

2012 NIACE Adult Participation in Learning Survey: Headline Findings

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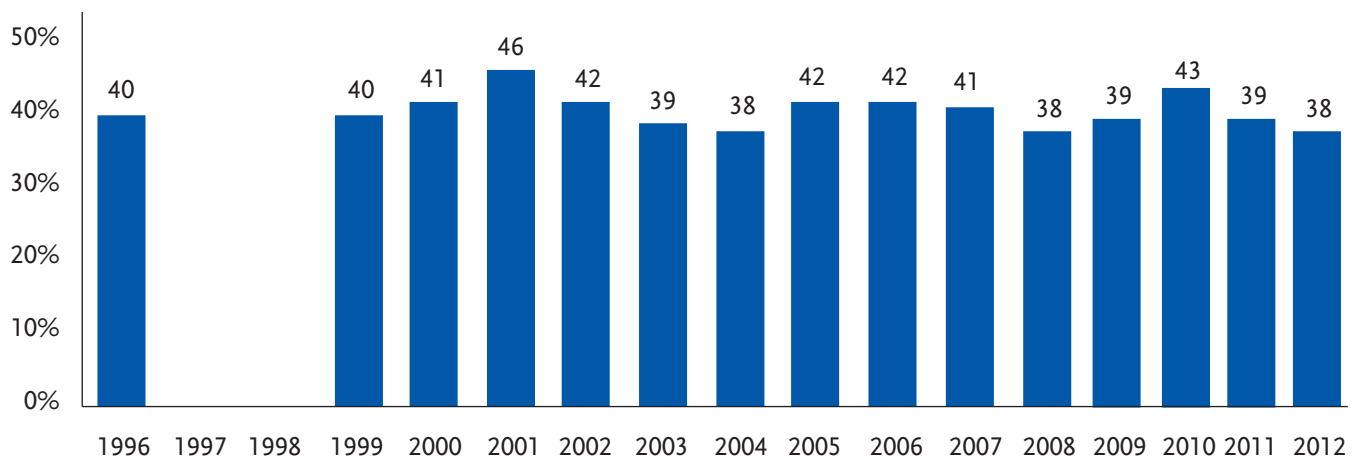
This briefing provides an overview of the headline findings from the 2012 NIACE Adult Participation in Learning Survey. NIACE has been conducting surveys like this since 1996, providing a unique overview of the proportion of adults taking part in learning and a detailed breakdown of who participates and who does not.

Who participates?

In the 2012 survey, 19 per cent of adults say that they are currently engaged in learning, with around two fifths of the adult population in the UK saying that they have taken part in some form of learning in the previous three years (see Figure 1). Neither of these figures has varied greatly since 1996, but there has been a gradual decline in participation since 2010 from 43 per cent of adults reported learning in the previous three years, down to 38 per cent in 2012.

Around one third of adults (36 per cent) say they have not participated in learning since leaving full-time education.

Figure 1: Participation in learning, 1996–2012



Base: all respondents

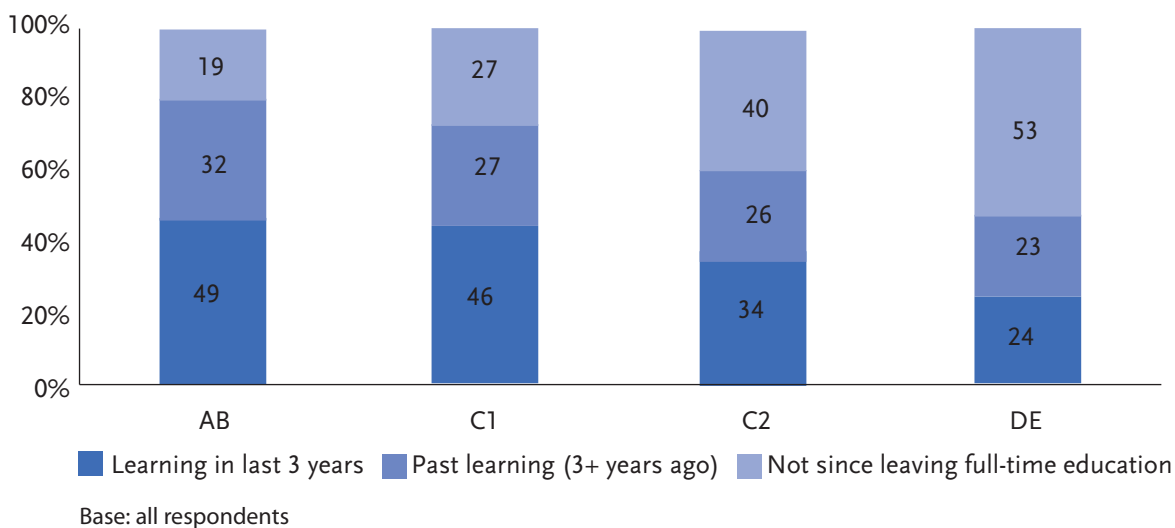
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Opportunities to learn as an adult, however, are not evenly distributed across society. As in previous years, the 2012 survey clearly shows that participation in learning is determined by class, employment status, age and prior learning.

