

2015 NIACE Adult Participation in Learning Survey: Headline Findings

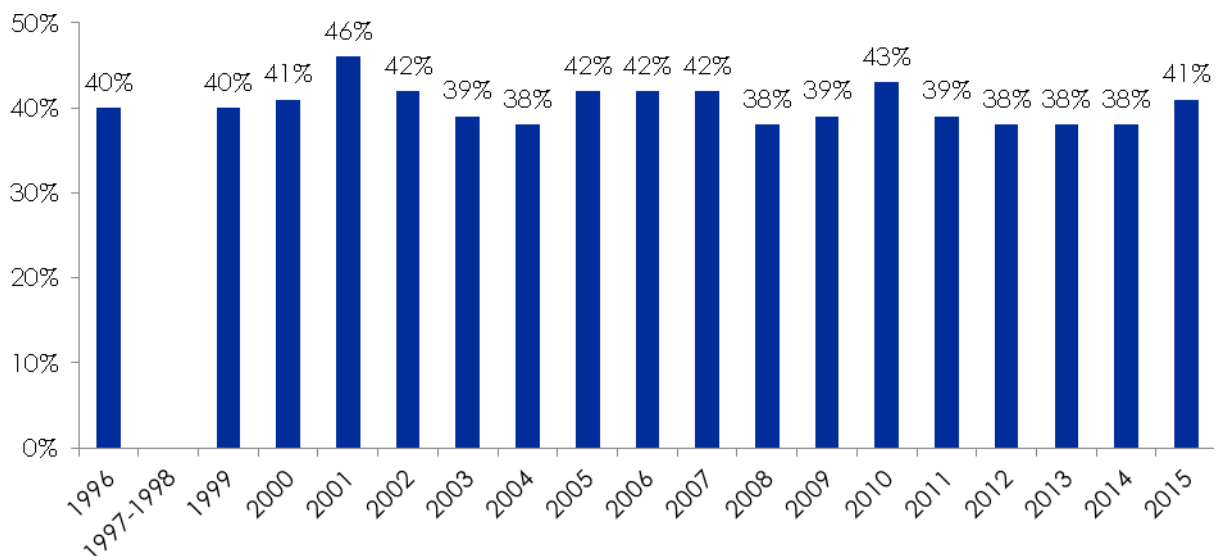
This briefing provides an overview of the headline findings from the 2015 NIACE Adult Participation in Learning Survey. The survey series, which began in 1996, provides a unique overview of the level of participation in learning by adults, with a detailed breakdown of who participates and who does not.

Who learns?

In the 2015 survey, just over a fifth of adults (22%) are currently learning, with around two in five adults (41%) having taken part in some form of learning in the previous three years. A third of adults (33%) have not participated in learning since leaving full-time education, a slight decrease from 35% in 2014.

The 2015 survey suggests that overall participation in learning has increased slightly, after remaining the same for the last three years. However, as Figure 1 below shows, there has been little variation in the overall level of participation since the survey series began in 1996.

Figure 1: Participation in learning, 1996–2015



Base: all respondents

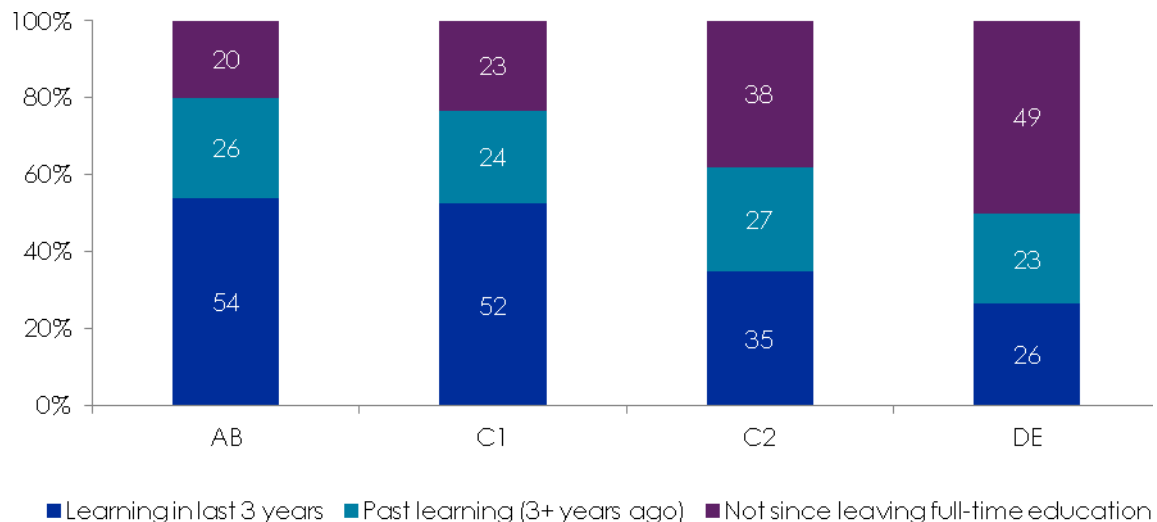
Engagement in learning is not evenly distributed across society. In 2015, as in all previous years, the survey clearly shows that participation in learning is determined by social class, employment status, age and prior learning.

