

Adult Education
Too important to be left to chance

Adult learner survey

Research Report for the All Party Parliamentary Group for Adult Education (APPG) – Inquiry into Adult Education

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University of Warwick, Institute for Employment Research (IER)

Established in 1981 by the University of Warwick, the Institute for Employment Research (IER) is a leading international social science research centre. Its research is interdisciplinary and made relevant to policy makers and practitioners. It is renowned for consistently delivering high quality research. The work of IER includes comparative European research on employment and training as well as that focusing on the UK at national, regional and local levels. The IER is concerned principally with the development of scientific knowledge about the socioeconomic system rather than with the evolution and application of one particular discipline. It places particular emphasis on using social science in the effective development of policy and practice and in collaborating with the policy and practitioner communities to bring this about.

Executive summary

- ❖ The majority of survey respondents have regularly engaged with learning and, over the last three years, have attended between 1 and 5 adult education courses. Across all English regions, Arts and design craft and Languages courses are popular. Other popular courses are on Teaching and education, Health and social care and a variety of leisure courses.
- ❖ Online information is key to adult learners in sourcing information about adult education, courses and options. The importance of hearing the voice of other learners and/or past students is considered key to attracting adults to learning. Current learners reported that they were attracted to adult education as part of the personal development activities.
- ❖ As a result of attending adult learning courses, significant outcomes are reported. For the majority, they had improved their subject knowledge and a range of soft skills, whilst others had become involved in voluntary activities. Respondents also, significantly, reported that attending a course had positively impacted on their knowledge and skills for personal goals, motivations to keep learning, ability to make well informed decisions about their next steps, and their confidence.
- ❖ A significant proportion of respondents face barriers to starting and/or completing an adult education course. These can be about finances and low confidence and/or self-esteem. Regional differences are evident; in the East of England lack of transport was a barrier; and a lack of housing in the North East, and Yorkshire and the Humber was barrier.
- ❖ To attract more adult learners, it was suggested that more should be done to promote opportunities using current and past learners; the learner voice is consider important to provide a real view of learning experiences. Respondents report a range of significant outcomes in terms of their personal development and professional skills, which could be promoted in order to attract more adults.
- ❖ Suggestions for improving adult learning now and in the future were around more financial investment, more adult education opportunities, as well as more flexible provision (in terms of delivery and times) to suit those with in work and with complex circumstances. Others suggested that the value of learning for personal pleasure should be promoted as it can have a significant impact in terms of wellbeing.

1. Introduction

The APPG for Adult Education commissioned the Warwick Institute for Employment Research at the University of Warwick (April – June 2016) to conduct research into the needs of adult learners.¹ This work was managed by nine Specialist Designated Institutions (SDIs) including: City Lit, Morley College, Hillcroft College, Northern College, Ruskin College, Working Men's College, Mary Ward Centre, Fircroft College and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). Each has its own identity, mission and distinctive approach, which adds to the rich diversity of adult education.

Our primary focus is on adult education, and on adults returning to learn. Learning can occur in education or training institutions (offline or online), the workplace (on or off the job), the family, or cultural and especially, community settings. We use 'learning' to refer to all kinds of formal education and training (organised/accredited). We also include non-formal (organised unaccredited) and informal approaches (not organised, e.g. learning from colleagues or friends) provided these have a degree of adult education focus.

The aim of the study was to scope the need, reach and areas for policy and practice development for adult education concerning disadvantaged adults. Four key research questions emerged:

- ❖ How can a greater priority be given to adults' views to support a demand-led approach?
- ❖ What practices and models of learning best motivate non-traditional students to keep on going with their studies while other from a similar background drop-out?
- ❖ What do we know already about the added value, cost-effectiveness and impact of adult education?
- ❖ What policy development is needed to secure the future of adult education?

1.1. Methodology

The research team collected evidence through the following channels: a literature review; a formal call for evidence; fieldwork with adult learners from across England; an online survey of adult learners; town hall meetings; and telephone interviews with key stakeholders. By drawing on these varied sources, the aim has been to develop a full picture of the benefits of adult education for individuals, employers and communities focusing on what works well and what needs to be improved to make best use of the resources available for adult education, particularly in addressing the needs of those most disadvantaged in our society. This Inquiry

¹ <http://wea.org.uk/news/New-Parliamentary-Group-for-Adult-Education.aspx>

provides an opportunity to relate recent research to adult education policy and practice of 2016 and look forward to the next five to ten years.

This report presents the analysis of the online survey of adult learners, which aimed to engage as diverse a group of adult learners as possible to cover all key demographics and life stages. The online survey attracted responses from 543 adults, all but 2 per cent of whom had attended adult education courses and spanning age groups from under 30 to over 65 years.

1.2. Online survey methodology

An online survey of adult learners was designed and conducted to capture adult engagement with learning, experiences, expectations and outcomes. The survey was created using SNAP and was made available online. The link to the survey was distributed via the WEA network, a range of contacts and social media. The survey comprised 15 questions, which allowed respondents to select answer(s) and add further text. Twelve demographic questions were included at the end of the survey. The online survey covered the following topics:

- ❖ Engagement with adult learning, including type of course, number of hours attended the course and number of courses attended;
- ❖ Data on how individuals had found out about their course(s) and on their knowledge of where to go to improve specific skills;
- ❖ Reasons for deciding to take part in course, what encouraged individuals to join a course and barriers to learning;
- ❖ Results of learning, including enhancing skills, personal development, social outcomes, participation in voluntary activities, motivations to continue learning and career planning;
- ❖ Views of whether individuals were willing to travel outside local area to attend a course;
- ❖ Views on what would attract more adults to learning; and
- ❖ Personal characteristics, including location, gender, age, English as first language, ethnicity, current status, highest qualification, caring responsibilities, learning difficulty, disability, long-term illness or disability, and whether claiming means tested state benefit or tax credit.

It was important that completion of the survey was not onerous for respondents to ensure that the potential participant failed to complete the survey. Respondents were provided the opportunity to save their progress on the survey and return to complete. The average time to complete the survey was 19.22 minutes.

In total, 543 respondents completed the online survey. Thirty-eight respondents did not complete the survey; these data were excluded from the analysis. Data were cleaned and then analysed using STATA.

2. Survey respondents

The following provides a summary breakdown of the respondents' personal characteristics, in summary:

- ❖ 73 per cent of response are female, 26 per cent are male;
- ❖ The majority of respondents are aged over 46 years of age;
- ❖ The majority are White, or White plus British, English, Irish, Polish, Spanish, Jewish or Anglo Saxon (86 per cent);
- ❖ The majority live in London (52 per cent);
- ❖ The profile of the respondents is mixed in term of current employment status with 32 per cent in full-time employment and 28 per cent retired or semi-retired;
- ❖ 3 per cent of respondents have no formal qualifications, 26 per cent have a Level 3 or below qualification, and the majority have a Level 4 or above qualification.
- ❖ 90 per cent recorded English as their first language;
- ❖ 20 per cent regularly act as a carer;
- ❖ 13 per cent have a learning difficulty or a disability;
- ❖ 14 per cent have a long-term mental health condition;
- ❖ 27 per cent have a long-term physical health condition; and
- ❖ 14 per cent are currently claiming a mean tested state benefit or tax credit.

