



Department
for Education

Adult Education Survey 2016

Research report

June 2018

Office for National Statistics



Social Science in Government

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Executive summary

Introduction

This report presents the results from the 2016 Adult Education Survey (AES). Prior to this, the survey was called the National Adult Learning Survey (NALS) which was commissioned for the first time in 1997, followed by repeat surveys in 2000, 2001, 2002, 2005 and 2010. More information on previous waves of the AES can be found in the accompanying Technical Report.

AES was designed to capture information on participation in various types of learning, as well as on people's perceived barriers and incentives to learning, and access to information about learning opportunities.

The survey sampled individuals in England aged 19 and over who were not in continuous full-time education or who had returned to full-time education following a break of more than two years. In total, 8,822 Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) were conducted, achieving an overall response rate of 52%.

Learning is subdivided into three categories:

- **Formal learning** – learning that is intended to lead to a nationally recognised qualification;
- **Non-formal learning** – a course or taught class that does not lead to a nationally recognised qualification;
- **Informal learning** – self-directed learning with the aim of improving knowledge of a subject.

Who is Learning?

Three-quarters of respondents (78%) reported engagement in any learning in the last 12 months, where 'any learning' covers any of the three types of learning (formal, non-formal or informal).

Individuals aged 19 to 24 were most likely to engage in any learning in the last 12 months (89%) compared to all other age groups, however this was not significantly higher than the 25 to 34 age group (84%). The oldest age band (65 and over) had the lowest proportion of respondents participating in any learning, with 70%.

Participation rates in learning did not differ significantly depending on the sex of a respondent, with 79% of men and 77% of women undertaking any learning in the last 12 months.

Respondents holding a degree or equivalent as their highest educational attainment were most likely to have undertaken any type of learning in the last 12 months (92%).

Respondents in employment (full-time or part-time) were more likely to have undertaken any learning in the last 12 months (85% and 81% respectively) compared to those who were unemployed (63%) or economically inactive (70%).

Formal and Non-Formal Learning

The results showed that one-in-ten (10%) respondents had participated in formal learning and four-in-ten respondents (42%) had participated in non-formal learning or training in the last 12 months. Of the respondents who undertook formal learning, the majority (97%) worked towards or completed a qualification, while 8% undertook a formal apprenticeship. Degree level qualifications (including foundation degrees and PGCEs) accounted for almost a third (31%) of the formal qualifications undertaken, followed by NVQ/SVQ (11%).

Over half of formal learning (59%) and non-formal learning (56%) activities were paid for in-full by someone other than the respondent. Employers were the most common source of funding, accounting for 75% of formal learning activities, and 93% of non-formal learning activities that were paid for by someone other than the respondent.

Respondents received, on average, 15 weeks of instruction for their formal learning and 11 weeks of instruction for their non-formal learning in the last 12 months. The average number of instruction hours received for both formal and non-formal learning per week was 15.

Respondents reported that the most common outcome from both formal and non-formal learning was that it enabled them to have a better performance in their current job (63% and 62% respectively).

Informal Learning

Two-thirds of respondents (66%) engaged in informal learning in the last 12 months. A respondent's age or sex did not influence informal learning participation rates, but those in employment (either full-time or part-time) were more likely than unemployed respondents to engage in self-motivated learning.

Learning using a computer, tablet or smartphone was the most popular mode of informal learning in the last 12 months, regardless of age, sex or level of highest educational attainment, with 77% of respondents selecting this mode of learning.

Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

Almost a quarter (24%) of respondents had looked for information about learning in the last 12 months. Younger respondents aged 19 to 24 (36%) were more likely than those aged 45 to 54, 55 to 64 and 65 and over to seek out information.

Around a third of respondents (34%) received information from institutions or organisations; of these, over nine-in-ten (93%) were provided with this information free of charge, while the remaining 7% paid for the information. Of the free information provided, half of respondents (52%) received it from education or training institutions such as colleges and universities.

The most common way of receiving the free information was interaction with a person through internet, phone, e-mail or any other media (54%). This was followed by interaction with dedicated materials such as books, leaflets and websites (49%).

Barriers and Incentives

Two barriers stood out as being particularly important to respondents: 'I don't have the time or training takes too long' which was selected by over half (54%) of respondents, and 'the cost/too expensive' which was selected by 42% of respondents.

Just over half (52%) of all respondents reported that they were likely or very likely to do job-related learning, training or education in the next two or three years. Similarly, half (50%) of all respondents reported that they were likely or very likely to do non-job-related learning, training or education in the next two or three years. When only looking at respondents in employment (either full-time or part-time) the proportions increased to 71% for job-related learning and 54% for non-job-related learning, suggesting that employment status has less of an impact on likelihood to undertake non-job-related learning when compared to job-related learning.

Respondents reported 'Learn something new' as the most common motivation to undertake future learning, and was selected by almost three-quarters of respondents (72%); this was consistently the most selected incentive regardless of sex or highest education attainment level.

1. Introduction

This report presents the results from the 2016 Adult Education Survey (AES). Prior to this, the survey was called the National Adult Learning Survey (NALS) which was commissioned for the first time in 1997, followed by repeat surveys in 2000, 2001, 2002, 2005 and 2010. More information on previous waves of the AES can be found in the accompanying Technical Report.

1.1 Information captured by AES 2016

AES was designed to capture information on participation in various types of learning as well as on people's perceived barriers and incentives to learning and access to information about learning opportunities.

Learning is subdivided into three categories which are recognised by international bodies including Eurostat and OECD:

Formal learning – learning that is intended to lead to a nationally recognised qualification; for example, a degree or NVQ.

Non-formal learning – a course or taught class that does not lead to a nationally recognised qualification; for example, a first aid course.

Informal learning – self-directed learning with the aim of improving knowledge of a subject, not including taught classes or qualifications; for example, watching an online tutorial.

1.2 Summary of methodology

The survey sampled individuals in England aged 19 years and over who were not in continuous full-time education or who had returned to full-time education following a break of more than two years. The sample was drawn from respondents who had completed their final Labour Force Survey (LFS)¹ interview between January 2015 and December 2015.

¹ For information on the Labour Force Survey, see

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/methodologies/labourforcesurveyuserguidance>

In total, 8,822 Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) were conducted; achieving an overall response rate of 52% which met the precision requirements set by Eurostat².

Weighting was applied to the dataset to account for the sampling design and non-response.

Full details on the survey methodology can be found in the accompanying Technical Report.

1.3 Comparability to previous surveys

The AES 2016 questionnaire was designed to be consistent with the European Adult Education Survey, with the addition of several questions from NALS 2010 and questions of policy interest. This approach was not taken with the previous NALS questionnaires meaning that questions have been asked in different ways, limiting comparability over the years.

Furthermore, AES 2016 differed from previous NALS in several areas such as data collection method (face-to-face in 2010 and telephone interviews in 2016), average length of interview (40 minutes in 2010 and 27 minutes in 2016) and achieved sample sizes (4,647 in 2010 and 8,822 in 2016).

Finally, the focus was on learning undertaken in the past three years in NALS 2010, whereas the 2016 report focused on learning undertaken in the past 12 months, meaning that often the results are not directly comparable.

1.4 Guidance for interpreting the data

The results presented in this report are survey-based estimates. While the survey is designed to be as accurate as possible, the estimates from it are subject to a level of uncertainty because the results are based on a sample rather than a count of the whole population. Confidence intervals give an indication of the range in which the true population value is likely to fall if our statistical assumptions are correct.

² For response rates broken down by age groups and precision requirements, see the accompanying Technical Report.

The accuracy of the estimates in this report are indicated by confidence intervals at the 95% level. By 95%, we mean that we would expect the true value for the population to fall within the upper and lower bounds of the confidence interval 19 times out of 20.

Differences between estimates have been deemed statistically significant when the respective confidence intervals do not overlap. Unless stated otherwise, this report only comments on differences that are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

The percentages presented here have been calculated from the weighted responses. The unweighted response base is shown at the bottom of each table and chart. In those tables and charts where percentages do not add up to 100%, this is due to either multiple answers, rounding, or the exclusion of 'don't know' or 'no response' categories.

Where estimates are based on small sample sizes (i.e. those of less than 30 respondents) they should be treated with caution; this is noted in the text or footnotes.

2. Who is Learning?

This section explores the characteristics of individuals that participated in formal learning, non-formal learning or informal learning within the last 12 months, such as net annual household income, age leaving continuous full-time education, and disability status.

Three-quarters of respondents (78%) reported engagement in any learning in the last 12 months, where 'any learning' covers any of the three types of learning (formal, non-formal or informal). Overall, one-in-ten respondents (10%) engaged in formal learning, four-in-ten respondents (42%) participated in non-formal learning, and two-thirds of respondents (66%) reported undertaking informal learning.

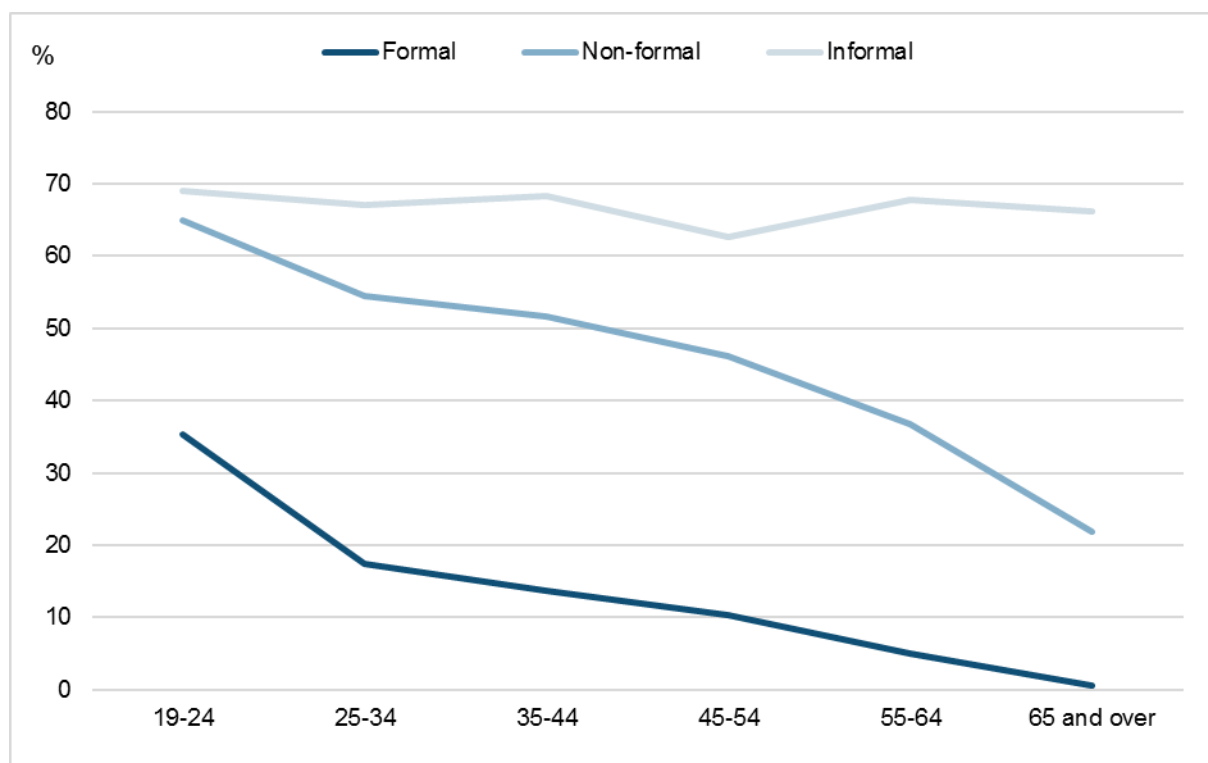
2.1 Age

Individuals aged 19 to 24 were most likely to engage in any learning in the last 12 months (89%) compared to all other age groups, however this was not significantly higher than the 25 to 34 age group (84%). The oldest age band (65 and over) were least likely to participate in any learning (70%).

