

# Learning, skills and progression at work

Analysis from the 2015 Adult Participation  
in Learning Survey

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## Summary

Five million people in the UK are currently in low paid work, 1 million more than the OECD average<sup>1</sup>. And many of them are stuck – unable to advance their careers, raise their income and improve their working lives. Research shows that three in four people in low paid work in 2001 were still low paid a decade later<sup>2</sup>.

The problem of low pay is connected to the challenge of low productivity. The average UK worker produces 20 per cent less per hour than in the US<sup>3</sup>, with low productivity (and low pay) concentrated in particular sectors, such as retail and hospitality, and driven by a relatively weak skills base, low investment and weaknesses in management and leadership. In itself, increasing productivity will not be sufficient to ensure people do not get trapped in low paid work; however as the engine of economic growth, it is a necessary condition in enabling wages to rise.

If we are serious about tackling low pay and low productivity, then part of the answer lies in ensuring that all adults have sufficient opportunities to engage in learning and develop their skills. This is true, not only for the 5 million workers currently in low paid work, but for all of us facing the challenges of a rapidly changing economy and longer – and often more complex – working lives.

Our survey of over 6,000 adults across the UK clearly shows that investment in learning and skills development for work can bring considerable benefits, both to the individual and the business in which they are employed. Reported outcomes of training include a more skilled, confident, satisfied and loyal workforce (Figure 16). Over 80% per cent of those learning for work report positive outcomes, with around 1 in 5 saying that they are now more productive and that their work is of a higher quality.

Just under one-third have since developed their work roles, while increased pay, greater job security and improved pay/promotion prospects were each cited by around 1 in 7 respondents. Employees learning for work-related reasons were significantly more likely than other respondents to have gained a new job or been promoted in the last 5 years (54% and 33% respectively), as well as to be aiming to get a better job or promotion in the next 5 (64% and 44% respectively). They were also more likely to believe that they would progress with their present employer over the same period (47% and 33% respectively) (Figure 18).

Providing opportunities to learn and develop skills, however, is only part of the solution. Tackling low pay and supporting progression also requires us to consider the wider context in which people are working. While most people say that they have enough opportunities to use their existing knowledge and skills at work, this is not the case for more than 1 in 10 employees (Figure 5). Around 1 in 5 of those learning for work-related reasons said that opportunities for progression are not clear and that

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<sup>1</sup> OECD (2014) OECD statistics.

<sup>2</sup> Resolution Foundation (2014) *Escape Plan: Understanding who progresses from low pay and who gets stuck*.

<sup>3</sup> ONS (2014) *International Comparisons of Productivity 2013*.

they are not supported or encouraged by their manager to develop their skills. Part-time workers in particular were more likely to say that their skills are being under-utilised and less likely to agree that they have opportunities to develop their skills or that there are clear opportunities for them to progress (Figure 6). Addressing these challenges will also be critical in enabling more people to get on at work.

The NIACE Adult Participation in Learning survey, from which this data is taken, consistently shows that participation in learning is not evenly distributed. Social class, age, employment status and prior learning all powerfully impact on whether adults engage in learning, such that despite its potential to transform lives, it is generally those who have benefited most from their initial education who continue to learn as adults. The 2015 survey shows that similar – and perhaps even more pronounced – inequalities exist in relation to work-related learning and training. For example, while 54 per cent of all employees have accessed employer-arranged training in the last 12 months, women are less likely than men, and part-time workers less likely than those working full-time to have done so.

Furthermore, while around two-thirds of employees received some form of wider support and development from their employer in the previous 12 months – including undertaking and receiving feedback on tasks beyond their current job role; receiving ongoing supervision, and learning by watching others perform their role – again, these opportunities are not equally available. Part-time workers, in particular, are much less likely than those working full-time (66% and 75% respectively) to have received any support at all (Figure 9).

There are also significant differences in the nature of the support, development and training opportunities on offer. For example, women are more likely than men to be offered training in equality & diversity or health & safety, while men are more likely to receive supervisory training. Full-time workers are more likely than those working part-time to have access to training in the use of new technology as well as to management training.

Men and women are equally likely to say that they would be willing to pay for learning that would help them with their job or career, as are full-time and part-time workers. In reality however, full-time workers are more likely than those working part-time to have had *all* of the costs of their learning paid for by their employer.

Given these significant inequalities in access to, and support for, work-related learning, training and development, it is therefore unsurprising that we also see significant inequalities in its outcomes: men are more likely than women to receive a pay rise; while women are more likely to show greater commitment to staying with their current employer (Figure 17). Full-time workers are also more likely than those working part-time to see their pay or promotion prospects improve. These figures are extremely uncomfortable for those who argue that investment in learning and skills alone can help tackle labour market inequalities and provide a pathway out of low pay.

They are particularly challenging given the current political focus on tackling gender inequality in the workplace and reducing the gender pay gap. At present, the gender pay gap in the UK is 19.1 per cent, compared with an EU average of 16.4 per cent<sup>4</sup>. Advancements in flexible working have helped to ensure that there are now a record number of women in work, but this flexibility is often accompanied by a hidden pay penalty: the hourly pay difference between full-time and part-time workers is currently 25 per cent. Women are much more likely than men to work part-time (44% and 13% respectively) and to be found in low paid sectors such as retail, hospitality and social care. It is clear therefore, that unless we effectively address inequalities in access to learning, training and development opportunities for work, then we will only succeed in further hardwiring inequalities into the labour market, rather than providing opportunities for progression and a pathway out of low pay for all.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/ashe/annual-survey-of-hours-and-earnings/2014-provisional-results/stb-ashe-statistical-bulletin-2014.html>

## Methodology

The NIACE Adult Participation in Learning Survey is an annual survey series which started in 1996. It provides a unique overview of the level of participation in learning by adults, with a detailed breakdown of who participates and who does not. Face to face interviews are carried out with a representative sample of the UK population aged 17 years and above. In the 2015 survey, a total of 6,217 adults were interviewed during February and March, producing a weighted sample size of 5,952 responses. The survey adopts a broad definition of learning, including a wide range of formal, non-formal and informal learning. More information about the survey series can be found at [www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk)

The 2015 survey, conducted in partnership with the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) included an additional module of questions designed to provide insight into and understanding of individuals' workplace skills development, opportunities for skills development and progression in work.

This paper presents the findings of our analysis of responses from a sub-sample of respondents who said that they were learning for work-related reasons, or had done so during the previous three years. This sub-sample makes up 32 per cent of the overall survey sample (1,874 responses when weighted). Although most of the analysis presented in this paper is focused on those who are/have been learning for work-related reasons, this paper also includes some comparative analysis with the whole survey sample. It is clearly stated in the report where this is the case. Results in figures marked with a star are those where a significant difference has been found. The technical paper underpinning this analysis is available on request.

## Findings

### Who learns?

The NIACE Adult Participation in Learning survey consistently shows that around two-fifths of adults have taken part in some form of learning in the previous three years. In 2015, 41 per cent of respondents reported taking part in learning over this period, while one third said that they have not participated in learning since leaving full-time education.

The survey consistently shows that engagement is not evenly distributed across society, with participation in learning determined by social class, employment status, age and prior learning.

- Social class remains a key predictor of participation in learning, with over half of those in the highest social classes (54 per cent of ABs; 32 per cent of C1s) having taken part in learning during the previous three years, compared with 35% of skilled manual workers (C2s) and 26 per cent of unskilled workers and people on limited incomes (DEs).
- Almost half of adults in employment have participated in learning in the previous three years (49 per cent of full-time workers; 48 per cent of part-time workers), considerably higher than those who are registered as unemployed (35 per cent) and those not currently seeking work (28 per cent). Retired adults (18 per cent) are least likely to have taken part in learning in the previous three years.
- In general, the older people are, the less likely they are to take part in learning. Ninety-one per cent of 17-24 year olds and 67 per cent of 20-24 year olds are learning compared with around two-fifths of the rest of the working age population. The decline is particularly steep for those aged 55 and over, with just 31 per cent of those aged 66-64, 20 per cent of those aged 65-74 and 12 per cent of those aged 75+ learning.
- There is considerable difference between levels of participation of those who left school at the earliest opportunity and those who continued in full-time education. Over one half (52 per cent) of those who left full-time education ages 21+ are learning, compared with just over one quarter (26 per cent) of those who left school at or before the age of 16.

As a consequence, the survey series maps a continuing divide between those who have enjoyed the benefits of an initial education, and those who left education with little to show for it.

In 2015, 59 per cent of respondents said that they had not taken part in any learning activity over the previous three years. The most frequently cited reason (20 per cent) for this was 'not interested/don't want to'. This was followed by work/other time pressures (14 per cent), feeling too old (10 per cent) and childcare arrangements or

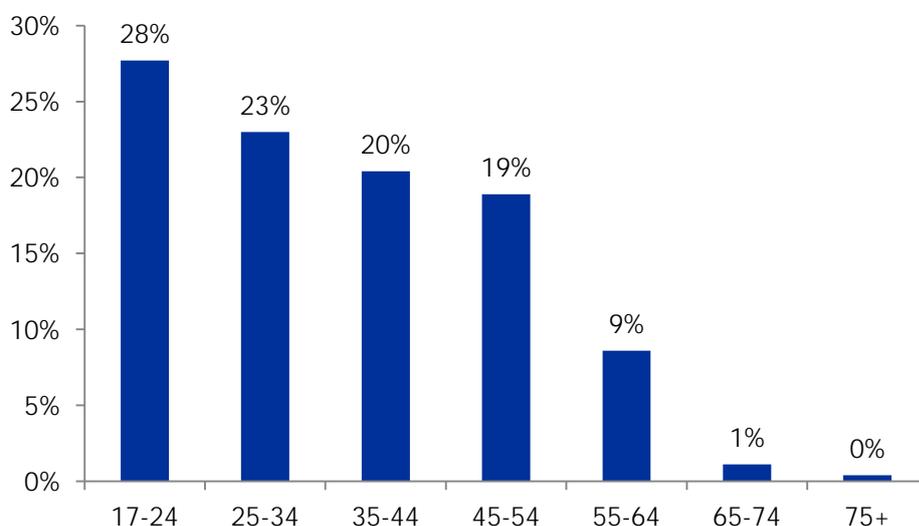
other caring responsibilities (9 per cent). Over a fifth of respondents (22 per cent) stated that there was nothing preventing them taking part.

