

The road to nowhere?



The NIACE Survey on Adult Participation in Learning
2007

Fiona Aldridge and Alan Tuckett



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Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Introduction	5
<i>Technical note</i>	7
Participation in learning	9
<i>Participation in learning in relation to gender</i>	11
<i>Participation in learning in relation to socio-economic class</i>	12
<i>Participation in learning in relation to employment status</i>	14
<i>Participation in learning in relation to age</i>	15
<i>Participation in learning in relation to terminal age of education</i>	17
<i>Participation in learning in relation to ethnicity</i>	18
<i>Participation in learning in relation to occupational sector</i>	19
<i>Participation in learning and future intentions to learn in relation to nations of the UK and regions of England</i>	20
Future intentions to learn	22
<i>Future intentions to learn in relation to learning status</i>	22
<i>Future intentions to learn in relation to gender</i>	24
<i>Future intentions to learn in relation to socio-economic class</i>	25
<i>Future intentions to learn in relation to employment status</i>	26
<i>Future intentions to learn in relation to age</i>	27
<i>Future intentions to learn in relation to occupational sector</i>	29
Access to the Internet	30

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Introduction

Are we, as the title of this report asks, on the road to nowhere in lifelong learning policy in the UK? As ever, there are a great number of policy changes affecting the climate of adult participation, yet, despite the gradual increase in the skills of the British workforce, and a decline in numbers without qualifications, overall participation amongst the poorest groups remains stuck at less than half that experienced by the upper and middle classes. At a time when the government's skills policies are designed to increase adult learning among the workforce, there has been a significant drop in participation by part-time workers. The survey reported here suggests that, as a minimum, we need to ask if the balance of public investment is right.

NIACE's annual participation surveys capture a wide range of formal, non-formal and informal learning, far beyond the limits of publicly offered educational opportunities for adults. Nowhere is that more graphically illustrated than in this year's results. Overall, we record a fall in current and recent participation of just one point, from 42 to 41 per cent (equivalent, none the less, to half a million learners). The proportion of retired people reporting current or recent participation has risen from 16 to 19 per cent. This comes at a time when the Learning and Skills Council in England, which accounts for some 80 per cent of the UK population, reports a reduction of almost one million adult learners in publicly funded further education over just two years, and a halving of participation by learners over the age of 60.¹ Wales, at the same time, reports a modest rise in overall participation.²

It is not the first time that such a divergence has been recorded. In the early 1990s colleges and other providers in the West Midlands reported booming enrolments but the overall survey reported a major drop in participation in the region. In that case, the gap was explained in part by job losses in training-rich companies like Rover and Lucas. This year the picture appears to be more complex.

The results relating to older cohorts of learners may be explained in part by the spread of information technology in daily life. Our most recent review of the subjects different age cohorts study showed more than 50 per cent of learners over the age of 65 were learning IT. However, overall participation among older people is low, with less than one in five taking part, despite the powerful evidence that continuing to learn prolongs health and independence among older people. In addition, differences in participation rates between the social classes continue to widen. Between the ages of 45 and 54 participation has increased among the professional and managerial groups and among skilled workers, whilst participation by white-collar workers (C1s), semi-skilled, unskilled and retired people has declined. After 65, it is white-collar and skilled workers whose participation has increased.

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- 1 LSC (2007) *Further Education, Work-based Learning for Young People, Train to Gain and Adult and Community Learning – Learner Numbers in England* – October 2003, DfES statistical First Release, available at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000717/index.shtml> (accessed 3 May 2007).
 - 2 Aldridge, F., Furlong, C. and Nettleship, S. (2007) *Wales: Moving Towards the Learning Country*, Welsh Assembly Government, Cardiff, NIACE Dysgu Cymru.

Encouragingly, and perhaps as a result of cohort changes, participation among people of all social classes is rising. Another factor affecting participation among older and younger learners alike has been the growth, through the Internet, of self-study opportunities, and then there is the spread of lifestyle learning provision in the private sector – whether in tango dancing classes, or in Saga learning cruises. However, many of the people now taking part in self-organised language groups, or discussion circles are ex-members of classes lost in the re-balancing of public provision. They know learning is a good thing, and in the absence of a public offer, decide to sort it out for themselves. In itself this may be a welcome development for those people with the confidence and connections to make such plans. But where, now, do potential new learners seeking to put their toes in the water of adult education go? It will be no surprise if the learning divide is reinforced, if not this year, then within the next three.

For government, the marked reduction in participation reported by people in employment and, in particular, by part-time workers, will be worrying. Since increasing the volume of workplace learning is a key goal of government policy, the loss of 15 per cent of learners working part time in a single year is, at best, disappointing. The introduction of the Train to Gain programme, which offers employers support for staff to gain full qualifications equivalent to five good GCSEs, inevitably leads to reductions in the overall volume of publicly supported participants. But the 2007 NIACE survey suggests that many of those hit by redistribution of budgets come from the very groups government is keen to encourage to learn.

There is little evidence in the survey, either, to suggest that employers are yet investing to ensure that workers benefit from more workforce learning, and there is some suggestion that cuts in public funding for very short course provision may hit part-time workers hardest.

Perhaps the most striking finding in the survey relates to participation measured by terminal age of education. From the beginning of the annual surveys the age people completed their initial education was a powerful predictor of continuing to learn through life. But as Table 10 in this report makes clear, there has been a steady decline over the last five years in participation by people who completed their education at 21 or later. The premium enjoyed by people staying on to 21 or more has all but disappeared when compared with groups who completed initial education at 17–20.

The persistent message of this survey, like its predecessors, however, is that no significant progress has been made in increasing participation amongst those who left school earliest, or amongst the poorest socio-economic groups – despite the successes of the government's Skills for Life strategy. Widening participation – a key policy priority of the first years of the Labour Government – has secured increases among C2s, but no significant gains among the poorest. So, the learning society that all European industrial societies aspire to – a society in which everyone is a confident learner and active citizen – remains a long way out of reach.

Nevertheless, the message is not wholly glum. There has been a significant growth across all social classes over the last decade in people's intentions to take up learning in the future. And whilst that intention has yet to feed its way into doing something about it, millions more of us clearly think that learning matters.