In the 2015 survey, socio-economic class¹ remains a key predictor of participation in learning (Figure 2). Over half of those in the highest classes (54% of ABs; 52% of C1s)

¹ Social Grade A includes the upper and upper-middle classes and is generally grouped with Grade B, the middle classes. Grade C1 includes the lower-middle class, often called white-collar workers. Grade C2 mainly consists of skilled manual workers. Grade D comprises the semi-skilled and unskilled working class, and is usually linked with Grade E, those on the lowest

have taken part in learning during the previous three years, compared with 35% of skilled manual workers (C2s) and 26% of unskilled workers and people on limited incomes (DEs). These proportions are very similar to those found in the 2014 survey, with only slight increases in participation amongst those in the highest classes (47% to 54% of ABs; 48% to 53% of C1s).

Figure 2: Participation in learning by socio-economic class, 2015



Base: all respondents

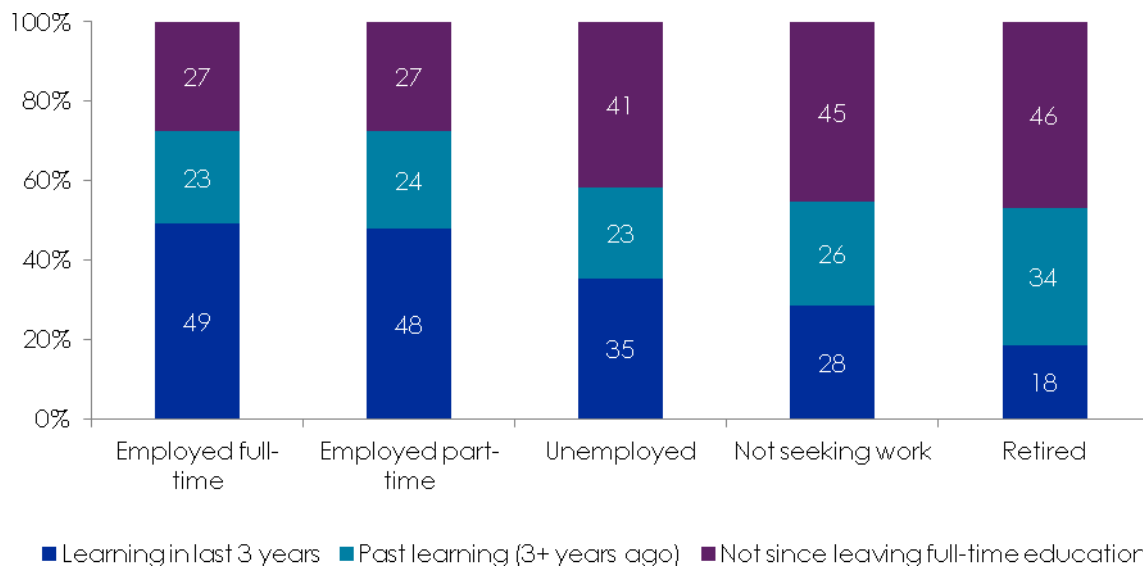
As Figure 3 below shows, there are significant differences between the participation rates of workers, unemployed adults and those outside of the workforce. This is unsurprising given that over three-quarters (76%) of all learners started their learning for work or career related reasons.

