LEARNING AND WORK INSTITUTE

The workforce learning slowdown?

Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2025

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Learning and Work Institute
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Foreword

After two years of record highs, this year's Adult Participation in Learning Survey shows a significant drop in the proportion of adults saying they have taken part in learning over the last three years. It is too early to tell whether this is a blip, if the last two years were outliers, or this is the start of a trend. And participation remains well above the pre-pandemic lows of the late 2010s.

But the big picture is clear. Learning brings a wide range of benefits to careers, confidence, wellbeing, interest in future learning and much more. Almost all learners say they experienced one or more benefits. Yet participation in learning is unequal, with stark inequalities by age, class and previous education. Those who might benefit most from learning are too often most likely to miss out.

The survey also shines a light on the changing nature of learning. It adopts a broad definition of learning that goes well beyond taking a course or qualification. This year's survey confirms the trend of recent years; there has been a step change in independent learning often using digital tools.

This is a good thing. People are finding new ways to learn what they want, when they want. But if they want to take that on to the next level, which can be vital for advancing their career, doors of opportunity need to be open. Employers and the Government are investing less in lifelong learning, with the cuts disproportionately affecting those on the lowest income levels and with the lowest qualification levels.

That needs to change. Our survey shows an innate interest in learning, new ways to access learning, and myriad benefits from doing so. The next step is to make sure that adults have access to the stepping stones they need to get to where they want, rather than finding they have nowhere to go for more formal or further learning provision.

Our survey has been running for almost 30 years, and you can see the picture it paints over time on our website. We hope it is a useful tool for policymakers, commissioners, providers, employers and others. All of these actors have a key role in getting the nation learning, the focus of L&W's new campaign.

Stephen Evans, Chief Executive
Learning and Work Institute

Executive summary

Adult participation in learning has fallen over the last 12 months, though remains above pandemic levels. Our headline rate of participation has dropped by 10 percentage points, with 42% adults reporting taking part in learning in the last three years, down from 52% in 2024. However, this remains above the record low of 33% recorded in 2019. Just one in five adults (21%) are currently engaged in learning of any kind, down from 30% in 2024.

Fewer people in work taking part in learning has contributed significantly to the overall fall in participation. Employed people are engaging in learning of all types in significantly reduced numbers. Only one in five (21%) people in work are currently learning at work, down from 28% in 2024. There are also major inequalities in who accesses training from their employer, with higher earners significantly more likely to benefit. Workers paid over £52,200 are almost twice as likely to report learning at work in the last three years compared to those earning less than £26,099 (33% vs 17%).

Too many people are being locked out of learning. Age, class, income, and when people left full time education are all key predictors of participation in learning. Likelihood of learning falls 4% for every year of life. One in two people (49%) in the highest social grade say they have taken part in learning in the last three years compared to just to one in three people (33%) in the lowest social grade. You're 20% more likely to learn as an adult if you left school aged 18 compared to age 16, and half of those who left full time education age 16 or below haven't engaged in learning since. These inequalities are at risk of becoming self-perpetuating, with participation in learning increasing your likelihood of learning again in the future. Currently learners are five times more likely to say they expect to learn in the next three years compared to people who say they haven't engaged in learning since leaving school (86% vs 16%).

Feeling too old, cost, and not wanting to are the three standout barriers people report preventing them from participating in learning. Convincing people without recent experience of learning of the benefits remains a key challenge in boosting overall levels of participation, with 29% of those not engaging in learning in the last three years reporting not wanting to. A quarter (24%) of adults now report cost as a barrier. This has more than trebled from 8% in 2019, reflecting the constraints on people's finances and the rising cost of living.

However, when adults do learn, they thrive. Nearly all (94%) of those engaging in learning identify at least one benefit, with self-confidence, personal development, the love of learning, and jobs and skills gains the most commonly reported. People who learn for work often experience personal benefits, and those who learn for personal and leisure reasons often report benefits for their work.

Digital technologies enable and enrich learning, so we need to boost people's confidence to use them. Nearly all learners report benefits in using them (98%). Two in five learners report that technology had allowed them to learn at home (43%), and at a convenient time (39%). This is interesting in the context of 'time pressure' being the most common challenge reported by learners. However, many people lack confidence to use specific technologies to aid learning, with only one third of people (34%) report feeling confident using video meetings in learning. Digital inclusion and capability must therefore be central to the mission of learning providers, giving more people the chance to benefit from technologies enabling power.

Introduction

Learning and Work Institute (L&W) has been publishing the Adult Participation in Learning Survey for nearly 30 years. It is the longest running study of its kind, and the definitive annual report on who's learning (or not), how and why.

Each year, a representative sample of around 5,000 people aged 17 and over from every nation and region of the UK are surveyed to produce the findings. The survey adopts a purposely broad definition of learning, extending beyond government and employer funded education and training opportunities for adults:

> '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.'

Similarly to previous years, the 2025 survey explores who participates in learning, why and where, as well as benefits, barriers and challenges, and how these intersect with social class, ethnicity, employment status, age, prior learning, and income. Thanks to support from UfI VocTech Trust, the report also explores how people are using various technologies as part of their learning, how these technologies are enabling or enhancing their learning, and levels of confidence people have in using them.

Fieldwork was conducted in June and July 2025 by Kantar, a market research company, via their UK online omnibus survey. The sample has been weighted to provide a dataset representative of the UK adult population. Further information about the methodology can be found in the Annex. To find out about the survey series and explore trend data through our interactive charts, visit www.learningandwork.org.uk.

The findings grant policymakers, commissioners, employers, and learning providers with an opportunity to make informed decisions, grasp the benefits of adult learning, and collectively move the UK towards being an economy and society where every adult has the opportunity to learn throughout life. This is the ambition of L&W's Get the Nation Learning campaign.

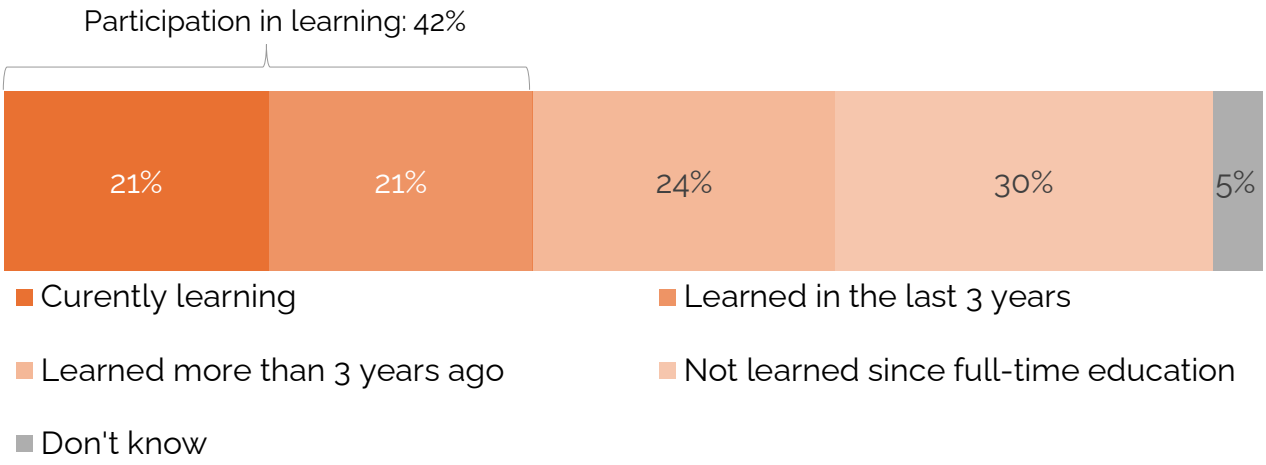
Chapter 1: Who is learning, and who isn't?

The gains of recent years have been erased

Levels of learning are backsliding

One in five adults in the UK report that they are currently learning (21%) (Figure 1), down from 30% last year. In just 12 months, this is a sharp contraction. Future surveys will reveal if this is the start of a downward trend, a blip, or an end to rising participation seen since the pandemic.

Figure 1: One in five adults report they are currently learning.[1]
Adult participation in learning, 2025

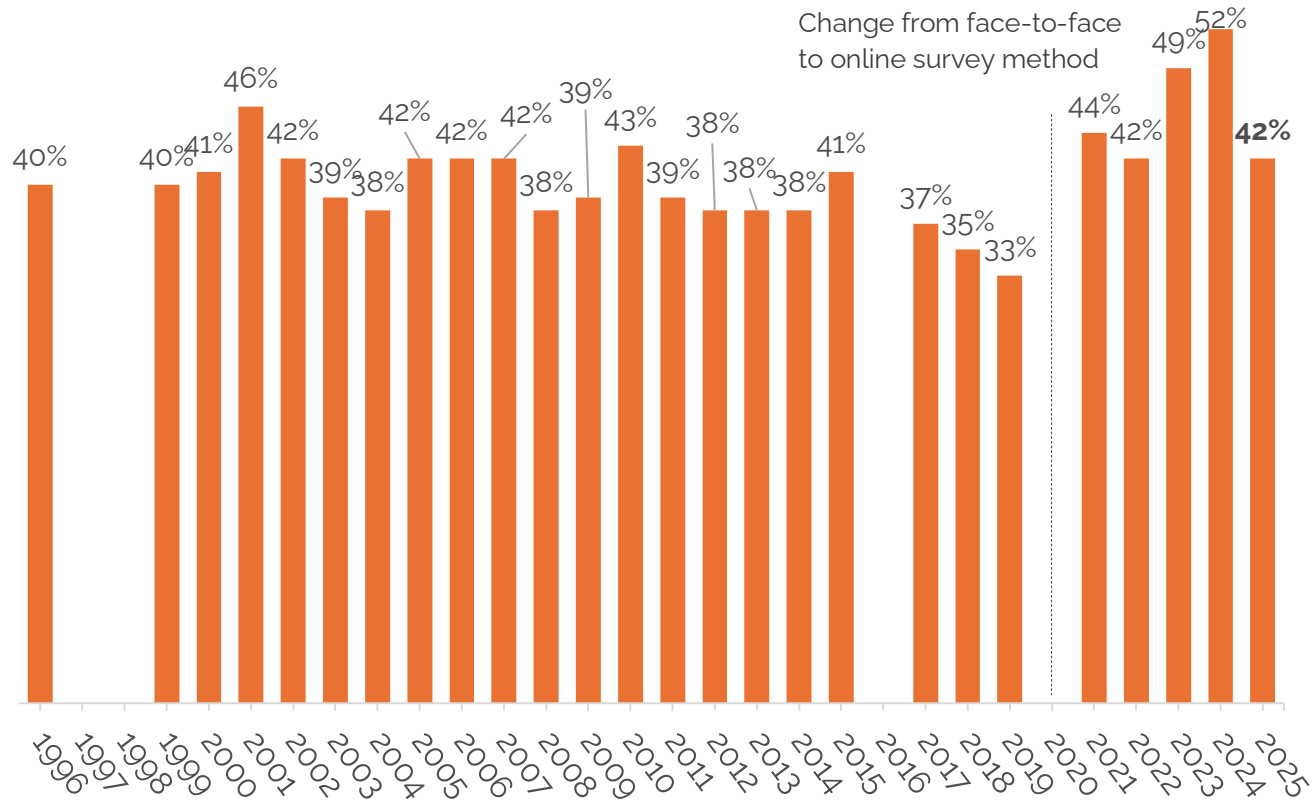


Base: all adults aged 17 over. Weighted = 5,102, unweighted = 5,103.

Indeed, in 2024, participation in learning reached a high-water mark, with 52% of adults reporting that they were currently learning or had done so in the last three years. This headline participation rate has fallen to 42% in 2025, wiping out increases seen over the last two years (Figure 2). This returns us to rates observed in 2021 (44%) and 2022 (42%), while remaining above pre-pandemic levels.

[1] Please note that the term 'not learned since full time education' in this report refers to respondents who do not report undertaking any learning since leaving full-time education. In the survey, this option is given as: 'I have not studied/learnt since I left full time education'. The shorthand is used for the purpose of chart formatting.

Figure 2: Recent participation in learning remains above pre-pandemic levels.
Adults' participation in learning in the last three years over time, 1996–2025



Base: all adults aged 17 over. Weighted = 5,186, unweighted = 5,186.

Rising participation in learning post pandemic was observed in the UK and across many European countries.[2] In the UK, previous surveys have shown that this was largely driven by increasing numbers of people learning for leisure and personal development as well as independently.[3] However, as this chapter will explain, declining participation in 2025 appears to largely relate to people in employment and is spread across all types of learning.

Employed people are learning in greatly reduced numbers

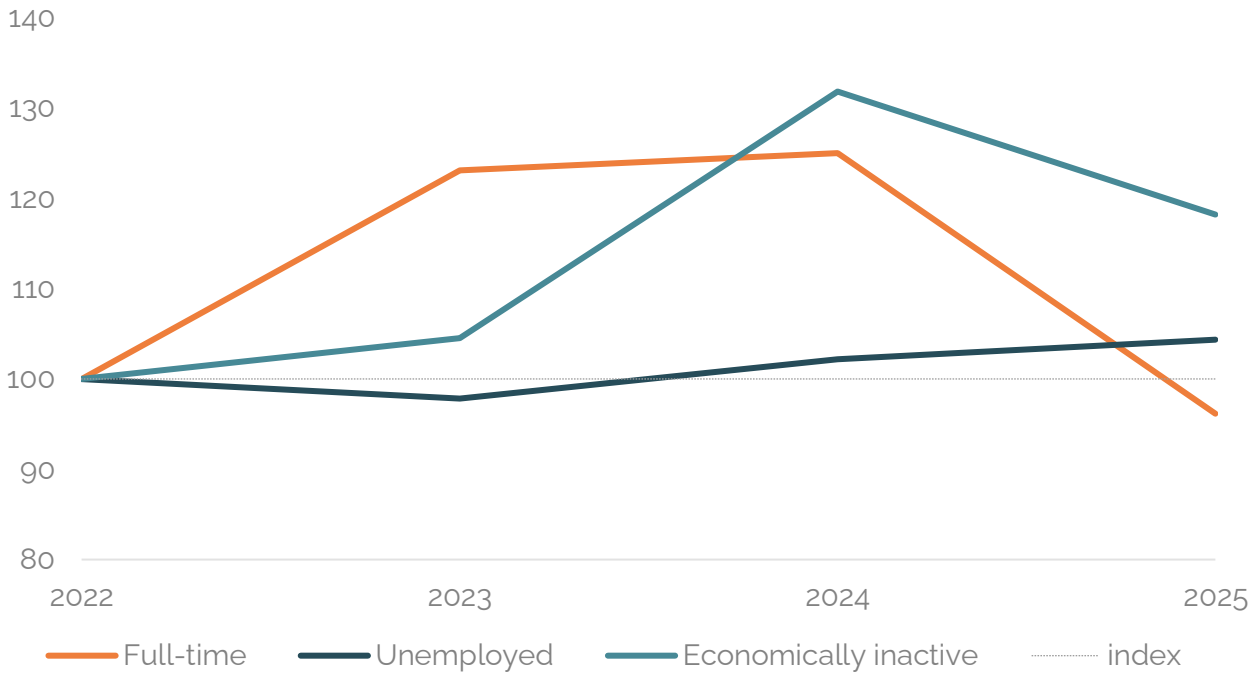
Learning participation rates for people in work (employed full-time or part-time) have significantly decreased since 2024. In 2024, 65% of those employed full-time and 61% of those employed part-time reported participating in learning in the last three years. This has fallen 50% and 48% respectively in 2025, broadly back to 2022 levels.

