

# Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2023: Wales

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# Summary

Learning is crucial for life, work and society. It can help people find work, progress in or change careers, support health and wellbeing, promote social integration, and many more benefits besides. Lifelong learning will only grow in importance as the UK's population ages, people have longer working lives, and our economy and society changes.

Since 1996, Learning and Work Institute has been undertaking the Adult Participation in Learning Survey on an almost annual basis. The survey provides a unique overview of the level of participation in learning by adults, with a detailed breakdown of who participates and who does not.

Year-on-year the survey finds stark and persistent inequalities, with some groups more likely to learn as an adult than others. The 2023 survey also indicated that differences between geographical regions may be widening. With devolution of learning and skills policy and funding, it is important to better understand patterns of participation at a national and regional level.

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

## Key findings for Wales

In Wales, around two in five adults (41 per cent) said they had learned over the past three years, which is significantly lower than the England average. **Wales has the lowest participation in learning rate of the UK nations and regions.** However, the proportion of current or recent learners was only statistically significantly lower than six of the other regions: Greater London (64 per cent), North West (52 per cent), East Midlands (52 per cent), West Midlands (51 per cent), South East (48 per cent) and South West (48 per cent).

The lower participation rate in Wales can be partly explained by demographic differences. For example, in the survey sample there was a higher proportion of adult in the DE<sup>1</sup> social grade in Wales than in the rest of the UK. Furthermore, more respondents in Wales were aged 50-74 than in the UK overall. The survey finds that both of these characteristics are associated with lower participation in learning.<sup>2</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> DE social grade corresponds to adults in semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations; unemployed and lowest grade occupations plus economically inactive and retired.

<sup>2</sup> Hall, S., Jones E., Evans, S. (2023) [Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2023](#), Learning and Work Institute.

- Adults in the AB<sup>3</sup> social grade are significantly more likely to participate in learning than adults in other social grades.
- Younger adults are significantly more likely to take up learning than older adults.
- The longer individuals remain in full-time education, the more likely they are to learn as an adult.

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

- **In Wales, adults in the C2<sup>4</sup> social grade are significantly less likely to participate in learning than adults in other social grades.**
- **People in Wales who left full time education aged 17 or 18 are also less likely to say they have taken part in learning in than in the rest of the UK.**

In Wales, adults' motivations for learning and their method of learning are similar to the UK overall: they are more likely to be learning for work than for leisure; they are mainly learning independently or through work; and most are doing at least some of their learning online.

In Wales, three in five (61 per cent) current or recent learners identified at least one challenge while learning, compared with nearly seven in ten (68 per cent) in the UK. The challenges identified by learners in Wales were relatively similar to those identified by adults in the rest of the UK. However, **adults in Wales were significantly less likely to identify situational challenges<sup>5</sup> while learning (40 per cent) than in the rest of the UK (49 per cent).**

In Wales, as seen in the rest of the UK, nearly seven in ten (69 per cent) adults identified at least one barrier to learning. These barriers were fairly consistent with the rest of the UK. However, **adults in Wales are significantly more likely to report illness or disability (14 per cent) as a barrier to take part in learning than the UK average (10 percent).** This could be explained by a higher proportion of people reporting being in bad

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<sup>3</sup> AB social grade corresponds to adults in higher and intermediate managerial, administrative, and professional occupations.

<sup>4</sup> C2 social grade corresponds in skilled manual occupations.

<sup>5</sup> Situational barriers are arising from an adult's personal and family situation, including: cost/money/can't afford it; Childcare arrangements or other caring responsibilities; Transport/too far to travel; Work/other time pressures; lack of digital equipment/broadband for online learning.

or very bad health in Wales than in England, and a higher proportion than any other region.<sup>6</sup>

The survey included questions about career change. Just over two in five respondents (42 per cent) would like or need to change their career/industry/occupation in the next one or two years. The main reason cited was to earn more money, followed by a desire to feel happier at work, to get a more interesting job or want a new challenge. Respondents were most likely to cite dispositional barriers<sup>7</sup> to changing job or career, including a lack of self-confidence and fear of applying for jobs. Most commonly, respondents said that if they wanted to change career, they would find learning or training helpful and they would search online to find information and advice. However, **adults in Wales are significantly more likely to say that they don't know where to go for advice on career change than the UK overall (17 per cent) and seven other regions or nations, including Northern Ireland.** This highlights a real need to raise awareness of sources of careers information, advice and guidance for adults.

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<sup>6</sup> In Wales, there was a higher proportion of people who were disabled and limited a lot in their day to day activities (10 per cent) than Wales average (7.5 per cent) on Census day, 2021.

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

<sup>7</sup> Dispositional barriers relate to the attitudes, perceptions and expectations of adult. They include barriers such as feeling too old to learn, being put off by tests and exams, not feeling confident enough to learn.

## Introduction

Learning is crucial for life, work and society. It can help people find work, progress in or change careers, support health and wellbeing, promote social integration, and many more benefits besides. Lifelong learning will only grow in importance as the UK's population ages, people have longer working lives, and our economy and society changes.

The Adult Participation in Learning Survey provides a unique insight into how many adults are taking part in learning each year, the benefits people see from learning, and the reasons why some adults say they have not taken part in learning. It does so based on a broad definition of learning, including but not limited to formal learning, courses and qualifications.

The 2023 survey shows almost one in two adults in the UK took part in learning in the last three years, the highest rate since the survey started in 1996. This continues the step change in learning participation seen since the pandemic, which followed a decade of declines in adult education budgets across the UK nations as austerity hit services. The increase in participation since the pandemic has been driven by a rise in self-directed learning, including online. This is often for personal or leisure reasons or general interest. This is clearly positive, but other opportunities to learn have become more limited over time as government investment has reduced and employer investment has been largely static in Wales and declining in other parts of the UK.

There is more positive news in the narrowing over time of some inequalities in learning participation between groups. This includes by age, important given our aging population. Nonetheless, these inequalities remain stark and persistent and, in the case of regional differences, may in fact have widened in recent years.

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

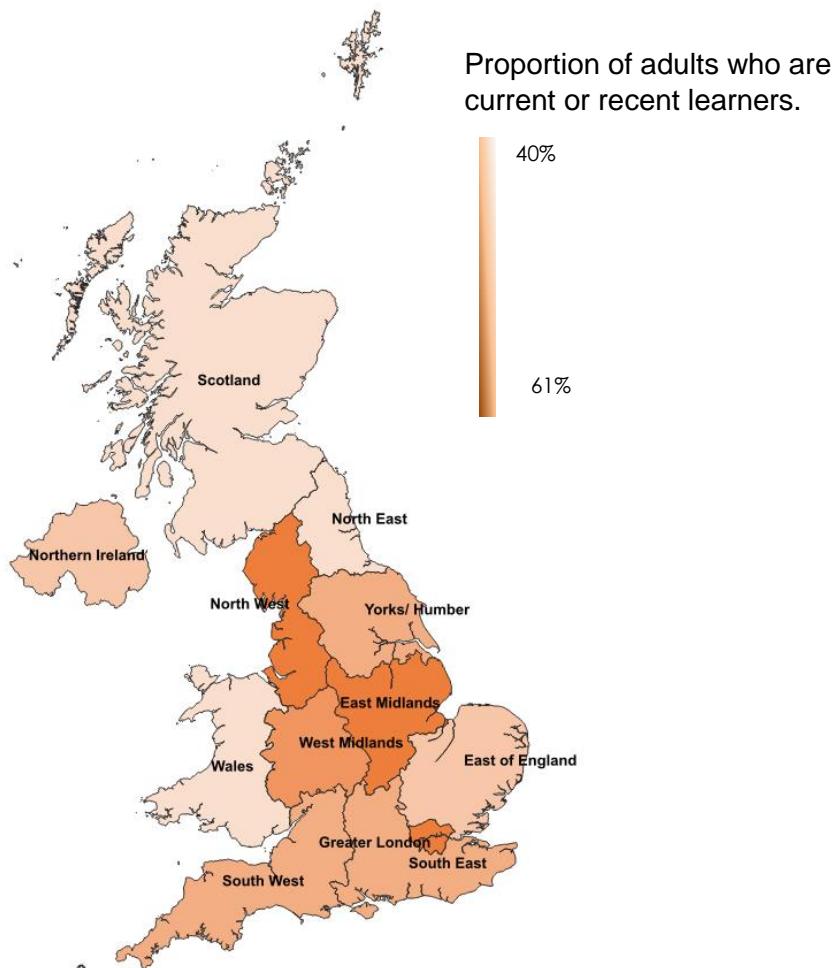
To engage more adults in learning, policymakers, commissioners and those working in learning providers need to look at people's motivations for learning. The biggest reasons adults give for not taking part in learning are cost, feeling too old, time pressures and also not wanting to / not seeing the benefits. That points to the need to build a culture of learning and offer people a range of flexible learning options. Welsh Government has made a significant statement of intent by making lifelong learning a statutory duty for its new funding and regulatory body Medr. This commitment needs to lead to meaningful policy that supports an entitlement to learning throughout life.

## Analysing UK's nations and regions

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

have been growing since 2017.<sup>8</sup> For example, while more than three in five adults in Greater London have learned within the past three years, only two in five adults say are either a current or recent learners in the North East of England. Furthermore, participation rates are also lower for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales than for England.

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



Source: Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2023.

However, there are also important inequalities within regions and nations, with some groups less likely to take part in learning than others. With greater policy variation across the UK, and devolution to areas of England in skills policy and funding, it is important to better understand patterns of participation across the UK nations and regions. This can help inform where interventions and support are best targeted and may make the greatest impact.

<sup>8</sup> Hall, S., Jones E., Evans, S. (2023) [Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2023](#), Learning and Work Institute.

## About the Adult Participation in Learning Survey

Since 1996, Learning and Work Institute has been undertaking the Adult Participation in Learning Survey on an almost annual basis.<sup>9</sup> The survey provides a unique overview of the level of participation in learning by adults, with a detailed breakdown of who participates and who does not.

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

*'Learning can mean practising, studying, or reading about something. It can also mean being taught, instructed or coached. This is so you can develop skills, knowledge, abilities or understanding of something. Learning can also be called education or training. You can do it regularly (each day or month) or you can do it for a short period of time. It can be full-time or part-time, done at home, at work, or in another place like college. Learning does not have to lead to a qualification. We are interested in any learning you have done, whether or not it was finished.'*

Like most of our surveys in recent years, the 2023 survey explores who participates in learning; motivations and barriers; how learning is undertaken; and benefits experienced as a result of learning. It also includes questions on learning for career change.

Unlike previous years, the 2023 survey sample includes regional boosts to achieve a minimum sample size in each UK nation and region (600 for all regions apart from Northern Ireland, where the sample was boosted to 400 respondents). The boosted sample consists of 9,506 adults aged 17 and over (8,906 weighted). A total of 597 adults in the Wales took part in the survey (422 weighted).

Fieldwork was conducted between August and September 2023 by a market research company via their UK online omnibus survey. The sample has been weighted to provide a dataset representative of the UK (i.e. it is not weighted to be representative of the Welsh population).

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

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<sup>9</sup> Surveys were undertaken annually from 1996 except in three years: 1997, 1998 and 2016.

