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Learners and Apprentices Survey 2018

Research report

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Executive Summary

Introduction and background

This report presents the findings from a survey of learners and apprentices carried out by Kantar Public on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE). The survey comprised telephone and online surveys with Further Education (FE) learners and apprentices aged 19 and over, sampled from the Individualised Learner Record (ILR). Herein, the term FE learner is used to describe all in-scope learners who were not apprentices. The sample included those who were currently completing their course or apprenticeship, had recently completed or had failed to complete - excluding those who were doing English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses, Community Learning, A-levels or Higher Education courses in a FE setting.

The research aimed to provide a full and detailed picture of learners' and apprentices' journeys: to provide a detailed understanding of the background of FE learners and apprentices; to capture information from learners and apprentices on their experiences and perceptions, and; to obtain consent from respondents to match their responses to the Longitudinal Educational Outcome (LEO) dataset.

An initial online phase of fieldwork started on 8 January 2018. Telephone fieldwork took place between 17 January and 29 April 2018. The online survey remained open for the whole fieldwork for those who preferred to take part online. In total 12,872 interviews were conducted (2,287 online and 10,585 telephone). The data have been weighted by learner / apprentice and course / apprenticeship characteristics to correct for differences in probability of selection and differential non-response.

Profile of FE learners and apprentices

The profile of apprentices and particularly FE learners highlights the vast diversity of the learners the FE sector serves. While half of apprentices are young people (19-24 years), more broadly, the sector serves large numbers of adults in their 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s. FE learners often have complex lives which may create additional pressures and challenges while learning. Many have to juggle family commitments alongside learning (around half of all apprentices and FE learners have children, typically of school age). FE learners are also more likely to have a long-term disability or illness than the general population.

There is a relatively high proportion of BAME learners in the FE sector (excluding apprentices, who reflect the ethnic profile within the England).¹ In particular, the proportion of black FE learners is around double the population average. Further to this, a large proportion of FE learners did not grow up in the UK (14% of apprentices and 24% of FE learners were living elsewhere at age 14). Consistent with this, 13 per cent of apprentices and 22 per cent of FE learners say they speak a language other than English as their main language.

Both apprentices and FE learners tend to live in relatively deprived areas (as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation – IMD) and are often on low incomes. Consistent with this, more than a quarter (27%) of FE learners were claiming out-of-work benefits before they started their course.

Based on the occupation of the chief income earner when learners were aged 14, both apprentices and FE learners tend to come from relatively low socio-economic backgrounds. Their parents were less likely to be in higher-level and professional occupations and more likely to be in semi-routine and routine occupations when they were growing up.

Routes into learning

Routes into learning varied greatly between apprentices and FE learners. Typically, apprentices were already working for their apprenticeship employer or were younger and had started their apprenticeship straight after full-time education. Reflecting the broader age profile and lower socio-economic profile of FE learners, their routes into learning were more varied. While half (51%) were working prior to learning, FE learners were twice as likely as apprentices to be unemployed (20% compared with 10%) and nearly five times as likely to be looking after children or family before starting their course (nine per cent compared with two per cent). Around six in ten apprentices (62%) already worked for their apprenticeship employer before starting their apprenticeship, meaning only around a third of apprenticeships covered by the survey were filled by external applicants. This is broadly consistent with the 2017 Apprenticeship Evaluation Survey of Learners, which estimated that 42% of Level 2 and 3 apprentices were already working for their apprenticeship employer, with a further 18% recruited as an apprentice but not starting their training straight away. Further to this, one of the most common reasons

¹ Survey data showed 14% of apprentices were BAME. ONS data estimates BAME population in England to be c. 14% as of 2015:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/censustransformationprogramme/administrativedatacensusproject/administrativedatacensusresearchoutputs/populationcharacteristics/researchoutputsethnicityestimatesfromsurveyandadministrativedata2015>

given for starting an apprenticeship was because their employer offered it to them or had made it a requirement of their job (cited as the main reason by 18% of apprentices).

The most common reason given for starting learning was to 'improve skills or knowledge'. This was consistent across both FE learners (33%) and apprentices (30%). FE learners and apprentices were slightly less likely to say it was explicitly to find work/get a better job (25%, FE learners and 21%, apprentices) or as a 'stepping stone' into further training (16%, FE learners and 17% apprentices).

Outcomes, intentions and perceptions

Learner outcomes at the time of interview tended to be positive among those who completed their learning. The proportion of apprentices in full-time employment at the time of interview was 20 percentage points higher compared with immediately before starting their apprenticeship. Most often this was associated with apprentices moving from study into employment. Increases in employment among FE learners were more modest – with a six percentage point increase in the proportions who were employed both full- and part-time. Most often this was associated with learners who were unemployed and looking for work before they started learning.

Three-quarters (74%) of apprentices who had *never* worked before completing their apprenticeship had moved into and remained in paid work at the time of interview. Nearly a quarter (23%) of FE learners who had *never* worked before completing their learning had moved into and remained in paid work at the time of interview.

FE learners and particularly apprentices were generally positive about the effect learning had on their earning potential and their chances of moving on to higher levels of training. Nearly three-quarters (71%) of apprentices who completed or were still working towards an apprenticeship agreed their chances of earning a higher wage in future had increased (compared with 51% of FE learners). Eight in ten apprentices (80%) who completed or were still working towards an apprenticeship agreed their chances of going on to higher levels of training had increased (compared with 66% of FE learners).

Funding and financial challenges

Around a quarter (24%) of FE learners were self-funded. The majority of these learners paid their course fees directly from their own money (62%), but one in five (21%) took

advanced learner loans.² Advanced learner loans were mainly used by Level 3+ learners. There was no substantive link between whether learners were self-funded and whether they completed their learning (non-completion rates were similar for funded and self-funded learners).

Two in ten self-funded FE learners (21%) said it was difficult to meet the cost of the fees – the majority said it was either easy or neither easy nor difficult. Those on Level 2 and Level 3 courses were more likely to find it difficult to meet the cost of the course fees than those on either lower or higher-level courses.

Only a minority of FE learners (18%) and apprentices (12%) reported having difficulty meeting additional costs as a result of learning (typically these were additional travel costs). Difficulties with additional costs were most likely to be felt by higher-level learners (Level 3+) and those living in London.

Non-completion

The survey was not designed to measure non-completion rates but provides insight into the types of learner and types of learning that are most at risk of non-completion. Non-completion was already known to be a significant issue in FE (particularly for apprenticeships). Non-completion was more prevalent among those on lower levels of learning and among those who held lower levels of qualification prior to starting their learning. This was largely associated with Entry Level FE learners (25% were yet to complete, compared with 16% of Level 1+ FE learners) and Level 2 apprentices (38% were yet to complete the training, compared with 28% of Level 3+ apprentices).

FE learners and apprentices with disabilities were more likely to have withdrawn from their learning (10% of FE learners and 13% of apprentices with disabilities had withdrawn from their learning compared with 8% and 10% of those with no disability). In addition, FE learners living in deprived areas (as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation – IMD) and those on lower incomes were more likely to have withdrawn. One in ten FE learners living in the most deprived IMD quintile (10%) had withdrawn from their learning, compared with 5% of those living in the least deprived IMD quintile.

² Advanced learner loans are available for some adult learners to help manage the costs of FE and training in England. They cover tuition fees for a wide range of Level 3 to Level 6 courses.

<https://www.gov.uk/advanced-learner-loan>

FE learners and (to a lesser extent) apprentices were likely to say they did not complete because of personal or domestic challenges (cited by 47% and 28% who did not complete their FE learning or apprenticeship).

There was also evidence that some FE learners and apprentices left courses because of issues with the learning. Three in ten FE learner and apprenticeship non-completers (31% and 29%) said they left because of issues with the course or apprenticeship. More positively, around one in six FE non-completers (15%) indicated that they left learning because they found work or moved to a new job (including apprenticeships). A similar proportion of apprentice non-completers (14%) indicated that they left for other employment or training.

1. Introduction

This report draws together the findings from of a survey of 12,872 learners and apprentices carried out by Kantar Public on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE).

Background

The UK economy faces many critical challenges.³ advances in technology and the changing nature of work suggest that an estimated 10-35% of UK jobs are at high risk of replacement in the next 20 years; an ageing population is increasing the need for adults to reskill throughout their extended working lives; the UK economy has an entrenched productivity gap relative to other advanced economies; and social mobility is low by international standards and does not appear to be improving.⁴

As outlined in the government's recent Industrial Strategy,⁵ if we are to successfully address these issues, improving both productivity and social mobility, then adults will need to upskill and retrain throughout their working lives. In this context, Further Education (FE) and apprenticeships specifically, are strategically important. FE has a central role in developing and maintaining an internationally competitive skills base.

There is strong evidence of the economic value of gaining formal qualifications as an adult, with no apparent disadvantage if these are obtained after the age of 25.⁶ Participation in learning as an adult can also result in a range of wider benefits, with research demonstrating a positive impact on health and well-being, as well as upon our families and communities.⁷ Increasing and widening access to learning is crucial to our future prosperity, fairness and inclusion as a nation.

In this context, initiatives like the National Retraining Service (NRS) are an increasingly important part of government policy to support and up-skill those who are already in work and to retrain those who are out of the workplace. The government's Careers Strategy, in

³ *Foresight Review into the Future of Skills and Lifelong Learning*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/future-of-skills-and-lifelong-learning>

⁴ *7 key truths about social mobility, the interim report of the APPG on social mobility*

<https://www.raeng.org.uk/publications/other/7-key-truths-about-social-mobility>

⁵ *Industrial Strategy White Paper*

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664563/industrial-strategy-white-paper-web-ready-version.pdf

⁶ *Foresight Review into the Future of Skills and Lifelong Learning*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/future-of-skills-and-lifelong-learning>

⁷ *Healthy, Wealthy and Wise: The impact of adult learning across the UK*

<https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/LW-EU-Report-Nov-2017-V8-1.pdf>

which the NRS sits, was published in December 2017.⁸ The Strategy sets out an ambition to develop and harness the nation's skills in order to boost productivity, increase social mobility and to foster a fairer society. At the heart of this, there must be a thriving careers system. Anne Milton, announcing the strategy in 2017, highlighted the four pillars of the Careers Strategy:

- Having a high-quality careers programme in every college and school in England
- Ensuring employers are integral to the approach
- Tailored support for those who need it
- Making full use of existing sources of information about jobs and careers

The NRS is being set up to support to up-skill people in work and retrain those out of work. This is a formal partnership between government, CBI and TUC commits additional for training (initially in digital and construction) to help employees develop and secure more highly skilled, better paid jobs. Ultimately, it is hoped the Service will help to increase social mobility, support business growth and improve productivity in the UK.

With all of these policies in mind, FE and apprenticeships are key to DfE's current strategic priority to ensure that all 19-year olds are able to access high-quality work or study options. In the Department's single departmental plan,⁹ a pledge to 'transform professional and technical education' is made to ensure it is a high-quality alternative to academic post-16 study (and is seen as such by learners). To this end, FE is undergoing a significant reform, aiming to simplify qualifications, improve standards and bring greater parity between FE and academia. The Post-16 Skills Plan, expresses an ambition that learners are presented with two choices: academic or technical (covering college-based and employment based – apprenticeship – education). The centrepiece of this reform will be the introduction of T-levels in 2019, with 20,000 courses replaced with 15 high-quality routes.

As part of this wider strategy, the Government has pledged to enable three million apprenticeship starts by 2020 and to require schools to promote apprenticeships on a par with university education, giving apprenticeships the same legal status as degrees. The Government's 2013 implementation plan, informed by the Richard Review into the Future

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664319/Careers_strategy.pdf

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-for-education-single-departmental-plan/may-2018-department-for-education-single-departmental-plan>

of Apprenticeships,¹⁰ focused on a new approach. This was based on standards designed by employers to meet their needs, those of the sector and the wider economy, while also introducing vigorous new criteria that apprentices need to meet to ensure that the apprenticeship has value to them as they progress through their career. The introduction of a new apprenticeship levy in April 2017 is a key policy to drive growth in apprentice numbers and, with it, the productivity of the UK economy. The levy places a greater emphasis on employer ownership, aiming to increase employer interest in apprenticeships and at the same time secure new funds to further support and build apprenticeships as a high-quality training route for the long term. Following the introduction of the apprenticeship levy, the Government published the English Apprenticeship 2020 vision which sets out plans for apprenticeships over the next five years.¹¹ This includes, of particular relevance to this study, supporting routes to apprenticeships and work. As a part of this, the Government pledged that ‘people from all backgrounds will get the preparation they need to be high-quality candidates for apprenticeships’.

Social mobility has been highlighted as a key priority for DfE. Apprenticeships and FE more broadly have been identified as potential key contributors to social mobility, with the ability to upskill the population and improve levels of basic and intermediate skills for disadvantaged groups. A significant number of adults enrol in FE courses every year. In the first two quarters of the 2017/18 academic year (August 2017 to January 2018) 677,300 learners participated in an apprenticeship and 1,495,300 participated in government-funded adult further education.¹² However, sector data indicates there are very high non-completion rates for apprentices and FE learners. Approximately 28 per cent of apprentices and 13 per cent of other learners¹³ do not complete their learning, and there is limited research and evidence to suggest why. Interventions may be necessary to ensure that disadvantaged people get into learning and to help ensure that they successfully complete their course, but there remains a relative lack of evidence upon which effective interventions could be based. Research was needed to investigate the learning journey of apprentices and FE learners and to better understand reasons for, and risk-factors behind, non-completion.

To address this knowledge gap, DfE commissioned Kantar Public to carry out one of the largest and most comprehensive studies of learners and apprentices to date. This survey was designed to capture information from FE learners and apprentices about their routes

¹⁰

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/253073/bis-13-1175-future-of-apprenticeships-in-england-implementation-plan.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeships-in-england-vision-for-2020>

¹² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693581/SFR23_2018_Further_Education_and_Skills_SFR_main_text.pdf

¹³ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/586015/SFR07_2017.pdf

into learning, their experiences, barriers to completion and post-course outcomes. The mainstage fieldwork for this survey took place from 8 January 2018 to 29 April 2018 with data collected from 12,872 FE learners and apprentices.

Aims and Objectives

This research aimed to provide a full and detailed picture of learners' and apprentices' journeys which can be broken down into key areas; i) the learners' current and past socio-economic status, ii) their present perceptions, experiences and barriers to learning and iii) their future outcomes. These three key aims are detailed further below.

- To provide a detailed understanding of the background of FE learners and apprentices, including their demographic and socio-economic characteristics, their working status pre- and post-learning, their income and details of their family background including the socio-economic status and educational attainment of their parents.
- To capture information from learners and apprentices about their experiences and perceptions. The focus was on their routes into learning, main reasons for starting, perceptions and experiences of the course, in particular any barriers or challenges they faced and their outcomes. A key objective was to understand how these experiences and perceptions varied by different groups, and for those from different socio-economic backgrounds. The research aimed to identify whether any groups were less likely to complete their apprenticeship or FE course, and to understand what barriers they faced, so these can be a key focus for intervention.
- To obtain consent from respondents for their responses to be matched to the Longitudinal Educational Outcome (LEO) dataset. This will allow DfE to carry out future analysis of learner outcomes, for example; to discover if completion of the course does increase social mobility, whether learners achieve their long-term objectives, and to gain a picture of the long-term outcomes for learners who do not complete their learning.

Methodology

The Learners and Apprentices Survey is a nationally representative telephone survey of FE learners and apprentices aged 19 to 64, sampled from the Individualised Learner Record (ILR). The survey included learners who were currently completing their course, had recently completed or had failed to complete.

Sampling

The sample frame for this study was the Individualised Learner Record (ILR). This is the most comprehensive list of all FE learners in England and is updated monthly. The ILR also contains additional demographic information about learners and course level data (including course details and completion status) as well as contact details. The in-scope population for the survey was all learners and apprentices aged 19 - 64 excluding those who were doing English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses, Community Learning, A-levels or Higher Education courses in a FE setting.

A disproportionate stratified random sample of learners was selected from the target population within the ILR. Prior to selecting a sample of learners, the sample frame was stratified using a combination of learner and course characteristics as described in table 1b. These strata represent important subgroups for the survey that either required boosting and/or were known be more or less likely than average to respond (based on the pilot).

Table 1a - Stratification variables and categories

Stratification Variable	Categories
Course Type	Apprenticeships FE courses
Tier 1 Subject Areas	Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies Construction, Planning and the Built Environment Information and Communication Technology All other subjects
Course completion	Complete Withdrawn (non-complete) Incomplete (unknown)
Ethnicity	White Non-White
Health status	Limiting Long term illness/disability Other

Questionnaire development

The questionnaire was developed jointly by Kantar Public and DfE. The process included several iterations of testing and piloting including:

- An initial round of cognitive interviewing consisting of 17 in-depth telephone interviews.
- A large-scale pilot comprising 369 online and telephone interviews.

Piloting aimed to identify potential issues with the survey content and structure, and also any potential issues with consent rates for data linkage or non-response bias.

Fieldwork

A mixed mode approach was utilised. Learners and apprentices were initially invited by letter and email.¹⁴ The letter explained the purpose of the survey and included a link to the online version of the survey. The main phase of computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) started two weeks after the initial invite. Targeted email and text reminders were used throughout fieldwork to boost response. An initial online phase of fieldwork started on 8 January 2018. Telephone fieldwork took place between 17 January and 29 April 2018. The online survey remained open for the whole fieldwork for those who preferred to take part online. In total 12,872 interviews were conducted (2,287 online and 10,585 telephone).

Response rates

The 12,872 achieved interviews represents a 32% response rate, from an issued sample of 56,386 (once deadwood and ineligible cases are taken into account). A breakdown of the response rates (both as a proportion of all issued cases and as a proportion of in-scope cases) is provided in Table 1b.

Weighting

All findings in this report have been weighted to ensure that they are representative of all FE learners and apprentices. The weights used comprised a design weight and a non-response weight. The design weight accounted for respondents' differential probabilities of being selected into the sample, and the non-response weight accounted for the probabilities of responding to the survey once sampled. See technical report for more details.

¹⁴ Emails were only sent where an email address was available on the ILR and the learner had given permission for email contact.

Table 1b - Summary of survey response rates

	N	% of selected cases	% of in-scope cases
Total selected sample	54,328	-	-
Deadwood [†]	12,657	23%	-
Ineligible	1,442	3%	-
Incapable of interview	783	1%	-
<i>Total out of scope</i>	<i>14,882</i>	<i>27%</i>	<i>-</i>
<i>Total in scope</i>	<i>39,446</i>	<i>68%</i>	<i>100%</i>
Refusals	5,050	9%	13%
Opt out	235	*	1%
No contact made - no interview	16,935	31%	43%
Initial contact made - no interview	4,354	8%	11%
Total completes (telephone)	10,584	19%	27%
Total completes (online)	2,288	4%	6%
TOTAL INTERVIEWS	12,872	24%	33%

[†] Includes invalid and incorrect numbers and cases where the respondent had died.

Analysis and Reporting

The results for apprentices and FE learners are described separately throughout this report due to differences in these populations; most importantly differences in the background, experiences and post-course outcomes for these two groups. Throughout, the term FE learner is used to describe all in-scope learners who were not apprentices.

Additional subgroup analysis has been carried out on other factors including: completion status, course level, course length, course subject, gender, age, region, ethnicity, disability, Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and whether English was the learner's first language. Differences between subgroups are reported only when they are both statistically significant and relevant to the survey objectives. Additional analytical conventions include:

- Statistical significance judged at the 95% confidence interval.

- Results with a base size of fewer than 100 respondents are not generally included. Where they are, they should be interpreted with caution - the finding should be viewed as only indicative.
- Percentages for single-response questions may not always add up to exactly 100% because of rounding.
- Where respondents have given multiple responses to a question, the sum of the individual responses may be greater than 100%.

Longer term analytical potential

One of the key aims of this research was to gain consent from learners and apprentices for their data to be matched to the Longitudinal Educational Outcome (LEO) dataset.¹⁵ This will allow future exploration of outcomes for learners such as progression to further learning, employment and future income.

In total, 75 per cent of respondents agreed to full linkage to LEO - 9,635 learners and apprentices. Those that did not agree to full data linkage were asked if their data could be linked to individual agencies. The total consent rate for each of the individual agencies is shown in table 1c.