Technical note

This survey, undertaken for NIACE, by RSGB, interviewed a weighted sample of 5,026 adults, aged 17 and over, in the UK in the period 7–25 February 2007. A range of questions was asked on adult participation in learning, language competence and learning, learning at work and media literacy. This report is mainly concerned with the findings from the following two questions on participation in learning. Additional reports have also been published on the language and learning at work data.

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

Which of the following statements most applies to you?

- 01: I am currently doing some learning activity
- 02: I have done some learning activity in the last three years
- 03: I have studied or learned but it was over three years ago
- 04: I have not studied or learned since I left full-time education
- 05: Don't know

How likely are you to take up learning in the next three years?

- 01: Very likely
- 02: Fairly likely
- 03: Fairly unlikely
- 04: Very unlikely
- 05: Don't know

Throughout this report percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Owing to this, and sensitivities introduced by weighting, some categories in the following tables may sum to slightly more than or less than 100%. Further, any percentages calculated on small bases should be treated with caution as they may be subject to wide margins of sampling error. Tables are percentaged vertically unless otherwise specified. In tables, * indicates less than 0.5 per cent but greater than zero, and – indicates zero. NSR indicates not separately recorded and NA indicates not asked.

Participation in learning

The 2007 survey shows that one in five adults are currently learning (20 per cent), with 41 per cent having participated in some learning activity during the last three years.

Just over one-third of adults (34 per cent) say that they have not participated in learning since leaving full-time education, a figure which has remained relatively constant since 1996 when the current introductory questions and definition of learning were adopted.³

Table 1. Participation in learning – 1996, 1999, 2002, 2005, 2006 and 2007 compared

	1996 %	1999 %	2002 %	2005 %	2006 %	2007 %
Current learning	23	22	23	19	20	20
Recent learning (in the last three years)	17	18	19	22	22	21
All current or recent learning	40	40	42	42	42	41
Past learning (more than three years ago)	23	23	21	24	23	25
None since leaving full-time education/don't know	36	37	36	35	34	34
Weighted base	4,755	5,205	5,885	5,053	4,924	4,916

Base: all respondents

This year's overall figure of 41 per cent of adults reporting current or recent participation in learning is slightly lower than that found in the 2006 survey (see Table 1 and Figure 1, page 11), although there has been little change in the overall proportion of current and recent learners since the series began in 1996.

The definition of learning used in the NIACE survey is deliberately broad and inclusive, being designed to capture a wide range of formal, non-formal and informal learning activity. This year's results powerfully illustrate how the learning reported in the survey extends far beyond the limits of publicly offered educational opportunities for adults. At the same time as our data have shown a small reduction in levels of overall participation in learning, from 42 to 41 per cent, and an increase in participation among retired adults, from 16 to 19 per cent, the Learning and Skills Council reports a reduction of almost one million adult learners in publicly funded further education in England over just two years, and a halving of participation by learners over the age of 60 (see Table 2).⁴

3 Despite the use of a broad definition of learning, the survey captures respondents' perceptions of themselves as learners. It does not claim to capture all of the activity undertaken by respondents through which learning has taken place.

4. LSC (2007) *Further Education, Work-based Learning for Young People, Train to Gain and Adult and Community Learning – Learner Numbers in England* – October 2003, DfES statistical First Release, available at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000717/index.shtml> (accessed 3 May 2007).

Table 2. Participation in further education in England, by age, 2004–06

	2004 (Numbers)	2005 (Numbers)	2006 (Numbers)	Drop 2005–06 %	Drop 2004–06 %
25–29	195,700	174,700	169,400	-3.0	-13.0
30–34	204,200	167,200	146,500	-12.4	-28.3
35–39	215,000	176,000	150,100	-14.7	-30.4
40–44	196,800	160,800	136,800	-14.9	-30.3
45–49	151,500	123,500	102,400	-17.0	-32.4
50–54	118,100	90,100	70,400	-21.8	-40.5
55–59	102,700	75,700	55,200	-27.1	-46.1
60+	193,800	134,800	94,500	-29.9	-51.0

Source: LSC (2007) *Further Education, Work-based Learning for Young People, Train to Gain and Adult and Community Learning – Learner Numbers in England* – October 2003, DfES Statistical First Release.

Even on safeguarded provision in adult and community learning, LSC data show that the number of adult learners has declined (see Table 3).

Table 3. Participation in ‘safeguarded’ provision in adult and community learning in England, by age, 2004–06

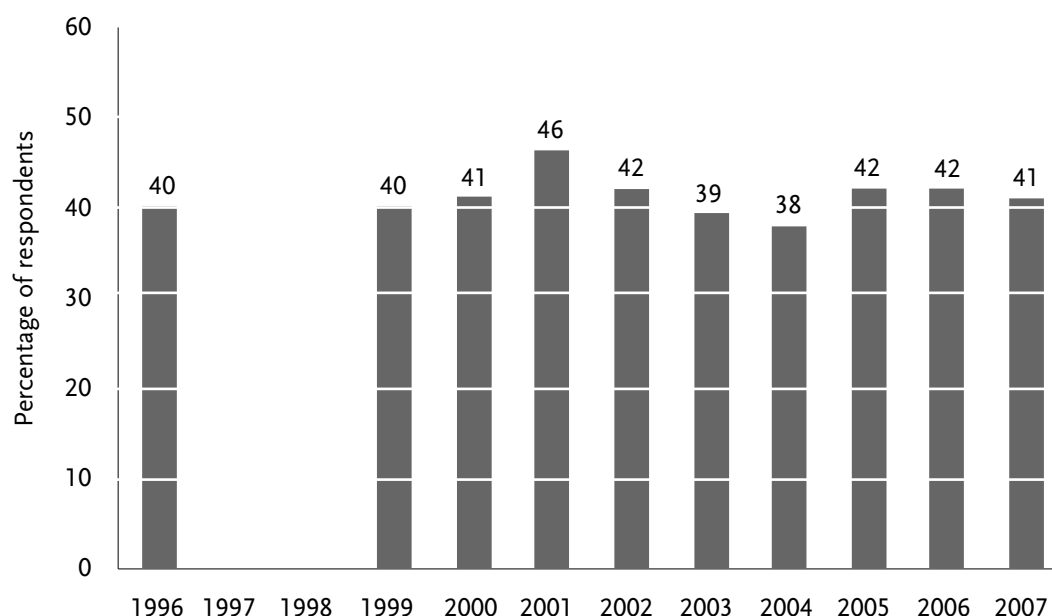
	2004 (Numbers)	2005 (Numbers)	2006 (Numbers)	Drop 2005–06 %	Drop 2004–06 %
25–29	24,800	20,500	18,900	-7.9	-23.8
30–34	33,300	26,300	22,700	-13.8	-31.9
35–39	37,500	30,500	26,300	-13.9	-29.9
40–44	38,800	32,500	28,200	-13.0	-27.3
45–49	36,200	29,900	26,700	-10.6	-26.2
50–54	39,200	30,500	26,500	-13.2	-32.4
55–59	47,600	38,900	33,000	-15.2	-30.7
60+	150,200	126,900	112,000	-11.7	-25.4

