Future Learn

The Future of Learning Report

2022

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THE FUTURE OF LEARNING REPORT 2022

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Our mission is to transform access to education

ANDY HANCOCK
CEO, FUTURELEARN

"We've witnessed widespread transformation across the sector, which continues to reinvent itself for a post-COVID future."

At FutureLearn, we are on a mission to transform access to education. As we reach the tenth anniversary of the emergence of the MOOC, we look at the potential that the expanding edtech market still holds, and what the learner of the future looks like.

We've witnessed widespread transformation across the sector, which continues to reinvent itself for a post-COVID future. Learners are increasingly seeking more choice, flexibility and affordability in their education, and institutions are looking to hybrid or blended models to deliver this learning. At FutureLearn, we are evolving our platform to address these new trends and opportunities.

We're focused on using data and insights – alongside technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning – to guide learners on bespoke pathways through their lifelong learning journey, while making the experience of creating valuable educational content as seamless as possible for partners.

Working closely with our network of more than 260 international partners across higher education, industry and government, we remain dedicated to providing the best digital learning experience and catalogue of courses that focus on developing the skills needed to help our 18 million learners navigate modern life.

Trends such as the 'Great Resignation' have driven demand for employability and career skills, while important issues such as mental health and diversity, equity and inclusion are being prioritised both in life and in the workplace as we face the challenges the post-COVID economy has presented. These issues are well-highlighted in the report but a fundamental finding is just how central online learning is to unlocking human potential and helping to build a better future for all.

This is why we must not undervalue the hope and tangible change that connection and the sharing of knowledge inspires. Education can and does have the ability to bring people together and reshape the world – we know this through witnessing the power of social learning on our platform.

The future for us culminates in deeper connections, closer collaboration, and in creating a global community where learning is open to all. Read on to discover how the education sector, employers and online learning providers can bring this future of learning to life.

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Introduction

A thirst for knowledge and skills fit for a new working world: these are learners' leading requirements of education as we rebuild following the pandemic.

The last two years have caused a fundamental shift in the way many people view their career paths, work-life balance and the future of work. As a result, they're more eager to learn than ever, hoping to boost their employability and life skills. 'Jobs for life' are now decidedly a thing of the past as the gig economy grows and people regularly switch careers.

As a result, learners recognise the need for lifelong learning – and the flexibility and accessibility of learning online is leading the way. They're even scrutinising the curriculum and identifying gaps in their knowledge – which, of course, provides a prime opportunity for providers to plug these gaps in order to help learners succeed.

Employers, too, are seeking fresh skills – from critical thinking, to a deep understanding of technology and emerging issues like sustainability – to give them a competitive advantage.

So, there is much for education providers to do: satisfy learners' need for flexible course options; play a part in educating the population in a way that suits individuals' vast range of requirements; and help employers upskill their workforce and future-proof their businesses.

In this report, FutureLearn analyses insights from our dual surveys of learners and business leaders. We uncover the education motivations, attitudes and behaviours of 2,000 people and more than 500 employers based in the UK.

To add to their voices, we've interviewed ten top academics and education sector experts for their take on the trends that are set to shape learning delivery for decades to come.

Readers will discover detail on:

• **How people learn**

• **Post-pandemic learning**

• **Skills fit for the future**

At present, people from different generations, social and ethnic groups feel multiple barriers to learning are blocking the best education experiences, from course affordability to race issues – and experts see technology as a critical tool to turn around perceptions and deliver best-in-class learning.

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SECTION 1

How people learn

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Education has developed at a rapid pace in the past few years. While people will still study just to satisfy a thirst for knowledge, many are becoming much more intentional in their learning choices.

Learners understand that there is no career for life anymore. With regular job switching here to stay and the gig economy still growing, there's an urgent demand for the UK's workforce to have a broader range of skills. Learners want, and need, to keep gaining qualifications throughout the lifespan of their careers.

As a result, respondents are turning to online learning. 81% who have changed careers since the start of the pandemic state that an online course helped them make their move. But they're also asking employers for lifelong learning opportunities.

Amid these trends, new teaching models and technologies are giving learners greater flexibility over how, where and when they choose to complete courses, from traditional face-to-face classes to new online-only or blended approaches.

David Coyne, Senior Policy Advisor, Skills Development Scotland, believes learners also have a keen eye trained on how new skills align to career options. "It would be interesting if you could get to a point whereby there's a catalogue of things you must demonstrate or do to achieve a qualification in a chosen field," he says. "'I'm going to be on a merchant ship for three weeks, that will get me 25 points; I'll do something online and that will get me more points; then I'm going to attend a series of expert lectures.' You'll assemble your own degree."

The experts observed new preferences for online and blended

courses that flexibly fit around learners' lives. In the future, the focus will be on models that encompass emerging ways to learn, from MOOCs to free learning on YouTube, creating a more inclusive offering that tears down barriers such as cost and location.

Nick Worthington, Director, King's Online, explains: "COVID-19 propelled the pace of change in the sector, and learning as a concept more generally. For many players in the market – universities but also other organisations – it has highlighted a big opportunity."

While these trends mark a major opportunity for both learners and educators, they're also highlighting the 'digital divides' in society. It's clear that people's socio-economic backgrounds still determine whether they succeed or struggle to embrace these new ways to learn.

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"It would be interesting if you could get to a point whereby there's a catalogue of things you must demonstrate or do to achieve a qualification in a chosen field. 'I'm going to be on a merchant ship for three weeks, that will get me 25 points; I'll do something online and that will get me more points; then I'm going to attend a series of expert lectures.' You'll assemble your own degree."

DAVID COYNE,
SENIOR POLICY ADVISOR,
SKILLS DEVELOPMENT SCOTLAND

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Top marks for online learning

33% **would choose online platforms to learn new skills**

Experts aren't surprised by the popularity of online learning, whether through short courses or blended learning, because its flexibility suits so many situations (for example, fitting study around a busy work life or parenthood). They point out that short online courses can also serve many purposes for the learner – from a simple thirst for knowledge to specific vocational needs.

Online platforms are rated the top provider by most age groups surveyed, apart from those aged 55-plus, who prefer to learn via a college (32%).

There are also some interesting differences in learning preference by ethnic background. Asian* (43%) and White* (33%) people name online learning platforms as their top choice when it comes to gaining new skills. When it comes to learning directly with a brand or technology

company such as TikTok and YouTube, however, this is most popular among Black* respondents (38%) and least popular among White respondents (11%).

In terms of how people learn, 31% of respondents say they would take an online short course if they needed to learn new skills to further their career, making this the top answer.

Learners prefer online courses to other ways of learning for several reasons. Chief among these is the freedom of learning at a pace that suits them (23%), but the ability to learn from home (22%) and overall flexibility (20%) are also highly rated.

Women are generally more positive than men about all of these factors. More than a quarter (26%) of women enjoy learning at their own pace, compared to a fifth (20%) of men. Moreover, 24% of women compared to 20% of men enjoy learning in the comfort of their own home.

Black respondents (25%) state that taking a course alongside others around the world is behind their preference for online learning. This type of 'cosmopolitan course', bringing together learners

* Please refer to methodology (pg 41) for a breakdown of the ethnicities for this group.

Key reasons people learn online

23% Learn at a pace that suits them

22% Learn from home

20% Overall flexibility

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from different backgrounds, cultures and locations, is also a much bigger draw for 16- to 24-year-old respondents (16%) than the oldest group surveyed – those aged 55 and over (4%).
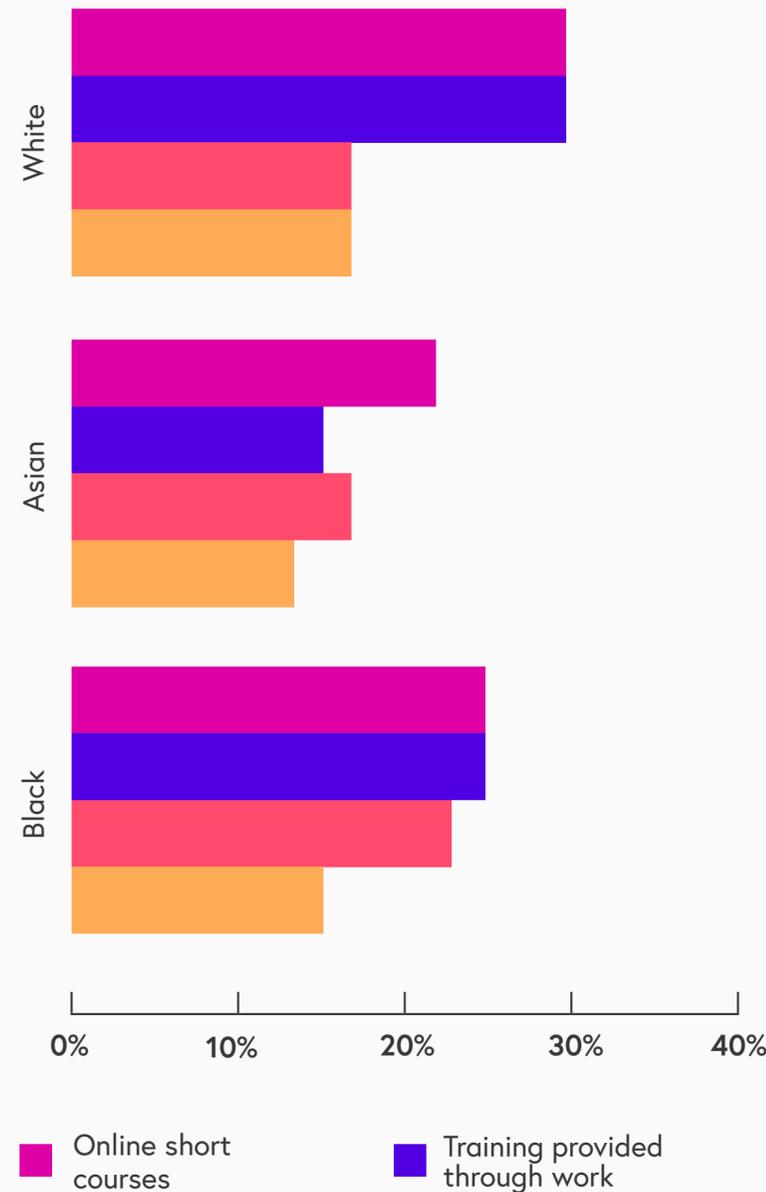
When we asked people to tell us their least favourite things about an online course they have taken, a fifth (20%) of respondents overall state there are no disadvantages to taking an online course.

