



ASSOCIATION
OF COLLEGES

Praline



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



Praline Project Adult education survey

Marguerite Hogg
Senior Policy Manager – Adult Education

Association of Colleges, UK



Assumptions and limitations



- Survey of project partners' countries – 9 EU Member States plus United Kingdom.
- Majority of respondents provide VET to both young people and adults, but there were some who are delivering formal/informal or vocational education to adults only.
- The survey provides a 'snapshot' of opinions.
- These are the view of individual institutions and do not necessarily reflect view of project partners.
- The data in these samples don't fully match the national data published by Eurostat.



Some interesting statistics

- Estonia has seen significant growth in working people participating in adult learning (70%).
- Most respondents have seen some growth in participation in people with low levels of education – some more than others (Estonia, Finland, Netherlands, Portugal and Ireland).
- Portugal, Finland and Ireland have higher numbers of learners who are classed as immigrant adult learners (including asylum seekers and refugees)

What EQF levels are adults learning at?

- EQF Level 1: Estonia and Finland have no learners at L1. UK has most adult learners at L1. Most other partners' countries have below 30% of learners at L1.
- EQF Level 2: Estonia, Finland and Ireland have fewer learners at L2. UK, again, has most learners at L2 in comparison to other countries.
- Most countries in the partnership have learners that are mainly learning at EQF Levels 3 and 4.
- Ireland has more adults learning at above Level 4 in comparison to the other countries in the partnership, closely followed by the Netherlands.

Where does adult learning take place?

- Most adults learn in the responding institutions.
- 100% of Estonian responding institutions said they offered online learning to adults. Only 9% of Spanish institutions said they offered online learning.
- The countries with the highest percentage of delivery to adults in the work-place were Finland, Netherlands and UK.
- In contrast, Slovenian respondents said they offer no adult learning in the workplace.
- Other settings include local community settings such as libraries or community centres.
- Some organisations work only with general adult education, some with vocational education, and some with both.
- There was a rise in hybrid delivery of adult learning – a result of the pandemic.





In your opinion, what are the THREE main reasons for adults to enrol in education programmes in your organisation:



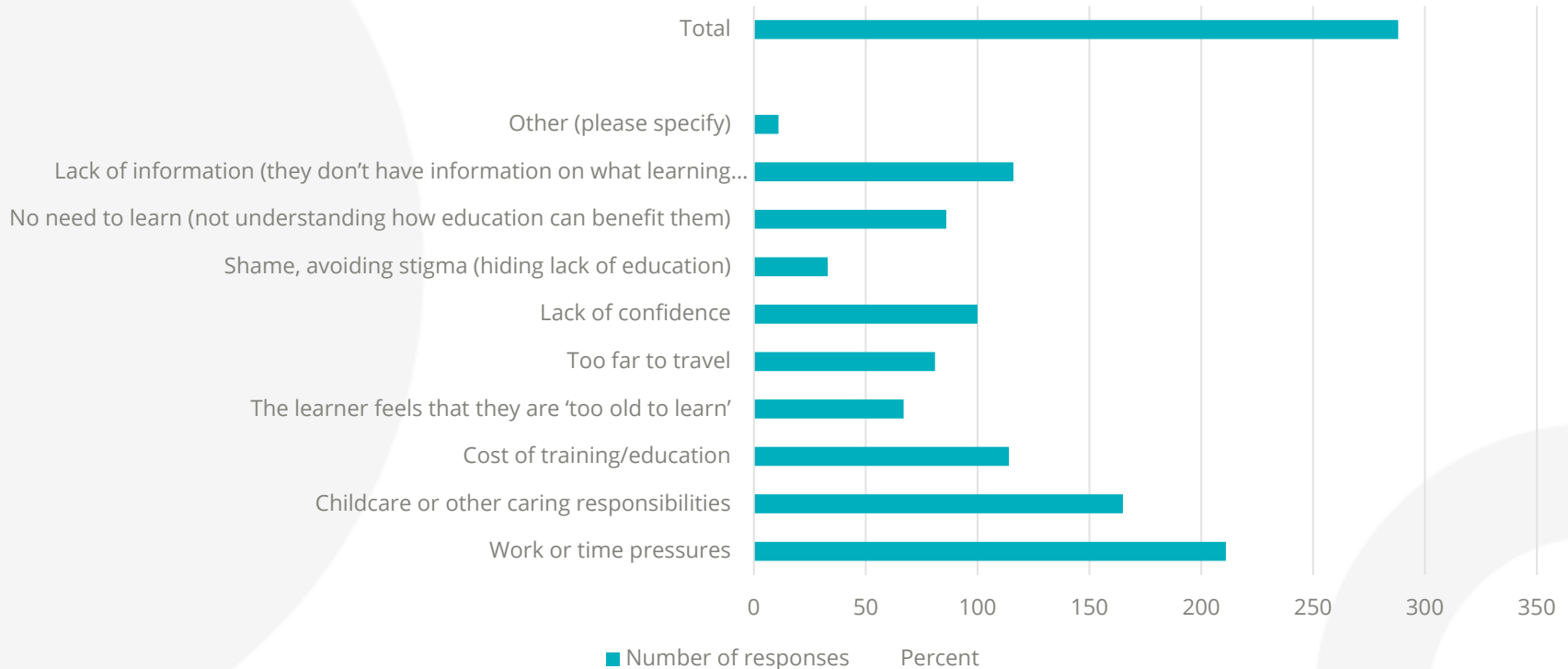
Reasons for adults to return to learning