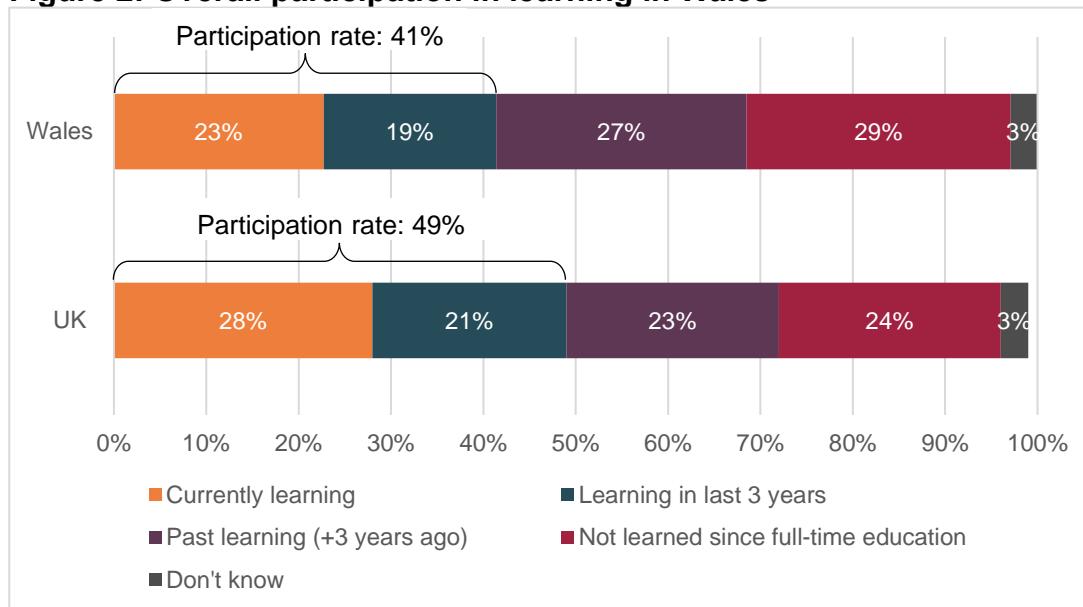
## Adult participation in learning in Wales

Participation in learning is statistically lower in Wales compared to the UK overall. Just over two in five (41 per cent) of adults in Wales stated they are currently learning or that they have taken up learning within the past three years, compared to 49 per cent in the UK.

Just under one in four (23 per cent) adults in Wales said they are currently learning, with a further one in five (19 per cent) saying they have done some learning over the past three years (Figure 2). Almost three in ten adults (29 per cent) said they have not done any learning since full-time education, while just over one in four (27 per cent) said they have been in learning over three years ago.

Adults in Wales are significantly more likely to say that they have done some learning but over three years ago (27 per cent), than the UK average (23 per cent). In addition, adults in Wales are significantly more likely to have not done any learning since full-time education (29 per cent), than the UK average (24 per cent).

**Figure 2: Overall participation in learning in Wales**



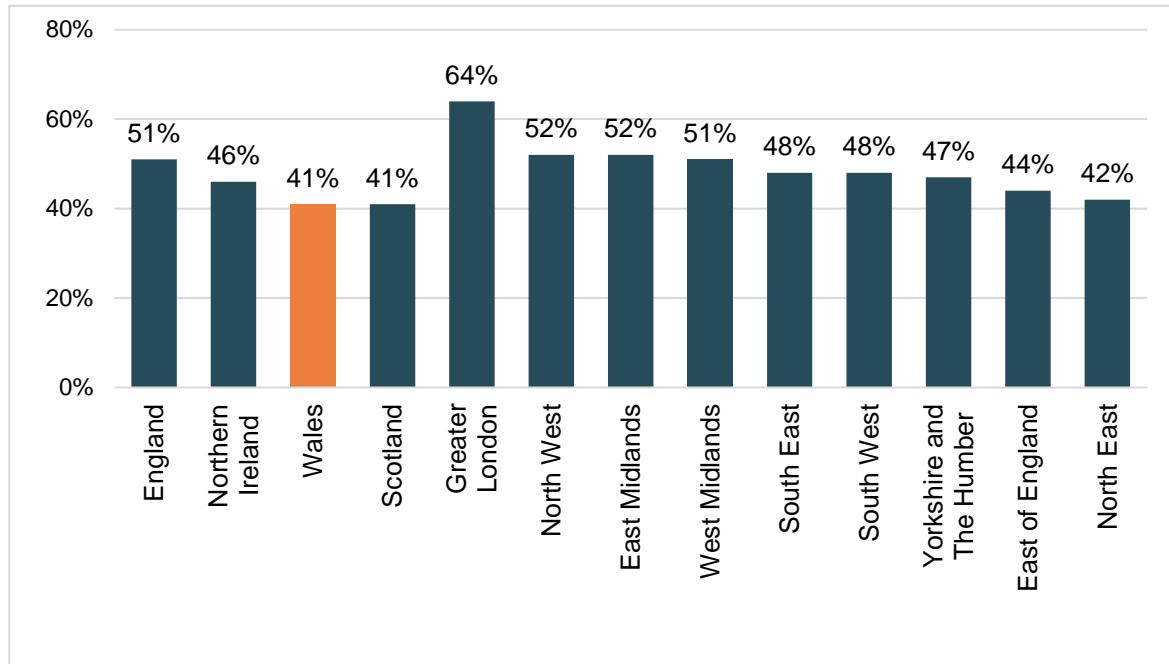
Base: Wales respondents. Weighted base: = 422, unweighted base = 597.

When comparing levels of participation in learning across the UK in 2023, the survey shows that the participation rate in Wales is equal to Scotland (41 per cent) and below the average in England (51 per cent) and in Northern Ireland (46 per cent) (Figure 3).

**Wales has the joint lowest participation in learning of all the other UK regions and nations.** However, the proportion of current or recent learners is only statistically lower than six other regions: Greater London (64 per cent), North West (52 per cent), East Midlands (52 per cent), West Midlands (51 per cent), South East (48 per cent) and South West (48 per cent). These differences can be partly explained by compositional factors –

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

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

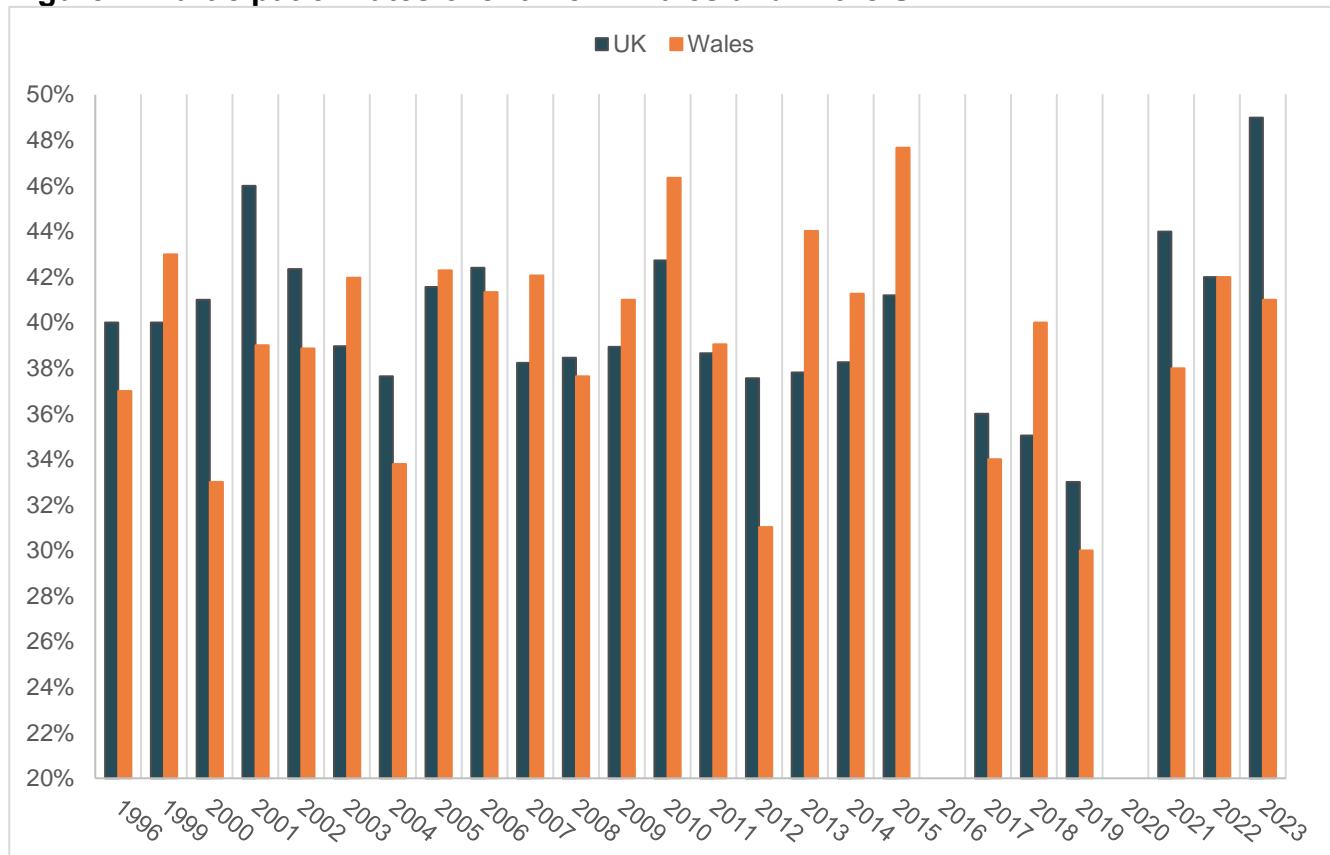


Base: all respondents. Total weighted base = 8,906, North East = 359, North West = 975, Yorkshire and The Humber = 730, East Midlands = 651, West Midlands = 782, East of England = 832, Greater London = 1,173, South East = 1,216, South West = 772, England = 7,491, Northern Ireland = 249, Scotland = 744, Wales = 422. Total unweighted base = 9,506, North East = 598, North West = 1,045, Yorkshire and The Humber = 786, East Midlands = 709, West Midlands = 834, East of England = 814, Greater London = 1,328, South East = 1,083, South West = 711, England = 7,908, Northern Ireland = 401, Scotland = 600, Wales = 597.

In the 27-year history of the survey, the participation rate in Wales has been higher than the UK average in 11 years (Figure 4).<sup>10</sup> However, the year-on-year changes need to be interpreted with caution as the volatility of the estimates are partly due to the smaller sample size at a regional level.

<sup>10</sup> Note that data is available for 23 out of 27 years. The survey did not run in 1996, 1997 or 2016. The survey in 2020 was carried out using a different methodology and is therefore not comparable.

**Figure 4: Participation rates over time in Wales and in the UK**



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

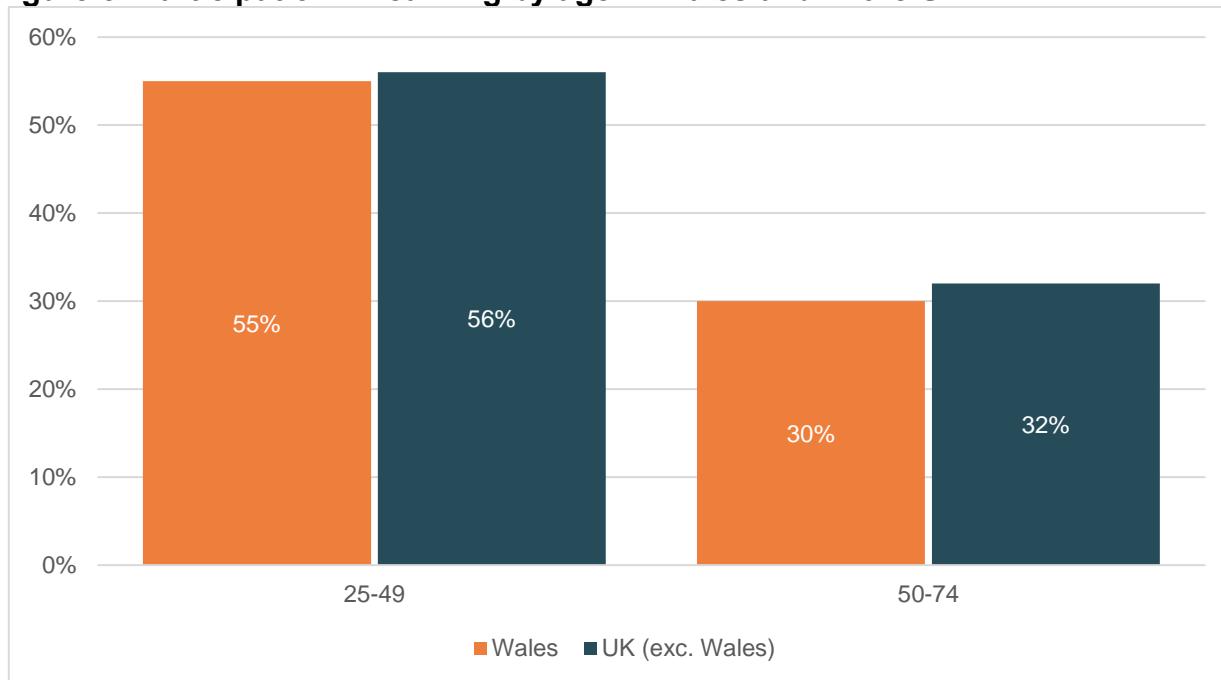
## Demographic breakdown

### Age

The UK survey consistently shows that participation in learning decreases with age. In Wales, adults aged 25-49 are significantly more likely to say they are current or recent learners than older adults aged 50-74 (Figure 5). Just over one half (55 per cent) of adults aged 25-49 said they are current or recent learners, compared with three in ten adults aged 50-74 (30 per cent).