Source: LSC (2007) *Further Education, Work-based Learning for Young People, Train to Gain and Adult and Community Learning – Learner Numbers in England* – October 2003, DfES Statistical First Release.

At the personal level, lack of skills and qualifications holds many adults back from realising their potential. Many are looking for a better job, a better standard of living, and more fulfilling lives. They know that the right skills could help them get there. But they find it difficult to make sense of the wide array of courses, qualifications, training providers and support programmes available... Demographic trends make it more pressing to tackle these challenges. People are living longer, fewer young people will be coming into the labour market, and the average age of the workforce is rising. We cannot rely solely on a flow of better skilled young people entering the labour market. So we must invest in helping more adults to gain the skills they need both for productive and satisfying employment throughout longer working lives, and for personal enrichment through into active retirement.⁵

5. DfES (2005) *Skills: Getting On in Business, Getting On at Work*. London, Stationery Office.

Figure 1: Current or recent participation in learning, 1996–2007



Base: all respondents

Participation in learning in relation to gender

The survey shows that women (42 per cent) are slightly more likely than men (41 per cent) to have participated in learning during the past three years, although this difference is not statistically significant (see Table 4).

Table 4. Participation in learning 2007, men and women compared

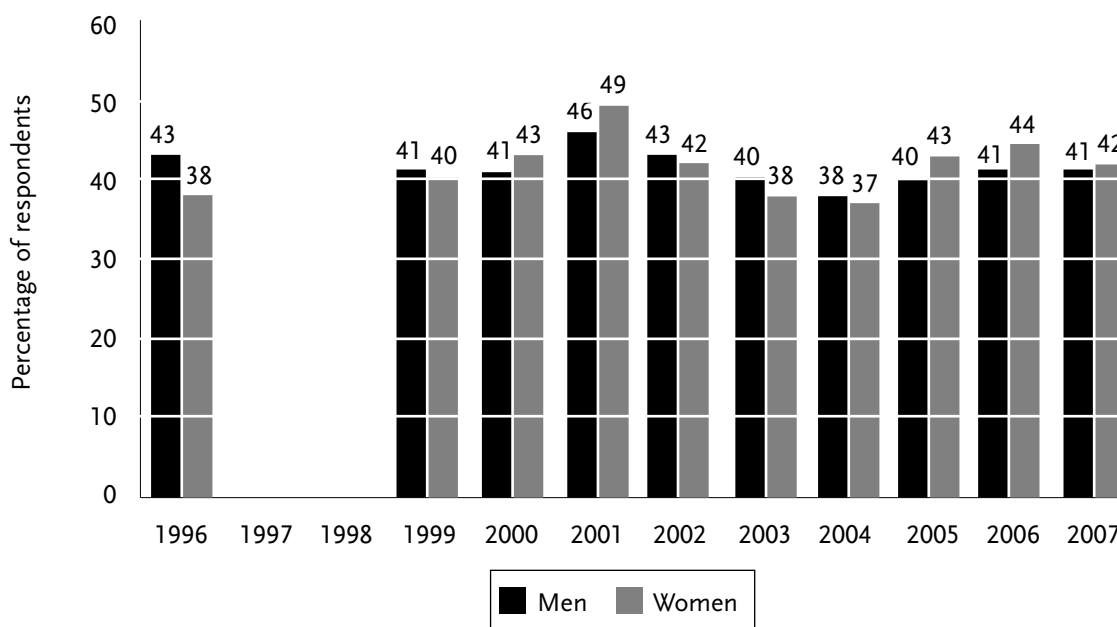
	Total %	Men %	Women %
Current learning	20	21	20
Recent learning (in the last three years)	21	20	22
All current or recent learning	41	41	42
Past learning (more than three years ago)	25	26	24
None since leaving full-time education/don't know	34	34	34
Weighted base	4,916	2,387	2,529

Base: all respondents

Since 2006, levels of participation in learning among men have remained unchanged, while for women they have fallen from 44 to 42 per cent, perhaps a reflection of the reduction in public provision, which women take advantage of in greater numbers.

Looking across the last decade as a whole, however, participation in learning by women has increased, while among men it has fallen (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Current or recent participation in learning by gender, 1996–2007



Base: all respondents

Participation in learning in relation to socio-economic class

Socio-economic class remains a key determinant of adult participation in learning. The 2007 survey (see Table 5) shows a statistically significant difference in the participation rate of adults in each socio-economic group. Fifty-five per cent of ABs report participating in learning during the past three years, compared with 48 per cent of C1s, 40 per cent of skilled manual workers (C2s) and 27 per cent of unskilled workers and people on limited incomes (DEs).

As a result, adults in the highest socio-economic groups (AB) are around twice as likely to be learning as those in groups DE. In addition, over one-half of DEs (52 per cent) have not participated in learning since leaving full-time education, compared with only 17 per cent of ABs.

Table 5. Participation in learning 2007, by socio-economic class⁶

	Total %	AB %	C1 %	C2 %	DE %
Current learning	20	28	25	17	12
Recent learning (in the last three years)	21	27	23	23	14
All current or recent learning	41	55	48	40	27
Past learning (more than three years ago)	25	29	27	24	21
None since leaving full-time education/don't know	34	17	25	36	52
Weighted base	4,916	1,041	1,346	983	1,546

Base: all respondents

Since 2006, participation in learning among DEs has remained constant while it has decreased within all other socio-economic groups. Table 6 shows that higher socio-economic groups have seen a greater decline in participation than lower groups.