However, the research shows that some providers and platforms can still make improvements to create even better online learning environments. For example, some respondents say losing motivation quickly and missing the physical classroom setting are their least favourite things about online learning.
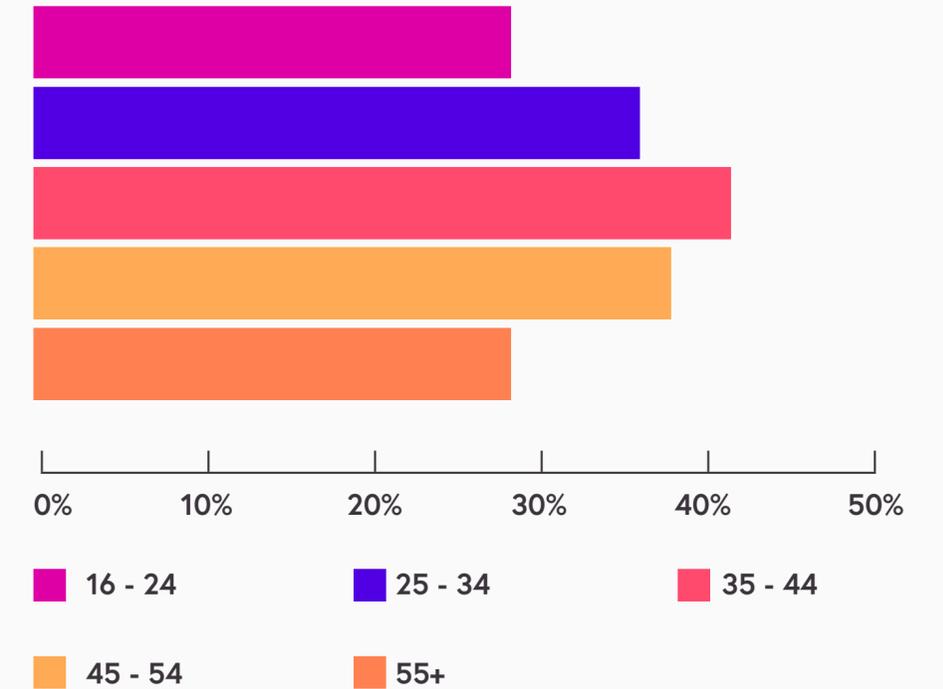
Experts point out that learners generally have similar likes and dislikes for all educational settings. To bolster motivation and support for online learners during a course, they believe dedicated counsellors/ tutors for advice and support, and online chat boards for students to share experiences will help. These measures are already in place, in many cases.

Educational psychologist Dr Kairen Cullen agrees: "If we don't enable people and help them to feel supported it can feel quite an anonymous, hostile world."

How do people want to gain new skills while in employment?

Online short courses

Training provided through work

Higher education - Part-time online

Doing my own self-guided study - YouTube, Google etc.

Respondents choosing online learning platforms to learn new skills, by age:

16 - 24

25 - 34

35 - 44

45 - 54

55+

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26%
want to study to suit their own schedule

Flexibility is key

People have different preferences when it comes to how they like to learn. More than a quarter (26%) want to do so in a way that fits into their own schedule.

Professor Kiran Trehan, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Partnerships and Engagement and Director of the Centre for Women's Enterprise, Leadership, Economy and Diversity, University of York, expands on this point: "A one-size-fits-all approach doesn't fit with our aspirations anymore. We like the idea of being able to learn when we want, how we want, in different spaces – reflecting the changing nature of work."

Men are most likely to seek out in-person learning (28%) but the top choice among women is the approach that best suits their schedule (29%).

Meanwhile, over a fifth (21%) of those aged 25 to 34 – and almost as many (20%) who are 35 to 44 – want fully online courses.

With 19% wishing to take short, frequent online courses, and a further 19% keen on a blend of face-to-face and web-based learning, it's clear that flexibility and personalisation are, and will continue to be, hugely important for learners.

Experts feel that blended learning – sometimes termed 'active learning' or 'hybrid learning' – is a key future approach. It combines the best aspects of in-person teaching, including learner support and informal networking, with the flexibility of online learning – much like the recent trend towards hybrid working.

There are already many examples of course providers incorporating online delivery into traditional programmes, with virtual laboratories or gamification, for instance. This may trigger a need to re-evaluate existing teaching skills among educators so they're fit to face this brave new world.

It's also interesting to note that many people want flexible fees. When respondents were asked how they prefer to pay to access online learning, 17% would like a free trial of a course before committing and around one in six (16%) think pay-as-you-go modules are a good option. In addition, 15% of respondents say their employer must cover learning costs for them.

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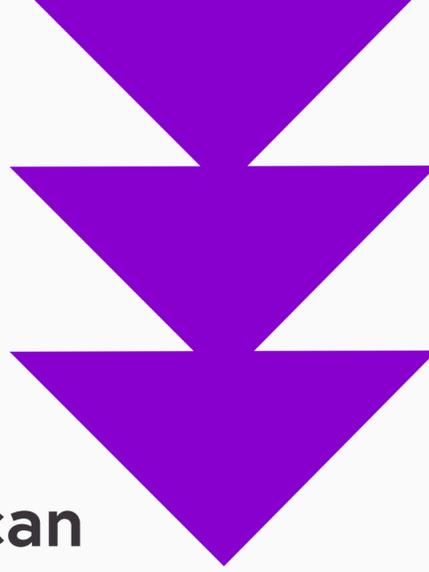
"I sometimes talk about an 'Uber-versity' model. If you can have taxi firms that don't have many cars (Uber) and hotel chains that don't own any hotels (Airbnb), can a university operate like the 'Netflix of learning', where you're comfortable with the fact that people can get their learning experiences wherever they like?"

PROFESSOR ROMY LAWSON,
DEPUTY VICE CHANCELLOR (STUDENTS)
FLINDERS UNIVERSITY

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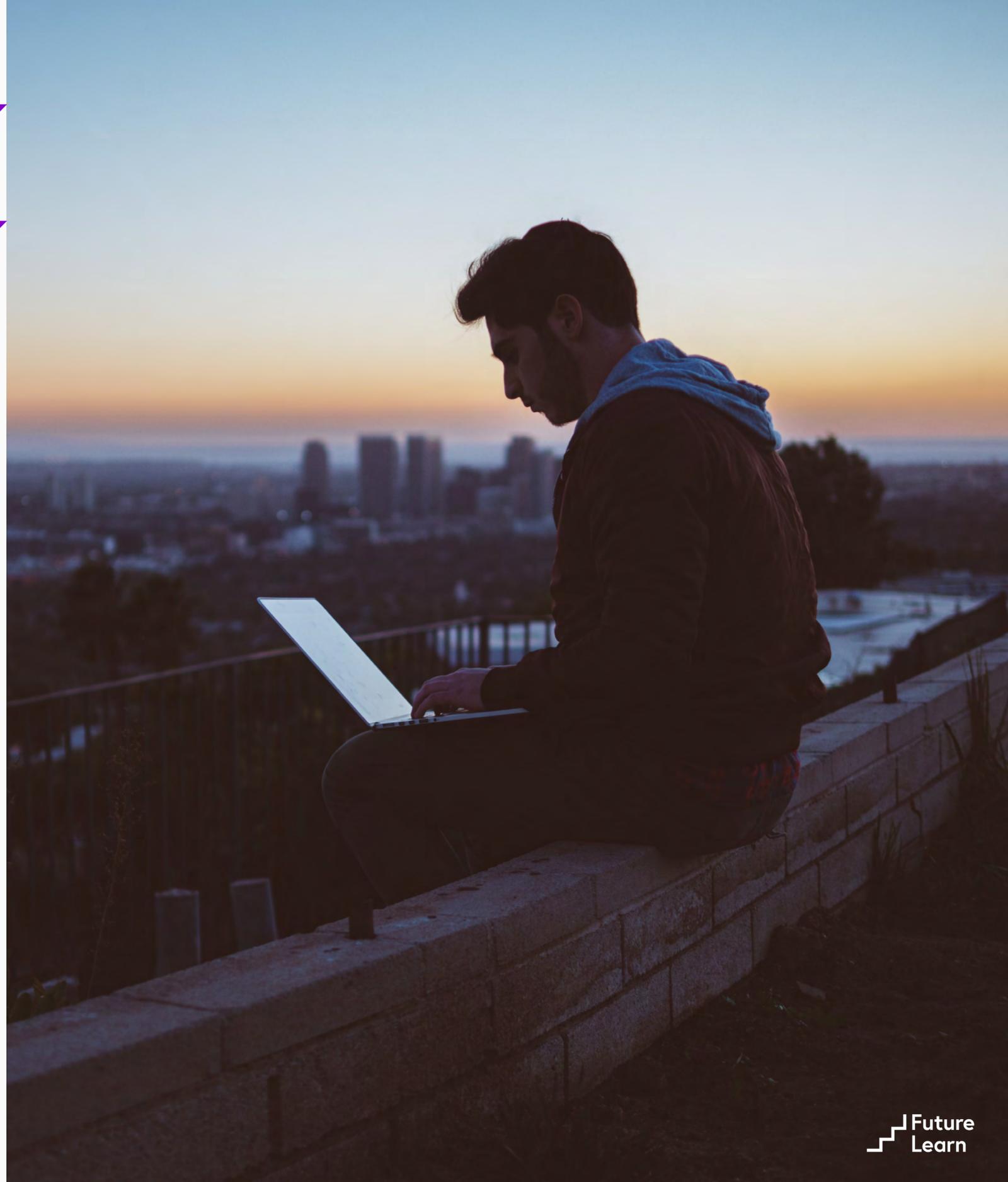
Why do people want to learn?