Data on adult learners participating in further education in 2014/15 presents a similar profile (albeit slightly higher proportions) in terms of gender, ethnic background and those declaring a learning difficulty and/or disability (see BIS, 2016²).

The following provides an overview of the personal characteristics of the survey respondents. Figure 2.1, below, shows the gender and age profile of the survey respondents; the majority were female and below 35 years of age. The age profile of male respondents was older than the female respondents.

² BIS (2016) *Statistical First Release: Further Education and Skills. Learner participation, outcomes and level of highest qualification held* (SFA/SFR33). London: Department for Business Innovation and Skills. Available online: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/513851/SFR_comm entary_March_2016_QAR_Update.pdf

Figure 2.1 Gender and age profile of the respondents (n=543)

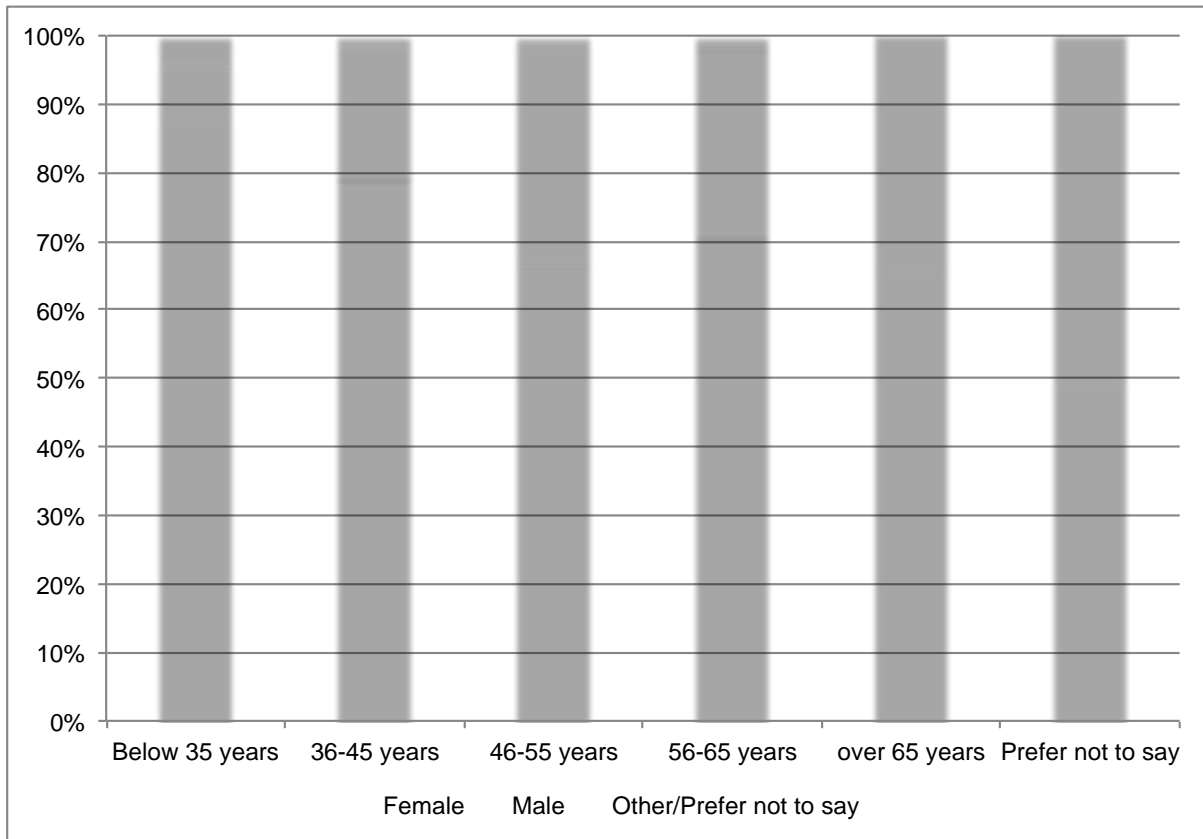


Figure 2.2 Ethnic background of respondents (n=543)

