engaging in learning, including work and other time pressures (17%), an illness or disability, being put off by exams and not feeling confident enough (all 10%).

Around three in ten adults (30%) said that nothing is preventing them from learning or that they don't want to. This is consistent with findings from previous years (no change since 2023) and points to the importance of not only removing barriers to learning, but actively promoting the benefits of learning and engaging adults to encourage participation.[42] **The consistent proportion of adults indicating a lack of interest in learning demonstrates that a more concerted effort is needed to reach this group**.

Figure 25: Participants who have not engaged with learning identify a range of barriers preventing them from learning.

Barriers to engage with learning

Note: retired or will retire soon and other were not included in the chart as they were reported by less than 0.5% of the respondents. Base: all respondents who have not participated in learning in the previous three years. Weighted base = 2,309; unweighted base = 2,234.

However, barriers to learning are not the same for all the groups:

- **Women are significantly more likely to report cost/affordability than men** (30% compared to 23%).
- **Men are significantly more likely to report work and time pressure than women** (19% compared to 16%).

[42] Kantar Public and Learning and Work Institute (2018) Decisions of adult learners. Department for Education

- **People in the DE social grade are significantly more likely to report cost/affordability than people in AB grade** (31% and 20% respectively).
- **Adults who left full-time education early are significantly more likely to report that lack of interest or that nothing is preventing them from learning** (32% of those who left at 16 or younger compared to 25% of those who left aged 21 or older). Likewise, **older people are significantly more likely to report nothing is preventing them** (34% of those aged 50-74 and 44% of those aged 75 or older compared with 13% of the 17-19 year-olds and 19% of those aged 20-49).

To enable comparisons with previous surveys, barriers are grouped into three categories: Situational[43], Dispositional[44] and Nothing is preventing me or I don't want to.

In line with previous years, dispositional barriers (52%) are more commonly reported than situational barriers (42%) (Figure 26). This shows the need to effectively communicate the value of learning and to increase adults' confidence in learning.

Dispositional barriers have remained relatively stable since 2021, with a slight increase of one percentage point in the last year, although this isn't statistically significant.[45] In contrast, situational barriers have increased significantly since 2021 (+ seven percentage points), despite a statistically significant decrease in the last year (- four percentage points). This emphasises the importance of addressing different types of barriers: although adults without recent experience of learning are more likely to cite dispositional barriers, the proportion of adults citing situational barriers is growing.

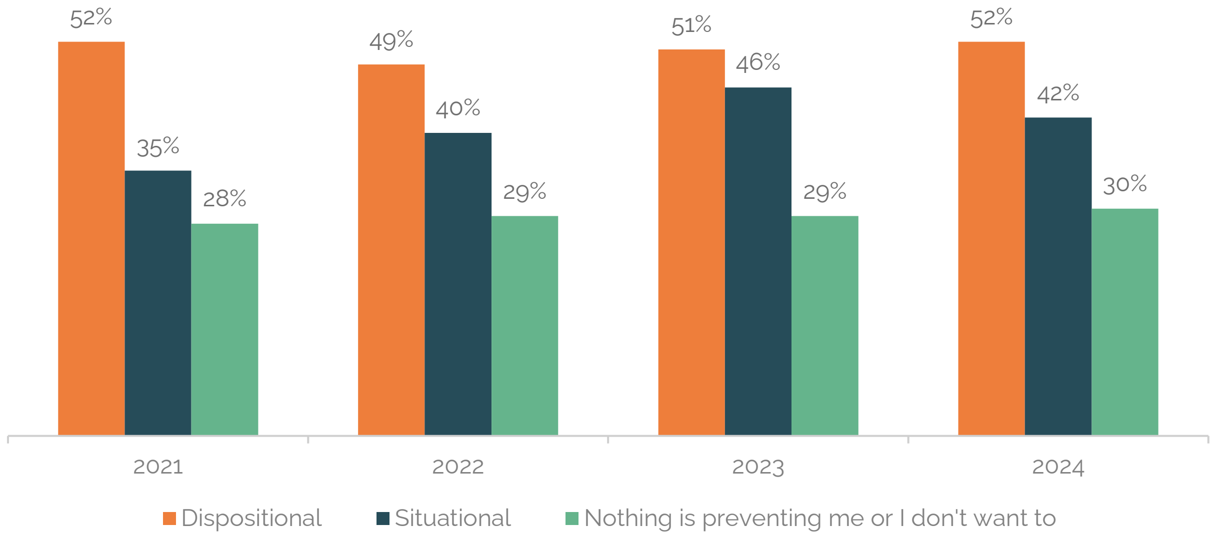
[43] This includes the following response options: Cost/money/can't afford it; Childcare arrangements or other caring responsibilities; Work/other time pressures; Lack of digital equipment/broadband for online learning; My home environment is not suitable for online learning; Transport/too far to travel.