Almost half of adults in employment have participated in learning in the previous three years (49% of full-time workers; 48% of part-time workers). This is considerably higher than those who are registered as unemployed (35%) and those who are not currently seeking work (28%). Retired adults (18%) are least likely to have taken part in learning in the previous three years.

The proportion of unemployed adults who are taking part in learning has decreased since 2014, falling from 41% to the previous level of 35% found in 2013. Furthermore, the proportion of unemployed adults who have not taken part in learning since leaving full time education has increased from 32% to 41%. However, the proportion of adults 'not seeking work' who are taking part in learning has risen from 21% to 28%, reversing the decline found in 2014.

levels of subsistence such as old age pensioners and those dependent upon welfare benefits.

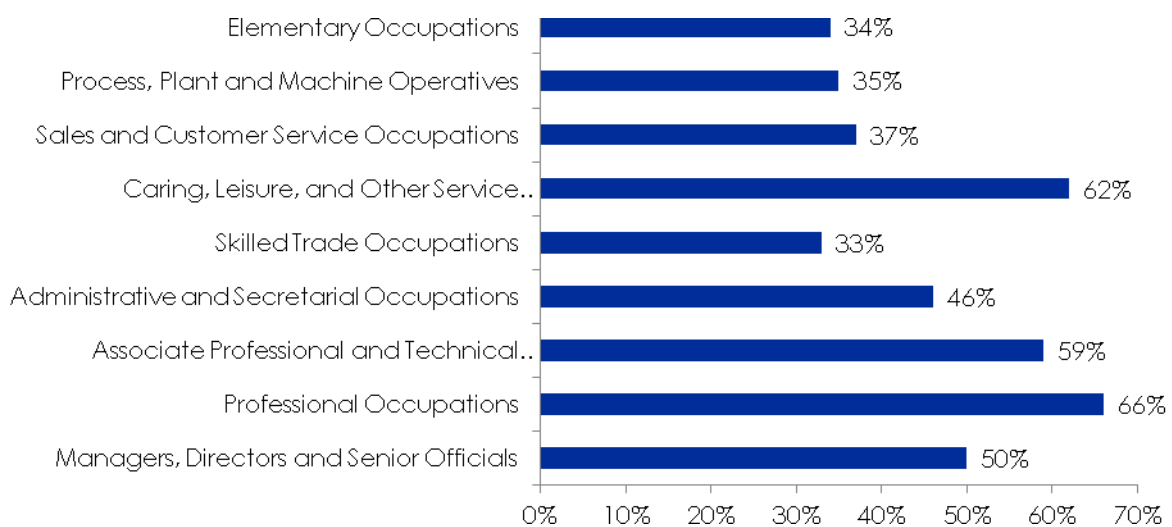
Figure 3: Participation in learning by employment status, 2015



Base: All respondents

Among those in employment, inequalities also exist in the participation rates of those working in different occupations (Figure 4). Sixty-six percent of adults in professional occupations and 62% of those in service occupations² have taken part in learning in the previous three years, compared with just over a third of those in elementary occupations or process, plant and machine operatives (34% and 35% respectively). Since 2014, the participation of those in skilled trade occupations has fallen from 43% to 33%, while the proportion of managers, directors and senior officials has increased from 41% to 50%.