As with any learning undertaken in the last 12 months, respondents aged 19 to 24 were most likely to engage in formal (35%) and non-formal learning (65%), while respondents aged 65 and over were least likely to participate in formal (1%)³ and non-formal (22%) learning (see figure 2.1). Age did not have a significant effect on the participation in informal learning.

³ Estimate should be treated with caution due to sample sizes less than 30 respondents.

Figure 2.1: Learning undertaken in the last 12 months, by age



Unweighted base: 8,822

Source: Adult Education Survey 2016

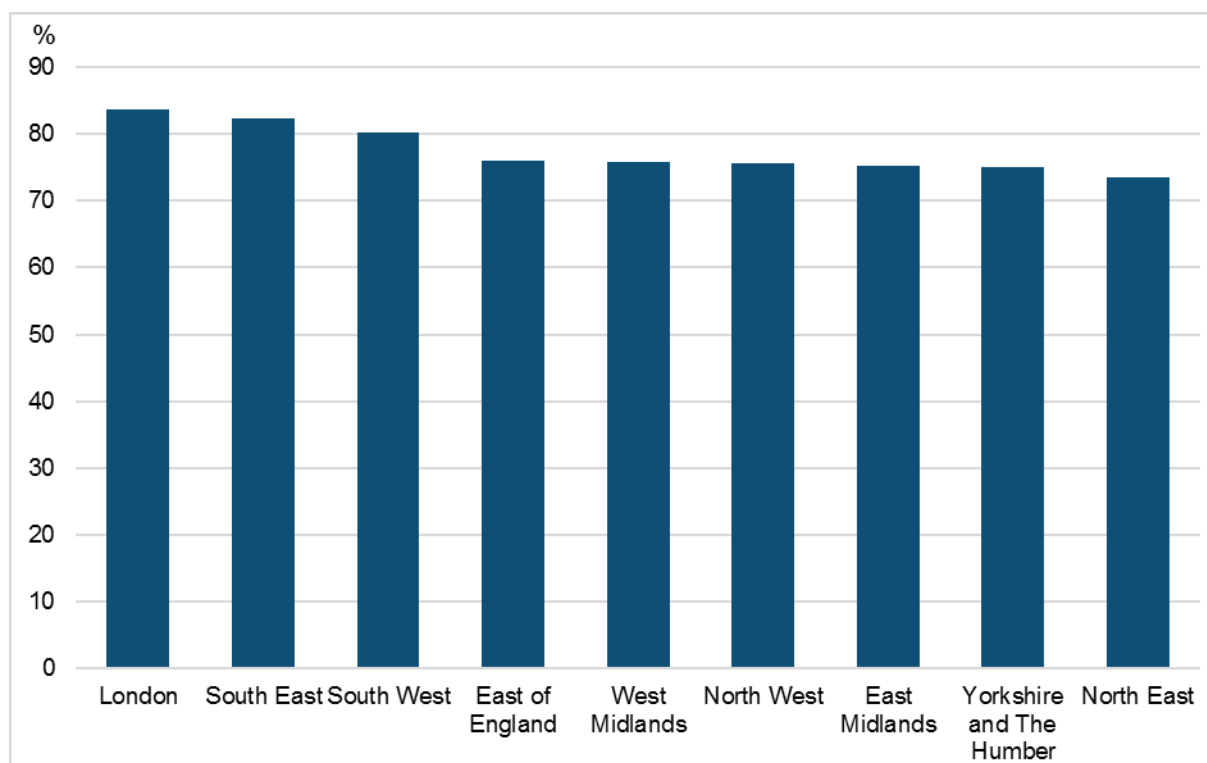
2.2 Sex

Participation rates in learning did not differ significantly depending on the sex of a respondent, with 79% of men and 77% of women undertaking any learning in the last 12 months. Participation rates for formal, non-formal or informal learning for men and women were also not significantly different.

2.3 Region of residence

Respondents living in London and the South East were the most likely to engage in any learning in the last 12 months compared to respondents in all other regions in England (with participation rates of 84% and 82%, respectively), however these regions were not significantly higher than the South West (80%) (see figure 2.2). The North East had the lowest proportion of respondents participating in any learning (74%), however this was not significantly lower than the other UK regions except for London, the South East and the South West.

Figure 2.2: Participation in any learning, by region of residence



Unweighted base: 8,822

Source: Adult Education Survey 2016

2.4 Household income

Household income figures collected from the questionnaire were self-reported monthly estimates. These figures were used to calculate the net *annual* household income for that respondent. 'Net' income refers to the household's income after any tax, contributions to pensions or maintenance payments have been deducted. For analysis purposes, net annual household income was grouped into the following bands:

- Less than £14,999
- £15,000 to £29,999
- £30,000 to £44,999
- £45,000 and above

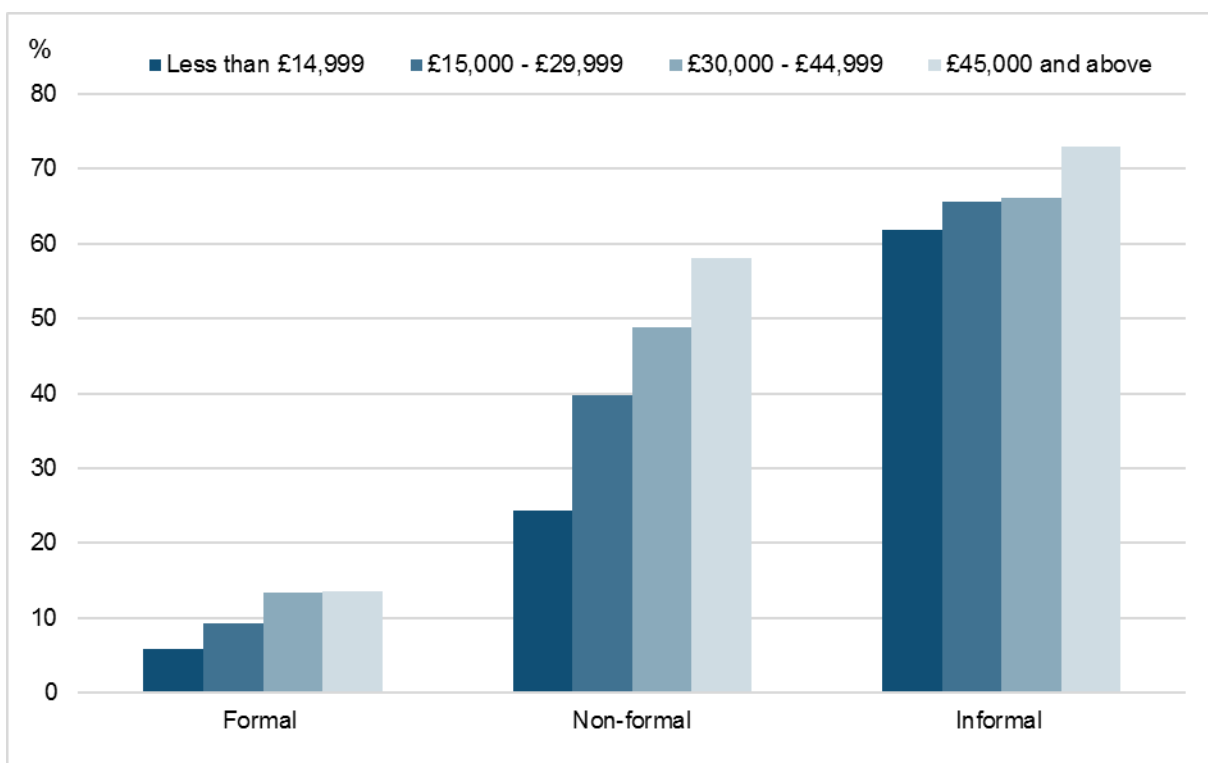
Respondents in households earning £45,000 and above per year were most likely to have engaged in any type of learning in the last 12 months (86%), compared to respondents in households with a lower annual income.

When examining the three different types of learning separately, respondents in households earning £45,000 and above per year were more likely than all other household income groups to undertake non-formal (58%) and informal learning (73%) in

the last 12 months (see figure 2.3). For formal learning, there was no noticeable difference when compared to the £30,000 to £44,999 household income band, however there was a difference compared to the remaining two household income bands.

Individuals with a net annual household income of less than £14,999 were least likely to have done any type of learning in the last 12 months, with 68%. This remained true for formal (6%) and non-formal learning (24%), however for informal learning, this household income band was not significantly lower than the £15,000 to £29,999 and £30,000 to £44,999 household income bands.

Figure 2.3: Learning undertaken in the last 12 months, by net household annual income



Unweighted base: 8,822

Source: Adult Education Survey 2016

2.5 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)

For interpretation of IMD⁴, 'quintiles' have been created. Quintiles are calculated by ranking the most deprived (Quintile 1) to least deprived (Quintile 5) areas and dividing them into 5 equal groups, each accounting for 20%.

Individuals living in areas in the least deprived quintile were more likely to have undertaken any learning in the last 12 months (83%), compared to areas in the most deprived quintile (72%).

One-third of respondents (34%) who lived in the most deprived quintile participated in non-formal learning in the last 12 months, the lowest level of participation when compared to the all other deprivation quintiles.

2.6 Employment status

Respondents in employment (full-time or part-time) were more likely to have undertaken any learning in the last 12 months (85% and 81% respectively) compared to those who were unemployed (63%) or economically inactive⁵ (70%).

For formal learning, respondents in full-time employment had higher rates of participation than individuals who were unemployed or economically inactive. Those classified as economically inactive were least likely to engage in formal learning compared to all other groups (3%) (see figure 2.4).

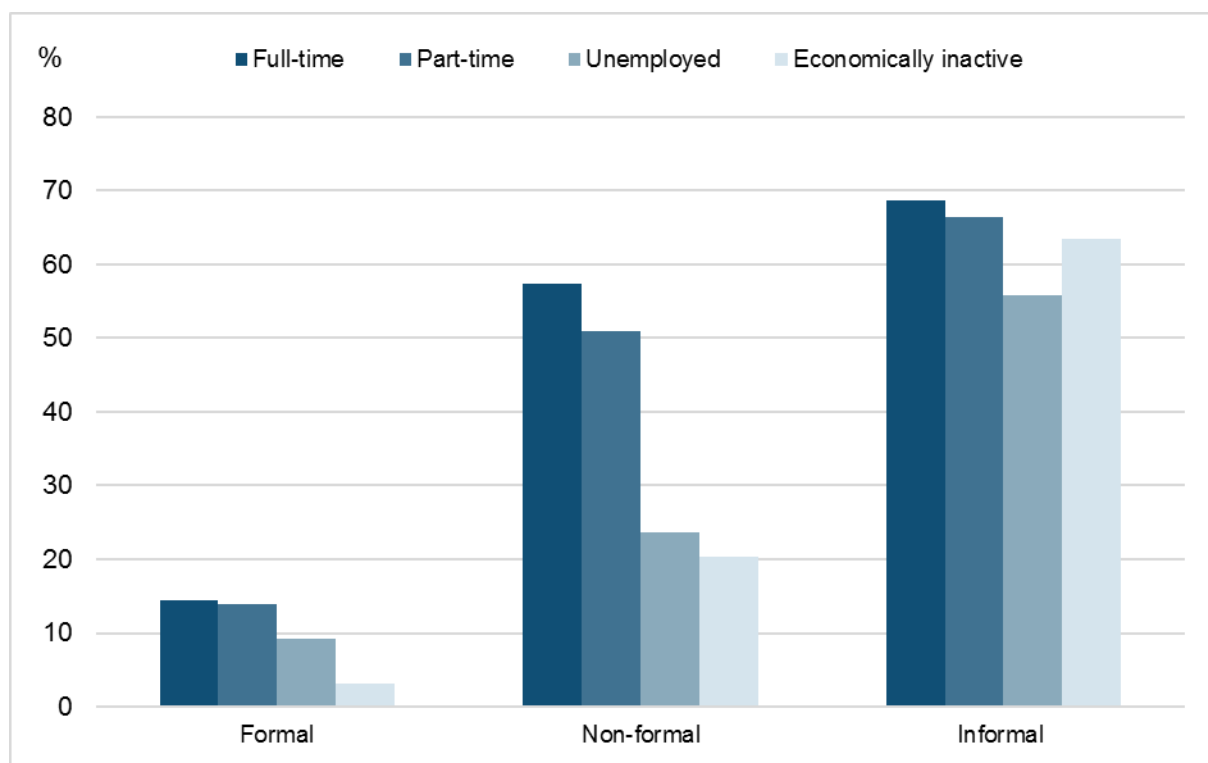
Respondents in full-time employment were more likely to participate in non-formal learning (57%) than those working part-time (51%). However, respondents in employment (full-time or part-time) were twice as likely to engage in non-formal learning compared to those unemployed (24%) and economically inactive (20%). This reflects that those in employment have access to learning that is delivered in the workplace and on-the-job training.