The participation in learning by age in Wales was similar to the rest of the UK.

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



Base: Wales respondents. Total weighted base = 422, 25-49 = 145, 50-74 = 133. Total unweighted base = 597, 25-49 = 180, 50-74 = 170. UK respondents. Total weighted base = 8125, 25-49 = 3556, 50-74 = 3586. Total unweighted base = 8909, 25-49 = 4038, 50-74 = 3586.

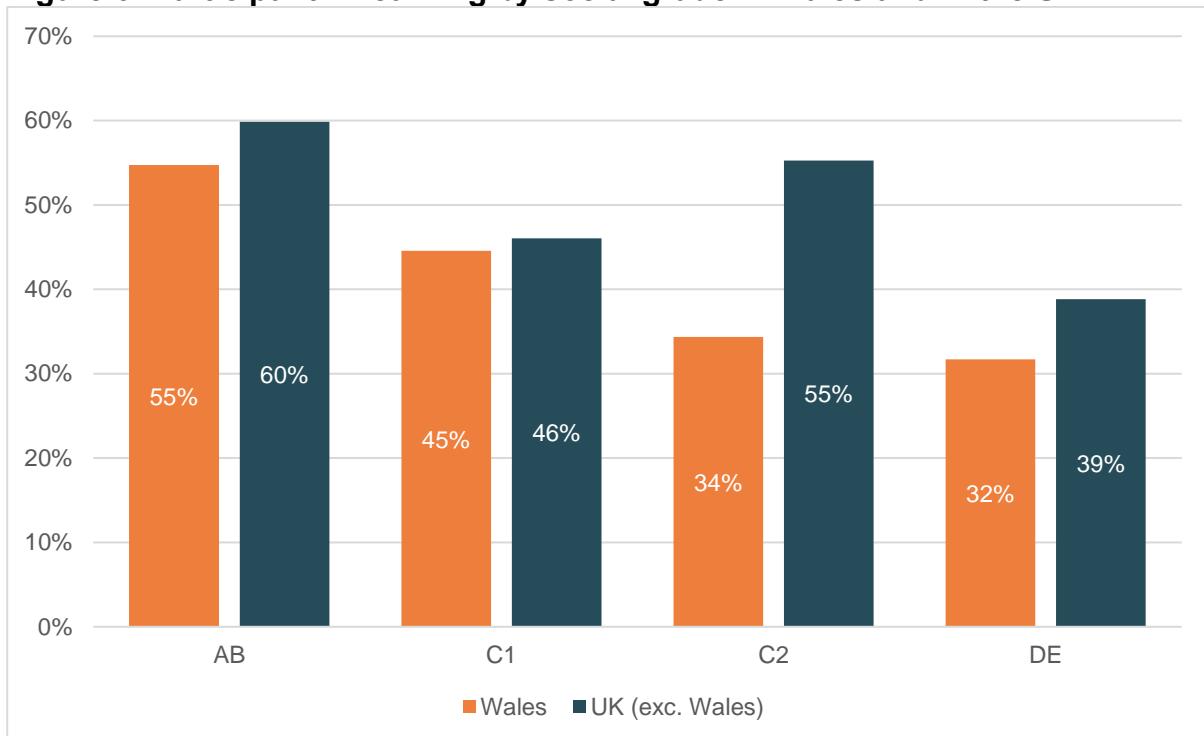
### Social grade

The Adult Participation in Learning Survey consistently shows that social grade<sup>11</sup> is a key predictor of participation in learning. In Wales, those in the AB social grade are significantly more likely to say they are current or recent learners compared to C2 and DE (Figure 6). Over half of adults (55 per cent) in the AB social grade said they are current or recent learners, compared to 45 per cent in the C1 and 34 per cent in the C2 grades. Respondents in the DE grade were the least likely to say they are current or recent learners (32 per cent). DE social grades were also significantly lower to participate in learning compared to C1 and AB social grades.

The participation rates by social grades are fairly similar to the rates in the UK (excluding Wales) for those in the AB grade, C1 grade and DE grade. However, **the participation rate for adults in the C2 grade is significantly lower in Wales than for the rest of the UK (55 per cent)**.

<sup>11</sup> Social Grade: AB: Higher and intermediate managerial, administrative, and professional occupations. C1: Supervisory, clerical, and junior managerial, administrative, and professional occupations. C2: Skilled manual occupations. DE: Semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations; unemployed and lowest grade occupations plus economically inactive and retired.

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



Base: Wales respondents. Total weighted base = 422, AB = 106, C1 = 110, C2 = 64, DE = 142. Total unweighted base = 597, AB = 150, C1 = 155, C2 = 92, DE = 200. Base: UK (excluding Wales) respondents. Total weighted base = 8125, AB = 2632, C1 = 1923, C2 = 1442, DE = 2497. Total unweighted base = 8909, AB = 2753, C1 = 2025, C2 = 1531, DE = 2600.

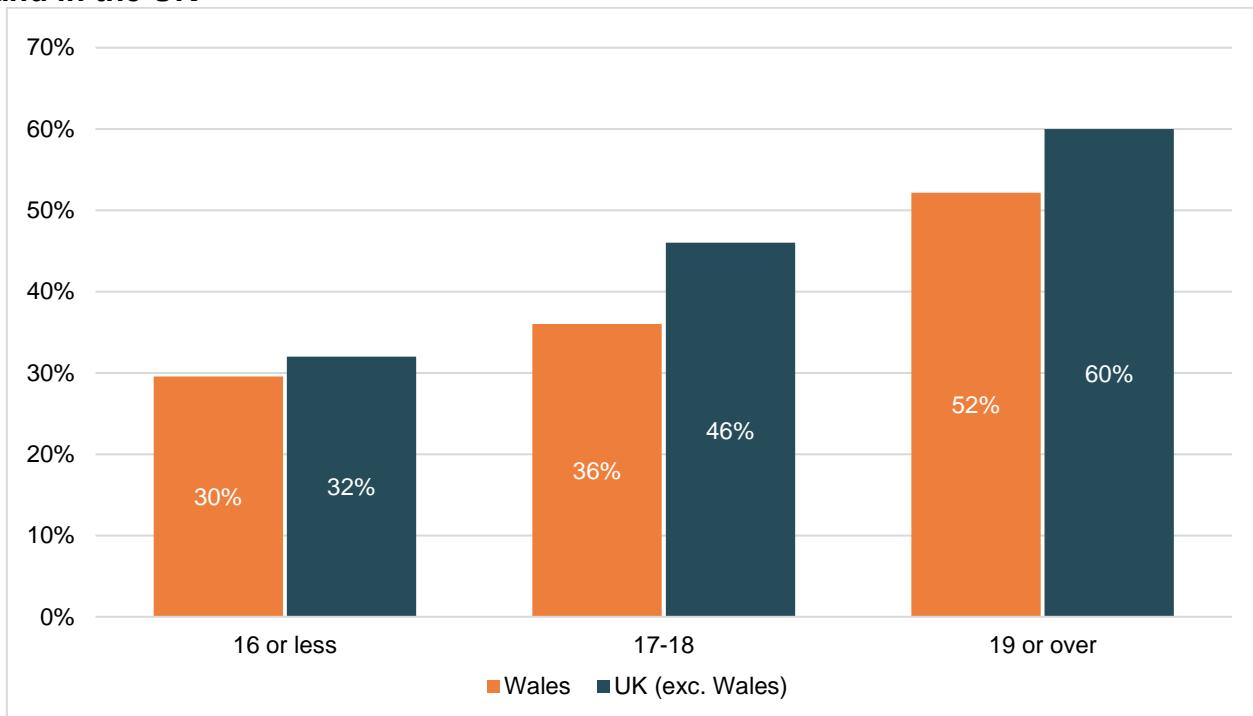
### Age completed full-time education

The survey uses the age someone left full-time education as a proxy for highest level of qualification. The UK survey shows that the longer individuals remain in full-time education, the more likely they are to learn as an adult. In Wales, adults who left full-time education aged 16 or under are less likely to learn as an adult than the other groups (Figure 7). Three in ten adults (30 per cent) who left education aged 16 or under are current or recent learners. This figure slightly increases for those who stayed in education until age 17-18 to just under two in five adults (36 per cent). The participation rate gradually increases further for people who left education aged 19 or over (52 per cent).

In Wales, the participation rates are fairly similar to the rates for the UK overall for people who left full-time education aged 16 or under. However, **the rate is significantly lower for those left education aged 17 to 18, with 36 per cent of adults in this group in Wales who said they are current or recent learners compared to 46 per cent in the UK.**

The participation gap between adults who left full-time education aged 16 or under and those who left aged 21 or over is lower in Wales than in the other UK nations and regions. The gap in participation in learning between adults who left full-time education aged 16 and those who left school aged 19 or over is 28 percentage points in the UK. In Wales the gap is equal to 22 percentage points, due to people who left full-time education later being less likely to take part in learning in Wales.

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



Base: Wales respondents. Total weighted base = 403, 16 or less = 142, 17-18 = 100, 19-20 = 36, 21 or over = 125. Total unweighted base = 572, 16 or less = 199, 17-18 = 142, 19-20 = 53, 21 or over = 178. Base: UK respondents. Total weighted base = 8040, 16 or less = 2483, 17-18 = 1919, 19-20 = 959, 21 or over = 2679. Total unweighted base = 8622, 16 or less = 2602, 17-18 = 2056, 19-20 = 1041, 21 or over = 2923.

## Gender

In Wales, women (61 per cent) are more likely than men (38 per cent) to say they are current or recent learners. However, the differences between the two proportions are not statistically significantly different. The rates are different to the UK overall, where women are more likely to say they are learning (51 per cent), and men are less likely to say they are learning (47 per cent).