Table 1c - Consent to link data from individual agencies

Agency	Percentage	Total number of respondents
National Pupil Database (NPD)	80%	10,257
Individual Learner Record (ILR)	80%	10,267
HMRC	77%	9,872
DWP	77%	9,932
UCAS	78%	10,087
Student Loans Company Records	77%	9,905
HESA	79%	10,112

Base: all respondents (12,872)

¹⁵ The LEO dataset includes (amongst others) information from the Department for Education (DfE), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). This can be used to provide additional information about learners, including their demographic characteristics, education, institutions attended, courses taken and qualifications achieved, employment, income and benefits claimed.

These high rates of consent for data linkage (ranging from 77% - 80% for individual agencies) provide enormous potential for detailed future analysis of learners' long-term outcomes.

Structure of report

The main body of the report is divided into five chapters:

- A **profile of FE learners and apprentices**, looking at key demographic and socio-economic data.
- The various **routes into learning**, exploring what learners were doing in the months before their course started and their **motivations for learning**.
- The **intentions, perceptions and post-learning outcomes of learners**, with a focus on those moving into employment or further learning after their course.
- **How learners fund their learning and financial challenges to learning**.
- **Rates of non-completion and reasons for not completing**.

2. Profile of apprentices and FE learners

Summary

- The profile of FE learners and apprentices highlights the great diversity of the learners the FE sector serves. While half of apprentices are young people (19-24 years), more broadly, the sector serves a large number of adults in their 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s.
- There is a relatively high proportion of BAME learners in the FE sector (excluding apprentices, who reflect the ethnic profile within the England). In particular, the proportion of black FE learners is around three times the population average.
- Both FE learners and apprentices tend to live in relatively deprived areas (as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation – IMD) and are often on low incomes at the point they choose to study. Consistent with this, more than a quarter (27%) of FE learners were claiming out-of-work benefits before starting their course.
- FE learners often have complex lives which may create additional pressures and challenges while learning. Many have to juggle family commitments alongside learning (around half of all apprentices and other learners have children, typically of school age) and FE learners are more likely to have a long-term disability or illness than the general population.
- A large proportion of FE learners and apprentices did not grow up in the UK (14% of apprentices and 24% of FE learners) and, consistent with this, 22 per cent of FE learners and 13 per cent of apprentices spoke a language other than English as their main language.
- Based on the occupation of the chief income earner when learners were aged 14, FE learners and apprentices tend to come from relatively low socio-economic backgrounds. Their parents were less likely to be in higher-level and professional occupations and more likely to be in semi-routine and routine occupations when the learner was growing up.

This chapter presents a detailed picture of FE learners' and apprentices' profiles and backgrounds. Throughout, comparisons are made between the two different learner types to demonstrate how markedly the populations differ from one another.

Comparisons are also made with the wider population, using census and Labour Force Survey data, to show how FE learners and apprentices differ from the general public.

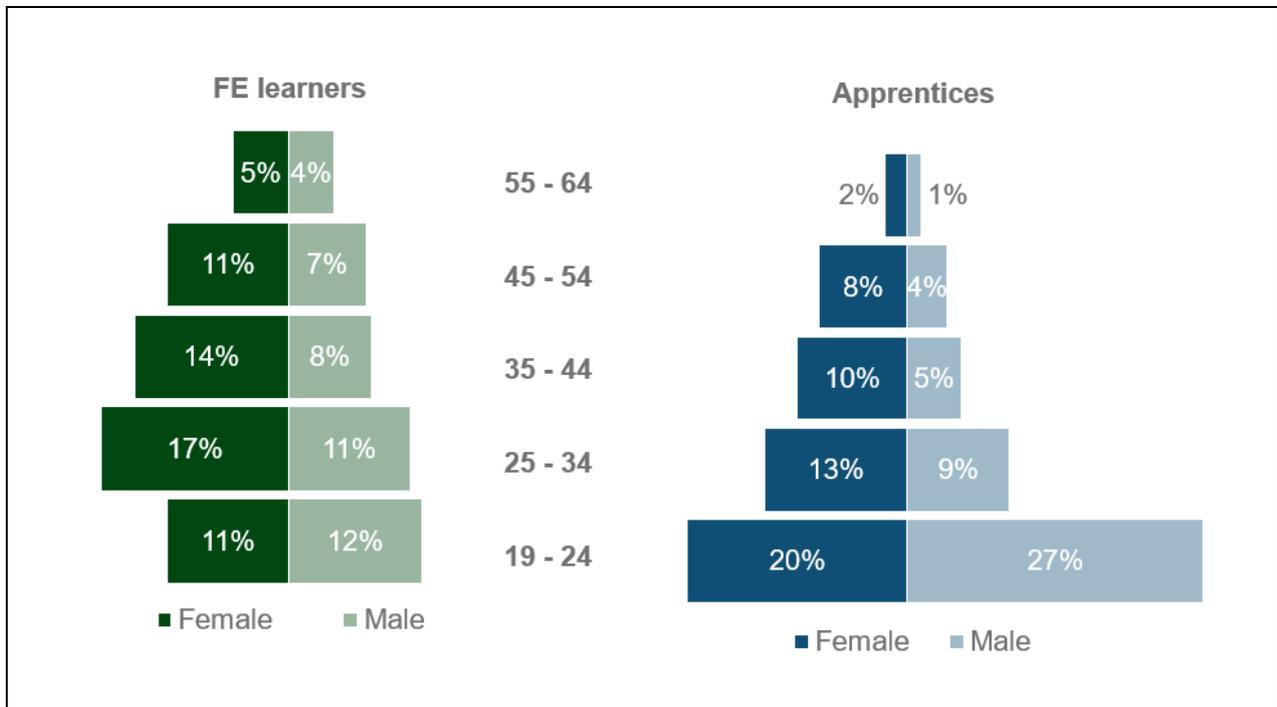
Age and gender

As shown in Figure 1, the survey confirms the very broad demographic that the FE sector serves. The gender and, more markedly, age profiles of FE learners and apprentices were substantially different. Apprentices tended to be much younger than FE learners (see Figure 1). Close to half (47%) of all apprentices were aged 19-24, compared with only a quarter (23%) of FE learners. FE learners came from a much broader demographic, with many undertaking learning well into their 50s and 60s. That said, while apprenticeships are often thought of as a route primarily for young people, more than half of apprentices were aged 25 or older and around three in ten were 35 or older.

There was also a small but significant difference in the gender profile of FE learners and apprentices. Six in ten (58%) FE learners were female, compared with 54% of apprentices.

When looking at the age and gender profiles together, it is clear that apprenticeships are currently providing a route into employment for many young men. More than a quarter of all apprentices (27%) were men aged 19-24.

Figure 1 – Age and gender profile of apprentices and FE learners



Base: All FE learners (5,894), all apprentices (6,978)

Disabilities and health problems

Overall, 17 per cent of all FE learners and apprentices reported having a physical or mental health condition or illness lasting, or expected to last, 12 months or more. This dropped to 15% among the youngest FE learners and apprentices (aged 19-24). These figures are lower than among the general population in England, where three in ten adults aged 19-64 (30%) and 21 per cent of those aged 19-24 have a disability or long-term illness.¹⁶

FE learners were more likely than apprentices to report having a disability (20% of FE learners, compared with 10% of apprentices). This is consistent with the older age profile of FE learners and suggests that the disability profile of FE learners is somewhat closer to that of the general population in England.

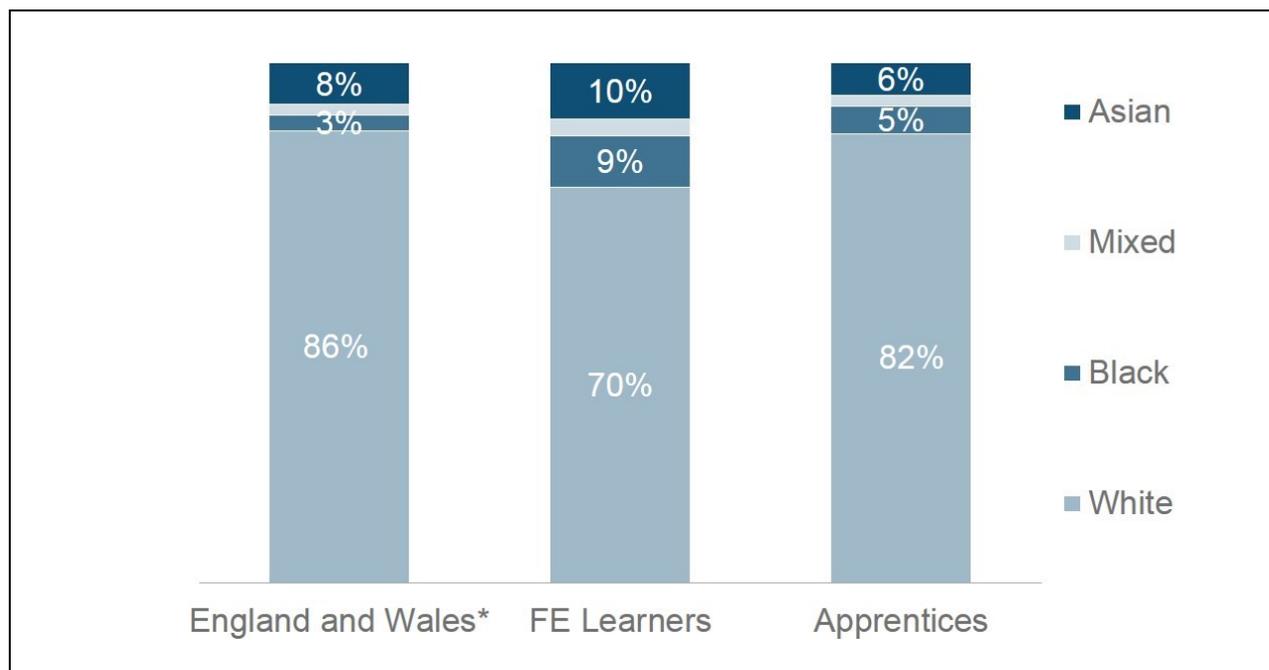
Of those who said they had a disability or illness, two-thirds (68%) said it reduced their ability to carry out day-to-day tasks 'a lot' or 'a little'. FE learners were much more likely than apprentices to say that this impacted their day-to-day activities 'a lot' (26% of FE learners with a disability said they were affected 'a lot', compared with 12% of apprentices with a disability).

Ethnicity

The ethnic profile of apprentices was similar to that of the general population of adults in England and Wales (see Figure 2) – 14 per cent came from a Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) group compared with 14 per cent of the general population. In contrast, the ethnic profile of FE learners was heavily skewed towards BAME (23%, compared with 14% of the general population). In particular, the proportion of FE learners who were Black was three times greater than the general population in England and Wales.

¹⁶ England only, 19-64 year olds – from the April 2016 – March 2017 Annual Population Survey

Figure 2 – Ethnic profile of apprentices and FE learners



*Source: Office for National Statistics 2011 Census

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/ethnicityandnationalidentityinenglandandwales/2012-12-11>

Base: All FE learners (5,894), All apprentices (6,978)

Non-native English speakers in the FE sector

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimates that eight per cent of the UK population do not speak English as their main language.¹⁷ FE learners were a lot more likely to do so, with more than one in five (22%) speaking a language other than English as their first language. This is particularly striking given that ESOL learners were not included in the survey. The proportion of FE learners who were non-native speakers was particularly high among those on lower-level courses: more than a third (36%) of those on Entry Level courses and close to a quarter (23%) of those on Level 1 courses. This compares with 20% of FE learners on Level 2 courses or higher. Apprentices were only slightly more likely than the national average to speak a language other than English as their first language (13%).

Although this highlights that many learners were non-native speakers, it is important to stress this does not imply that all these learners would have been struggling with English.

¹⁷

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/language/articles/detailedanalysisenglishlanguageproficiencyinenglandandwales/2013-08-30>

Many non-native speakers are, of course, fluent English speakers. Nevertheless, the findings further highlight the diversity of learners in FE (particularly non-apprentices) and suggests that language barriers may be a challenge for a significant number of learners and teachers in FE.

Presence of children

More than half of all FE learners (55%) had children living either in their household (41%) or elsewhere (14%). This compares with four in ten (40%) apprentices who had children living either in their household (30%) or elsewhere (10%).

Those who had children living at home were asked the age of their youngest child. The median age of FE learners' youngest child living at home was seven, while the median age of apprentices' youngest child living at home was eight.¹⁸ Overall, this shows that many FE learners and apprentices have to balance family commitments with their learning. In particular, many have school-age, dependent children and the accompanying financial and logistical challenges that family-life can bring. Challenges to learning and reasons for non-completion are discussed in chapter 6.

Learners' and apprentices' socio-economic status

This section looks at range of measures to understand the socio-economic status of learners and apprentices and how this compares with the general population.

Relative deprivation of learners and apprentices

An accepted measure of relative deprivation is the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), based on seven area-based measures.¹⁹ IMD quintile (ranging from the most deprived to the least deprived quintiles in the UK) was assigned to all surveyed learners using their postcode (where a valid postcode was available). This section looks at how the IMD profiles of FE learners and apprentices compared to the general population in England.

Overall, both FE learners and apprentices tended to live in relatively deprived areas. In particular, FE learners were more likely to live in an area in the most deprived IMD quintile (36% compared with 20% overall in England, see Figure).²⁰ Apprentices were

¹⁸ The median is a measure of central tendency.

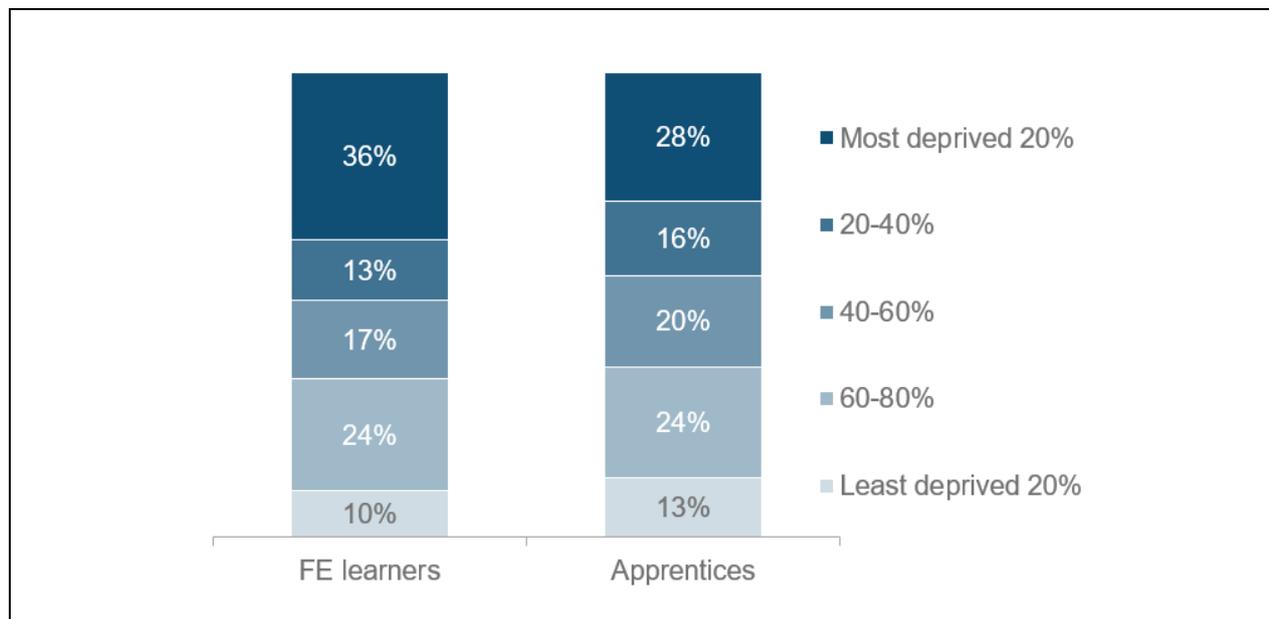
¹⁹ These seven measures are Income deprivation, Employment Deprivation, Education, Skills and Training de.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/579151/English_Indices_of_Deprivation_2015_-_Frequently_Asked_Questions_Dec_2016.pdf

²⁰ This is based on the IMD quintile learners fell within.

also more likely to live in an area in the most deprived IMD quintile (28%, compared with 20% overall in England) but to a lesser extent than FE learners.

Figure 3 – Area based deprivation of learners and apprentices



Base: all FE learners with a valid postcode (5,852), all apprentices with a valid postcode (6,912)

Personal income

Respondents who were either employed or in an apprenticeship were asked about their personal income before tax at the time of the interview. Six in ten (59%) FE learners earned up to £21,000 (the student loan repayment threshold) and a quarter (27%) earned more than £21,000 (see table 2). Similarly, two-thirds of apprentices (65%) earned up to £21,000 while a quarter (24%) earned more than £21,000. However, FE learners were more likely to be on very low personal incomes. One in five (22%) earned below the personal tax allowance threshold (£11,500) compared with 17% of apprentices (see table 2). This partly relates to the relatively high proportion of FE learners who worked part-time rather than full-time (see chapter 3).

Table 2 – Personal pre-tax income of FE learners and apprentices in employment

Personal income before tax	FE learners	Apprentices
Up to £5,200	6%	3%
£5,201 up to £11,500	16%	14%
£11,501 up to £21,000	25%	39%
<i>Up to £21,000 (but specific range not given)[†]</i>	12%	8%
NET: Up to £21,000	59%	65%
NET: £21,001 or more	27%	24%
Preferred not to say	14%	11%

Base: All currently employed or in an apprenticeship - FE learners (3517), apprentices (5726).

[†] Those who didn't want to give a specific range were asked whether they earned up to £21,000 or more.

Family and childhood background

The survey included a range of measures to capture details of learners' family and childhood backgrounds, including some details about learners' parents. This was to understand the socio-economic context of learners' upbringings, to better understand the potential impact learning may have on social mobility.

Free School Meal eligibility

Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility is often taken as a proxy for socio-economic status. The precise eligibility criteria have shifted over time, but have consistently included being in receipt of out-of-work benefits or benefits for those on low incomes. Overall, a quarter (27%) of all FE learners and apprentices said they were eligible for or received FSM when they were younger. FE learners were slightly more likely than apprentices to report being eligible for FSM (29%, compared with 25%).

Comparisons with a national average are not straightforward as the survey population spans multiple cohorts aged between 19 and 64. The survey measure also relies on learner awareness of FSM-eligibility. However, the proportion who were eligible does seem high.²¹ One estimate suggests that 21 per cent of 4-15-year olds were eligible for

²¹ Claiming rates for FSM have been in decline over the past decades. The average age of an apprentice is around 25 and for FE learners it is approximately 35. That would mean figures from 15-20 years ago are our best guide to understanding how learners and apprentices compare with the general public. In 2001, claiming rates were well below 20%. This demonstrates that FSM eligibility rates are high in the learner and apprentice population.

FSM at around the time many of the learners in this survey would have been at school (Iniesta-Martinez, Evans, 2012). This fits well with what has been described elsewhere in this chapter with FE learners and, to a slightly lesser extent, apprentices being more likely to come from more deprived areas.

Educational attainment of parents

Without implying causality, various studies have established a link between parental education and the outcomes of their children.²² With this in mind, the survey captured the types of qualification held by parents and whether one or both parents attended university. When analysing parental educational attainment, we have looked at learners aged under 35 and 35 or over. This roughly divides learners into two groups – older learners, whose parents were from the ‘baby-boomer’ generation, and those with parents from younger generations (where continued education post-18 and attending university have increasingly become the norm).

As shown in figure 4, almost half of older FE learners and apprentices (aged 35 or over) had parents with no formal qualifications. Learners aged under 35 were more likely to have parents with formal qualifications – 28 per cent of younger FE learners and just one in five younger apprentices (20%) said their parents had no formal qualifications.

Figure 4 – Educational attainment of learners’ parents



Base: Excludes those who said ‘don’t know’ or ‘prefer not to say’ when asked if their parents had any formal qualifications FE learners (4,534), Apprentices (5,534)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/552342/SFR20_2016_Main_Text.pdf

²² E.g. https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/files/iser_working_papers/2010-16.pdf

It is notable that a quarter of younger FE learners (25%) and younger apprentices (24%) had parents who went to university. Given the other socio-economic factors we have considered in this section, this is surprisingly high and highlights that many learners come from backgrounds where education is clearly valued.