Figure 4: Participation in learning by occupation, 2015



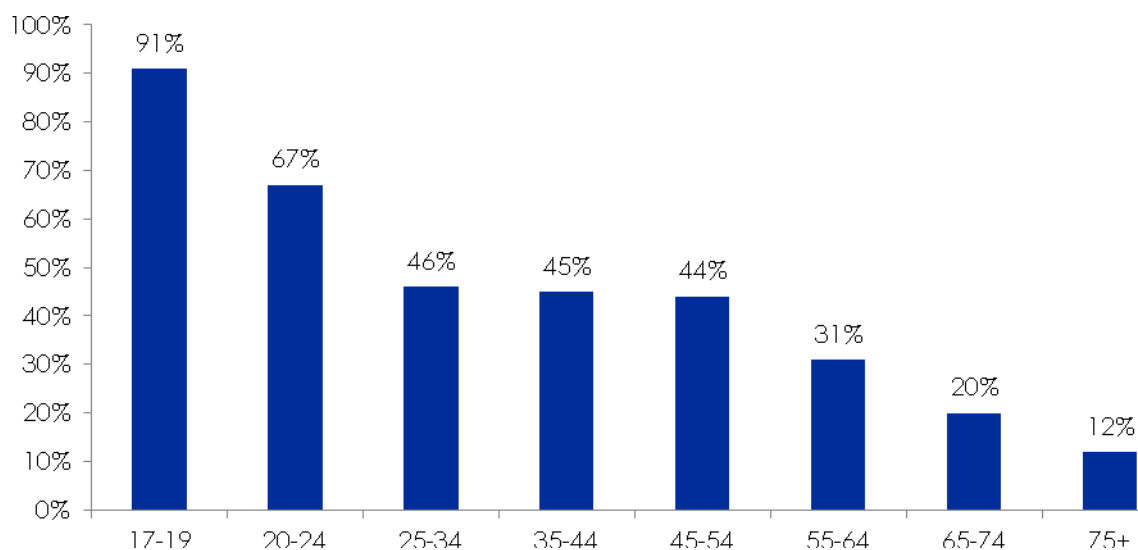
Base: All respondents

² Includes caring, leisure and other service occupations

In general, the older people are, the less likely they are to take part in learning (Figure 5). Ninety-one per cent of 17–19 year olds and 67% of 20–24 year olds are learning compared with around two-fifths of the rest of the working age population. The decline in participation is particularly steep for those aged 55 and over, with only 31% of those aged 55-64, 20% of those aged 65-74 and 12% of those aged 75+ regarding themselves as learners.

Since 2014 there has been a small increase in the proportion of adults of all ages taking part in learning. The only exception to this trend is adults aged 20-24, whose participation stayed the same at 67%.

Figure 5: Participation in learning by age, 2015



Base: all respondents

In line with previous surveys, the 2015 survey confirms that there is a considerable difference in the participation of those who left school at the earliest opportunity and those who continued in full-time education. Over half (52%) of those who left full-time education aged 21+ are learning, compared with just over a quarter (26%) of those who left school at or before the age of 16.

Almost half (47%) of adults with internet access have taken part in learning in the previous three years compared with just 12% of those without access. Furthermore, nearly two-thirds (62%) of adults without regular access to the internet have not taken part in learning since leaving full time education. This suggests that the digital divide continues to have a significant impact on participation in learning.

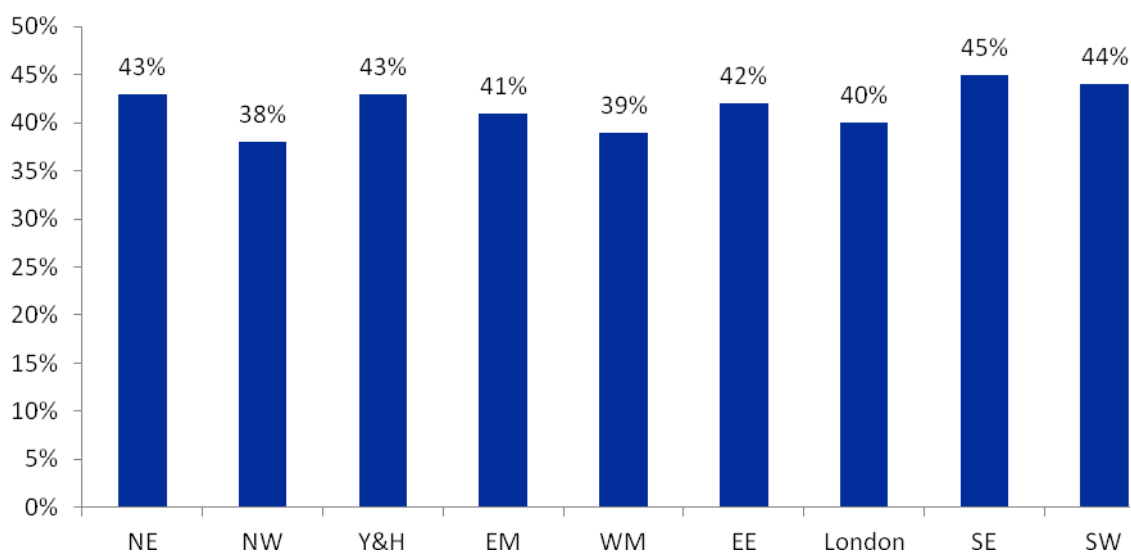
When comparing levels of participation in learning across the four UK nations, the survey shows that 42% of adults in England are learning, compared with 38% of adults in Wales, 48% in Scotland and 38% in Northern Ireland³. These proportions suggest an increase in participation in England and Scotland (by four and 13

