
PATHWAYS IN ADULT LEARNING SURVEY (PALS) 2003

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The Pathways in Adult Learning Survey (PALS) 2003 is a follow up sample survey of respondents to the National Adult Learning Survey (NALS) 2001. The survey was conducted between February and May 2003. It achieved a 59% response rate and included 1,815 interviews among a randomly selected sub-sample of NALS 2001 respondents. The survey asked about a variety of learning experiences in the previous two years since the respondent was last interviewed.

Key findings

- 84% of those who were learning at NALS did some further learning in the two years following NALS (so only 16% stopped learning).
- By contrast, only 31% of those who were not learning at NALS did some learning in the two years following NALS (so 69% continued not to learn).
- 78% of respondents who did vocational learning in NALS did more vocational learning in the following two years. However, only 26% of those who did non-vocational learning only at NALS went on to do vocational learning.
- 87% of people who were studying for qualifications in PALS had been learners in NALS. So nearly everyone studying for qualifications had done some form of prior learning over the previous three-five years.
- Regression analysis found that learners who continued to learn were more likely: to have left full time education aged 19+, to be economically active, and to be in managerial or professional occupations. Non-learners who started to learn were more likely to be: educated at level 3 or above, self employed or unemployed, under 40 and white.
- About 15% of vocational learners said that their learning had led to a major change in their work, such as a new job, a move to a different type of work, or setting up a new business.
- Most learners (90%) who received Information, advice and/or guidance (IAG) at NALS continued to learn at PALS, whereas only 75% of those who didn't receive IAG at NALS continued to learn.
- A high proportion (71%) of non-learners who had used ICT at NALS went on to become learners, compared to only 21% of non-learners who didn't use ICT.
- Over 60% of respondents who said they were likely to learn in the next two to three years said they would consider attending either a further education college or adult education institute. Those expecting to do non-vocational learning were slightly more likely to favour the latter.

Introduction

In 2002, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) commissioned the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) to carry out the Pathways in Adult Learning Survey (PALS) 2003 to track individual learning paths over time. It is a longitudinal survey that follows up a sample of respondents to the National Adult Learning Survey (NALS) 2001. The survey was conducted between February and May 2003. It achieved a 59% response rate and included 1,815 interviews among a randomly selected sub-sample of NALS 2001 respondents.

The survey asked about a variety of learning experiences in the previous two years since the respondent was last interviewed. In keeping with the definitions used at NALS 2001, learning activities were classified as either taught learning or as self-directed learning; and further subdivided into vocational and non-vocational learning.

Learning over time

Four key learning groups were used for analysis throughout the report based on whether the respondent's learning status changed between NALS and PALS. These four groups were: *Long-term learners* who had done some learning at both NALS 2001 and PALS 2003 (58% of the PALS sample); *Lapsed learners* who had done some learning at NALS 2001 but had stopped learning at PALS 2003 (11%); *New learners* who had not done any learning at NALS 2001 but had started learning at PALS 2003 (10%); and *Non-learners* who had not done any learning at either survey (21%).

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Motivation for learning

- The three main vocational motivations for engaging in taught learning were: to gain new skills for a current job (55%), for career development (42%), and to gain more satisfaction out of work (34%).

- The main economic motivations for learning included: to change to a different type of work (13%); to get a new job (15%); to get a pay rise (8%); and to get a promotion (6%).
- Employers can play a significant role in helping their employees to learn; half of those respondents doing non-compulsory vocational taught learning at PALS said that their employer had suggested that they do the learning.
- Three-quarters of these people said their employer had encouraged them to do the learning either a great deal (40%) or a fair amount (35%).
- The majority (61%) also said that they did the learning in their employer's time, while 17% said they did the course entirely in their own time.

The survey investigated whether previous recent learning experiences influenced whether respondents continued to learn or whether they lapsed. Overall, long term learners tended to report more benefits from their learning at NALS than lapsed learners, although the differences were not always statistically significant.

Perhaps surprisingly, lapsed learners didn't usually have negative experiences with their previous learning; only 20% of them reported at least one problem with their previous taught learning at NALS (compared to 32% of long term learners). And only 13% of lapsed learners said they learnt little or nothing from their course, compared to 16% of long-term learners.

Attitudes of non-learners

- All respondents were asked to report barriers to learning in NALS and these were tracked against their subsequent learning status in PALS. Practical barriers (e.g. lack of time due to work or family commitments) seemed to be more easy to overcome than motivational barriers to learning (e.g. feeling too old to learn).
- Although many non-learners were quite negative about learning, just over half of PALS non-learners (53%) who were working or planning to work did identify at least one way that vocational learning might benefit them. The most commonly cited benefits were: to enable them to get a new job (26%), or to change to a different type of work (25%).