### Learning for work

Three-quarters (76 per cent) of those who have taken part in learning during the previous three years said that this was for work or career-related reasons, with the remainder saying that they were primarily learning for leisure or personal interest. In part, these figures represent a recognition among individuals of the role that learning and skills development can play in supporting them to secure employment and progress at work, however it also reflects the availability of, and funding for, learning opportunities both within and outside of the workplace.

Among those learning for work-related reasons, 51 per cent were women and 49 per cent were men. Of those in work, 74 per cent were working full time and 26 per cent part-time, with women (37 per cent) much more likely than men (15 per cent) to be part-time workers. Although the average age of the workforce continues to increase, the average age of those learning for work-related reasons was 34, with 28% aged between 17 and 24. Only 10 per cent of the group was aged 55 and over (Figure 1). Respondents learning for work also tend to be from higher socio-economic groups and more likely to have stayed on in education beyond 16.

**Figure 1: Participation in work-related learning during the previous three years, by age**



Base: respondents learning for work-related reasons = 1874

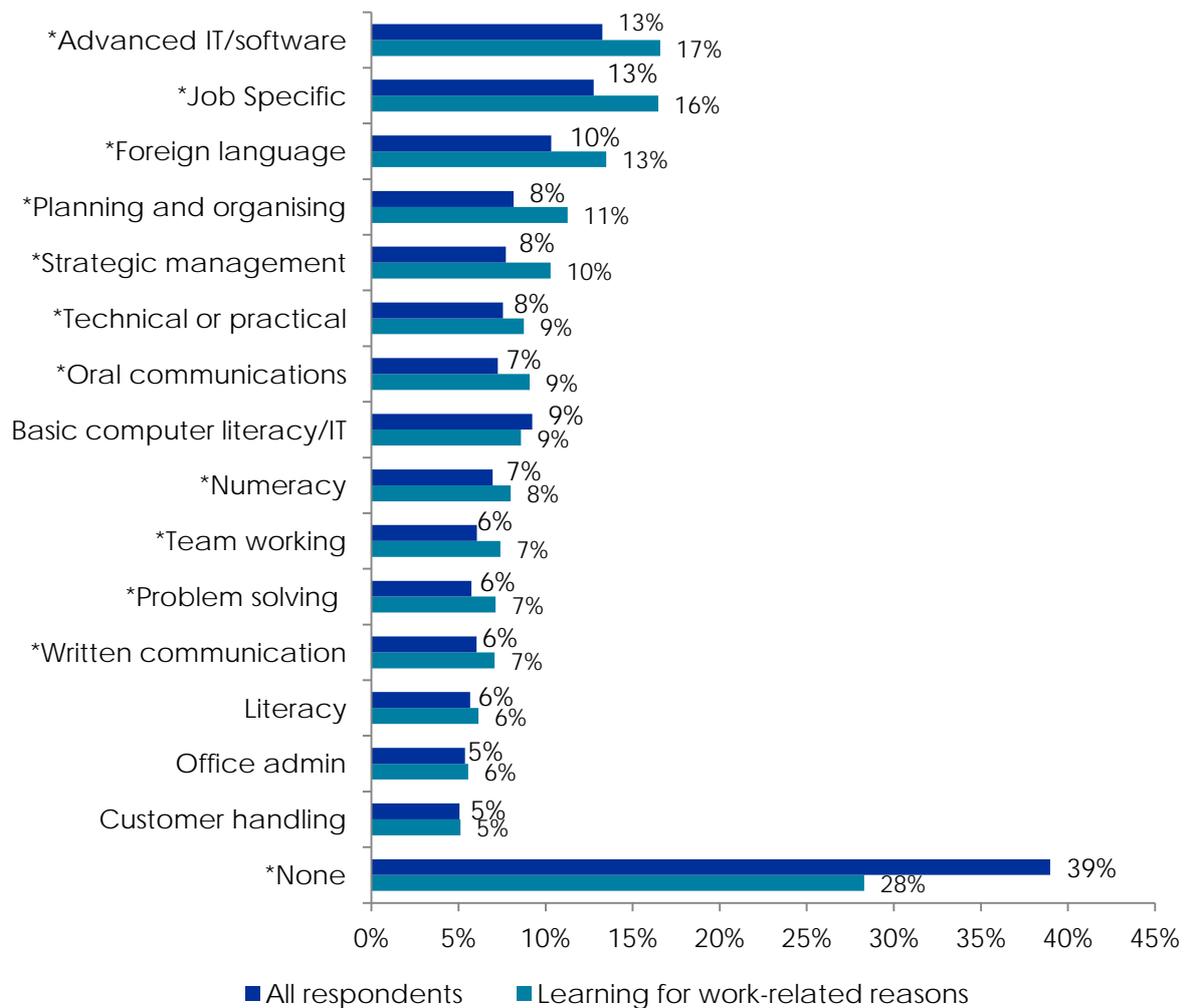
### Improving skills for work

Sixty one per cent of all survey respondents said that they felt the need to improve their skills to support their work or career (Figure 2). The most commonly cited skills needs were advanced IT/software (13 per cent) and job-specific skills (13 per cent).

Among those who have been learning for work-related reasons, a much greater proportion (72 per cent) identified a need to improve their skills, including advanced

IT software skills (17 per cent), job-specific skills (16 per cent), foreign language skills (13 per cent), planning and organising skills (11 per cent) and strategic management skills (10 per cent). It is not possible to tell from the data whether those who were engaged in learning for work-related reasons actually had greater skills needs or whether they were simply better able to identify and articulate them.

**Figure 2: Skills needs for work or career**



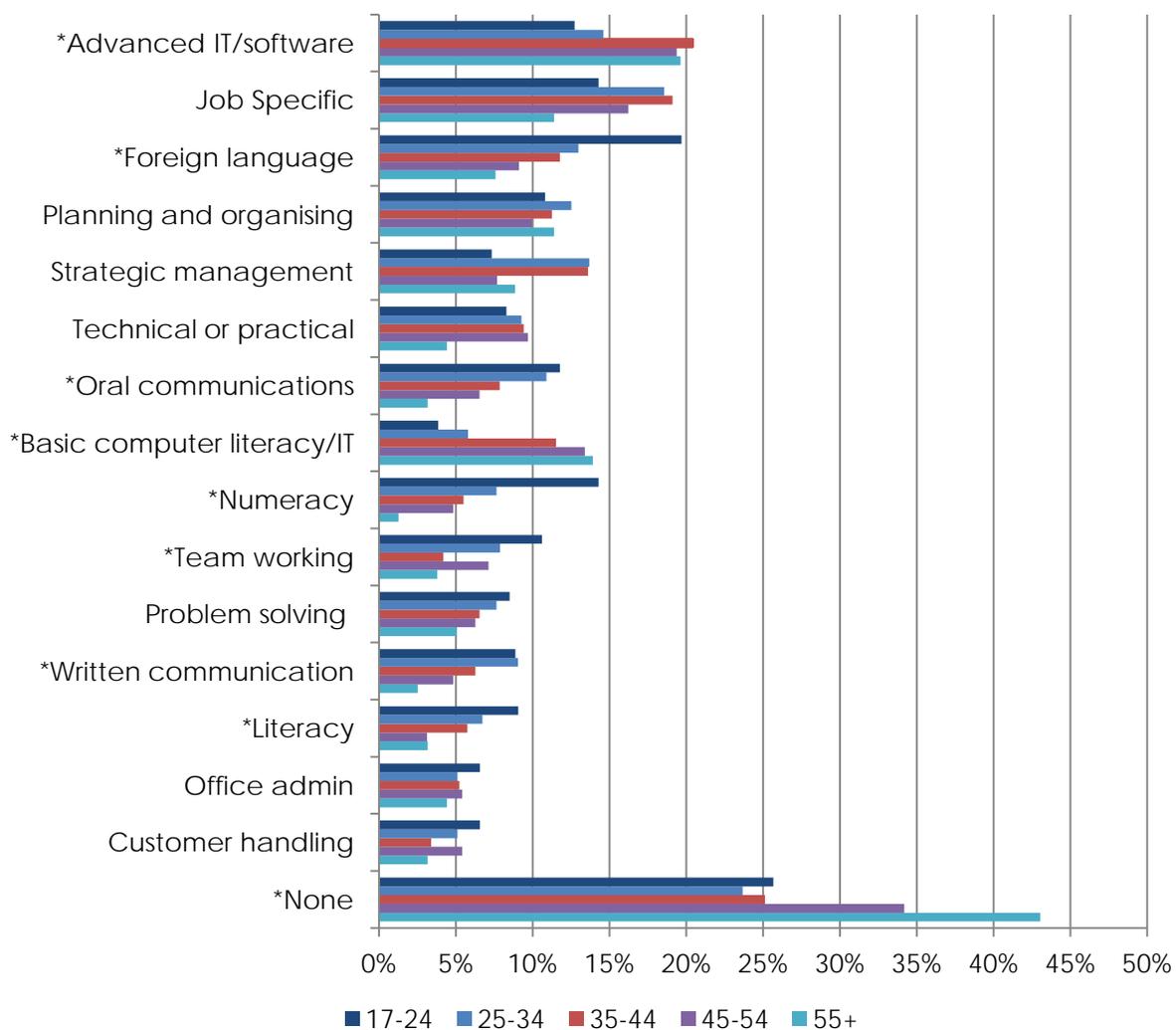
Base: respondents who were not retired = 4489

Among those learning for work-related reasons, women were significantly more likely to identify skills needs around IT/advanced software (19 per cent of women; 14 per cent of men) and numeracy (11 per cent of women; 5 per cent of men). In contrast, men were significantly more likely to identify planning and organising skills needs (13 per cent of men; 10 per cent of women). While gender was found to be a key predictor variable in the identification of skills needs, some of the differences between men and women can also be explained by variability in other factors such as their job sector, social class and age profile.