Levels of participation in learning among ABs are only slightly higher than those found in 1996, while among C1s the decline in participation seen in recent years has continued such that the proportion of learners is now considerably lower than that reported a decade ago.

While the proportion of C2s reporting current or recent participation in learning is lower this year than in 2006, the figures remain much higher than found in 1996. Participation rates among DEs have remained broadly unchanged over time.

Just as in other social policy areas public policy has been least effective in reaching and meeting the needs of its poorest and oldest communities.

Table 6. Current or recent participation in learning by socio-economic class – 1996, 1999, 2002 2005, 2006 and 2007 compared

	1996 %	1999 %	2002 %	2005 %	2006 %	2007 %
Total sample	40	40	42	42	42	41
AB	53	58	60	56	58	55
C1	52	51	54	51	50	48
C2	33	36	37	40	41	40
DE	26	24	25	26	27	27
Weighted base	4,755	5,205	5,885	5,053	4,924	4,916

Base: all respondents

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

Participation in learning in relation to employment status

Just under one-half of full-time workers (49 per cent), part-time workers (47 per cent) and unemployed adults (43 per cent) reported current or recent participation in learning compared with 29 per cent of those who are not working and 19 per cent of retired adults (see Table 7).

Half of retired adults (49 per cent), 43 per cent of those who are not working and 37 per cent of unemployed adults say that they have not been involved in any learning since leaving full-time education, compared with around one quarter of adults in employment.

Table 7. Participation in learning 2007, by employment status

	Total %	Full-time %	Part-time %	Unemployed ⁷ %	Not working %	Retired %
Current learning	20	21	21	16	10	9
Recent learning (in the last three years)	21	28	27	28	19	10
All current or recent learning	41	49	47	43	29	19
Past learning (more than three years ago)	25	24	27	19	27	31
None since leaving full-time education/don't know	34	27	25	37	43	49
Weighted base	4,916	2,029	594	207	620	1,219

Base: all respondents

Since 2006, the proportion of retired adults reporting participation in learning has increased from 16 to 19 per cent, while levels of participation have fallen among all other groups (see Table 8). In particular, the decline in participation is most evident among part-time workers (by 8 percentage points) and unemployed adults (by 4 percentage points).

This marked reduction in participation reported by people in employment and, in particular, by part-time workers, should be of concern to government. Since increasing the volume of workplace learning is one of its key policy goals, such a large reduction in a single year is, at best, disappointing. In part, this drop in participation may be as a result of the ending of the public subsidy for health & safety and food hygiene courses.

7. Includes only those who are registered as unemployed and claiming Job Seeker's Allowance.

Over the period of a decade, however, participation in learning has increased among those not in paid employment, part time workers and the unemployed, remained constant among full-time workers and decreased slightly among retired adults (1 per cent).

Table 8. Current or recent participation in learning by employment status – 1996, 1999, 2002, 2005, 2006 and 2007 compared

	1996 %	1999 %	2002 %	2005 %	2006 %	2007 %
Total sample	40	40	42	42	42	41
Full-time employment	49	51	52	52	51	49
Part-time employment	42	50	51	53	55	47
Unemployed	40	41	46	40	47	43
Not working	23	30	31	30	30	29
Retired	20	16	19	17	16	19
Weighted base	4,755	5,205	5,885	5,053	4,924	4,916

Base: all respondents

Participation in learning in relation to age

In general, the older people are, the less likely they are to participate in learning (see Table 9 and Figure 3). Eighty-two per cent of 17–19 year olds and 64 per cent of 20–24-year-olds are current or recent learners, compared with around half of the rest of the working age population.

The decline in participation is particularly steep for those aged 55 and over, such that only 31 per cent of adults aged 55–64, 21 per cent of adults aged 65–74 and 15 per cent of those aged 75 and over regard themselves as learners. In addition, over one-half of all adults aged 65 and over say that they have not participated in any learning since leaving full-time education.

Table 9. Participation in learning 2007, by age

	Total %	17–19 %	20–24 %	25–34 %	35–44 %	45–54 %	55–64 %	65–74 %	75+ %
Current learning	20	63	36	24	19	18	14	9	7
Recent learning (in the last three years)	21	19	29	27	24	26	16	12	8
All current or recent learning	41	82	64	50	44	45	31	21	15
Past learning (more than three years ago)	25	4	15	22	26	25	31	29	33
None since leaving full-time education/don't know	34	14	21	27	30	31	38	51	53
Weighted base	4,916	254	349	817	955	814	726	540	461

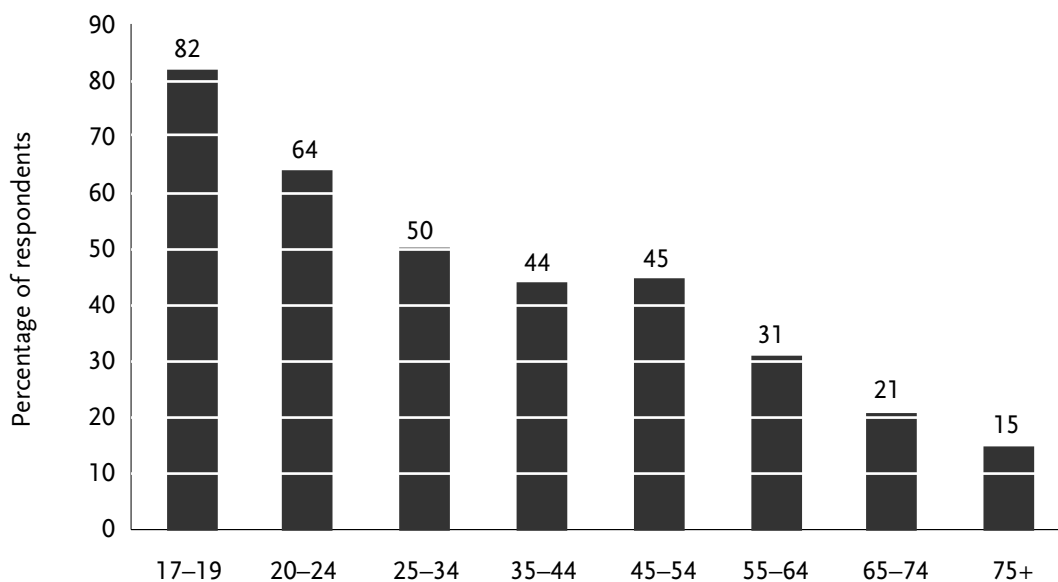
Base: all respondents

The most notable change in levels of participation by age since the last survey is among older adults, where participation among those aged 75 and older has risen from 10 to 15 per cent.