Full-time and part-time respondents were more likely to participate in informal learning compared to those unemployed.

⁴ The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2015 is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas (or neighbourhoods) in England. For more information on Index of Multiple Deprivation, see the guidance document: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015>

⁵ Economically inactive is defined as people who are not in employment and are not actively seeking employment (unemployed). There are many reasons why an individual may be inactive, for example, they might be studying, looking after family or long-term sick.

Figure 2.4: Learning undertaken in the last 12 months, by self-reported employment status



Unweighted base: 8,806

Source: Adult Education Survey 2016

2.7 Highest educational attainment

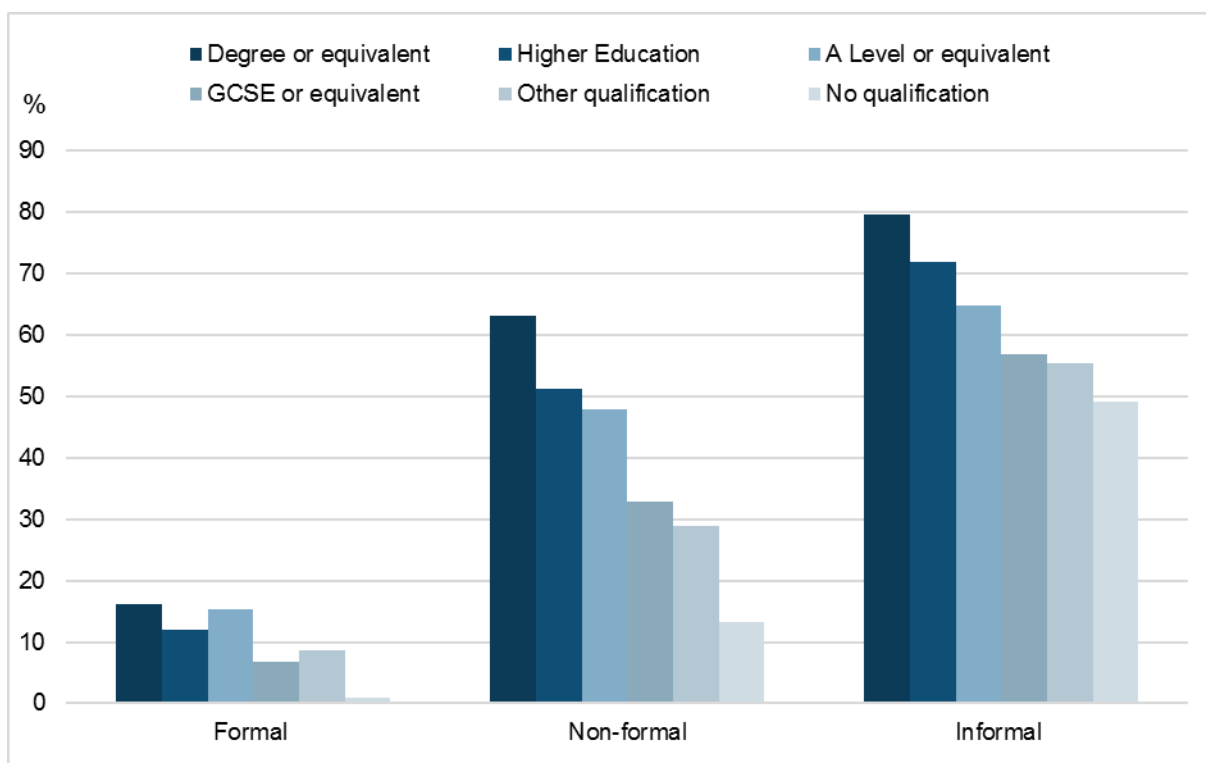
Respondents holding a degree or equivalent as their highest educational attainment were most likely to have undertaken any type of learning in the last 12 months (92%). Those with a degree or equivalent also reported the highest levels of non-formal learning (63%) and informal learning (80%), but this was not the case for formal learning (see figure 2.5).

In contrast, only half (53%) of respondents with no qualifications reported any learning in the last 12 months, the lowest of all the educational attainment levels. Those with no qualifications also reported the lowest level of non-formal learning (13%).

Individuals with A levels and equivalent or higher were more likely than those with GCSE qualifications and equivalent or below to engage in formal learning in the last 12 months.

Individuals with GCSE qualifications and equivalent or below were less likely to engage in informal learning in the last 12 months, compared to those with A level qualifications or higher.

Figure 2.5: Learning undertaken in the last 12 months, by highest educational attainment



Unweighted base: 8,119

Source: Adult Education Survey 2016

2.8 Age leaving continuous full-time education

Respondents who left continuous full-time education (FTE) aged 25 and over were most likely to engage in any type of learning in the last 12 months⁶ (95%), while individuals who left continuous FTE aged 16 or younger were least likely to engage in any learning in the last 12 months (70%).

Those who left continuous FTE aged 25 and over had the highest participation rate in formal learning in the last 12 months (32%), compared to all other age groups. Respondents who left education aged 16 or younger were least likely to have undertaken formal learning (8%), non-formal learning (32%) and informal learning (58%) in the last 12 months.

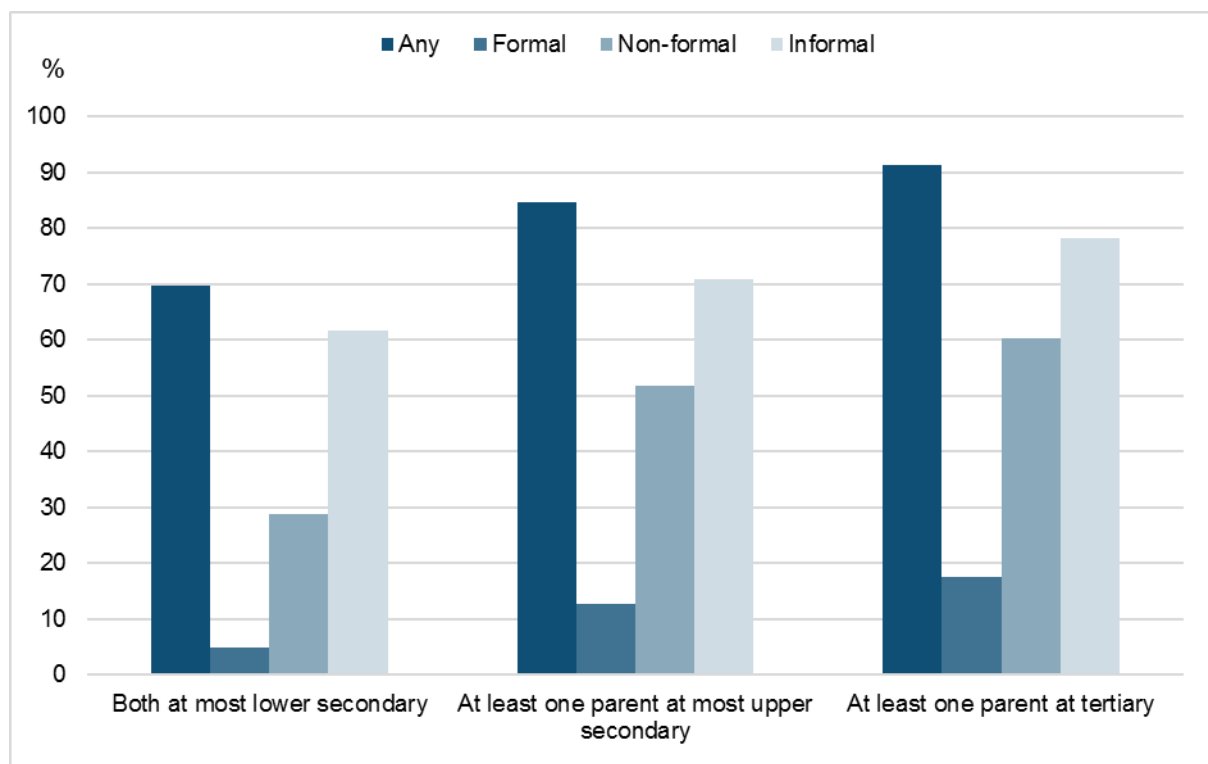
⁶ Estimate should be treated with caution due to sample sizes less than 30 respondents.

2.9 Parental education

Participation rates in any type of learning increased as parental education level increased. Of the respondents with at least one parent with tertiary⁷ level education, nine-in-ten (91%) engaged in some type of learning in the last 12 months (see figure 2.6). In contrast, seven-in-ten (70%) respondents whose parents both had at most lower secondary education engaged in some type of learning in the last 12 months.

This trend also applied to each type of learning individually, where respondents with at least one parent holding tertiary level qualifications had the highest levels of formal (18%), non-formal (60%) and informal learning (78%). In comparison, respondents whose parents both had at most lower secondary education were least likely to engage in formal (5%), non-formal (29%) and informal learning (62%).

Figure 2.6: Learning undertaken in the last 12 months, by parental education



Unweighted base: 8,822

Source: Adult Education Survey 2016

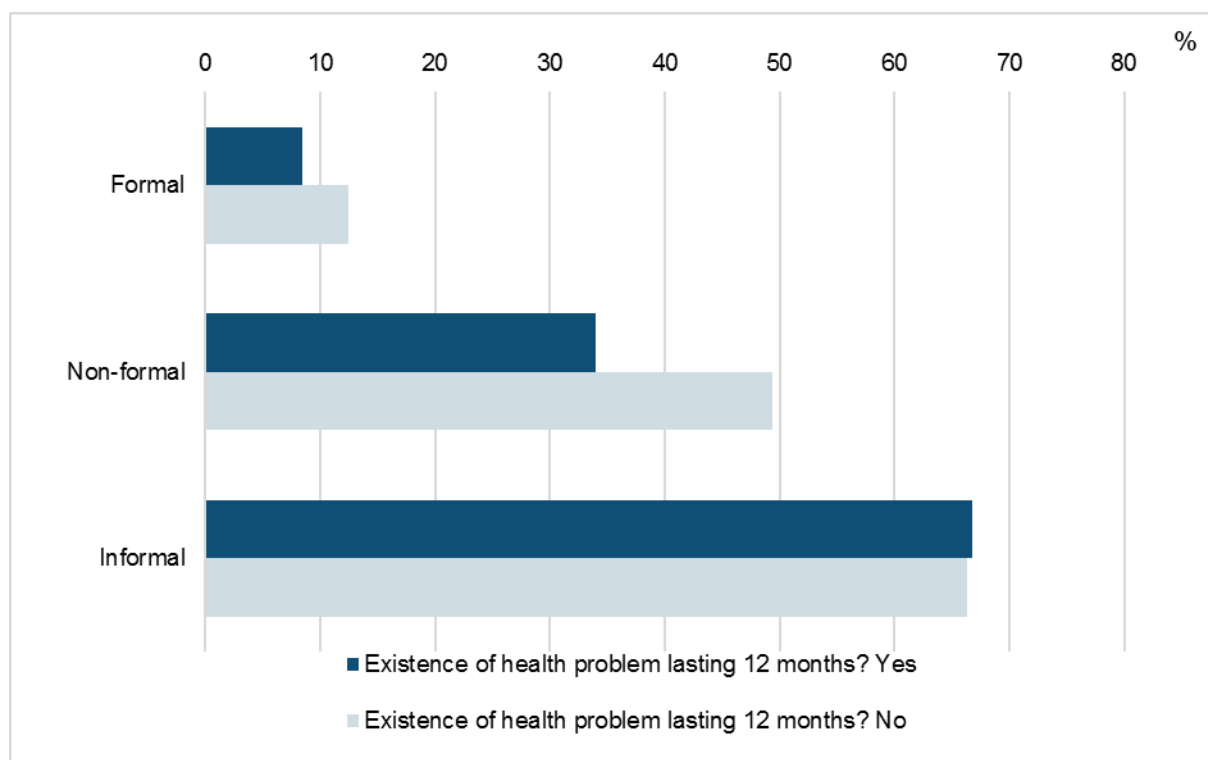
⁷ Tertiary education refers to post-secondary education such as degrees.