Around one quarter of 17-44 year olds, who are learning for work-related reasons, said that they did not feel the need to improve their skills. Thirty-four per cent of 45-54 year olds and 41 per cent of those aged 55 and over also felt this way (Figure 3). Identification of skills needs around advanced IT/software and basic computer literacy tend to increase with age. In contrast, identification of skills needs in relation to foreign languages, oral communication, numeracy, team working, written communication and literacy tend to decline with age.

In particular, 17-24-year-olds were significantly more likely identify numeracy and foreign language skills needs and significantly less likely to cite basic computer literacy/IT skills needs. 45-54-year-olds were significantly more likely to identify basic computer literacy as a skills need and 55-64-year-olds were significantly more likely to state that they had no work-related skills needs.

**Figure 3: Skills needs for work or career, by age group**

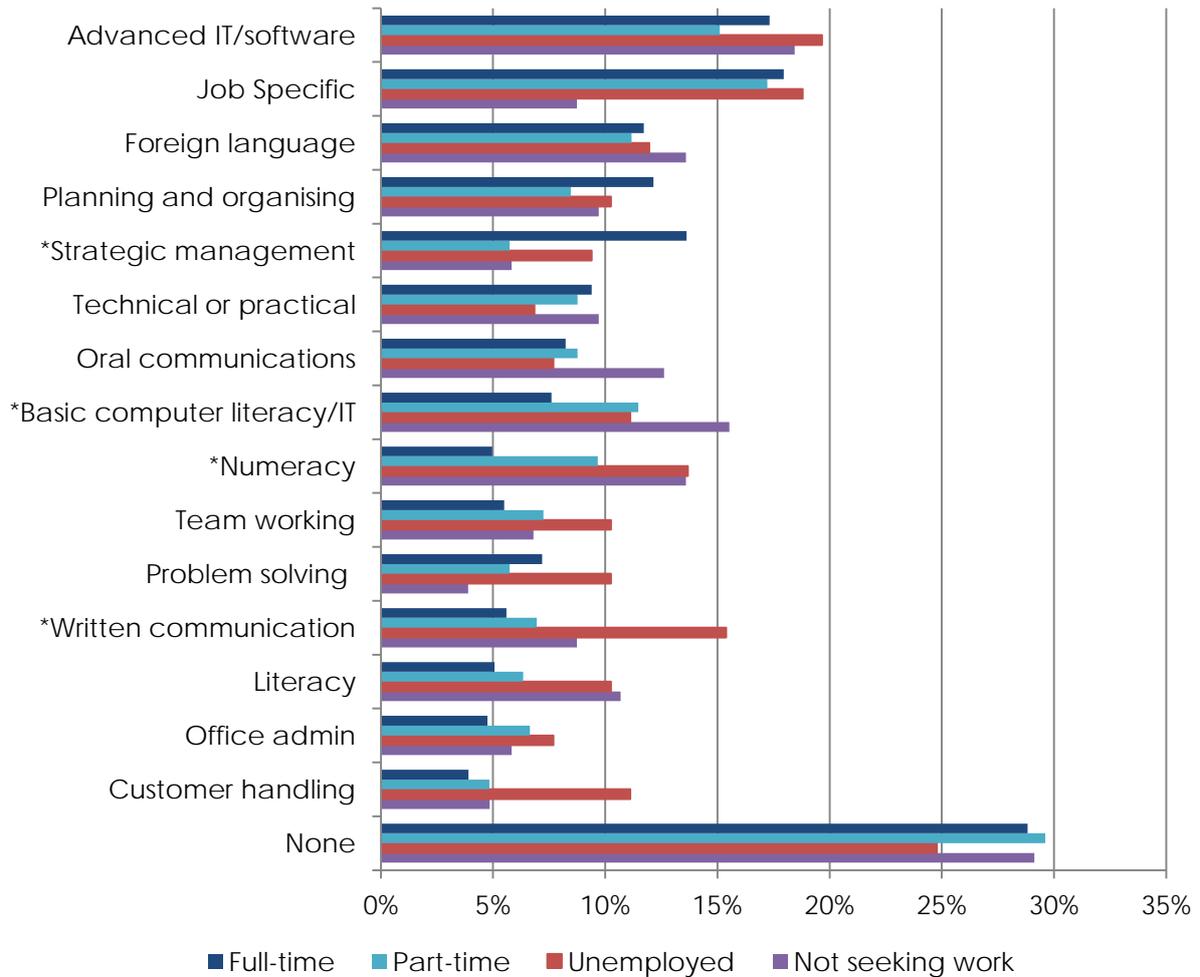


Base: respondents learning for work-related related reasons = 1839

Full-time workers were significantly less likely than other respondents to identify numeracy skills needs; and more likely to identify needs around strategic

management skills – with part time workers significantly less likely to cite this (Figure 4). Unemployed adults were significantly more likely to identify written communication skills needs. Identification of basic computer literacy and numeracy skills needs tend to increase as engagement with the labour market decreases (i.e. from full-time to not seeking work).

**Figure 4: Skills needs for work or career, by employment status**



Base: respondents learning for work-related reasons who were not retired or in full-time education = 1498

## Progression: using and developing skills

Respondents were asked to assess the extent to which they agreed with the following six statements about their opportunities to use and develop their skills in their current job:

- In my current job, I have enough opportunity to use the knowledge and skills that I have.
- In my current job, I have enough opportunities to develop the skills I need to progress further at work.
- In my current job, the opportunities to progress are clear to me.
- In my current job, my manager or supervisor supports and encourages me to develop my skills.
- In my current job, I wish to progress.
- In my current job, I would like to increase the hours of work that I do.

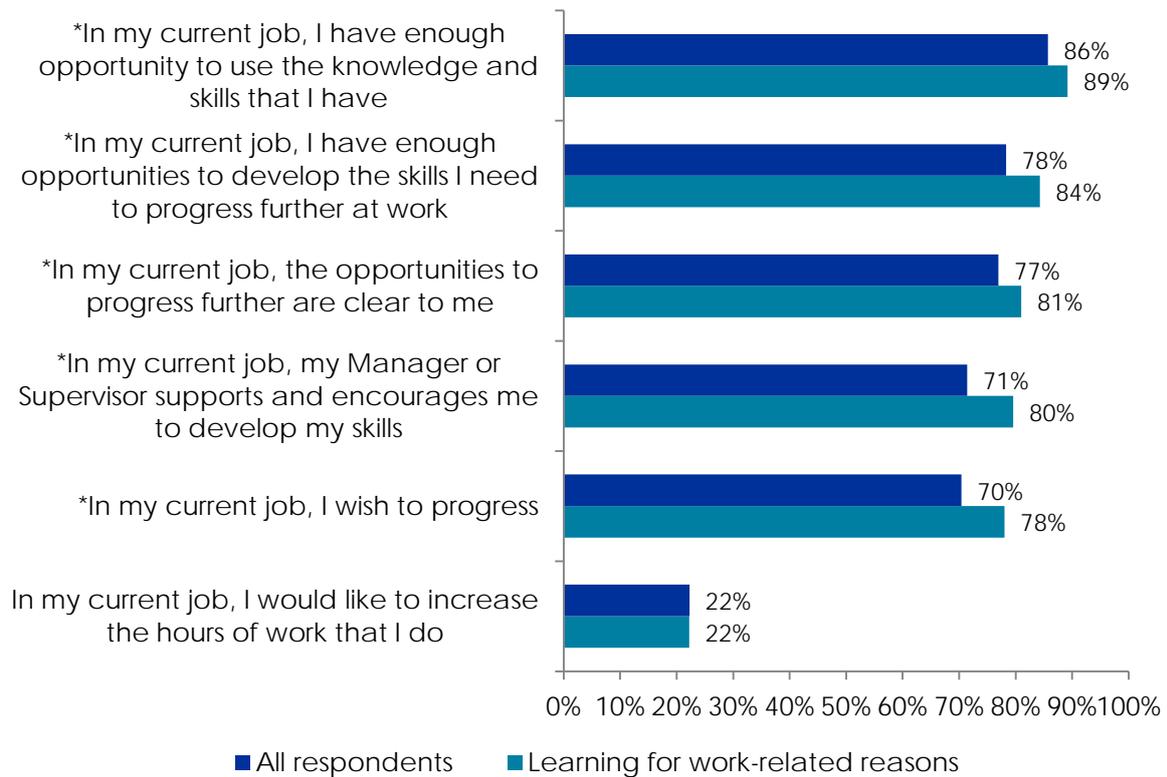
With the exception of wishing to increase the number of hours worked, respondents who are learning for work-related reasons were significantly more likely than the rest of the sample to agree with each of these statements (Figure 6).

Eighty-six per cent of all respondents and 89 per cent of those who are learning for work-related reasons agreed that they have enough opportunities to use their knowledge and skills within their current role. While this represents the vast majority of respondents, it still leaves more than 1 in 10 employees feeling that their skills and knowledge are under-utilised.

Seventy per cent of all respondents and 78 per cent of those learning for work-related reasons said that they wish to progress in their current job, with around four-fifths agreeing that they had the opportunity and support to progress. However this also means that around one in five adults is not clear about their opportunities for progression, does not feel supported or encouraged to do so and does not consider that they have opportunities to develop the skills needed to progress.

Only 22 per cent of respondents said that they would like to increase the hours that they do in the current job.