[44] This includes the following response options: 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.

[45] Comparisons with pre-2021 data have not been included due to changes in answer categories between the 2019 and 2021 surveys.

Figure 26: People without recent experience of learning are most likely to identify dispositional barriers, but the proportion of people identifying situational barriers is growing.

Grouped barriers to learning



Base: all respondents who have not participated in learning in the previous three years. Weighted base = 2,309; unweighted base = 2,234.

Using technology to support learning

Key findings
New technologies are becoming more prominent in learning. In line with last year's survey, almost all current or recent learners (95%) report that they have used technology as part of their learning. Adults report using a range of technologies to support their learning, including online videos (43%), online assessments (36%), emails, search engine or video calls (all 30%).

Almost all learners (98%) who have used technology to support their learning identify at least one benefit of doing so. Nearly nine in ten learners (86%) identify benefits in which technology is an enabler; for example, allowing people to learn at home (42%), learn at their own level and pace (39%), learn at a convenient time (38%) and learn at a convenient location (35%).

Nearly four-fifths (79%) of the people who have not learned in the past three years or have not used technology to support their learning identify at least one benefit technology could bring. Most commonly, they identify benefits in which technology is an enabler, including being able to learn at home (48%), at their own level and pace (43%), and at a convenient time (40%).

Respondents are generally more confident using technology in their daily lives than for learning or at work: 97% are confident using at least one kind of technology in their daily lives, compared to 93% for learning and 85% at work. Older learners and those who left education aged 20 or below are less confident in using technology, as are people in the lowest (DE) social grade.

With technology becoming integral to how we learn, Learning and Work Institute is partnering with Ufi VocTech Trust to identify key trends in the development, deployment and use of technology in adult learning. As part of our partnership, we have included survey questions to explore how adults use technology for learning, how this can support them to learn, and the kinds of technology they are comfortable using in their learning and wider life.

Use of technology to learn

All adults who said they had recently done or are currently doing some learning were asked about technology they had used as part of their learning.