Figure 4 shows that the participation rates for people employed full-time and part-time are now below the rates in 2022 (50% vs 55% for full-time and 48% vs 49% for part-time). The participation rate for economically inactive people declined from 30% in 2024 to 26%

[2] Nermond, O. Egglestone, C. Manetti, L. Jones, E. (2024) Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2024. Learning and Work Institute.
[3] Hall, S. Jones, E. Evans, S. (2023) Adult Participation in Learning 2023. Learning and Work Institute

in 2025, though this decrease is not statistically significant. The rate among unemployed people increased by one percentage points since 2024 to reach 48%, but this change is not statistically significant.[4]

Figure 3: Participation by people employed full time is now below the 2022 level. Rates of adult participation in learning in the last three years by employment status, indexed to 2022 rates



Base: 2025. Full-time: Weighted = 2,025, unweighted = 2,126. Unemployed: Weighted = 298, unweighted = 316. Economically inactive (excluding students and retired people): Weighted = 237, unweighted = 250.

Despite this large decrease, people in work remain significantly more likely to report having participated in learning than those outside of work and not seeking work. Among economically inactive people (excluding students and retired people), 26% report taking part in learning in the last three years (**Figure** 4). This compares to 17% of retired people. However, people out of work and seeking work are no less likely to have taken part in learning in the last three years than those in employment. Roughly half (48%) of unemployed people have participated in learning in the last three years. The same is true for those employed full-time and part-time.

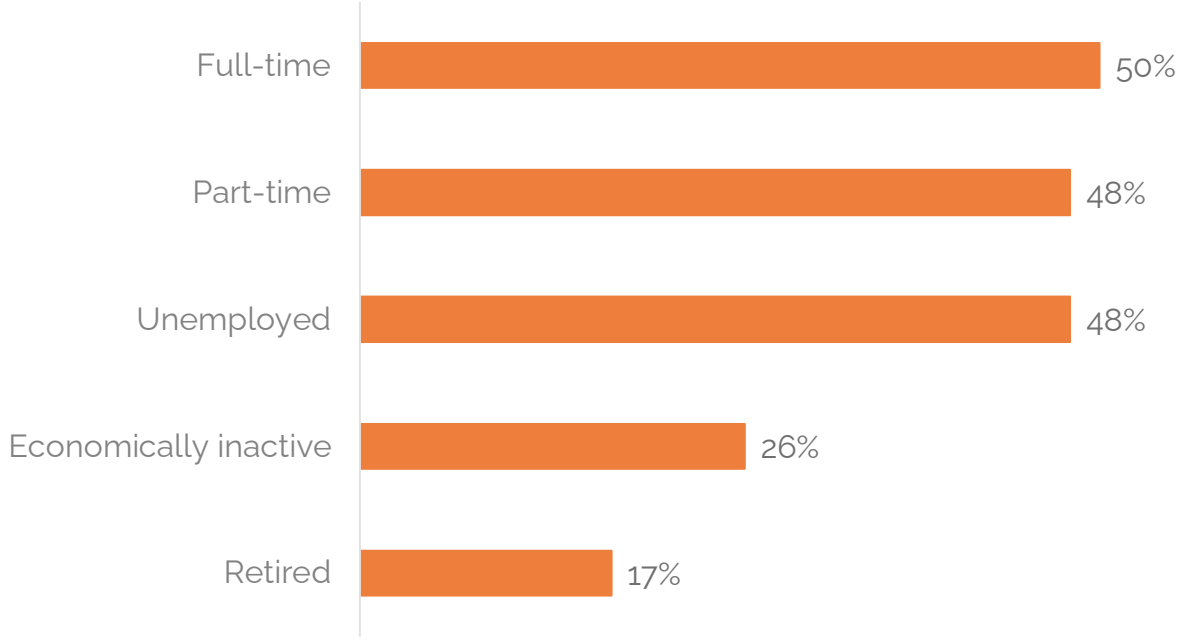
Similarly to 2024, working status remains a strong predictor of learning when controlling for other factors.[5] People who are economically inactive (excluding students and retired people) are 42% less likely to say they have taken part in learning than those in full-time employment.

[4] See L&W's interactive chart for participation rates by working status over time
[5] Nermond, O. Egglestone, C. Manetti, L. Jones, E. (2024) Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2024. Learning and Work Institute.

Type of employment is also a strong predictor of learning undertaken at work. Among working age learners, once other factors are taken into account, learning is 67% less likely to be undertaken at work for self-employed people compared to those employed full-time. Those who work part-time are 27% less likely to be learning at work compared to those employed full-time.

Figure 4: People in work and unemployed are significantly more likely to report having participated in learning in the last three years than economically inactive people (excluding students).

Participation in learning by working status, 2025



Base: Full-time: Weighted = 2,025, unweighted = 2,126. Part-time: Weighted = 796, unweight = 827. Unemployed: Weighted = 298, unweighted = 316. Economically inactive (excluding students and retired people): Weighted = 237, unweighted = 250, Retired: Weighted = 1,128, unweighted = 943.

Workers' access to training is likely being impacted by recent labour market factors

Declining engagement in learning by people in employment is associated with tightening access to learning at work. Around one in five (21%) of respondents in full or part time employment report currently accessing "learning at work". This has dropped from 28% in 2024.

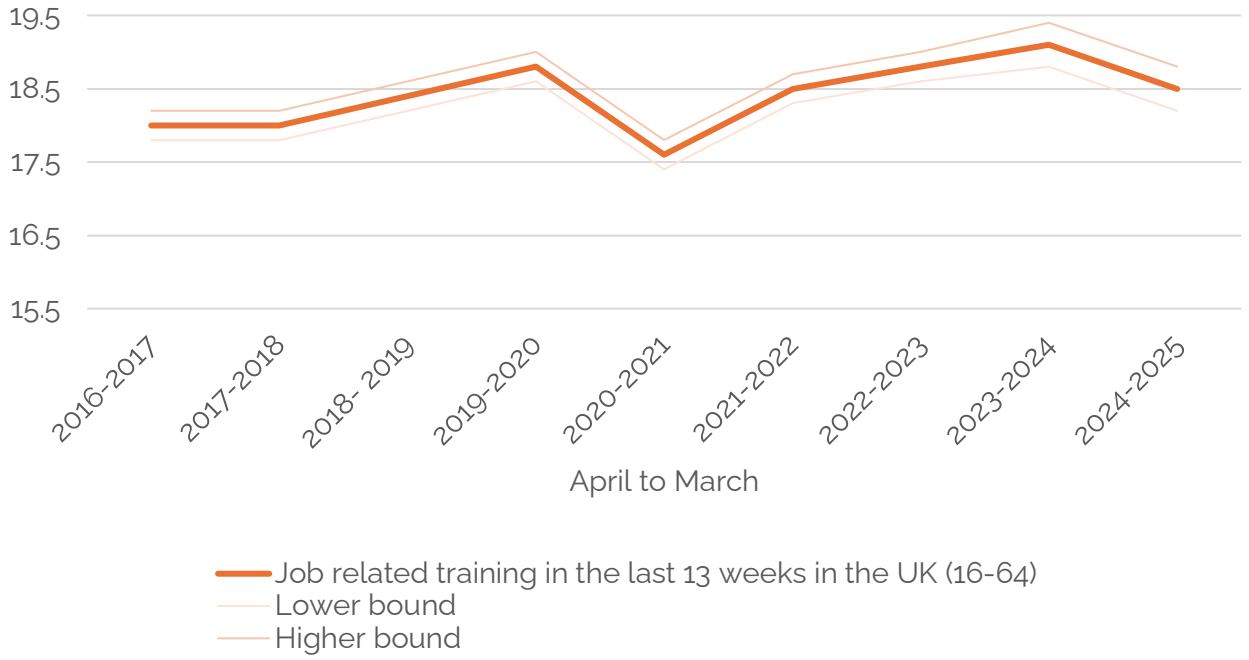
This decline in employer training could reflect recent labour market factors. Firstly, businesses reported using learning to develop and upskill their existing workforce in the face of acute recruitment challenges experienced in 2023 and 2024.[6] As the labour market cools and vacancies fall, employers may be less likely to provide training.

[6] CIPD (2024) Resourcing and talent planning report. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

Secondly, there was a significant churn in the labour market post-pandemic, with large increases in numbers of people moving job. Between April 2021 and June 2022, 8.341 million people started new jobs. This number fell to 7.085 million in the year up to June 2025.[7] This reversion could also help explain the decline in in-work training, with job movers likely to participate in induction training when starting a new role.

These trends can be witnessed in L&W analysis of the Labour Force Survey (Figure 5). This shows job related training falling a little in the year up to 2025, following yearly increases since the pandemic, most sharply between 2021 and 2022. It is now back at levels generally seen pre-pandemic.

Figure 5: The percentage of employed people who have received job related training in the last 13 weeks has fallen in the year up to April 2025.
Proportion of people in employment who received job related training in last 13 weeks in the UK (16-64)



Source: Annual Population Survey, ONS.

People in work have seen falls in their participation in all types of learning, not just learning at work. The reasons for the falls in other types of learning are less clear. However, they could be related to falls in learning at work, for example if growth in online courses at work during the pandemic meant more self-directed learning alongside this.

[7] L&W analysis of the Labour Force Survey flows estimates. ONS. 2025. Due to the concerns with the quality of LFS estimates and the wide confidence intervals, these figures are to be taken with caution. Furthermore, the data does not provide any indications on the quality or length of the training provided. More detail is provided on employer investment and quality of training in the following sections.

Too many people remain locked out of learning

The survey reveals stubborn inequalities in access to learning.

Participation in learning decreases with age

As in previous years, participation in learning decreases with age (Figure 6). Indeed, regression analysis shows that, when other characteristics are taken into account, the likelihood of learning decreases 4% for each additional year of life, a figure unchanged since 2024. This should be a cause of concern for two major reasons.

Firstly, longer careers and a fast-changing economy will require people to learn and gain new skills later into their life. However, just 26% of people aged 55-64 say they are currently learning or have done so in the last three years, compared to 63% of adults aged 25-34. Learning for every age category[8] used in this survey is equally likely to be work related (58%). However, the lower participation rate for older workers means fewer of them are learning at work also.

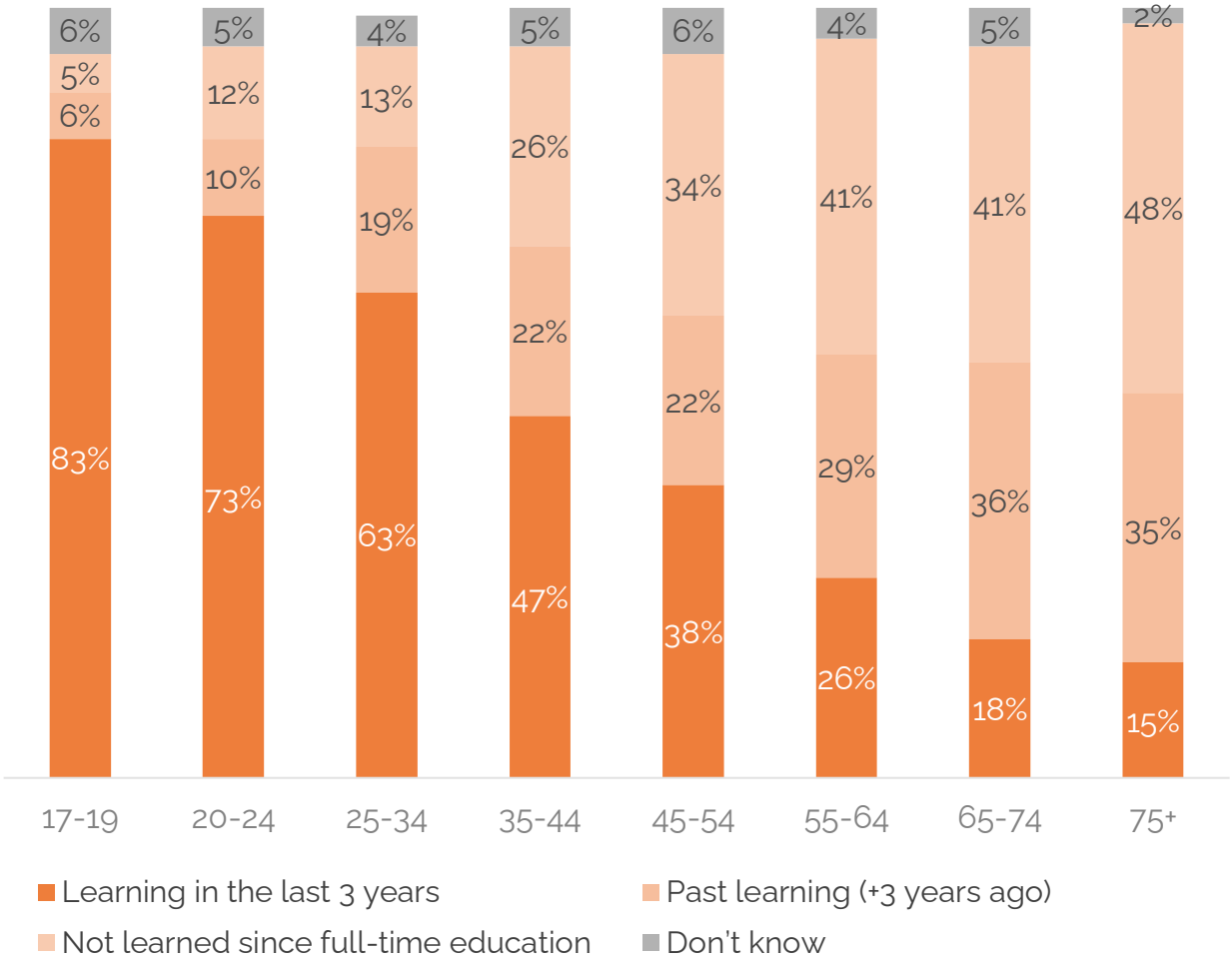
Secondly, the benefits of learning on reducing loneliness and improving connection and wellbeing are well evidenced.[9] Nearly one million people aged 65 and over report often feeling lonely, and of course this can affect younger people too.[10] It is concerning therefore that just 18% of people aged 65-74 say they have taken part in learning in the last three years, falling to just 15% of people aged 75 and above.

[8] The age categories of 19 to 24, 25 to 49, and 50 to 64

[9] Aleynikova, E. Atay, A. James, J. and Stevenson, A. (2022), Social Prescribing and Adult Education in London, Learning and Work Institute.

[10] Age UK (2024), You are not alone in feeling lonely.

Figure 6: Participation in learning decreases with age.
Participation in learning by age category, 2025



Base: all adults aged 17 over. Weighted = 5,186, unweighted = 5,538.