- Many adult learners in the UK returned to learning for personal development reasons – improve self-confidence, acquire basic skills – importance of funding for 'leisure courses' as a stepping stone to those who have been out of education for a long time.
- In Spain many return to education due to expectations from family, friends or colleagues.
- National campaigns have had impact in Croatia, Estonia and the Netherlands.
- Another reason, given by a Portuguese respondent, was that returning to learn was a condition for receiving welfare benefits for some.





In your opinion, what are the main barriers, to coming back into education, that adult learners report:



Barriers to adult learning – key recommendations



- Adults need access to better information, careers advice and guidance.
- Adult programmes need to be flexible, accessible and modular.
- Funding should be provided to pay for or subsidise childcare to mitigate putting women at a disadvantage.

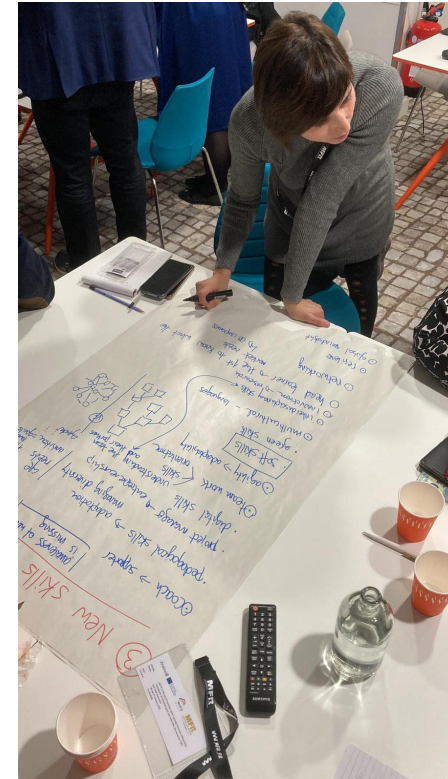
In your opinion, what are the main barriers, to coming back into education, that adult learners report: (Please tick all that apply)