- Socio-economic class remains a key predictor of participation in learning (see Figure 2). Just under one half of those in the highest classes (49 per cent of ABs; 46 per cent of C1s) report taking part in learning during the previous three years, compared with 34 per cent of skilled manual workers (C2s) and 24 per cent of unskilled workers and people on limited incomes (DEs).¹
- The importance of work, both as a place to learn and as a motivation for learning, can be seen in the participation rates of workers, unemployed adults and those outside the workforce. Levels of participation in learning are significantly higher among those adults in employment (44 per cent of full-time workers; 42 per cent of part-time workers) or looking for work (41 per cent) than for those who are retired (14 per cent) or otherwise outside of the workforce (24 per cent).

Over the previous 12 months, there has been a small decline in participation, of 2–3 percentage points, among employed adults.

Figure 2: Participation in learning by socio-economic class, 2012

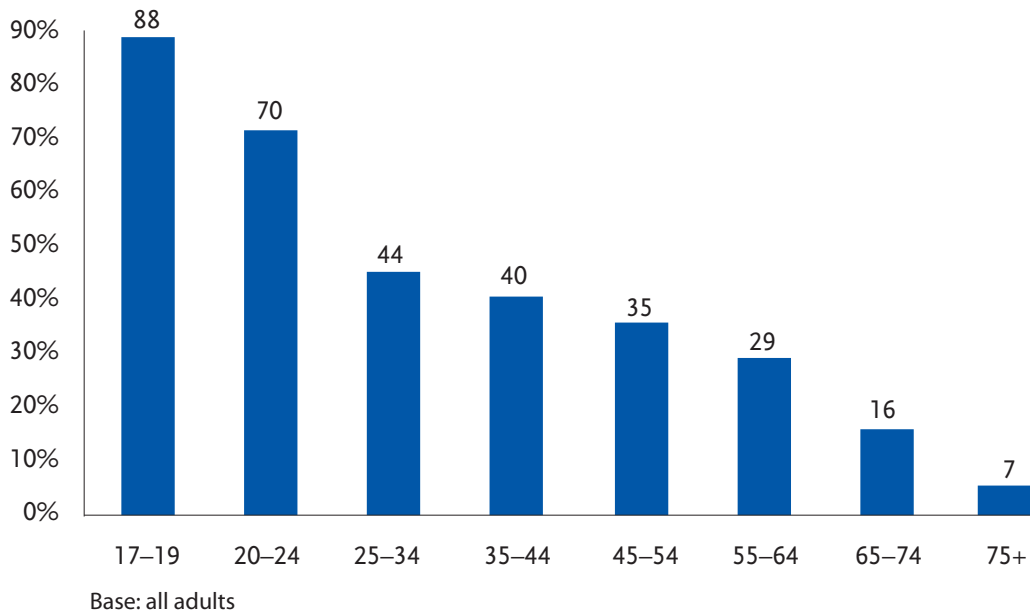


- In general, the older people are, the less likely they are to take part in learning (see Figure 3). Eighty-eight per cent of 17–19 year olds and 70 per cent of 20–24 year olds are learning compared with less than two fifths of the rest of the working age population. The decline in participation is particularly steep for those aged 65 and over, with only 16 per cent of those aged 65–74 and 7 per cent of those aged 75+ regarding themselves as learners.

Over the previous 12 months, there has been a small decline in participation across most age groups. Among those aged 45–54, however, participation has declined by six percentage points. In contrast, 20–24 year olds are now more likely to be learning.