Social grade is a key predictor of participation in learning

Since last year, learning participation rates have decreased across all social grades (Figure 7).[11] The largest decrease is among people in the C2 grade (-12 percentage points to 45% in 2025), AB grade (-11 percentage points to 49% in 2025), and C1 grade (-9 percentage points, to 41% in 2025). People in the DE grade have also experienced a significant decrease of six percentage points (from 39% in 2024 to 33% in 2025).[12]

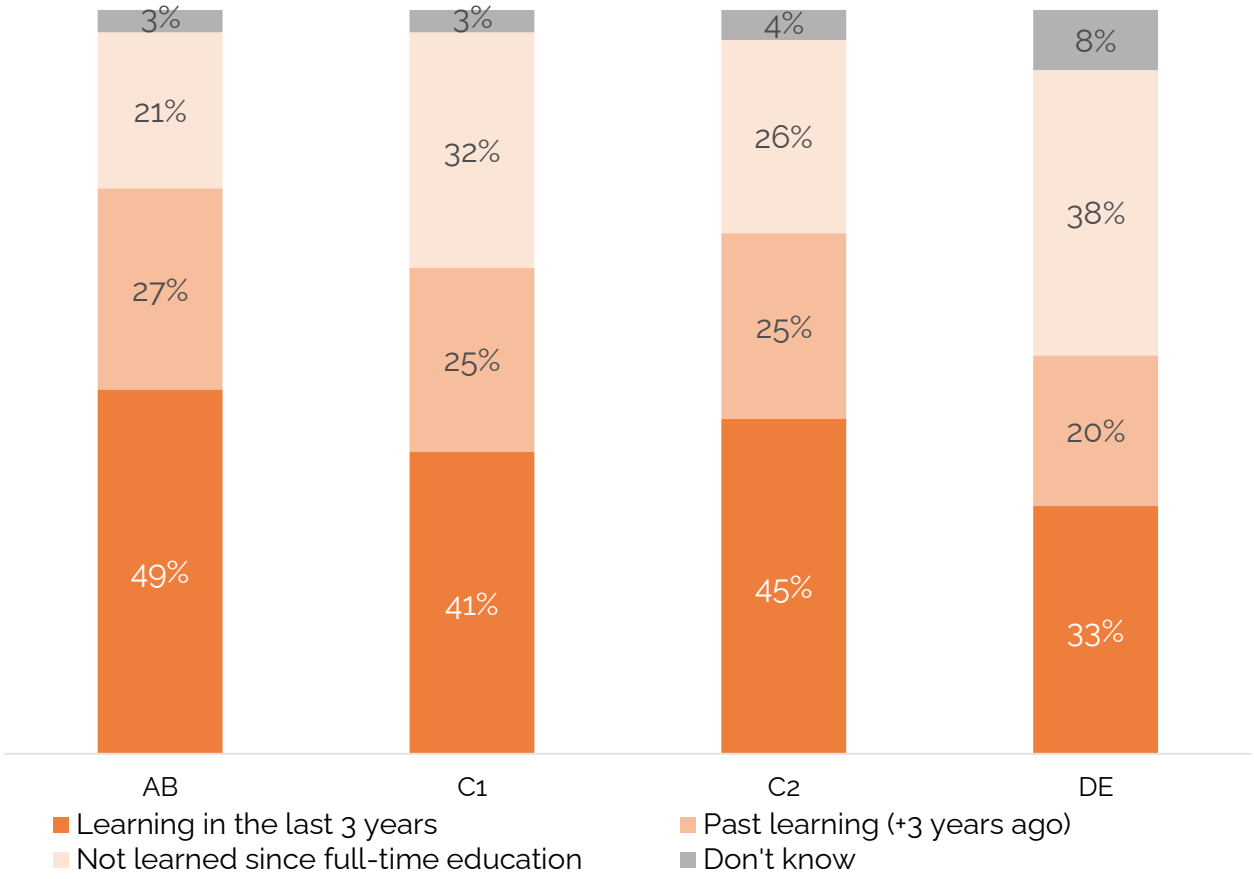
It remains the case that people from the three higher social grades (AB, C1 and C2) are significantly more likely to report having taken part in learning in the last three years than people from the lowest grade (DE) (Figure 7). Individuals in the AB grade are also

[11] Social grade groups are a way of categorising people by social and financial situation. The categories are: AB: higher and intermediate managerial, administrative and professional occupations; C1: supervisory, clerical, and junior managerial, administrative and professional occupations; C2: skilled manual occupations; DE: semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations, unemployed and lowest grade occupations.
[12] Longer trends can be found in L&W interactive charts.

significantly more likely than C1 and C2 to have reported learning, as are those in C2 compared to C1.

However, regression analysis shows that, once other characteristics are taken into account, it is the AB and C1 grades that are associated with a substantial increase in the underlying likelihood of learning. These social grades are respectively associated with a 59% and 36% increased likelihood of learning, compared with the DE grade. In contrast, there is no significant difference between C2 and DE once other characteristics are taken into account. The disparity between the actual figures and the regression analysis for the C2 grade may be due its younger age profile in the survey sample, since younger people are more likely to have participated in learning.

Figure 7: People in the lowest social grade are significantly less likely to learn.
Adult participation in learning by social grades, 2025 [13]



Base: AB: weighted = 1,520, unweighted = 1,531. C1: weighted = 1,195, unweighted = 1,183. C2: weighted = 949, unweighted = 966. DE: weighted = 1,522, unweighted = 1,506.

[13] Please note that the DE social category percentages total 99% due to rounding.

The longer people stay in full-time education the more likely they are to learn as an adult

The survey uses the age people left full time education (FTE) as a proxy for educational attainment. People who stay in FTE longer are more likely to report learning as an adult (Figure 8). Half of people who left FTE aged 21 or above (51%) or aged 19 or 20 (50%) have engaged in learning in the last three years. This compares to 23% of those who left aged 16 or below and 39% of those who left aged 17 or 18.

Participation in learning has decreased significantly since 2024 for all groups. The largest decline is for those who left FTE aged 19–20 (-12 percentage points), followed by those who left aged 16 or under and 21 or above (-11), and those who left aged 17–18 (-8). The decline brings the participation rate by age people left FTE closer to the 2022 levels, when participation ranged from 24% for those who left FTE aged 16 or below and 48% for those who left FTE aged 21 or over. For all groups, participation remains above pre-pandemic levels.[14]

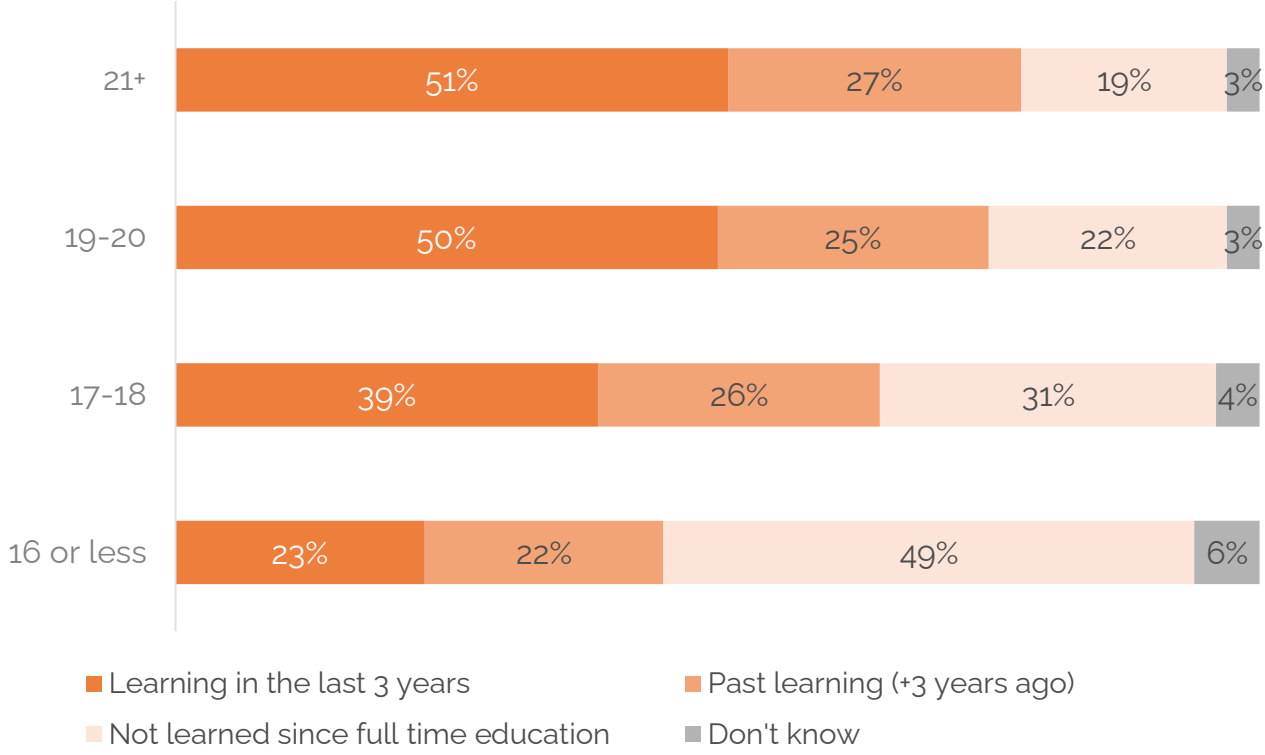
People who leave FTE at a younger age are also less likely to be engaging in learning through their lifetime. Half of those who left FTE aged 16 or below have not engaged in learning since (49%). This compares to 31% of those who left aged 17-18, 22% of those who left aged 19-20, and 19% of those who left aged 21 and above.

Regression analysis factoring in all other characteristics shows that the age a person left FTE is one of the strongest predictors of learning afterwards. The likelihood of participating in learning increases 20% with each step up in the age band of leaving FTE. While older respondents are more likely to report not learning since leaving FTE and also be less likely to engage in learning than younger counterparts, the age of leaving FTE is a strong predictor of future learning across all age groups.

[14] Longer trends can be found in L&W interactive charts.

Figure 8: Adults who left FTE aged 16 or below are significantly less likely to participate in learning.

Participation in learning by age leaving full-time education, 2025



Base: All adults aged 17+. 16 or less: weighted = 1432, unweighted = 13666. 17-18: weighted = 1048, unweighted = 1038. 19-20: weighted = 696, unweighted = 712. 21+: weighted = 1765, unweighted = 1806.

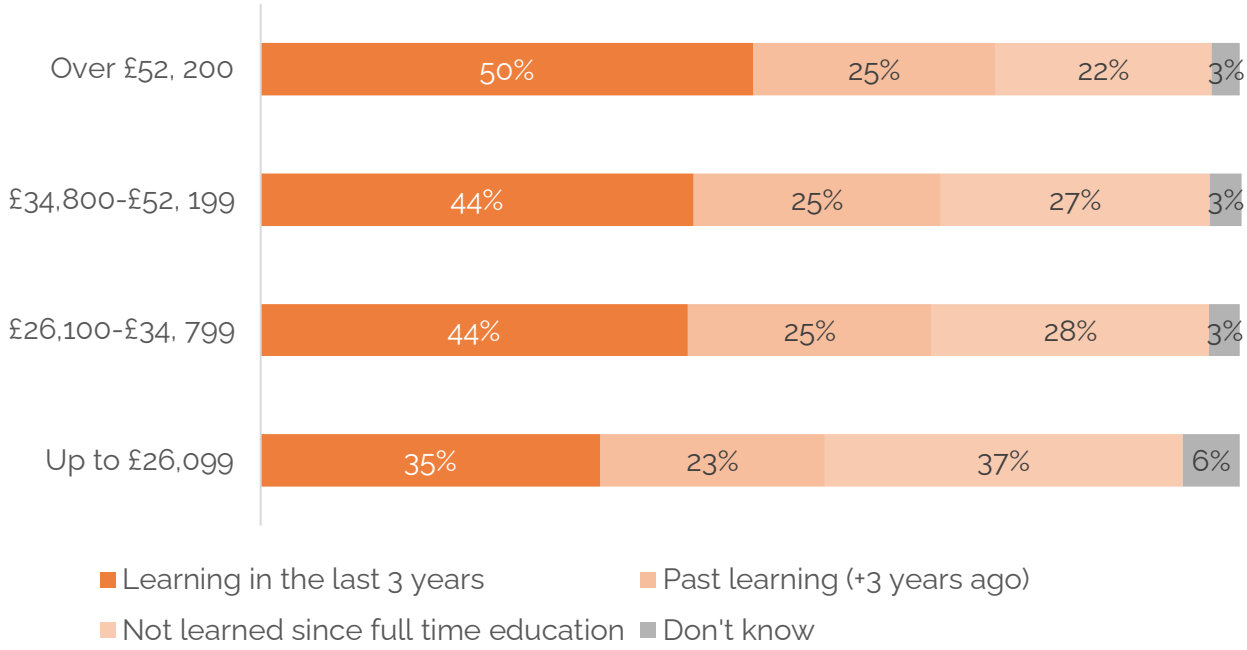
These disparities are also seen in who is receiving and accessing learning at work**.** Only 18% of people in work who report leaving FTE aged 16 or below report having participated in learning at work in the last three years. This compares with 30% of people in employment who left aged 21 or over. Older workers are more likely to have left education age 16 finished and also less likely to be learning at work. However, this trend is true across age groups. L&W's wider research has shown that graduates are three times more likely to receive training at work than non-graduates.[15] In this sense, employer investment in learning is reinforcing inequalities in education. This may also reflect the quality of job opportunities available to those leaving FTE aged 16 and below, and an increased likelihood of entering roles offering lower pay and lower investment in training.

There are also significant disparities in participation in learning by income level

Higher earners are more likely to participate in learning (Figure 9). One half of respondents with a household income over £52,200 (50%) say they have participated in learning in the last three years, compared with 44% of those with a household income between £26,099 and £52,199 and 35% of those with an income below £26,099.

[15] Evans, E. and Egglestone, C. (2024). The great skills divide. Learning and Work Institute.

Figure 9: Respondents with higher household income are more likely to report they have participated in learning in the last three years than lower earners.
Participation in learning by household income, 2025



Base: All adults aged 17+. Over 52,200, weighted base = 1,144, unweighted = 1,173. 34,800 - £52,199, weighted = 1,247, unweighted = 1,240. £26,100-£34,799, weighted = 917, unweighted = 920. Up to £26,099, weighted = 1,551, unweighted = 1,534.

Higher earners are also significantly more likely to report that they are learning at work (Figure 10). One in three workers (33%) in the highest household income bands (above £52,200) report learning at work in the past three years. This compares to 27% of those earning between £34,800 and £52,199, 26% of those earning between £26,100 and £34,79 and 17% of those in the lowest earning bands (below £26,099) (Figure 10). Put simply, workers in the top income bracket are nearly twice as likely to benefit from learning at work as those in the lowest income bracket.