**Figure 5: Opportunities to use and develop skills for progression**

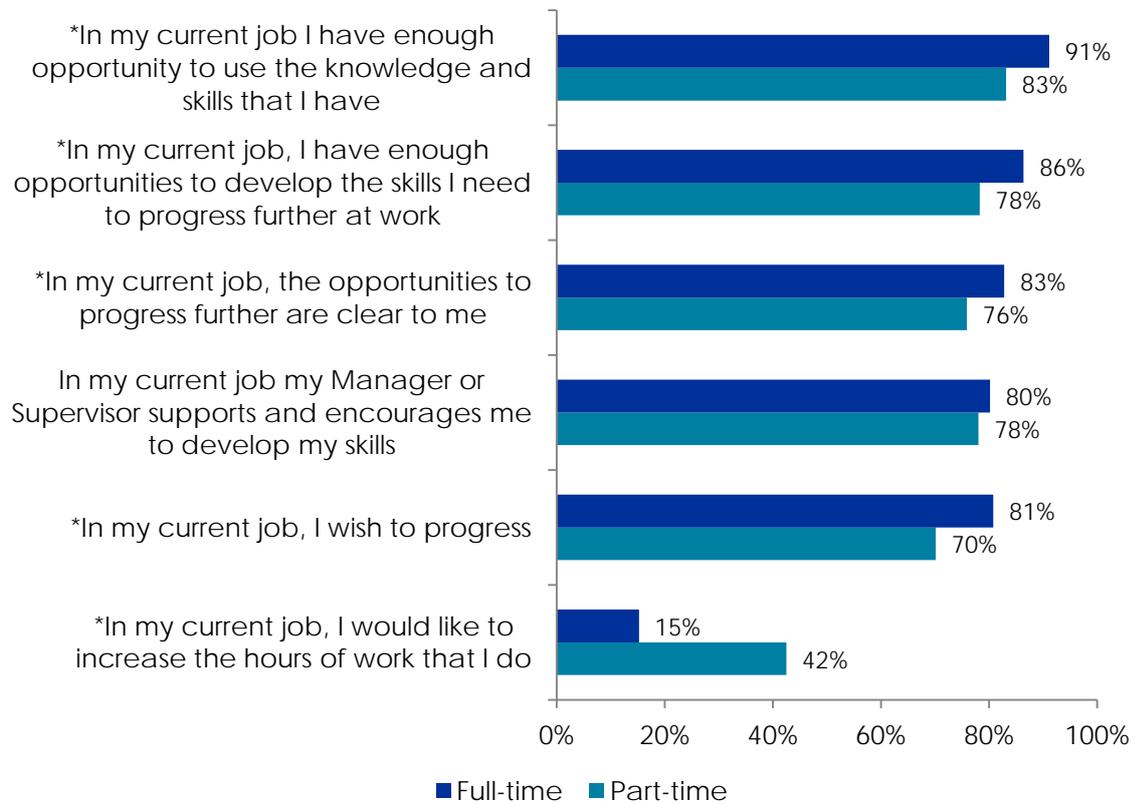


Base: respondents who are in work = 3077

While there was generally little difference in responses between men and women, men (81 per cent) were significantly more likely than women (75 per cent) to say that they wish to progress in their current job.

Full-time workers were significantly more likely to agree that they had enough opportunity to use their knowledge and skills in their current job, that they had enough opportunities in their current job to develop the skills they need to progress, that the opportunities to progress in their current job are clear to them, and that they wish to progress in their current job. Perhaps unsurprisingly, part-time workers were significantly more likely to wish to increase their working hours (Figure 6).

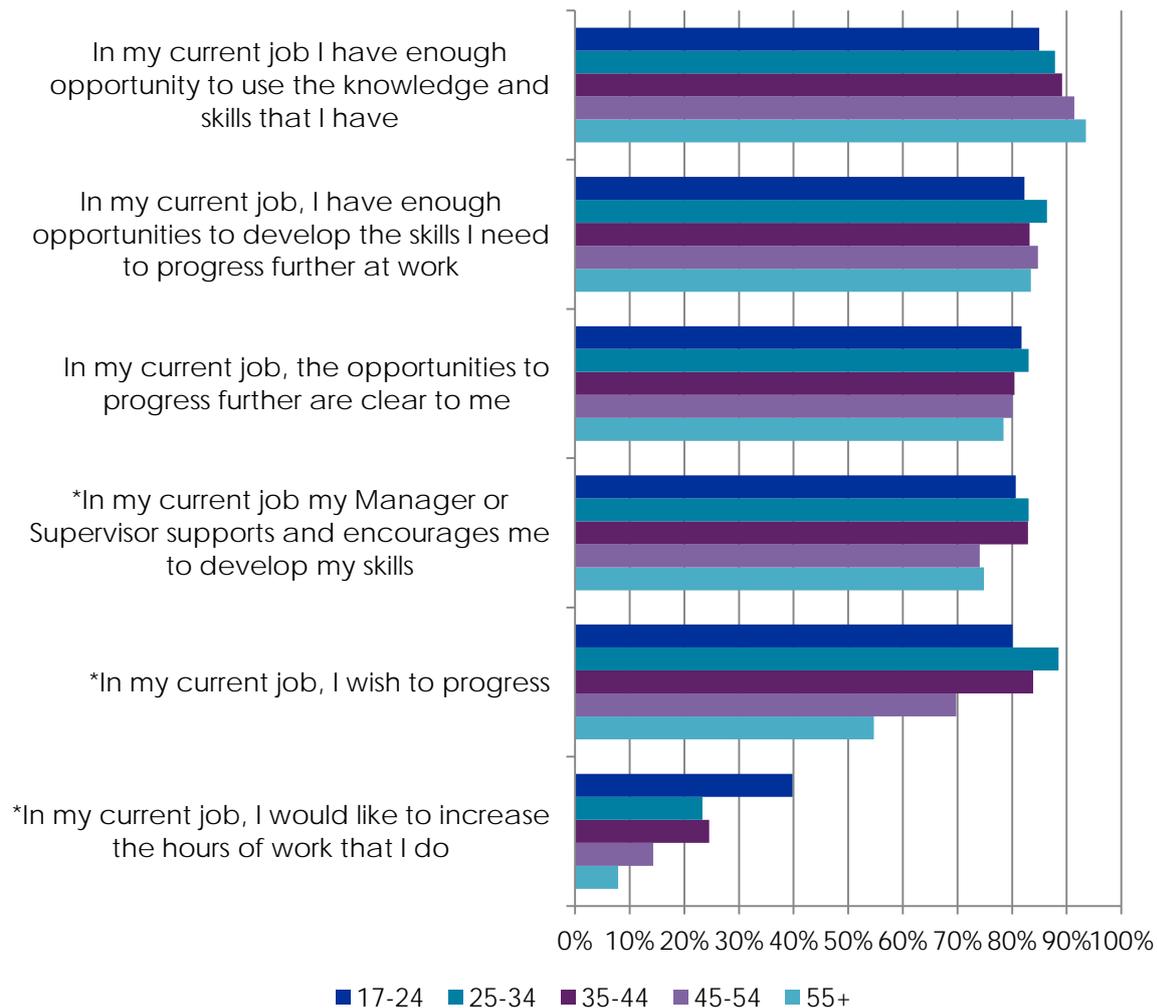
**Figure 6: Opportunities to use and develop skills for progression, by employment status**



Base: respondents who are learning for work-related reasons who are in work = 1278

In general, agreement with the statements tended to vary little by age (Figure 7). However, the proportion of people wanting to progress in their current job or to increase the hours of work that they do, declines with age. Respondents over 45 are significantly less likely to receive support from their manager or supervisor to develop their skills. Respondents aged 17-24 were most likely (40 per cent) to say that they would like to increase their hours, while those aged 25-34 were most likely (88 per cent) to agree that they wished to progress in their current jobs.

**Figure 7: Opportunities to use and develop skills to progress, by age group**



Base: Respondents learning for work-related reasons who are in work excluding those 65 and over = 1278

### Employer support and development

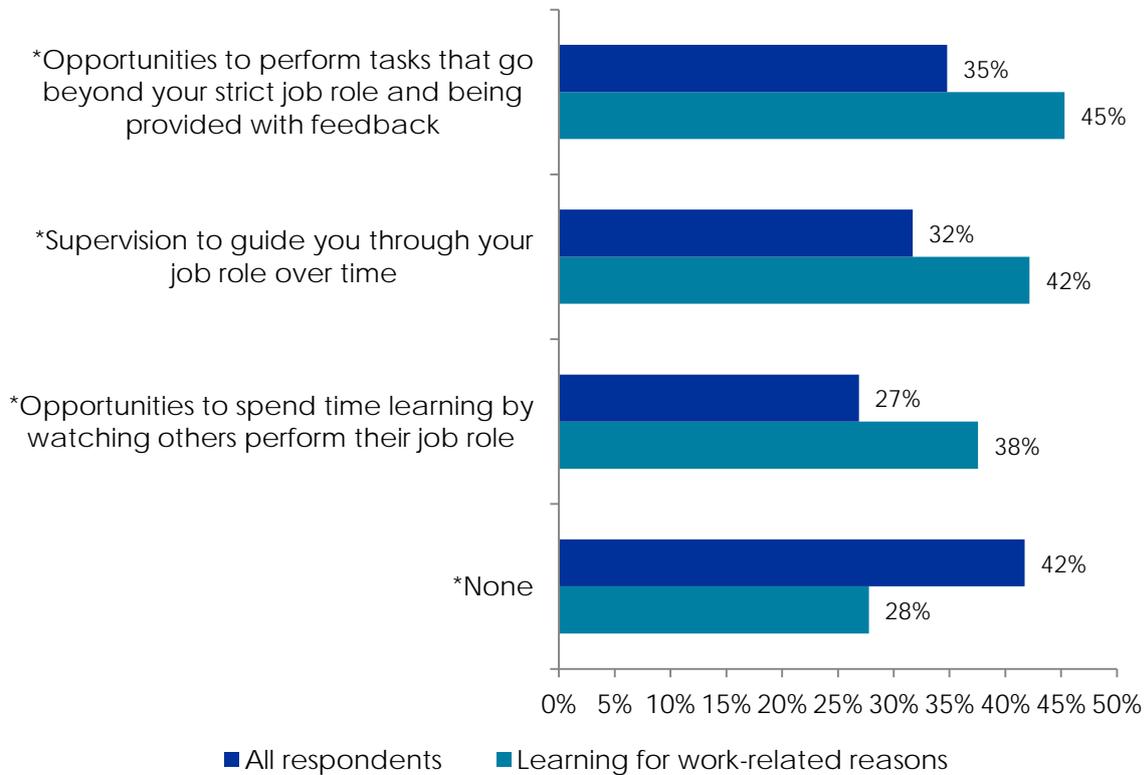
Respondents were asked to identify the different kinds of support or development opportunities that had been provided for them by their employer in the previous 12 months (Figure 8). Fifty-eight per cent of all respondents and 72 per cent of those learning for work-related reasons reported having received some support in the previous year.