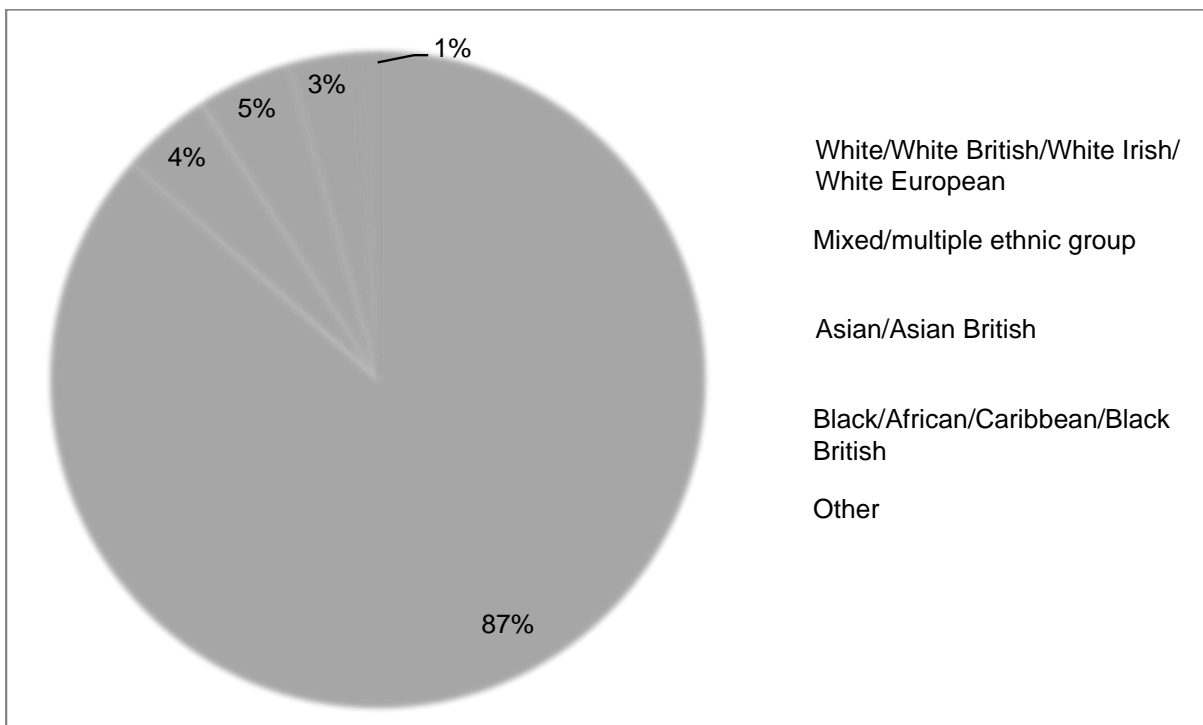
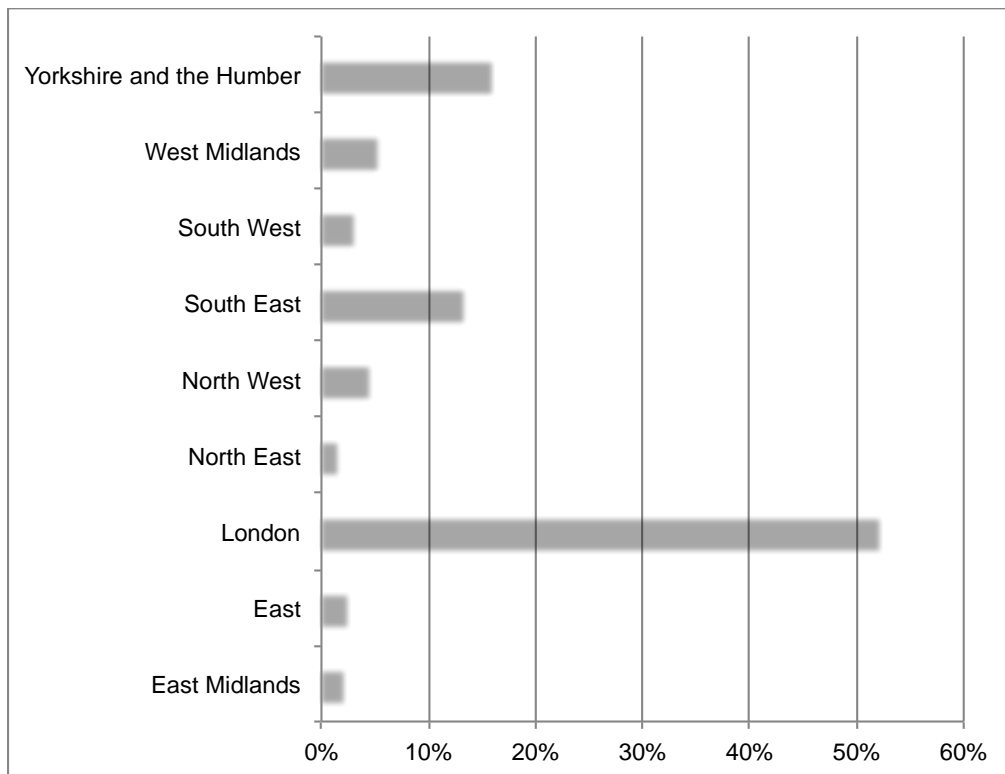


Figure 2.2, above, shows that the majority of respondents are White or White with an additional identifier (86 per cent) and 13 per cent from a Black or Minority Ethnic background (including Mixed/multiple ethnic group, Asian/Asian Black, Black and Other Ethnic Group).

Around half of all respondents lived in London (52 per cent), 16 per cent in Yorkshire and the Humber, 13 per cent in the South East and small numbers across other English regions. Two respondents lived in the devolved nations. Figure 2.3 below shows the geographic profile of respondents.

Figure 2.3 Geographic profile of respondents (n=543)



Respondents were also asked about the highest level of qualification held. Whilst a range of qualifications was recorded; the majority of respondents reported having gained traditional academic qualifications (78 per cent) and 10 per cent reported vocational qualifications. Table 2.1, below, presents the highest qualification level of all respondents. Three per cent of respondents have no formal qualifications, 26 per cent have a Level 3 or below qualification, and the majority have a Level 4 or above qualification. The latest data on the working population reports increases in the proportion of men and women qualified to Level 2, Level 3 and Level 4 (see BIS, 20163).

³ Op cit.

Table 2.1 Highest qualification level of all respondents (n=543)

| Qualification level | Number of responses | Percentage |
|--------------------------|---------------------|------------|
| No formal qualifications | 19 | 3% |
| Level 1 | 7 | 1% |
| Level 2 | 50 | 9% |
| Level 3 | 82 | 15% |
| Level 4 | 15 | 3% |
| Level 5 | 44 | 8% |
| Level 6 | 157 | 29% |
| Level 7 or above | 142 | 26% |
| Other | 4 | 1% |
| Prefer not to say | 23 | 4% |

The current situation or status of the survey respondents is complex with many reporting different status. The majority of respondents are employed full-time (31 per cent) or retired/semi-retired (28 per cent). Table 2.2, below, shows the current situation or status of all respondents.

One per cent of respondents reported that they believe they are currently underemployed and four per cent report that they are working, but not in the profession or industry of their choice.

Table 2.2 Current situation/status of all respondents (n=543)

| Current situation/status | Number of responses | Percentage |
|--|---------------------|------------|
| Full time employed | 168 | 31% |
| Retired/Semi-retired | 150 | 28% |
| Volunteer/charity work | 67 | 12% |
| Part time permanent | 52 | 10% |
| Self-employed | 47 | 9% |
| Unemployed and seeking work | 39 | 7% |
| Unemployed not seeking work due to health | 33 | 6% |
| Full or part time education or training | 32 | 6% |
| Part time temporary | 22 | 4% |
| Full time temporary | 14 | 3% |
| Unemployed and not seeking work (due to personal circumstances, in a caring role, personal choice) | 11 | 2% |
| Zero hours contract | 5 | 1% |

2.1. Engagement with adult learning

Of the 543 respondents completing the online survey, a significant proportion (89 per cent) reported that they had attended an adult education course, 9 per cent had attended a course over 1 year ago. Only 2 per cent reported that they had not attended an adult education course. Figure 2.4, below, shows the percentages of those engaged in adult learning.

Figure 2.4 Percentage of respondents who have attended an adult education course (n=543)