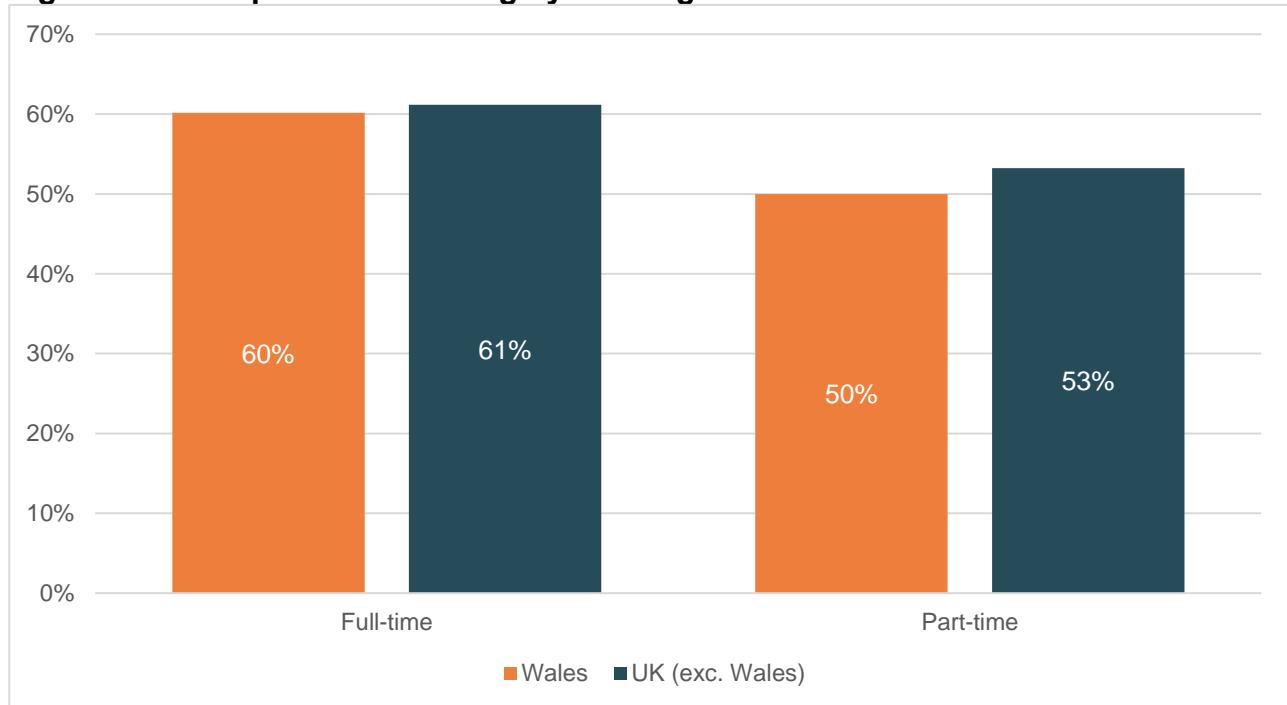
## Working status

The survey shows that working status is a key predictor of participation in learning, with closer proximity to the labour market associated with higher participation rates. Due to small sample sizes, the Wales analysis includes only two working statuses: working full-time and working part-time (Figure 8).

Adults working part-time are less likely to say they are currently learning or have done so in the last three years (50 per cent), compared to those working full-time (60 per cent).

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

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



Base: Wales respondents. Total weighted base = 422, Full-time = 138, Part-time = 60. Total unweighted base = 587, Full-time = 204, Part-time = 88. Base: UK (excluding Wales) respondents. Total weighted base = 8125, Full-time = 3346, Part-time = 1195. Total unweighted base = 8672, Full-time = 3684, Part-time = 1303. Note: Respondents in other working status are not shown in this chart due to small sample sizes in Wales.

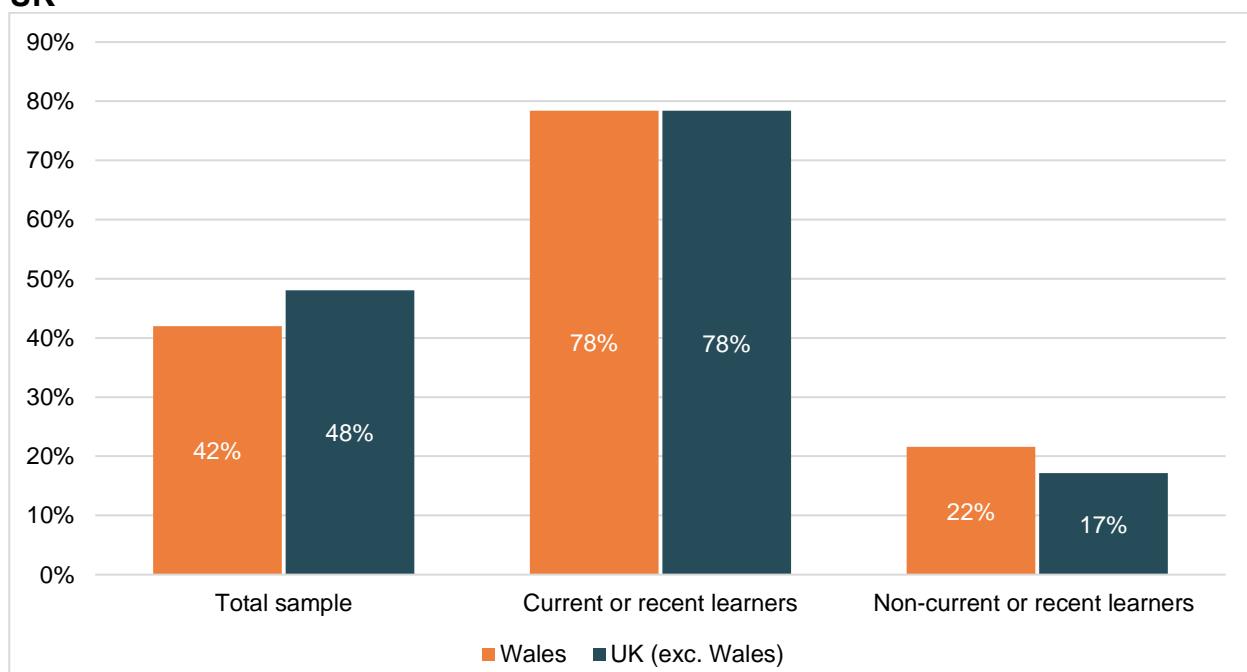
## Future intentions to learn

As well as patterns and experiences of current/recent learning, the survey captures future intentions to learn. Respondents were asked about their likelihood of taking up learning in the next three years.

In Wales, two in five (42 per cent) of adults said that they are either very likely or likely to take up learning in the next three years (Figure 9). However, adults' intention to learn is highly influenced by their current learning status. Recent and current learners are significantly more likely to say they are likely to learn in the future than adults who haven't engaged with learning in the past three years. Just under four in five (78 per cent) current or recent learners said they are likely or very likely to learn in the future, compared with one in five (22 per cent) of adults who haven't engaged with learning in the past three years.

These proportions are fairly similar to the UK overall: 78 per cent of the current or recent learners said they are likely to learn in the future compared with only 17 per cent of adults who have not taken up learning over the last three years.

**Figure 9: Future likelihood of learning by current learning status in Wales and in the UK**



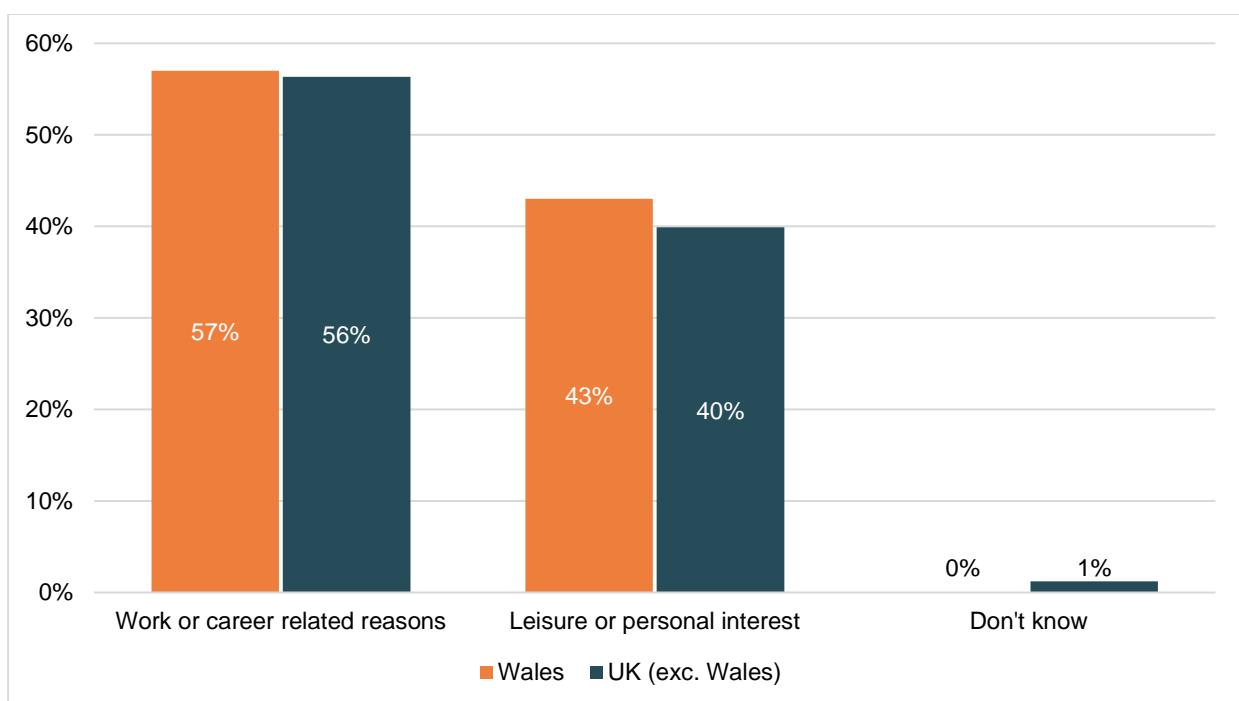
Base: Wales respondents. 'Don't know' responses have been removed. Weighted base = 377, Current or recent learner = 162, Not current or recent learner = 215 Unweighted base = 597, Current or recent learner = 417, Not current or recent learner = 179. Base: UK (excluding Wales) respondents. Weighted base = 8529, Current or recent learner = 4234, Not current or recent learner = 3984. Unweighted base = 8909, Current or recent learner = 4525, Not current or recent learner = 4384.

## Motivations to learn

Respondents who have engaged with learning within the previous three years were asked to state whether they started their main learning for work or career related reasons. In Wales, nearly three in five adults (57 per cent) said they took up learning for work or career related reasons, while just over two in five (43 per cent) said they took up learning for leisure or personal interests (Figure 10).

These proportions are similar to the rest of the UK: 56 per cent of respondents in the rest of the UK said they took up learning for work or career related reasons compared 40 per cent who say they did it for leisure or personal interest.

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



Base: all current or recent learners in Wales. Weighted base = 175, unweighted base = 235. Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding Wales). Weighted base = 4221, unweighted base = 4525.

## Learning delivery

Adults who reported that they are currently learning or have done so in the last three years were asked how they did or are doing their main learning. In Wales, over one third (37 per cent) current and recent learners said they learned independently on their own (Figure 11).