Passion propels learning more than any other factor: more than half (51%) of the respondents said being passionate about a subject would be their main motivation in choosing to take a course on a certain topic.

The second strongest motivation among respondents (32%) is learning something so they can get a well-paid job, a promotion or pay rise. This increases to 37% of 35- to 44-year-olds.

Altruism is also a factor. Almost a quarter (24%) want to learn to help them make a difference to the world, and more than a fifth (21%) want to benefit their local community.

As Mike Zealley, MD, KPMG Learning Services, points out:

"You have to understand why the individual is learning. Is it to get promoted? Because they want a different role? That connects to what form of recognition and reward is appropriate."

32%
learn to get a promotion or pay rise

51%
cite passion as a motivator for learning

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Tackling sensitive subjects

Educational experts are intrigued that respondents name mental health education as the subject they'd most like to learn online (16%). Those aged 55 and over are the least likely to prefer mental health education online (11%) but this method is most popular among 35- to 44-year-olds (22%).

Experts feel this is explained by a greater focus on mental health during the pandemic. They also point to growing mental health awareness in educational institutions and working environments. It's becoming less of an unmentionable subject than it might have been in the past, say the experts, which is likely piquing learners' interests – along with their personal experiences.

While there is a better understanding of the need for society as a whole to discuss mental and sexual health matters today, some learners still feel more comfortable discovering topics such as mental health (16%), sexual health (15%) and sexual relations (13%) online.

David Coyne, Senior Policy Adviser, Skills Development Scotland, believes there are advantages to an online approach to tricky topics. "We can all giggle about dreadful memories of sex ed classes at school. The messenger is really important. If you've got one good teacher, they can educate 40 kids – but if it's a good online influencer, they can reach millions of people."

Learners from non-White ethnic groups generally feel more comfortable learning about race via online courses. Just 6% of White respondents select this subject compared to 17% of Asian respondents and around one in seven (13%) Black respondents.

What subject areas would you feel more comfortable learning about online than in person?
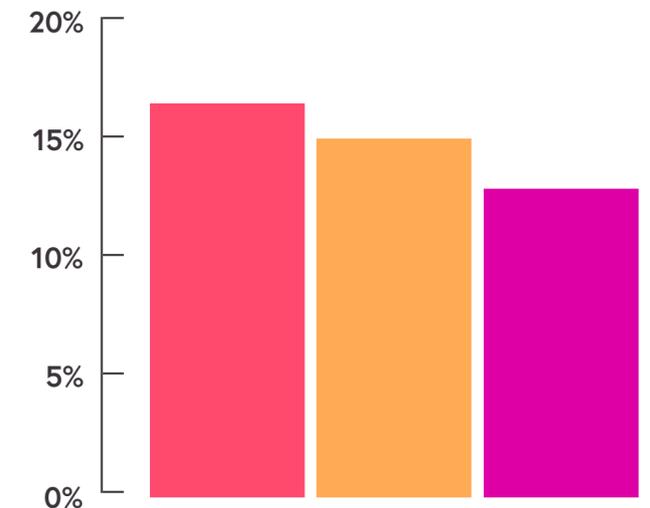
- Mental health
- Sexual health
- Sexual relations

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"We can all giggle about dreadful memories of sex ed classes at school. The messenger is really important. If you've got one good teacher, they can educate 40 kids – but if it's a good online influencer, they can reach millions of people."

DAVID COYNE,
SENIOR POLICY ADVISER,
SKILLS DEVELOPMENT SCOTLAND

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What's standing in the way of learning?

Education clearly still has a way to go to become truly accessible. Respondents say several aspects of personal background could result in a negative impact on individuals, affecting the ways they prefer to learn. In fact, nearly four in five (79%) suggest there is at least one factor that could make the learning process more difficult.

Disability (33%) is viewed as a major factor in a negative educational experience, while the same proportion (33%) pick socio-economic background.

Professor Kiran Trehan, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Partnerships and Engagement, University of York, believes:
"Digital poverty has been a real blocker. Can we create inclusive virtual learning environments? We might then be able to tackle the ongoing digital divide, and move from governance and compliance to a course-design strategy that's embedded in action."

Personal appearance can be an issue, say nearly a third (32%), while race can often be an obstacle, according to 29% of respondents. Against this backdrop, it's interesting to note over a fifth (21%) of Black respondents prefer to learn fully online, compared to around one in six (16%) White respondents.

More than a quarter (26%) of respondents feel issues of gender identity could negatively impact people's learning experience, with a similar total (25%) also referencing sexuality.
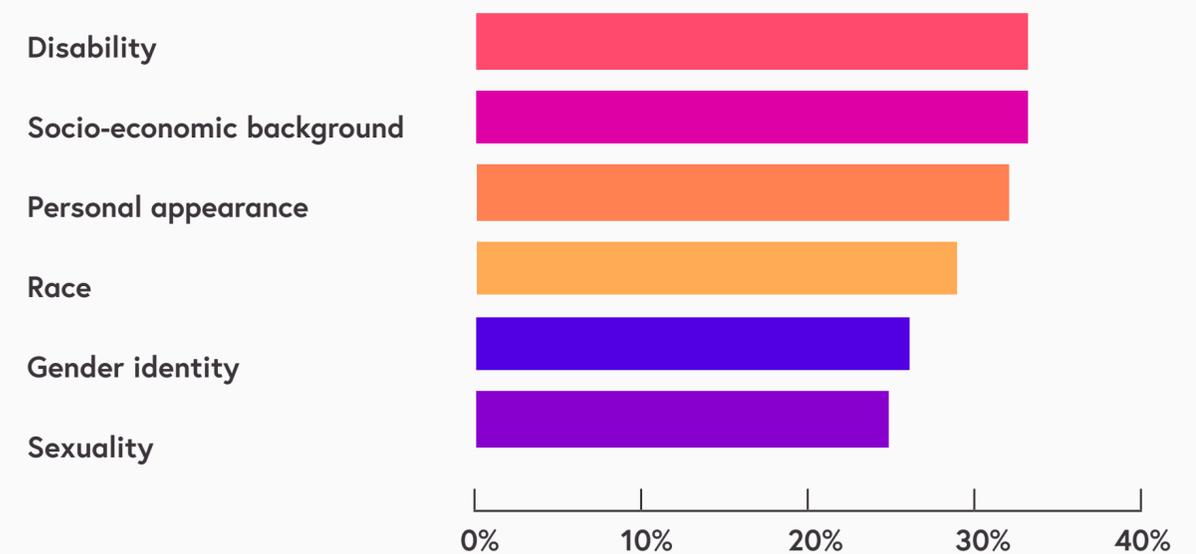
The biggest barriers to learning:

"Digital poverty has been a real blocker. Can we create inclusive virtual learning environments? We might then be able to tackle the ongoing digital divide."

PROFESSOR KIRAN TREHAN,
PRO-VICE-CHANCELLOR FOR PARTNERSHIPS AND ENGAGEMENT,
UNIVERSITY OF YORK

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SECTION 2

Post-pandemic learning

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As the world rebuilds after the pandemic, learners will have new requirements of education and providers can take the opportunity to support these needs.

For example, the rapid growth of the gig economy and the number of people becoming self-employed highlights the need for flexible learning, and an array of different kinds of courses so people can refresh their skills or gain new ones. Experts agree that education – especially online learning – is set to play a vital role in supporting people as they change careers, whether through choice or necessity.

While these transitions were already well under way prior to the pandemic, experts we consulted for this report note the emergence of a number of exciting educational opportunities for the future, including:

- new partnerships, such as traditional providers of education working with business partners and delivery platforms

- new models for tertiary education and beyond – a kind of 'Uber-university'

- fresh approaches to assessment and exams

- more microcredentials, and further new approaches to accreditation and qualifications in general, reflecting changing needs from learners

- a 'build your own degree' approach

- continued course optimisation for mobile devices

- a growing need for recursive education thanks to constantly changing needs from employers and learners

- the application of new digital technologies: artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR) and learning analytics.

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"Implicit in some spheres of education is a social divide. If you have the money or the means to attend face-to-face, then you do so, while other people must learn remotely. There's almost been a snobbery attached to this, which creates a tiered system of educational kudos, and I don't think we should accept that."