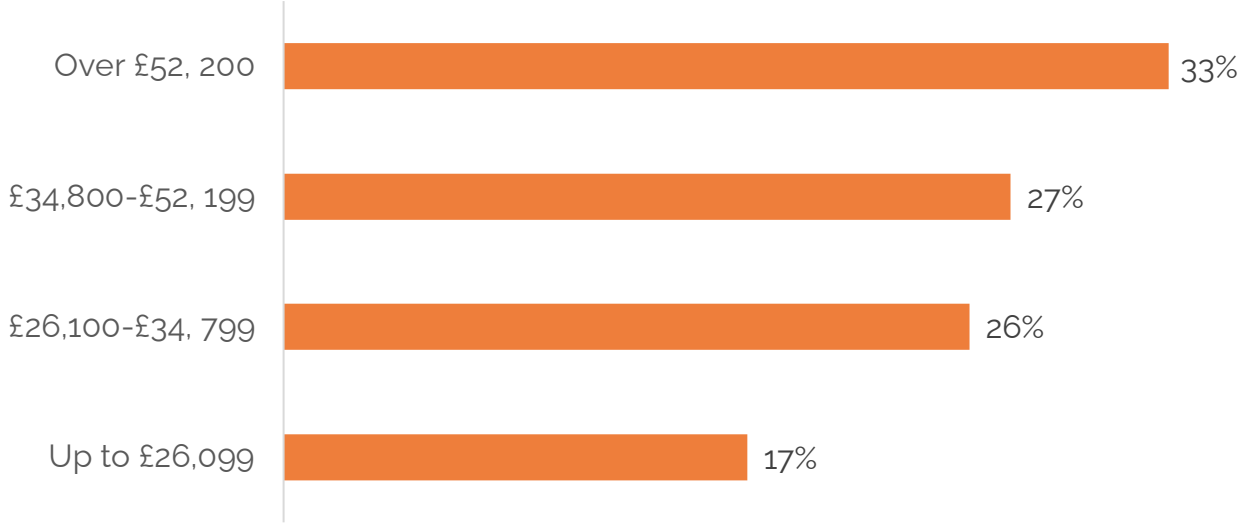
Regression analysis of working age[16] people who are in work and have engaged in learning over the last three years shows that, once other factors are taken into account, income is a key predictor of learning at work. For each jump in income band,[17] there was a 5% increased likelihood that learning would be undertaken at work.

Taken together, these findings help to illustrate the two-track character of the UK labour market, with a lack of access to workplace training contributing to low progress in and from low paid work.

[16] Defined as aged 19-64.
[17] The survey recorded incomes in bands of between £4,350 and £4,400.

Figure 10: Workers earning above £52,200 are almost twice as likely to report that they are learning at work.

Workers learning at work by household income, 2025

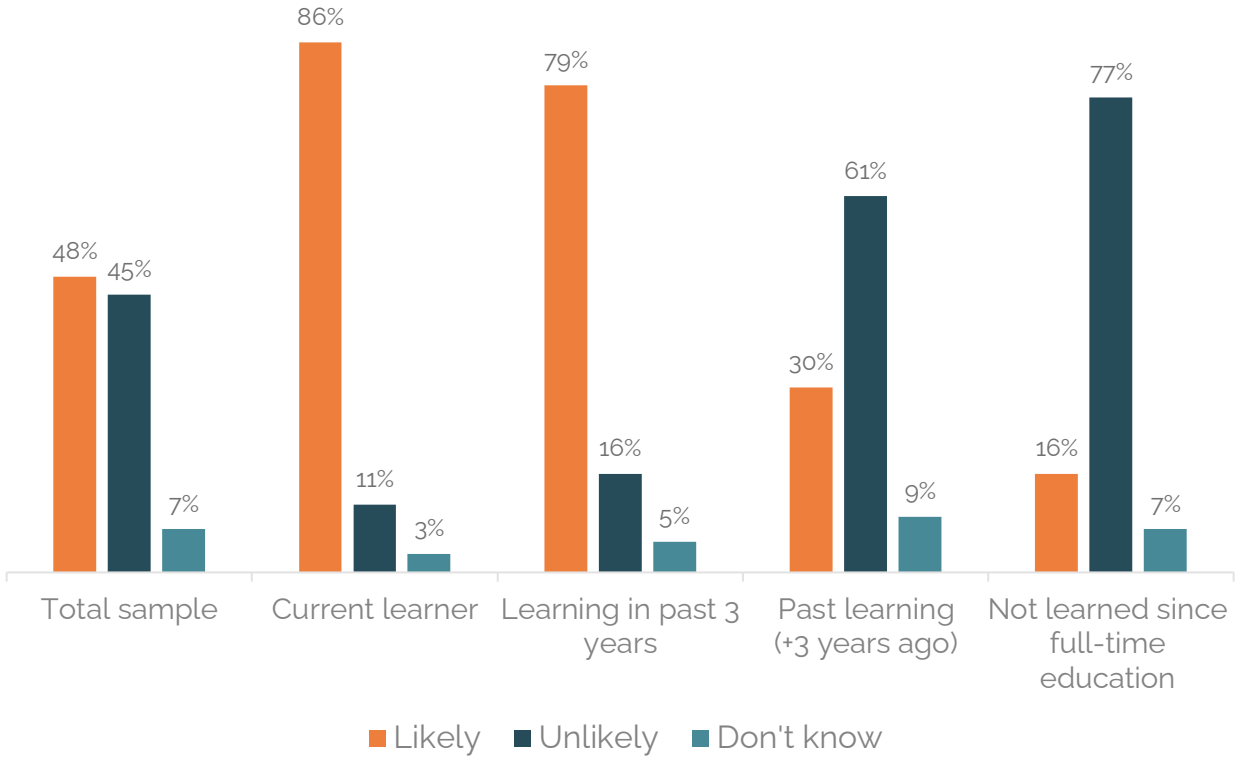


Base: All respondents who are in work (employed full-time, or part-time, or self-employed). Over 52,200, weighted base = 912, unweighted base = 959. £34,800 - £52,199, weighted = 843, unweighted = 875. £26,100-£34,799, weighted = 575, unweighted = 603. Up to £26,099, weighted = 603, unweighted = 631.

Inequalities are at risk of becoming self-perpetuating

Four in five respondents (79%) who reported engaging in learning in the last three years expect to do so again in the next three years. This compares to just 30% of those who reported not engaging in learning in the last three years (Figure 11). Those currently learning are five times more likely to say they expect to learn in the next three years than those who haven't engaged in learning since leaving school (86% and 16%).

Figure 11: Those who have engaged in learning recently expect to do so again.
Likelihood to participate in learning in the next three years



Base: all adults aged 17 over. Weighted = 5,186, unweighted = 5,186.

Differences by nation, region and ethnicity can be partially explained by other factors

Most English regions and UK nations have broadly similar percentages of adults reporting engagement in learning over the last three years.[18] However, participation rates in London (56%) and the North East (49%) are significantly higher than all the other areas. This is in contrast to the East of England (32%), which is significantly below the other regions.

Over the years, the regions with the highest and lowest participation rates have changed, except for London which has consistently been the region with the highest levels since 2021.[19] London's population is younger and more highly qualified than the rest of England,

[18] There is some variation in the other regions, but these are not statistically significant.
[19] Over the years, regional participation rates have varied considerably which is explained by the high volatility of survey data at regional level. Previous reports have also shown no evidence of a place effect when other characteristics are taken into account.

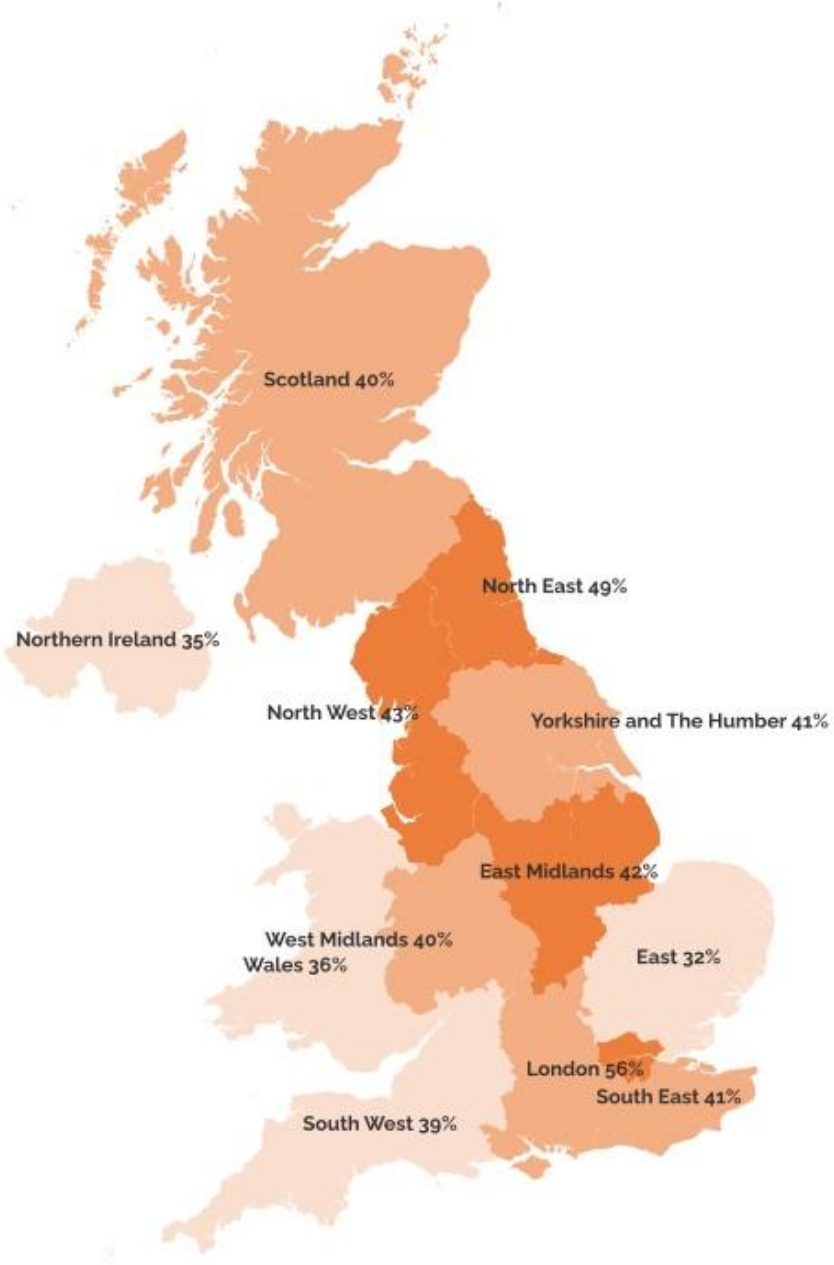
Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.[20] This can help explain why its participation rate is higher, given younger adults are more likely to engage with learning.

Geographical inequality is historically high. In 2025, the difference between the region with the highest and lowest participation is 24 percentage points – one percentage point higher than in 2023 and 2024 and three percentage points higher than in 2021 and 2022. Gaps were relatively constant between 2002 and 2015 (from 10 to 14 percentage points) but dropped to 7 percentage points in 2017 before rising again to 14 percentage points in 2018. Since 2019, the gap has risen gradually from 17 percentage points in 2019 to 24 in 2025.

However, regression analysis found no clear evidence of a place effect when other characteristics are taken into account. 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, such as age, social grade, employment status, income, and age when leaving FTE.

[20] As of the census, the median age in Greater London was lower (35) than England (39), Wales (43), Northern Ireland (37) and Scotland (41). See: Census, Median Age by region (2021) for London's median age and this bulletin for the median age of the four nations.

Figure 12: People in London and North East are significantly more likely to report they are learning than elsewhere in the UK.
Participation in learning by UK nations and English regions, 2025

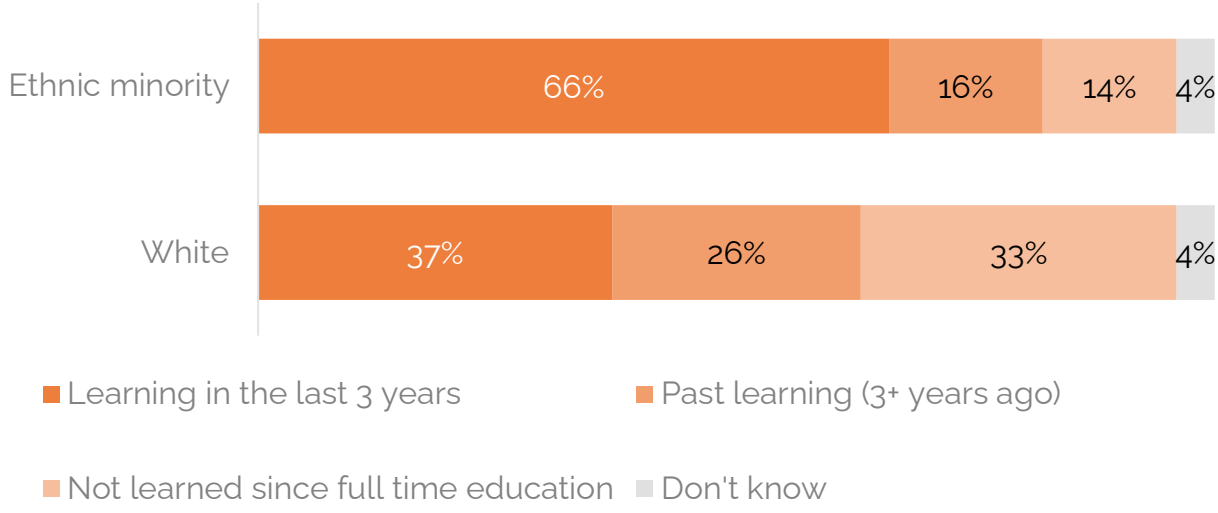


Base: All respondents. Weighted = 5186. Unweighted = 5186. Weighted base = North East 209, North West 570, Yorks/ Humber 425, East Midlands 379, West Midlands 458, East of England 485, Greater London 683, South East 708, South West 446, Wales 245, Scotland 434, Northern Ireland 144. Unweighted base = North East 273, North West 660, Yorks/ Humber 442, East Midlands 351, West Midlands 457, East of England 426, Greater London 772, South East 621, South West 380, Wales 251, Scotland 424, Northern Ireland 129

People from ethnic minority backgrounds (66%) are significantly more likely to report having taken part in learning in the past three years than people from white backgrounds (37%) (Figure 13).[21]

The higher participation rate among respondents from ethnic minority groups is likely in large part attributable to the average younger age of people from ethnic minority groups.[22] In our survey sample, 79% of respondents from ethnic minority groups were under the age of 50, compared to 45% of white respondents.

Figure 13: Ethnic minority groups are more likely to report participating in learning than white respondents.
Participation rate by ethnicity, 2025



Base: all respondents. Weighted = 5186. Unweighted = 5816.

[21] Combining people from different ethnic groups masks differences between individual ethnic groups. However, the size of the respondent base does not allow for more granular analysis of the responses from individual ethnic groups.
[22] See: Census, data on ethnicity (2021). As of the time of the census, people from white ethnic groups had the highest average age.

Chapter 2: Why are adults learning and where is learning happening?