Socio-economic measures when the learner was aged 14

To gain a deeper understanding of FE learners and apprentices' backgrounds, we asked a series of questions about their situation when they were aged 14. This is the point in life where the learners are thinking about their choices for post-16 education and provides us with a view into their situation when learners were making these choices.

Learners schooled outside the UK

A number of survey questions related to things such as free school meals and socio-economic status while growing up which were only meaningful for those who were living in the UK at that time. We therefore asked respondents whether they were living in the UK when they were aged 14. A quarter (24%) of FE learners lived outside the UK when they were aged 14, compared with around one in seven apprentices (14%). This compares with 14% of the general population in the UK who were born outside the UK, suggesting that FE learners are more culturally diverse compared with apprentices.²³

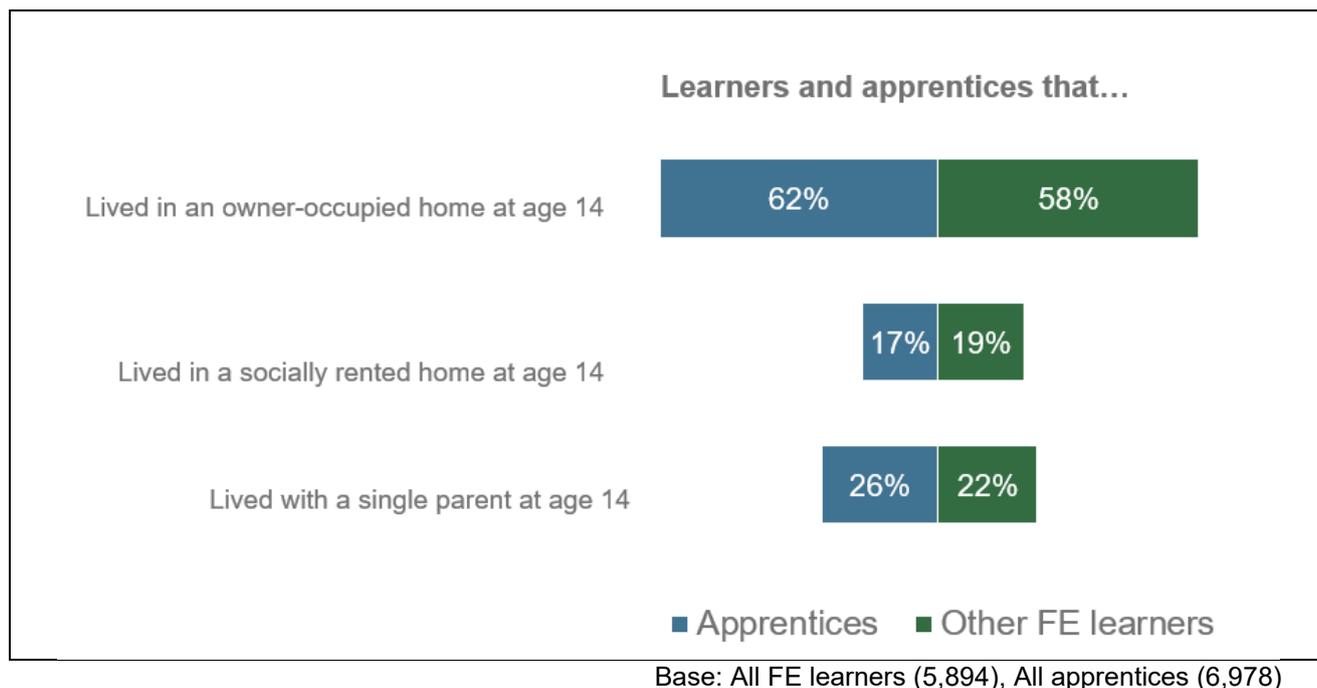
Those on lower-level courses or apprenticeships were more likely to have lived outside the UK when they were 14 years old: 37 per cent of those on Entry Level FE courses and 23 per cent of those on Entry Level/ Level 1 apprenticeships lived outside the UK at that time.

Learners were asked what type of home they were living in when they were 14 years old. Six in ten FE learners (58%) and apprentices (62%) lived in owner-occupied homes, while 19 per cent of FE learners and 17 per cent of apprentices lived in socially rented properties (see figure 5).

²³

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/ukpopulationbycountryofbirthandnationality/2017>

Figure 5 – Learners’ and apprentices’ situation when they were aged 14



One in five FE learners (22%) and a quarter of apprentices (26%) lived in single parent households when they were 14 years old.

Socio-economic classification (NS-SEC) at age 14

Respondents were also asked about the occupational status of the chief income earner when they were aged 14. Based on their responses, it is possible to classify their household using the National Statistics Socio-economic classification (NS-SEC).²⁴

As shown in figure 6, FE learners’ and apprentices’ parents were slightly more likely than the national average to have lower-skilled jobs.²⁵ They were also slightly more likely to have never worked or be long-term unemployed (11% of FE learners and 8% of apprentices, compared with 6% nationally). In contrast, they were slightly less likely than the national average to have higher-level or intermediate-level jobs.

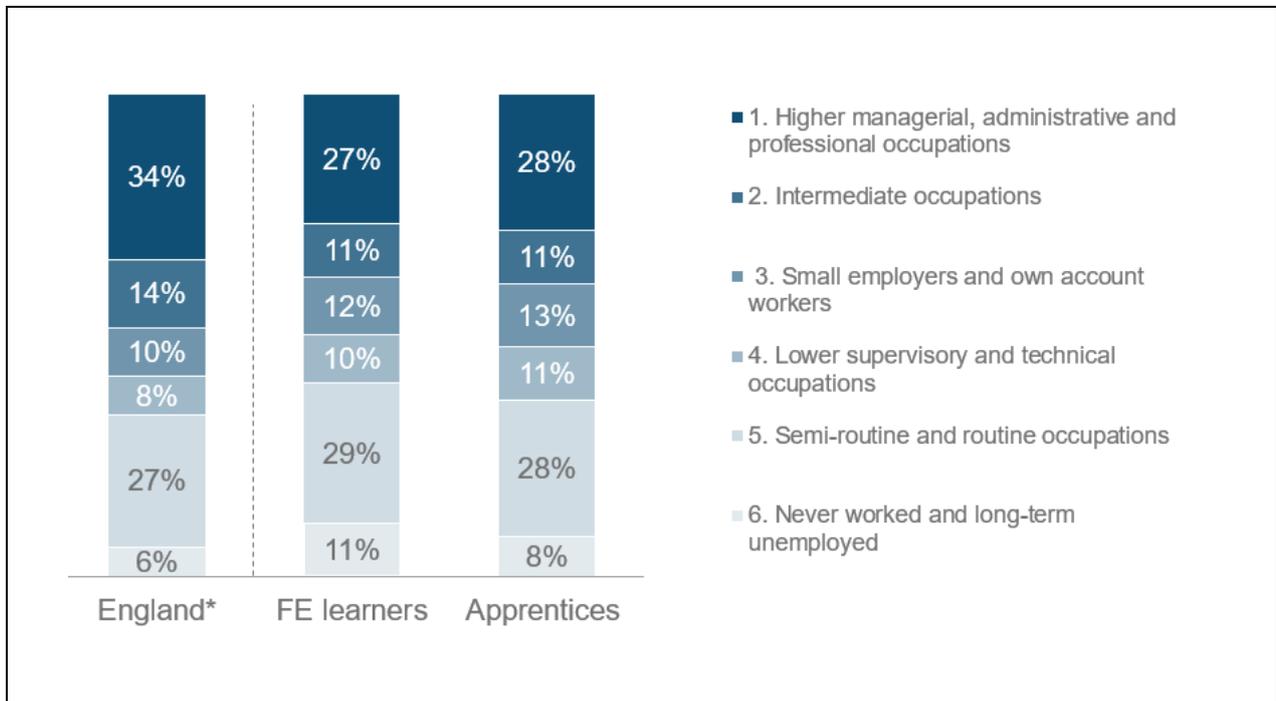
²⁴

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/otherclassifications/thenationalstatisticsocioeconomicclassificationnssecrebasedonsoc2010>

²⁵ Note: A comparison is made between our survey data and the 2011 Census. Those who were aged 14 at the time of the Census would have been 20-21 at the time they were interviewed, meaning the comparison is most robust for younger learners and apprentices. The occupational structure in England has changed over time but, for simplicity and brevity, we have not presented multiple Census comparisons in this section.

The socio-economic profiles of FE learners and apprentices were very similar, except for a higher proportion of long-term unemployment among FE learners. This is, again, consistent with the profile of FE learners and apprentices discussed in this chapter, showing apprentices and, particularly, FE learners were more likely to come from slightly more disadvantaged backgrounds.

Figure 6 – Occupational status of Chief Income Earner when learner or apprentice was aged 14



Base: All usual residents in England, 2011 (38,881,374), FE learners where the occupational status of CIE at age 14 could be established (4,245), Apprentices where the occupational status of CIE at age 14 could be established (5267),

* Source: ONS Census 2011

3. Routes into learning

Summary

- Routes into learning vary greatly between FE learners and apprentices. Reflecting the broad age profile and lower socio-economic profile of FE learners, routes into learning were varied. While a half (51%) were working prior to learning, FE learners were twice as likely as apprentices to be unemployed (20%, compared with 10%) and nearly five times as likely to be looking after children or family (nine per cent, compared with two per cent).
- Typically, apprentices were either older (25+) and already working for their apprenticeship employer, or were younger (<25) and started their apprenticeship straight after full-time education.
- Nearly two-thirds (62%) of apprentices already worked for their apprenticeship employer, meaning only around a third of apprenticeships covered by the survey were filled by external applicants.²⁶ This is primarily the case for older apprentices aged 25 and older - 84% had already been working for their apprenticeship employer.
- Further, one of the most common reasons given for starting an apprenticeship was because their employer offered it to them or had made it a requirement of their job (cited as the main reason by 18% of apprentices).
- The most common reason given for starting learning was to 'improve skills or knowledge'. This was consistent for both FE learners (33%) and apprentices (30%). Learners and apprentices were slightly less likely to say it was explicitly to find work/better paid work or as a 'stepping stone' into further training.

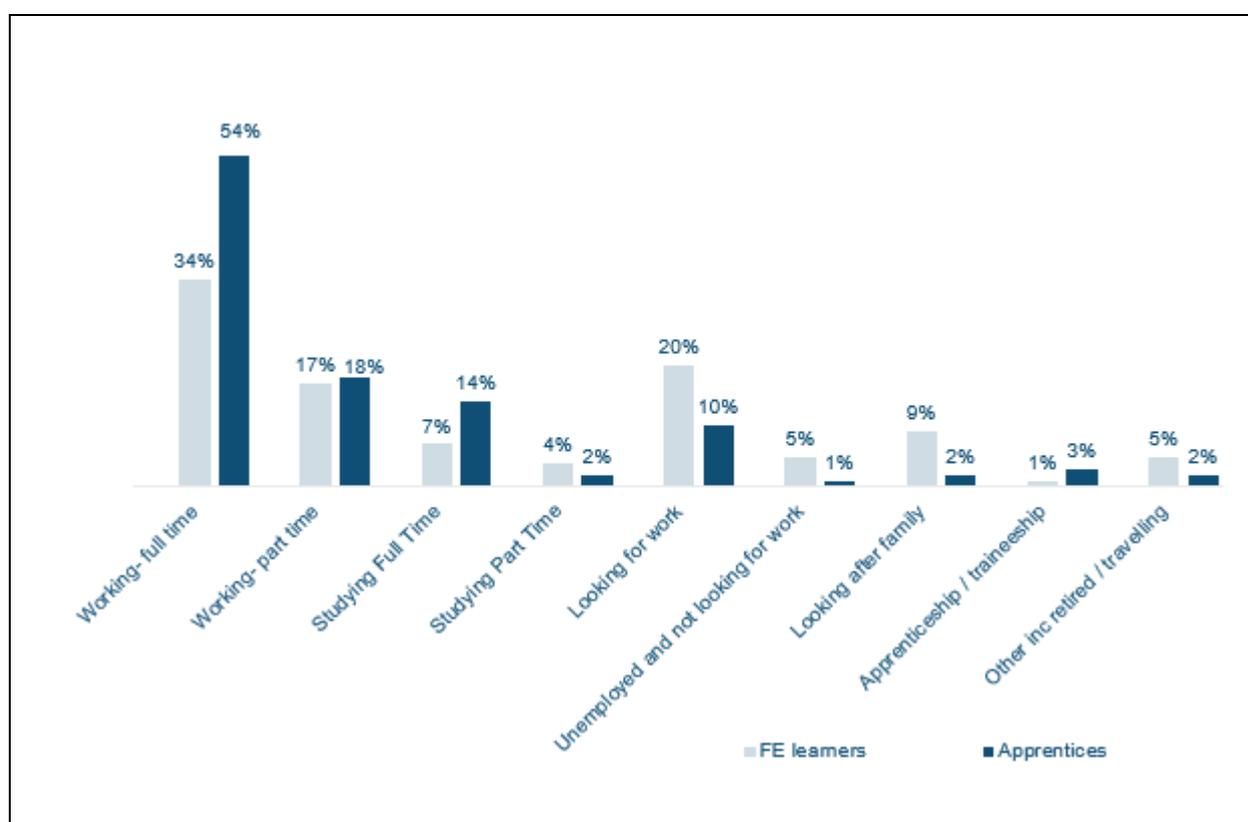
²⁶ While this is a high proportion, DfE figures taken from the Apprenticeship Evaluation Survey (AEvS) suggest the figure is decline, with greater numbers of apprentice places being taken by external applicants. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-evaluation-2015-learner-and-employer-surveys>

This chapter explores what learners and apprentices were doing in the months prior to their learning to provide an understanding of their routes into learning. It also explores the main motivations to learn and how these differ by learner and course characteristics.

Economic activity prior to learning

FE Learners and apprentices were asked what they were doing in the months immediately before starting their learning. Figure 7 summarises the responses given, comparing results from FE learners and apprentices. The figures do not sum to 100 per cent as respondents could select more than one option. The majority of all learners and apprentices (70%) reported being employed or in training.

Figure 7 - What learners and apprentices were doing immediately before starting their learning



Base all respondents: FE learners (5,894), apprentices (6,978)

Learners and apprentices were asked a prompted question to check if they were looking for work prior to their learning, if they had not said they were in work or looking for work previously. One in ten of all apprentices (11%) and nine per cent of all FE learners said they were looking for work when prompted. In total (including prompted and unprompted responses), three in ten (30%) FE learners and two in ten (20%) apprentices were looking for work prior to their learning.

Working and history of employment

Overall, 51 per cent of FE learners and 71 per cent of apprentices were employed (full-time or part-time) immediately before starting their course or apprenticeship. Apprentices were more likely than FE learners to be in full-time employment (54% compared with 34%). For both FE learners and apprentices, rates of employment prior to learning were higher for those on higher-level courses. Only 23 per cent of Level 1 learners and apprentices were employed before starting their course. This increased to 40 per cent for those on Level 3 courses and 46 per cent for Level 5 courses and above.

A quarter (25%) of all FE learners and apprentices had never worked. This was more likely to be the case among FE learners: three in ten (29%) had never worked before starting their course, compared with 16 per cent of apprentices. The difference between the previous work experience of FE learners and apprentices is particularly striking given apprentices were, on average, a lot younger.

Apprentices who had never worked before their apprenticeship tended to be younger people coming from full-time education – for many it is their first job after school or college. On the other hand, FE learners who had never worked before their course included a large proportion who had been long-term unemployed. The fact that three in ten FE learners (29%) had never worked before underlines the importance of FE as a route into the labour market.

Studying

Around one in ten FE learners (7%) and 14% of apprentices were in full-time study before their course started. Unsurprisingly, younger people were more likely to be studying. In the months prior to their course commencing, 25 per cent of apprentices and FE learners aged 19-24 were studying full-time compared with just three per cent or less among the other age groups. Younger apprentices (19-24) were slightly more likely than younger FE learners (19-24) to be studying full-time before starting their apprenticeship (27% compared with 23%).

Unemployment

Seventeen per cent of all learners and apprentices were unemployed and looking for work before starting their course. A further four per cent were unemployed and not looking for work.

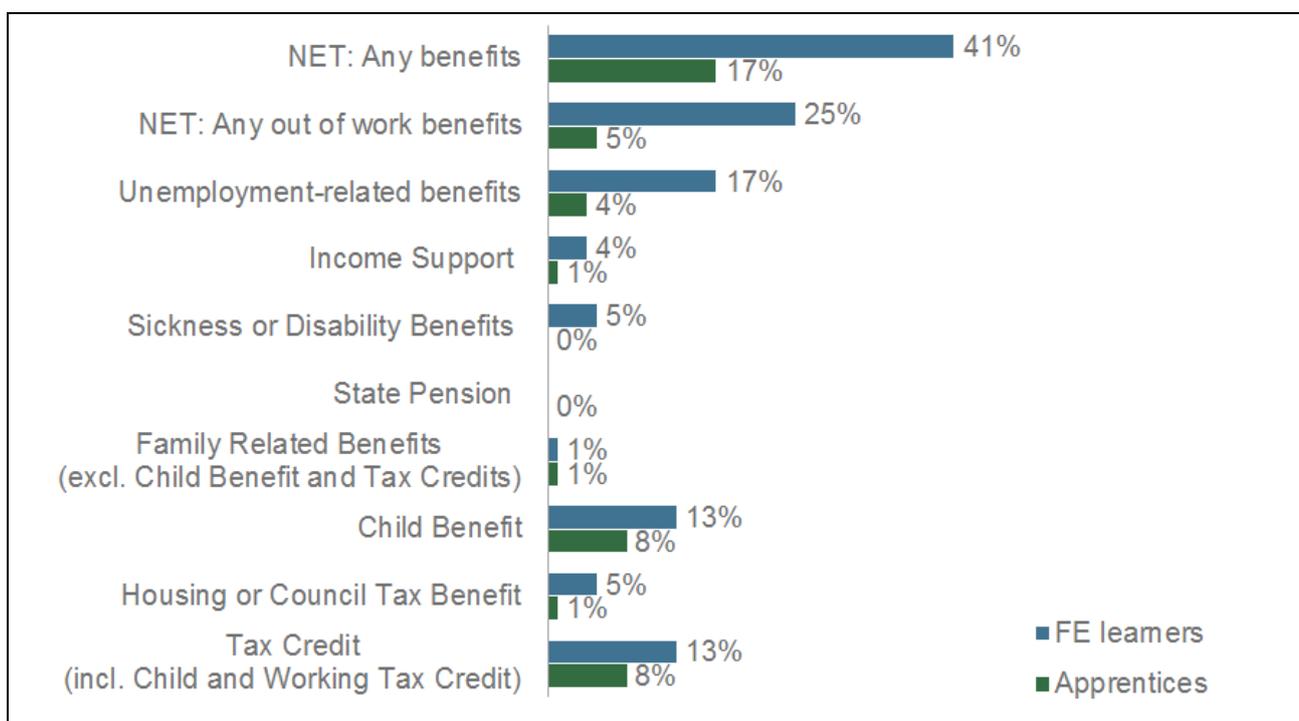
FE learners were twice as likely as apprentices to be looking for work before starting the course (20% compared with 10%) and were significantly more likely to have been claiming out-of-work benefits before their course started (27% of FE learners compared with six per cent of apprentices). FE learners were also significantly more likely than

apprentices to describe their activity as 'unemployed and not looking for work' in the months before their learning (5% compared with 1%).

Benefits claimed before starting learning

A third (33%) of all FE learners and apprentices claimed benefits or tax credits before starting their course or apprenticeship. FE learners were much more likely to be claiming benefits than apprentices. Four in ten (41%) FE learners were claiming benefits before they started their course, compared with less than one in five apprentices (17%) claiming benefits before starting their apprenticeship (see figure 8). This is consistent with the older age profile of FE learners and their relative levels of deprivation (discussed above).

Figure 8 – Proportions claiming benefits before their course or apprenticeship



*The net proportions show how many are claiming any benefits and out-of-work benefits out of *all* learners and apprentices.
 Base: All FE learners (5,894), All apprentices (6,978).