- Approximately a third (34%) of non-learners who had wanted to learn expressed a wish to develop their computer, IT or word processing skills.
- Fifteen per cent of those who had not wanted to learn also said that they would like to develop their computing skills.
- Only 13% of non-learners in paid work said their employer had ever offered them the opportunity to undertake learning or training. Lack of employer encouragement for learning was reported most frequently by those in routine and manual occupations.

The work-related impact of learning

- The most commonly reported job-related benefits of taught learning were increased skills (69%) and increased ability to do their job (60%).
- About 15% of vocational learners said that their learning had led to a major change in their work such as a new job, a move to a different type of work, or setting up a new business.
- Over three-quarters of these respondents benefited as a result of the change. The most common benefits were: greater enjoyment of their work (60%) and increased pay (49%).
- Overall, about 5% of learners said that their pay increased as a direct result of their learning. Four-fifths of this group (81%) said that their pay increased by less than £100 per week (for taught and self-directed learning).
- Non-vocational learning can also have job-related benefits as is evidenced by the fact that 41% of PALS taught learners whose first course was non-vocational said it had resulted in a work-related benefit.
- All taught learners and 82% of self-directed learners mentioned at least one skill that they had developed as a result of their learning.
- The most commonly reported skills developed through taught learning included: job-specific skills (41%), problem-solving skills (36%), computing skills (35%), planning (31%) and team-working (29%).

The impact of learning initiatives and of information, advice and guidance

- A much higher proportion of those who stopped learning between the two surveys had *not* used

IAG at NALS (50% of lapsed learners had not used IAG at NALS compared to 28% of long-term learners).

- New learners were more likely than long-term learners to have received information or advice from friends, relatives, colleagues (37% of new learners compared to 24% of long-term learners), and from the media (13% compared to 7%). They were less likely to have received IAG from their employer (32% compared to 44%) and from the Internet (2% compared to 9%).
- Over two-thirds (68%) of PALS respondents had heard of **learnirect**, but only 6% had actually used the service. Of these, 32% had phoned the helpline and 28% had visited the website.
- Just under a quarter (23%) had heard of UK Online Centres, but just 2% said they had used one. Over half (52%) of those who were aware of UK Online Centres had heard about them through TV, radio, newspapers or magazines.
- Just over a fifth (22%) of respondents had heard of Adult Learners Week, 7% had heard of Learning at Work Day and 4% had heard of Family Learning Weekend.

Use of ICT

- Between NALS 2001 and PALS 2003, there were significant increases in the overall proportions of respondents saying they were current computer users (up from 55% at NALS 2001 to 63% at PALS) and current Internet users (up from 44% to 56%).
- At both NALS and PALS, a strong association was found between learning and use of ICT. For example, 77% of long-term learners were computer users at NALS compared to only 8% of non-learners.
- There was a similar pattern for Internet use: 63% of long-term learners were Internet users at NALS compared to only 4% of non-learners
- Twenty-nine per cent of PALS taught learners reported that their first course since NALS had been delivered by e-learning (i.e. over the Internet or by CD-rom).
- Respondents were generally positive about e-learning and felt that it enabled them to work at their own pace (62%), at a time that suited them best (55%), and it made the course more interesting (35%) or enjoyable (33%). A minority of respondents reported disadvantages

including: they wanted more contact with a teacher (12%) or with other students (3%).

Future learning

- NALS respondents who remained stable in their learning status were most accurate in predicting their future learning (88% of long-term learners correctly said that they would do future learning, and 81% of non-learners correctly predicted that they would not do so).
- Over 60% of respondents who said they were likely to learn in the next two to three years said they would consider attending either a further education college or adult education institute. Those expecting to do non-vocational learning were slightly more likely to favour the latter.

Most non-learners cited a number of obstacles to learning. They were asked whether specific actions to remove these barriers would make it likely that they would learn.

- Four-fifths (80%) of those who cited the cost of courses as an obstacle to learning, said that they would be likely to do some learning if their course fees were paid in full.
- Two-thirds (65%) of those who said they lacked local knowledge about courses said they would be likely to learn if provided with information and guidance.
- Nearly half (47%) of those who said a health problem or disability posed an obstacle to learning said they would be likely to learn if given help to overcome this.
- Almost half (48%) of those who saw transport as an obstacle to learning said they would be likely to learn if transport was provided door to door and nearly 40% said they would probably learn if it was easier to use public transport.

Additional information

Copies of the full report (RR559) - priced £4.95 - are available by writing to DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ.

Cheques should be made payable to "DfES Priced Publications".

Copies of this Research Brief (RB559) are available free of charge from the above address (tel: 0845 60 222 60). Research Briefs and Research Reports can also be accessed at www.dfes.gov.uk/research/

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