PROFESSOR JONATHAN WILSON,
PROFESSOR OF BRAND STRATEGY
& CULTURE (DIRECTOR),
REGENT'S UNIVERSITY LONDON

Meanwhile, the experts also believe there's a huge opportunity for learners, employers, and education partners alike to benefit from the addition of life skills – such as financial management, mental health and diversity – to the national curriculum.

Yet barriers to learning remain. The survey reveals many people feel uncomfortable with the current lack of diversity and inclusion in education, believing it impacts negatively on individuals throughout their learning journey. It's a complex issue that must be addressed and, while some initiatives are already happening to fix the lack of diversity among educators, further action is evidently required.

Professor Jonathan Wilson, Professor of Brand Strategy & Culture (Director), Regent's University London, believes the pandemic can be viewed as a chance to tackle the current inequalities in education.

"Implicit in some spheres of education is a social divide. If you have the money or the means to attend face-to-face, then you do so, while other people must learn remotely. There's almost been a snobbery attached to this, which creates a tiered system of educational kudos, and I don't think we should accept that."

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More diversity in the classroom and workplace

While diversity was already becoming a key issue in all walks of life prior to the pandemic, it's now front-of-mind for many learners.

Race is a hot topic overall. Nearly three in ten (29%) respondents state it negatively impacts on individuals' education experiences. The figure is higher (35%) among Asian respondents – 29% of White people surveyed agree, as do a quarter (25%) of Black respondents.

Experts believe there are many social and economic factors that feed into these perceptions – not least the disproportionate effect of COVID-19 on non-White ethnic groups.

It's worth noting that more than a fifth (21%) of Black people and 19% of Asian people surveyed feel more comfortable learning fully online, compared to 16% of White respondents. There is a view among experts that learners feel remote learning removes educator bias – unconscious or otherwise – from classroom settings.

Professor Jonathan Wilson, Professor of Brand Strategy & Culture (Director), Regent's University London, says:

"I am very aware, having listened to colleagues or observed lessons, of ethnic minority learners being treated differently. It could be a micro-aggression, a micro-invalidation. I'm not necessarily saying that people do so intentionally, but many of those things can and do happen, and it's a difficult, traumatic experience for somebody."

21%

of Black people
feel more comfortable
learning fully online

"People have identified a lack of representation in connection with educational delivery – and they have a problem with that, quite rightly so."

PROFESSOR JONATHAN WILSON,
PROFESSOR OF BRAND STRATEGY
& CULTURE (DIRECTOR),
REGENT'S UNIVERSITY LONDON

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36%

of people expect their leaders to have equality and diversity training

More respondents would like diversity in educational settings – in short, they want to be taught by a wider variety of people than the people who taught them growing up. A majority say they were taught by either a White cis man (55%) or a White cis woman (54%).

More than four in ten (43%) would have liked to have been taught by someone who identifies as non-binary, and nearly three quarters (73%) by someone from a non-White ethnic group. Around a third in total would have liked to have been taught by a trans person (34%).

There is, however, evidence in the survey results to suggest educator diversity is improving. Learners aged 16 to 24 are the least likely age group to say they have been taught by a White cis man (39%) or woman (40%). In comparison, 67% of those aged 55-plus say their teacher was a White cis man and 63% were taught by a White cis woman.

In addition, many employers are sympathetic towards the need for a better understanding of diversity in business. A fifth (20%) cite diversity and cultural awareness as a major skills gap at their organisation.

This is felt even more strongly by employees. When asked what training people in leadership positions should receive on an ongoing basis, 36% say equality and diversity training – the third highest answer. This is also the third highest answer when we asked what training people in all positions within a business should receive (38%).

Meanwhile, 17% of business respondents think gender studies should be included in the national curriculum. A further 17% state Black and minority-ethnic history should be included. Another 17% would also like future generations to learn about Britain's colonial history, and 16% cite neurodiversity and disability as a missing subject.

Overall, the survey data highlights sharp divides in society, which experts believe education providers can tackle to create more inclusivity in the classroom and the workplace.

Professor Moira Fischbacher-Smith, VP Learning and Teaching, University of Glasgow, concludes: "There's plenty of evidence that a diverse workforce is a better workforce. You bring in more creative ideas, a much healthier mix of views and experiences, policies and practices. By immediately excluding a whole sector of the population we deny ourselves the chance to recruit the best, most talented people."

16%

cite neurodiversity and disability as missing from the national curriculum

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"There's plenty of evidence that a diverse workforce is a better workforce. You bring in more creative ideas, a much healthier mix of views and experiences."

PROFESSOR MOIRA FISCHBACHER-SMITH,
VP LEARNING AND TEACHING,
UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

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Completing the curriculum

The pandemic threw greater focus not only on how people want to learn in future, but also the core skills they will need to meet emerging challenges. Personal finance skills and a better understanding of mental health issues are two examples of focus areas that learners and businesses alike think should appear in the national curriculum.

Which topics do consumers feel are missing from the national curriculum? Everyday financial management (39%), mental health (39%), and home skills – e.g. cooking, cleaning and parenthood (35%) – ranked highest. Women (43%) more than men (37%) want financial management courses.

Business leaders agree. Everyday financial management skills (40%) and mental health education (35%) also feature in their wish lists, with practical skills (building, woodwork, electrical) coming in third at 30%.

Bosses name home skills (28%) next, meaning learners and business leaders are closely aligned on the key future-proofing skills they think should be added to the curriculum.

Taz Latif, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Consultant & Educator, isn't surprised people want more insight into how to manage their finances, saying: "Financial skills correlate to positive mental wellbeing: how to save, manage our money, or negotiate a salary and often, the quality of life we are able to lead. I'm definitely frustrated that nobody taught me about taxes in school! People tend to feel really disgruntled about the lack of necessary life skills once they've left education."

Meanwhile, Mike Zealley, MD, KPMG Learning Services, ponders whether learners should be given more help to understand how to access education. With such extensive ways to learn now available – from classroom, to online, to hybrid settings – he believes information should be provided to help people make the most of the huge opportunities on offer.

He states:

"The skill I wish was on the curriculum, that I believe people need more than any other, is learning how to learn."

What topics do consumers feel are missing from the national curriculum?

39%
Everyday financial management

39%
Mental health

35%
Home skills e.g. cooking, cleaning, parenthood

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"Financial skills correlate to positive mental wellbeing: how to save, manage our money, or negotiate a salary, and often, the quality of life we are able to lead. I'm definitely frustrated that nobody taught me about taxes in school! People tend to feel really disgruntled about the lack of necessary life skills once they've left education."

TAZ LATIF,
DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION
CONSULTANT & EDUCATOR

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Online courses are the top way to gain new skills to start a business

42%
are keen to start a side hustle alongside their full-time job

Learning for the gig economy

The growth of the gig economy shows no signs of slowing. Of those respondents who have changed jobs as a result of the pandemic, 4% are now self-employed. A further 5% who say they've not yet started a new job would like to become self-employed – meaning almost one in ten people have either started, or want to try, self-employment.

Many learners have their hearts set on working for themselves in some capacity, even if they're currently in full-time employment. More than four in ten (42%) are keen to start a side hustle alongside their full-time job. This is especially true of non-White ethnic group respondents, with 69% of Black respondents and 65% of Asian respondents saying they'd like a side project. Across the entire UK workforce, this would represent a huge number of people willing to seek new skills to achieve their dreams.

These figures reveal people spent time during the pandemic considering how work can work for them going forward, says Professor Jonathan Wilson, Professor of Brand Strategy & Culture (Director), Regent's University London: "There's a fear that people might lose a greater amount of control that they began to acquire on their lives as we move beyond the pandemic. If you do the maths, then perhaps the savings on dry-cleaning, travel and childcare bills associated with being in full-time employment mean you'll discover that you're not worse off working for yourself more flexibly and remotely via alternative working arrangements. People have been making those calculations."

Online short courses are considered a fruitful route to self-employment, with 19% of respondents – rising to nearly a quarter (23%) of those aged 45 to 54 – saying this would help

them acquire new skills to establish their business. Choosing online courses was ranked first among all learning options listed.

All of these changes to learners' professional lives mean course providers and business leaders must focus on helping upskill a workforce that's fit for the future.

Professor Romy Lawson, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students), Flinders University states:

"We have to prepare people for employability – that's the key word. People used to talk about being 'job ready' but it's not just one job any more. Students need the skills to navigate their careers; to be adaptive experts."

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Mental health matters

NHS leaders in England warn of a "wave of mental health issues"[1] following the pandemic. Learners are keen to access a greater understanding of these issues, as they're already affecting many people's personal and professional lives.

Education experts also feel mental health is no longer a 'taboo' subject. They believe provision of online learning in this area, if it is appropriately accredited and safe, could be highly effective. Learners seem to agree, ranking mental health first (16%) above all other subjects when asked which type of course content they would feel more comfortable learning about online than in person.