Arguably, the biggest difference between FE learners and apprentices was that FE learners were much more likely to be claiming out-of-work and low-income benefits. Six percent of apprentices were claiming out-of-work benefits before starting their apprenticeship compared with a quarter of FE learners (27%). This reflects the fact that three in ten (29%) FE learners had never worked before starting their course (a full discussion of economic activity prior to learning is presented in chapter 3).

A reasonable proportion of FE learners (but very few apprentices) were claiming family and child related benefits (see figure 8) – 13% of all FE learners were claiming Child

Benefit (30% of those with children living in their household) and 13% were claiming Tax Credits, including Child Tax Credit (29% of those with children living in their household).²⁷

Family commitments

Aside from looking for work, the most common reason FE learners (but not apprentices) were not working or studying was to look after family or children. Nine per cent of FE learners said they were doing this compared with just two per cent of apprentices. This reflects the younger age profile of apprentices compared with FE learners. There was a significant difference in the number of men and women entering learning after looking after children or family. One in ten women compared to just one in a hundred men stated this as their main economic activity prior to learning. Those who were living in an area in the most deprived IMD quintile were slightly more likely to have been looking after family or children beforehand (8% compared with 5-6% for all other IMD quintiles). Overall, the findings suggest that FE courses are an important route back into work for those with childcare and other family responsibilities. One in five FE learners (19%) who had been looking after children or family before starting their course were in employment at the time they were interviewed. Outcomes for FE learners are discussed in the following chapter.

Whether apprentices already worked for apprenticeship employer

Apprentices were asked whether they were already working for the employer that they did their apprenticeship with. Six in ten apprentices (62%) already worked for the employer before starting their apprenticeship. This was fairly consistent for all levels of apprenticeship and is broadly consistent with the 2017 Apprenticeship Evaluation Survey of Learners. This showed 42% of Level 2 and 3 apprentices were already working for their apprenticeship employer, with a further 18% saying they were recruited as an apprentice but did not start training straight away. This means that only around a third of apprenticeships covered by the survey were filled by external applicants.²⁸ Motivations for starting an apprentice are discussed later in this section. Nearly one in five apprentices (18%) said their main reason for taking the course was because their

²⁷ Family and child-related benefits were most often claimed by women – e.g. 35% of female FE learners with children in their household claimed child benefit, compared with 15% of male FE learners with children in their household.

²⁸ While this is a high proportion, DfE statistics from the Apprenticeship Evaluation Survey (AEvS) series suggest the figure is decline, with greater numbers of apprentice places being taken by external applicants. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-evaluation-2015-learner-and-employer-surveys>.

employer offered it or required them to do it. While we cannot establish which apprenticeships were advertised externally, it seems clear that many apprenticeships are being offered to those who are already in the workplace.

Interestingly, apprentices living in the least deprived IMD quintile were the least likely to already be working for their employer (only 55% did, compared with between 60 and 64% of apprentices in the more deprived IMD quintiles)..

Age of apprentice

While the majority of apprenticeship starts were among those who were already working for the apprenticeship employer, apprenticeships clearly remain an important way into the workplace for young people. The majority of apprentices aged 19-24 years had not been working for their apprenticeship employer before starting their apprentice (only 37% of those aged 19-24 already worked for their apprenticeship employer). Furthermore, over a quarter (28%) of young apprentices (19-24 years) had never had a paid job before starting their apprenticeship. This is further positive evidence that apprenticeships can provide an important stepping stone into (typically long-term, sustained)²⁹ employment for young people.

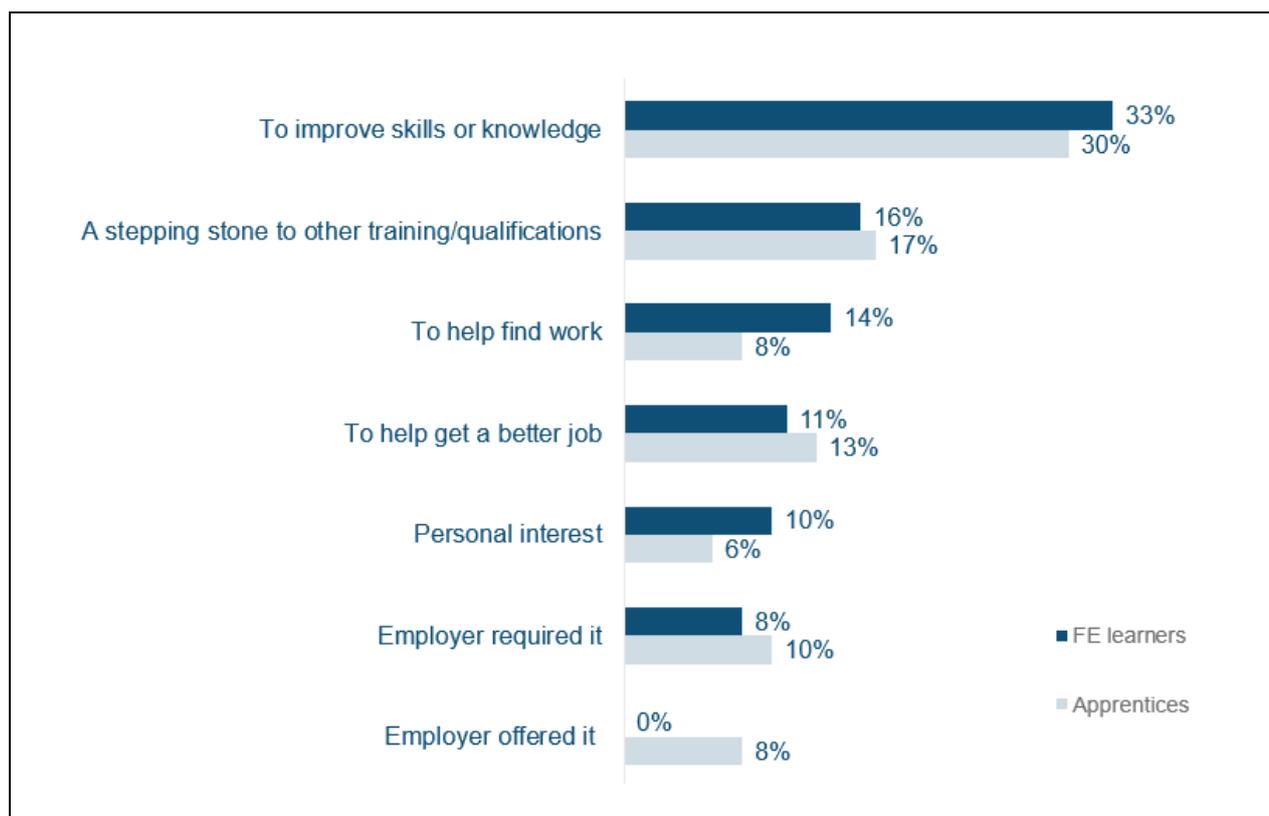
However, this is in sharp contrast to older apprentices (aged 25 and above). A large majority (84%) of apprentices aged 25 and older had already been working for their apprenticeship employer. This suggests that apprenticeships are rarely a route into a new job or back into employment for older apprentices – most are already known and employed by the apprenticeship employer.

Reasons for starting learning

All FE learners and apprentices were asked ‘what is the main reason you started your course/apprenticeship’. Responses are shown in figure 9.

²⁹ As highlighted in chapter 4, most who complete an apprenticeship remained in longer-term employment after the apprenticeship finished.

Figure 9 - Main reason learners and apprentices started their course



Base all respondents: FE learners (5894), apprentices (6978)

The top three reasons for both FE learners and apprentices were:

1. To improve skills or knowledge. This was the top reason for starting for FE learners and apprentices, cited by 33 per cent of FE learners and 30 per cent of apprentices. This suggests that many do not enter learning with a very specific goal in mind, beyond the completion of learning and self-improvement (or at least this the way they articulate their motivation).

2. To help find work or get a better job. A quarter (25%) of FE learners and one in five (21%) of apprentices said this was their main reason. FE learners were significantly more likely than apprentices to state their main reason was 'to find work' (14% compared with 8%), reflecting the fact that FE learners were more likely to be unemployed before starting their course.

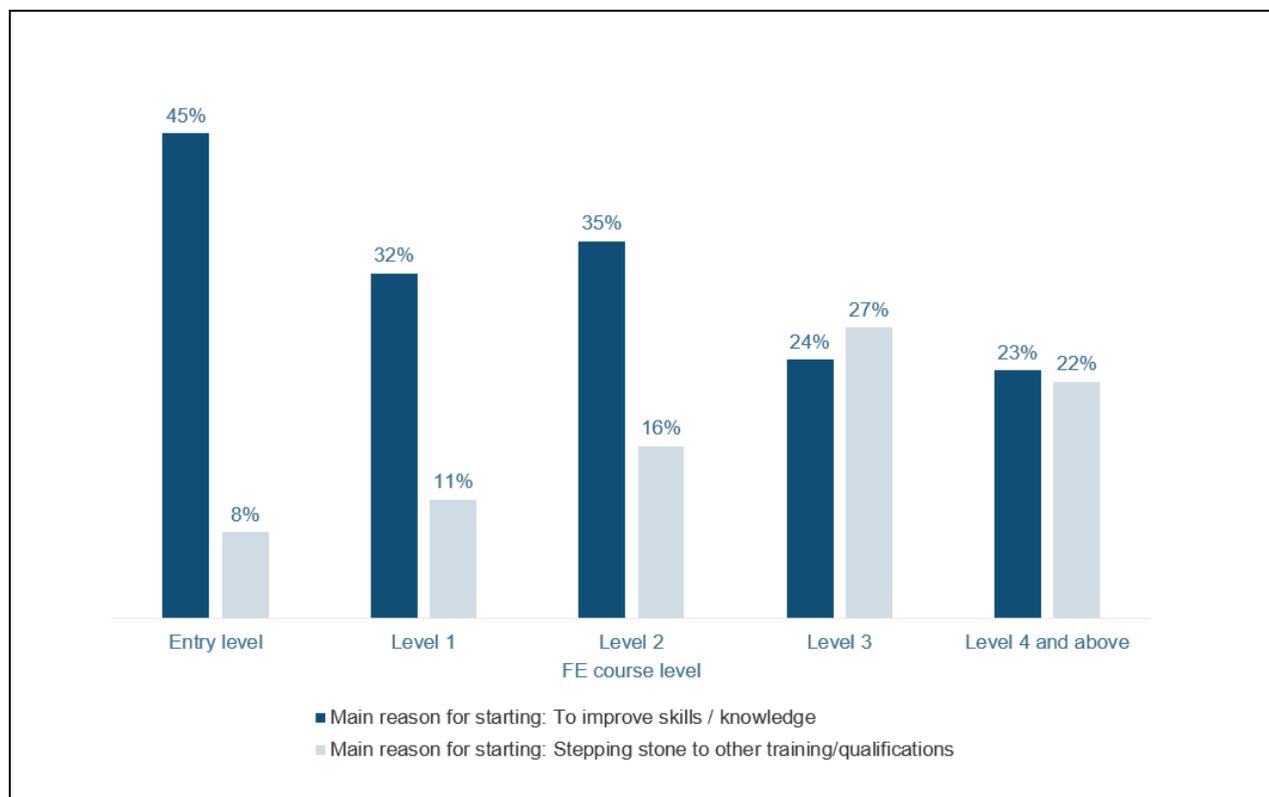
3. As a stepping stone to other training / qualifications. This was cited by 16 per cent of FE learners and 17 per cent of apprentices.

While work was only the second most common response given by learners, it is likely that ambitions to improve employability and career prospects were implicit in improving skills and going on to other training. As outlined in chapter 4, a large proportion of learners and particularly apprentices moved into work, regardless of the reasons they gave for starting their learning.

How motivations varied depending on FE course level

As shown in figure 10, for FE learners (but not apprentices) reasons for starting learning varied a lot by course level. The higher the level of the FE course, the *less* likely the learner was to be looking to improve their skills or knowledge and *more* likely they were to be taking the course as a stepping stone to further qualifications.

Figure 10 - Main reason FE learners started their course by course level



Base: All FE learners (5,894)

At Entry Level to Level 2, FE learners were significantly more likely to be looking to improve skills or knowledge than at Level 3 or Level 4 and above. At Entry Level, 45 per cent of FE learners reported their main reason for starting the course was to improve skills or knowledge, whereas at Level 4 and above only 23 per cent stated this was their main reason for starting. This suggests that learners on lower-level courses may be taking a first step into learning to improve skills or find work, but as they progress to higher levels they become more motivated to continue their learning journey and progress onto higher training/qualifications.

This pattern was not seen among apprentices, reasons for starting an apprenticeship did not vary substantively by apprenticeship level.

Variation in motivation by age

Younger FE learners and younger apprentices (especially those aged 19-24 years) were less likely to be doing the course to improve skills (a quarter (25%) of 19-24-year olds compared with a third of 25-34-year olds (34%) and those aged 35 and older (36%)). Instead, young FE learners and apprentices (19–24-year olds) were more likely than any other age group to say they started their course to help find work/get a job (15% compared with 11% or less among all other age groups).

Employers offering or requiring apprenticeships/ FE Courses

One in five apprentices (18%) stated their main reason for taking the course was because their employer offered it or required them to do it. This is in stark contrast to FE learners. Fewer than one per cent were offered their FE course by an employer and only eight per cent said they were required to attend it by their employer. This may be one of the factors contributing to the high number of apprentices who were already working for their apprenticeship employer (see earlier discussion in this chapter). Employer influence was most common for apprentices on lower-level apprenticeships; 22 per cent of Level 2 apprentices said they started their apprenticeship because their employer offered or required it, compared with just 14% of apprentices on Level 3 or higher.³⁰

Reasons for learning by prior economic activity

There was a strong connection between economic activity in the months leading up to the course and reasons given for starting learning. Not surprisingly those FE learners and apprentices who were unemployed and looking for work before starting their course were more likely than any other group to say the main reason for starting was to find a job (30%, compared with eight per cent who were not looking for work before starting their learning). In contrast, those who were working full-time were mostly likely to say they started learning to improve skills (36% compared with 29% of those who were not working full-time).

³⁰ At level 4 and 5 the base size is less than 50. The results are not, therefore, broken down further for Level 4 and 5 apprentices.

4. Outcomes, intentions and perceptions of learners (post-learning)

Summary

- Learner outcomes at the time of interview tended to be positive among those who completed their learning. The proportion of apprentices in full-time employment at the time of interview was 20 percentage points higher compared with immediately before starting their apprenticeship. Most often this was associated with apprentices moving from study into employment.
- Increases in employment among FE learners were more modest – with a six percentage point increase in the proportions who were employed full-time and a six percentage point increase for those employed part-time. Most often this was associated with learners who were unemployed and looking for work moving into the workplace.
- Three quarters (74%) of apprentices *who had never worked* before completing their apprenticeship had moved into and remained in paid work at the time of interview (many still working for their apprenticeship employer).
- Nearly a quarter (23%) of FE learners *who had never worked* before completing their learning had moved into and remained in paid work at the time of interview.
- FE learners and particularly apprentices were generally positive about the effect learning had on their earning potential and their chances of moving on to higher levels of training.
- Half (51%) of FE learners who had completed or were still learning agreed their chances of earning a higher wage in future had increased (compared with 71% of apprentices).
- FE learners and, to a lesser extent, apprentices who completed higher level courses (specifically Level 3 or higher) were more positive about the impact on earning potential. Differences were particularly marked among FE learners – fewer than half (46%) of those who completed a EL1 - L2 course agreed that their chances of earning a higher wage in future had improved. This rose to 66 per cent among Level 3, 4 and 5+ learners.
- Eight in ten apprentices (80%) who completed or were still working towards an apprenticeship agreed their chances of going on to higher levels of training had increased (compared with 66% of FE learners).

This chapter looks in detail at the outcomes and perceptions of learners and apprentices. It also looks at how these may, or may not, be related to the original intentions of learners and apprentices. Throughout, most of the analysis relates to learners and apprentices who completed their learning. In some places the analysis is expanded to also include those who were still learning at the time of interview.³¹ It is important to stress that we are assessing short-term outcomes for learners and apprentices. The full effect of learning is likely to be felt over a much longer timescale. This is one of the reasons for seeking permission to link learners' survey data to the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) database. We cannot directly attribute causality between post-course outcome and learning experience. Nevertheless, the findings suggest a number of positive early outcomes for learners and apprentices which are consistent with learners' largely positive perceptions of the effect of their learning.

Economic activity post-learning

Outcomes for apprentices and FE learners who completed their training are summarised in figure 11. Nine in ten apprentices (90%) were working at the time they were interviewed (either full- or part-time). This is a marked increase of 20 percentage points from the 70 per cent of apprentices who were working prior to their apprenticeship. The minority who completed but were not working were fairly evenly split between those who were unemployed and looking for work, in a new apprenticeship or looking after family (three per cent each). Only one per cent were in training or education, suggesting that apprenticeships rarely acted as a springboard into immediate further learning. Overall, the findings suggest very positive employment outcomes for apprentices who completed their learning.

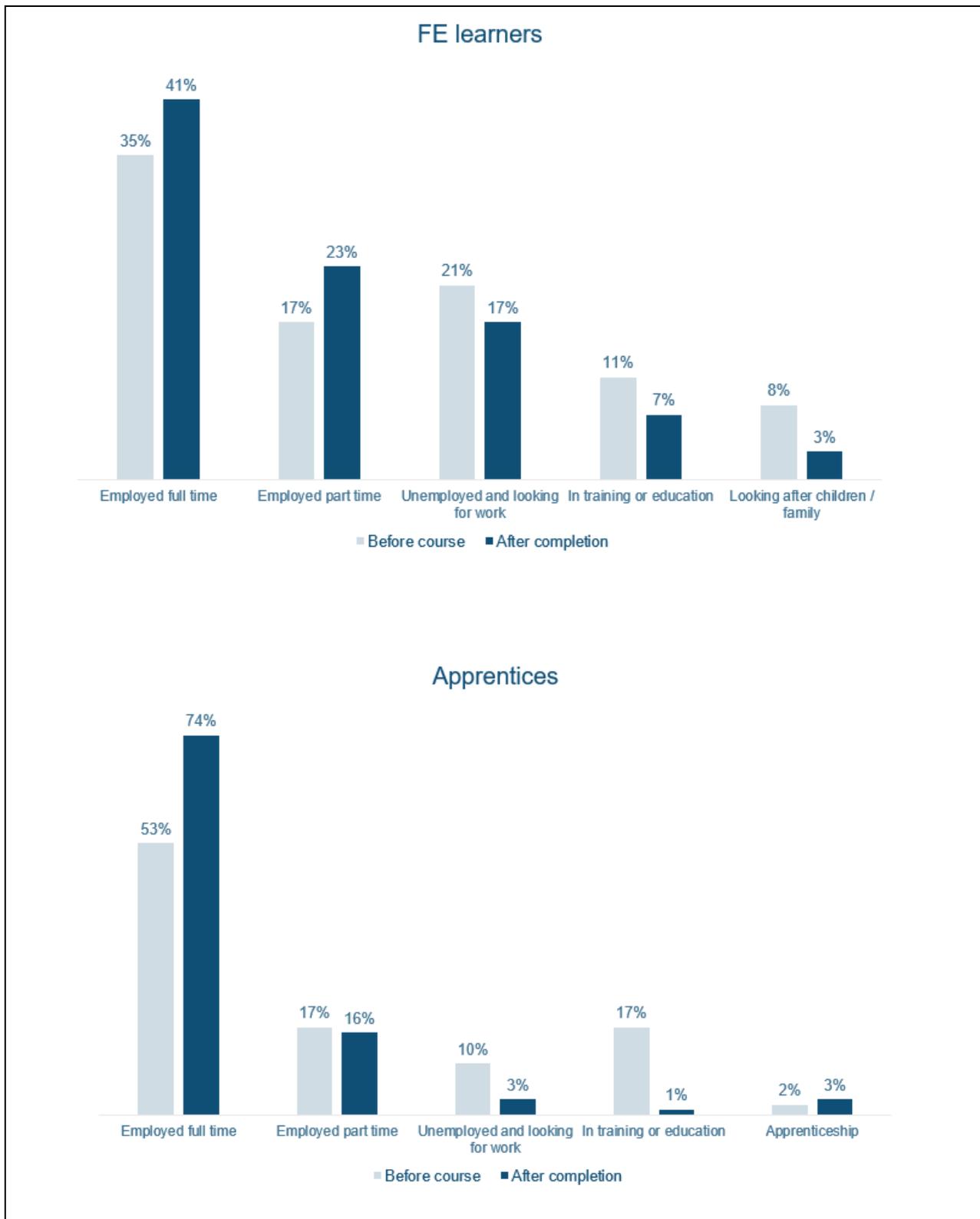
The picture is more mixed for FE learners and reflects the large diversity of these learners (previously described in chapter 2). It also reflects the vast variety of training on offer within FE, from short Entry Level courses, Level 3 provision as an alternative to A-levels, to higher-level vocational qualifications such as Higher National Diplomas (HNDs). In short, some forms of FE learning are less directly targeted at getting straight into the workplace.