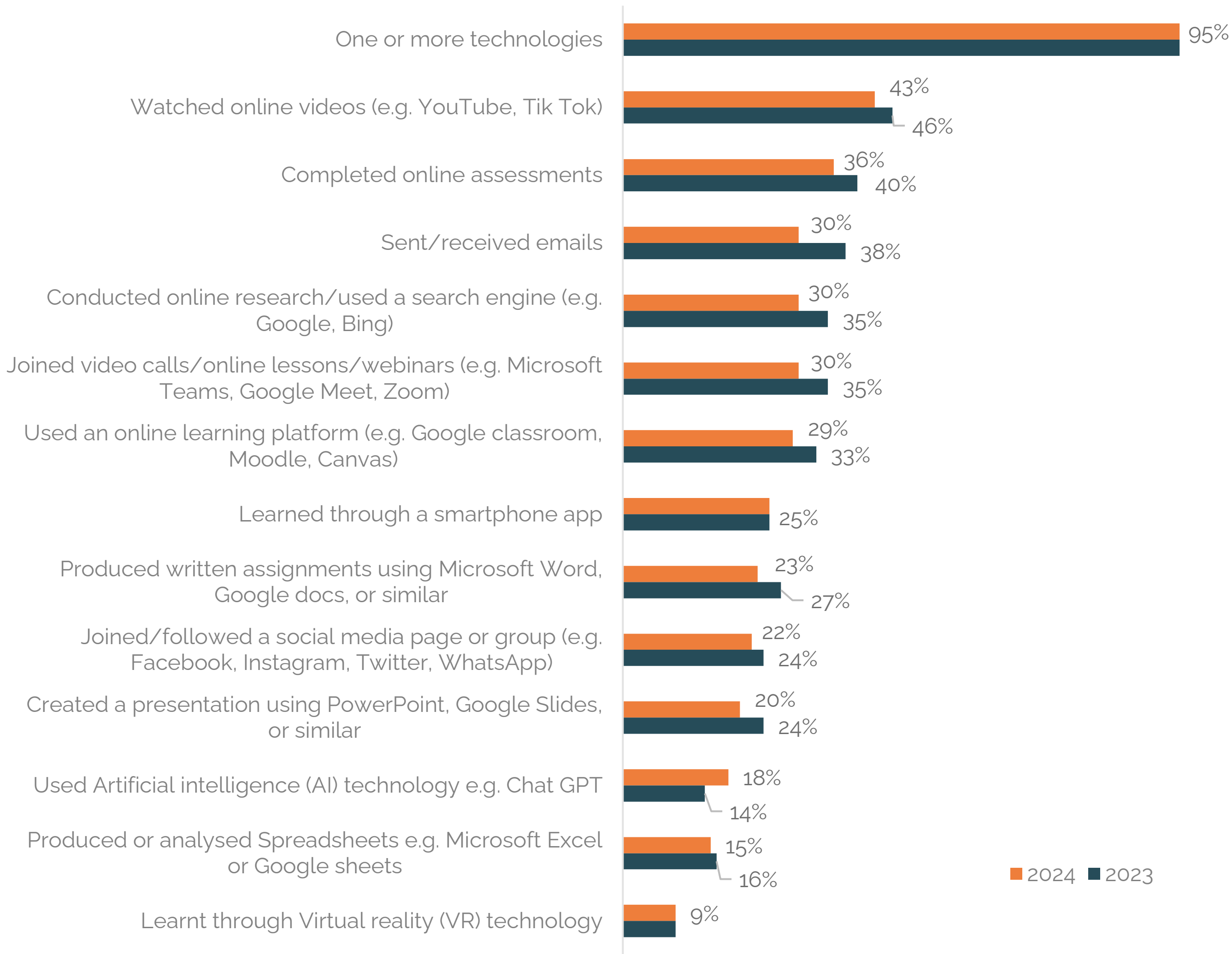
In line with last year's survey, **almost all learners (95%) have used technology as part of their learning** (Figure 26).

A range of technologies are used to support adult learning, including online videos (43%), online assessments (36%), emails, search engines or video calls (all 30%).

Although the proportions of adults reporting using most technologies has decreased since 2023, a significantly higher proportion of adults have reported using artificial intelligence (14% in 2023 and 18% in 2024). While only a minority of learners are using newer technologies (AI and virtual reality), these numbers are not insubstantial. It will be interesting to measure changes as these technologies become more established.

Figure 27: Most learners report using one or more technologies to support their learning.

Use of technology to learn



Base: all recent or current learners. Weighted = 2,641, unweighted = 2,719.

There are some variations across groups:

- **Younger respondents are significantly more likely to report that they have used one or more technologies than older respondents.** Nearly all 19-24 year olds (98%) and 25-49 year olds (97%) report using at least one technology compared to 89% of those aged 50-74 and 86% of those aged 75 or older.

- While people across all social grades are as likely to have used at least one technology, **the average number of technologies used by people in the AB grade is significantly higher than all the other grades**; on average, people in the AB grade use 3.8 types of technology compared to 3.3 for C1, 3.4 for C2 and 3.2 for DE.

- **People who left full-time education aged 21 or older are significantly more likely to report using at least one technology than people who left aged 16 or earlier**.