Mike Zealley, MD of KPMG Learning Services, states: "Some of the stigma associated with mental health has diminished over the years, and it's now more acceptable to acknowledge the challenges it brings. Life has been hard for the past couple of years and I think we all have more of a connection with mental health issues now."
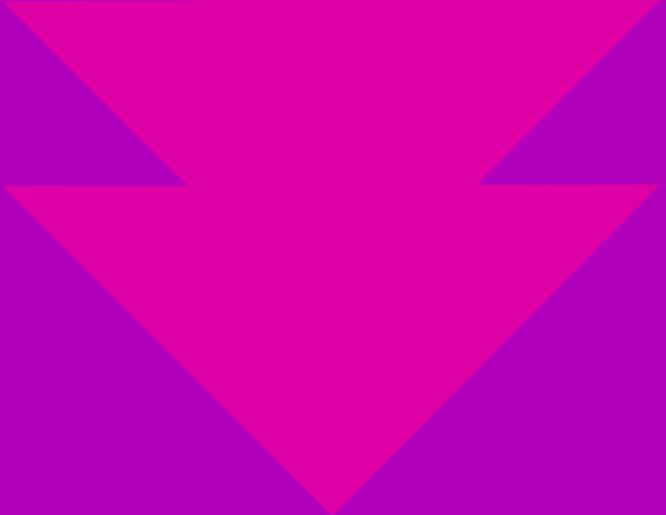
Mental health is the number one subject people are more comfortable learning about online

44%

think business leaders should receive mental health training

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Professor Romy Lawson, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students), Flinders University thinks learning is key to tackling the wave of mental health issues. "I think the reason many people want to learn about mental health online is because they feel they've missed the boat with formal education so this is their opportunity to learn about it," she says. "But it's really encouraging to hear this response about it needing to appear on the curriculum. It's not taboo anymore – it's OK that people have mental health issues and support."

Despite people's interest, there's frustration about the lack of mental health learning opportunities on offer. Nearly half (46%) of women feel mental health education is missing from the national curriculum.

There's also support for mental health education being added to the curriculum among learners across different ethnic groups, with White (41%), Asian (34%) and Black (28%) respondents all agreeing it's currently absent.

Respondents' strength of feeling about the importance of mental health education is borne out in their views on how business and academic leaders approach the issue. When asked what ongoing training teachers, CEOs and other business leaders should receive, nearly half (44%) suggest mental health awareness training. The figure increases to 50% of women surveyed, and 48% of everyone aged 45 and over. And learners think mental health awareness training shouldn't just be for the bosses. Nearly half (46%) think every employee should complete courses that deal with this prominent issue of modern life, rising to 53% of women.

Taz Latif, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Consultant & Educator, agrees a greater focus on mental health education is critical:

"We don't do enough. I think the biggest way we'll make progress in mental health awareness is to acknowledge wholeheartedly and openly that there is no finish line when it comes to this work. Gen Z will be a massive part of that movement – they are the powerhouse behind that thinking, and rightly so. To build a better world for future generations means we need to co-create that future with them."

[1]   https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/feb/21/england-second-pandemic-mental-health-issues-nhs-covid

46%
of women feel mental health education is missing from the national curriculum

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Technological innovations

An even greater reliance on technology was another major consequence of the pandemic. From an overnight switch to remote working to the need to shop online, more of us than ever before reached for our devices.

Perhaps more than any other aspect of the research, the future points to technology-driven strategies that will revolutionise the way we learn and teach. And a learner preference for online courses shows this is already under way.

Experts predict digital innovation and adoption will accelerate to meet learning and employment needs, with a rapid introduction of new partnerships and platforms including:

- Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning in conjunction with learning analytics; for example to recommend further courses or to adjust courses in real-time based on learners' behaviour

- Augmented reality (AR) and potentially virtual reality, supporting more practical courses

- Growing use of gamification to drive engagement

- Coaching bots and chat bots for support and virtual tuition

This is further supported by the opinions of our experts. Dr Liz Marr, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Students) at The Open University, says this is now the desired direction of travel:

"Providers can use the data from learning analytics to amend courses as they're happening. If analysis shows something's not working, it can be tweaked."

Mike Zealley, MD of KPMG Learning Services, agrees: "Virtual education delivery is here to stay. I think it's

necessitated a redesign of lots of fairly old, clunky learning, which is probably long overdue. And I think it's interesting because, with the technology tools that have become ubiquitous now for all of us, it creates new opportunities for collaboration and ways in which you can engage with learners."

The pandemic has clearly changed priorities in the educational sphere — not just for learners, but also course providers and technology companies bringing innovation to the sector. Educators must continue to anticipate more shifts, standing ready to respond to learners' and employers' evolving needs.

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"Virtual education delivery is here to stay. I think it's necessitated a redesign of lots of fairly old, clunky learning, which is probably long overdue. It creates new opportunities and ways to engage with learners."

MIKE ZEALLEY,
MD OF KPMG LEARNING SERVICES

THE FUTURE OF LEARNING REPORT 2022

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SECTION 3

Skills fit for the future

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With so many people changing careers as a result of the pandemic, there's an inevitable need for employees and employers to build new skills.

Experts feel education is key to tackling the emerging skills gap and, in response to learner and business leader requirements, providers should focus courses on:

- the rapidly changing need for new skills – including for jobs that weren't even on the horizon a few years ago

- the move to a contingent workforce and the emergence of the gig economy

- the impact of automation on workers and how they can refocus or reskill for their careers

Business leaders tell us they are mainly seeking employees with skills such as critical thinking, creativity and time management, that are currently absent from their workforce.

Dr Liz Marr, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Students), The Open University, explains,

"For years, employers have said they don't get graduates who can think, turn up on time or have interpersonal skills. I'm really interested to see them talking about creativity and critical thinking now, because I think that's what we should be doing in higher education. We don't know what the jobs of the future are. Who knew 20 years ago that we would be desperate for cybersecurity specialists?"

Another trend is the recognition that people no longer expect to have one job for their whole working life. Dr Kairen Cullen, Educational Psychologist, says:

"We're preparing youngsters to be able to diversify and work in lots of different fields, and possibly make changes throughout their working lives. The vocational side of education is hugely important."

This means lifelong learning and development opportunities should be prioritised for employees. Dr Marr of The Open University says this reflects a wider policy agenda to support ongoing learning. "There's very much a demand for economic competitiveness in the government's levelling up programme," she explains. "It signals a desire to have learning available in smaller chunks for vocational skills to get people into work, keep them in work and progress during their careers."

Experts also agree the education sector must lead the way when it comes to upskilling people to deal with issues like sustainability, which is having an increasing impact on our personal and professional lives.

The challenge ahead for education providers, employers and employees is huge – but it's also a big opportunity to shape workforce skills for decades to come.

Tackling the skills gap

When assessing their organisation's skill set with an eye on future requirements, employers admit a number of holes need to be filled. In fact, 88% are certain some skills are missing within their business.

But they also see this deficiency as an opportunity to comb the market for crucial competencies, like critical thinking (32%), strategic team planning (31%), creativity (27%), interpersonal traits like empathy (27%) and basic digital skills (25%).

In contrast, it's interesting to note that these kinds of skills are not the main things learners expect business leaders to be seeking. When asked what kind of qualification would get them the job they want, vocational and skills-based courses were among learners' top answers – highlighting the fact employers and job candidates aren't closely aligned on what's attractive in a candidate.

When sifting through CVs in the hunt for new talent, skills (41%) stand out as the most crucial thing for candidates to highlight. This is rated higher than past job experience (37%). Also relatively important to employers are a strong personal statement or covering letter (35%) and skills-based qualifications (26%). Around one in seven (14%) scrutinise CVs for signs candidates have completed 'microcredentials' courses: online learning designed to boost specialist skills.
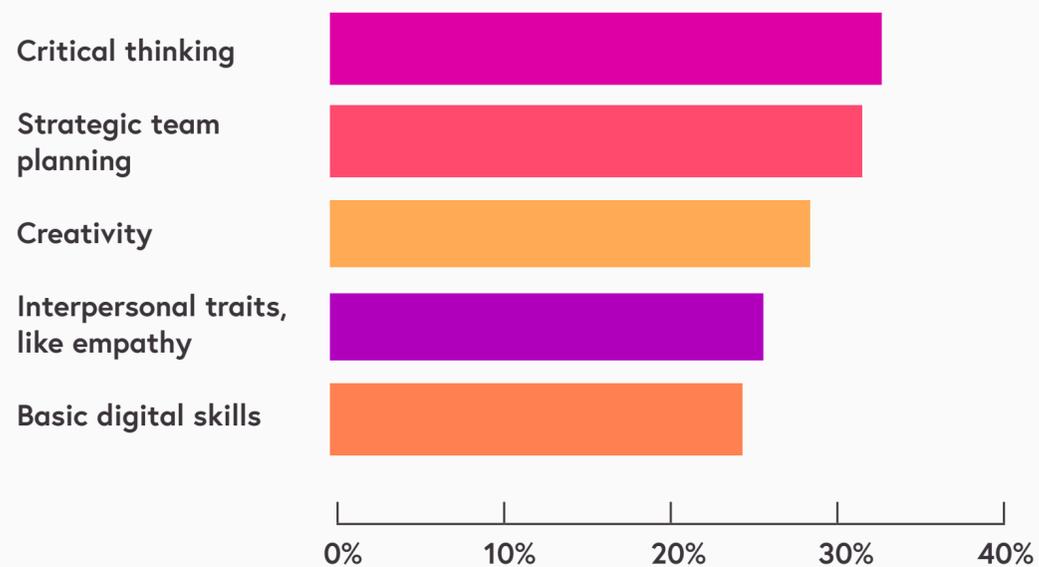
Despite this focus on skills with the aim of boosting future growth, businesses are only allowing an average of less than five hours per month – equivalent to an hour a week – for each employee to use for ongoing learning and development as part of their role. In fact, 12% of firms surveyed provide no consistent training programme.