At the time of interview, 64 per cent of FE learners who completed their training were in full- or part-time employment. The increase in employment rates pre- and post-learning was less marked than among apprentices – 12 percentage points compared with 20 percentage points among apprentices. As shown in figure 11, unlike apprentices, this increase relates more to a decrease in the proportion who were looking after children/

³¹ Based on ILR data, all sampled FE learners and apprentices should have completed their learning by the time they were interviewed. As discussed elsewhere, this may mean some who said they were still learning would go on to drop out.

family than to a reduction in unemployment or move away from training and education. The next section explores the movement of learners and apprentices pre- and post-training.

Figure 11 - Learner outcomes – outcome compared with prior economic activity



Base: FE learners who completed their training (4,550), Apprentices who completed their training (4,536);

Comparison of pre- and post-learning economic activity

Apprentices

Continuing to look at those who completed their learning, most of the increase in pre- and post-apprenticeship employment appears to relate to apprentices leaving training and education, with the remainder coming from a reduction in unemployment. One in six apprentices (17%) who completed were in training or education prior to their apprenticeship; this had dropped to just one per cent by the time they were interviewed. Looking at the movement of individual apprentices who had been in training or education prior to their apprenticeship, nearly all of these had moved into full-time employment (70%) or part-time employment (8%).³² The bulk of the remaining increase in pre- and post-apprenticeship employment comes from a reduction in the number of apprentices who were previously unemployed / looking for work; the unemployment rate dropping from 10 per cent to three per cent by the time apprentices were interviewed.

To understand the origins of the increase in employment, it is useful to consider what the 1,190 apprentices who moved into employment were doing prior to their apprenticeship:

- 48% were studying full-time, with a further 5% studying part-time
- 33% were looking for work
- 5% were unemployed and not actively looking for work
- 4% were in unpaid work / volunteering
- 3% were looking after children or family
- 2% were on a traineeship.

This supports other evidence that apprenticeships can act as a bridge between education and the workplace. More than half who had moved into work were previously studying full- or part-time.

It also supports the evidence that apprenticeships are a catalyst for getting previously unemployed learners into paid work.

³² The figures for full- and part-time work include those who were self-employed.

FE learners

As described above, changes in economic activity among FE learners were more modest, including a net 12 percentage point increase in employment compared with 20 percentage points among apprentices. Nevertheless, this still represents a significant and important shift for those who completed their learning. As with apprentices it is important to understand the origins of this increase in employment. Of the 727 FE learners who completed their training and moved into employment:

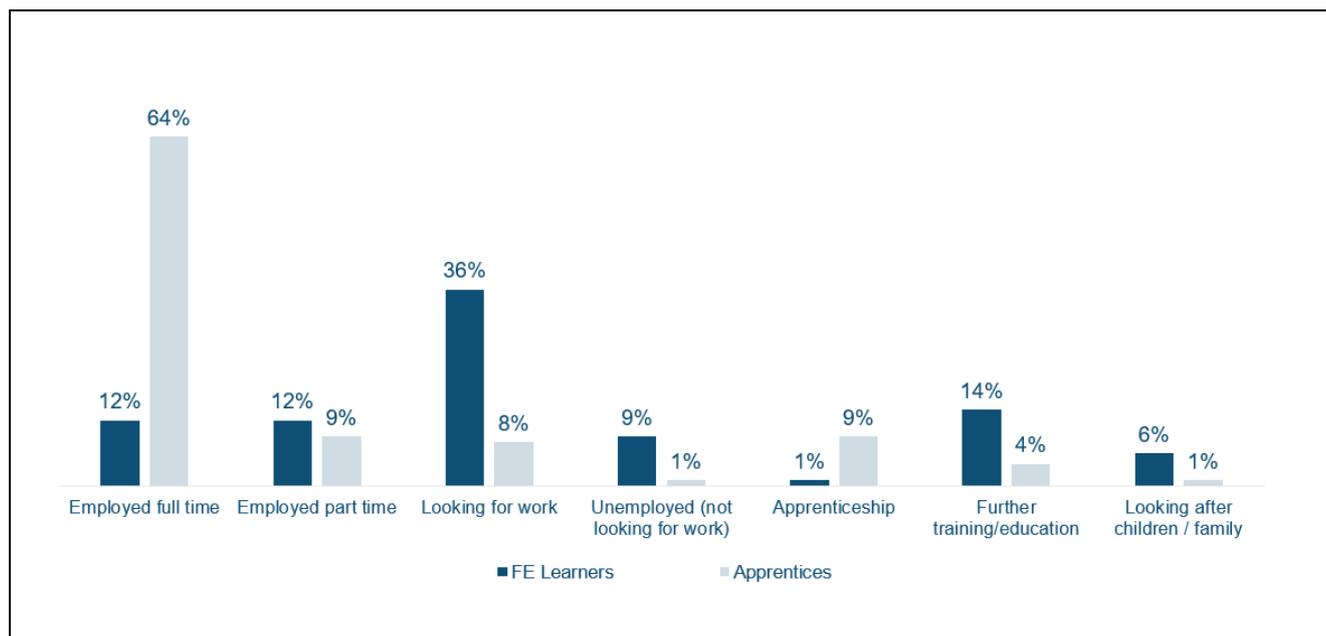
- 15% were studying full-time, with a further 7% studying part-time
- 48% were looking for work
- 7% were unemployed and not actively looking for work
- 8% had been in unpaid work / volunteering
- 11% had been looking after children or family.

Unsurprisingly, most of the increase in employment came from learners who were actively looking for work prior to their learning. This simply reflects the relatively large proportion of FE learners who were unemployed prior to learning (see chapter 2). That said, unlike apprenticeships, the majority who were looking for work prior to learning had *not* found work by the time of interview. In fact, only a third (37%) who were previously unemployed had moved into work, compared with 62% of apprentices. Employment outcomes were generally stronger among younger FE learners; 25% of FE learners aged under 25 who completed their learning moved into work by the time they were interviewed. This compared with just 14% of those aged 25 and older.

Working status of learners and apprentices who had never worked prior to learning

As discussed in chapter 3, 16 per cent of apprentices had never worked prior to starting their apprenticeship. Very positively, two thirds (65%) of the 850 apprentices who had *never* previously had a job before completing their apprenticeship remained in full-time employment at the time of the interview. If we factor in part-time employment, three-quarters (74%) of apprentices who had never previously had a job before completing their apprenticeship were working at the time of interview. This highlights the value of apprenticeships for getting people who are out of the labour market into continued employment. Further, a large proportion who were not working before their apprenticeship had moved into either further training or education, or (another) apprenticeship (12% combined). Less than one in ten (8%) were unemployed and looking for work.

Figure 12 - Outcome for learners who have never previously had a job



Base: All who completed their course and had never been in paid employment before: FE learners (1,285), apprentices (844)

As we have seen elsewhere in this section, the outcomes for those who had never worked before completing FE learning were more mixed. A quarter (25%) were in work at the time of interview, split evenly between full- and part-time working, but it was most common for these learners to be unemployed (45% were unemployed and either looking for or not looking for work).

These differences in outcome between apprentices and FE learners are best explained by the age and socio-economic characteristics of those who had never previously worked. Among apprentices this group largely consists of under 25s (84% of all apprentices who had never previously worked), more than half (53%) of whom had been studying full- (48%) or part-time (6%) before they started their apprenticeship. These are largely younger people who are looking for their first job and using an apprenticeship as their way in. In contrast, FE learners who had never previously worked tended to be much older – 34 per cent were younger than 25 and 41 per cent were aged 35 or older. These are people who were long-term unemployed, in many cases for ten or more years. FE learners who had never previously worked also tended to live in relatively deprived areas, which inevitably have fewer local job opportunities – 48 per cent lived in an area in the most deprived IMD quintile, compared with 32 per cent of apprentices. In summary, the challenges for FE learners who have never worked are more entrenched than they are for the equivalent group of apprentices.

Reductions in under-employment

We have also looked for any potential change in under-employment post-learning, specifically whether learners and apprentices moved between part-time and full-time working after completing their learning. There is some limited evidence of this but only for apprenticeships. In total, five per cent of all apprentices who completed their apprenticeship had moved from working part-time to full-time at the time of interview. This is the equivalent of 26 per cent of those were working part-time prior to their apprenticeship moving into full-time work. In contrast, there was virtually no net movement from full-time to part-time work among FE learners.³³

Consistent with the findings on increases in employment overall, the biggest movement between part-time and full-time employment was among younger apprentices. Nearly half (41%) of apprentices aged under 25 who were previously working part-time moved into full-time work after completing their apprenticeships (compared with just 13% of those aged 25 and older).

Comparison of reasons for learning and outcome

As discussed in chapter 3, reasons for starting FE learning and apprenticeships were quite varied. The predominant reason (given by 32% of all learners and apprentices) was to 'improve skills or knowledge'. It was less common for learners to cite 'wanting to get a job / a better job' (24%) or 'as a stepping stone to other training' (16%). Here we consider whether there are links between the original reason for learning and the outcomes post-learning (at the time of interview).

The findings suggest that connections between reasons for learning and learners' short-term outcomes are, at best, weak. Table 3 shows a small but positive link between original reason for learning and increases in employment; those who started learning to find work or get a better job were more likely to move into employment. However, the underlying factor behind this is probably *being unemployed* – learners can only move into employment if they are unemployed in first place and, those who are unemployed will be more motivated to learn by the prospect of finding work.

³³ Just one per cent of FE learners who completed their training moved from full-time to part-time work.

Table 3 - Outcomes (at time of interview) by original intention

Outcomes		Reason for learning		
		Improve skills or knowledge	Find work / better job	Stepping stone to further training
Economic activity at time of interview	Working (FT / PT)	75%	60%	72%
	Training / education (inc. apprenticeship)	4%	6%	12%
	Unemployed (inc. not looking for work)	16%	29%	14%
	Something else	5%	5%	3%
<i>Change in activity</i>	<i>NET increase employment (Working FT / PT)</i>	14%	28%	18%

Base: FE learners who completed their training (4,677), Apprentices who completed their training (4,409);

Learners' intentions and how these vary

As discussed above, the majority of apprentices (95%) and FE learners (71%) who had completed their learning were either in employment, training or education at the time of interview. Those who were yet to find employment or further training opportunities (or had not completed their learning) were asked a series of questions about what they were likely to do in the next 12 months (or when they completed their learning). There were no substantive differences between the intentions of apprentices and FE learners who were yet to find work or further training:

- Two-thirds (67%) said they were likely to look for paid work;
- Half (53%) said they were likely to look for further training or education;
- A quarter (25%) said they were likely to look for an / a new apprenticeship;

The exception to this was a higher proportion of FE learners (53%) said they were likely to look for further training or education compared with 45% of apprentices.

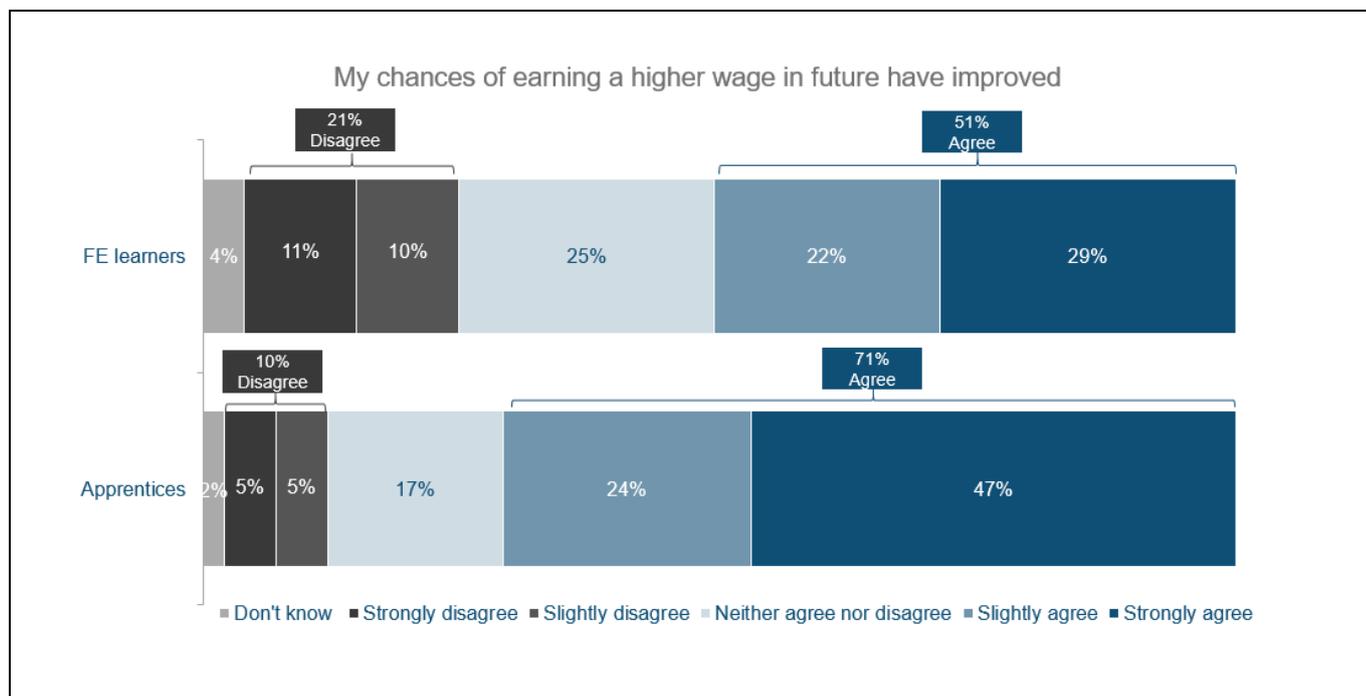
Learners' intentions didn't vary substantially by learner characteristics with the exception of age. Predictably, under 25s were more likely than those aged 25 and older to say they were likely to look for an (or a new) apprenticeship (36%, compared with 21%). There was also little variation in intention by type of learning, although learners and apprentices who had been on, or were working towards, a qualification in Business Administration and Law, Retail and Commercial Enterprise, and ICT were more likely than those in other

areas to say they were likely to look for paid work (79%, 75% and 72% respectively, compared with a 65% average across all other areas of learning).³⁴

Perceived impact of training on earning potential

Those who completed their learning were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed that since completing the course their ‘...chances of earning a higher wage in future have improved’.³⁵ As shown in figure 13, the balance of opinion among apprentices and FE learners was positive, particularly among apprentices. Almost three-quarters of apprentices agreed that their chances of earning a higher wage in future had improved, with nearly half (47%) agreeing strongly. Only one in ten disagreed that this was the case. Apprentices who started their apprenticeship because their employer required them to do so were less positive – 60 per cent agreed their chances of earning a higher wage in future had improved, but 22 per cent disagreed this was the case.

Figure 13 - Perceived impact on earning potential



Base: FE learners who have completed or are currently on their course / apprenticeship (5,088);
Apprentices who have completed or are currently on their course / apprenticeship (6,158)

³⁴ A comprehensive analysis of intention by subject area is not possible due to the small base sizes for most subjects.

³⁵ These questions were also asked of those who were still learning but the analysis here is limited to those who had already completed (being the most likely to properly assess the impact).

While FE learners were slightly less positive, still half agreed their chances of earning a higher wage in future had improved (29% agreeing strongly). Bearing in mind the breadth of learning within FE this should be seen as positive.³⁶ Equally, not all FE learning is undertaken with goal of boosting earning potential or employability – one in ten FE learners (10%) said their main reason for starting their course was for personal interest or enjoyment. Many of these learners would have no expectation of a short-term wage increase.

FE learners and, to a lesser extent, apprentices who completed higher level courses (specifically those on Level 3 or higher) tended to be more positive about the impact on earning potential. Differences in perceived impact on earning potential by level were particularly marked among FE learners – fewer than half (46%) of those who completed a EL1 - L2 course agreed that their chances of earning a higher wage in future had improved. This rose to 66 per cent among Level 3, 4 and 5+ learners. Among apprentices the distinction was mainly between Level 2 and Level 3+ apprentices. Seven in ten Level 2 apprentices who completed (69%) agreed that their chances of earning a higher wage in future had improved. This rose to 76 per cent among Level 3, 4 and 5+ apprentices .

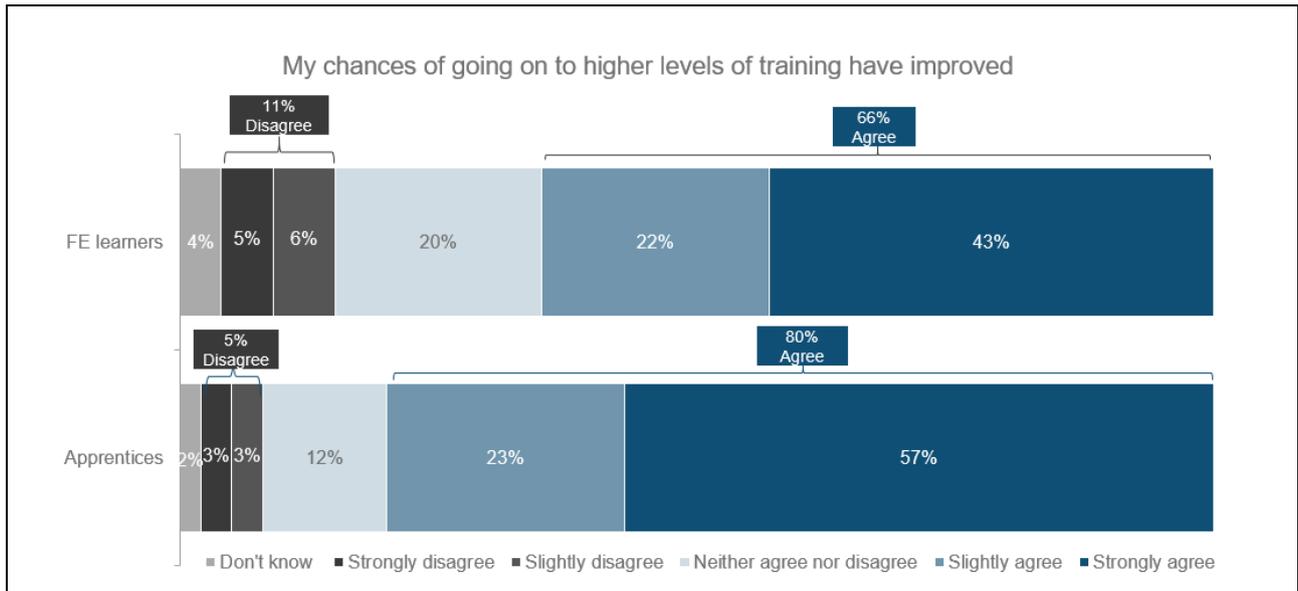
Perceived impact on likelihood of higher training

As shown in figure 14, those who completed their learning were even more positive about the impact on likelihood of further training than they were about the impact on earning potential. Two-thirds (66%) of FE learners and eight in ten apprentices (80%) agreed that their chances of going on to higher training had improved (43% and 57% respectively agreeing strongly). Around one in ten FE learners who completed (11%) and five per cent of apprentices who completed disagreed that this was the case.

As with impact on earning potential, there was a connection between level of learning and perceived likelihood of higher levels of training, but only for FE learners (not apprentices). Nearly two-thirds (63%) of FE learners who completed a EL1 - L2 course agreed that their chances of going on to higher training in future had improved. This rose to 79 per cent among Level 3, 4 and 5+ learners. In contrast, there was no substantive difference in perceived impact by level of apprenticeship completed.