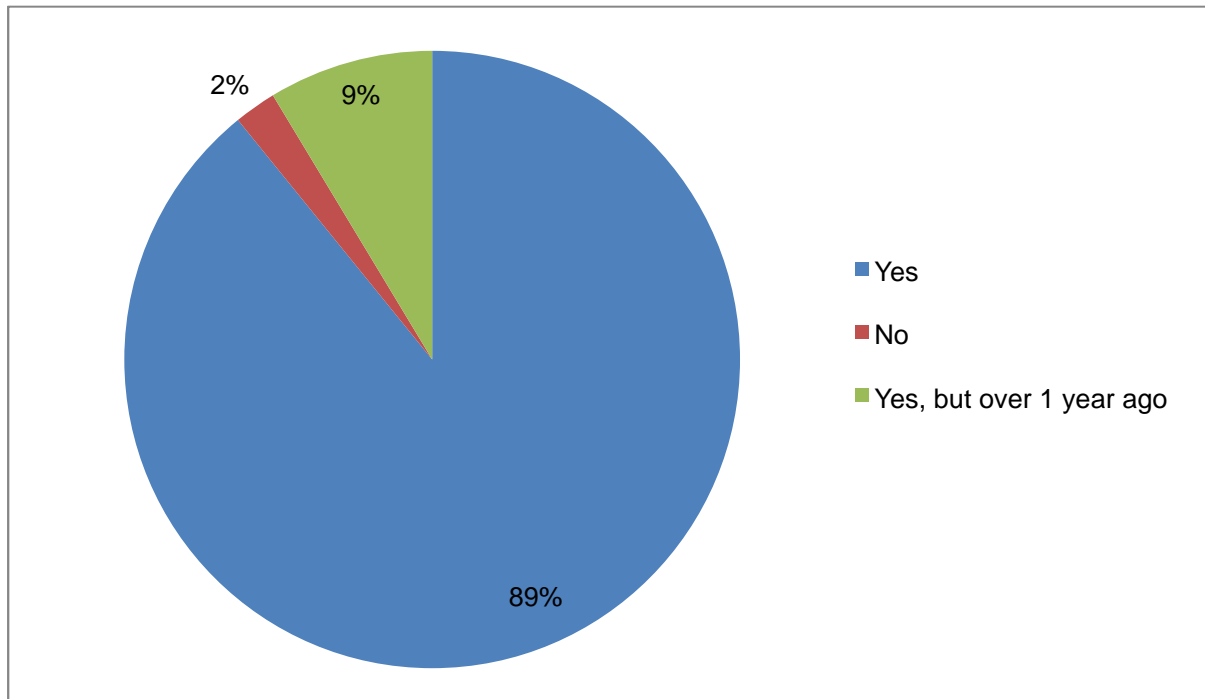
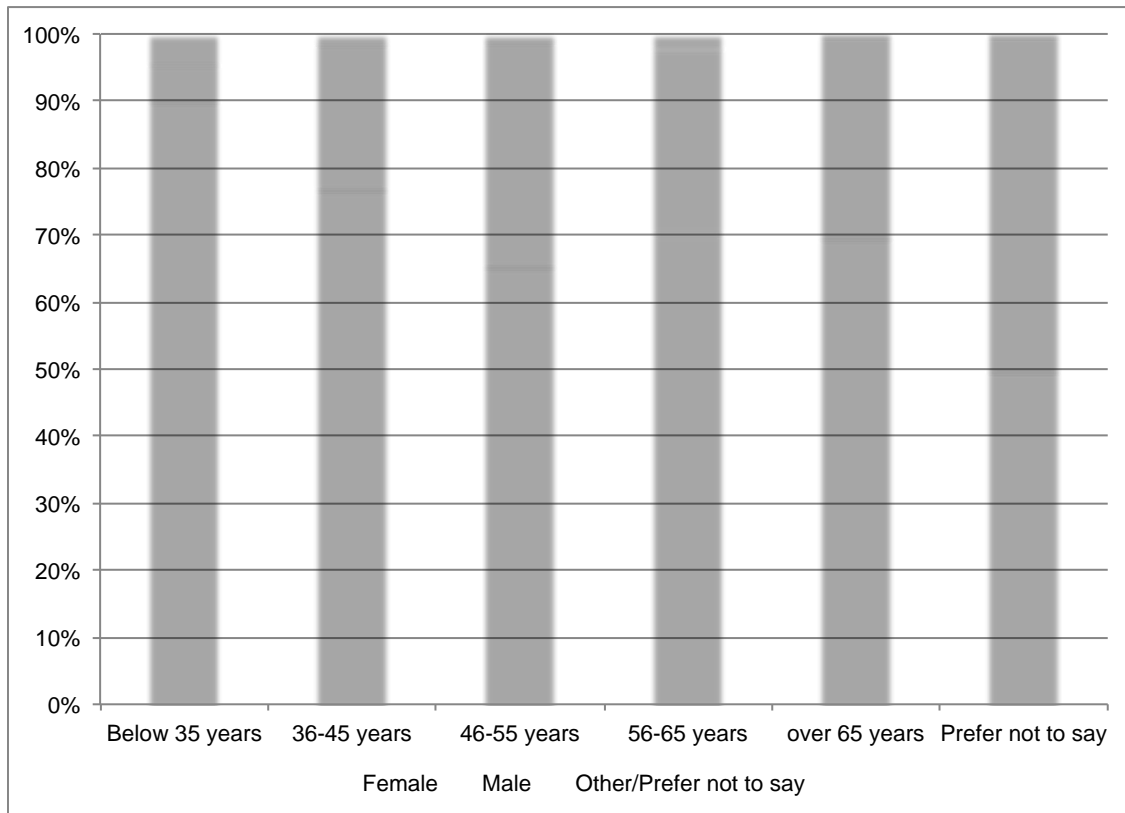


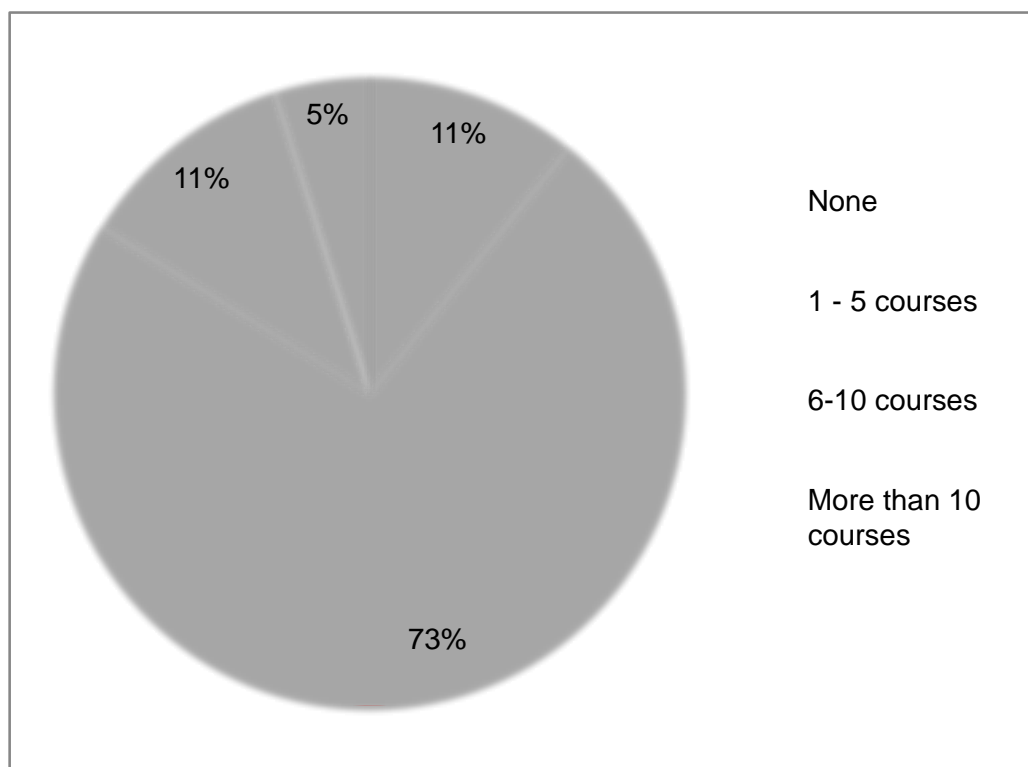
Figure 2.5, below, shows the gender and age profile of respondents who have recently attended an adult learning course. Adult learners are mainly female and under 35 years of age, whilst male learners are older.