76%
of learners say access to ongoing development is important in a prospective employer

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This seems a major deficiency, because more than three quarters (76%) of learners say access to ongoing learning and development is an important consideration when they're choosing a new employer. This rises to 86% of 35- to 44-year-olds and 82% of 25- to 34-year-olds.

More than eight in ten (82%) Asian people surveyed, along with 77% Black respondents and 76% White respondents agree.

Key skills employers look for:

Skill	
Critical thinking	
Strategic team planning	
Creativity	
Interpersonal traits, like empathy	
Basic digital skills	

0%　10%　20%　30%　40%

12%
of businesses surveyed provided no consistent training programme

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Upskilling online

Amid the much-discussed 'Great Resignation', nearly one in five (19%) respondents say they have changed career paths during the pandemic, sharpening focus on the education sector to provide widespread opportunities to learn new skills.

Men (20%) are more likely than women (17%) to have changed careers. Meanwhile, some ethnic groups have been affected more than others, with Black respondents (38%) more than twice as likely as White respondents (17%) to have made a career switch.

Experts hail the role of education in supporting people through career changes – and point to online learning as a powerful way to upskill.

Of the people who have switched jobs in the past two years, a total of 81% who took an online course reveal it has helped them to change their career path. Men (88%) are most likely to have benefitted, along with almost three quarters (73%) of women.

This is also true for 100% of Asian respondents who have changed career and learned online, and 95% of Black people. The figure for White respondents is 77%.

Almost nine in ten (89%) 25- to 34-year-olds who have switched careers reveal they were helped by an online course, with 86% of those aged 16 to 24 saying the same.

But upskilling isn't just about new careers – it's beginning to be viewed as a lifelong necessity.
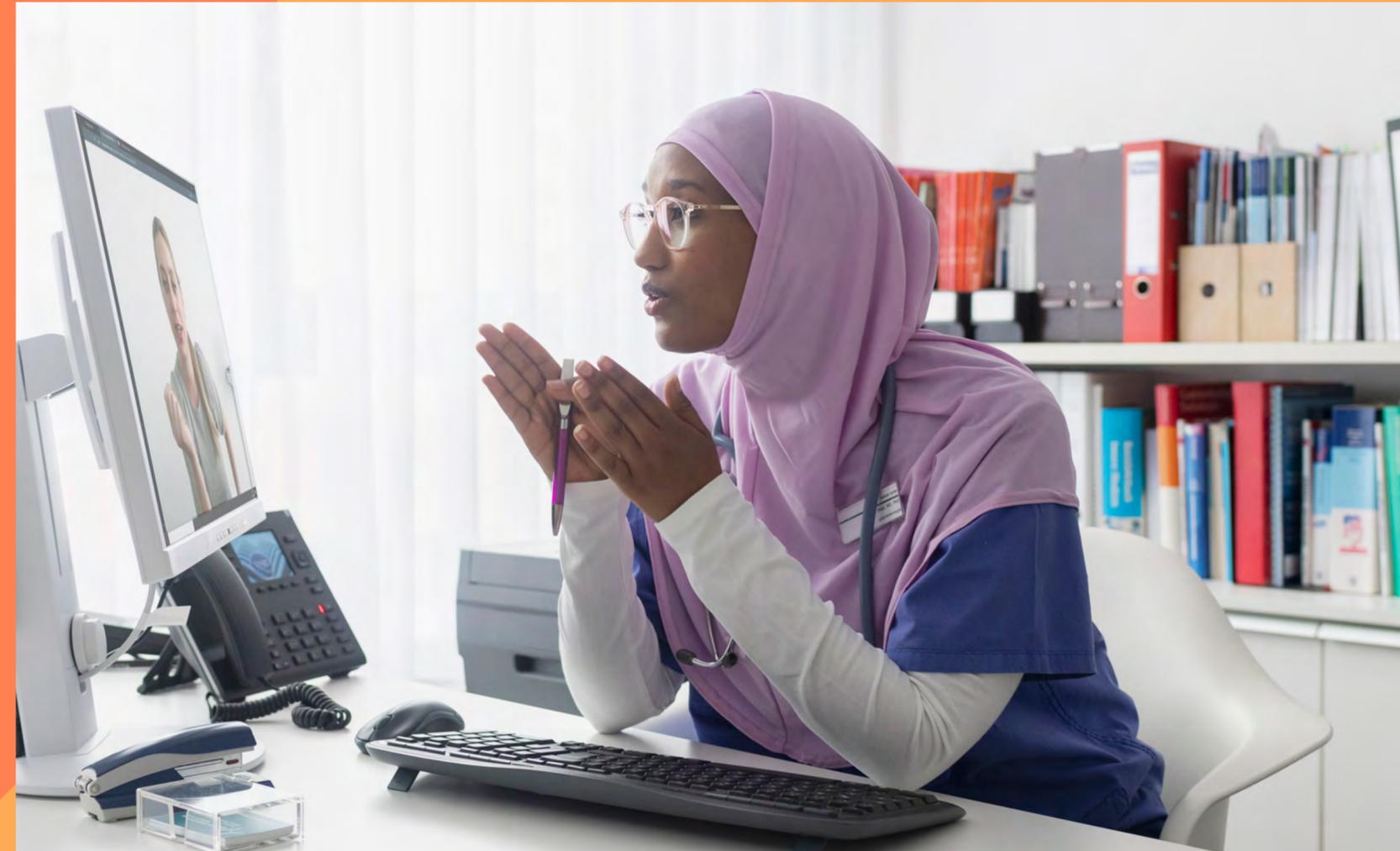
81% of people who changed career path said on online course helped them

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"No job is for life. We can't rest on our laurels, so it makes sense to continue learning about a wide range of things and explore the possibility of multiple career pathways."

PROFESSOR JONATHAN WILSON, PROFESSOR OF BRAND STRATEGY & CULTURE (DIRECTOR), REGENT'S UNIVERSITY LONDON

The thirst for lifelong learning

People's attitudes to their career development are changing. Increasingly, they're expecting their employers to help them upskill to suit the changing nature of the job market and shifts in their own career.

More than three quarters (76%) of respondents say that when they think about choosing a new job or employer, access to ongoing learning and development is an important aspect of their decision. Almost a third (31%) state it's very important that they're able to continuously learn.

Dr Liz Marr, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Students), The Open University, understands this strength of feeling. She says: "Lifelong learning is critical; having the resources to be able to quickly change direction, to equip yourself for it. I know quite a few people who've changed careers completely."

We've already witnessed the desire for alternative subjects such as financial management and diversity to be added to the national curriculum. Alongside the growing trend for employees to change career paths completely, or strike out for self-employment, side hustles and the gig economy, lifelong learning is becoming more critical to upskilling the workforce of the future. Professor Jonathan Wilson, Professor of Brand Strategy & Culture (Director), Regent's University London, observes: "No job is for life. We can't rest on our laurels, so it makes sense to continue learning about a wide range of things and explore the possibility of multiple career pathways."

On the whole there is great restlessness in the job market, reflecting the widely cited 'Great Resignation' that's taking place. Nearly two thirds (63%) of respondents whose job was not affected by the pandemic say they would like to try a career in another industry.

While 10% of these respondents aren't sure what role they want to do next, there's also a broad range of aspirations mentioned – from IT/telecoms and manufacturing to self-employment.

63%
say they would like to try a career in another industry

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Meanwhile, perhaps surprisingly, age isn't viewed by most people as a barrier to learning. When asked what would be the oldest they'd bother to spend time getting a new qualification, more than a quarter (27%) of respondents say that they wouldn't stop seeking new skills at any age.

So it seems learners are considering how they might continue to acquire new skills and knowledge long into their working lives – and that means a conversation about funding and the affordability of learning.
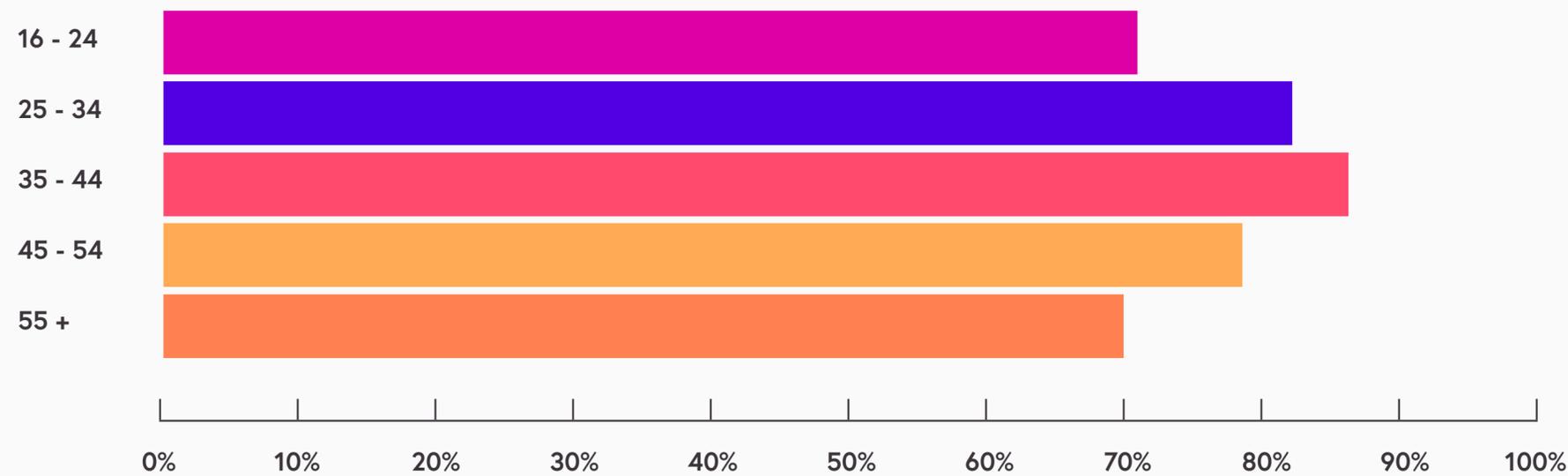
Professor Moira Fischbacher-Smith, VP Learning and Teaching, University of Glasgow, believes: "We need to look at funding, because if we're trying to stimulate social, cultural and economic recovery, there's a question about whether individuals and employers can afford to pay for courses."