³⁶ As discussed elsewhere, compared with apprenticeships, not all FE learning has such a direct goal of getting learners into the workplace / improving workplace skills.

Figure 14 - Perceived impact on continued higher-level training



Base: FE learners who have completed or are currently on their course / apprenticeship (5,088);
Apprentices who have completed or are currently on their course / apprenticeship (6,158)

Perhaps surprisingly, there was no link between perceived effect on likelihood of continued higher training and learners' highest prior level of education.

5. Funding and financial challenges to learning

Summary

- Around a quarter (24%) of FE learners were self-funded. The majority of these learners paid their course fees directly from their own money (62%), but one in five (21%) took out advanced learner loans. Advanced learner loans were mainly used by Level 3+ learners.
- Two in ten self-funded FE learners (21%) said it was difficult to meet the cost of the fees. Those on Level 2 and Level 3 courses were more likely to find it difficult to meet the cost of the course fees than those on either lower or higher-level courses.
- There was no substantive link between whether learners were self-funded and whether they completed their learning (non-completion rates were similar for funded and self-funded learners).
- Awareness of how fees were funded (among learners who were not self-funded) was variable. Approximately one in five apprentices (18%) and FE learners (20%) who said their fees were paid by someone else did not know how the fees were paid.
- Only a minority of apprentices and FE learners felt they incurred additional costs that were difficult to meet as a result of learning. Typically these were additional travel costs. The difficulty of additional costs was most likely to be felt by higher-level learners (Level 3+) and those living in London.

This chapter explores how learning is funded, additional costs associated with learning and any financial challenges that apprentices and FE learners face. Throughout, apprentices and FE learners tend to be treated separately given the very different nature of how they are funded. Apprenticeships are co-funded by employers and government,³⁷ indeed apprentices earn while they learn. In contrast, many adult FE learners have to pay

³⁷ In April 2017, the apprenticeship levy was introduced. This compulsory levy is paid via PAYE by all employers with a pay bill over £3 million per year. The levy is used to help fund the development and delivery of apprenticeships, with the aim of improving the quality and quantity of apprenticeships.

course fees.³⁸ The latter may be eligible to take out an Advanced Learner Loan to help with fees and other learning costs.³⁹

Funding of apprenticeships

As expected, the majority of apprentices (82%) said that someone else paid the fee for their apprenticeship (see figure 15). Only two per cent of apprentices reported paying a fee themselves for their apprenticeship.⁴⁰

Of those who said that someone else paid their fee, more than half (54%) said that their employer had paid with a further four per cent saying the apprenticeship was delivered as internal training by their employer (see figure 15). Most other apprentices said their fees were paid with government funding (22%). However, one in five (18%) apprentices who said someone else paid for their apprenticeship did not know who had paid their fees. This suggests that there is limited awareness of the funding mechanisms among apprentices, given apprenticeships are co-funded by employers and government.

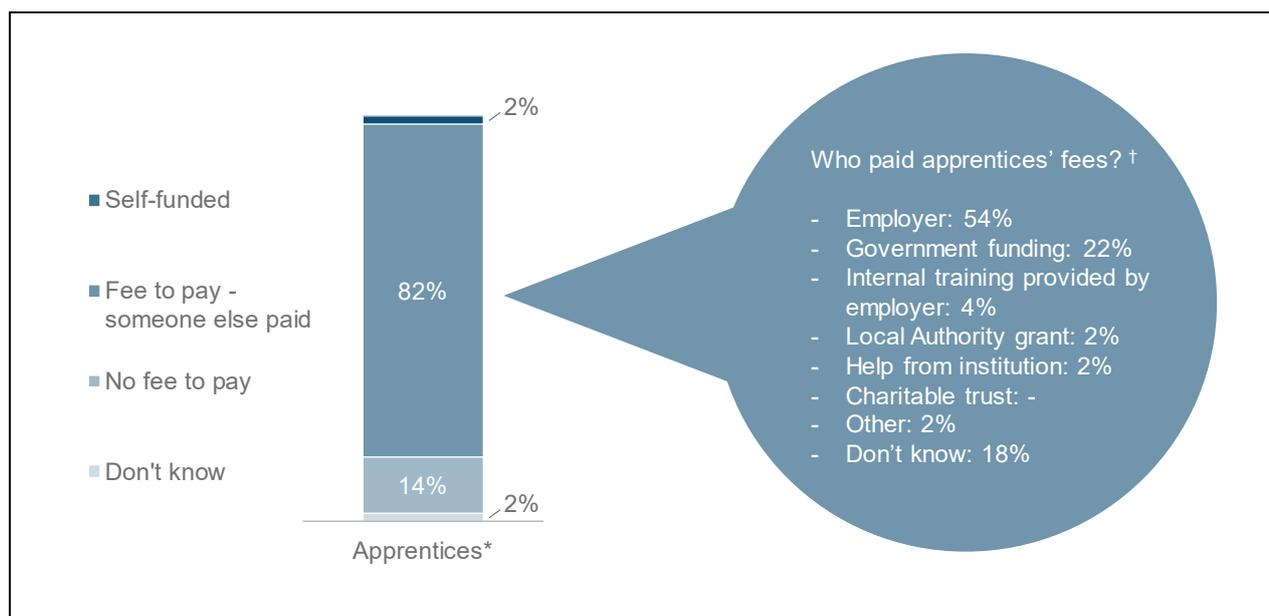
Those taking apprenticeships at the highest levels (Level 5 and above) were slightly more likely to say they self-funded than those on lower-level apprentices (7% compared with 2% at Levels 2 to 4).

³⁸ Some FE courses may be free to learners, i.e. fully government-funded. These include courses in support of adult employability and basic skills. In addition, FE colleges may offer some free or discounted tuition to learners from low income families, disabled learners or learners on benefits. Other courses may be partly government-funded, with learners or employers making a contribution towards fees.

³⁹ For courses starting since August 2016, Advanced Learner Loans have been available for some learners aged 19 or older on the first day of their course. The loan is generally available for Level 3, 4, 5 or 6 qualifications (e.g. A Levels or graduate certificates) taken at an approved college or training provider. <https://www.gov.uk/advanced-learner-loan>

⁴⁰ This is likely to be a misunderstanding among apprentices as fees should not be passed on to learners by apprenticeship employers or providers.

Figure 15 – Funding of apprenticeships



* Base: All apprentices (6,978)

† Base: Respondents who reported they did not pay a fee for their apprenticeship (5,805)

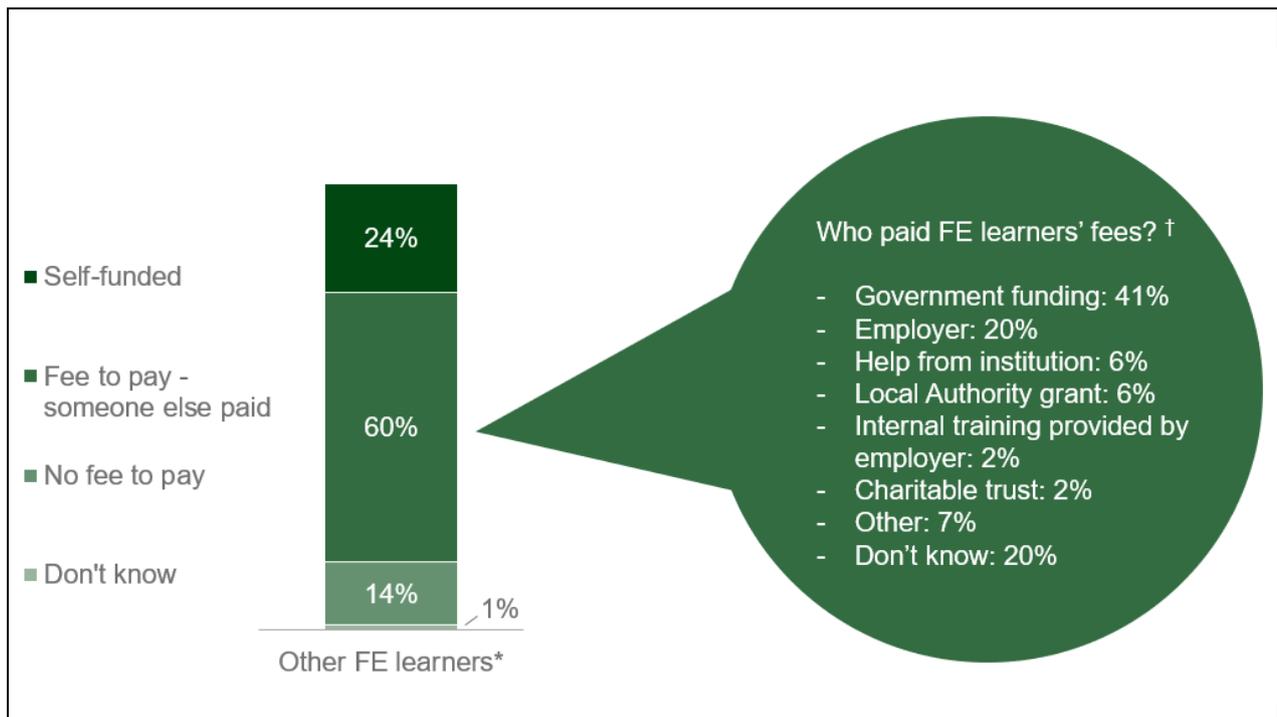
Funding of FE courses

As expected, FE learners were much more likely to fund their own courses compared with apprentices, with a quarter (24%) paying course fees themselves (compared with only two per cent of apprentices).⁴¹ Those on higher levels were more likely to self-fund with the proportions varying from 21% at Entry Level, 18% at Level 1 and 2, 44% at Level 3 and 55% at Level 4 and higher. Of the learners that paid for the course themselves, six in ten (62%) paid the fee directly from their own money and two in ten (21%) took out an advanced learner loan (see figure 16).

Six in ten FE learners (60%) said that someone else paid their course fee (see figure 16). Of these, four in ten (41%) said they received government funding (excluding Local Authority grants) and two in ten (20%) said that their employer paid their fees. Payment by employer was much more likely for FE learners on higher-level courses. For example, half (51%) of those learning at Level 4 or above who reported that someone else had paid their fees, stated that their employer had paid. This compared with 18% of FE learners at Level 3 or below.

⁴¹ These figures are consistent with data from the ILR which indicates 26 per cent of FE learners on in scope courses received no funding for their course.

Figure 16 – Funding of FE courses



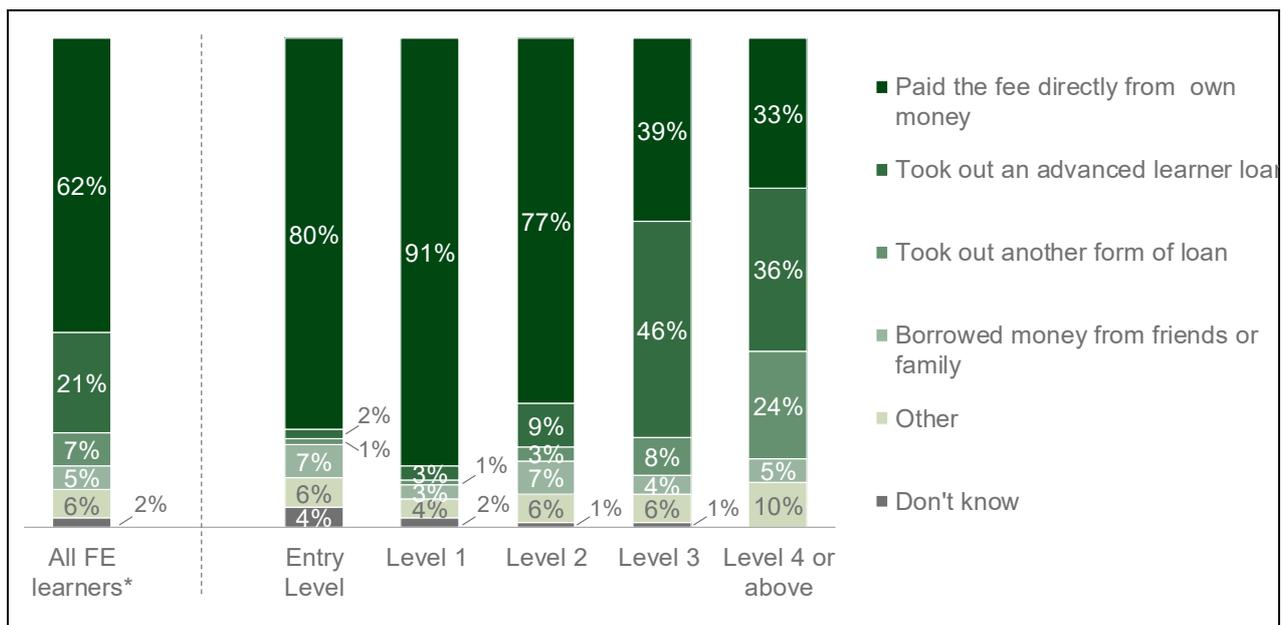
* Base: All FE learners (5894)

† Base: Respondents who reported they did not pay a fee for their course (3592)

Of those who said that someone else had paid for their course, one in five (20%) said that they did not know who had paid their fees. As we have seen among apprentices, this suggests there is limited awareness among FE learners about the funding mechanisms involved.

Of those who were self-funded, those on lower-level courses (specifically Level 2 and lower) were much more likely to pay course fees directly from their own money than those on courses on Level 3 and above. Nine in ten (91%) self-funded learners on Level 1 courses and eight in ten Entry Level (80%) and Level 2 (77%) paid directly themselves. In contrast, those on higher-level courses were more likely to take out advanced learner loans or other loans. This probably reflects the substantial difference in course fees between lower and higher-level courses and the lack of availability of advanced learner loans below Level 3. Across all levels there is a small but substantial reliance on borrowing money from friends or family (6% overall). Borrowing money from friends or family was most common among learners on course at Entry Level or Level 2.

Figure 17 – How self-funded learners paid for their course, by course level



Base: FE Learners who self-funded (paid a fee for their course) (1,468)

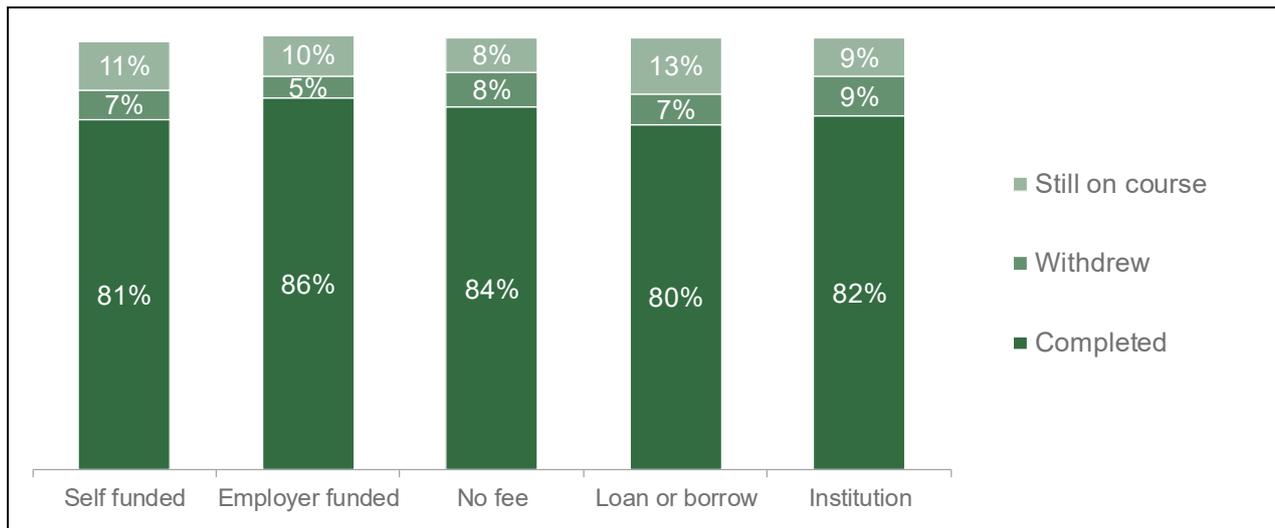
Differences in outcome by funding

This section looks at links between how FE learners funded their courses and the outcome of that learning.⁴²

It might have been expected that self-funded learners would be more likely to complete their courses, it being reasonable to assume they might have higher levels of motivation and direct personal financial interest in completing their learning. However, this does not appear to be the case (see figure 18). There was no clear pattern between likelihood of completing and how learning was funded.

⁴² The analysis is limited just to FE learners. Apprentices are excluded as only a very small proportion of apprentices said they paid fees for their apprenticeship (see above) - and this is likely to be a misunderstanding among apprentices as fees should not be passed on to learners by apprenticeship employers or providers.

Figure 18 – Completion status based on the different funding mechanisms



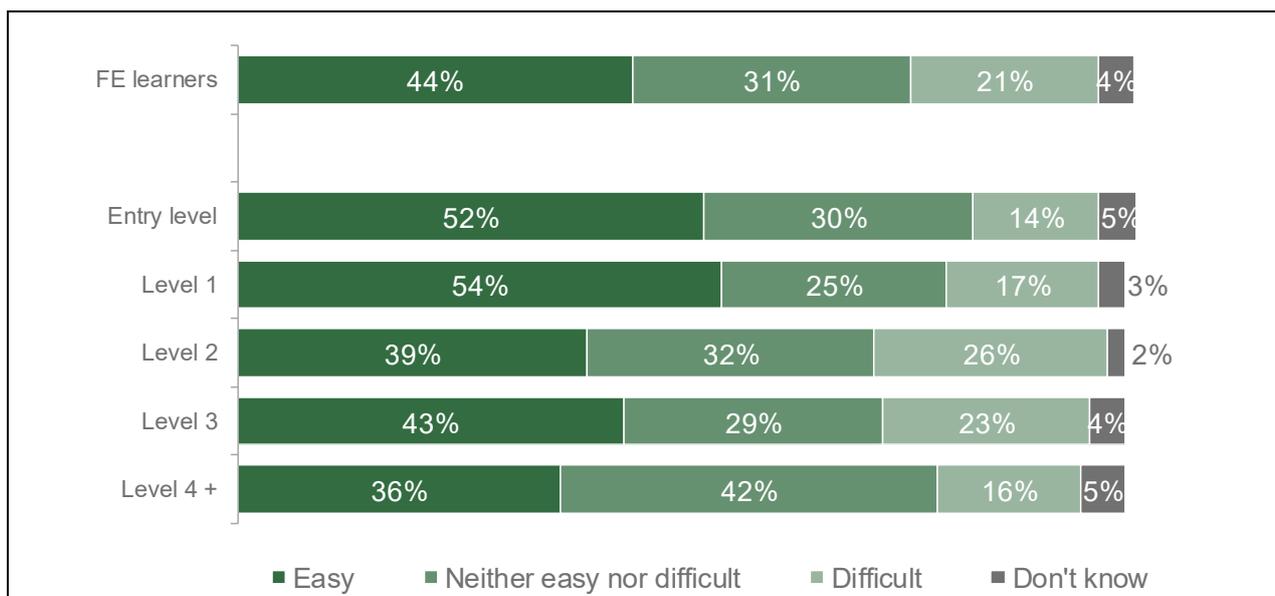
Base: FE learners who self-funded (1,463), Employer funded (719), No fee paid (827), Loan or borrowed money (487), Institution funded (1,914).

How easy or difficult is it for FE learners to meet the cost of fees?

This section explores how easy or difficult it was for FE learners to meet the cost of fees for their course. As in the previous section, the analysis focuses just on FE learners, as apprentices should not have to pay apprenticeship fees themselves.

Overall, more than four in ten FE learners who paid a fee for their course (44%) said it was easy for them to meet the cost (see figure 14). However, two in ten (21%) said it was difficult to meet the fee cost. FE learners on Level 2 or Level 3 courses were more likely to find it difficult to meet the cost of their course than those at lower or higher levels.