2.10 Disability status and Health

Respondents reporting as having no disability⁸ were more likely than those classified as disabled to participate in any learning in the last 12 months, with 80% compared to 75%. Similarly, individuals without a disability engaged in more formal (12%) and non-formal (48%) learning, compared to those with a reported disability (8% and 31% respectively). Disability status did not affect participation rates in informal learning, with no significant differences observed.

Respondents who reported the existence of a health problem lasting 12 months or more were less likely to engage in any type of learning in the last 12 months (76%) compared to respondents without a health problem (80%). Respondents without a health problem were also more likely to undertake formal (12%) and non-formal (49%) learning, but no significant differences were observed for informal learning, highlighting that the existence of a health problem had no effect on participation in this type of learning (see figure 2.7).

Figure 2.7: Learning undertaken in the last 12 months, by existence of health problem



Unweighted base: 8,379

Source: Adult Education Survey 2016

⁸ A respondent's disability status was classified as either 'Currently disabled and/or work-limiting disabled' or 'Not disabled'. Disabled (current disability) includes those who have a long-term disability which substantially limits their day-to-day activities. Work-limiting disabled includes those who have a long-term disability which affects the kind or amount of work they might do.

3. Formal and Non-Formal Learning

This chapter examines participation in formal and non-formal learning. Formal learning is defined as learning that is intended to lead to a nationally recognised qualification such as a Degree or NVQ. Non-formal learning is similar, in that it is defined as a course or taught class, but does *not* lead to a nationally recognised qualification. Since both types of learning are delivered in a structured environment, they have been examined together throughout this chapter.

Respondents were asked how many formal and non-formal learning activities they had undertaken in the last 12 months, followed by detailed questions about the most recent formal learning activity that they had worked or studied towards and two randomly selected non-formal learning activities.

3.1 Participation rates

The results showed that one-in-ten (10%) respondents had participated in formal education or training in the last 12 months. Of these, the majority (97%) worked towards or completed a qualification, while 8% undertook a formal apprenticeship. Most respondents (79%) undertook just one formal learning activity while 21% undertook two or more formal learning activities. In comparison, four-in-ten people (42%) participated in non-formal learning. Of these, 50% undertook one non-formal learning activity, while 50% engaged in two or more activities.

Formal learning was most common among the youngest age group (19 to 24) with over a third (35%) participating in the last 12 months; this age group also had the highest proportion of apprenticeships (36%).

Three-in-five people (63%) said that their non-formal learning did not lead to a certificate. Of those that said they would receive a certificate upon completion of the non-formal learning, 22% reported that it was a requirement by the employer.

Around two-in-five (42%) people conducted their formal learning as distance learning, and of these, 61% undertook their formal learning mainly as an online course. In contrast, a smaller proportion of non-formal learning activities were organised as distance learning (23%), of which 67% took the form of online courses.

3.2 Qualification and Field of study

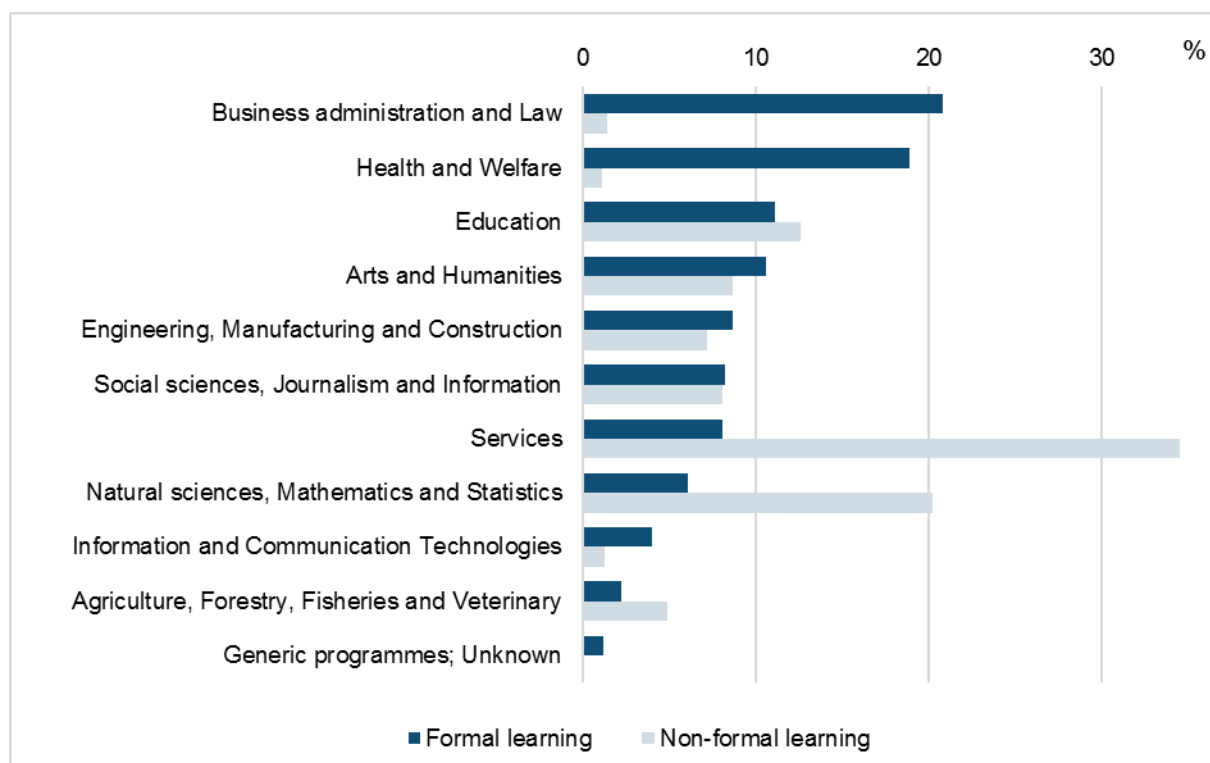
Formal learning was spread across a wide range of qualification types. Degree level qualifications (including foundation degrees and PGCEs) accounted for almost a third (31%) of the formal qualifications undertaken, followed by NVQ/SVQ⁹ (11%).

Of the reported formal learning activities, 21% were in the field of Business administration and Law, closely followed by Health and Welfare with 19%, however these were not significantly different from each other (see figure 3.1).

One-third (35%) of non-formal learning activities were in the field of 'Services'; this was significantly higher than the remaining subject areas, and 27 percentage points higher than the proportion of formal activities in this field (8%). Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics accounted for 20% of non-formal learning activities, followed by Education (13%). Despite being the two most popular fields of formal learning, 'Health and Welfare' and 'Business administration and Law' were two of the least popular fields of non-formal learning (both 1%).

⁹ The National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) and Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) are work based qualifications which recognise the skills and knowledge a person needs to do a particular job.

Figure 3.1: Field of study for formal and non-formal learning



Unweighted bases: Formal 525; Non-formal 5,807

Source: Adult Education Survey 2016

Footnotes:

The unweighted base for formal learning relates to the number of respondents. The unweighted base for non-formal learning relates to the number of activities undertaken.

Services was the most popular field of non-formal learning for both sexes, however women were more likely than men to undertake learning in this area, with 41% of women undertaking this learning compared to 28% of men. ‘Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics’ was the second most popular field of non-formal learning for both sexes, with men more likely than women to engage in this field (22% and 19% respectively).

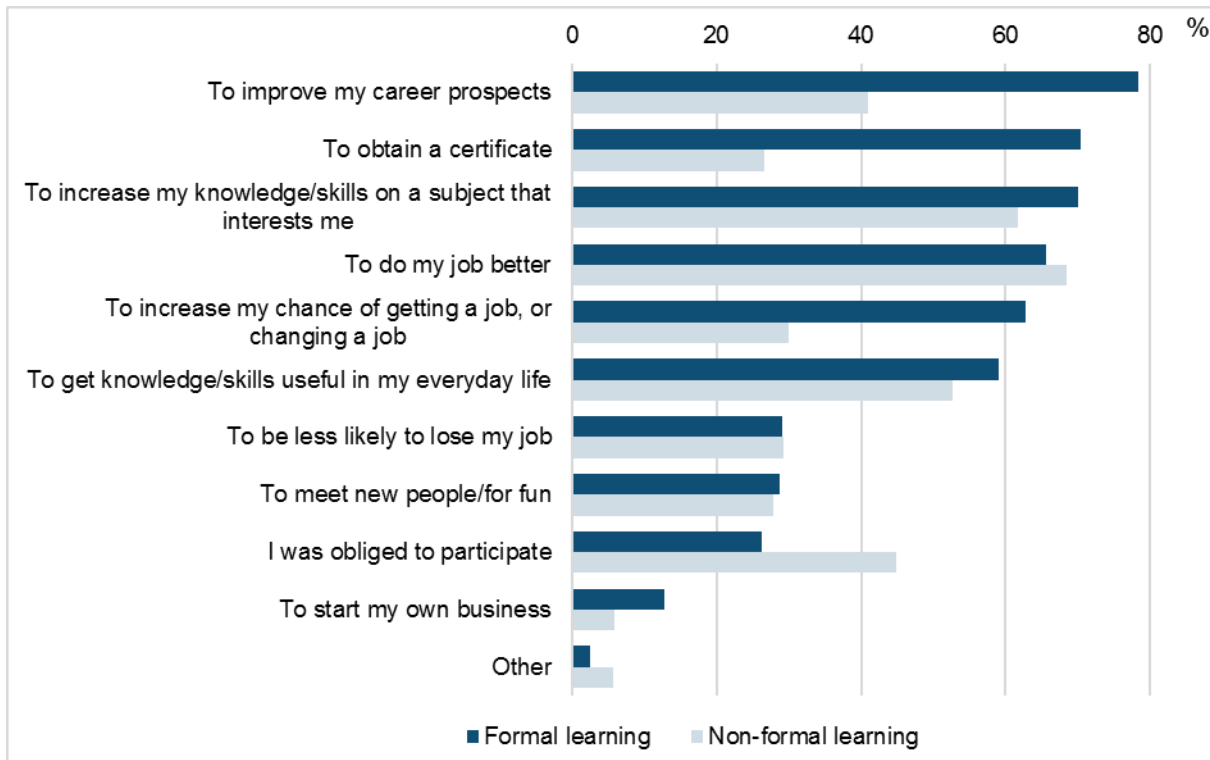
3.3 Reasons for undertaking learning

Figure 3.2 shows that the most commonly selected reason for undertaking a formal learning activity was ‘to improve my career prospects’, selected by more than three-quarters of respondents (78%). The least selected reason aside from ‘other’ (3%) was ‘to start my own business’ (13%).