How technology supports learning

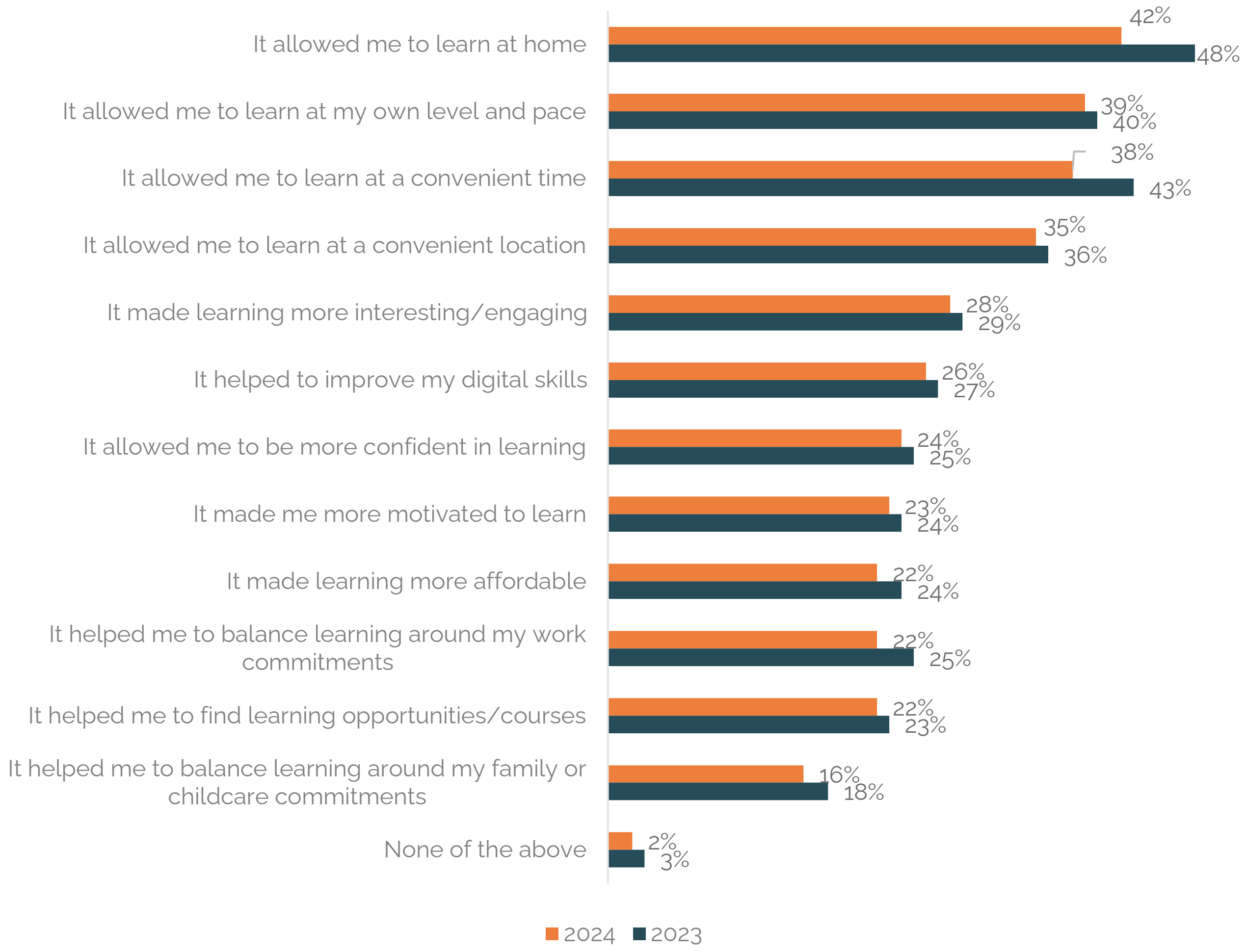
Learners who have used technology in their learning were asked how this technology helped to support their learning. **Almost all learners (98%) identified at least one benefit of using technology to support their learning** (Figure 26). The proportion of learners who identified at least one benefit has increased since last year by one percentage points, although the increase is not statistically significant. However, the proportion who identified each benefit has dropped since 2023.