Adults' motivations for learning are varied

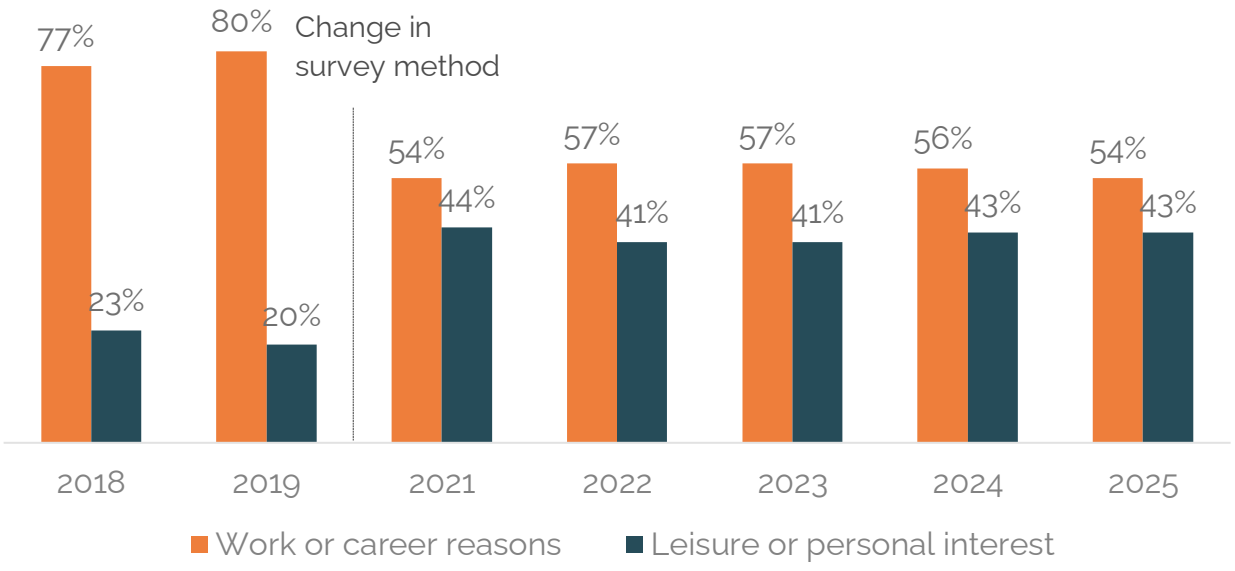
Work remains the leading motivation for learning, but personal interest has significantly increased post pandemic

Adults who are currently or have recently engaged in learning are asked to report their main reason for doing so – either for "work or career" (54%) or "leisure and personal interest" (43%). The proportions of people reporting each motivation remains consistent with recent years post pandemic (Figure 14).

Through the survey series, the majority of adult learners say their main motivation for learning relates to work and career. However, the proportions of adult learners reporting learning for work related or career reasons significantly decreased post-pandemic, from 80% in 2019 to 54% in 2021. Conversely, there has been a substantial increase in adults saying their learning is for leisure or personal interest post-pandemic, with levels more than doubling between 2019 (20%) and 2021 (41%). This proportion has remained constant since 2021 (41% in 2022 and 2023, 43% in 2024 and 2025). It is unclear to what extent this is a real shift or due to the change in survey method.[23]

Figure 14: The proportion of adults learning for leisure or personal interest remains twice as high as before the pandemic.

Current and recent learners' motivation for learning



Base: all who have recently or are currently doing some learning. 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

[23] In 2021, the survey method has changed from face-to-face to online.

2023 = 4,396; unweighted base 2023 = 4,778. Weighted base for 2024 = 2,641; unweighted base for 2024 = 2,719. Weighted base 2025 = 2171; unweighted base 2025 = 2253.

However, respondents' broad motivations for learning are more varied

When asked about their broader motivations for learning, adults select a range of motivations (Figure 15) The proportion of people stating each motivation for learning remains largely consistent compared with previous surveys.

Some of the motivations reported by learners vary by demographic groups. For example, people in the AB and C1 social grades are significantly more likely to report that they have engaged in learning to help with their current job or to improve job skills (35% of C1, 33% of AB compared with 27% of C2 and 22% of DE). Likewise, people aged 25-49 are significantly more likely to report that changing the type of work or career is one of their motivations (17%) for learning than people aged 19 – 24 (14%) or those aged 50 – 74 (13%).

Figure 15: Learners' broad motivation for learning

Base: Weighted = 2171; unweighted = 2253.

How are adults learning?

Adults are engaging in learning in a range of settings (Figure 16). The four most commonly reported settings this year are the same as recent years, although from 2024, 'through a university/higher education institution/Open University' has leapfrogged 'on the job' into third place, with the proportion of learners selecting this option rising from 16% to 21%. The proportion of learners selecting the other most popular options have not changed on a statistically significant basis from the 2024 survey.

Looking at longer term trends, the proportion of learners who report learning independently on their own has nearly tripled since 2012 (from 12% in 2012 to 34% in 2024 and 32% in 2025), with the largest rise in 2021 (from 16% in 2019 and 34% in 2021).[24] The proportion of adults learning independently on their own has remained stable since 2021. The rise of independent and self-directed learning post-pandemic is a trend that has also been observed across OECD countries.[25]

[24] Nermond, O. Egglestone, C. Manetti, L. Jones, E. (2024) Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2024. Learning and Work Institute.
[25] OECD (2025) Trends in Adult Learning: Who is missing out? OECD.

Figure 16: Adults learn in a range of settings

Adults learning location, 2025

Base: All recent learners. Weighted = 2,171. Unweighted = 2,253.
Note: Respondents could select more than one option.

In this report, the settings are classified into four main categories:

- Work-related, which includes adults who are learning in at least one of the following settings: 'on the job,' 'on a training course at work,' 'on an external training course arranged by my employer' and 'on an apprenticeship'.
- Independently, which includes 'independently on my own' and 'independently with others'.

- Formal educational establishment, which includes 'through a university/higher education institution/Open University,' 'through a further education college/tertiary/6th form college' and 'through a local adult education centre or class'.
- Community or voluntary organisations, which includes 'through a voluntary organisation,' through local community facilities' and 'through a leisure or health club'.

Figure 17 shows adults are most likely to report learning in a work-related setting (43%), followed by independently (39%), in formal educational establishments (36%), and community or voluntary settings (22%). These are broadly in line with the last two years. However, given the decline in the total numbers of learners reflected in the headline rates of participation, it is worth noting that a lower proportion of the population accessed learning through any of these sources than in 2023 and 2024.

Figure 17: Adults are most likely to report learning at work.
The four main categories of how adults are learning in the UK

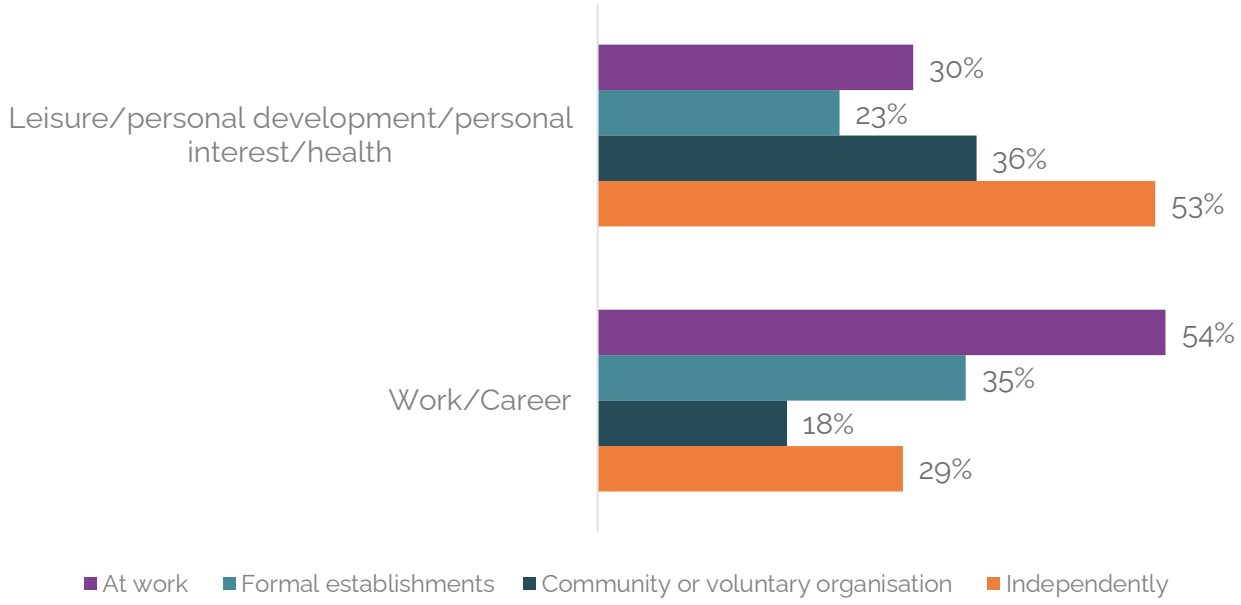
Base: All recent learners. Weighted = 2,171. Unweighted = 2,253.
Note: Respondents could select more than one option.

How learning is delivered and undertaken has changed

Independent learning is largely and increasingly connected to learning done elsewhere

As reported in previous years, the rise in independent learning may relate to an increase in the proportion of people learning for leisure or personal reasons, which more than doubled in 2021 and has remained stable since the pandemic (see previous section on adults' motivations). People who report learning independently are more likely to state leisure and personal reasons as their main motivation for learning. Just over one half (53%) of adults learning for leisure or personal interest report doing so independently, compared to 29% of those who have done so for work or career related reasons (Figure 18).

Figure 18: The reason for learning differs significantly by location.
Main motivation for learning by settings of learning, 2025



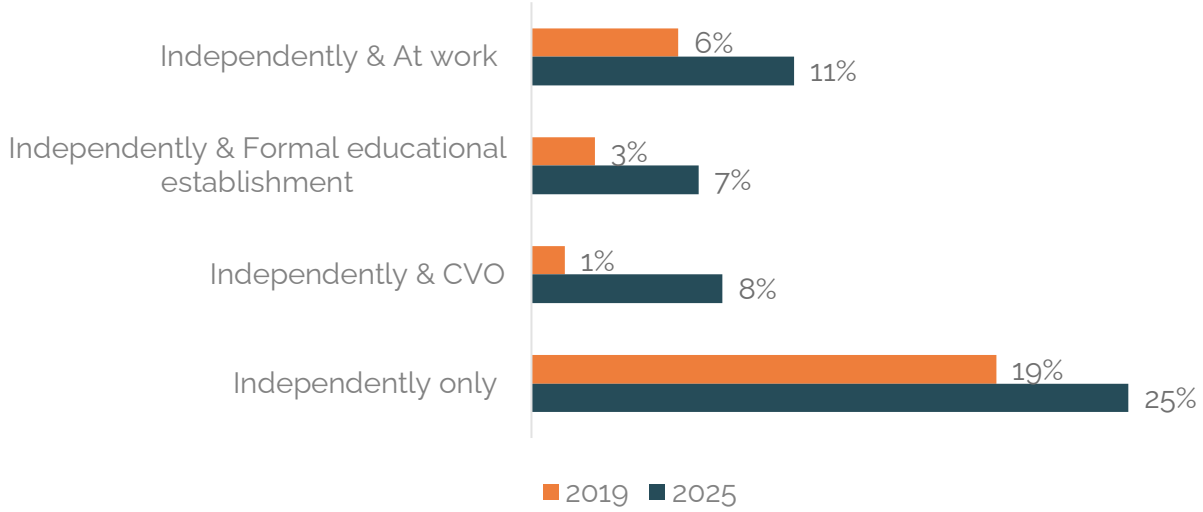
Base: All recent learners. Weighted = 2171, unweighted = 2,253. Leisure/personal development/ interest/health = 939. Work/Career = 1,187.

While the proportion of recent learners who solely undertook independent learning rose from 19% to 25% between 2019 and 2025, this year's survey reveals that people learning independently are often also learning in other ways too, such as at work (Figure 19). As we unpack in the following section on digitisation, this may reflect the adaptation of learning delivery by employers and providers during and since the pandemic, with learning at work or in other settings supported and supplemented by independent learning.

This year, one in ten (11%) recent learners report learning independently and at work, up from under 6% in 2019. Just 1% of recent learners reported learning in a CVO and independently in 2019. This has risen to 8% in 2025. In 2019, only 3% of learners reported

learning independently and through a formal educational establishment, compared to 7% in 2025.

Figure 19: There has been a rise in numbers of people learning independently and elsewhere since 2019.
Proportions of learners reporting learning independently and, in another setting, 2025



Base: All recent learners. 2025: weighted = 2171, unweighted = 2,253. 2019: weighted = 1659, unweighted base = 1,515.

This has been supported by increasing digitisation

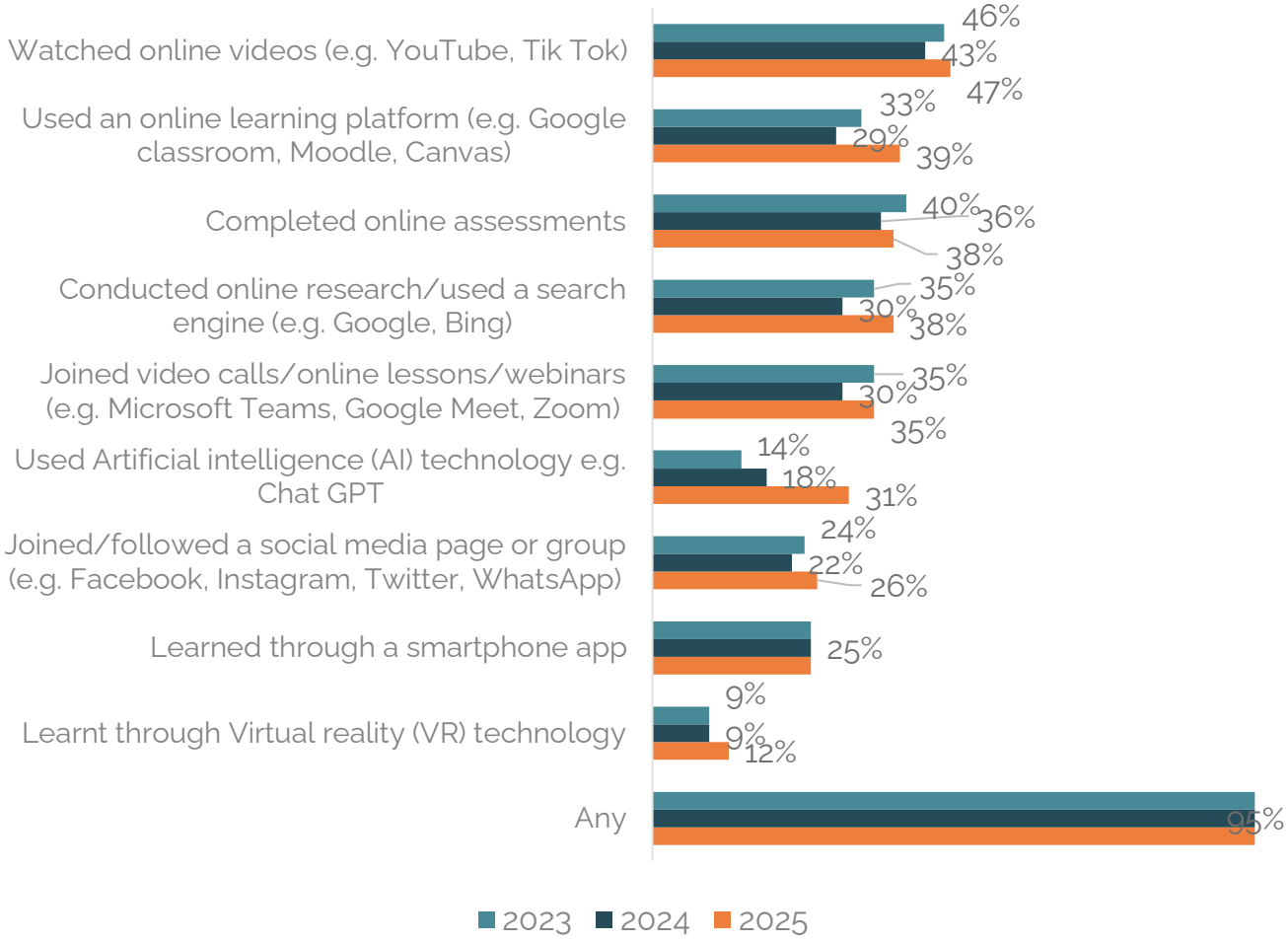
Increased digitisation of learning delivery by employers, CVOs and formal education establishments appears to be supporting the upward trend in independent learning. Almost everyone who reported currently learning or doing so in the last three years (95%) used some form of technology as part of their learning. This is the same proportion as in 2023 and 2024 (although not directly comparable, the 2019 survey found that 47% of learners had done some learning online).[26] Most learners report they are also using multiple technologies to support their learning (on average 3.65).