Two-thirds (69%) of non-formal learning activities were undertaken to help the respondent do their job better; this was the most frequently selected reason for non-formal learning. ‘To increase my knowledge/skills on a subject that interests me’ closely

followed with 62%. Alongside 'other' (6%), 'to start my own business' was selected the least frequently and was the motive for just 6% of non-formal learning activities.

Figure 3.2: Reasons for undertaking formal and non-formal learning



Unweighted bases: Formal 892; Non-formal 6,066

Source: Adult Education Survey 2016

Footnotes:

The unweighted base for formal learning relates to the number of respondents. The unweighted base for non-formal learning relates to the number of activities undertaken.

As age increased, the focus shifted away from job-related reasons such as improving career prospects for formal learning, and moved towards skill-building and interest reasons, with 88% of 19 to 24-year-olds citing 'to improve my career prospects' compared to just 54% of those aged 55 to 64 years old.

Over nine-in-ten (93%) unemployed respondents cited 'improve career prospects' as a motivation to undertake formal learning, this was significantly higher than all other employment statuses.

3.4 Funding for learning¹⁰

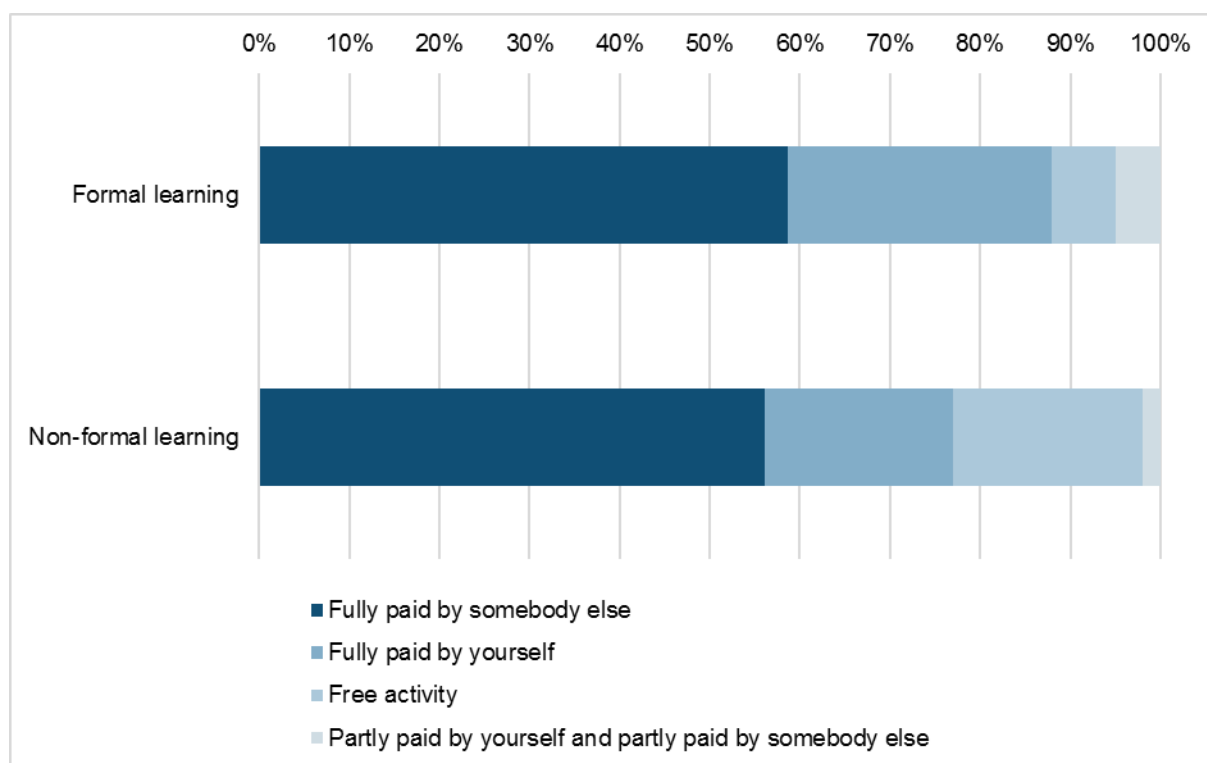
Over half (59%) of the formal learning activities undertaken in the last 12 months were paid for in-full by someone other than the respondent, while almost one-third (29%) were fully paid for by the respondent (see figure 3.3).

Of the respondents who had their formal learning paid for in-full or in-part by someone else, three-in-four (75%) had their learning paid for by their employer or prospective employer, while one-in-ten (11%) people had their formal learning paid for by other public institutions (such as schools or colleges).

Respondents who reported paying for their formal learning either fully or partially by themselves and respondents who had their learning paid for in-full by a household member or relative were asked about the costs involved. The average amount paid by a respondent or family member for the most recent formal learning was £3,850.

Figure 3.3 also shows that over half of non-formal learning activities (56%) were fully paid for by somebody else, while 2% reported that the activity was partly paid for by themselves and partly paid by somebody else.

Figure 3.3: Types of funding for formal and non-formal learning



Unweighted bases: Formal 887; Non-formal 6,039

Source: Adult Education Survey 2016

¹⁰ Monetary values have been rounded to the nearest £50.

Footnotes:

The unweighted base for formal learning relates to the number of respondents. The unweighted base for non-formal learning relates to the number of activities undertaken.

Of those that had their non-formal learning paid for in-full or in-part by somebody else, nine-in-ten (93%) had their learning paid for by the employer or prospective employer. This coincided with the fact that employers were the largest provider of non-formal learning activities with just under half (46%).

Respondents aged 65 and over were most likely to fully pay for their non-formal learning themselves (60%), while those aged between 19 and 24 were most likely to undertake free non-formal learning activities (29%).

Respondents who reported paying for their non-formal learning either fully or partially by themselves and respondents who had their learning paid for in-full by a household member or relative were asked about the costs involved. The average amount of money spent on non-formal learning in the last 12 months by the respondent or the respondent's relative or household member was £800. Women had more money spent on their non-formal learning with an average expenditure of £850, compared to £650 for men.

3.5 Time spent on learning

In the last 12 months, respondents received, on average, 15 weeks of instruction for their formal learning and 11 weeks of instruction for their non-formal learning. The average number of instruction hours received for formal and non-formal learning per week was 15.

Of the respondents who had undertaken some formal learning in the last 12 months, 37% completed their formal learning only during paid working hours, while 28% completed it exclusively outside of paid working hours.

Respondents in the oldest age group (65 and over) received significantly more instruction weeks for their non-formal learning than their fellow respondents, with 21 weeks. However, those aged 65 and over received the lowest number of instruction hours compared to those aged 64 and below, with just 8 hours per week. This could suggest that the younger respondents were more likely to undertake shorter but more intensive non-formal learning activities compared to respondents aged 65 and over.

3.6 Outcomes of learning

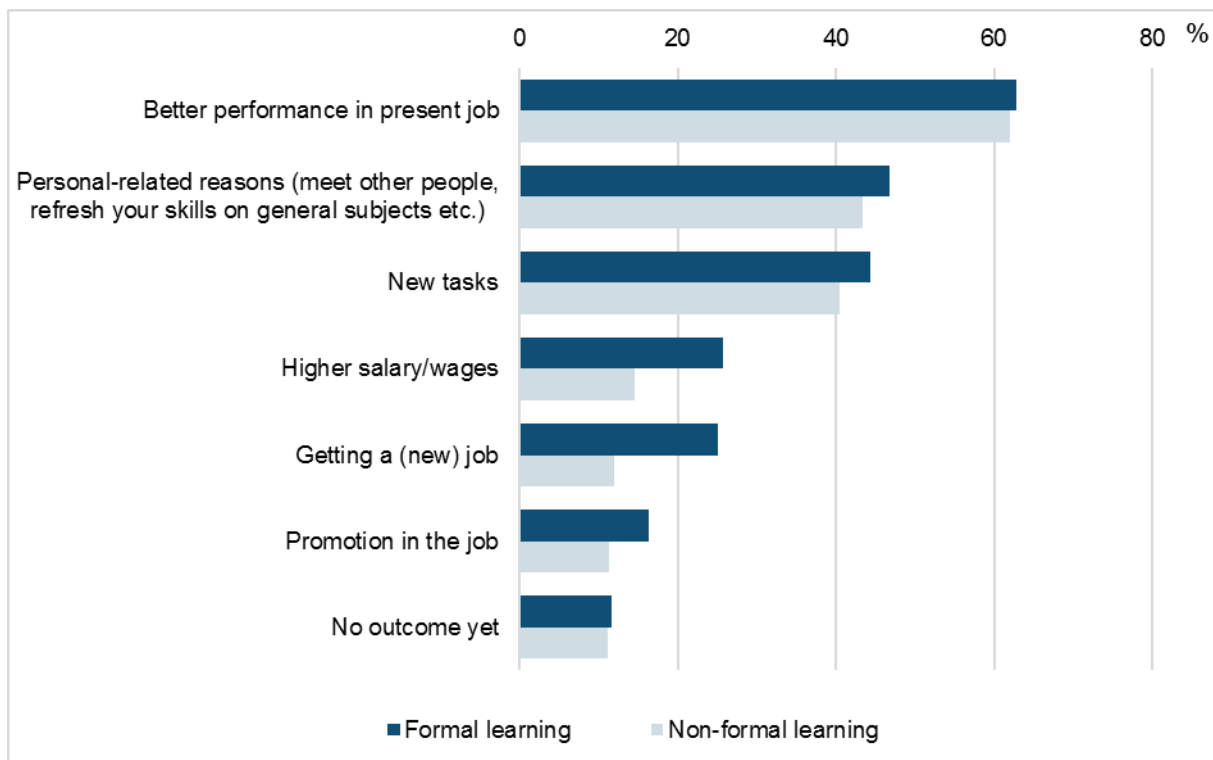
Respondents were asked whether the new skills, knowledge or any other benefits acquired through their formal and non-formal learning had helped them in any way.

Almost two-thirds (63%) of people stated that they had better performance in their current job; this was the most common outcome for formal learning (see figure 3.4).

The next most common outcomes for formal learning were related to personal benefits (e.g. meeting other people, refreshing skills on general subjects etc.), and learning new tasks (47% and 44% respectively).

Three-in-five non-formal learning activities (62%) reportedly resulted in respondents performing better in their present job. The second most common outcome for non-formal learning was personal-related (e.g. meeting new people and refreshing skills on general subjects), which applied to two-in-five (43%) non-formal learning activities.

Figure 3.4: Outcomes of formal and non-formal learning



Unweighted bases: Formal 850; Non-formal 5,634

Source: Adult Education Survey 2016

Footnotes:

The unweighted base for formal learning relates to the number of respondents. The unweighted base for non-formal learning relates to the number of activities undertaken.

Respondents were asked whether the skills or knowledge that they acquired through their formal and non-formal learning were currently being used. In terms of formal learning, half of respondents (51%) said that they were currently using the skills a lot, while a quarter (25%) said that they were using them a fair amount. For non-formal learning, just under half (47%) of respondents said that they are currently using the skills

and knowledge acquired a lot, while 28% of respondents said that they were currently using their skills a fair amount.

Respondents were also asked how much they were expecting to use the skills or knowledge that they acquired from their formal and non-formal learning in the future. In terms of formal learning, the majority of respondents (70%) said that they expected to use their skills a lot, while 2%¹¹ said that they did not expect to use them at all. For non-formal learning, over half of respondents (53%) reported that they expect to use the skills and knowledge they had gained a lot, while 4% of respondents reported that they did not expect to use their skills or knowledge from their non-formal learning at all.

¹¹ Estimate should be treated with caution due to sample sizes less than 30 respondents.