Nearly nine in ten learners (86%) identify benefits in which technology is an enabler; for example, allowing people to learn at home (42%), learn at their own level and pace (39%), learn at a convenient time (38%) and learn at a convenient location (35%). These figures are significantly lower than 2023, with the exception of learning at their own level and pace.

Respondents also identified additional ways that technology had aided or enhanced their learning experience, including by making learning more interesting or engaging (28%) or helping them develop digital skills (26%). Both of these have dropped by one percentage point since 2023, although this not statistically significant.

Figure 28: Most learners identify at least one benefit of using technology to support learning.

How technology supports learning



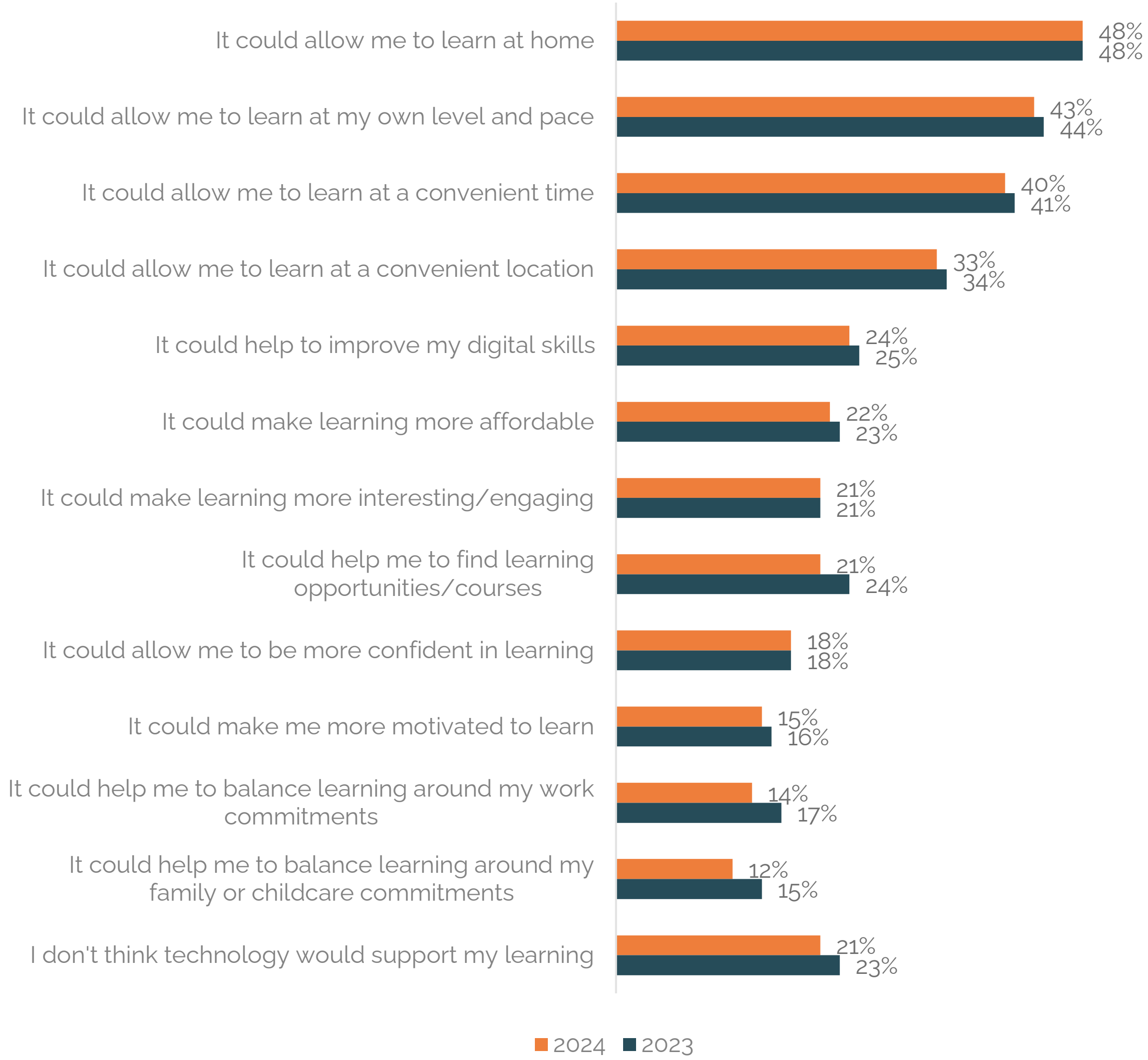
Base: All who have used technology to help support their learning. Weighted = 2,505, unweighted = 2,586.