Since 1996, NIACE's participation surveys have shown a decline in participation among young adults aged 17–24 and an increase in participation among 45–64-year-olds. There has been some variation in participation among older adults, although overall levels have remained low with less than one in five of this group identifying themselves as learners (see Table 10).

As a result, Figure 3, which once would have shown a smoother decline in participation across age groups, now shows marked differences between young adults aged 17–19, those of working age – where levels of participation have become more uniform – and older adults.

Figure 3. Current or recent participation in learning by age, 2007



Base: all respondents

Table 10 shows in parentheses the proportion of each age group in full-time education. A clear divide is evident between those under 25, where substantial numbers are studying full time and those aged 25 and over where only 4 per cent or less are full-time students.

Since 2006, the proportion of 17–19-year-olds in full-time education has continued to rise, with a slight increase in the proportion of 20–24-year-old full-timers. Since the series began there has been no effective increase in the proportion of full-time students aged 25 and over.

Table 10. Current or recent participation in learning by age – 1996, 1999, 2002, 2005, 2006 and 2007

	1996 %	1999 %	2002 %	2005 %	2006 %	2007 %
Total sample	40 (5)	40 (4)	42 (4)	42 (5)	42 (5)	41 (5)
17–19	86 (42)	81 (37)	78 (34)	75 (46)	82 (49)	82 (53)
20–24	65 (15)	70 (25)	72 (27)	63 (29)	68 (21)	64 (22)
25–34	48 (2)	50 (2)	51 (2)	52 (4)	49 (4)	50 (4)
35–44	43 (1)	47 (1)	47 (2)	49 (1)	48 (1)	44 (1)
45–54	36 (1)	41 (*)	44 (1)	47 (*)	44 (*)	45 (*)
55–64	25 (*)	29 (–)	30 (–)	32 (–)	34 (–)	31 (–)
65–74	19 (2)	16 (–)	20 (–)	17 (–)	19 (–)	21 (–)
75+	15 (–)	9 (–)	10 (–)	10 (–)	10 (*)	15 (–)
Weighted base	4,755	5,205	5,885	5,053	4,924	4,916

Base: all respondents

Figures in parentheses show the proportion of each age group who are in full-time education.

Participation in learning in relation to terminal age of education

In previous surveys, terminal age of education has been a key predictor of participation in learning as an adult. The 2007 figures again confirm the key divide between those who leave school at the earliest opportunity and those who stay on for even a short while (see Table 11). Only 28 per cent of those who left school as early as possible are current or recent learners, compared with around half of all other respondents.

Table 11. Participation in learning 2007, by terminal age of education

	Total %	Up to 16 %	17–18 %	19–20 %	21+ %
Current learning	20	11	20	21	29
Recent learning (in the last three years)	21	17	30	32	25
All current or recent learning	41	28	50	53	54
Past learning (more than three years ago)	25	26	26	25	28
None since leaving full-time education/don't know	34	46	24	22	18
Weighted base	4,916	2,693	903	250	799

Base: all respondents

In 1999, when data on participation in learning by terminal age of education first became available in this format, it clearly showed that each year of initial education had an impact on the likelihood to participate in learning as an adult. As Table 12 illustrates, however, this pattern has changed over time, such that by 2007, participation rates among those who left initial education aged 17–18, 19–20 and 21+ are at a similar level.

Table 12. Current or recent participation in learning by terminal age of education – 1999, 2002, 2005, 2006 and 2007 compared

	1999 %	2002 %	2005 %	2006 %	2007 %
Total sample	40	42	42	42	41
Up to 16	28	30	30	31	28
17–18	53	52	48	48	50
19–20	55	45	47	48	53
21+	61	65	60	56	54
Weighted base	5,205	5,885	5,053	4,924	4,916

Base: all respondents

Participation in learning in relation to ethnicity

The survey shows that white respondents (40 per cent) are much less likely than adults from black and minority ethnic groups (54 per cent) to have participated in learning during the past three years (see Table 13).

The size of the sample, however, precludes us from disaggregating overall findings for distinct minority groups, and our previous analysis of data on participation in learning by ethnicity indicates that there are often dramatic differences in levels of participation between particular groups and subgroups of minority ethnic adults.⁸

Table 13. Participation in learning 2007, white and minority ethnic compared

	Total %	White %	Minority Ethnic %
Current learning	20	18	37
Recent learning (in the last three years)	21	21	17
All current or recent learning	41	40	54
Past learning (more than three years ago)	25	26	17
None since leaving full-time education/don't know	34	34	29
Weighted base	4,916	4,443	454

8. Aldridge, F., Dutton, Y. and Tuckett, A. (2006) *In the Spotlight: A NIACE Briefing on Participation in Learning by Adults from Minority Ethnic Groups*, Leicester: NIACE.

Participation in learning in relation to occupational sector

Table 14 shows the participation rates within those occupational sectors with more than 70 respondents. The highest rates of participation are found within the public administration (64 per cent), health (64 per cent) and education (63 per cent) sectors, and the lowest among the construction (35 per cent), transport, storage and communication (36 per cent) and wholesale and retail (39 per cent) sectors.

Table 14. Participation in learning 2007, by occupational sector

	Total %	Construction %	Transport, storage & communication %	Wholesale & retail %	Manufacturing %	Hotels & restaurants %	Real estate, renting & business activities %	Other community, social & personal service activities %	Financial Intermediation %	Education %	Health & social work %	Public administration & defence %
Current learning	20	14	13	16	13	17	21	20	26	35	28	29
Recent learning (in the last three years)	21	20	23	23	26	31	26	32	30	27	36	35
All current or recent learning	41	35	36	39	40	47	47	52	56	63	64	64
Past learning (more than three years ago)	25	26	25	26	26	19	26	27	27	23	22	20
None since leaving full-time education/ don't know	34	39	39	35	34	34	27	20	17	14	14	16
Weighted base	4,916	181	212	355	307	118	291	179	90	243	299	198

Base: all employees

Only sectors with over 70 respondents are listed.