Figure 2.5 Gender and age profile of respondents who have attended an adult learning course (n=484)



The majority of respondents reported that this was not their first adult learning course (87 per cent), and, over the last three years, have attended between 1 and 5 adult education courses (71 per cent). Figure 2.6, below, shows the number of different courses that respondents have attended in the last three years.

Figure 2.6 Number of different course respondents have attended in the last 3 years (n=531)



Note: Missing responses, n=61

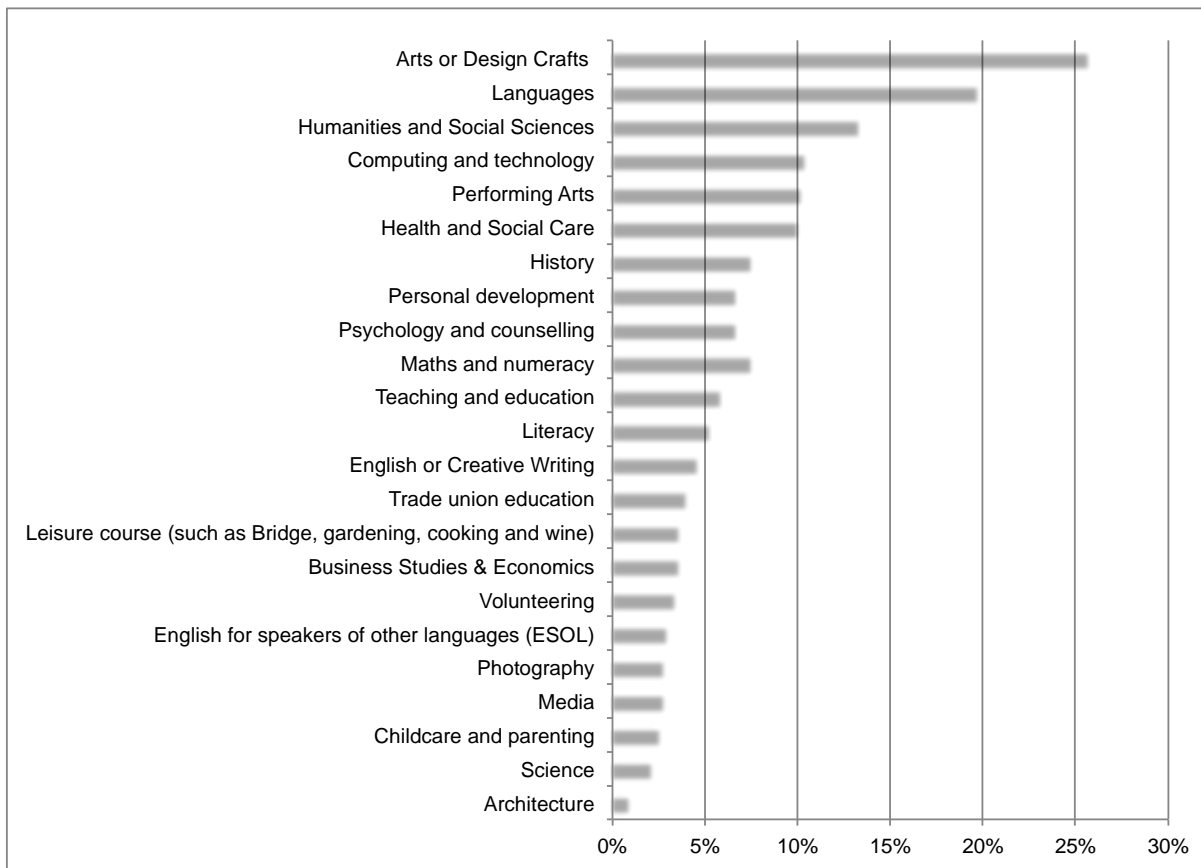
There were no significant regional differences, but respondents in the West Midlands, and Yorkshire and the Humber had the highest proportions reporting that they had attended between 6-10 courses over the last 3 years.

Respondents reported that they had undertaken a variety of adult education courses including courses leading to an academic qualification, leisure courses, personal development and well-being courses and skills development courses. Figure 2.7, below, presents the types of courses respondents have attended or are currently attending. Significant proportions had or were engaging with Arts and design craft (26 per cent) and Languages (20 per cent), particularly in the East of England. Numbers engaged with selected core courses were low in, for instance:

- ❖ Maths and numeracy (7 per cent);
- ❖ Literacy (5 per cent);
- ❖ English and creative writing (5 per cent); and
- ❖ English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) (3 per cent).