³ The Northern Ireland sample is small and therefore this figure should be treated with caution.

percentage points respectively) while participation in learning in Wales and Northern Ireland has fallen (from 41% to 38% and 43% to 38% respectively).

Adults living in the South East, South West, North East and Yorkshire and the Humber are most likely to be learning, while those living in the North West are least likely to participate (Figure 6). Since 2014, participation in learning across the English regions has either stayed the same or increased. Adults living in the East of England and the South West are considerably more likely to be learning in 2015 than in 2014, with participation increasing from 33% to 42% and 38% to 44% respectively.

Figure 6: Participation in learning by English region, 2015



Base: all respondents

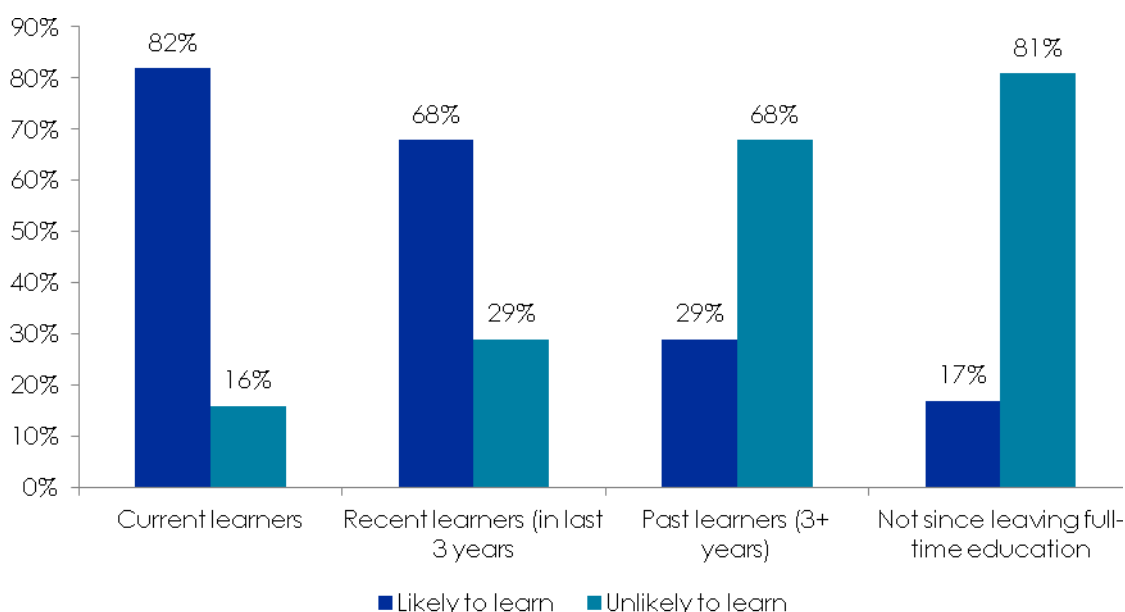
Who intends to be learning in the next three years?

Forty-four per cent of adults say that they are likely to take up learning in the next three years, while 53% say that they are unlikely to learn.

As in previous years, the 2015 survey suggests that current or recent participation in learning is a key indicator of future intentions to learn. Eighty-two per cent of current learners say that they are likely to take up learning in the next three years compared with just 17% of those who have done no learning since leaving full-time education (Figure 7).

While the vast majority of learners participate for work or career related reasons (76%), learning for leisure and personal interest is particularly important for older learners, those who are not in employment and those without internet access. As such, the provision of learning opportunities beyond those directly related to the workplace is an important element in engaging more and different adults in learning.

Figure 7: Future intentions to take up learning, by learning status, 2014



Base: all respondents

The survey

Each year, 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 learning, 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 a 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 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.

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