It is necessary to remember the smaller sample sizes involved when examining data from some sectors, such as financial and hotels & restaurants, which should be interpreted with care.

Participation in learning and future intentions to learn in relation to nations of the UK and regions of England

In 2007, participation rates across the four nations of the UK varied slightly, although only the differences between the Scottish, and the England and Wales rates are statistically significant to each other (see Table 15).

There was also some variation between English regions (see Table 14), with adults living in the North East, East Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber being significantly less likely to participate in learning than adults residing in other English regions.

Table 15. Participation in learning 2007, by nation of the UK

	Total %	England %	Wales %	Scotland %	Northern Ireland %
Current learning	20	21	21	18	14
Recent learning (in the last three years)	21	21	25	15	26
All current or recent learning	41	42	44	33	40
Past learning (more than three years ago)	25	25	25	23	24
None since leaving full-time education/ don't know	34	33	31	44	35
Weighted base	4,916	4,138	218	421	139

Base: all respondents

It is necessary to remember the smaller sample sizes involved when examining data concerning Wales, Scotland and particularly Northern Ireland, which should be interpreted with care.

The sample for Wales was boosted to 1,057 for the 2007 survey, although it has been reweighted for this report. A detailed analysis of the Welsh data is available in a separate report.⁹

Among the nations of the UK, adults in England (47 per cent) are most likely to see themselves as future learners, while those in Scotland (37 per cent) are least likely to take up learning in the next three years (see Table 16).

9. Aldridge, F., Furlong, C. and Nettleship, S. (2007) *Wales: Moving Towards the Learning Country*, Welsh Assembly Government, Cardiff, NIACE Dysgu Cymru.

In the English regions, adults living in London (52 per cent), and the East of England (49 per cent) are more likely to take up learning in the future than their counterparts in the rest of the country.

Table 16. Participation in learning and future intentions to learn 2007, by Government Office region and nation of the UK

	Weighted base %	Current or recent participation %	Future intentions	
			Total likely %	Total unlikely %
Total: United Kingdom	4,916	41	46	52
East of England	444	46	49	49
London	601	45	52	44
West Midlands	450	45	46	53
South West	400	44	44	53
North West	578	42	47	50
South East	674	41	46	52
Yorkshire & the Humber	400	38	41	57
East Midlands	374	37	46	53
North East	215	34	45	52
Wales	218	44	43	54
England	4,138	42	47	51
Northern Ireland	139	40	40	59
Scotland	421	33	37	60

Base: all respondents

Percentages are horizontal.

Over the series, the NIACE surveys have reported regional and national participation rates that have fluctuated widely. The smaller levels of variation found in recent surveys may in part be as a result of a stronger commitment to regional planning.

Future intentions to learn

Levels of future intentions to learn are a key indicator of how far the government's commitment to lifelong learning is resulting in the emergence of a learning culture among the adult population more generally. This year's figures, while slightly lower than those reported last year, remain higher than those seen at any other time in the previous decade. In 2007, 46 per cent of adults who have left full-time education say that they are likely to take up learning in the next three years, while 52 per cent say that they are unlikely to do so (see Table 17).

Table 17. Future intentions to take up learning,¹⁰ 1996, 1999, 2002, 2006 and 2007 compared

	1996 %	1999 %	2002 %	2006 %	2007 %
Very likely	20	22	22	25	28
Fairly likely	18	16	19	22	18
Total likely	38	38	41	47	46
Fairly unlikely	9	12	10	13	11
Very unlikely	46	47	47	37	41
Total unlikely	55	59	57	50	52
Don't know	7	3	3	3	2
Weighted base	4,755	5,205	5,885	4,924	4,916

Base: all respondents

2005 data are omitted from this table as it was calculated from a different base to other years.

Future intentions to learn in relation to learning status

The 2006 survey reinforces findings from previous years, which suggest that current participation has a significant impact upon future intentions to learn (see Table 18 and Figure 4). Eighty-eight per cent of current learners report that they are likely to take up learning in the future, compared with only 14 per cent of those who have not participated since leaving full-time education. The majority of those who have not participated in learning since leaving full-time education (83 per cent) say that they have no intention of doing so in the future.

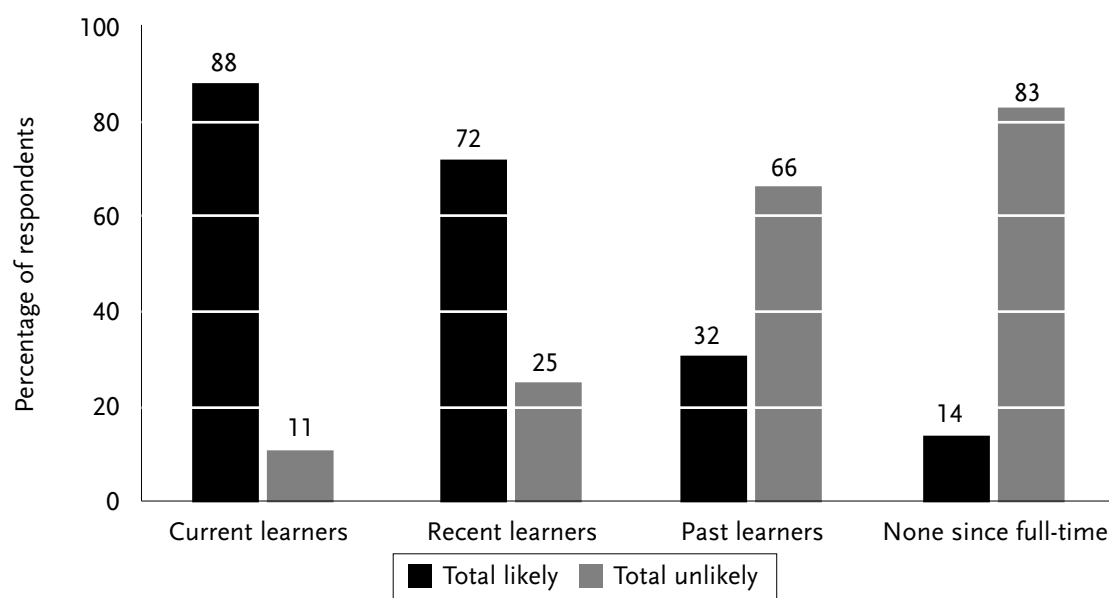
10. In most years this question is asked of all respondents. In 2005, however, it was asked of all respondents who had left full-time education. Recalculations of the data show levels of future intentions to learn in 2005 were similar to those found in 2002–04. Data on future intentions to learn among respondents who have left full-time education are available in the report of the 2005 survey or on request.