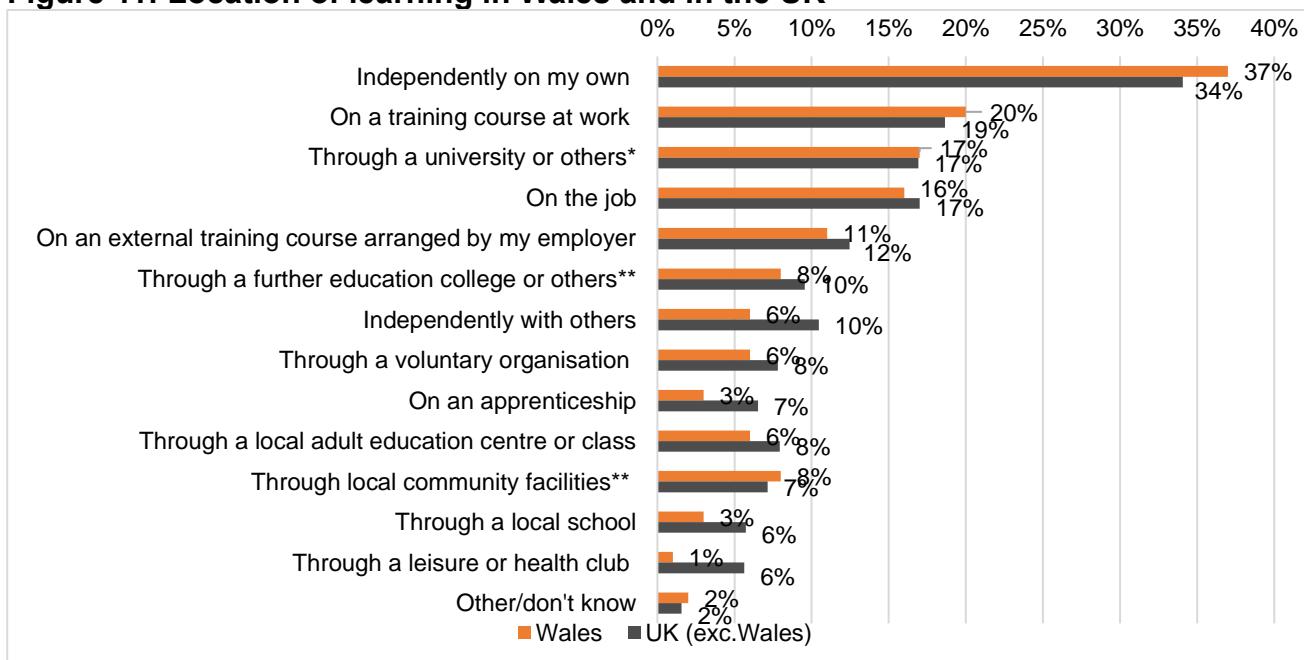
Work related learning was also commonly reported, with one in five adults learning through a training course at work (20 per cent), 16 per cent learning on the job and 11 per cent learning through an external training course arranged by their employers. Only three per cent reported doing an apprenticeship.

The third most commonly reported type of provision was a course with a university higher education institution (17 per cent). Just under one in ten learners (8 per cent) said they did this through a further college.

Other provision reported by learners included learning through community facilities (8 per cent), a voluntary organisation (6 per cent), local adult education centre (6 per cent), local school (3 per cent), or leisure or health club (1 per cent).

Whilst proportions are similar to the UK overall, respondents in Wales were more likely to learn independently on their own than in than the North West, East Midlands and Greater London.

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



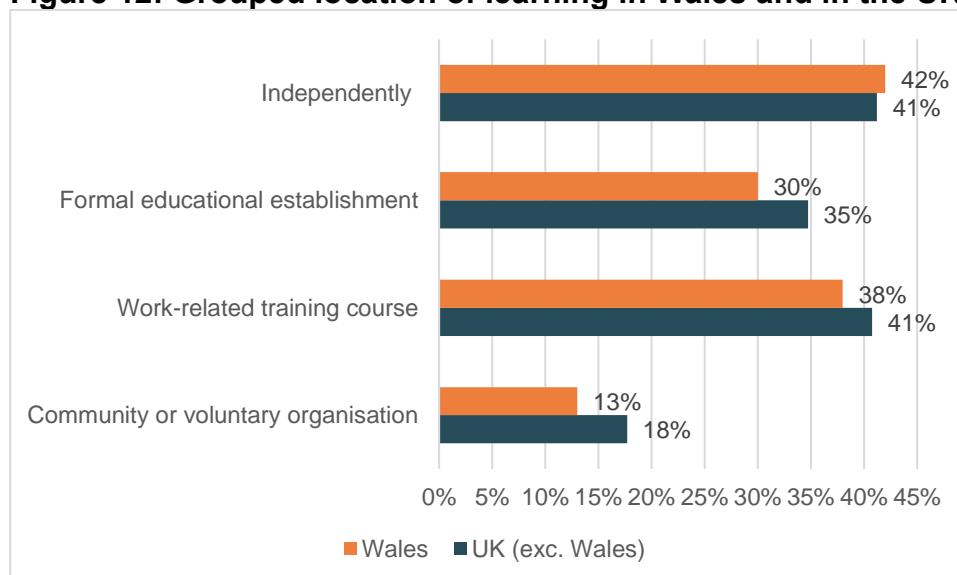
Base: All current or recent learners in Wales. Weighted base = 175, unweighted base = 253. Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding Wales). Weighted base = 4221, unweighted base = 4525.

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

To help with comparison, these delivery methods could be grouped in four categories: independently; formal education establishment; work-related training course and community or voluntary organisation.<sup>12</sup> In Wales, two in five participants said they have done their learning independently (42 per cent) or on a work-related learning course (38 per cent), one in three (30 per cent) said they have done their learning through a formal establishment and 13 per cent said they have done their learning through a community or voluntary organisation (Figure 12).

The delivery methods are fairly similar to the rest of the UK, with 41 per cent of current or recent learners in the other nations or regions doing their learning either independently or through a work related course, 35 per cent doing it through a formal educational establishment and 18 per cent through a community or voluntary organisation.

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



Base: all current or recent learners in Wales. Weighted base = 175 Unweighted base = 253. Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding Wales). Weighted base = 4221, unweighted base = 4525.

<sup>12</sup> The response options were categorised as follows:

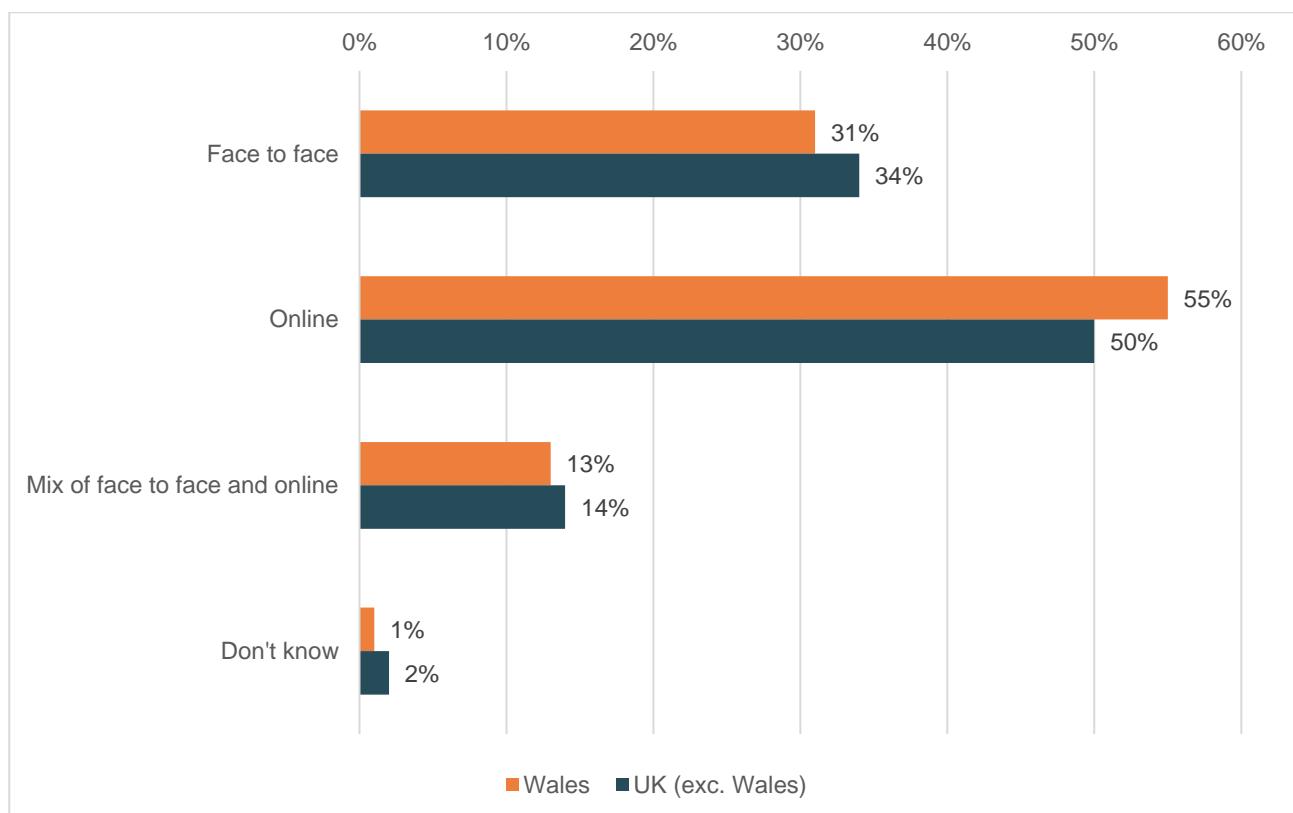
- Work-related, including: On the job; On a training course at work; On an external training course arranged by my employer; On an apprenticeship
- Independently, including: Independently on my own; Independently with others
- Formal educational establishment, including: Through a university/higher education institution/Open University; Through a further education college/tertiary/6th form college; Through a local adult education centre or class; Through a local school
- Community or voluntary organisation, including: Through a voluntary organisation; Through local community facilities e.g. library, museum, place of worship, bookshop etc; Through a leisure or health club.

## Online and face to face

Adults who reported that they are currently learning or have done so in the last three years were asked whether their main learning took place online or face-to-face. In Wales over one half (55 per cent) of current or recent learners said they completed at least one of their learning online (Figure 13). Nearly one in three (31 per cent) said they have taken up their learning face to face and more than one in ten (13 per cent) said their learning has involved a mix of online and face to face learning.

The proportions are similar to the UK overall: 50 per cent of learners in the rest of the UK said they have done their learning online and 34 per cent said they have done it face to face.

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



Base: all current or recent learners in Wales. Weighted base = 175, unweighted base = 253.

Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding Wales). Weighted base = 4221, unweighted base = 4525.

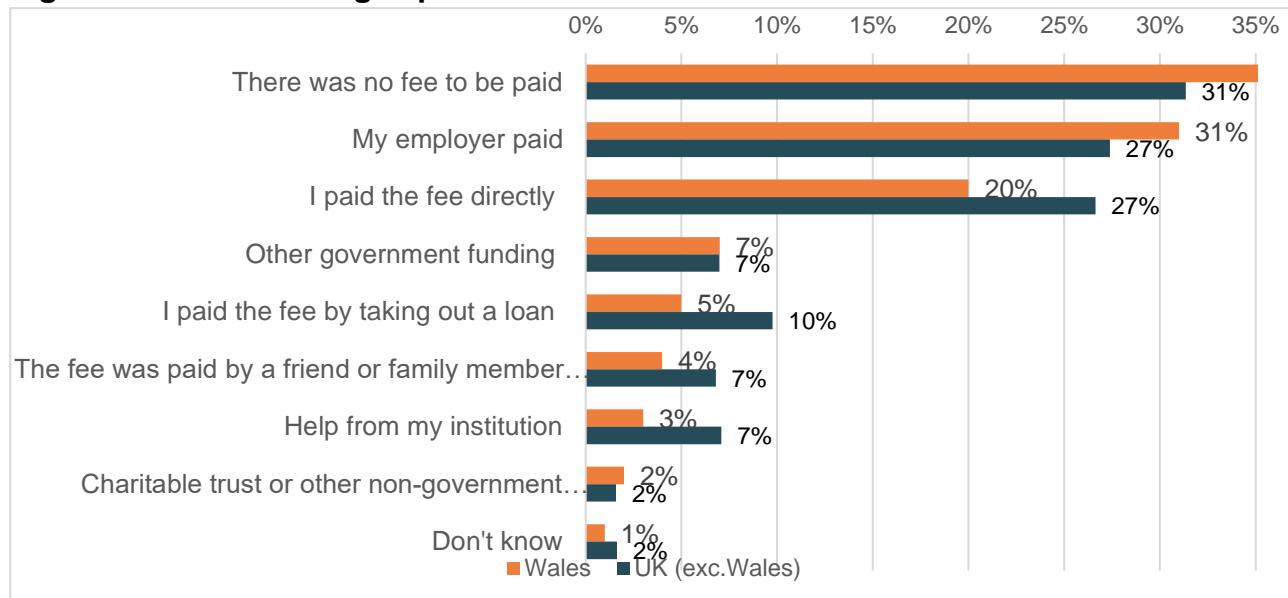
## Fees

In Wales, nearly two thirds (65 per cent) of current or recent learners said a fee was attached to their main learning (Figure 14). Most commonly, learners reported their fee was paid by their employer (37 per cent). One in five (20 per cent) of learners said they paid their fee directly. Less than one in ten learners said they paid their fee with other government funding (7 per cent), by taking out a loan (5 per cent), with support from their friend or family member (4 per cent), with help from institution (3 per cent). Support by charities or non-governmental organisation was reported by just two per cent of learners.