	Croatia	Estonia	Finland	France	Netherlands	Portugal	Republic of Ireland	Slovenia	Spain	UK	Total
Work or time pressures	75%	100%	82%	47%	82%	65%	77%	93%	65%	91%	73%
Childcare or other caring responsibilities	55%	52%	27%	31%	65%	65%	100%	57%	44%	89%	57%
Cost of training/education	80%	14%	9%	53%	65%	6%	31%	29%	14%	72%	40%
The learner feels that they are 'too old to learn'	25%	38%	36%	14%	35%	45%	23%	0%	21%	15%	23%
Too far to travel	25%	29%	36%	71%	12%	16%	23%	0%	18%	19%	28%
Lack of confidence	20%	52%	27%	18%	35%	26%	54%	21%	26%	64%	35%
Shame, avoiding stigma (hiding lack of education)	15%	19%	9%	0%	12%	10%	23%	14%	5%	23%	11%
No need to learn (not understanding how education can benefit them)	40%	52%	55%	4%	41%	65%	15%	43%	18%	26%	30%
Lack of information (they don't have information on what learning opportunities are available to them)	30%	43%	55%	29%	24%	23%	15%	36%	65%	47%	40%
Other (please specify)	5%	0%	9%	2%	6%	3%	0%	7%	7%	2%	4%

Barriers to learning

From the country breakdown, we can see that certain barriers are only issues in certain countries:

- The cost of training and education is mainly an issue in Croatia (80%) and the UK (72%) but less of a problem in Finland (9%), Portugal (6%) and Estonia (14%).
- Work or time pressures are a barrier for many of the countries, although not so much so for France.
- Childcare is a challenge in most countries to a certain degree although 100% of Irish respondents said it was one of the main barriers.
- Some of the countries where delivery of adult education is online, there is less of an issue in terms of travelling to learn (such as in Estonia and Finland). In France, 'too far to travel' is perhaps more of a challenge where there are fewer opportunities to access adult learning online and where there are learners in rural areas with poor travel connections.



The legacy of the pandemic

- Shift in demand for more hybrid delivery models which, for some respondents, has increased enrolments.
- Flexible nature of hybrid delivery supports busy lives of adults.
- Does not suit all programmes, e.g. practical vocational classes.
- Does not suit all learners (learning styles are very individual).
- Those studying at higher EQF levels tended to adapt better to online learning.
- Some did not feel there were any positive outcomes of online learning due to the 'digital divide' – most disadvantaged negatively impacted with poor access to technology.
- Online learning restricted the social contact that face-to-face learning brings.

The legacy of the pandemic

- Slovenian and UK respondents reported the added impact of Covid on mental health having a knock-on effect on adult enrolments.
- Financial pressures and cost of living pressures impact on those where funding for all adult courses is not provided by the state. Learners prioritise work over learning.

The legacy of the pandemic

- More sharing of digital teaching and learning resources and best practice between educators.
- Need for better technology with VET centres to support hybrid or online learning to a high standard.
- In some countries, respondents were disappointed that there was a complete reversion to face-to-face teaching and learning and felt this was a 'missed opportunity'.
- A mix of face-to-face, supplemented with some independent online tasks was favoured by many respondents.
- The VET/adult education sector showed great resilience during the pandemic, responding swiftly to an adverse situation so as not to impact negatively on learners.

Key priorities for next five years

- Profile of adult education and lifelong learning needs raising. Status of VET versus Higher Education.
- Investment in the teaching workforce and teaching methodology.
- Some countries will need increased/better funding. E.g. England reports no increase in the adult funding rate for at least 10 years.
- Teacher recruitment and retention needs addressing.
- Ageing populations - need to reintegrate older people into the workforce – flex work and training opportunities.
- AI, automation and virtual reality technologies – how this impacts on work and what skills workers will need to adapt.
- Need for re-skilling into key industry areas – green skills, health and social care, digital skills, engineering.
- Support asylum seekers and refugees to integrate better into the workforce to close skills gaps.

Key priorities for next five years

- Better recognition of prior learning for adults.
- Recognition that, whilst most European countries make move to become highly skilled economies, there are limits to progression when basic skills in literacy, numeracy, digital skills and learning a host language as a second language are still a big concern.
- For some governments, the focus of adult education is linked to heavily to economic value rather than social value. The value of learning to wellbeing, mental health and an individual's role in society is underestimated.
- The role of employers as co-creators or co-designers of adult education vocational curricula and the role of VET centres in supporting local businesses with innovation, product development and research.
- Better VET/university collaboration.
- The importance of learning other languages and internationalisation to prepare learners for the future world of work.

Friends as well as project partners



Thank you

marguerite.hogg@aoc.co.uk