Table 18. Future intentions to take up learning 2007, by learning status

	Total %	Current learners %	Recent learners %	Past learners %	Not since leaving full-time education %
Very likely	28	73	40	11	6
Fairly likely	18	15	32	20	9
Total likely	46	88	72	31	14
Fairly unlikely	11	4	11	17	12
Very unlikely	41	6	14	49	72
Total unlikely	52	11	25	66	83
Don't know	2	1	3	2	2
Weighted base	4,916	993	1,033	1,223	1,633

Base: all respondents

Figure 4. Future intentions to take up learning by learning status, 2007



Base: all respondents

Since 2006 the proportion of recent learners who say that they are likely to take up learning in the next three years has increased from 66 to 72 per cent, whereas among other groups – current learners, past learners and those who have done no learning since leaving full-time education – there has been a slight decline.

Over the past decade, future intentions to learn have increased for all except those who have done no learning since leaving full-time education. As a result, the gap between those who are convinced of the value of learning and those who are more sceptical has widened (see Table 19).

Table 19. 'Likely to learn in the next three years' by learning status, 1996, 1999, 2002, 2006 and 2007 compared

	1996 %	1999 %	2002 %	2006 %	2007 %
Total	38	38	41	47	46
Current learners	73	76	78	89	88
Recent learners	59	60	61	71	72
Past learners	26	25	28	33	31
Not since leaving full-time education	14	12	13	15	14
Weighted base	4,755	5,205	5,885	4,924	4,916

Base: all respondents

2005 data are omitted from this table as it was calculated from a different base to other years.

Future intentions to learn in relation to gender

Forty seven per cent of women and 44 per cent of men report that they are likely to take up learning in the future. However, around 40 per cent of both men and women also say that they are *very* unlikely to take up learning in the next three years (see Table 20).

Table 20. Future intentions to take up learning 2007, by gender

	Total %	Men %	Women %
Very likely	28	27	29
Fairly likely	18	17	18
Total likely	46	44	47
Fairly unlikely	11	12	11
Very unlikely	41	41	40
Total unlikely	52	54	51
Don't know	2	2	2
Weighted base	4,916	2,386	2,529

Base: all respondents

Since 2006, levels of future intention to learn among both men and women have declined, although they remain higher than those found a decade ago (see Table 21).

Table 21. 'Likely to learn in the next three years' by gender, 1996, 1999, 2002, 2006 and 2007 compared

	1996 %	1999 %	2002 %	2006 %	2007 %
Total	38	38	41	47	46
Men	39	38	40	45	44
Women	37	38	41	49	47
Weighted base	4,755	5,205	5,885	4,924	4,916

Base: all respondents

2005 data are omitted from this table as the calculation was on a different base to other years

Future intentions to learn in relation to socio-economic class

Data on future intentions to learn also show that we can expect the learning divide to continue into the future, potentially becoming wider (see Table 22). Over one-half of the upper and middle classes (57 per cent of ABs and 52 per cent of C1s) say that they are likely to take up learning in the future, compared with 44 per cent of C2s and 33 per cent of DEs.

Table 22. Future intentions to take up learning 2007, by socio-economic class¹¹

	Total %	AB %	C1 %	C2 %	DE %
Very likely	28	36	33	26	18
Fairly likely	18	21	18	18	15
Total likely	46	57	52	44	33
Fairly unlikely	11	11	13	12	10
Very unlikely	41	30	33	42	54
Total unlikely	52	41	46	54	64
Don't know	2	2	2	2	3
Weighted base	4,916	1,041	1,346	983	1,546

Base: all respondents

Since 2006, levels of future intention to learn have declined across all except the lowest socio-economic groups where they have remained constant. In contrast, across the decade as a whole, future intentions to learn have increased across all categories, with the largest gains seen in socio-economic groups AB and C2 (see Table 23).

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

Table 23. 'Likely to learn in the next three years' by socio-economic class, 1996, 1999, 2002, 2006 and 2007 compared

	1996 %	1999 %	2002 %	2006 %	2007 %
Total	38	38	41	47	46
AB	46	50	52	60	57
C1	45	46	48	54	52
C2	34	34	38	46	44
DE	28	27	29	33	33
Weighted base	4,755	5,205	5,885	4,924	4,916

Base: all respondents

Future intentions to learn in relation to employment status

Employment status also has an impact upon future intentions to learn (see Table 24). Just over one half of respondents who are employed or registered as being unemployed said that they are likely to take up learning in the future, compared with 43 per cent of those who are not working, and only one in six retired adults (17 per cent).

Table 24. Future intentions to take up learning 2007, by employment status

	Total %	Full-time %	Part-time %	Unemployed %	Not working %	Retired %
Very likely	28	33	31	30	22	9
Fairly likely	18	21	23	26	21	8
Total likely	46	55	54	56	43	17
Fairly unlikely	11	13	12	10	13	10
Very unlikely	41	30	31	27	40	72
Total unlikely	52	43	44	38	54	82
Don't know	2	2	3	6	4	1
Weighted base	4,916	2,029	594	207	620	1,219

Base: all respondents

Since 2006, levels of future intention to learn have declined across all categories of employment status, except among the retired, where they have increased slightly from 16 to 17 per cent. Across the decade as a whole, future intentions to learn have increased across all categories, with particularly substantial increases seen among part-timers, the unemployed and those who are not working (see Table 25).