The proportions of people who reported paying for their learning in Wales was similar to the rest of the UK (69 per cent).

Although the proportions of learners in Wales are marginally different from some of the ways participants reported paying for their learning, the majority of these differences are not statistically significant to the rest of the UK. **While not significantly different, it's notable that fewer learners in Wales paid for their courses through loans, which might reflect the differences in the policy landscape between England and Wales.**

**Figure 14: How learning is paid for in Wales and in the UK**



Base: all current or recent learners in Wales. Weighted base = 175, unweighted base = 253. Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding Wales). Weighted base = 4221, unweighted base = 4525.

## Barriers to learning

Each year, current or recent learners are asked to state any challenges that they have encountered while learning, and adults who have not participated in learning for at least three years are asked to identify the barriers that prevent them from doing so. These provide insights on the types of obstacles that policy and practice can seek to remove to ensure that more and different adults are able to engage in learning throughout their lives.

### Challenges current or recent learners have experienced

In Wales, three in five (61 per cent) current or recent learners identified at least one challenge while learning, compared with nearly seven in ten (68 per cent) in the UK.

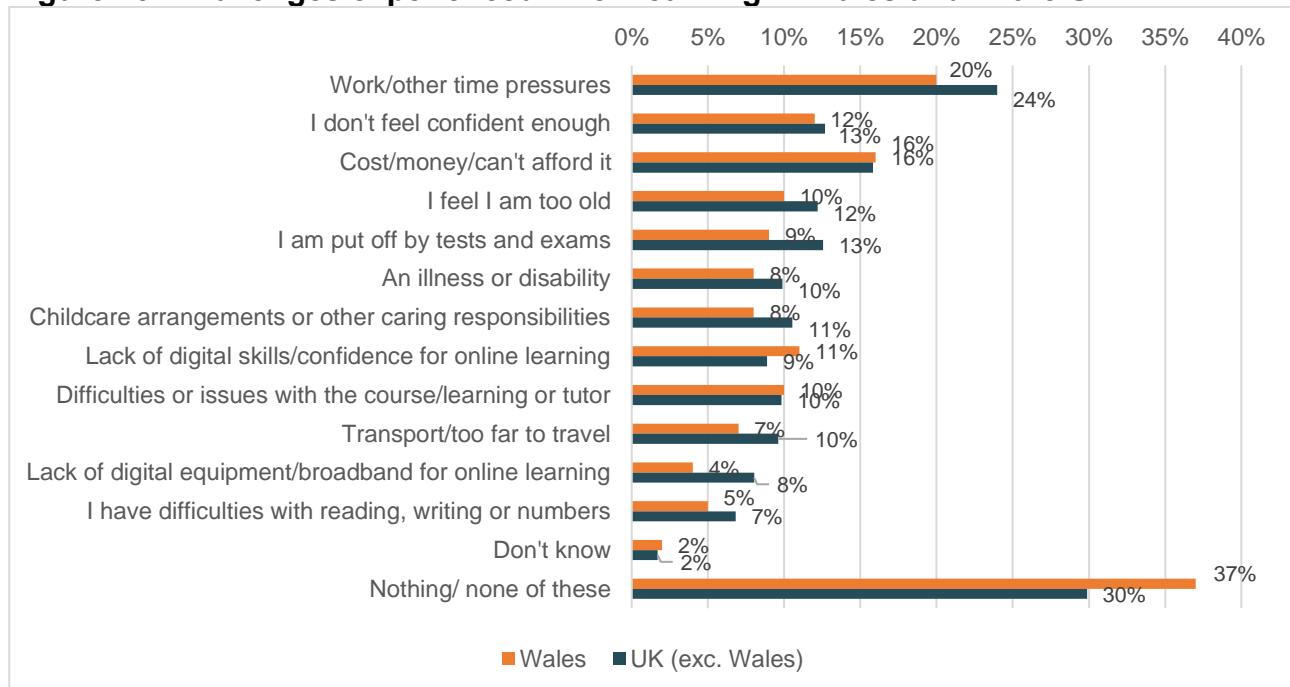
Most commonly, current or recent learners identified work and other time pressures as a challenge, with one in five (20 per cent) adults in Wales identifying these as a challenge (Figure 15).

Respondents identified challenges related to their situation, including the cost of learning (16 per cent), illness or disability (8 per cent), childcare arrangements or other caring responsibilities (8 per cent), or transport (7 per cent). Other common challenges relate to people's attitudes or perceptions of learning, such as lack of confidence to learn (12 per cent), feeling too old (10 per cent), or being put off by tests/exams (9 per cent).

Participants also said they experienced digital barriers while learning due to a lack of digital skills or confidence for online working (11 per cent) or lack of digital equipment (4 per cent).

Despite learners in Wales being significantly less likely to identify challenges than in the UK overall, the reported challenges were fairly similar to those identified by learners elsewhere in the UK.

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



Base: all current or recent learners in Wales. Weighted base = 175, unweighted base = 253.

Base: all current or recent learners in the UK (excluding Wales). Weighted base = 4221, unweighted base = 4525.

Challenges encountered by learners can be grouped into those that are:

- **Situational**, arising from an adult's personal and family situation, including: cost/money/can't afford it; Childcare arrangements or other caring responsibilities; Transport/too far to travel; Work/other time pressures; lack of digital equipment/broadband for online learning
- **Dispositional**, relating to the attitudes, perceptions and expectations of adults, including: I feel I am too old; An illness or disability; I am put off by tests and exams; I have difficulties with reading, writing or numbers; I don't feel confident enough; lack of digital skills/confidence for online learning
- **Institutional**, arising from the unresponsiveness of educational institutions, including: Difficulties or issues with the course/learning or tutor.

In Wales, two in five adult (40 per cent) learners said they have experienced situational challenges (Table 1). A similar proportion (38 per cent) said they are facing dispositional challenges and a further 10 per cent said they are facing institutional challenges. **In Wales, adults are significantly less likely to report experiencing situational challenges than in the rest of the UK.** The proportions for the other grouped challenges are fairly similar to the rest of the UK (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Grouped challenges experienced by current or recent learners in Wales and in the UK**

Group	Wales	The UK (excluding Wales)
Situational	40%	49%
Dispositional	38%	42%
Institutional	10%	10%
No challenges encountered	37%	30%

Base: all current or recent learners in Wales. Weighted base = 175, unweighted base = 253. Base: all current or recent learners in the UK. Weighted base = 4396, unweighted base = 4778.

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

In Wales, seven in ten (69 per cent) of adults who say they have not engaged in learning within the past three years identified at least one barrier to learning. This proportion is similar to the rest of the UK (71 per cent).

The top two barriers barrier identified by the adults who haven't taken up learning within three years were the cost of learning (26 per cent) and feeling too old to take up learning (26 per cent) (Figure 16).

More than one in ten adults (14 per cent) identified a disability or illness preventing them from taking part in learning. Other barriers that were reported by around one in ten adults in Wales related to people's perception including not feeling confident enough (12 per cent) or being put off by test and exams (9 per cent).

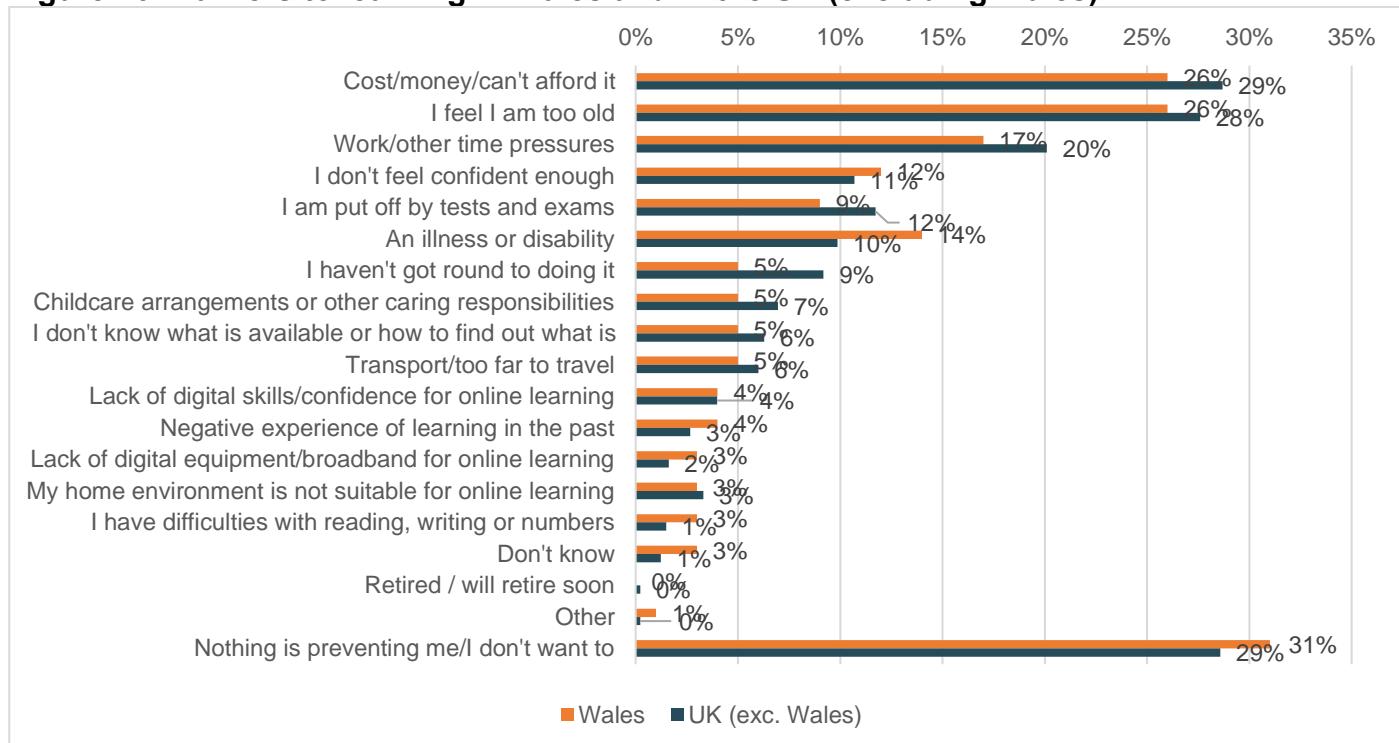
The barriers people faced in Wales are similar to the barriers experienced in the other parts of the UK.

**Adults in Wales are significantly more likely to report illness or disability (14 per cent) as a barrier to take part in learning than the UK average (10 percent).** This could be explained by the general health of the population in Wales, with higher proportion of people reporting being in bad or very bad health in Wales than in England, and a higher proportion than any other nation or region.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> In Wales, there was a higher proportion of people who were disabled and limited a lot in their day to day activities (10 per cent) than England (7.5 per cent) on Census day, 2021.