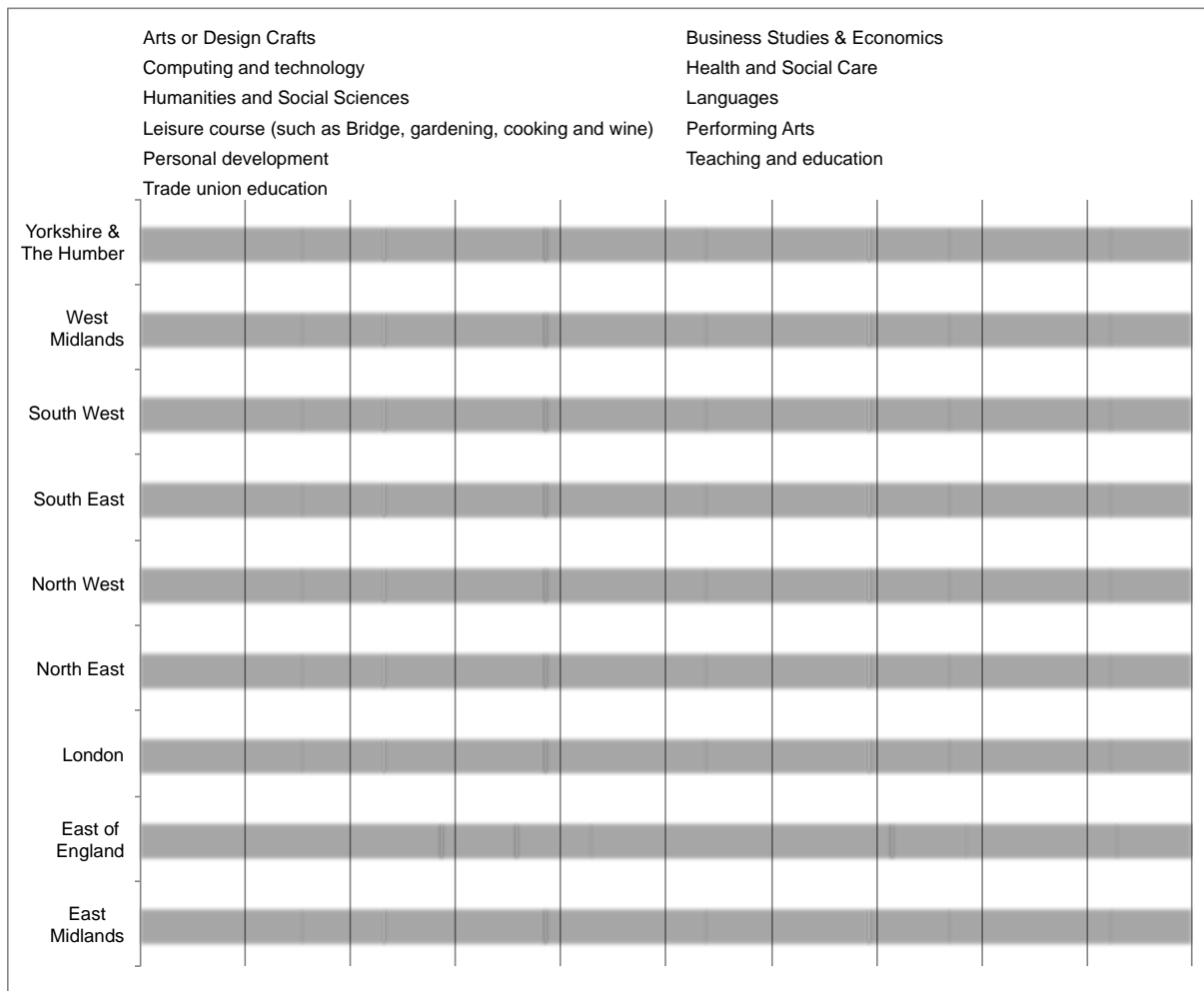
It was evident that those engaged in these courses were also likely to be engaged with or attending another adult education course.

Figure 2.7 Types of course(s) undertaken by respondents (n=484)



Across all regions, Teaching and education, Health and social Care, and Leisure courses (such as gardening, cooking and wine, Bridge, etc.) are equally popular. Figure 2.8, below, shows the geographical spread in adult education courses undertaken by respondents.

Figure 2.8 Type of course undertaken by region (n=484)



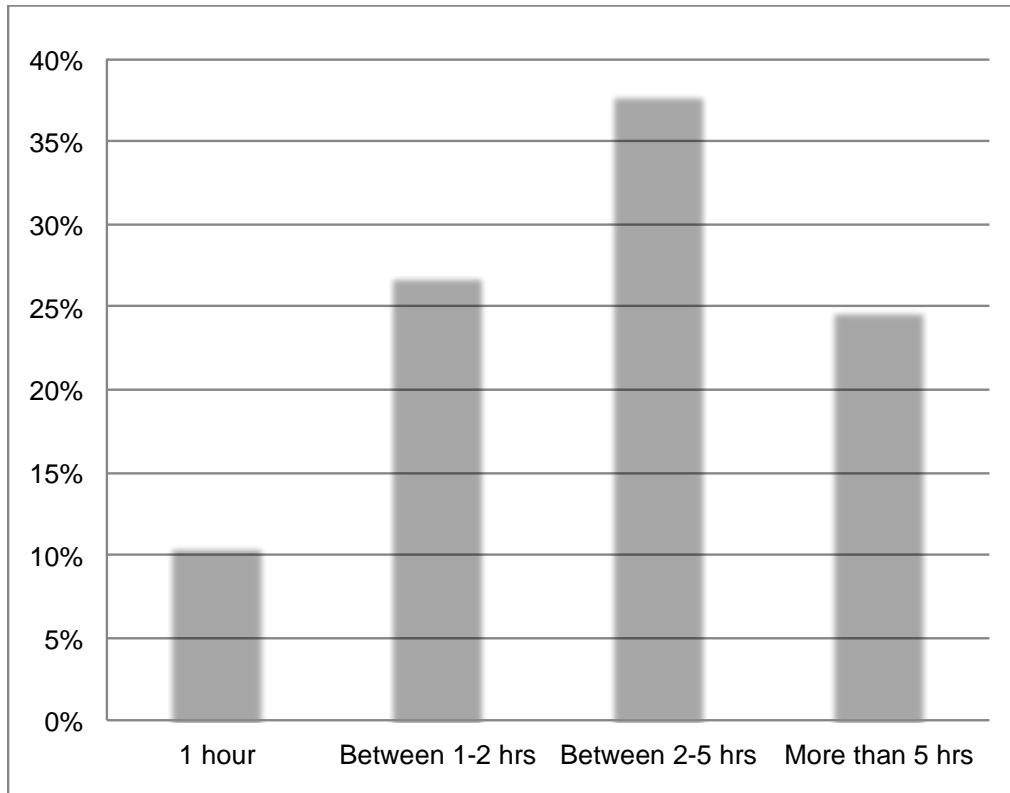
Note: Only selected courses are shown.

Those who had, or were, attending an adult learning course were, on average, spending between 2 and 5 hours per week (38 per cent). Notable, regional differences include:

- ❖ In the East Midlands, the majority of respondents reported that they had spent up to 1 hour per week on an adult education course (44 per cent);
- ❖ In the North West (38 per cent) between 1-2 hours per week;
- ❖ In the East of England (44 per cent), London (44 per cent) and the South East (44 per cent) between 2-5 hours per week; and
- ❖ In the West Midlands (70 per cent), South West (45 per cent), Yorkshire and the Humber (44 per cent) and the North East (43 per cent) more than 5 hours per week.

Figure 2.9, below, shows the proportions attended courses in terms of hours.

Figure 2.9 Number of hours currently spent per week on an adult education course (n=484)



When asked their reasons for taking part in an adult learning course, respondents provided a range of reasons. An overwhelming proportion of respondents reported that it had been for their own personal development (75 per cent). Table 2.3, below, provides an overview of the range of reasons respondents gave for taking part in the course. Other responses were related to wanting to test out interests in a new skill.

Table 2.3 Reasons for taking part in an adult education course (n=531)

| Reasons for taking part in course | Number of responses | Percentage |
|---|---------------------|------------|
| Own personal development | 408 | 75% |
| Own enjoyment | 163 | 30% |
| Improve my health and wellbeing | 162 | 30% |
| Improve job prospects | 150 | 28% |
| Meet new people | 144 | 27% |
| Improve qualifications generally | 138 | 25% |
| Active contribution to society | 92 | 17% |
| Change in personal or family circumstances | 78 | 14% |
| Meet people wouldn't normally mix with | 76 | 14% |
| Study close to home | 66 | 12% |
| Reduce loneliness and isolation | 57 | 10% |
| Take part in community activities | 56 | 10% |
| Assist in recovery | 44 | 8% |
| Get onto further education course | 42 | 8% |
| Support children's or grandchild's learning | 40 | 7% |
| Get into higher education | 38 | 7% |
| Equip from discrimination | 17 | 3% |
| ESOL, Improve basic skills | 16 | 3% |
| Get into apprenticeship | 6 | 1% |
| Other | 4 | 1% |

Respondents were also asked what had encouraged them to join their course. A significant proportion reported that the course subject had been a source of encouragement (80 per cent), whilst location and transport links were a further important factor (42 per cent) together with the reputation of the college, course or tutor (42 per cent). Table 2.4 provides an overview of the range of sources of encouragement reported by respondents.