4. Informal Learning

This section explores participation in informal learning in the last 12 months. Informal learning is defined as self-directed learning that is deliberately undertaken to improve knowledge or skills, not including taught classes or qualifications. Respondents were asked how they engaged in the informal learning, the field of study, how long they spent on it in total and the outcome of the learning.

4.1 Participation rates

Two-thirds of respondents (66%) engaged in informal learning in the last 12 months. A respondent's age or sex did not influence informal learning participation rates, but those in employment (either full-time or part-time) were more likely than unemployed respondents to engage in self-motivated learning.

Respondents with a degree or equivalent were most likely to participate in informal learning (80%), compared to fellow respondents with lower levels of highest educational attainment. Individuals with GCSE qualifications or equivalent had lower proportions of participation in informal learning compared to those with A level or equivalent qualifications and higher.

4.2 Field of study

Respondents were asked about what they have tried to learn about most recently from a list of different subject areas, including computer use, first aid, photography and health and well-being.

Computer use (including internet use) was the most popular field of informal learning, with 13% participation, while the second most popular was health and well-being (8%), however this was not significantly higher than historical and philosophical studies (6%). One-in-five respondents (22%) aged 65 and over engaged in informal learning in the field of computer use (including internet use); this was higher than all other age groups.

4.3 Time spent on informal learning

Respondents were asked if they had spent less than or more than ten hours in total on the informal learning they had completed in the last 12 months.

Four-in-five people (81%) reported spending more than 10 hours in total on informal learning in the last 12 months. Time spent on informal learning was not significantly different when examined by age group or sex. Respondents with a degree or equivalent were most likely to spend more than 10 hours in total on informal learning in the last 12

months (87%), however this was not significantly different to respondents whose highest educational attainment level was higher education (82%).

4.4 Mode of learning

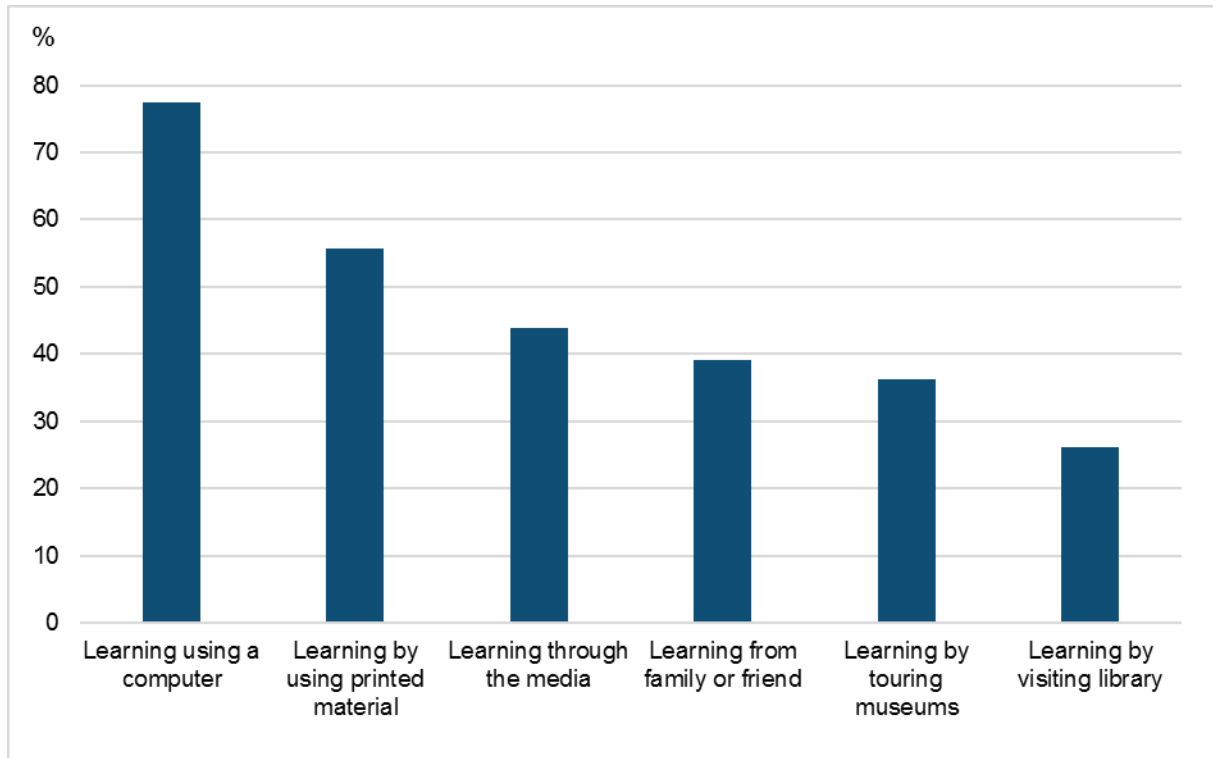
Respondents were asked if they had deliberately done anything in the last 12 months to improve their knowledge or skills through the following modes:

- Learning from a family member, friend or colleague;
- Learning using printed material such as books or magazines;
- Learning using a computer, tablet or smartphone (either online or offline);
- Learning through watching television, DVD or blu-rays, or listening to the radio;
- Learning by taking guided tours of museums, historical, natural or industrial sites;
- Learning by visiting libraries or other learning resource centres.

Learning using a computer, tablet or smartphone was the most popular mode of informal learning in the last 12 months, with 77% of respondents selecting this (see figure 4.1). This was followed by learning using printed materials, which was selected by just over half of respondents (56%). Libraries or other learning resource centres were the least common way of engaging in informal learning, with one-quarter (26%) selecting this.

Using a computer, tablet or smartphone for informal learning was the most popular mode of learning regardless of age, sex or level of highest educational attainment.

Figure 4.1: Mode of informal learning



Unweighted base: 5,980

Source: Adult Education Survey 2016

4.5 Outcomes of informal learning

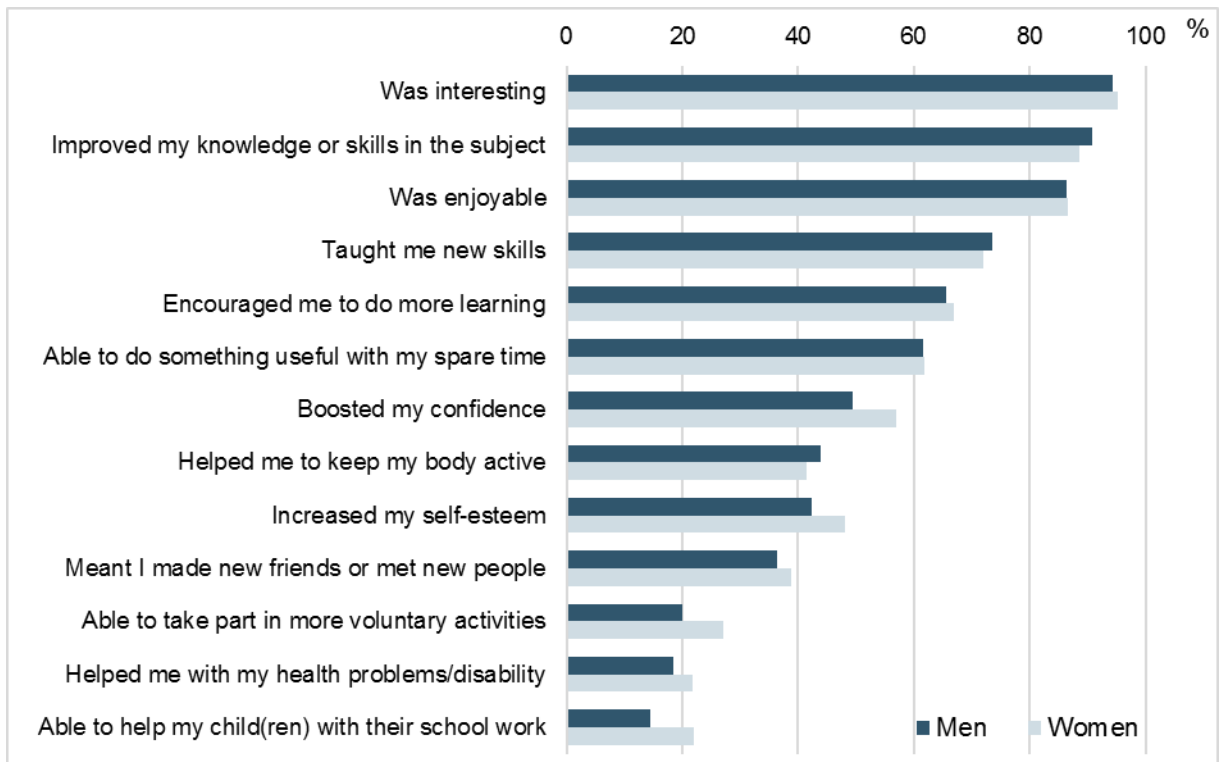
Respondents were asked to think about the time they had spent on informal learning in the last 12 months and select which outcomes they felt applied to them.

The majority of respondents (95%) stated that their informal learning ‘was interesting’, which was the most frequently selected outcome. Nine-in-ten people (90%) felt that the informal learning improved their knowledge and skills in the subject area.

‘Enabled me to help my child(ren) with their school work’ and ‘helped me with my health problems/disability’ were selected least frequently compared to all other outcomes, with 18% and 20% respectively.

Men and women were equally likely to report that their informal learning was interesting, with 94% and 95% respectively (see figure 4.2). Women were significantly more likely than men to report that their informal learning had enabled them to help their child(ren) with their school work with 22% compared to 14%; this was the biggest difference between the sexes.

Figure 4.2: Outcomes of informal learning, by sex



Unweighted base: 5,909

Source: Adult Education Survey 2016

5. Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

This chapter examines the information, advice and guidance sought and received by respondents in the past 12 months, looking at the type and source of information received by different groups of adult learners.

5.1 Seeking information on learning possibilities

Respondents were asked if they had looked for any information concerning learning possibilities during the last 12 months. Almost a quarter (24%) of respondents had looked for information about learning in the last 12 months. Younger respondents aged 19 to 24 were more likely than those aged 45 to 54, 55 to 64 and 65 and over to seek out information (36%), while those aged 65 and over were least likely (15%).

Similarly, those with the highest educational attainment level of a degree or equivalent were more likely than all other educational attainment levels to seek out learning information (37%).

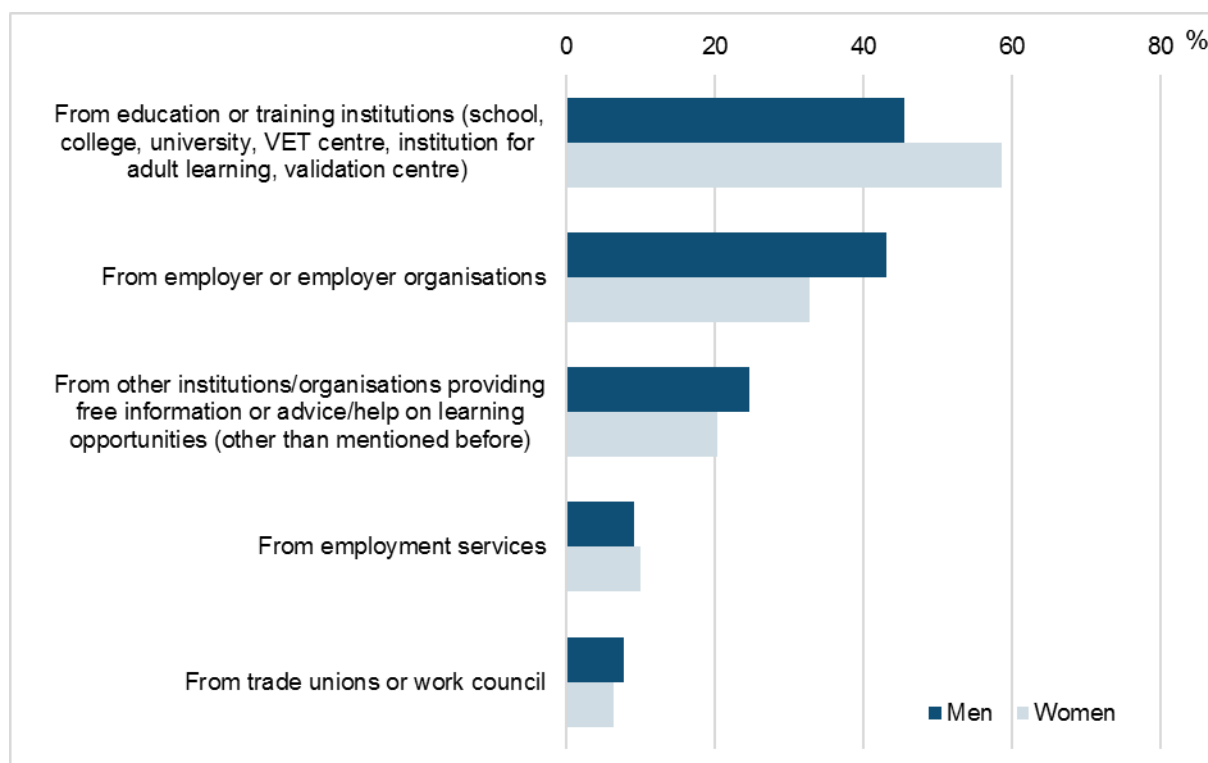
5.2 Source of free information, advice or guidance

During the last 12 months, around a third of respondents (34%) received information from institutions or organisations; of these, over nine-in-ten (93%) were provided with this information free of charge, while the remaining 7% paid for the information.