Respondents who hadn't learned in the last three years, or who had not used technology to support their learning, were asked how they thought technology could support their learning if they decided to take up learning in the future. **Just under four in five (79%) identified at least one way in which learning could support their learning**. This proportion has increased significantly since last year's survey (77%).

Most commonly, they identified benefits in which technology is an enabler, including being able to learn at home (48%), at their own level and pace (43%), and at a convenient time (40%) or location (33%) (Figure 29). These figures are broadly consistent with last year's survey.

When compared to those who had already used technology to support their leaning, this group is less likely to recognise benefits related to enhancing the learning experience, such as making learning more interesting or engaging (21%) and increasing confidence (18%) or motivation (15%). This may indicate a need to promote the benefits of technology to support learning to those who are currently not engaging with learning or using technology as part of their learning.

Figure 29: Most adults who have not participated in learning in the last three years identify at least one benefit of using technology to support learning.
How technology could support learning



Base: All who haven't done any learning recently or haven't used technology to help support their learning. Weighted = 2,444, unweighted = 2,367.

The perceived benefits of using technology differ by groups.

- **Younger people are significantly more likely to report at least one benefit technology brings/could bring to learning than older respondents**, with 97% of those aged 17-19, 95% of 25-49, 82% of 50-74 and 73% of 75 years old or over reporting this. People aged 25-49 are also significantly more likely than other age groups to report that technology supports/could support learning by making it more affordable (25%, compared to 18% of 17-19 years old, 21% of 50-75 and 17% of 75 or older). Younger people (17-19 and 25-49) are significantly more likely to report benefits related to enhancing learning experiences than older age groups including: technology allow/could allow to be more confident (23% and 25% respectively), to make learning more interesting/engaging (27% and 28%) or more motivating (22% and 23%).

- **People from AB and C2 grades are significantly more likely to report at least one benefit (93% and 91%) than people from C1 (88%) and DE (81%).** People in the AB grade are significantly more likely to report most individual benefits than the other grades. However, people in C1 grade are significantly more likely to report that technology allow/could allow to learn at home.
- **People in work (full-time, part-time and self-employed) are significantly more likely to report at least one benefit** (94%, 92% and 94% respectively) than retired people (76%), people out of work and seeking employment (89%), people out of work and not seeking work (82%) and people unable to work (85%). However, people out of work are significantly more likely to report that technology allows/could allow them to learn at their own pace and level and that it allows/could allow them to learn at a convenient time.
- **People from ethnic minority groups are significantly more likely to report at least one benefit (97%) than people from white backgrounds (87%).**[46]

Confidence in using technology

All respondents were asked whether they would feel confident using various types of technology in three different scenarios: at home or in their everyday life; at work; and for learning (Table 1). The purpose of this question is to explore whether there are technologies that adults are already confident using in their everyday lives that can be tapped into in a learning setting to increase engagement.

The findings show that respondents are generally more confident in using technology in their daily lives than for learning or at work: 97% are confident using at least one kind of technology in their daily lives, compared to 93% for learning and 85% at work. The proportions are similar to last year's survey.