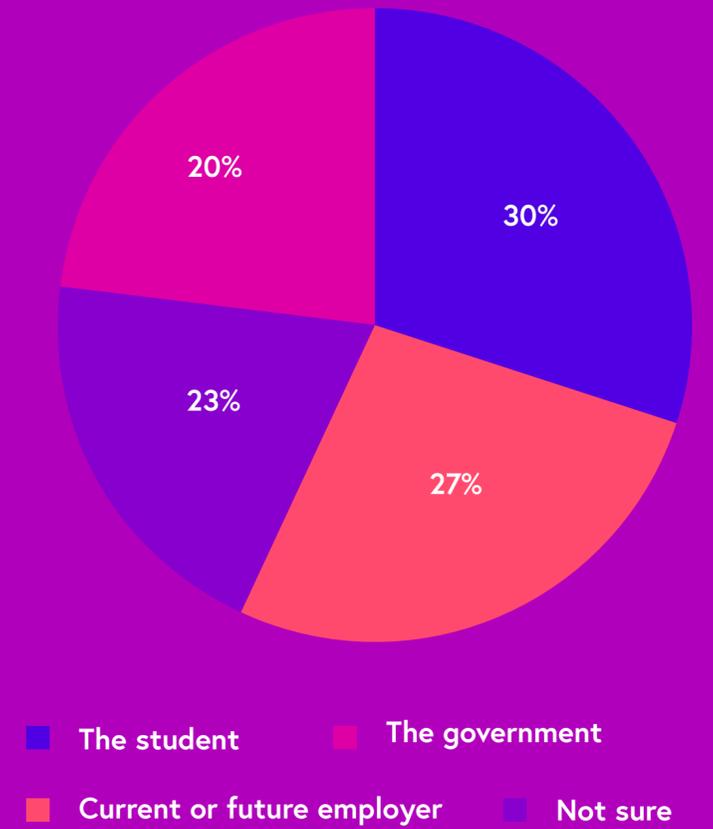Almost a third (30%) of respondents expect to pay for lifelong learning themselves, while only slightly fewer (27%) want their current or future employer to pay. A further fifth (20%) (and three in ten (30%) 16- to 24-year-olds) say the government should foot the bill to keep workers' skills sharp – something policymakers should closely consider.

Ultimately, this is a reflection that, alongside flexibility in how people can learn, lifelong learning opportunities must be prioritised.

The importance of access to ongoing learning and development when considering a new job/employer:

Age	
16 - 24	
25 - 34	
35 - 44	
45 - 54	
55 +	

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Who should pay for lifelong learning?

30%
20%
23%
27%

- ■ The student
- ■ The government
- ■ Current or future employer
- ■ Not sure

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Skills for a more sustainable future

As the world attempts to move on from the pandemic, there's a renewed focus on matching workforce skills to emerging industrial trends.

The pandemic – along with headline-grabbing extreme weather events – has thrown renewed focus on the environment. As a result, many respondents are keen to know more about global sustainability strategies as they rise up the corporate agenda.

"It's a vibrant area for learning, and hugely important to give people knowledge about decarbonisation. COP26 gave this more prominence, and it's important that we follow

through. Learning teams need to remember this is about more than purely the technical knowledge related to net zero and carbon neutrality. We also need learning to help organisations address the cultural and behavioural aspects too," says Mike Zealley, MD of KPMG Learning Services.

Sustainability is becoming a key consideration for employers and employees. Already, more than one in ten (12%) of individuals have changed career in order to join a company they consider to be more environmentally responsible.

A further 11% have quit a role because their employer didn't seem to them to be taking sustainability seriously.

Almost four in five (79%) say green issues are very or somewhat important to them, with women (83%) more likely than men (77%) to agree.

Business leaders are responding. A range of activities is underway at organisations that are keen to go green, such as reducing their carbon footprint (41%), educating employees on sustainability (36%) or introducing a cycle-to-work scheme (28%).

12% have changed career to join a more environmentally responsible company

1 in 7 join short educational courses to learn about sustainability

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How businesses are going greener
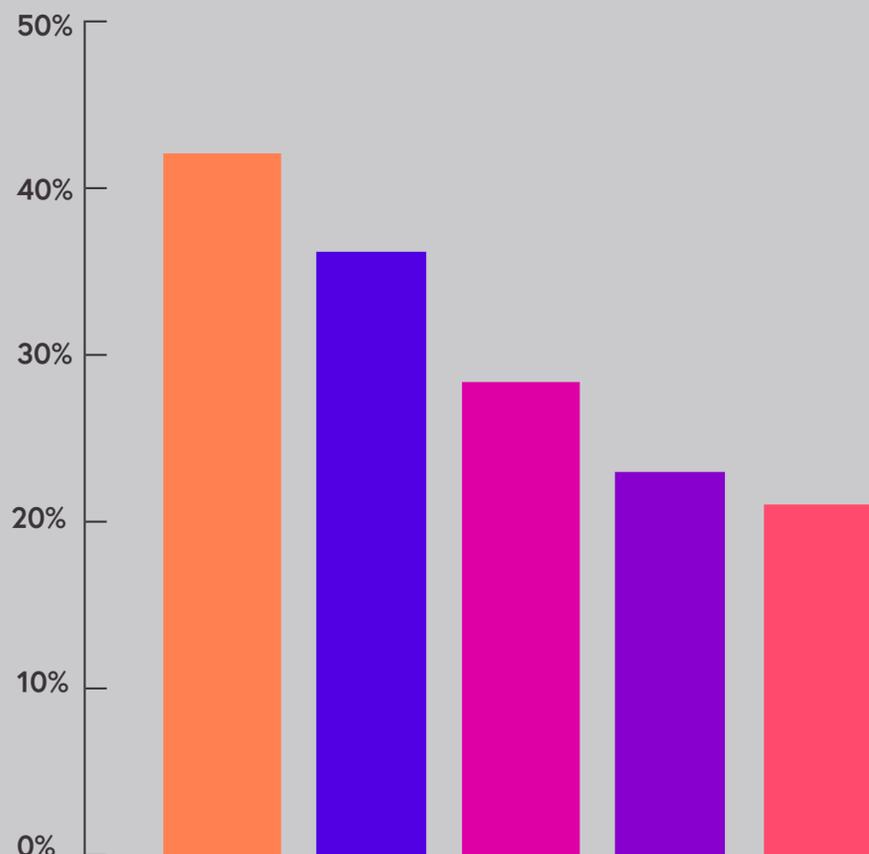
Legend:
- Reducing carbon footprint
- Educating employees on sustainability
- Introducing cycle-to-work schemes
- Implementing no-print policy
- Tree-planting initiative

And, because 88% of firms in total are making changes in this area, sustainability skills look set to be a strong attribute for employees across the UK in the near future. Professor Moira Fischbacher-Smith, VP Learning and Teaching, University of Glasgow, says:

"We need to create opportunities for learners to understand what sustainability really means in their discipline. At our university, colleagues are developing the curriculum to give them the chance to do that."

Dr Liz Marr, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Students), The Open University, agrees upskilling for sustainability is a complex challenge. "An interdisciplinary approach is important. You're not just going to get a water engineer from 'somewhere'. You need people with an understanding of cultural concepts and geographical knowledge. A load of skills and knowledge must come together for us to address the Sustainable Development Goals."

At present, almost a quarter (23%) of business leaders feel education about the environment is missing from the current school-to-university curriculum. An almost identical (24%) amount of individual respondents agree. This includes 27% of women and almost three in ten (29%) of those aged 55 and over.

It's also interesting to note that around one in seven (13%) respondents seek sustainability information by joining short educational courses. This makes learning the third-highest source for information about the green agenda, behind news (41%) and social media content (26%).

25%
of business leaders feel environmental education is missing from the national curriculum

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"We need to create opportunities for learners to understand what sustainability really means in their discipline. At our university, colleagues are developing the curriculum to give them the chance to do that."

PROFESSOR MOIRA FISCHBACHER-SMITH,
VP LEARNING AND TEACHING,
UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

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Digital skills: Good for business

Innovation in technology will be a key driver of future growth for firms and the wider UK economy. It's also crucial to building skills throughout the nation's workforce.

Business leaders recognise this requirement, not least because organisations can reap the rewards of employees who are able to get the best out of technology. Nearly a quarter (23%) of business respondents would like to see digital skills formally included in the national curriculum.

Online learning has an increasingly important role to play in business strategy, says Educational Psychologist Dr Kairen Cullen:

"I can't think of a single conflict situation that isn't ameliorated by better communication. How you tap into creativity and use it, time management and personal organisation skills; lots of strategies can be successfully taught online."