Of the free information provided, half of respondents (52%) received it from education or training institutions such as colleges and universities. The second most common source was employers or employer organisations (38%).

Looking at this question by sex, women were significantly more likely to receive this free information from education or training institutions (59%) than men (45%) (see figure 5.1). Men were more likely to receive this free information from an employer or employer organisation (43%) than women (33%).

Figure 5.1: Provider of IAG, by sex



Unweighted base: 3,008

Source: Adult Education Survey 2016

5.3 Type of free information, advice or guidance

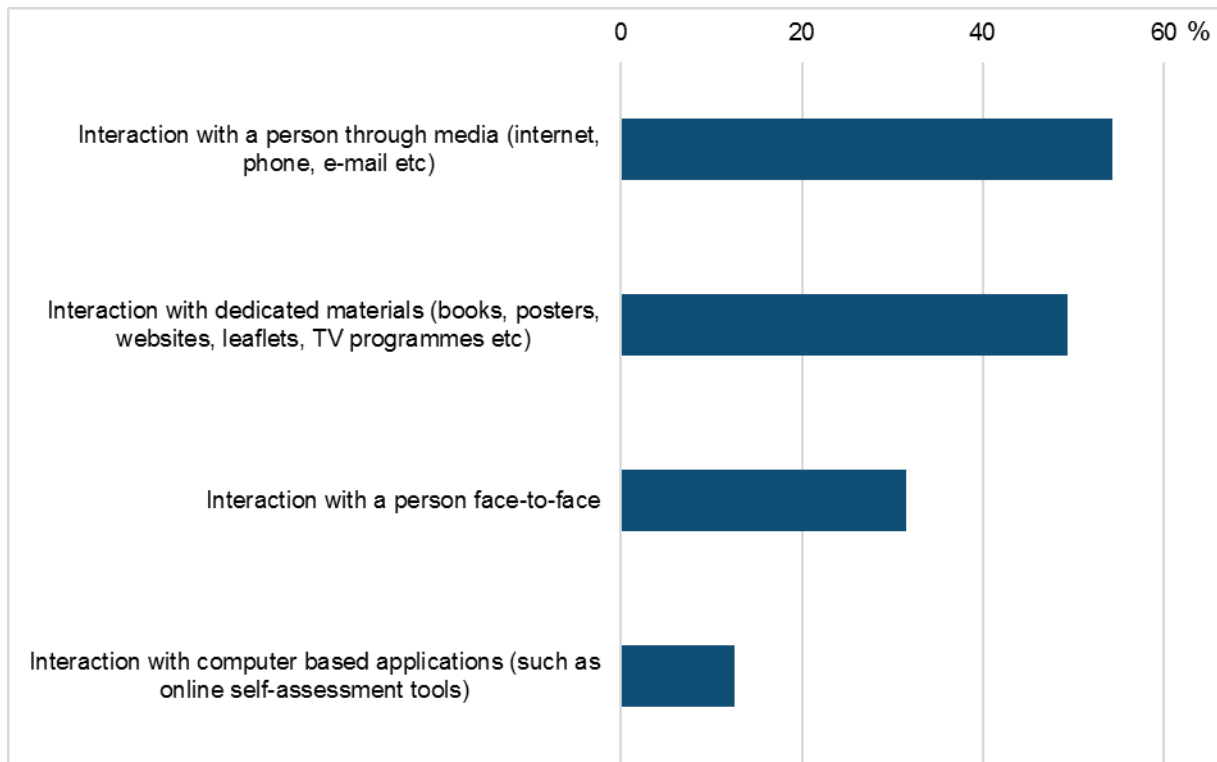
Of the free information received in the last 12 months, the majority (86%) was related to learning possibilities, while information on the assessment of skills (23%) and procedures for recognition of skills or prior learning (22%) were the least common.

Women were more likely to have reported receiving advice on learning possibilities (89%) compared to men (83%). While a higher proportion of men received information on the assessment of skills (26%) and procedures for recognition of skills or prior learning (23%), it was not significantly different to the results for women (20% and 21% respectively).

5.4 Mode of free information, advice or guidance

The most common way of receiving the free information was interaction with a person through internet, phone, e-mail or any other media (54%). The next most common way was through interaction with dedicated materials such as books, leaflets and websites (49%) (see figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2: Mode of IAG received



Unweighted base: 2,768

Source: Adult Education Survey 2016

Respondents aged 65 and over were most likely to get information from sources such as books, leaflets and websites (72%).

Individuals who had highest educational attainment levels of A level or equivalent or a degree or equivalent were most likely to gather their information via interaction with a person through media (such as internet, phone, e-mail) than any other mode, with 55% and 73% respectively.

For those respondents who reported undertaking any type of learning in the past 12 months, interaction with a person through internet, phone, e-mail or any other media was the most common form of information gathering (56%). In comparison, those who had not undertaken learning in the past 12 months were most likely to receive information through dedicated materials such as books, leaflets, and websites (62%).

6. Barriers and Incentives

This chapter examines the perceived barriers to participating in learning or training in the last 12 months as well as the likelihood of undertaking future learning and the incentives associated with participation in learning.

6.1 Learning needs

All respondents were asked if they would have liked to participate in more learning in the last 12 months. If they responded 'no' to this then they were asked if this was because they felt that they did not require any further training.

Of the respondents who had undertaken some formal or non-formal learning in the last 12 months, around half (52%) reported that they would not have liked to participate in more learning; of these people, three-quarters (76%) stated that this was because they did not need additional education or training.

In comparison, of the respondents who had not undertaken any formal or non-formal learning in the last 12 months, almost three-quarters (71%) reported that they would not have liked to participate in some learning. Of these, 76% stated that this was because they did not need additional education or training.

6.2 Perceived barriers to learning

Respondents¹² were asked to identify which obstacles they felt prevented them from participating in education and training in the last 12 months (see figure 6.1).

Two barriers stood out as being particularly important to respondents: 'I don't have the time or training takes too long' which was selected by over half (54%) of respondents, and 'the cost/too expensive' which was selected by 42% of respondents. While these results are not directly comparable with NALS 2010 due to the question being asked in a different way, it is interesting to note that cost was the most commonly selected barrier in NALS 2010 with 58% suggesting that the importance of this has decreased, potentially as a result of the economy strengthening since 2010.

¹² This question was asked of respondents who reported that they would have liked to have undertaken some or more learning in the last 12 months, as well respondents who reported that they would not have liked to have undertaken some or more learning in the past 12 months, but not because they did not need additional training,

Figure 6.1: Perceived barriers to learning in the last 12 months



Unweighted base: 4,448

Source: Adult Education Survey 2016

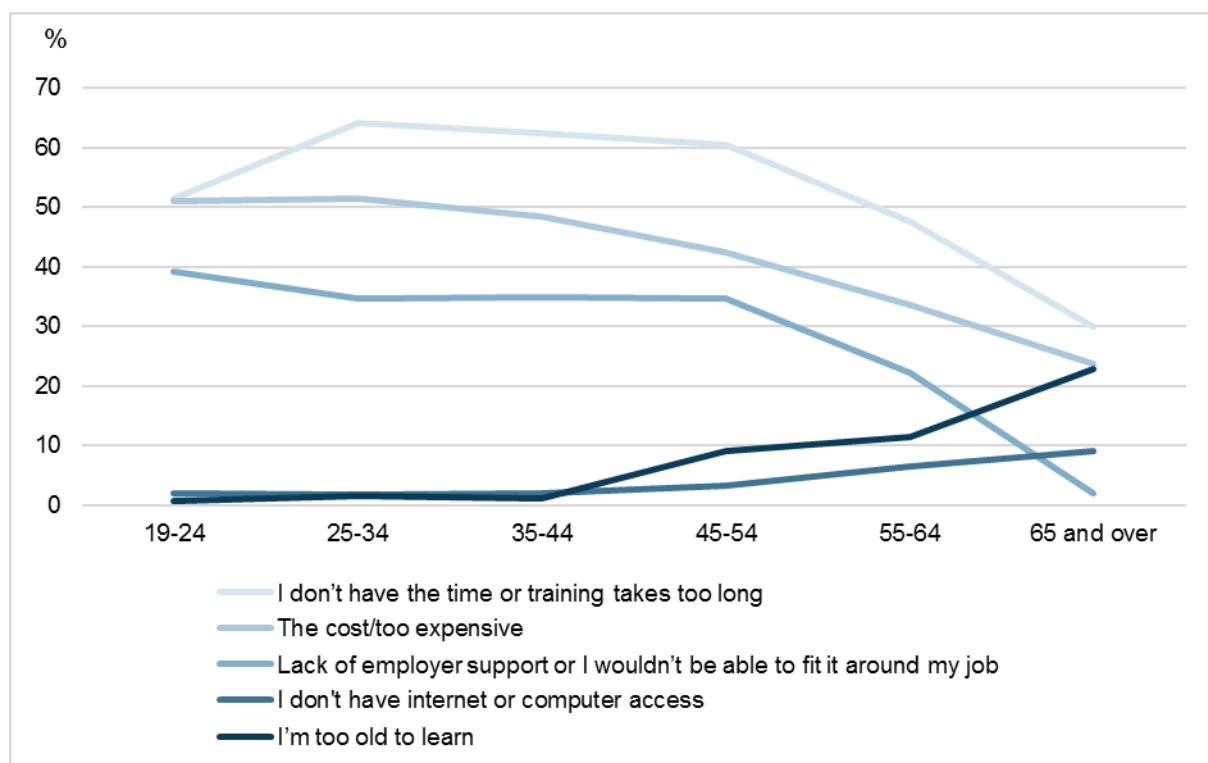
‘Not having the time’ was the most commonly cited barrier for all age groups (see figure 6.2), although this was not significantly higher than ‘cost’ for those aged 19 to 24 as well as respondents aged 65 and over, suggesting that both barriers were perceived to be prevalent by the youngest and oldest respondents.

Those aged 65 and over were significantly more likely to report that they did not have internet or computer access (9%) compared to all other age groups except for 55 to 64-year-olds (7%). Compared to all other age groups, those aged 65 and over were more likely to report that they felt too old to learn (23%).

The barrier that showed the largest difference between the youngest and oldest age groups was ‘lack of employer support or not being able to fit it in around my job’, having been selected by 39% of 19 to 24-year-olds but 2%¹³ of those aged 65 and over, reflecting the change in working patterns and career-related priorities with age.