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

**Figure 16: Barriers to learning in Wales and in the UK (excluding Wales)**



Base: respondents who have not participated in learning within the last three years in Wales. Weighted base = 235, unweighted base = 327. Base: respondents who have not participated in learning within the last three years in the UK (excluding Wales) Weighted base = 3964, unweighted base = 4071.

Barriers can be grouped into those that are:

- **Situational**, including: Cost/money/can't afford it; Childcare arrangements or other caring responsibilities; Work/other time pressures; Lack of digital equipment/broadband for online learning; My home environment is not suitable for online learning; Transport/too far to travel
- **Dispositional**, including: I don't know what is available or how to find out what is; I feel I am too old; An illness or disability; I haven't got round to doing it; I am put off by tests and exams; I have difficulties with reading, writing or numbers; I don't feel confident enough; Lack of digital skills/confidence for online learning; Negative experiences of learning in the past.

Two out of five adults (42 per cent) who have not taken part in learning recently said situational barriers preventing them from doing so. Nearly one in three adults (31 per cent) said they did not want to engage with learning or that nothing was preventing them from doing so. These findings are fairly similar to the UK overall (see Table 2).

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

Group	Wales	The UK (excluding Wales)
Situational	42%	46%
Dispositional	49%	51%
No challenges encountered	31%	29%

Base: respondents who have not participated in learning within the last three years in Wales. Weighted base = 235, unweighted base = 327. Base: respondents who have not participated in learning within the last three years in the UK (excluding Wales) Weighted base = 3964, unweighted base = 4071.

## Learning for career change

Advances in technology, including Artificial Intelligence, alongside longer working lives will see more people needing to change jobs and careers. The Coronavirus pandemic also had a profound effect on the labour market, with an increase in the number of people who are economically inactive and job vacancies at record levels.

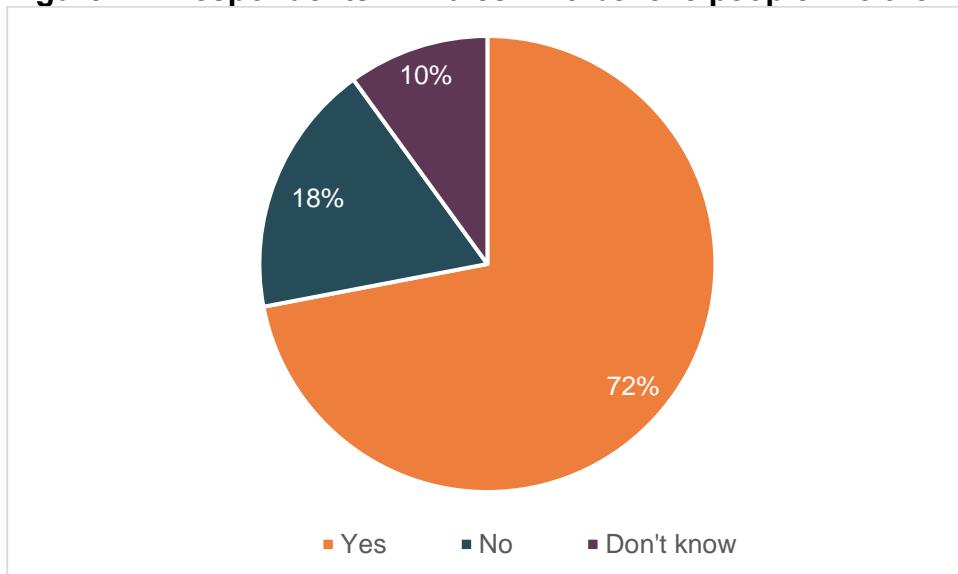
Many workers will therefore need to reskill into different careers to ensure they can make the most of the opportunities ahead. Within this context, this year's survey asked adults whether they are planning to change job or career in the near future. The survey also explored motivations to change career, barriers to changing career and what support people would find helpful.

### Changing job or career

All respondents who are working or unemployed and seeking work were asked whether they thought people like them could change careers or change the occupation/industry they were in. In Wales, around seven in ten adults (72 per cent) believe that people like them can change career (Figure 17). Nearly two in five (18 per cent) said they did not think that people like them could change careers and one in ten (10 per cent) said they don't know.

This is fairly similar to the UK overall with 71 per cent of respondents who believe that people like them are able to change careers, 16 per cent who did not think so and 12 per cent did not know. Although adults in Wales are statistically higher than the East of England to agree that people can change their career.

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



Base: respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in Wales.  
Weighted base = 242, unweighted base = 356.

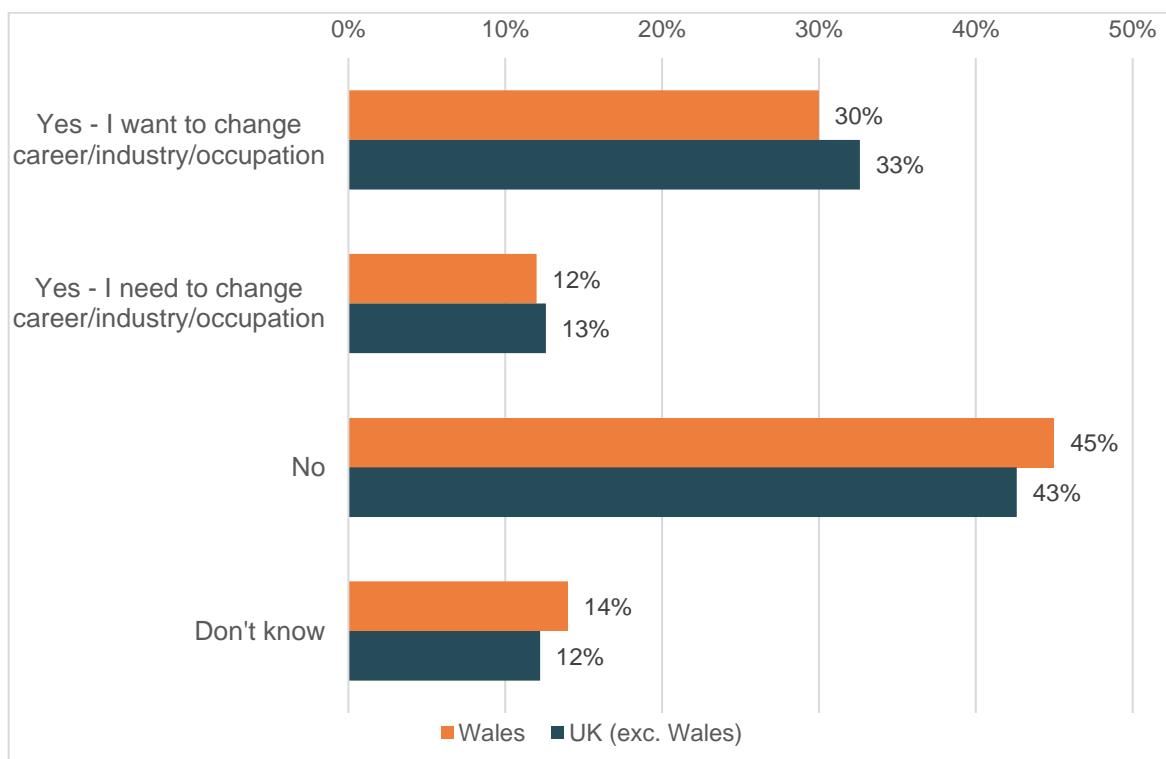
In Wales, just over than two in five adults (42 per cent) want (30 per cent) or need (12 per cent) to change their career/industry/occupation in the next one or two years (Figure 18).

Over two in five (45 per cent) said they do not need or want to change career and 14 per cent don't know.

These figures are similar to the rest of the UK, with 33 per cent of adults who said they want to change career/industry/occupation in the next one of two years, 13 per cent who said they need to, 43 per cent who said they do not want or need to and 12 per cent saying they don't know. In Wales, adults are statistically more likely to say that they do not need to change career in the next one or two years than adults in the North West of England and Greater London.

Wider research indicates that around six per cent of adults change occupation or sector each year.<sup>14</sup>

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



Base: respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in Wales. Weighted base = 242, unweighted base = 356. Base respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the UK (excluding Wales). Weighted base = 5724, unweighted base = 6233.

<sup>14</sup> Evans, S. and Vaid, L. (2023) [All change: Understanding and supporting retraining and career change](#)

## Motivations for career change

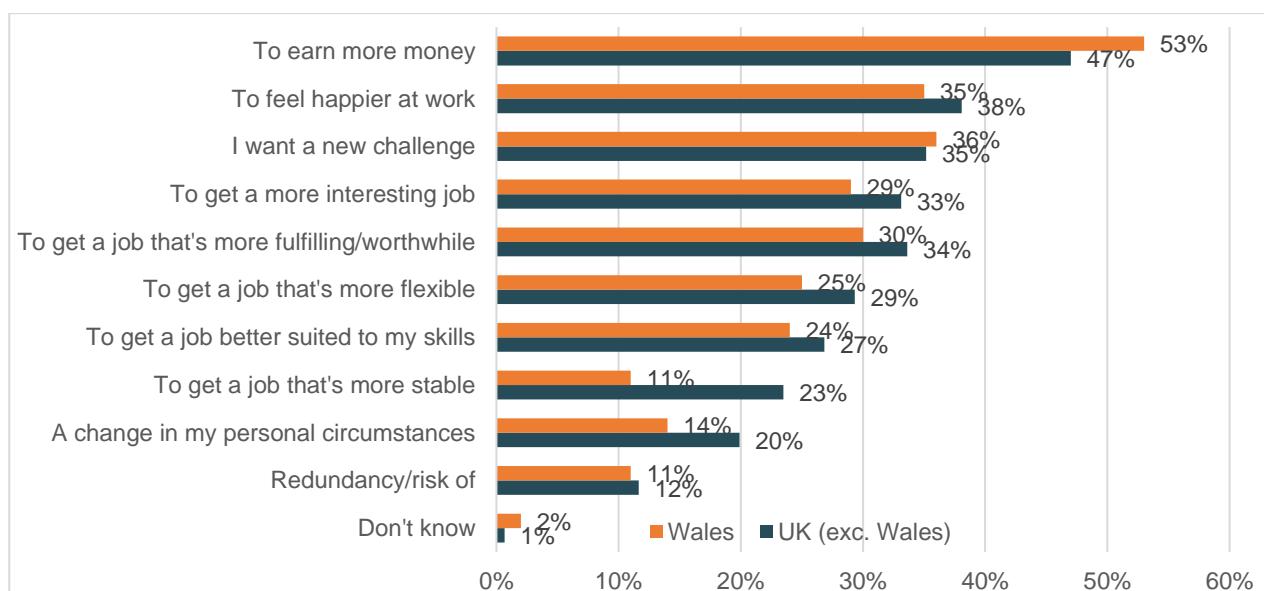
Respondents who indicated that they either want to or need to change career in the next one to two years were asked the reason for this change (Figure 19). In Wales, the main reason cited was to earn more money (53 per cent). This was followed by wanting a new challenge (36 per cent).

Respondents also reported wanting to feel happier at work (35 per cent), to get a job that would be more fulfilling or worthwhile (30 per cent), more interesting (29 per cent), more flexible (25 per cent), better suited to their skills (24 per cent) or more stable (11 per cent).

One in ten respondents (14 per cent) reported that a change in personal circumstances was the reason for wanting a career change. A further one in ten (11 per cent) said they feared or were at risk of redundancy.

The motivations for career change in Wales are fairly similar to the other UK regions and nations (Figure 20). Although adults in Wales are significantly more likely to say they want or need a career change to earn more money than in the North West of England and Greater London.

**Figure 19: Reasons for wanting or needing career change in Wales and in the UK (excluding Wales)**



Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in Wales. Weighted base = 101, unweighted base = 149. Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in the UK (excluding Wales). Weighted base = 2585, unweighted base = 2832.