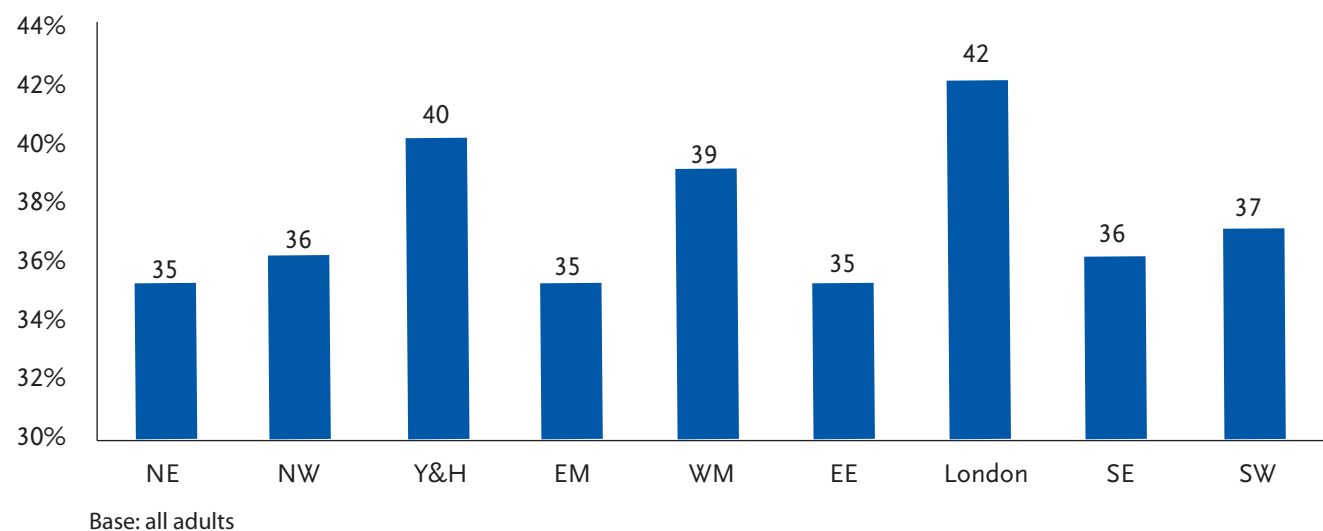
1. Social Grade A includes the upper and upper-middle classes and is generally grouped with Grade B, the middle classes. Grade C1 includes the lower-middle class, often called white-collar workers. Grade C2 mainly consists of skilled manual workers. Grade D comprises the semi-skilled and unskilled working class, and is usually linked with Grade E, those on the lowest levels of subsistence such as old age pensioners and those dependent upon welfare benefits.

Figure 3: Participation in learning by age, 2012



- As with all previous surveys, the 2012 survey confirms the key divide between those who leave school at the earliest opportunity and those who stay on even for a short while. Around one half (49 per cent) of those who left full-time education aged 21+ are learning, compared with just 23 per cent of those who left school at or before the age of 16.
- Adults living in Wales are least likely to be participating in learning. Forty-two per cent of adults in Scotland, 40 per cent of those in Northern Ireland and 37 per cent of those in England report learning in the previous three years, compared with just 31 per cent of adults in Wales.
- While generally there is little variation in participation within the English regions, Londoners are significantly more likely to be learning than adults living in many other parts of the country (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Participation in learning by English region, 2012

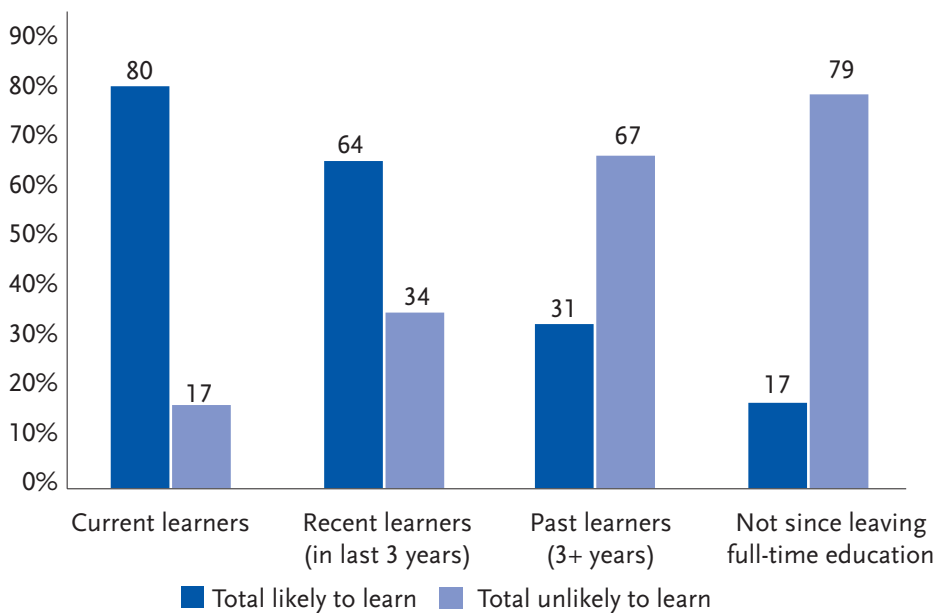


Who intends to be learning in the next three years?

When asked whether they are likely to take up learning in the next three years, 41 per cent of adults say that they are likely to do so, with 56 per cent saying that they are unlikely to learn. Over the previous 12 months, intentions to learn have increased four percentage points from 37 per cent, though they remain far short of the record high of 47 per cent in 2010.

As in previous years, current participation in learning is a key indicator of future intentions to learn. In the 2012 survey, 80 per cent of current learners say that they are likely to take up learning in the next three years compared with just 17 per cent of those who have done no learning since leaving full-time education (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Future intentions to take up learning, by current learning status, 2012



Base: all adults

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.



For more information about the survey, please contact fiona.aldridge@niace.org.uk



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