¹³ Estimate should be treated with caution due to sample sizes less than 30 respondents.

Figure 6.2: Selection of barriers to learning, by age



Unweighted base: 4,448

Source: Adult Education Survey 2016

Footnotes:

This figure presents a selection of the barriers that respondents were able to choose from. For full details of the remaining barriers see the reference tables.

The sex of a respondent had a minimal impact on the ranking of the majority of the barriers. The most common obstacle for both sexes was 'I don't have the time or training takes too long'; a slightly higher proportion of men reported this, with 58% compared to 51% of women. Despite this, the biggest difference between the sexes was for 'I wouldn't be able to fit it around my family/caring responsibilities' with 39% of women identifying this as a barrier compared to 28% of men.

The second biggest difference between the sexes was for 'lack of employer support' which was reported by a higher proportion of men (33%) than women (23%). This suggests that women are more likely to see family responsibilities as an obstacle to undertaking learning, whereas men perceive their job to be one of their biggest obstacles.

Respondents in full-time employment most commonly reported not having the time or training takes too long (69%), while cost was perceived to be the biggest barrier for unemployed respondents (50%).

Comparing responses for the highest and lowest educational attainment levels, 40% of respondents with no qualifications reported ill-health as a barrier compared with only 4% of respondents with degrees or equivalent. Conversely, those with a degree or equivalent were twice as likely to cite the time taken as a barrier (66%) compared to those with no qualifications (33%); this was one of the few barriers that increased in prevalence as educational attainment level increased.

6.3 Future learning intentions

6.3.1 Job-related learning

Just over half (52%) of all respondents reported that they were likely or very likely to do job-related learning, training or education in the next two or three years. This increased to 71% when considering those respondents who were in employment (either full-time or part-time).

There was a noticeable difference between respondents who had undertaken any type of learning in the past 12 months (learners) compared to those who had not (non-learners). Specifically, a higher proportion of learners (39%) reported that they were very likely to do some job-related learning in the next two or three years when compared to non-learners (9%).

Five-in-ten respondents (52%) with a degree or equivalent reported that they were very likely to do some job-related learning in the next two or three years. Around one-in-ten respondents (12%) with no qualifications reported that they were very likely to undertake job-related learning in the next two or three years.

These findings can partially be explained by the fact that learners and those with higher educational attainment levels are more likely to be in paid employment and so will have greater access to work-related learning opportunities. However, other factors such as people's incentives to learn will also have had an impact; these are examined in section 6.4.

6.3.2 Non-job-related learning

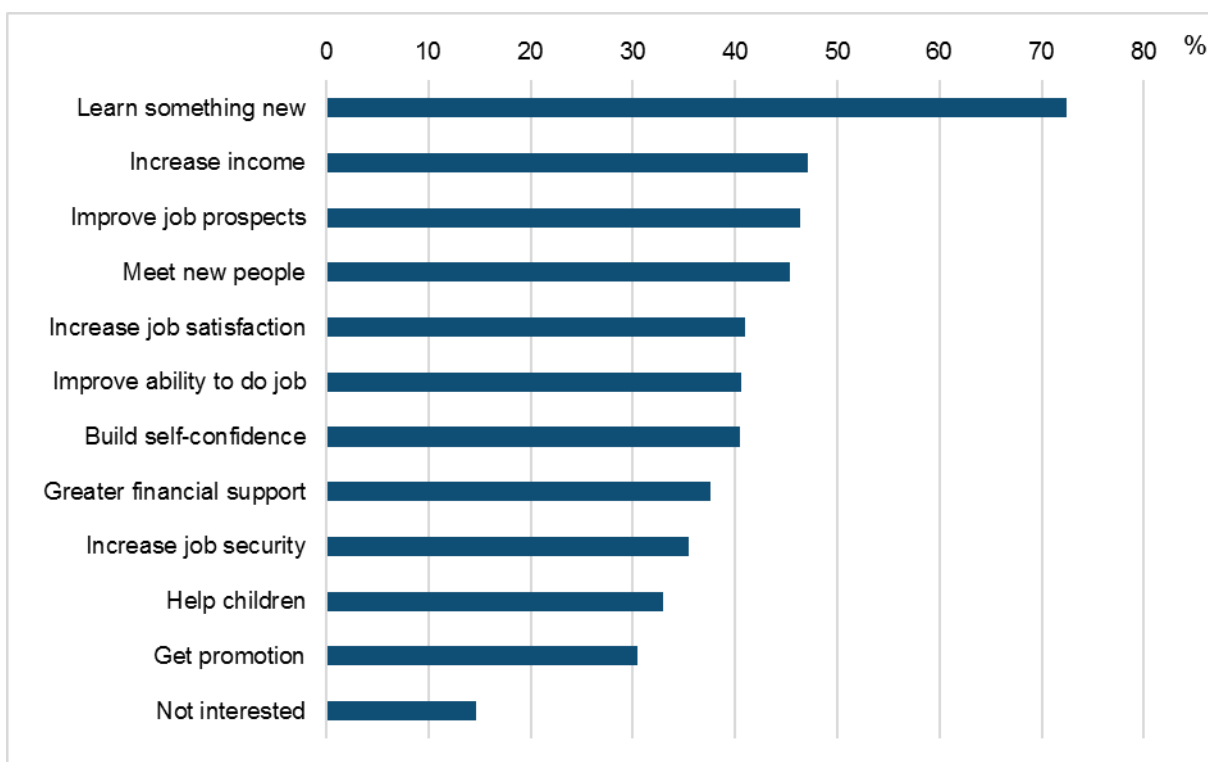
Respondents were also asked how likely it was that they would do any non-job-related learning, training or education in the next two or three years. Half (50%) of all respondents reported that they were likely or very likely to do non-job-related learning, training or education in the next two or three years. This rose to 54% when looking at respondents who were in paid employment, suggesting that employment status had less of an impact on likelihood to undertake non-job-related learning when compared to job-related learning.

As with job-related learning, a higher proportion of learners reported they were very likely to undertake non-job-related learning in the next two or three years (30%) compared to non-learners (5%). In addition, a higher proportion of respondents whose highest educational attainment level was a degree or equivalent reported they were very likely to do some non-job-related learning in the next two or three years (37%) compared to all other educational attainment levels.

6.4 Incentives for future learning

Respondents were asked to consider which reasons would encourage them to take part in learning in the future (see figure 6.3). The most common motivation was the prospect of learning something new, which was selected by almost three-quarters of respondents (72%); this was consistently the most selected incentive regardless of sex or highest education attainment level. Following this, just under half of respondents selected ‘increase income’ (47%) as well as ‘improve job prospects’ (46%), closely followed by ‘meet new people’ (45%). Only 15% of respondents reported that they were not interested in undertaking learning in the future.

Figure 6.3: Future learning incentives



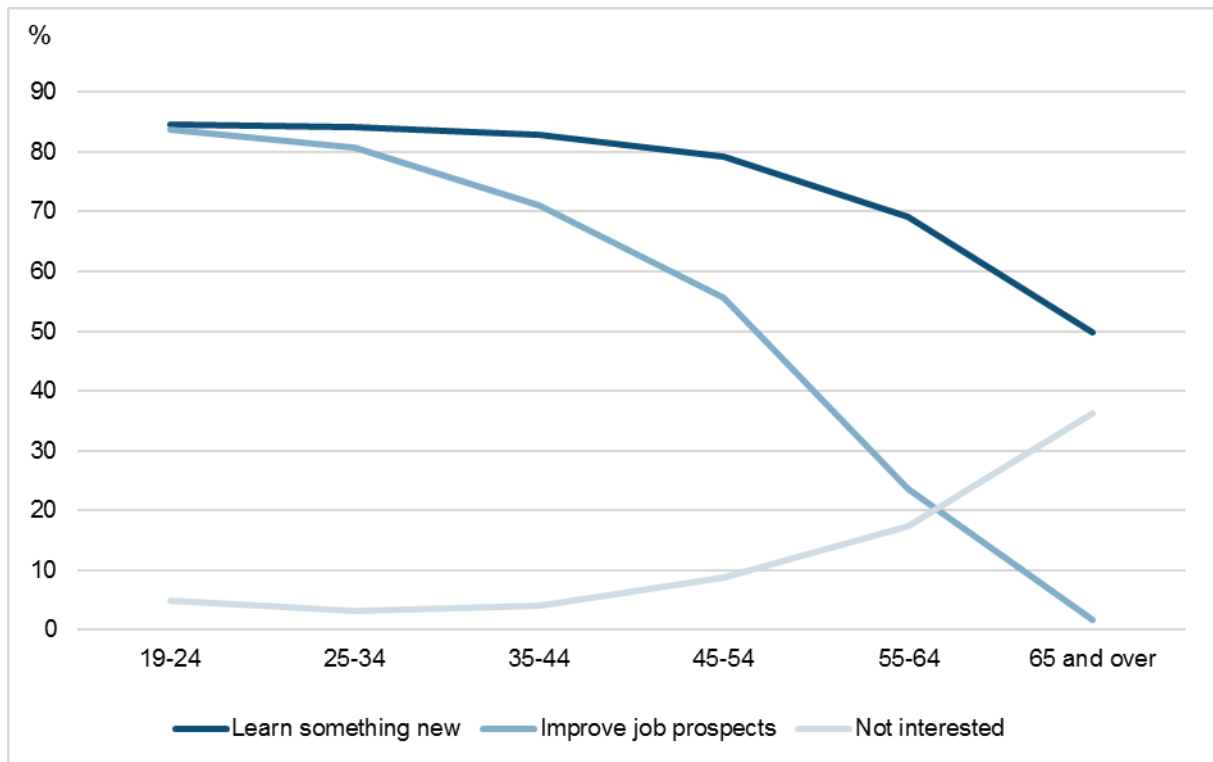
Unweighted base: 8,797

Source: Adult Education Survey 2016

Whilst ‘learn something new’ was a common motivation for all age groups, the proportion of respondents selecting this decreased as age increased, with 85% of 19 to 24-year-olds compared to 50% of respondents aged 65 and over (see figure 6.4).

The incentive showing the biggest difference between the youngest and oldest age groups was ‘improve job prospects’, being selected by 84% of those aged 19 to 24 compared to 2%¹⁴ of those aged 65 and over. The proportion of respondents reporting that they were not interested in learning increased from 5%¹⁵ of 19 to 24-year-olds to 36% of those aged 65 and over.

Figure 6.4: Selection of learning incentives, by age



Unweighted base: 8,797

Source: Adult Education Survey 2016

Footnotes:

This figure presents a selection of the incentives respondents could choose from. Information on all the incentives can be found in the reference tables.

Women were more likely to cite meeting new people (51%) and building self-confidence (46%) as incentives to undertaking learning compared to men (40% and 34% respectively). Conversely, motivations related to working life such as ‘improve job prospects’ and ‘increase income’ were more frequently chosen by men (50% and 51% respectively) than women (43% and 44% respectively).

Individuals with no qualifications were less motivated by job-related incentives such as ‘improve job prospects’ (30%) compared to all other highest educational attainment

¹⁴ Estimate should be treated with caution due to sample sizes less than 30 respondents.

¹⁵ Estimate should be treated with caution due to sample sizes less than 30 respondents.

levels. The proportion of respondents reporting that they would not be interested in future learning decreased as highest educational attainment levels increased from no qualification (31%) to degree or equivalent (4%).

Respondents that had undertaken any learning in the last 12 months (learners) were more likely to select incentives for future learning compared to those who had not undertaken learning (non-learners). However, non-learners were more likely to report that they were not interested in doing any learning in the future (31%). The biggest difference between the learners and non-learners was for 'improve ability to do job', which was selected by 46% of learners and 21% of non-learners.



Department
for Education

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Reference: DFE-RR801

ISBN: 978-1-78105-905-0

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