Almost one in ten (9%) businesses look during recruitment for people who have taken campus-based courses with a technology company, including giants like Google and Microsoft. Interestingly, 13% of learners feel this type of qualification could help them get their dream job – including 16% of men, 27% of Asian respondents and 26% of Black people surveyed.

Nick Worthington, Director, King's Online, suggests:

"AI and big data will have a huge role to play in learning. For example, if a Google or an Amazon were to truly enter the education market, think of the ripple effect that would have. Those kinds of moves will fundamentally change how education is thought of more generally."

Technology has a leading role to play in the future of learning generally, but especially in delivering the skills that will drive productivity and economic growth. It's one pillar of an educational strategy that must promise ongoing learning and development for all – access to universal skills for the full span of every career.

9%
of businesses look for employees who have taken courses with a technology company like Google or Microsoft

23%
of businesses want to see digital skills included in the national curriculum

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Conclusion

It's an exciting time for the world of education. Things are changing fast post-pandemic, as determined learners look to upskill in order to navigate the changing world of work, digital innovations build momentum, and issues like sustainability and diversity become increasingly pertinent.

In great numbers, people are embracing non-traditional learning to address this new world – not least online courses, which are rapidly becoming the number one way to get new skills. This applies whether people want to succeed in their existing role, change career or start their own business. And they're not satisfied with a one-off educational experience – lifelong learning is here to stay.

That means education is now baked into many businesses' strategies, with questions about skills, training and funding being asked in boardrooms across the country.

Education providers are responding with a wide-ranging and powerful mix of in-person, online and blended learning opportunities – but there's more to be done to complete the curriculum and make courses accessible for the whole population. The pressure is on to embrace the unique opportunities presented by this sea change in the world of learning.

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Methodology

This research was conducted by Censuswide, among a sample of 2,000 UK adults aged 16+, nationally representative on age, gender and region, and also 500 employers aged 18+. The data was collected between 24.12.21-04.01.22. 10 qualitative interviews with thought leaders in the education space were also conducted as part of the research. Censuswide abides by and employs members of the Market Research Society and follows the MRS code of conduct which is based on the ESOMAR principles.

Race:

Respondents from the following ethnicities were included in the research: 'White' includes respondents who ticked White British, White Irish, White Gypsy or Irish Traveller, Other White; 'Asian' denotes respondents who ticked Asian – Indian , Asian – Pakistani, Asian – Bangladeshi, Asian – Chinese, any other Asian ethnic group; and 'Black' includes those who ticked Black – African, Black – Caribbean, any other Black/African/Caribbean ethnic group.

We also included the following groups: Mixed descent – White and Black African, Mixed descent – White and Black Caribbean, Mixed descent – White and Asian, Mixed descent – Any other mixed, Arab, and Any other ethnic group. However, these respondents cannot be included in the analysis as the sample size was too small.

Gender:

The survey included a non-binary option when asking participants for their gender. 31 selected this, so we were unable to comment on this demographic due to an insufficient number of respondents. 'Cis gender' refers to an individual using the gender they were assigned at birth. The respondents' gender in the survey is self-assigned by the respondent – we haven't specified if they were assigned this gender at birth.

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Our panel of experts

A huge thank you to the thought leaders and experts who shared their insights and predictions with us. Here's a bit more information about who they are and what they do.

DAVID COYNE
SENIOR POLICY ADVISOR,
SKILLS DEVELOPMENT SCOTLAND

David's role is Senior Policy Adviser at Skills Development Scotland. He supports the leadership in the organisation in the formation of policy and services in Scotland's changing skills and employment landscape. He has a rich background in economic development, with experience of infrastructure, employability, neighbourhood regeneration and international development.

DR KAIREN CULLEN
EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST

Dr Kairen Cullen is a registered practitioner and chartered educational psychologist who has worked extensively in a range of fields including education, health, sport and the media. She is also a writer and has produced articles for academic, educational and popular publications as well as books on child psychology and parenting.

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PROFESSOR MOIRA FISCHBACHER-SMITH
VP LEARNING AND TEACHING,
UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

PROFESSOR ROMY LAWSON
DEPUTY VICE CHANCELLOR - STUDENTS,
FLINDERS UNIVERSITY

TAZ LATIF
DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION
CONSULTANT & EDUCATOR

DR LIZ MARR
PRO-VICE-CHANCELLOR (STUDENTS),
THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Moira Fischbacher-Smith is Professor of Public Management and Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) at the University of Glasgow. She leads the University's strategy and policy development for learning and teaching, has responsibility for teaching quality, and works with colleagues across the University to support student and staff development in relation to teaching and learning. Moira was on the Project Board that developed the James McCune Smith Learning Hub on the University's main campus and leads the work on refurbishing teaching spaces on campus.

Romy has over 25 years of experience in higher education leadership, and strategic learning and teaching initiatives in Australia and the UK. Before her appointment at Flinders she was interim Vice Chancellor and Provost at Murdoch University. During her career she has led the National OLT Strategic Priority Project: Hunters & Gatherers: Strategies for Curriculum Mapping and Data Collection for Assurance of Learning (assuringlearning.com), and has been a team member in other ALTC funded projects including: embedding professionally relevant learning in business education; and facilitating staff and student engagement with graduate attribute development, assessment and standards in business faculties. In 2013, she was awarded a National OLT Teaching Fellowship for work on curriculum design for assuring learning.

An ex-teacher on a mission to reform education, Taz harnesses the power of community to build sustainable systems for change.

She is a global DEI educator and leader, inspiring future generations through activism to create social impact. Her work is two fold; building new ecosystems with young people at a grassroots level as well as relearning and restructuring at a corporate level.

Over the last decade, Taz has partnered with forward thinkers like Samsung and GoogleForStartups as well as powerhouses including the Ministry of Justice, JPMorgan, the Financial Times, Macmillan Cancer and Expedia, to co-create a more equitable future.

Dr Liz Marr is Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students) at The Open University. Her responsibilities include the student experience, student voice, student engagement and student satisfaction with a major focus on student success. She also has oversight of student employability, the Access, Participation and Success Strategy (including the APP), the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and Quality Monitoring and Enhancement (QME).

Liz has over 30 years of experience in UK higher education with particular interest in lifelong learning and continuing education, and their role in social justice and social mobility. She is passionate about opening opportunities for all who wish to participate in learning, both formally and informally. She is Vice-President of the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), having served two years as President, and a college governor.

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PROFESSOR KIRAN TREHAN, PRO-VICE-CHANCELLOR FOR PARTNERSHIPS AND ENGAGEMENT AND DIRECTOR OF THE CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S ENTERPRISE, LEADERSHIP, ECONOMY AND DIVERSITY, UNIVERSITY OF YORK

Kiran Trehan is Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Partnerships and Engagement at the University of York and Director of the Centre for Women's Enterprise, Leadership, Economy & Diversity. Professor Trehan is a key contributor to debates on leadership, enterprise development and diversity in small firms and business. She has led a number of leadership, enterprise and business support initiatives and has extensively published a number of journal articles, policy reports, books and book chapters in the field. Her work has been supported by grants from a full range of research funding bodies, including the Economic and Social Research Council and Arts and Humanities Research council, government departments, regional and local agencies including Local Enterprise Partnerships and Chambers of Commerce and the private sector. She has held several national and international advisory roles that shape debates and policy in enterprise and equality, diversity, and inclusion.

PROFESSOR JONATHAN WILSON PROFESSOR OF BRAND STRATEGY & CULTURE (DIRECTOR) REGENT'S UNIVERSITY

Professor Jonathan A.J. Wilson is an award-winning practitioner and academic with two doctorates – specialising in what he calls the ABCDs of business: Advertising, Branding, Communication, and Digital. Professor Wilson has over 200 pieces of published work, travelled to 40 countries, and worked on branding everything – from countries to people. His music and voice feature on the early Grand Theft Auto video games; and he's performed internationally on television and stages like Glastonbury music festival. He's received a Top Voices award from LinkedIn for 4 consecutive years and recently appeared in their US television advertisements.

NICK WORTHINGTON DIRECTOR OF KING'S ONLINE, KING'S COLLEGE LONDON

Nick began his career in private industry, working across various roles in a FTSE 100 retailer focused on accessing high growth markets through new channels. In 2015, he joined the Higher Education sector to lead a number of prominent expansion projects at Coventry University.

In 2017, Nick was appointed as Director of Coventry University Online, a wholly-owned subsidiary company of the University Group. He built the business from nothing to an organisation of over 130 employees that in four years became one of the most dominant players in the international distance learning market, delivering online education to nearly one million learners across 195 countries.

In late 2021, Nick joined King's College London as Director of King's Online to deliver the institution's vision of becoming the market leader in online education by 2029.

MIKE ZEALLEY MANAGING DIRECTOR KPMG LEARNING SERVICES

Mike is the Managing Director of KPMG Learning Services, a KPMG business dedicated to helping clients nurture and grow the people and capability they need to ensure their businesses' future health and success. Mike is passionate about real-world results and learning that makes a difference to organisations and individuals' lives.

KPMG work widely with customers across different market sectors. The work they do with their learners, and providers in the education and learning sector is energising and rewarding, helping them have a lasting impact that they couldn't otherwise achieve.

Mike is proud and privileged to have lead KPMG's work with the Government Skills and Curriculum Unit, helping design and deliver the curriculum of learning for the UK Civil Service and others in the public sector.

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Thank you
for reading.

Are you an organisation interested in working with FutureLean?

Please contact partnerenquiries@futurelearn.com

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