High numbers of learners watched videos online (47%) or used an online learning platform (39%). Nearly one third of learners now report using artificial intelligence (AI), over double the reported level in 2023 (31% vs 14%). However, there are wide variations in who is accessing this. People from higher social grades (AB) are significantly more likely to report using AI in their learning (35%) than all the other social grades (28% of C1 and C2, and 29% of DE). People who report learning for work are significantly more likely to report using AI than those learning for leisure (35% vs 27%). The same is true for online learning

[26] Respondents to the Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2019 were asked if they had participated in any online learning (including independently and combined with in-person tuition or tutor/peer support). However, the survey did not ask about use of other technology in learning.

platforms (43% vs 35%), and online assessments (46% vs 30%), again highlighting the relationship between independent learning and learning at work.

Figure 20: Most learners report using one or more technologies for learning.
Use of technology to learn, 2025



Base: All recent learners. Weighted = 2,171. Unweighted = 2,253. Note: Respondents could select more than one option.

Other research has also suggested an increased reliance on self-directed learning by employers to combat skills gaps.[27] This should be considered against the backdrop of declining per employee training spend.[28] The latest government figures show investment per training falling from £3,250 in 2022 to £2,710 in 2024, and investment per employee falling from £1,960 to £1,700 over the same period.[29] While digitisation and self-directed learning may be driving down costs for employers, it also raises questions about the quality of training being delivered. Indeed, previous L&W research has highlighted that

[27] CIPD (2023) Learning at work. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
[28] Evans, S (2022) Raising the bar: Increasing employer investment in skills. Learning and Work Institute.
[29] DfE (2025) Employer Skills Survey

training by UK employers tends to be shorter and cheaper, and less likely to be work enhancing than training delivered by employers in the EU.[30]

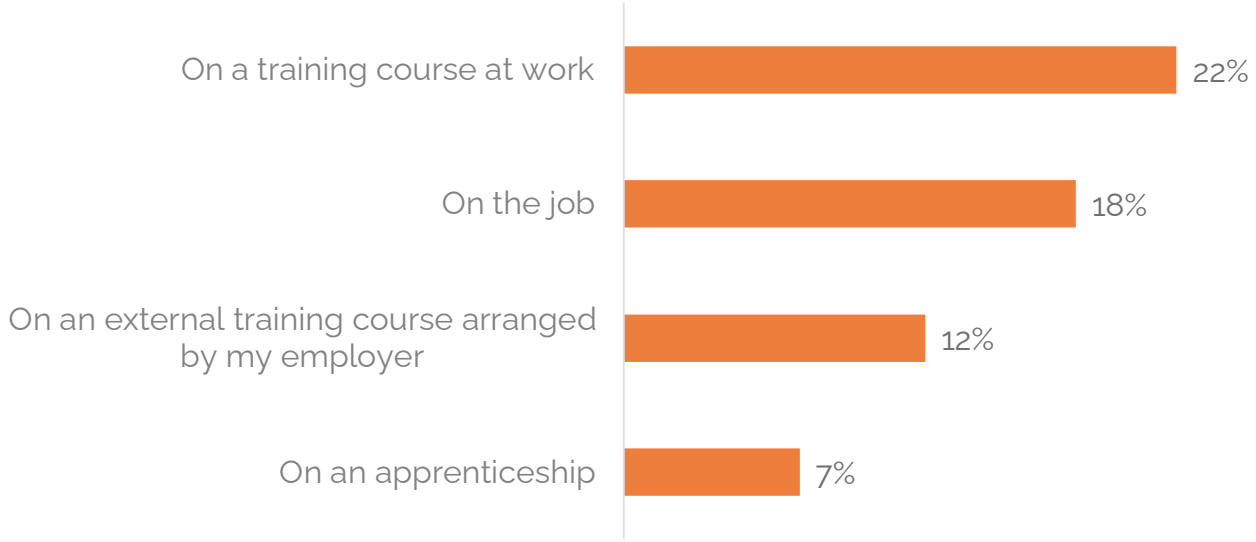
Adults remain most likely to report learning at work

The proportion of current or recent learners who report learning at work has remained unchanged between 2024 and 2025 (43%). This remains the highest percentage of any the four settings in the survey (Figure 17). This is set within a declining rate of participation in learning overall. This means that, while the proportion of people learning at work has remained unchanged, fewer people overall say they are accessing workplace training. For this year's survey, 18% of all respondents reported learning at work currently or in the last three years, down from 22% in 2024.

'A training course at work' is the most common form of work-related learning reported. Just over one fifth (22%) of those learning in the last three years report doing a training course at work. This is followed by 'on the job learning' (18% of learners), and 'an external training course arranged by my employer' (12%) (Figure 21).

Figure 21: 'On a training course at work' is the most common form of work-related learning in the UK.

Work-related learning, 2025



Base: All recent learners. Weighted = 2,171. Unweighted = 2,253. Note: Respondents could select more than one option.

More learners report learning in community or voluntary organisations

One of the main changes in where adults are learning over the last few years is in community or voluntary organisations (CVOs) (Figure 12). Just over one fifth of learners

[30] Clayton, S. and Evans, S. (2021) Learning at work: employer investment in skills. Learning and Work Institute.

(22%) are now learning via a CVO. This is double the rate reported in 2022 (11%) and up from 18% last year. Interestingly, this learning does not appear to be displaced from other settings, with the proportion of total learners learning at work, independently, and in formal education establishments remaining broadly consistent with the last two years.

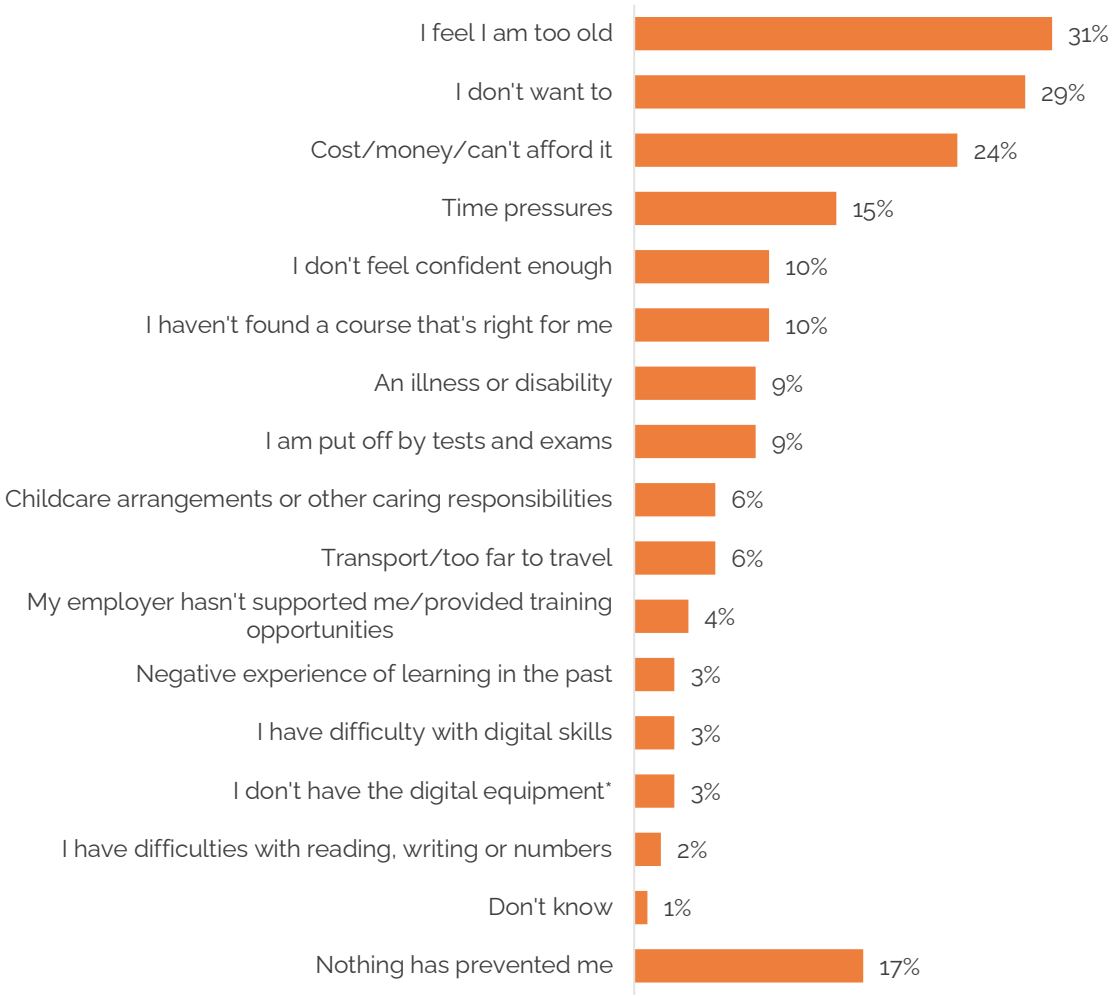
Chapter 3: What are people's experiences of learning?

People face a range of barriers and challenges

Age, cost and inclination prevent people from engaging in learning

More than four in five (82%) respondents who have not engaged in learning in the past three years identified at least one barrier preventing them from doing so (Figure 22). The responses remain in line with last year's survey.[31]

Figure 22: People report a range of barriers preventing them from learning.
Barriers to learning, 2025



Base: respondents who have not engaged in learning in the past three years. Weighted = 2778. Unweighted = 2696. Note: Respondents could select more than one option. *broadband/home environment for remote/online learning

[31] Please note that, in previous surveys, the responses 'I don't want to' and 'Nothing has prevented me', were combined into a single response. In this year's survey, they were presented as separate options. This report has therefore not compared these like-for-like to previous years.

Nearly one third of people who say they have not engaged in learning in the last three years report **feeling too old to learn (31%).** The older people get, the more likely they are to feel this way. For example, one fifth (20%) of 35–44-year-olds who say they have not participated in learning in the past three years report this as a barrier, rising to 32% of 55-64-year-olds and 47% of people aged 75+. As outlined in the first chapter, age is a key predictor of learning, with people 4% less likely to learn in each year of life. With five-decade careers becoming the norm, and with social isolation and loneliness challenges for many groups including those above state pension age, its vitally important we empower people of all ages to engage in learning of all forms.

Convincing more people of the benefits of learning also remains an important goal. Numbers reporting '**I don't want to**' learn remain high, at 29% of those who say they haven't engaged in learning in the last three years, and 34% of those who haven't since leaving FTE. People who left FTE aged 16 and below (31%) or 17-18 (33%) are significantly more likely to report not wanting to learn, than those who left FTE aged 19-20 (21%) or 21+ (26%). This suggests that there may be some relationship between people's experience of FTE, how long they remained in it, and their view of learning in later life. This should be considered alongside findings that half of those who left FTE aged 16 or below have not engaged in learning since.

Cost is the third most commonly reported barrier preventing people from learning. It is reported by one quarter of all respondents (24%) who have not engaged in learning in the last three years. This is over three times higher than the level reported in 2019 (8%), suggesting that the rising cost of living may be impacting on people's ability to take up learning. Unsurprisingly, cost is cited as a greater barrier by those who are on lower incomes, people in the lowest social grade, and people who are economically inactive (excluding students and retired people).[32] These groups could have a significant amount to gain from engaging with learning. Women are also significantly more likely than men to identify cost as a barrier (28% vs 20%). This may reflect persistent inequalities around pay.[33]

In addition to those listed above, there are some other notable differences in the barriers stated by different groups. For example, **childcare** is cited as a particular barrier by younger working age adults, with 15% of people aged 25-34, and 14% of people aged 35-44 reporting this, compared to the average of 6%. People aged 20-24 are significantly more likely to report that their **employer hasn't provided training opportunities** (11% compared to 4% overall). This may reflect the lower paid jobs many young people do at the beginning of their careers, with income strongly associated with likelihood to receive

[32] 30% of people with a household income below £17,399 report cost as a barrier. 28% of people in the DE social grade report cost as a barrier. 35% of people who are economically inactive (excluding students and retired people) report cost as a barrier.
[33] The ONS estimates that, as of April 2024, full-time median hourly earnings excluding overtime were £19.24 for men and £17.88 for women.

training. However, this could be at least partially counterbalanced by young people being more likely to change jobs more often and hence be eligible to receive induction training.

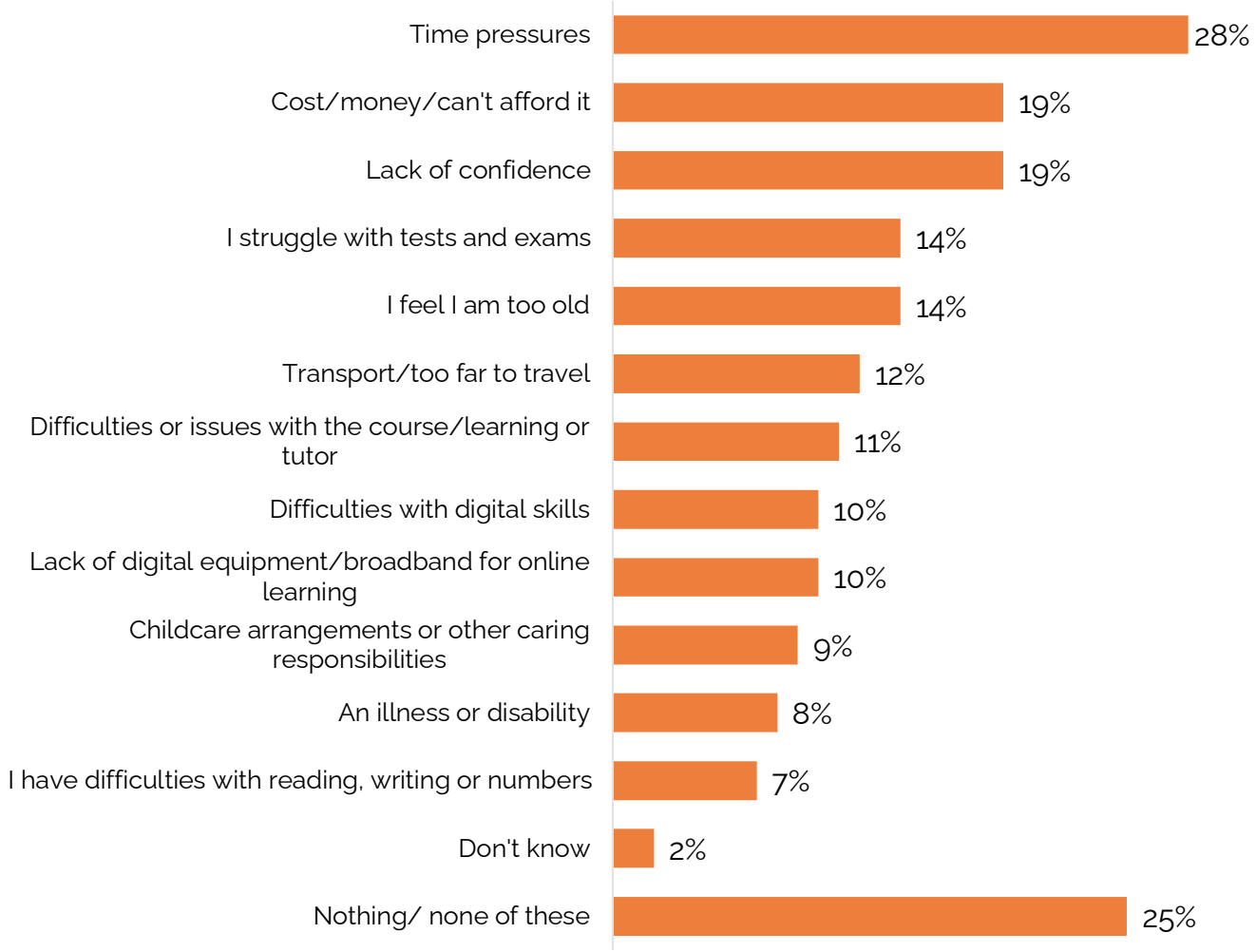
Cost, time pressures, and a lack of confidence can make the learning experience challenging

Nearly three-quarters (73%) of adults who say they have taken part in learning in the past three years report at least one challenge while learning (Figure 23). This is marginally above but broadly consistent with the 2024 survey (70%). Time pressure remains the most reported challenge, and one experienced by an increasing number of learners (28% in 2025 compared to 23% in 2024).