Just over a third of respondents (35 percent) said that their employer has provided them with opportunities which go beyond their strict job role and just under a third (32 percent) that they had supervision to guide them through their job role over time. Twenty-seven per cent reported opportunities to spend time learning by watching others perform their job role.

Over two-fifths of all respondents (42 percent) said that their employer has provided them with no support or development opportunities in the workplace in the previous year. However, respondents learning for work-related reasons were significantly

more likely to have been offered each of the different kinds of support or development opportunities by their employer.

**Figure 8: Employer provided support/development opportunities**

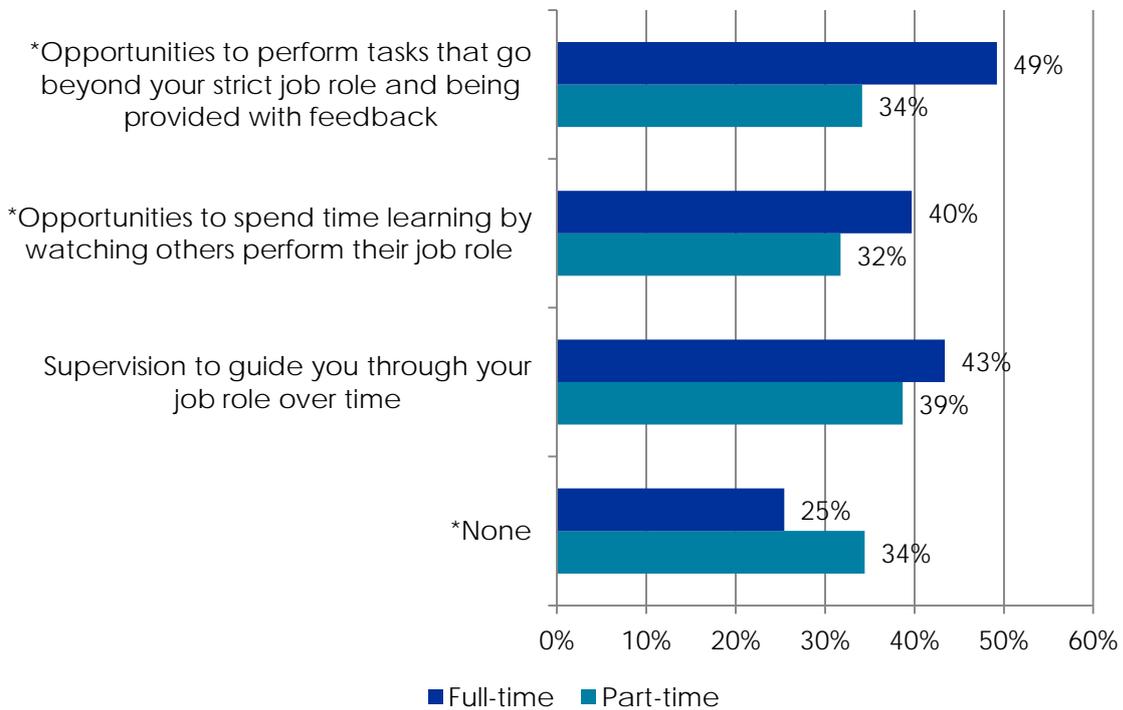


Base: all respondents in whole sample who are in work = 3077

Men and women generally receive similar levels of support and development opportunities, although women – particularly younger women working full-time – were significantly more likely to have received on-going supervision to guide them through their role (46 per cent of women; 39 per cent of men).

Part-time workers are significantly less likely than full-time workers to receive any workplace development and support opportunities (Figure 9). This was particularly the case in relation to opportunities to perform tasks going beyond their strict job role or to spend time learning by watching others.

**Figure 9: Employer provided support/development opportunities, by employment status**

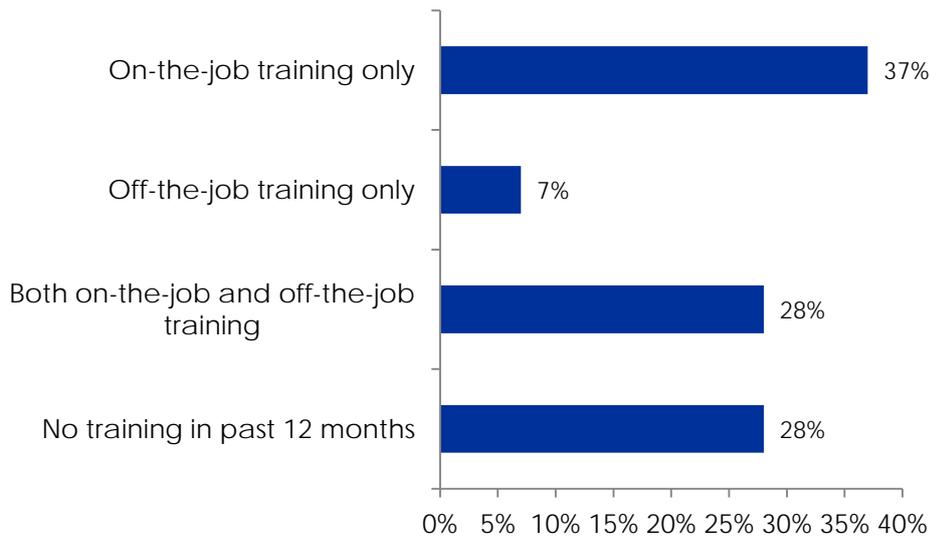


Base: respondents learning for work-related reasons who are in work = 1278

### Types of training

During the past 12 months, 54 per cent of all respondents and 72 per cent of those who are learning for work-related reasons have accessed training arranged for them by their employer. Among the latter, 28 per cent have accessed both on and off-the-job training, a further 37 per cent have only accessed on-the-job training and 7 per cent off-the-job training (Figure 10).

**Figure10: Types of training accessed in the last 12 months**

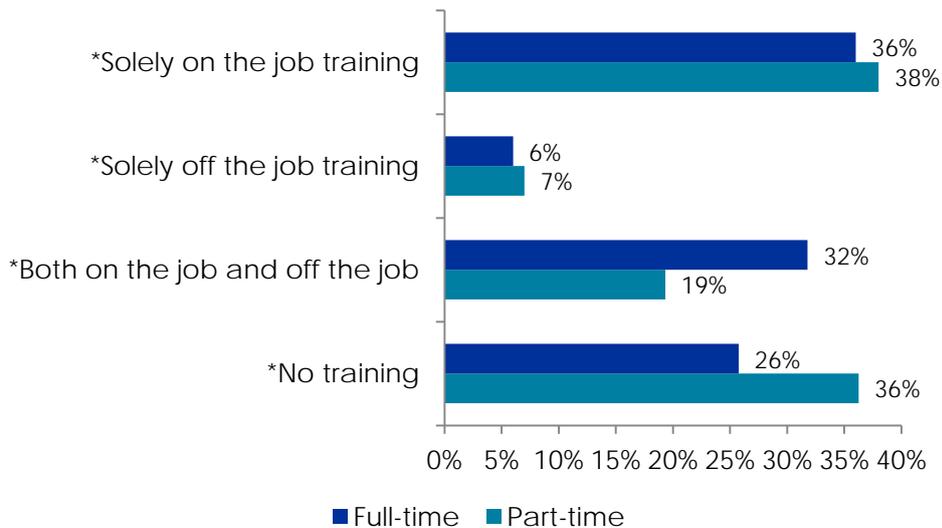


Base: respondents learning for work-related reasons who are in work = 1278

As with participation in learning more generally, engagement in learning for work-related reasons is not evenly distributed. Women (31 per cent) were significantly more likely than men (26 per cent) to have received no employer arranged training at all in the previous 12 months.

There was little variance in type of training between age groups, however full-time workers are significantly more likely than their part-time colleagues to have access to employer-provided training (Figure 11). Thirty-two per cent of full-time staff and 19 per cent of part-time staff have accessed both on-the-job and off-the-job training in the previous 12 months. Twenty-six per cent of full-timers and 36 per cent of part-timers have accessed neither.