## Barriers to career change

Respondents who indicated that they want or need to change career were then asked what was stopping them from doing this (Figure 20). In Wales, the most cited barrier was related to finance, including not being able to afford training costs (26 per cent), not being

able to afford to retrain (25 per cent), and/or not being able to afford a pay cut (22 per cent).

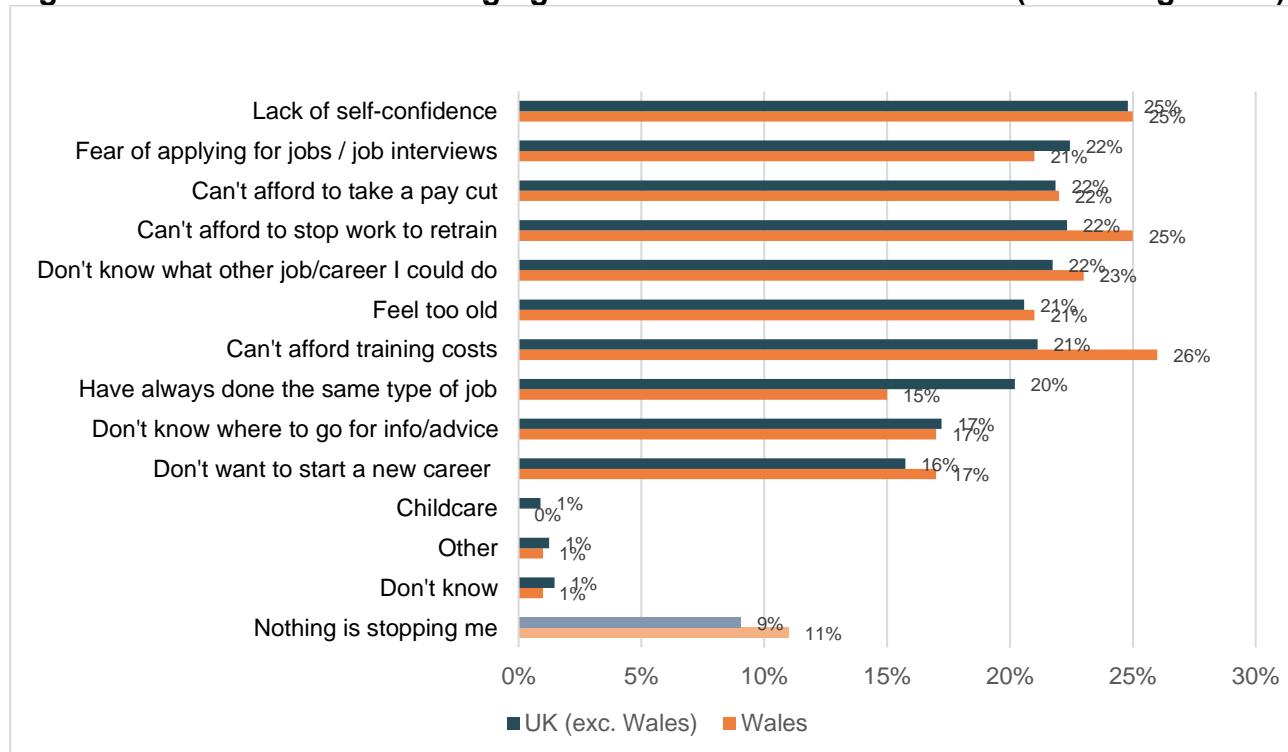
In Wales, dispositional barriers included a lack of self-confidence (25 per cent), a fear of applying for jobs/job interviews (21 per cent), feeling too old (21 per cent), not wanting to start a new career (17 per cent), or having always done the same job (15 per cent).

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

One in ten respondents (11 per cent) who say they want or need to change career say that nothing is stopping them from doing this.

The barriers to career change identified by respondents in Wales are fairly similar to the ones identified in the rest of the UK (see Figure 20). While some of the figures are slightly different, none of the differences are statistically significant.

**Figure 20: Reason for not changing career in Wales and in the UK (excluding Wales)**



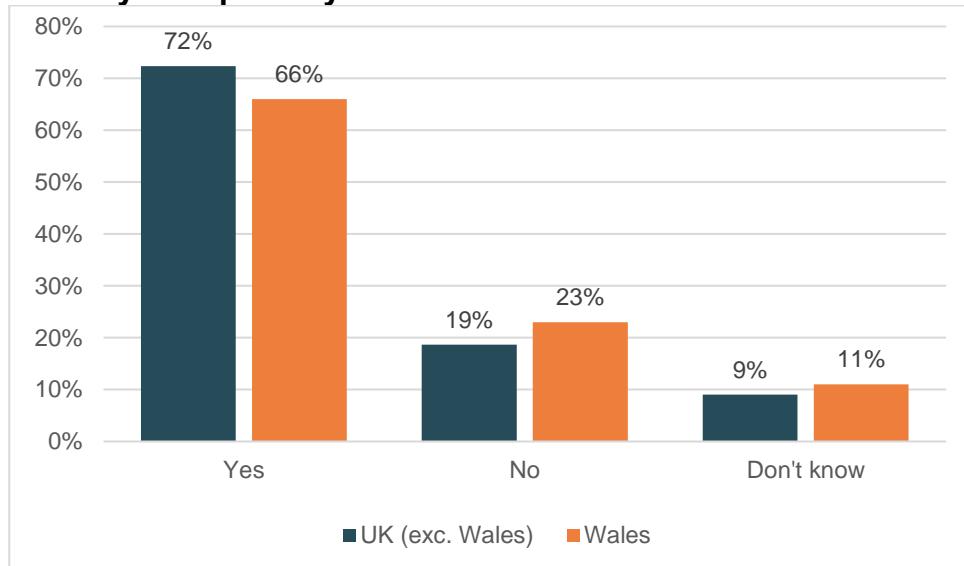
Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in Wales. Weighted base = 101, unweighted base = 149. Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in the UK (excluding Wales). Weighted base = 2585, unweighted base = 2832.

## Developing skills for career change

Respondents who indicated that they want or need to change career were asked if they need to develop their skills in order to change career or the industry/occupation they are in (Figure 21).

In Wales, two thirds of adults (66 per cent) said they need to develop their skills, while 23 per cent said they don't and 11 per cent said they don't know. These figures are fairly similar to the rest of the UK overall.

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



Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in Wales. Weighted base = 101, unweighted base = 149. Base: respondents who want to change job/career in the next 1-2 years in the UK (excluding Wales). Weighted base = 2585, unweighted base = 2832.

## Support for career change

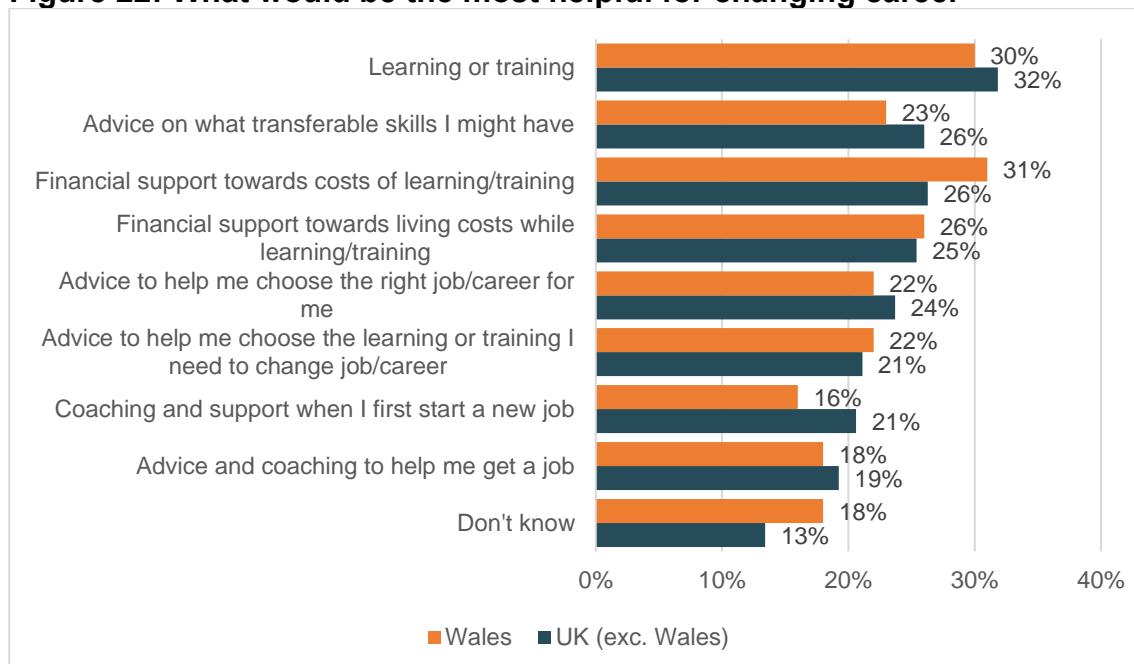
Respondents were asked to select, from a list of options, what support they would find helpful if they wanted/needed to change career (Figure 22). In Wales, respondents most commonly indicated that they would need financial support to change career, including towards costs of learning/training (31 per cent) or towards living costs while learning/training (26 per cent).

This was followed by respondents stating that they would find advice useful – on learning or training (30 per cent), advice their transferable skills (23 per cent), to choose the right learning or training they need to change job/career (22 per cent), to choose the right job/career for them (22 per cent), or coaching to help them get a job (18 per cent). Nearly one in five respondents (18 per cent) said that they would like coaching and support when they first start a job.

There was no statistically significant difference in the support respondents in Wales identified. However, adults in Wales were statistically more likely to say they would like financial support towards living costs while learning/training than people in Greater London.

In addition, nearly one fifth (18 per cent) of adults in Wales said that they didn't know what would be helpful, and this was statistically higher than the UK average. This demonstrates a need for raising awareness on easily accessible advice, support and guidance for adults, if they want or need to change careers.

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



Base: respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in Wales.

Weighted base = 242, unweighted base = 356. Base respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the UK (excluding Wales). Weighted base = 5724, unweighted base = 6233.

Respondents were asked where they would go for information and advice if they wished to change career (Table 3). In Wales, nearly two in five respondents (38 per cent) said they would use a general online search to find information and advice. This was followed by friends, family and colleagues (20 per cent). These findings highlight the need for credible and trustworthy information being available and easy to find online, as well as the importance of social networks in providing information.

Other sources of information and advice include a recruitment agency/consultant (15 per cent), a professional, sector or trade organisation (15 per cent), social media (14 per cent), an education provider such as a college or university (13 per cent), or Jobcentre Plus (13 per cent). Just over one in ten adults in Wales said they would go to a prospective employer, or they would go to their current employer (both 12 per cent).

Nearly one in five adults (17 per cent) said they do not know where they to go.

These figures are similar to the rest of the UK (see Table 3). However, adults in Wales are significantly more likely to say that they don't know where to go for advice on career change than the UK overall (17 per cent). This highlights a need to raise awareness of sources of careers information, advice and guidance for adults.

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

Source of information/advice	Wales	UK (excluding Wales)
General online search	38%	37%
Friends, family or colleagues	20%	24%
Education provider such as a college or university	13%	16%
Social media	14%	16%
Recruitment consultant/agency	15%	16%
Professional, sector or trade organisation	15%	15%
Jobcentre Plus	13%	15%
Prospective employers	12%	12%
Your current employer (e.g. HR, line manager)	12%	11%
Citizens' Advice	8%	8%
Local community, voluntary or religious centre	3%	5%
Local or national charity	4%	5%
Unionlearn representative or Workplace Learning Advocate	3%	5%
Don't know	17%	11%

Base: respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in Wales.

Weighted base = 242, unweighted base = 356. Base respondents who are employed, unemployed and seeking work or in full-time education in the UK (excluding Wales). Weighted base = 5724, unweighted base = 6233.