Cost is also cited as a challenge by an increasing number of learners, with over twice the proportion of people reporting this compared to 2019 (8% vs 19%). As mentioned in the previous section, this may reflect the impact of a rising cost of living. Indeed, of current and recent learners, 28% of people earning up to £17,399 identify cost as a challenge, compared to only 12% of people in the income category of over £60,900, while 32% of people unemployed and seeking work report cost as a challenge, compared to 17% of employed people.

A **lack of confidence** is also a significant and rising challenge reported by learners. One in five report a lack of confidence (19%), up significantly from last year (13%). This may be intersecting with other challenges, such as 'feeling too old', 'difficulties with digital skills', 'difficulties with reading, writing, and numbers' or 'having an illness or disability'. In this sense, a lack of confidence may be the effect of other challenges, in addition to being a challenge in and of itself.

Figure 23: Learners are experiencing a range of challenges while learning.
Challenges experienced while learning, 2025



Base: All recent or current learners. Weighted base = 2171; unweighted base = 2253

Respondents from **ethnic minority backgrounds** are significantly more likely to report at least one challenge than white respondents (81% compared to 71%). There are some challenges that respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds are significantly more likely to identify than white respondents (

Table 1). The challenges raised by ethnic minority respondents may be partly related to the younger average age of this group. Respondents in younger age categories are more likely to raise cost as a challenge, for example.

Table 1: Respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely to identify some challenges than white respondents.

Challenges experienced while learning by ethnicity, 2025

Challenge	Ethnic minority	White
Time pressures	33%	27%
Cost/money/difficulty affording it	25%	16%
Struggling with tests and exams	18%	13%
Transport/travel	17%	10%
Difficulties or issues with the course/learning or tutor	14%	10%

Base: All who have recently done or are currently doing some learning. Weighted = 2092; unweighted = 2172. Ethnic minority, weighted = 572, unweighted = 610. White, weighted = 1520, unweighted = 1562.

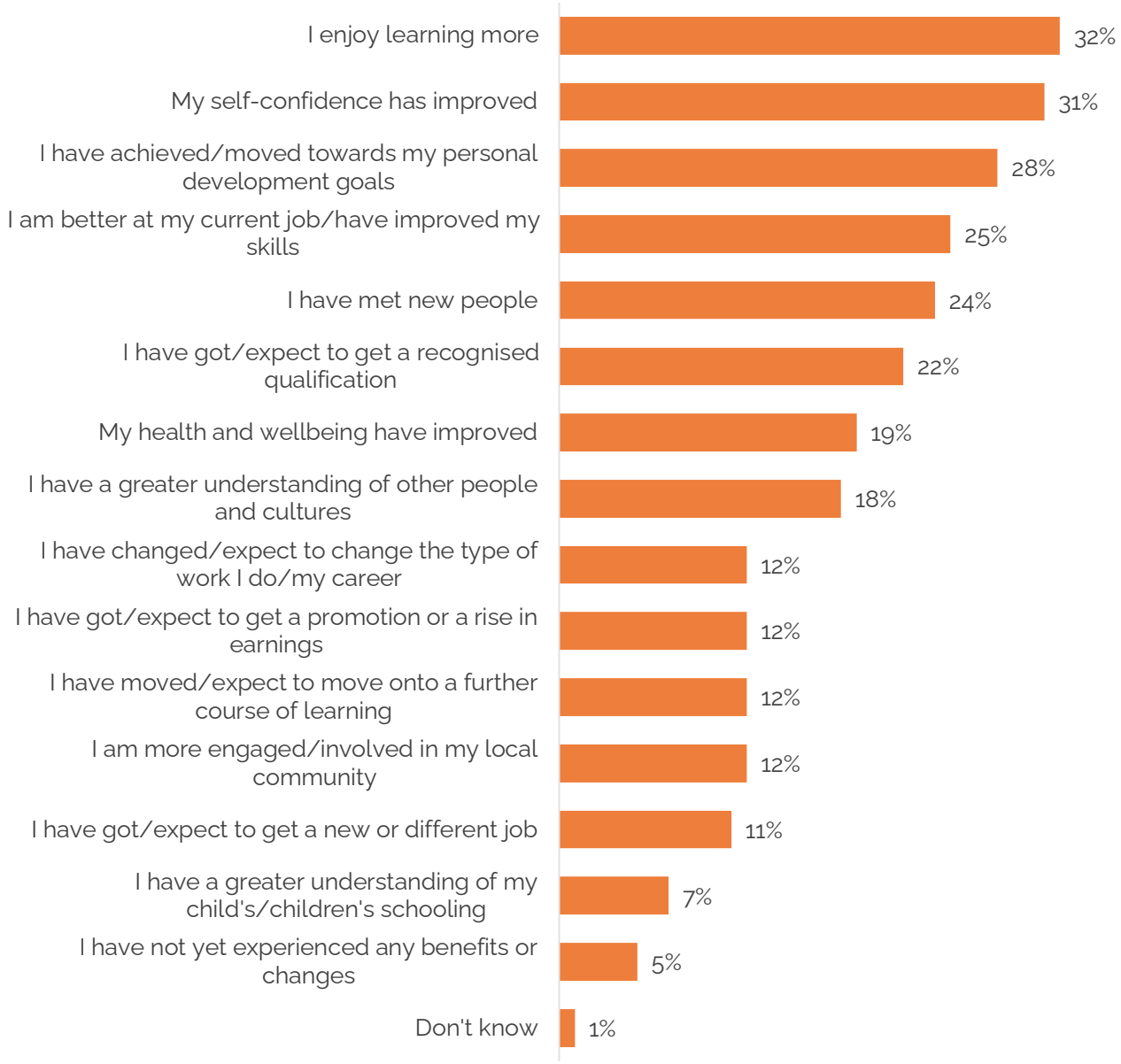
When adults learn, they thrive

The benefits of learning are many

People who have engaged in learning in the last three years report a range of benefits or positive changes as a result, with almost all (94%) identifying at least one benefit. The benefits most commonly noted by learners are enjoying learning more (32%), improved self-confidence (31%), and having achieved or moved towards their personal development goals (28%) (Figure 24).

In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that 79% of people who have engaged in the last three years anticipate that they will do so again in the next three years (see Figure 11). This contrasts with just 30% of those who have not engaged in learning in the last three years, and 16% of people that have not since FTE. This again highlights the importance of convincing non-learners of the benefits of learning. However, with clear benefits to speak to, it also presents an opportunity.

Figure 24: Learners note a range of benefits from taking part in learning.
Changes or benefits as a result of learning, 2025



Base: All who have recently or are currently doing some learning. Weighted = 2171; unweighted = 2253.

There are some differences in the benefits experienced by different groups. **People from ethnic minority backgrounds** (17%) are significantly more likely than white people (9%) to report that they have got or expect to get a new or different job as a result of their learning. Ethnic minority respondents are also more likely to report an increase in confidence (36%), compared to white respondents (29%). Ethnic minority respondents are significantly more likely than white respondents to report that a benefit of their learning has been a greater understanding of other people and cultures (24% compared to 16% of white respondents). These divergences may be partly explained by the younger average

age of the ethnic minority respondents. For example, people in younger age groups are more likely to report increased self-confidence as a benefit of learning.[34]

The benefits of learning extend beyond people's motivation to learn

People learning as leisure or personal development are significantly more likely to report a greater enjoyment of learning, improved health and wellbeing, and a greater understanding of other people and cultures (Table 2). Meanwhile, people learning for their work or career were significantly more likely to note benefits or changes related to work, including improved work-related skills and progression at work. However, there is spillover in the benefits and changes noted by learners that demonstrate the broader benefits of learning. Just over two fifths (42%) of learners whose main reason for learning is leisure or personal development report at least one work-related benefit. Likewise, over one half (52%) of learners whose main motivation is learning for work reasons report at least one personal benefit.

Table 2: Changes or benefits from learning by motivation for learning.

Change or benefit	Motivation for learning	
	Learning for leisure	Learning for work or career
I enjoy learning more	**38%**	27%
My self-confidence has improved	32%	30%
I have achieved/moved towards my personal development goals	28%	29%
I am better at my current job/have improved my skills	17%	**33%**
I have met new people	25%	22%
I have got/expect to get a recognised qualification	16%	**27%**
My health and wellbeing have improved	**26%**	14%
I have a greater understanding of other people and cultures	**21%**	15%
I have changed/expect to change the type of work I do/my career	11%	13%
I have got/expect to get a promotion or a rise in earnings	9%	**14%**
I have moved/expect to move onto a further course of learning	11%	12%
I am more engaged/involved in my local community	13%	11%
I have got/expect to get a new or different job	9%	**13%**

[34] People in the 20-24 (36%) and 25-34 (37%) age brackets are significantly more likely than all other age brackets to report increased confidence as a benefit of learning.

I have a greater understanding of my child's/children's schooling	8%	7%
I have not yet experienced any benefits or changes	5%	5%
Any work-related benefit or change	42%	**66%**
Any personal benefit or change	**57%**	52%
Any social benefit or change	**46%**	36%
Any learning and knowledge benefit or change	55%	55%

Base: All who have recently done or are currently doing some learning. Main reason for learning. Leisure: weighted = 939, unweighted = 955. Main reason for learning – Work/career: weighted = 1187, unweighted = 1248. Note: Proportions that are significantly higher than the other proportions same row are highlighted in orange.

Technology can enable and enrich learning, but only if people have the know-how

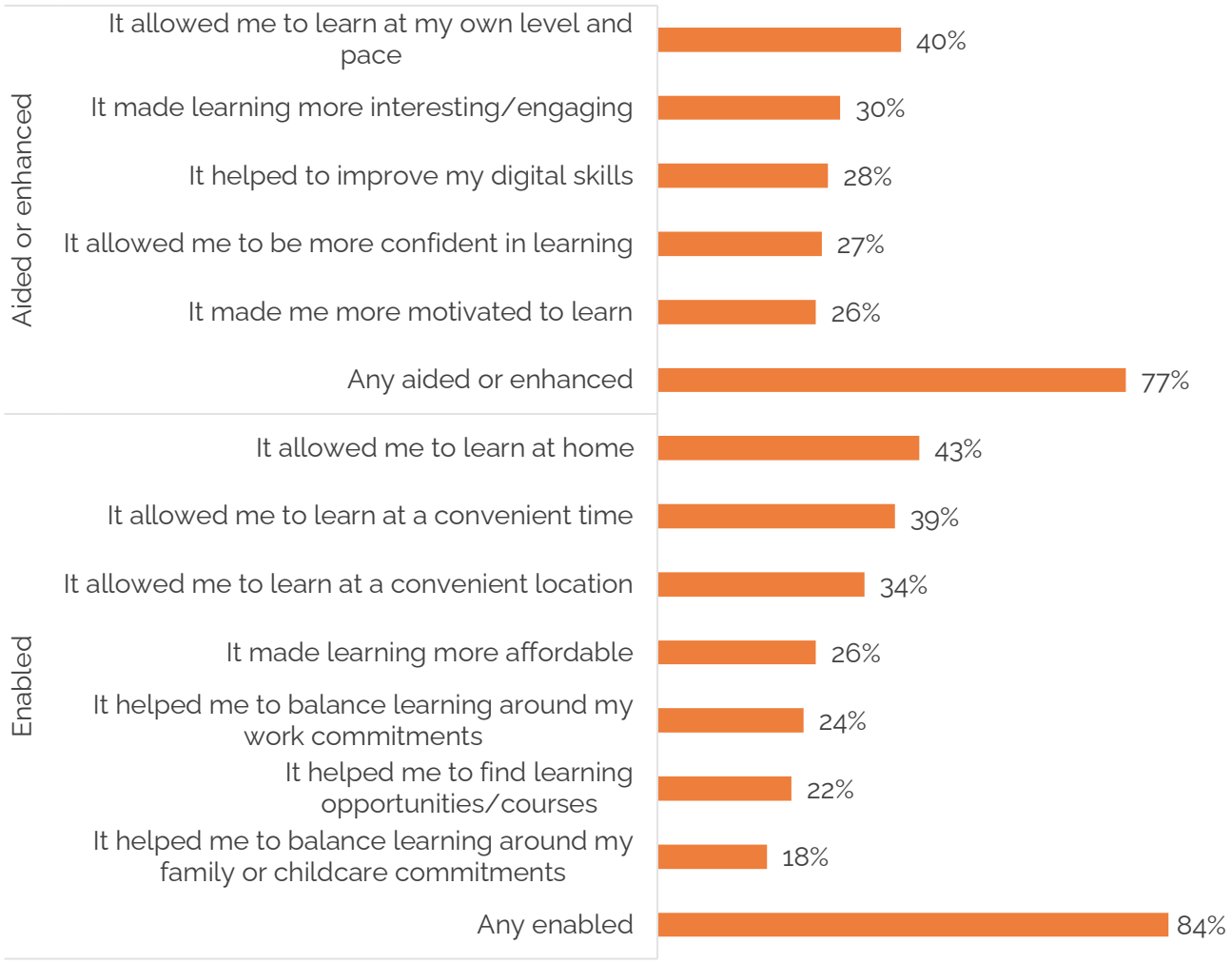
Technology can ease challenges experienced by learners and break down barriers

Further to our earlier analysis on the digitisation of learning delivery, 95% of current or recent learners report the use of at least one digital technology. The shift towards blended learning that this signals appears to be welcomed by learners, with nearly all (98%) reporting benefits in their learning from using technology.