Table 25. 'Likely to learn in the next three years' by employment status, 1996, 1999, 2002, 2006 and 2007 compared

	1996 %	1999 %	2002 %	2006 %	2007 %
Total	38	38	41	47	46
Full-time	47	47	50	57	55
Part-time	41	45	48	57	54
Unemployed	44	50	54	60	56
Not working	30	39	43	44	43
Retired	16	11	12	16	17
Weighted base	4,755	5,205	5,885	4,924	4,916

Base: all respondents

Future intentions to learn in relation to age

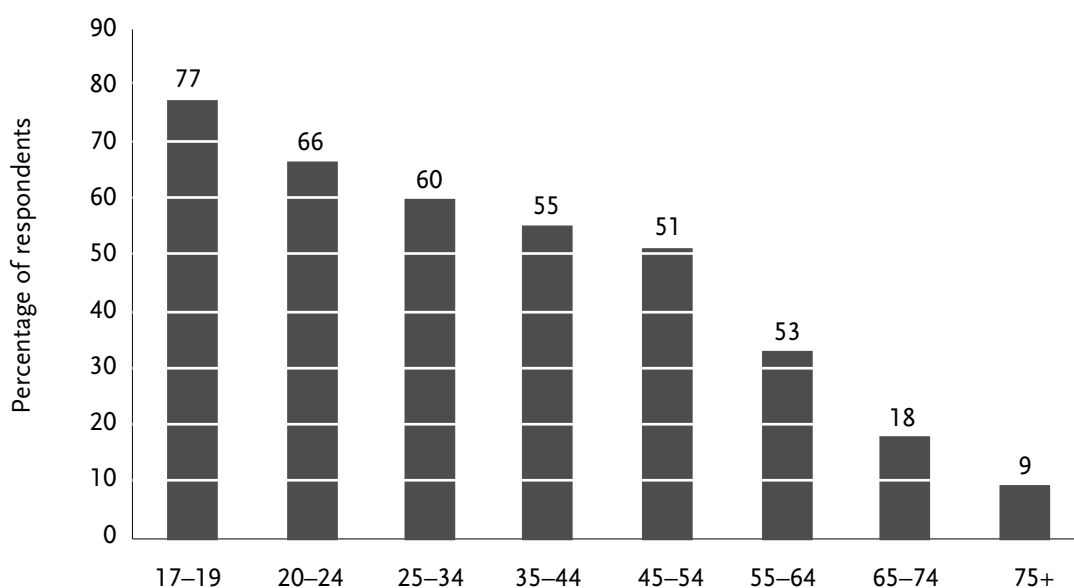
As with participation in learning, future intentions to learn tend to decline with age (see Table 26 and Figure 5), particularly among adults aged 55 and over.

Table 26. Future intentions to take up learning 2007, by age

	Total %	17-19 %	20-24 %	25-34 %	35-44 %	45-54 %	55-64 %	65-74 %	75+ %
Very likely	28	64	39	40	32	29	18	9	5
Fairly likely	18	13	27	20	24	21	15	8	4
Total likely	46	77	66	60	55	51	33	18	9
Fairly unlikely	11	8	11	13	13	11	12	9	9
Very unlikely	41	13	20	23	28	36	53	72	81
Total unlikely	52	21	31	37	41	48	65	81	90
Don't know	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	1	1
Weighted base	4,916	254	349	817	955	814	726	540	461

Base: all respondents

Figure 5. Future intentions to take up learning by age, 2007



Base: all respondents

Since 2006, levels of future intention to learn have increased among adults aged 65+ and declined for all other age groups. Since 1996, future intentions to learn have increased across all categories except those aged 75 and over (see Table 27). Over this period, particularly substantial increases have been seen among those aged 45-64.

Table 27. 'Likely to learn in the next three years' by age, 1996, 1999, 2002, 2006 and 2007 compared

	1996 %	1999 %	2002 %	2006 %	2007 %
Total	38	38	41	47	46
17-19	71	76	72	84	77
20-24	57	64	63	68	66
25-34	50	56	59	65	60
35-44	47	47	50	56	55
45-54	36	36	42	47	51
55-64	20	22	23	34	33
65-74	14	10	12	17	18
75+	10	4	7	7	9
Weighted base	4,755	5,205	5,885	4,924	4,916

Base: all respondents

Future intentions to learn in relation to occupational sector

Future intentions to learn are highest among employees within the education (65 per cent), public administration (66 per cent) and health and social work (71 per cent) sectors (see Table 28).

Table 28. Future intentions to take up learning 2007, by occupational sector

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Transport, storage & communication</i>	<i>Wholesale & retail</i>	<i>Manufacturing</i>	<i>Construction</i>	<i>Real estate, renting & business activities</i>	<i>Other community, social & personal service activities</i>	<i>Hotels & restaurants</i>	<i>Financial Intermediation</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Public administration & defence</i>	<i>Health & social work</i>
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Very likely	28	24	28	22	22	31	28	28	37	45	47	49
Fairly likely	18	21	17	23	24	22	27	31	22	20	19	22
Total likely	46	45	45	45	46	53	55	59	60	65	66	71
Fairly unlikely	11	10	15	15	15	14	15	12	11	13	9	9
Very unlikely	41	41	37	37	37	31	27	27	27	20	23	19
Total unlikely	52	51	51	53	52	45	42	39	38	33	32	28
Don't know	2	3	4	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	1
Weighted base	4,916	212	355	307	181	90	299	181	90	198	291	243

Base: all employees

Only sectors with over 70 respondents are listed.

It is necessary to remember the smaller sample sizes involved when examining data from some sectors, such as financial intermediation, which should be interpreted with care.

Access to the Internet

Data on access to the Internet highlight that the digital divide continues to reinforce the learning divide (see Table 29). Only 21 per cent of those without access to the Internet report current or recent participation in learning, compared with 53 per cent of those with Internet access.

Similarly, only 27 per cent of those without Internet access say that they are likely to take up learning in the next three years compared with 57 per cent of those with access.

Table 29. Participation in learning and future intentions to learn 2007, by access to the Internet

	No Internet access %	Any Internet access %
Current/recent participation in learning?	21	53
Likely to learn in the future?	27	57
Weighted base	1,833	3,083

Base: all respondents



The road to nowhere?

The NIACE Survey on Adult Participation in Learning

2007

Fiona Aldridge and Alan Tuckett

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