Table 2.4 Sources of encouragement for adult learners (n=531)

| Reasons encouraging individual to join course | Number of responses | Percentage |
|--|---------------------|------------|
| Subject | 432 | 80% |
| Location or Transport links | 228 | 42% |
| Reputation of the college, course or tutor | 228 | 42% |
| Affordable or financial support available | 166 | 31% |
| Fitted around family or personal circumstances | 166 | 31% |
| Personal recommendation or connection | 105 | 19% |
| Guidance and support from an organisation | 62 | 11% |
| Other | 9 | 2% |

2.2. Information on courses

As part of the online survey, respondents were asked how they had found out about the current or most recent adult education course they had attended. The majority of respondents reported that they had found out about their current or recent course by searching the web, visiting a particular website or through social media (59 per cent). Individuals all reported that their adult learning provider had also been a source of information (35 per cent). Other sources of information included: the media or hard copy materials (such as leaflets, posters, brochures, etc.)(25 per cent); and a family member, friend or colleague (24 per cent). Table 2.5 below shows other sources of course information.

The majority of respondents reported that they knew where to go if they needed to improve their English, Maths, computing or vocational skills (58 per cent). However, thirty-six per cent of respondents did not think that this was applicable.

Similar proportions of respondents reported that if they had not found their course locally they would travel outside their local area to study (31 per cent) and similarly respondents would not travel (31 per cent). Equally, others were less sure that they would travel to study (34 per cent).

Table 2.5 Sources of adult course information (n=543)

| Source of information | Number of responses | Percentage |
|---|---------------------|------------|
| Internet search, website, social media | 320 | 59% |
| Adult learner provider | 191 | 35% |
| Media or hard copy material | 134 | 25% |
| Family, friend, colleague | 133 | 24% |
| Trade union rep | 31 | 6% |
| Community centre or local residents association | 10 | 2% |
| Health, social or support worker | 8 | 1% |
| Job centre | 7 | 1% |
| National Careers Service | 3 | 1% |
| Other | 3 | 1% |

2.3. Outcomes of attending an adult education course

Respondents were also asked a number of questions on the outcomes of attending an adult learning course. First, respondents were asked about what skills they had improved as a result of their learning. A significant number reported that their subject knowledge had improved (68 per cent). Improvement in softer skills was also reported, as well as improving their learning and study skills. Table 2.6, below, presents the range of skills improved as a result of attending an adult learning course.

Table 2.6 Skills improved as a result of attending an adult education course (n=531)

| Skills | Number of responses | Percentage |
|----------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Subject knowledge | 368 | 68% |
| Confidence | 254 | 47% |
| Creative | 197 | 36% |
| Self esteem | 189 | 35% |
| Learning | 182 | 34% |
| Communication | 164 | 30% |
| Critical thinking | 145 | 27% |
| Language | 120 | 22% |
| Study Skills | 110 | 20% |
| Research | 109 | 20% |
| Problem solving | 108 | 20% |
| Teamwork | 96 | 18% |
| Analytical | 86 | 16% |
| Computing or digital | 84 | 15% |
| Organisational | 76 | 14% |
| Reading | 72 | 13% |
| Numeracy | 55 | 10% |
| Other skills | 50 | 9% |

About a fifth of respondents reported that as a result of their course they had become involved in voluntary activities and a further 10 per cent were planning to do some voluntary work as a result of their studies.

Respondents were also asked to rate whether attending the course had resulted in changes to their behaviour, sense of belonging, motivations, confidence and future direction. Respondents were asked to rate each item on impact after attending the course. It is evident that attending an adult education course has a positive impact on individuals in a number of ways, see Table 2.7 below. The most significant outcome reported was an improvement in:

- ❖ Knowledge and skills for personal goals (84 per cent);
- ❖ Motivations to keep learning (71 per cent);
- ❖ Being able to make well informed decisions about next steps (58 per cent);
- ❖ Confidence in dealing with new situations (51 per cent).

No change was reported in sense of belonging to Britain, interest in helping the local community or being better able to cope with personal issues.

Table 2.7 Course outcomes reported by respondents (n=531)

| As a result of the course... | More than before the course | No change | Less than before the course | Don't know | Not applicable |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|------------|----------------|
| I am interested in helping to make my local area a better place to live | 22% | 53% | 1% | 2% | 23% |
| I feel a sense of belonging to Britain | 16% | 57% | 1% | 2% | 24% |
| I am better able to understand other cultures | 35% | 45% | 1% | 0% | 18% |
| I am more motivated to keep learning | 71% | 26% | 1% | 0% | 2% |
| I am more confident in dealing with new situations | 51% | 37% | 0% | 1% | 11% |
| I am better able to cope with your personal issues | 32% | 48% | 1% | 2% | 17% |
| I have gained the knowledge and skills for your personal goals | 84% | 11% | 1% | 0% | 4% |
| I am more able to make well informed decisions about your next steps | 58% | 31% | 1% | 1% | 10% |

2.4. Barriers to learning for adults

Respondents were also asked about the barriers that they might have experienced making it difficult to start and/or complete an adult education course. Fifty per cent of respondents reported no barriers, whilst others reported a wide range of barriers. Finance was the most significant barrier reported (27 per cent), with low confidence and/or self-esteem reported next (14 per cent). Table 2.8, below, lists further barriers. Respondents also provided additional barriers in the free text. A significant barrier was the timing of courses; for some with a disability they were unable to travel early in the morning, for others the timing did not fit with working full-time or fit with personal circumstances. Another barrier was reported to be courses not running or closing after one term, tutors being unavailable for the course and the lack of subject options.

Table 2.8 Barriers that make it difficult to start and/or complete a course (n=543)

| Barriers | Number of responses | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|------------|
| No barriers | 272 | 50% |
| Financial barriers | 149 | 27% |
| Low confidence or self esteem | 77 | 14% |
| Mental health issues | 49 | 9% |
| Personal health issues | 48 | 9% |
| Caring commitments | 45 | 8% |
| Age | 45 | 8% |
| Put off education at school | 43 | 8% |
| Lack of study skills | 35 | 6% |
| Few opportunities to progress in work | 34 | 6% |
| Lack of transport | 30 | 6% |
| Fitting around work | 18 | 3% |
| Discrimination | 17 | 3% |
| Other | 10 | 2% |
| Time pressure | 7 | 1% |
| Cultural or linguistic barriers | 5 | 1% |
| Lack of housing | 4 | 1% |

Across all regions, financial problems were the most reported barrier to starting or completing an adult education course. Other barriers noted of significance by region, include:

- ❖ The East of England was the only region where lack of transport was a barrier;
- ❖ Lack of housing was only reported as a barrier in the North East, and Yorkshire and the Humber;
- ❖ Cultural or linguistic barriers were only reported as a barrier in London, the West Midlands, and Yorkshire and the Humber; and
- ❖ Time pressures were only reported in the South West, the South East and London.