These differences are particularly notable for commonly used technologies. For example, nearly two thirds (65%) of respondents said they are confident in using their smartphone (internet access) at home, compared to only 48% at work and 52% for learning. These findings highlight the importance of providing structured guidance and support when technology is used in a learning or work context, even if this technology seems familiar.

Respondents are less confident overall in using technologies more specific to work and learning settings, such as word processing, video meetings, spreadsheets,

[46] This could relate to the fact that people from ethnic minority groups are on average younger than white people.

presentations, learning platforms, and databases. Fewer than one half of respondents are confident using any of these technologies in any settings.

Table 1: Respondents are generally more confident using technology in their daily lives than for learning or at work.
Confidence using technology in everyday life, learning and work

Type of technology	At home/in everyday life	At work	For learning
Confidence using one or more	97%	85%	93%
Smartphone (internet access)	65%	48%	52%
Email	63%	51%	50%
Laptop or desk top computer	59%	50%	55%
Online search engines e.g. Google, Bing	58%	45%	50%
Social media e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp	54%	35%	38%
Online videos e.g. YouTube, TikTok	51%	35%	46%
Tablet/iPad	47%	36%	41%
Word processing e.g. Microsoft Word or Google docs	41%	39%	39%
Video meetings e.g. Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, Zoom	35%	36%	35%
Spreadsheets e.g. Microsoft Excel or Google sheets	32%	34%	30%
Presentations e.g. PowerPoint or Google Slides	26%	31%	31%
Learning Platform e.g. Google classroom, Moodle, Canvas	23%	23%	28%
Database*	22%	27%	23%
Artificial intelligence (AI) technology e.g. Chat GPT	19%	16%	17%
Virtual reality (VR) technology	11%	9%	10%
None of these	3%	15%	7%

Base: all respondents. Weighted base = 5,102, unweighted base = 5,103

There are variations in confidence in using technology by demographic factors, which are more notable when it comes to using technology for work or learning:

- **Confidence declines with age** for both work and learning, although not for everyday life. When it comes to using technology at work, confidence starts to decline for those aged 50 or over: from 96-94% for 19-49 year olds to 77% for 50-74 year olds, and 55% for those aged 75 plus. A similar pattern can be observed for learning, although this is less pronounced: confidence sits between 96% of 19-49 year olds to 91% of 50-74 years old and 87% of those aged 75 plus.

- **Respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds are significantly more likely than those from white backgrounds to feel confident using technology at work** (97% compared to 83%) and for learning (98% compared to 93%)**.** The difference for using technology in everyday life is also statistically significant, although smaller (99% compared to 97%).[47]

- **People who left full-time education aged 21 or above and who are educated up to degree level are more likely than the sample average to be confident using technology in their everyday lives (both 97%), for work (both 92%) and for learning (both 96%).**

- **Adults in the DE grade are significantly less likely than those is all other social grades to be confident using technology in their everyday lives (94%), at work (74%) and for learning (87%).**

[47] This could relate to the fact that people from ethnic minority groups are on average younger than white people.

Annex: Methodology

The Adult Participation in Learning Survey deliberately adopts a broad definition of learning, including a wide range of formal, non-formal and informal learning, far beyond the limits of publicly offered educational opportunities for adults. Each year, a representative sample of approximately 5,000 adults aged 17 and over across the UK are provided with the following definition of learning and asked when they last took part in any, as well as how likely they are to take part in learning during the next three years:

> 'Learning can mean practising, studying, or reading about something. It can also mean being taught, instructed or coached. This is so you can develop skills, knowledge, abilities or understanding of something. Learning can also be called education or training. You can do it regularly (each day or month) or you can do it for a short period of time. It can be full-time or part-time, done at home, at work, or in another place like 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.'

The 2024 Adult Participation in Learning Survey included 5,103 adults aged 17 and over across the UK. This sample has been weighted (generating an effective sample of 5,102) to provide a UK representative dataset. In addition to overall participation, the 2024 survey explores who participates in learning; motivations and barriers; how learning is undertaken; benefits experienced as a result of learning; use of technology to support learning; and voting behaviours and political knowledge.