Figure 19 – Ease of meeting cost of course fees for FE learners, by course level



Base: FE learners who paid a fee for their course (1,468), Entry level (127), Level 1 (248), Level 2 (447), Level 3 (426), Level 4 and above (198)

FE learners aged 25 to 44 were more likely to find it difficult to meet cost of fees than the youngest FE learners and those aged 45 and older (see Table 4). This is likely to be related to the higher living costs associated with moving out of the parental home and having a family, both of which typically occur around this age. When looking at the youngest learners (19-24), seven in ten (68%) of those aged 19-24 were living with their parents (suggesting they may have been receiving direct or indirect financial support from their parents). In contrast, those aged 45 and older were more likely to have older children or children that had left home (and were arguably more financially stable).⁴³

Table 4 - Percentage of self-funded FE learners who found it difficult to meet cost of fees, by age

Age	% of self-funded FE learners who found it difficult to meet cost of fees
19-24	15%
25-34	23%
35-44	29%
45-54	17%
55-64	12%

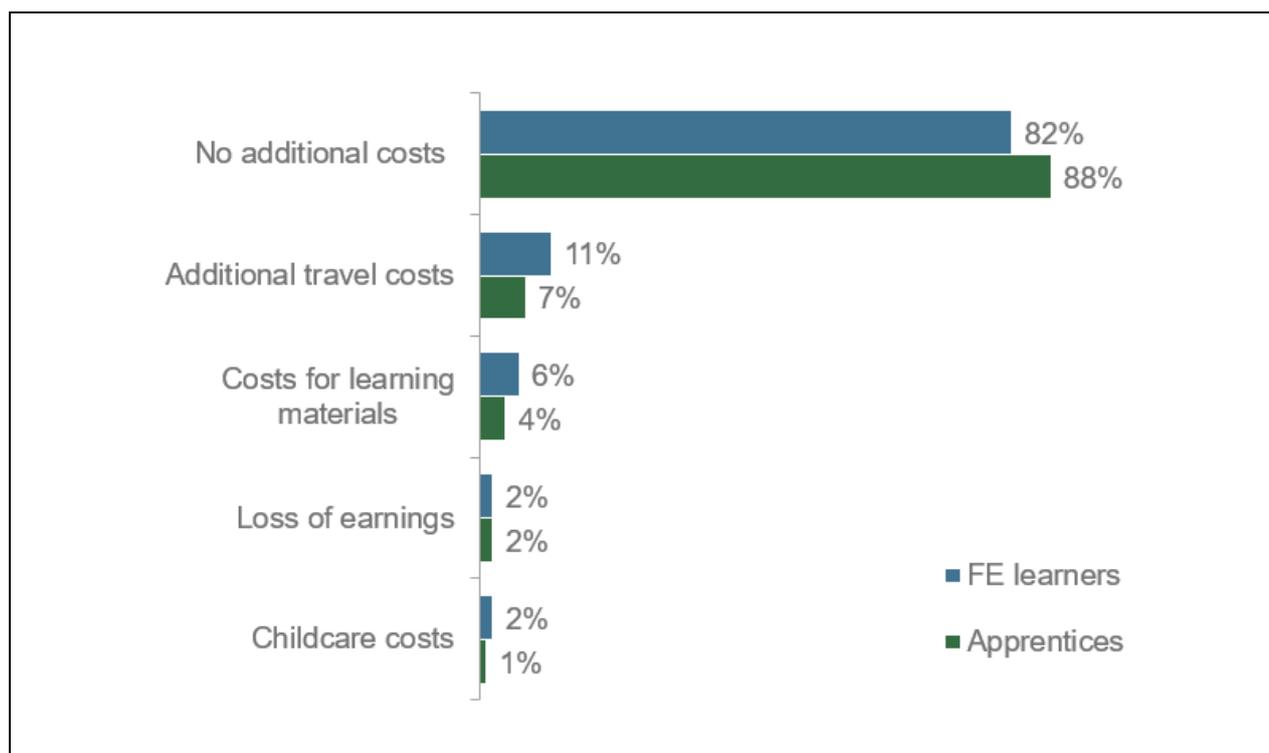
Base: All FE learners who paid a course fee (1,468), aged 19-24 (356), 25-34 (357), 35-44 (329), 45-54 (279), 55-64 (147)

Difficulty meeting additional costs

Aside from course fees, FE learners and apprentices may incur additional costs including travel, books or learning materials, and childcare costs. The majority of FE learners and apprentices said they did not incur additional costs that they found difficult to meet (see figure 20). FE learners were only slightly more likely than apprentices to say they incurred additional costs which were difficult to meet (18% compared with 12%). For both groups, travel costs were the most commonly cited additional cost that was difficult to meet, followed by costs for learning materials.

⁴³ 48% of FE learners aged 45-54 had children in their households (including dependent and independent children), down from 68% among those aged 35-44. This drops further to 22% among 55-64s. Further, the majority of those aged 45 and older with children had teenage or adult children.

Figure 20 – Additional costs incurred by learners and apprentices that were difficult to meet



Base: all FE learners (5894), All apprentices (6978).

FE learners on higher-level courses were more likely to have difficulty meeting additional costs than those on lower levels. More than a quarter (27%) of those on a Level 3+ FE course said they had incurred additional costs that were difficult to meet, compared with 15 per cent of those on FE courses below Level 3. There was no such variation by level for apprentices. FE learners and apprentices in certain subject areas were also more likely to incur additional costs that were difficult to meet (see Table).

Table 5 – Additional costs that were difficult to meet by subject

Subject	Incurred any additional costs that were difficult to meet
Arts, Media and Publishing	28%
Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care	27%
Science and Mathematics	24%

Base: FE learners and apprentices within Arts, Media and Publishing (256), Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care (213), Science and Mathematics (197).

Apprentices and FE learners living in London were also more likely to say they incurred additional costs compared with learners in general (22% compared with 15%). This may be attributable to high travel costs within the capital – 15 per cent of those in London said they incurred additional travel costs (compared with 9% of non-Londoners).

6. Non-completion

Summary

- Non-completion was more prevalent among learners and apprentices on lower levels of learning and among learners who held lower levels of qualification prior to starting their learning. This is largely associated with Level 2 apprentices and Entry Level FE learners (i.e. those on the very lowest levels of learning).
- Apprentices with a disability were also less likely to complete their apprenticeship.
- In addition to these factors, FE learners living in the most deprived areas (as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation – IMD) and those on lower incomes had a were less likely to complete their learning.
- FE Learners and apprentices were most likely to say they failed to complete because of personal or domestic challenges (cited by 47% and 28% who did not complete their FE learning or apprenticeship respectively).
- There is evidence that some learners and apprentices left courses because they didn't like the training. Three in ten FE and apprentice non-completers (31% and 29%) said they had left because of issues with the course or apprenticeship.
- More positively, around one in six FE non-completers (15%) indicated that they left learning because they found work or moved to a new job (including apprenticeships). A similar proportion of apprentice non-completers (14%) indicated that they left for other employment or training.

Independent of the survey, it was already known that many learners and apprentices do not complete their training. The Department estimates that 13 per cent of FE learners and 28 per cent of apprentices do not complete.⁴⁴ Given the size of the FE sector, reducing non-completion even modestly could have a quite significant impact on learner outcomes, social mobility and the economic benefit of FE. However, prior to the survey, little was known about why learners do not complete and the barriers they face. The Learners and Apprentices Survey addresses this with 1,545 interviews with FE learners (767) and apprentices (778) who did not complete their training. At the start of the

⁴⁴https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/586015/SFR07_2017.pdf

interview, all learners and apprentices were reminded of the title and dates of the course for which they were sampled from the ILR. They were then asked if they had completed that course, were still working towards it, or had not completed it. As described in the introduction (chapter 1), all sampled learners had been attending courses that were expected to have finished by the time of the survey (based on expected outcome date in the ILR).

Overall non-completion rates

Eight per cent of FE learners and 10 per cent of apprentices said they had withdrawn from their training. This difference is not statistically significant. In addition, 9 per cent of FE Learners and 23 per cent of apprentices said they were still learning but had not completed their course. All sampled FE learners and apprentices were selected from the ILR on the basis that their course was expected to be complete by the time of the survey. There is no single simple explanation for the difference between non-completion rates as measured by the survey and DfE's estimates. It is possible that those who did not complete were less likely to take part in the survey. We also suspect that some non-completers may have transferred on to FE courses and were thinking about a new course when answering this question. If we add those who said they were still learning to the pool of non-completers, the total proportions who *should have completed by the time they were interviewed* are much closer to DfE's estimates. In total, 17 per cent of FE learners had not completed or should have completed and a third (33%) of apprentices had not completed or should have completed.

Factors associated with non-completion

A number of course and learner characteristics were associated with higher levels of non-completion. As shown in table 6, those on lower-level courses were more likely to be yet to complete (including those who did not complete or were still learning). For both FE learners and apprentices, the distinction was mainly between those on the lowest levels of training (Entry Level for FE learners and Level 2 for apprentices) and all other learners. The distinction was more notable for FE learners compared with apprentices –13% doing Entry Level courses did not complete, compared with seven per cent doing higher levels (and just five per cent doing a Level 4 course or higher).

Table 6 - Course completion status by level of course

Type	Level	Completed	Learner indicated they didn't complete	Learner indicated still learning	Yet to complete (NET)	Base (n)
FE	EL1/2	75%	13%	12%	25%	607
	L1	83%	8%	8%	17%	1,309
	L2	87%	6%	7%	13%	2,443
	L3	84%	8%	8%	16%	975
	L4+	82%	5%	13%	18%	365
Apprentice	L2	61%	11%	27%	38%	3,212
	L3	73%	9%	18%	27%	2,627
	L4+	71%	9%	20%	29%	517

Base: All FE learners and apprentices (bases given in final column)

Levels of non-completion also varied by the type of subject being studied. Notably, non-completion rates were highest for ICT (13%), Business Administration and Law (11%) and Preparation for Life and Work (11%). For ICT and Preparation for Life and Work, this may relate to the prevalence of lower-level learners in these subject areas and the challenges that these bring. In ICT, 30% of training was below Level 2 and in Preparation for Life and Work 52% of training was below Level 2 (compared with an average of 18% across all forms of training).

For FE learners (non-apprentices), differences in completion rate by level seem to be partly explained by previous education of learners. There is a strong connection between FE learners' highest level of education (prior to current training) and propensity to complete. As shown in table 7, non-completion rates for FE learners whose previous highest qualification was Level 1 or lower were approaching double those whose previous highest qualification was Level 2 or higher. In contrast, there was very little connection between previous highest qualification and completion status for apprentices.

Table 7 - Course completion status by previous highest level of qualification (FE learners)

Type	Previous highest level	Completed	Learner indicated they didn't complete	Learner indicated still learning	Yet to complete (NET)	Base (n)
FE learners	None	73%	14%	13%	27%	443
	EL1/2	75%	12%	12%	25%	240
	L1	80%	11%	8%	19%	453
	L2	82%	9%	9%	18%	1,356
	L3	83%	8%	8%	16%	1,401
	L4+	87%	5%	8%	13%	1,732
	L1 or lower	76%	12%	11%	23%	1,136
	L2 or higher	84%	7%	8%	15%	4,489
Apprentices	None	65%	10%	25%	34%	374
	EL1/2	65%	10%	23%	32%	146
	L1	62%	12%	25%	37%	433
	L2	66%	10%	24%	34%	2,094
	L3	69%	10%	21%	31%	2,716
	L4+	63%	10%	26%	36%	937
	L1 or lower	64%	11%	25%	35%	953
	L2 or higher	67%	10%	23%	33%	5,747

Base: All FE learners and apprentices (bases given in final column)

Table 8 - Learner characteristics associated with non-completion (apprentices and FE learners)

Factor		FE learners		Apprentices	
		Learner indicated they didn't complete	Base (n)	Learner indicated they didn't complete	Base (n)
Deprivation (IMD)	<i>Most deprived quintile</i>	10%*	1,953	11%	1,700
	<i>Least deprived quintile</i>	5%	652	10%	1,045
Low paid worker ⁴⁵	<£21,000	8%*	2,067	10%	3,653
	£21,000+	5%	967	9%	1,470
Disability	<i>Yes – any disability</i>	10%*	1,254	13%*	817
	<i>No – no disability</i>	8%	4,340	10%	5,891

Base: All FE learners and apprentices (bases given in final column)
 * denotes significantly higher level of non-completion

Aside from a range of course-related factors and previous education, a number of learner characteristics were also associated with a higher risk of non-completion. These are described below and suggest that learners from more disadvantaged backgrounds and with more complex learning needs are more likely to not complete their learning (see table 8).

As shown in table 8, among both FE learners and apprentices, those with disabilities or long-term illnesses were significantly less likely to complete their learning. This does not necessarily mean disabilities in and of themselves lead to non-completion, simply that there is a correlation between the two. Nevertheless, given that 17 per cent of all learners and apprentices had a disability or long-term illness, it is potentially worrying. (In the following section, we discuss reasons for non-completion as described by learners and apprentices).

Among FE learners (but not apprentices) there was also a strong association between non-completion and learners' socio-economic backgrounds. Comparing those in the most and least deprived IMD quintiles,⁴⁶ rate of non-completion was five percentage points higher in the most deprived quintile. Similarly, FE learners who were earning below

⁴⁵ In work immediately prior to learning (reported gross annual salary)

⁴⁶ The Index of Multiple Deprivation, commonly known as the IMD, is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in England.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/579151/English_Indices_of_Deprivation_2015_-_Frequently_Asked_Questions_Dec_2016.pdf

£21,000 at the time of the survey were three per centage points more likely not to complete than those who earned £21,000 or more. In the chapter 5, we considered the financial challenges facing learners. Unsurprisingly, those from the most deprived areas and those on lower incomes were the most likely to report financial challenges. For apprentices, there were no significant differences on these measures – probably because most apprentices were working before starting their apprentice (see chapter 3) and because they were earning while they learned. Indeed, apprenticeships are paid jobs with training, allowing individuals to earn while they learn without having to pay for their training or qualifications.

Reasons learners give for not completing

Those who did not complete their learning⁴⁷ were asked what were the main reasons for this. Learners could give multiple reasons for non-completion, anticipating that reasons may be complex and multi-faceted. Figure 21 presents the findings split by FE learners and apprentices.

Prevalence of personal and domestic challenges

For both groups, but particularly for FE learners, personal and domestic problems were common reasons for non-completion – these were mentioned by nearly half (47%) of FE learners who had not completed. This included ill health, family / childcare commitments, not being able to juggle learning with other commitments, and other personal challenges (such as bereavement or having to care for an older family member). These issues disproportionately impacted on women and those aged 25 and over:

⁴⁷ This excludes the group who were still learning / yet to complete.

Among FE learner non-completions:

- 54% of women cited personal or domestic problems, compared with 32% of men.
- 47% aged 25 and over cited personal or domestic problems, compared with 37% of under 25s.

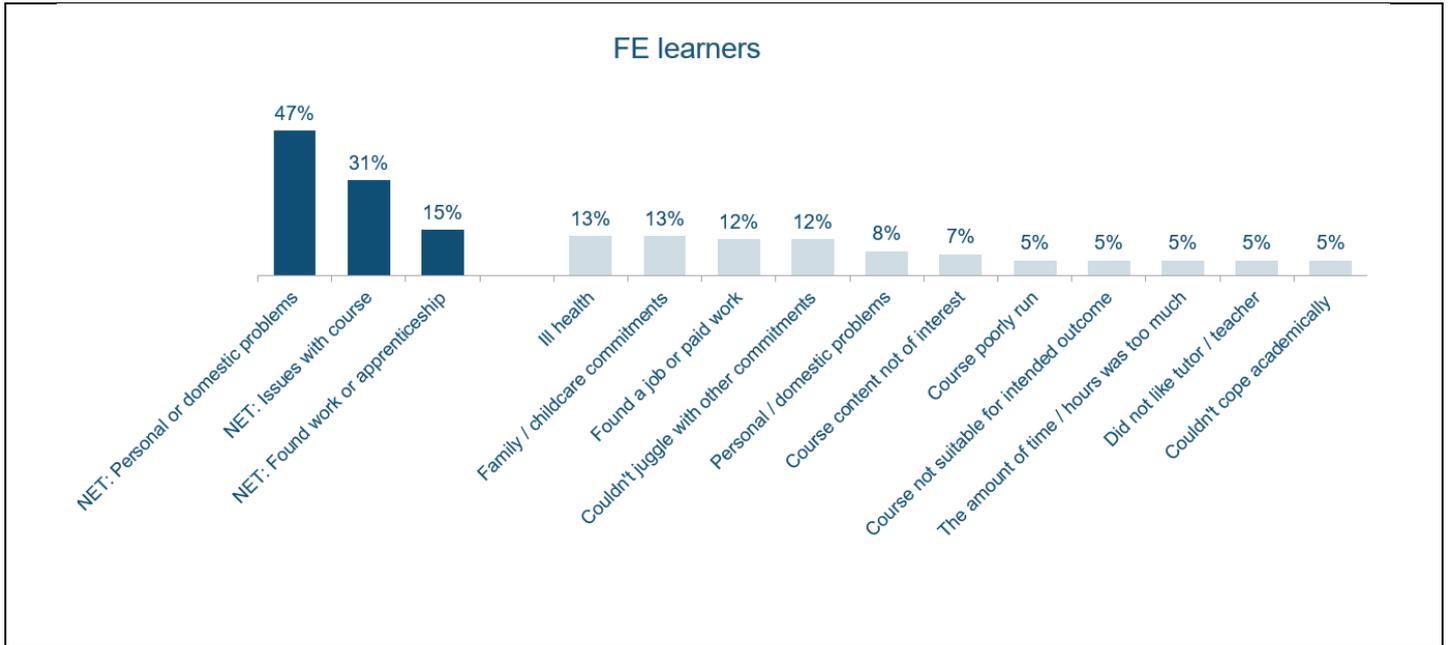
Among apprenticeship non-completions:

- 31% of women cited personal or domestic problems, compared with 17% of men.
- 30% aged 25 and over cited personal or domestic problems, compared with 17% of under 25s.

This is as we might expect - although gender roles are changing, women still take disproportionate levels of responsibility for childcare compared with men, often alongside work commitments.⁴⁸ Equally, older learners are more likely to have dependent children and to be working. Indeed, the proportion of FE learners and apprentices aged 35 to 44 who did not complete citing personal or domestic problems is very high – 54 per cent and 42 per cent respectively.

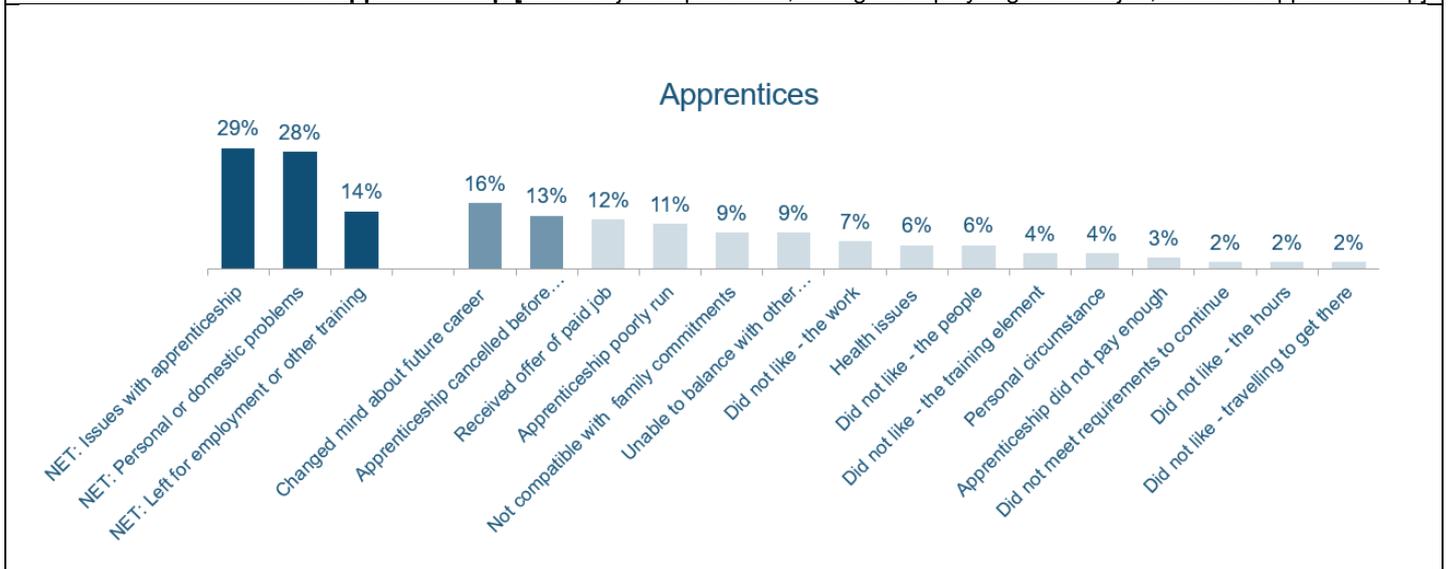
⁴⁸ ONS figures have shown some of the strongest employment growth to be among mothers with dependent children
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/familiesandthelabourmarketengland/2017>

Figure 21 - Main reasons for not completing learning



Base: all FE learners who did not complete (768).