Table 2.9, below, shows reported barriers by region with colour coding to represent the intensity of reporting; red reports high proportions and green low proportions.

Table 2.9 Barriers that make it difficult to start and/or complete a course by region (n=543)

| Barrier | East Midlands | East of England | London | North East | North West | South East | South West | West Midlands | Yorkshire & The Humber |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|--------|------------|------------|------------|------------|---------------|------------------------|
| No barriers | 19% | 8% | 43% | 31% | 23% | 46% | 18% | 10% | 16% |
| Financial barriers | 12% | 21% | 19% | 8% | 23% | 14% | 25% | 11% | 15% |
| Low confidence or self esteem | 4% | 4% | 7% | 15% | 9% | 6% | 4% | 16% | 12% |
| Mental health issues | 4% | 8% | 3% | 15% | | 3% | 7% | 8% | 11% |
| Personal health issues | 15% | 17% | 5% | 8% | 3% | 1% | | 5% | 8% |
| Caring commitments | 8% | 4% | 5% | 8% | 9% | 3% | 11% | 5% | 5% |
| Age | 8% | 8% | 4% | 8% | | 2% | 0% | 9% | 7% |
| Put off education at school | 4% | 4% | 1% | | 11% | 5% | 7% | 13% | 8% |
| Lack of study skills | 8% | | 2% | 8% | 9% | 3% | 7% | 9% | 5% |
| Few opportunities to progress in work | 4% | 4% | 4% | | 11% | 1% | 7% | 6% | 3% |
| Lack of transport | 8% | 17% | 2% | | | 3% | 7% | 1% | 6% |
| Fitting around work | 4% | | 2% | | | 5% | 4% | 1% | 2% |
| Discrimination | 4% | | 2% | | | 1% | | 4% | 3% |
| Time pressure | | | 1% | | | 3% | 4% | | |
| Cultural or linguistic barriers | | | 1% | | | | | 1% | 1% |
| Lack of housing | | | 1% | | | | | | 1% |
| Other | | 4% | 1% | | 3% | 3% | | | 1% |

2.5. Attracting more adults to learning

Finally, respondents were asked their views on what would attract more adults to take up learning, particularly those who may not think adult learning is for them. Around half of respondents thought that hearing from others who had already done the course would attract others (51 per cent). More government financial investment (40 per cent) and more adult education opportunities were also suggested. Table 2.10, below, provides an overview of suggestions.

Table 2.10 Suggestions to attract more adults to take up learning (n=543)

| Attracting more adults | Number of responses | Percentage |
|--|---------------------|------------|
| Hearing from others already done course | 276 | 51% |
| More government financial investment | 218 | 40% |
| More adult education opportunities | 193 | 36% |
| More promotion of adult education | 132 | 24% |
| More support for carers | 114 | 21% |
| More focus on informal qualifications | 102 | 19% |
| More access in workplace | 89 | 16% |
| More schools opening doors to adults | 87 | 16% |
| More emphasis on social cultural economic outcomes | 84 | 15% |
| More emphasis on health courses | 71 | 13% |
| Improved rural transport | 39 | 7% |
| More student loans | 35 | 6% |
| Increase adult apprenticeships | 34 | 6% |
| More volunteers or mentors recruited locally | 24 | 4% |
| More intergenerational family learning | 13 | 2% |
| Other | 19 | 3% |

A number of suggestions were also around course timings being flexible, promotion of online learning, emphasis on courses being enjoyable, college league tables, universal teaching standards and a reduction in fees.

3. Summary of survey findings

- ❖ The majority of respondents to the survey have regularly engaged with learning (98 per cent) and, over the last three years, have attended between 1 and 5 adult education courses (73 per cent).
- ❖ The majority of individuals engaged on an adult learning course attended for more than 2 hours per week (38 per cent) and others more than 5 hours per week (25 per cent).
- ❖ Respondents report undertaking a variety of adult education courses, including: courses leading to an academic qualification; leisure courses; personal development and well-being courses; and skills development courses. Arts and design craft courses (26 per cent) and Language course (20 per cent) are particularly popular, particularly in the East of England. Across all regions, Teaching and education, Health and social care, and Leisure courses (such as gardening, cooking and wine, Bridge, etc.) are equally popular.
- ❖ When asked their reasons for taking part in an adult learning course, respondents provided a range of reasons, but an overwhelming proportion reported that it had been for their own personal development (75 per cent).
- ❖ A significant proportion of respondents reported that the course subject had been a source of encouragement (80 per cent), whilst location and transport links were a further important factor (42 per cent), together with the reputation of the college, course or tutor (42 per cent).
- ❖ The internet and social media are reported to be the main source of course information (59 per cent), along with adult learning providers (35 per cent). Other sources of information included the media or hard copy materials (such as leaflets, posters, brochures, etc.) (25 per cent) and a family member, friend or colleague (24 per cent).
- ❖ The majority of respondents reported that they knew where to go if they needed to improve their English, Maths, computing or vocational skills (58 per cent).
- ❖ Respondents equally reported that if they had not found their course locally, they would (31 per cent) and would not travel (31 per cent) outside their local area to study.
- ❖ A significant number of respondents reported that their subject knowledge had improved (68 per cent) as result of attending an adult education course. Improvement in softer skills were also reported.
- ❖ About a fifth of respondents reported that as a result of their course they had become involved in voluntary activities and a further 10 per cent were planning to do some voluntary work.
- ❖ It is evident that attending a course has a positive impact on improving: knowledge and skills for personal goals (84 per cent); motivations to keep learning (71 per cent); being able to make well informed decisions about next steps (58 per cent); and confidence in dealing with new situations (51 per cent). No change was reported in sense of belonging to Britain, interest in helping local community or being better able to cope with personal issues.
- ❖ Fifty per cent of respondents reported experiencing no barriers making it difficult to start and/or complete an adult education course. Others, however, reported a wide

range of barriers. Across all regions, finance was the most significant barrier reported (27 per cent), with low confidence and/or self-esteem reported next (14 per cent). Lack of housing only reported as a barrier in the North East, and Yorkshire and the Humber. The East of England was the only region where lack of transport was a barrier.

- ❖ Around half of respondents thought that hearing from others who had already done the course would attract others to take up learning (51 per cent). More government financial investment (40 per cent) and more adult education opportunities were also suggested.