Greater flexibility granted by these technologies appears to be highly valued (Figure 25). Two in five current or recent learners report that technology had allowed them to learn at home (43%), and at a convenient time (39%). These findings are interesting in the context of challenges reported by learners – with 'time pressures' the most commonly reported (28%). These technologies may also have a role to play in removing barriers for non-learners, with 15% those who haven't taken part in learning in the last three years reporting that 'time pressures' have prevented them.

Figure 25: Learners who used technology identified a range of benefits

How technology supported learning



Base: all respondents who used technology to help support their learning. Weighted = 2064; unweighted = 2149.

As well as supporting the learning experience and enabling people to learn, these technologies appear to be enriching people's learning experience. Two fifths of learners (40%) identified being able to learn at their own level and pace, and 30% reported that learning was more interesting and engaging as a result of using technology. Overall, over four fifths (84%) of learners who had used technology to support their learning identified a way it had enabled their learning, and over three quarters (77%) identified a way it had enhanced it.

However, the enabling power of these technologies and ability to ease challenges learners face also depends on the ability of learners to use these technologies and be confident in doing so.

Too often people lack the confidence to use technologies to learn

All respondents were asked about their level of confidence in using technology in different settings: at home/everyday life, at work, and for learning.

While a high proportion report feeling confident using at least one technology at home (96%), for learning (91%) and at work (82%), confidence in the use of specific technologies varies greatly. Too often, people appear to lack the confidence to use digital technologies in their job and when learning.

A smartphone is the technology most people feel confident in using at home (65%). While databases (21%) and VR (10%) are the technologies people are the least confident with.

Interestingly, only one half of people report being confident about using a laptop or computer at work (47%) or for learning (51%).

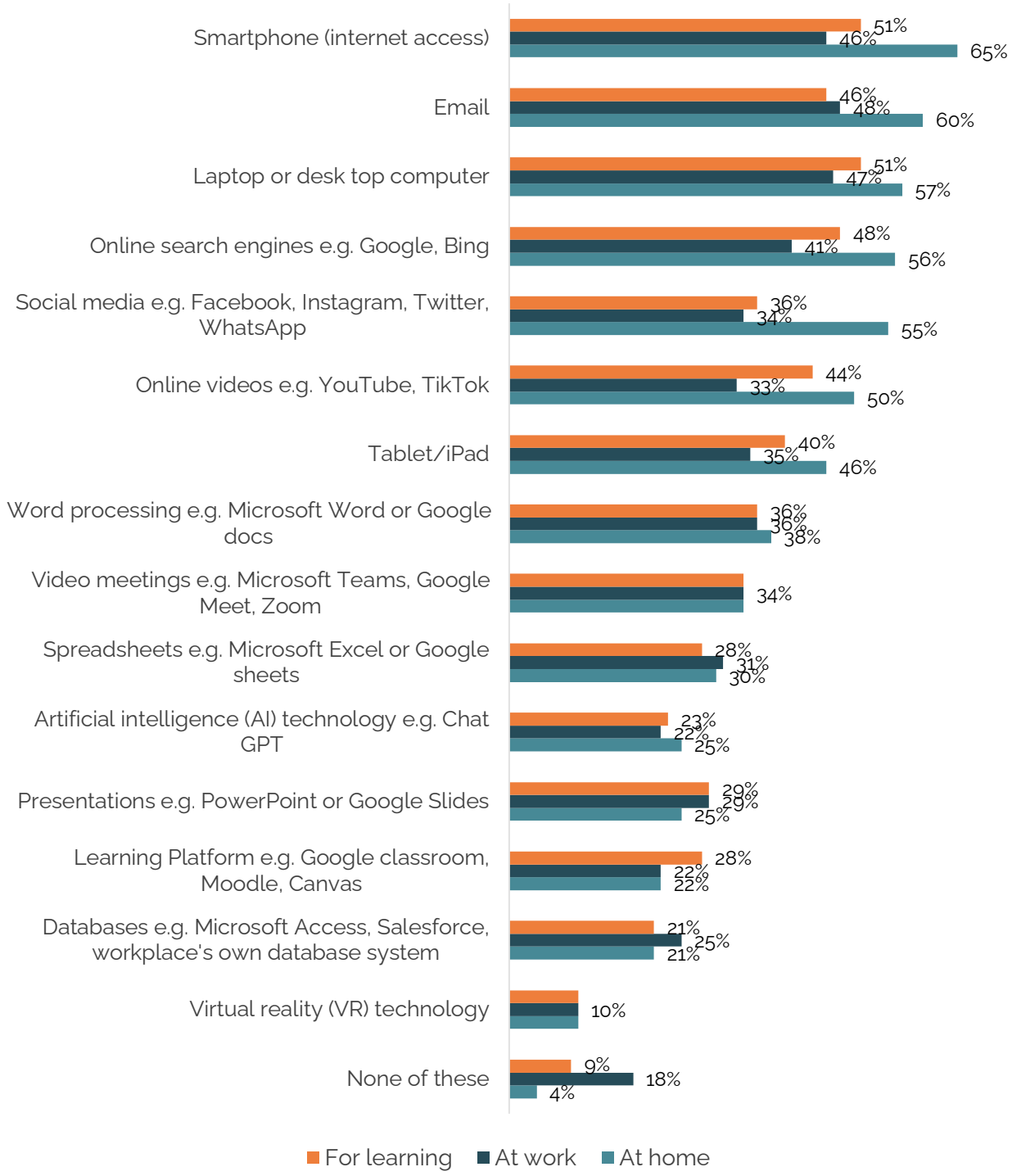
- Younger people (20-24) are significantly less likely to express confidence in using a laptop or desktop PC for work (38%) than the rest of the population. This compares to 53% of those aged 45-54 and 57% of those 55-64.
- Among employed people specifically, 51% report confidence in using a laptop or computer for work, and self-employed people express significantly higher levels of confidence (60%).
- The type of work that people do may also impact confidence. People in the AB (51%) and C1 (56%) social grades are significantly more likely to express confidence in using this technology for work than people in the C2 (44%) and DE (37%) categories.

Only one third of people report feeling confident using video meetings in any setting (34%). Just over one fifth now report feeling confident using AI at work (22%). This has increased eight percentage points since 2023.

- The age group with the highest level of confidence in using AI for work is people aged 25-34 (33% compared to an average of 22%).
- Respondents in the DE social grade were significantly less likely to report confidence in using AI for work (14%), compared to people in the AB social grade (28%).

Figure 26: Learners expressed overall higher levels of confidence in using technology at home.

Adult's confidence in using technology at home, work and for learning, 2025



Base: All adults 17 or over. Weighted = 5186; unweighted = 5186.

For some technologies, confidence levels in using technology for work are highest among the 45-54 and 55-64 age categories and significantly above the average (**Error! Reference source not found.**), and in several cases, significantly above younger age groups. This suggests that it cannot be taken for granted that younger people in the workforce have confidence in the use of technology for work, though of course it may be that young people are confident with the technology itself but aren't generally in jobs that require its use.

Table 3: Older working age groups express higher than average levels of confidence in using some technologies at work.

Technology	All respondents' confidence in using for work	Age 45-54 confidence in using for work	Age 55-64 confidence in using for work
Smartphone (Internet access)	46%	56%	53%
Laptop or desktop computer	47%	53%	57%
Tablet/iPad	35%	42%	44%
Email	48%	55%	62%
Online search engines	41%	51%	51%

Base: all adults aged 17+. Weighted = 5186; unweighted = 5186.

The increased digitisation of learning is an irreversible trend and brings many benefits. However, with many lacking the confidence to use these technologies for learning, digital inclusion must be central to the mission of learning providers. This survey has clearly shown how technology can enable learning and remove barriers people face. As such, targeted learning focused on digital skills could also unlock opportunities for future learning, giving people the confidence and know-how to benefit from these technologies' enabling power.

For employers, it is clear that a considerable proportion of the workforce lack the confidence to use technologies that are essential to an increasing proportion of jobs. For firms to fully harness these technologies, their staff must first have the confidence and know-how to use them. This creates a clear need for employers to be investing in workplace training to develop digital skills and doing so in the context of how they will be used in the workplace. However, employer investment in workplace training is in long term decline, standing at roughly half the EU average on a per-worker basis.[35] It is perhaps unsurprising that the UK lags behind other advanced economies when it comes to technology adoption.[36]

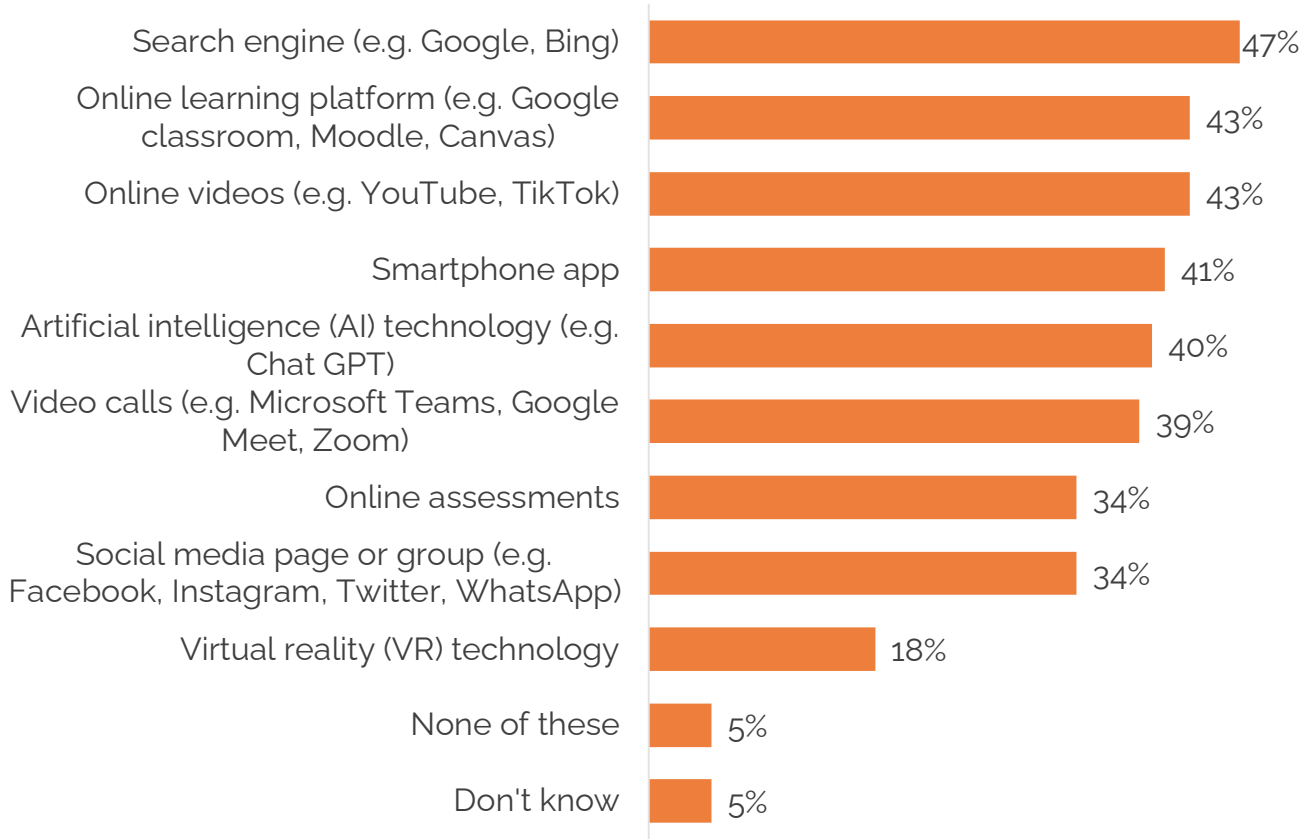
[35] Evans, S (2022) Raising the bar: Increasing employer investment in skills. Learning and Work Institute.
[36] Department for Business and Trade, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and HM Treasury (2025), Technology Adoption Review 2025.

People expect AI to play a key role in their working life and career

Survey respondents who said they are likely to take part in learning in the future were asked about their expectations around the role for different technologies (Figure 27). Nine in ten adults (90%) expect technology to support their future working life and career. Notably, 40% of respondents expect AI to support their working life or career, a similar proportion to the longer-established technologies of video calls (39%) and smartphone apps (41%).

Figure 27: Nearly all respondents who are likely to learn in the future expect that technologies will play a role.

Technologies respondents expect to support their working life or career prospect



Base: all who are likely to engage in learning. Weighted = 2486; unweighted = 2553.

Conclusion

The findings for this year's report can support informed decision making by policymakers, employers, learning providers and community level organisations, aiding them to enable more people to learn throughout life and reduce inequalities in access to learning between groups. The survey contributes further evidence on several key challenges around lifelong learning that have already been reported by L&W and others.

Firstly, participation is falling (though remains above pre-pandemic levels) at a time when lifelong learning has never been more important. Five-decade careers and changes in technology leave us all needing new skills and know-how for life inside and outside of work. For this reason, and others, levels of learning cannot be left to languish. Government funding and public policy have an important role to play, particularly in the wake of deep and longstanding cuts to adult skills budgets in England. However, new community-based and digital ways of increasing participation can also prove valuable, leveraging the input of organisations who can remove barriers and empower people to learn.

Secondly, there are major inequalities in who accesses training at work, with higher earners and graduates significantly more likely to benefit. In this sense, employer funded training risks replicating and reinforcing inequalities in public spending on education. In a two-track labour market where pay is a predictor of access to training, people are at risk of being stuck in a doom loop of low-pay and low skills. Efforts to incentivise greater employer investment in training and reverse the decline of recent years should therefore also focus on redressing the balance between workers and giving more people the chance improve their skills and earnings.

Thirdly, too many people lack confidence in using technologies increasingly essential to modern life and the world of work. Digital inclusion and upskilling and contextualising learning with how technology will be used in the workplace must be a priority for firms seeking to adopt technologies and learning providers exploring ways to innovate their delivery. If got right, this can enable more people to engage in learning as well as enhance their experience when doing so.

Lastly, the benefits of learning are enormous and wide ranging and must be relentlessly promoted. Learning helps people with their work and careers, supports health and wellbeing, promotes integration, reduces loneliness, and enriches lives. For this reason, lifelong learning should be the golden thread running through all public services, including social prescribing in primary care, housing support, and employment programmes. Because when adults learn, our society and economy thrive.

Annex: Survey method

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 2025 Adult Participation in Learning Survey included 5,186 adults aged 17 and over across the UK. This sample has been weighted (generating an effective sample of 5,186) to provide a UK representative dataset. In addition to overall participation, the 2025 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 confidence in and future expectations of technology in careers.

In 2025, the survey was part-funded by Ufi VocTech Trust. Fieldwork was conducted by Kantar via their UK online omnibus survey, running from 23rd June 2025 to 14th July 2025.

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. The National Adult Learner Survey (NALS) [37] adopted an alternative approach, 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' 30-year history. An alternative approach would be through use of nationally collected statistics on adult education such as in DfE and ESFA statistical releases.[38] 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 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, income, 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 for the main model (i.e. analysis of likelihood of participation in learning) the chosen explanatory variables account for between 19% and 25% of the variation in participation status.

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

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.