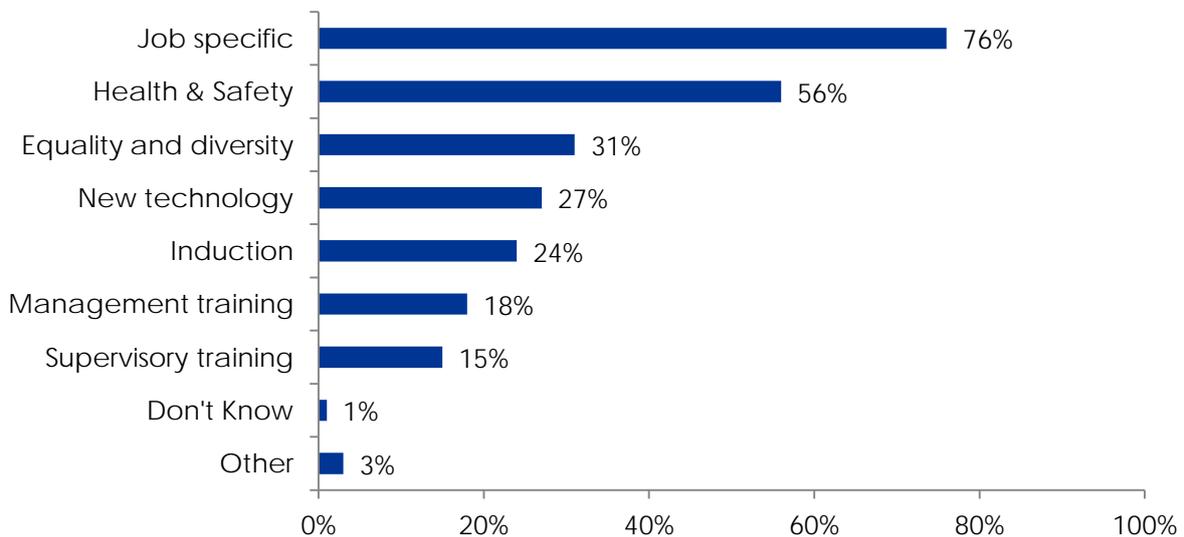
**Figure 11: Types of training accessed in the last 12 months, by employment status**



Base: respondents learning for work-related reasons who are in employment = 1278

Those who had taken part in employer-arranged training over the previous 12 months were asked about the nature of this training (Figure 12). Three-quarters (76 per cent) of respondents had participated in job-specific training, 56 per cent in health and safety training, 31 per cent in equality & diversity training, 27 per cent in training related to new technology and 24 per cent in induction training.

**Figure 12: Subjects of training participated in over previous 12 months**



Base: respondents learning for work-related reasons who had participated in training in last 12 months = 914

Women were significantly more likely than men to have received equality and diversity training (39 per cent of women; 24 per cent of men) and health and safety training (61 per cent of women; 52 per cent of men). Men were more likely to have received supervisory training (17 per cent of men; 12 per cent of women). In part, this is likely to reflect the greater proportion of women working in the public sector and the greater proportion of men in supervisory positions.

Full-time workers were more likely than part-time workers to have received training in the use new technology (29 per cent compared to 20 per cent) and in management (21 per cent compared to 7 per cent).

Perhaps unsurprisingly younger adults were more likely to have received induction training: 38 per cent of those aged under 25 had taken part in induction training, a significantly higher proportion than for any other age range.

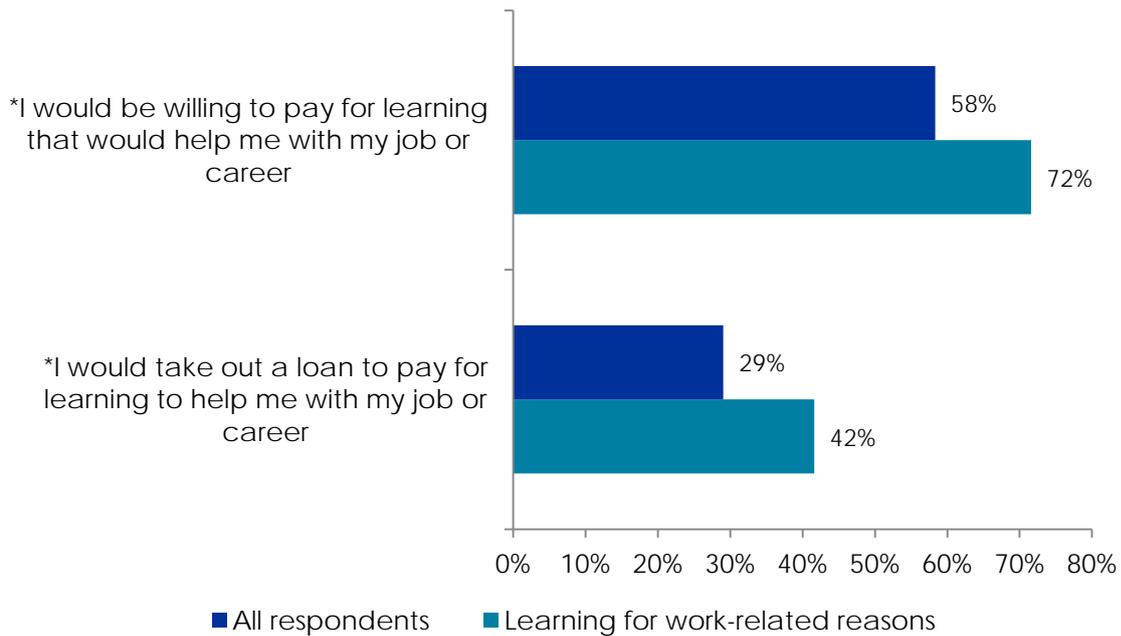
### **Paying for training**

Respondents were asked about their willingness to pay for learning to help them in their job or career. The majority of respondents (58 per cent) agreed that they would be willing to do this, although only 29 per cent said that they would be willing to take out a loan to pay for their learning (see Figure 13).

Those already learning for work-related reasons were significantly more likely to express willingness both to pay for their learning and to take out a loan to do so.

Those respondents who have paid either the full or partial costs of a training or development activity over the previous 12 months, were also significantly more likely to continue to pay for their learning and to take out a loan to do so. However, 13 per cent of those who had paid for training in the previous year indicated that they would not be willing to do so in future and 60 per cent said that they would not be willing to take out a loan to pay for this.

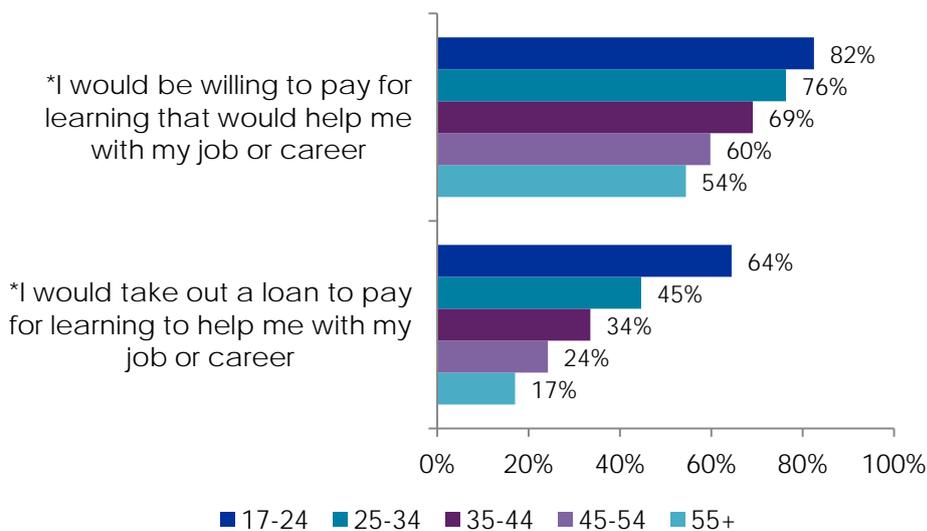
**Figure 13: Willingness to pay for learning**



Base: respondents learning for work-related reasons who are not retired = 4489

There was very little difference between men and women, and across people of different employment status, with regards to their willingness to pay for their learning, or to take out a loan to do so. However, there were significant differences according to age: with willingness to pay for learning or to take out a loan to do so declining as age group rises. Under-25s were significantly more likely to agree with both statements, while respondents aged 55 and over were significantly less likely to agree with both (see Figure 14).

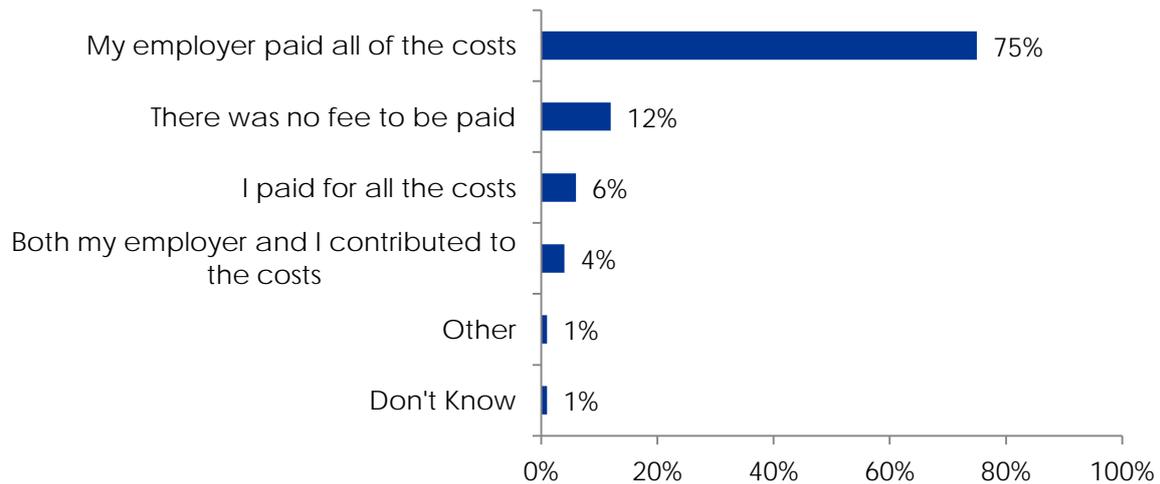
**Figure 14: Willingness to pay for learning, by age group**



Base: respondents learning for work-related reasons who are not retired = 1840

Respondents who had undertaken some work-related training or development activity in the last 12 months were asked how this was paid for. For 75 per cent of respondents, their employer had paid all of the costs, 12 per cent said that there was no fee to be paid. Just 6 per cent paid for all of the costs and 4 per cent shared the costs with their employer (Figure 15).