In 2024, the survey was part-funded by Ufi VocTech Trust. Fieldwork was conducted by Kantar via their UK online omnibus survey, running from 1 to 15 August 2024.

Fieldwork for the survey was first conducted online in 2021. Prior to this, fieldwork was conducted via a face-to-face omnibus, however, a shift in how people are communicating, with more households online than ever before, coupled with the Coronavirus pandemic creating challenges for face-to-face fieldwork, has led to market research agencies shifting to an online approach. This raises some potential issues regarding representation of older, disabled and digitally excluded adults, who we know from previous surveys are less likely to participate in learning. Weighting has been applied to mitigate this impact and to ensure a representative sample; however, year on year comparisons with surveys pre-2021 should be treated with some caution.

Analysis

Analysis of the survey results predominately involved a mixture of descriptive statistics and the significance testing of demographic and key variable breakdowns. It should be noted that due to space limitations not all results have been included in this report. It should also be noted that all figures, breakdowns and analyses throughout the report are based on weighted data. For further analysis and access to the dataset, please email: corin.egglestone@learningandwork.org.uk.

Measuring participation

The survey uses a deliberately broad definition of learning to capture as wide an array of learners as possible, which goes beyond participation in publicly funded provision. The interpretation of the definition is subjective and some individuals with similar experiences may classify themselves differently. An alternative approach was adopted by the National Adult Learner Survey (NALS),[48] which uses a different definition and a series of questions to classify respondents into formal learners, non-formal learners, informal learners and non-learners. Participation rates measured through NALS are higher than those captured by the Adult Participation in Learning Survey.

While respondents are given a definition of learning, the self-reported nature of the survey relies on individuals to make a judgement about how it relates to them. This can be influenced by their existing understanding of what learning is, which can relate to a range of factors such as the formality of the learning, duration and/or method of delivery. Respondents may therefore interpret questions differently, and they may provide incorrect information (either deliberately or through misremembering details). However, this risk is mitigated by the large sample size and by the general consistency of responses over the surveys' 29-year history. An alternative approach would be through use of nationally collected statistics on adult education such as in DfE and ESFA statistical releases.[49] However, such statistics are limited to publicly funded provision and are unable to identify qualitative issues such as barriers to learning or motivations.

Regression analysis

Binary logistic regression analyses were conducted to identify which demographic variables are significant predictors of certain binary outcomes (i.e., participation status and likelihood to participate in future learning). Predictor variables are variables found to influence an outcome once other variables have been controlled for. Therefore, a regression analysis helps to identify whether or not differences between demographic groups can be explained by differences in underlying variables. For the regression analyses described in this report, the variables tested were age, gender, social class, working status, age at leaving full-time education, region, ethnicity and marital status. A regression analysis produces a model of predictor variables for a particular outcome. The strength of the model is indicated by the proportion of the variance in answers that the model predicts. The level of model fits is given by the Nagelkerke R squared statistic, which shows that the chosen explanatory variables account for between 22.1% and 29.4% of the variation in participation status.

[48] Department for Business Innovation & Skills (2012) National Adult Learner Survey 2010
[49] Department for Education (2016) Statistics: further education and skills

In 2024 additional interaction analyses were run. These analyses examine the interaction between different combinations of variables, such as young people in the DE social grade compared to older people in the DE social grade. This enables analysis of the variable impact of predictor variables on specific sub-groups.

Definitions

The following definitions are used throughout the report:

Current learners: respondents who are currently learning.

Recent learners: respondents who are not currently learning, but have done so within the three years prior to interview.

Participation in learning: respondents who are currently learning or who have done so in the three years prior to interview (current and recent learners).

Participation rate: the proportion of respondents who are current or recent learners.

Main learning: the primary item of learning in which respondents are engaged, or have been within the previous three years, as self-defined by respondents.

Social grade: is based on the occupation of the Chief Income Earner in the household. If they have retired, they are asked to provide their previous occupation.

Regions: regional analysis is based on the highest tier of sub-national division in England. There are nine English regions in England.