Nets include: **Personal or domestic problems** [Ill health, Family/childcare commitments, couldn't juggle studying with my other commitments, personal/domestic problems]; **Issues with course** [Course content not of interest, course poorly run, course was not suitable for intended outcome, the amount of time/hours too much, did not like the tutor, couldn't cope academically] **Found work or apprenticeship** [Found a job or paid work, changed employer/got a new job, found an apprenticeship]



Base: all apprentices who did not complete (775)

Nets include: **Issues with apprenticeship** [apprenticeship poorly run, did not like the work, did not like the people, did not like the training element, did not pay enough, did not like the hours, did not like travelling to get there]; **Personal or domestic problems** [not compatible with childcare/family commitments, health issues, personal circumstance, too busy with job search]; **Left for employment or other training** [received offer of paid job, left to go into full time education, left to go on training]

Leaving learning for paid work

Around one in six FE non-completers (15%) indicated that they left learning because they found work or moved to a new job (including apprenticeships). A similar proportion of apprentice non-completers (14%) indicated that they left for other employment or training. Of all the reasons for non-completion, these are perhaps the most positive. The base sizes for those who left because they found work is too low to provide a more detailed analysis, but where this was given as the reason it was nearly always the sole reason given. In other words, the offer of work does seem to be the root cause of non-completion rather than, for example, underlying financial worries or because the learner did not like their course. Employment outcomes for learners and apprentices are discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

Issues with the training offered

Three in ten FE and apprenticeship non-completers (31 and 29%) said they had left because of issues with the course or apprenticeship. In the case of apprenticeships, this was most commonly because the apprentice felt the apprenticeship was poorly run (11% of apprenticeship non-completers gave this as a main reason). Typically, this related to the training they were offered. Examples included not feeling supported by their tutor / apprenticeship provider or the employer not being supportive of the training elements.

For FE non-completers, the reasons for not liking their course were varied. This reflects the very wide range of learning within FE in terms of level, length, subject and intensity of learning. The range of reasons included the course content not being of interest (7%), the course being poorly run (5%), or the course not being suitable for the intended outcome (5%). Later in this chapter, we look at the degree to which learning met or exceeded learners' and apprentices' expectations.

Unavoidable apprenticeship non-completion

We should also acknowledge that, for some apprentices, the reason for non-completion is beyond the control of any reasonable intervention. More than one in ten apprentice non-completers (13%) indicated that the apprenticeship had been cancelled before they had completed it. This included cases where the apprenticeship employer had closed or where the apprentice's position had been made redundant. A further 16 per cent said they had changed their mind about their future career as a result of working as an apprentice.

Further evidence of personal challenges

All non-completers were also asked, directly, if they experienced any of the following challenges while learning:

- An illness that lasted a long time
- A change in your personal circumstances
- A change in employment
- A learning disability
- A physical disability
- Mental or emotional difficulties

Supporting the findings on reasons for non-completion, around two-thirds (64%) of all non-completers had experienced at least one of these while learning (65% of FE learners and 63% of apprentices). Overall, the findings point to a high degree of challenging and complex situations for FE learners (particularly non-apprentices). As evidenced in chapter 2, learners and apprentices tended to come from relatively deprived areas, have below average incomes and were often juggling family and/or working commitments alongside learning.

Impact of learning experience on completion rates

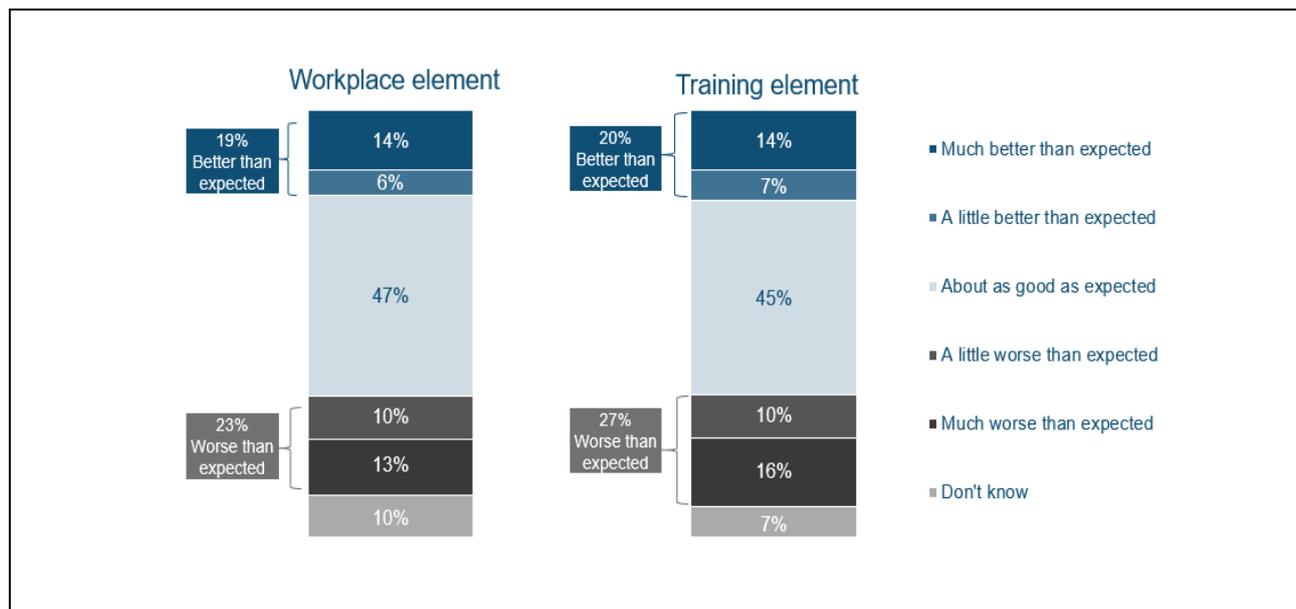
All FE learners and apprentices who did not complete were asked whether their experience had been better or worse than expected. This section explores these perceptions to understand the extent to which learning experience may contribute to non-completion.

Perceptions of apprenticeships among non-completers

Apprentices were asked two questions to capture the perceptions of the work experience and training elements separately. As shown in figure 22, opinion was fairly evenly divided. Despite not completing their apprenticeship, one in five felt that the workplace element had been better than expected (19%) with a similar proportion (20%) saying the training element had been better than expected. Around half felt each element was about as good as expected. This leaves around a quarter who felt the training element (27%) or the workplace element (23%) were worse than expected.

Perhaps surprisingly, links between perceptions of apprenticeships and reasons for non-completion were limited. No single reason for non-completion was strongly associated with particularly positive or negative perceptions. This supports the idea that drop outs are not generally caused (at least solely) by a negative experience of an apprenticeship. As discussed above, personal circumstances and other factors such as leaving because of paid job offer are common reasons for non-completion.

Figure 22 - Perceptions of apprenticeships among non-completers



Base: all apprentices who did not complete (775)

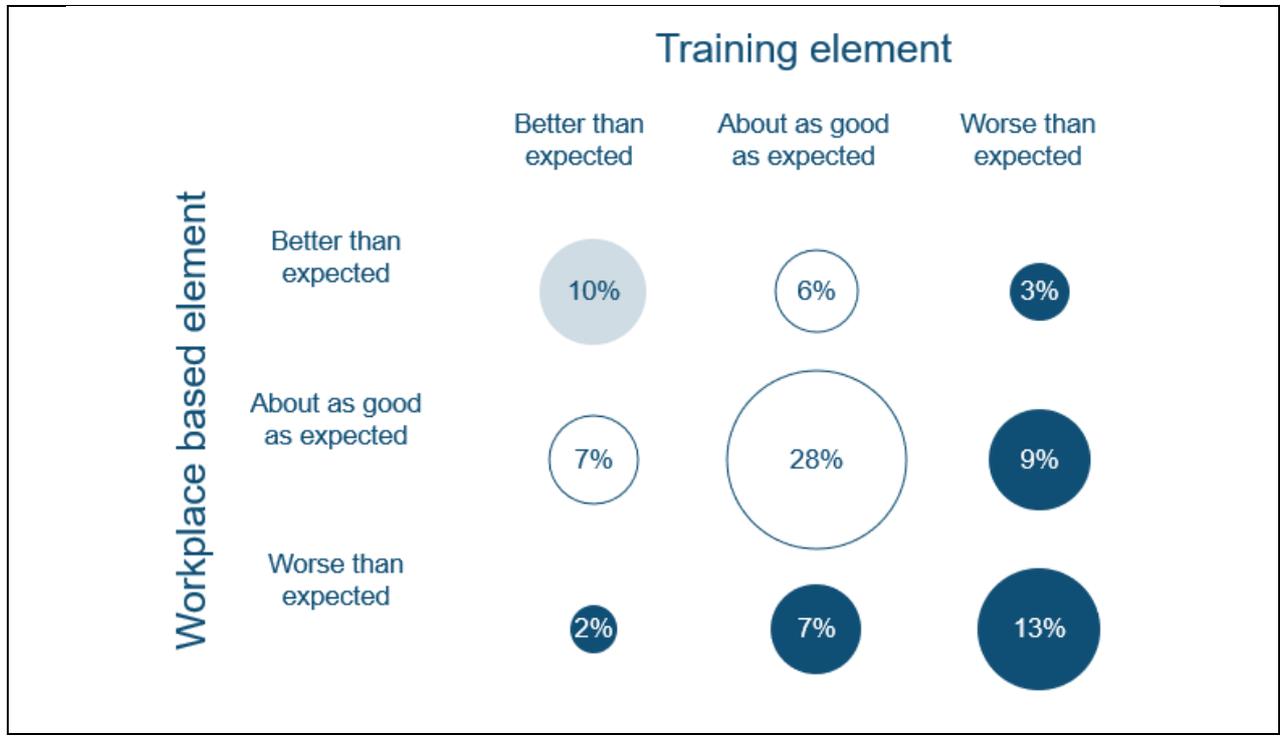
Variations in perceptions of apprenticeships by sub-groups were limited, although apprentices who were not already working for their apprenticeship employer⁴⁹ tended to be slightly more negative. Slightly more than a quarter (27%) felt the workplace element was worse than expected, compared with 21 per cent of those who were already working for the employer. And, 30 per cent felt the training element was worse than expected, compared with 25 per cent of those who were already working for the employer.

As shown in figure 23, there was a fairly strong relationship between apprentices' perceptions of the workplace and training elements of their apprenticeship. Despite not completing the apprenticeship, 10 per cent felt that both elements of the of the apprenticeship were better than expected, with a similar proportion (13%) saying that both elements were worse than expected. Perhaps most striking, 51 per cent of all apprentice non-completers felt that both elements were as good or better than expected

⁴⁹ As noted in section 3, many apprentices were already working for the employer who took them on as an apprentice.

and 20 per cent felt that one or both elements were better than expected. Again, this suggests that apprenticeship quality is not the primary driver behind high non-completion rates.

Figure 23 - Comparison of perceptions of training and workplace elements of apprenticeships

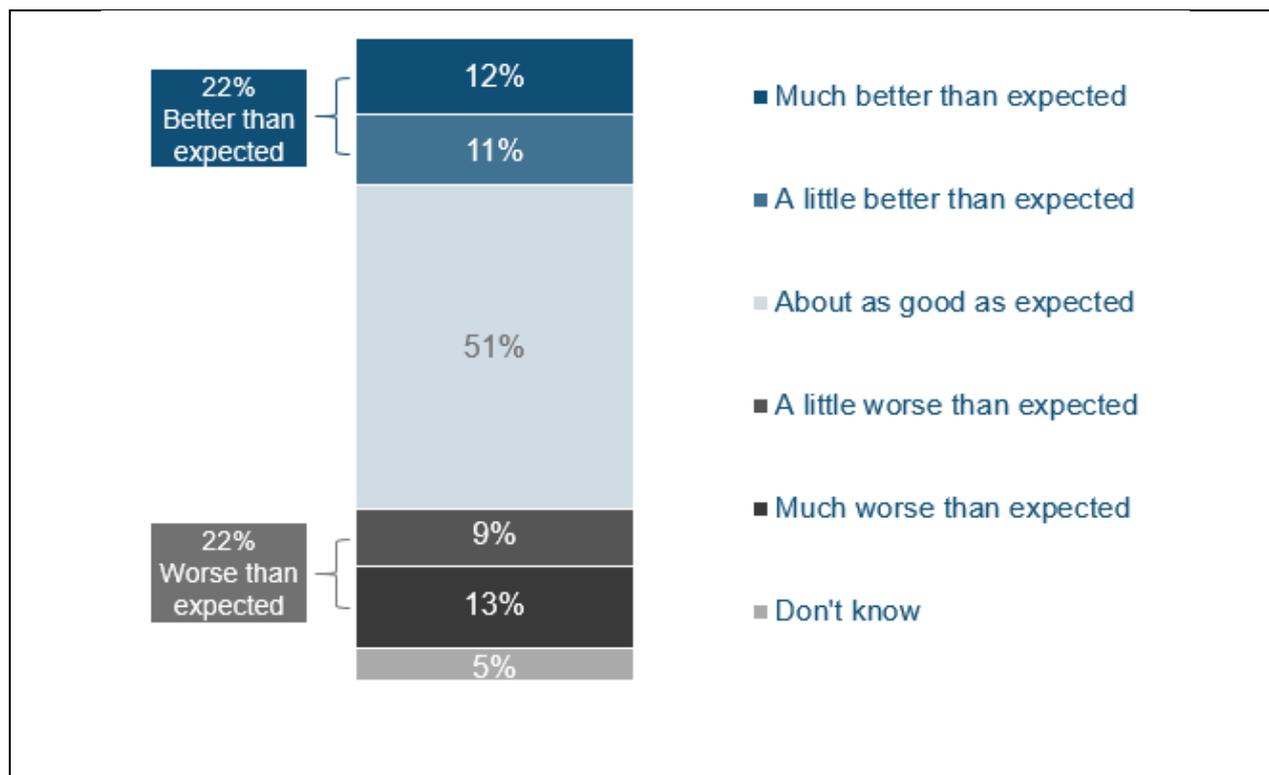


Base: all apprentices who did not complete (775)

Perceptions of FE learning among non-completers

Perceptions of FE learners who did not complete their course were very similar to those of apprentices. As shown in figure 24, around a fifth said the learning was either better (22%) or worse (22%) than expected, with half saying about as good as expected (51%). Unlike perceptions of apprenticeships, there are quite significant variations in perceptions of FE learning, particularly by previous levels of education and work experience. Non-completers who already held a Level 3 qualification or higher were more likely to feel the training was worse than expected (28%, compared with 18% of those with no qualifications or qualifications below Level 3). This includes nearly one in five who felt the training was much worse than expected (17%).

Figure 24 - Perceptions of FE learning among non-completers



Base: all FE learners who did not complete (768)

Similarly, non-completers who had at least some work experience were more negative; 25 per cent felt the training was worse than expected compared with 17 per cent of those who had never worked. This includes 15 per cent who felt the training was *much* worse than expected. It seems, understandably, that prior work experience and previous education levels help to determine levels of expectation.

Reasons apprenticeships fail to meet expectations among non-completers

Table 9 summarises the main reasons given for apprenticeships failing to meet their expectations.⁵⁰ More than half of apprentices who felt their apprenticeship was worse than expected said that a problem with the training (55%) had been a contributing factor. Largely this was associated with a lack of support or contact from providers, colleges or tutors (42%). This included mentions of tutors failing to attend meetings and the infrequency of provider visits. Other contributing factors included a general lack of training or poor-quality training (25%). This is largely consistent with findings from the

⁵⁰ This is based on responses from 314 apprentices which does not allow for robust sub-group analysis of the reasons given.

2017 Apprenticeship Evaluation Survey of learners.⁵¹ This showed that while satisfaction levels are high with all aspects of apprenticeships, satisfaction is lower with the amount of training provided (78% were satisfied with this compared with 89% being satisfied with the apprenticeship *overall*).

Around one in five (19%) mentioned problems with the employer they were placed with. This included being given low-level or low-quality work duties, and even being mistreated or undervalued by the staff they were working with.

Table 9 - Reasons why apprenticeships did not meet expectations

Reason	%
NET: Problems with training element	55%
NET: The apprenticeship was irrelevant, poor/too easy	35%
Lack support or contact from provider/college/tutor	42%
Badly organised	26%
Lack of / Poor quality training	25%
Problems with employer placed with	19%
Problems with the time frame/management	15%
Didn't learn anything new / too easy	11%
The apprenticeship was irrelevant	9%
Role was not as expected	7%
Problems with pay	4%
Long delays with certification	3%
No job at the end of training	2%
<i>Don't know</i>	3%

Base: All apprentice non-completers who said it was worse than expected (314)

Other common reasons included the apprenticeship being badly organised, problems with the timeframe, feeling they didn't learn anything or feeling the apprenticeship wasn't relevant.

⁵¹ Acknowledging that the Apprenticeship Evaluation Survey focused on current and complete apprentices. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeships-evaluation-2017-learners-survey>

Conclusion

The survey findings build on and complement existing evidence on the experiences, outcomes, barriers to completion and attitudes of FE learners and apprentices. They highlight how critically important the FE sector is to the economy and how it may act a catalyst for social mobility. The sector serves more than two million learners and apprentices, including a hugely diverse population of learners and apprentices. This includes young people but also very large numbers of adults in their 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s. Both apprentices and particularly FE learners tend to come from in relatively deprived areas and are more likely than the general public to be claiming benefits before they start their learning. The sector also serves a disproportionately large number of BAME learners.

FE learners, and particularly apprentices, were generally positive about the effect learning had on their earning potential and their chances of moving on to higher levels of training. Reflecting this, learner outcomes at the time of interview tended to be positive among those who completed their learning. In particular, 74% of apprentices who had never worked before completing their apprenticeship had moved into and remained in paid work at the time of interview. A quarter (23%) of FE learners who had never worked before completing their learning had moved into and remained in paid work at the time of interview.

While there is evidence of positive outcomes, the survey re-confirms the level of untapped potential in FE. Department estimates suggest approximately 28 per cent of apprentices and 13 per cent of other learners do not complete. Given the size of the sector, reducing non-completion even modestly could have a quite significant impact on learner outcomes, social mobility and the economic benefit of FE. The survey shows that non-completion rates vary by type of learning – non-completion is more prevalent among those on lower levels of learning and among those who held lower levels of qualification prior to starting their learning. FE learners living in more deprived areas (as measured by IMD) and those on lower incomes were also less likely to complete their learning.

Learners and apprentices who do not complete their learning, frequently cited a range of personal and domestic challenges as a barrier to completion. This is consistent with recent research by the Learning and Work Institute (L&W) which highlighted a ‘a range of situational, institutional and dispositional barriers’ the learners and prospective learners face.⁵² Their research concluded that the most disadvantaged learners were more likely experience the ‘cumulative effect of multiple barriers to learning.’ More might be done to

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/735453/Barriers_to_learning_-_Qualitative_report.pdf

reduce the number of non-completions, for example helping learners and apprentices with personal or domestic challenges which often contribute to learners failing to complete.

The survey findings in this report are only a starting point. Full data tables and SPSS data have been published alongside the report, allowing users to further explore the data in more detail. In addition, DfE intend to carry out further analysis of learner outcomes for those learners and apprentices who provided consent to match their survey responses to Longitudinal Educational Outcome (LEO) dataset. This will provide, for example, a better understanding of the link between learning and social mobility. It will also help understand whether learners achieve their stated long-term goals and provide a detailed picture of the long-term outcomes for learners who do not complete their learning.



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