**Figure 15: Who paid for training or development activity**



Base: respondents who had participated in training in last 12 months = 914

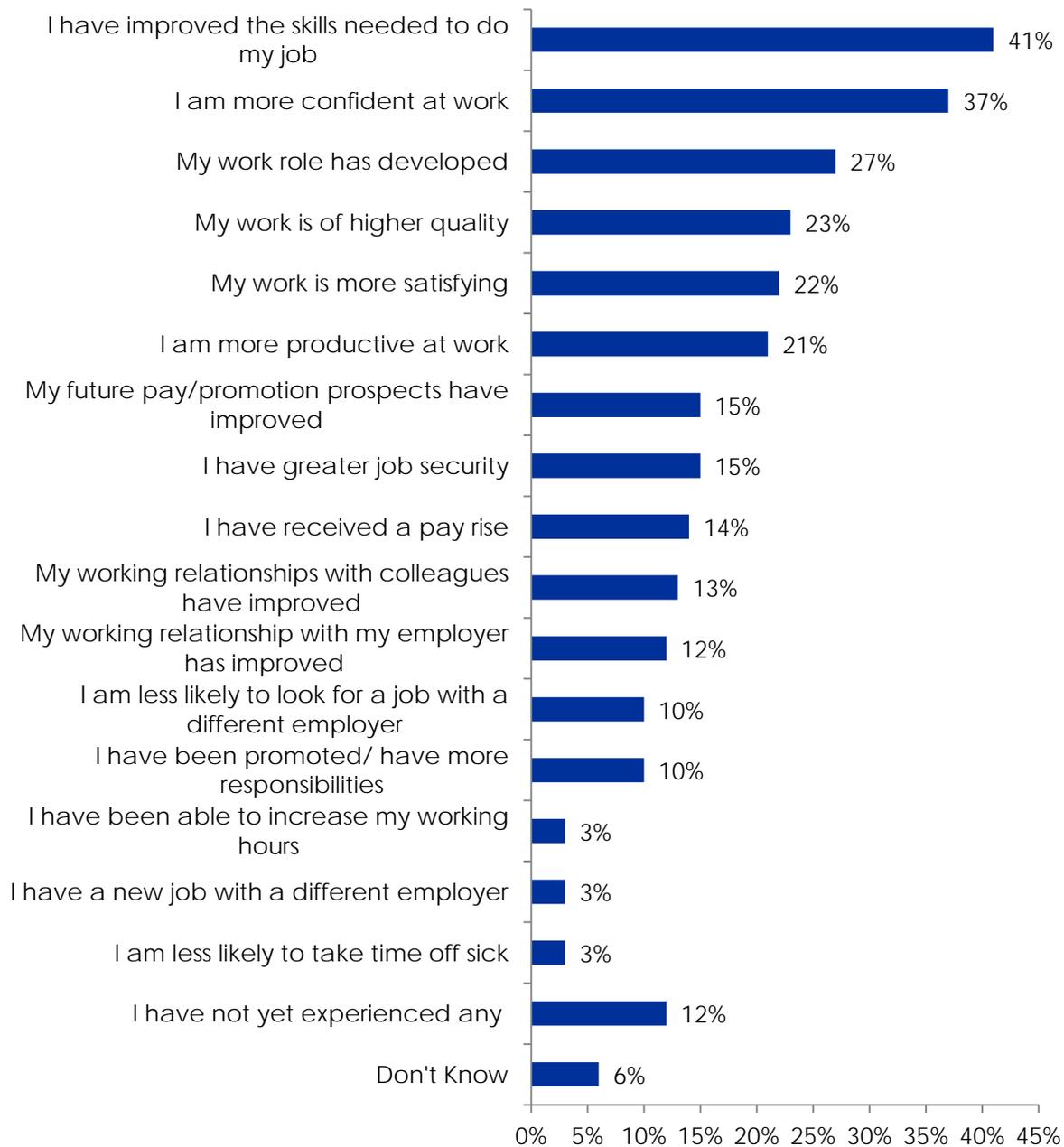
Women were more likely than men to have contributed towards the costs of their training. Full-time workers (77 per cent) were significantly more likely than part-time workers (70 per cent) to have had *all* of the costs of their learning paid for by their employer.

### Work-related outcomes of training

When asked to identify the work-related outcomes of their training and development activity, respondents were most likely to identify an improvement in the skills they need to do their job (41 per cent), an increase in their confidence at work (37 per cent) and that their work role had developed (27 per cent). Around one in five said that their work is of higher quality (23 per cent) and is more satisfying (22 per cent) and that they are now more productive at work (21 per cent)

Twelve per cent of respondents said that they had not yet experienced any work-related outcomes from their training (Figure 16).

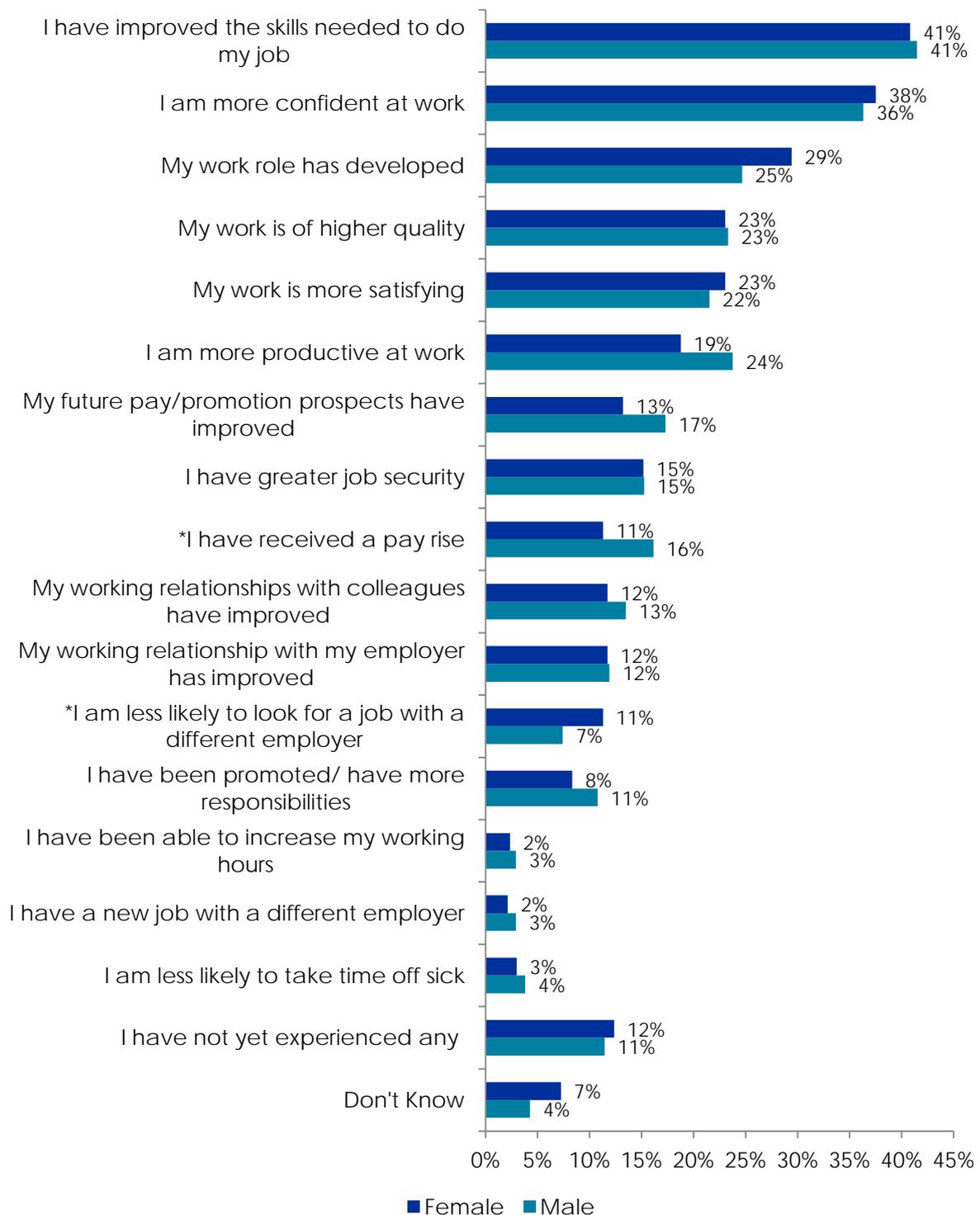
**Figure 16: Work-related outcomes of training and development activity**



Base: Respondents who had participated in training in the last 12 months = 914

In general, there were few differences between the proportion of women and men reporting experience of each of the outcomes (see Figure 17). However, men were significantly more likely than women to have received a pay rise (16 per cent compared with 11 per cent) and women were significantly more likely to say that they would be less likely to look for a job with a different employer (11 per cent compared with 7 per cent).

**Figure 17: Work related outcomes of training and development activity, by gender**



Base: Respondents who had participated in training in the last 12 months = 914

Part-time workers were significantly less likely to state that their pay or promotion prospects had improved (8 per cent part-time; 17 per cent full-time) and significantly more likely to state either that they had not experienced any benefits (17 per cent part-time; 10 per cent full-timers). They were also significantly more likely to state

that they didn't know whether they had experienced any outcomes (10 per cent part-time; 5 per cent full-time).

Younger respondents were more likely to say that their future pay/promotion prospects had improved, and that they were more confident at work.

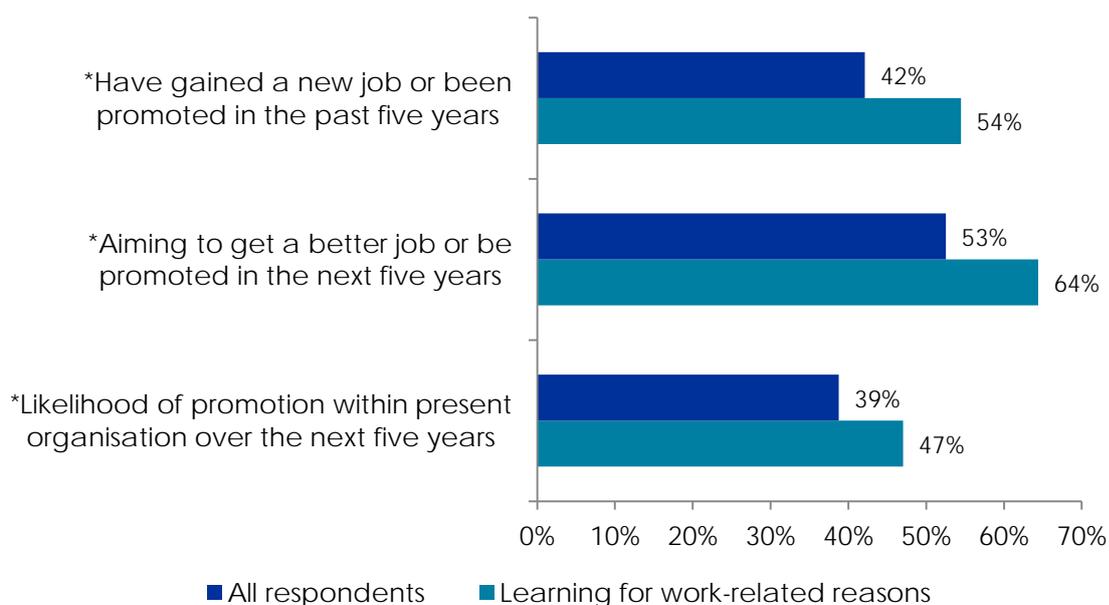
### Progression in work

Respondents were asked a range of questions about opportunities for progression within their workplace.

Forty-two per cent of all respondents, 54 per cent of those learning for work-related reasons and just 33 per cent of those not in this group said that they had gained a new job or been promoted in the previous five years. Fifty-three per cent of all respondents, 64 per cent of those learning for work-related reasons and 44 per cent of those not in this group said that they were aiming to get a new job or be promoted in the next five years (Figure 18).

Just over two fifths of all respondents (42 per cent) had gained a new job or been promoted in the previous five years. Just over half (53 per cent) were aiming to attain a better job or be promoted within the next five years, but around two fifths (39 per cent) thought it was likely that they would be promoted over the next five years. Thirty-nine per cent of all respondents, 47 per cent of those learning for work-related reasons and 33 per cent of those not in this group think that they are likely to be promoted by their present organisation in the next five years. For all three statements, there was a significant difference between those who are learning for work-related reasons and those who are not.

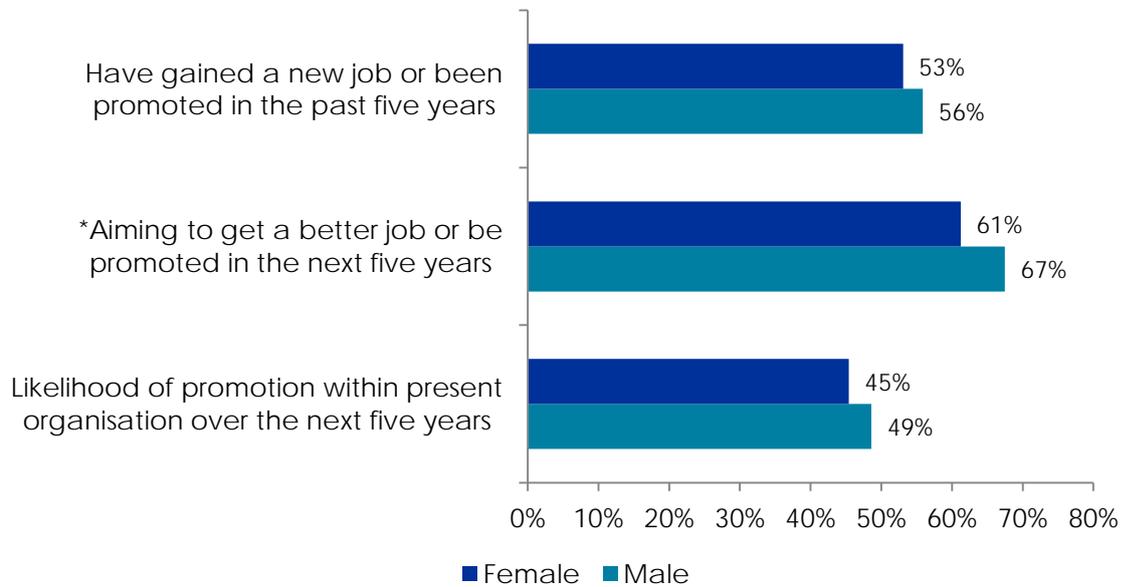
Figure 18: Progression in work



Base: respondents who are in work = 3077

The proportion of men and women who had gained a job or promotion during the previous five years and who thought that it was likely that they would gain a promotion over the next five years were similar. However, men were significantly more likely than women to say that they were aiming to get a better job or be promoted in the next five years (Figure 19).

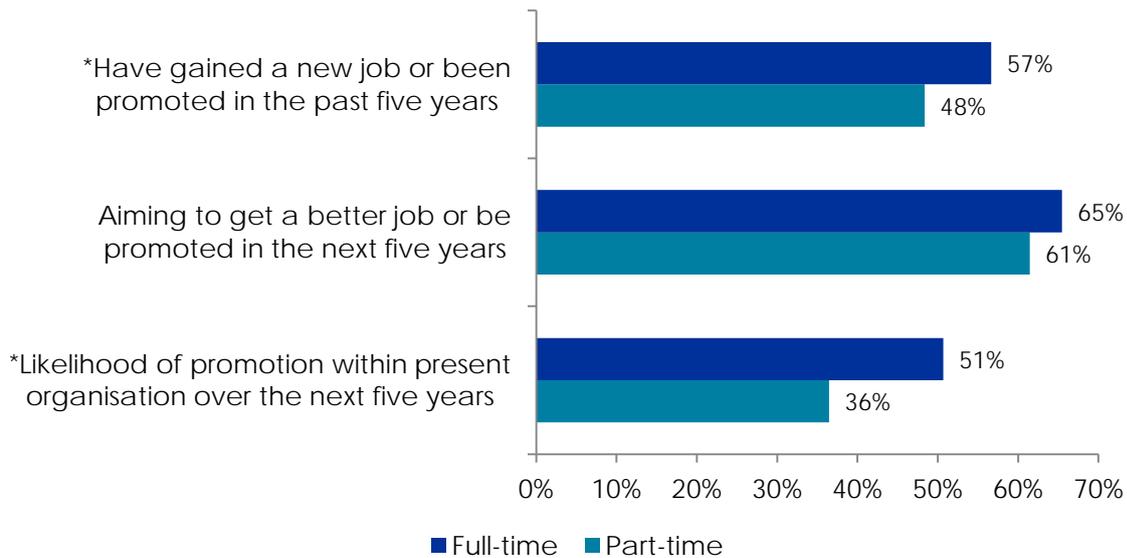
**Figure 19: Progression in work, by gender**



Base: respondents learning for work-related reasons who are in work = 1278

There was no significant difference between the proportion of full and part-time workers who were aiming to get a better job or be promoted over the next five years. However, full-time workers were significantly more likely both to have gained a new job/been promoted over the previous five years and to think it likely that they will be promoted over the next five years.

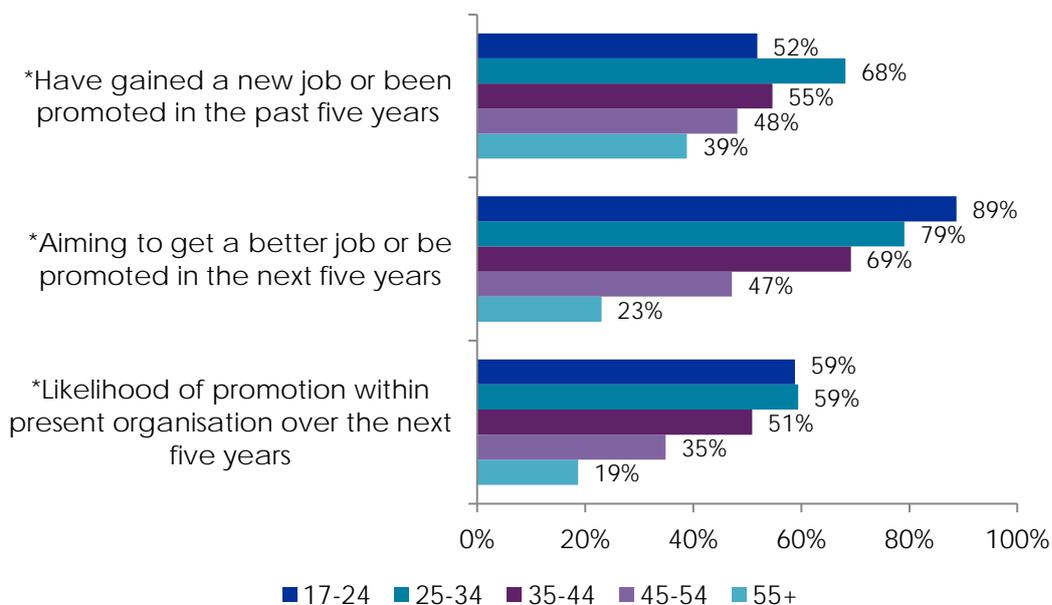
**Figure 20: Progression in work, by employment status**



Base: respondents learning for work-related reasons who are in work = 1278

Age is a significant factor in a respondent’s attitude towards, and experience of progression, with older adults less likely to have gained a new job/been promoted in the last five years and to consider themselves likely to do so in the next five. The decline is particularly pronounced in respondents’ ambitions to get a better job or be promoted in the next five years (Figure 21).

**Figure 21: Progression in work, by age group**



Base: respondents learning for work related reasons who are in work = 1279

Under 25s were significantly more likely to be aiming to get a better job or be promoted over the next five years and to think it likely that they would be promoted over the next five years, 25-34-year-olds were significantly more likely to agree with all three of the statements, 45-54-year-olds were significantly less likely to be aiming to get a better job or be promoted over the next five years) and to think it likely that they would be promoted over the next five years and 55-64-year-olds were significantly less likely to agree with all of the statements.