



SOCIAL RESEARCH NUMBER:

86/2024

PUBLICATION DATE:

12/12/2024

# Learner experiences in post-16 education (2024)

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

This document is also available in Welsh.

**OGI** © Crown Copyright Digital ISBN 978-1-83625-975-6

## Learner experiences in post-16 education (2024)

Authors: Charlotte Eales, Claire Griffiths

Full Research Report: Eales, C., Griffiths, C. (2024). *Learner Experiences in Post-16 Education (2024)*. Cardiff: Welsh Government, GSR report number 86/2024.

Available at: <https://www.gov.wales/learner-experiences-post-16-education-april-may-2024>

Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

For further information please contact:

Schools Research Branch

Social Research and Information Division

Knowledge and Analytical Services

Welsh Government

Cathays Park

Cardiff

CF10 3NQ

Email: [schoolsresearch@gov.wales](mailto:schoolsresearch@gov.wales)

## **Executive summary**

### **1. Introduction and background**

- 1.1 The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has affected the way we all live, learn, and work. Enforced social restrictions, the introduction of new ways of learning, and changes to assessments all have potentially long-lasting consequences, many of which are still beginning to emerge.
- 1.2 In 2023, the Welsh Government conducted a scoping exercise into identify the need for research evidence about the ongoing and longer-term impacts of the pandemic on learners in Wales who were aged 0-19 at the start of the pandemic.
- 1.3 The scoping exercise found reports of poor mental wellbeing and heightened anxiety amongst learners now enrolled in further and higher education.
- 1.4 Between April and May 2024, the Welsh Government conducted a survey of learners in further education to respond to the identified evidence gap. The research focused on improving understanding of the recent experiences of learners in further education who are aged 16-24.
- 1.5 The research aimed to build on the findings of a survey that was conducted in 2020 amongst further education learners. The 2020 survey focused specifically on learner wellbeing and digital inclusion. This 2024 survey aimed to explore ongoing and emerging challenges that young people may be facing in their education.

### **2. Findings**

- 2.1 Over a third of respondents indicated that their original education plans had changed due to the pandemic. This was particularly evident for care-experienced learners (65.4%), those with a reported disability/Additional Learning Need (ALN) (65.2%) and for those who are economically disadvantaged (55.8%).
- 2.2 The decline in the quality of education and decrease in poor mental health since the pandemic were the most frequently cited reasons for changes in planned learning courses.

- 2.3 Respondents cited mental ill health as a disruption to their learning with more than half (52.9%) of all respondents 'strongly agreeing' or 'tending to agree' that their learning had been disrupted in the previous twelve months due to mental ill health including stress and anxiety<sup>1</sup>.
- 2.4 The wellbeing score gap between male and female respondents widened between 2020 and 2024. Female respondents in 2024 had a score 1.9 points lower than males, compared to 1.1 difference between the groups in 2020.
- 2.5 Learners reported that the pandemic negatively impacted their education (71.6%), their mental health (62.3%) and their job prospects (39.7%).
- 2.6 Almost half (47.3%) of respondents who were in year 11 in March 2020 reported that the pandemic had a negative impact on their job prospects, compared to just 36.0% of learners who were in year 8.
- 2.7 When surveyed, around 80% of respondents indicated that they had access to adequate space, equipment and internet connection to enable them to work from home. Two-thirds (67.2%) agreed that they have the peace and quiet they require to work from home although just 40.2% felt focused and motivated when working online from home.
- 2.8 Respondents value the ability to attend their courses in person, with 82.0% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement 'It is important that I attend all my scheduled learning sessions in person'.

### **3. Conclusions**

- 3.1 Poor mental health and emotional wellbeing presents a significant challenge amongst learners in post-16 education.
- 3.2 Significant gender differences exist in relation to reported mental health and wellbeing. Females are more likely to report disruption to their education as a result and had lower wellbeing scores than their male counterparts.

---

<sup>1</sup> This question asked respondents 'Please tell us the extent to which you agree or disagree that your learning in post-16 education has been disrupted by the following in the past twelve months?'

- 3.3 Whilst providers are reported to be going some way to meet the mental health and wellbeing support needs of their learners there remains a significant unmet demand.
- 3.4 Further research may be required to fill the ongoing evidence gap in post-16 education whilst targeted support may be needed to address the identified challenges and support the most vulnerable learners in their progression.

## **Contents**

Executive summary.....	1
List of tables.....	5
List of figures.....	6
Glossary.....	8
1. Background.....	10
2. Methodology.....	12
3. Respondent profile.....	14
4. Findings.....	17
5. Conclusions.....	53
6. Recomendations.....	55
7. Appendicies.....	56

## List of tables

Table 1: Did your plans for your education change in any way because of the pandemic?.....	21
Table 2: How is your course currently delivered and what would your preferred method of delivery be?.....	31
Table 3: Comparison of experiences working from home (2020/24).....	33
Table 4: What equipment do you use to learn from home? .....	33
Table 5: Which of the following challenges do you face about public transport? .....	37
Table 6: Comparison of SWEMWBS scores (2020/24).....	43
Table 7: SWEMWBS scores: by year group .....	44
Table 8: Gender differences in experiences of bullying and harassment.....	48
Table 9: In the past 12 months, have you applied for Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)?.....	50

## List of figures

Figure 1: Respondent profile (2024) .....	14
Figure 2: What language does your family normally speak at home? .....	15
Figure 2: Geographical distribution of survey respondents by postcode district .....	16
Figure 4: What type of learning were you doing in March 2020? .....	17
Figure 5: In March 2020, which school year were you in? .....	18
Figure 6: Did your plans for your education change in any way because of the pandemic?.....	19
Figure 7: Change in education plans due to the pandemic: by group .....	20
Figure 8: Were you able to return to your original planned learning later? .....	23
Figure 9: Return to original planned learning by year group .....	24
Figure 10: Which type of learning provider are you with now? .....	25
Figure 11: What are you currently studying? .....	25
Figure 12: Are you studying full-time or part-time? .....	26
Figure 13: What impact do you feel that the pandemic had on your education, mental health and job prospects? .....	27
Figure 14: Impact of the pandemic on respondents mental health: by group.	28
Figure 15: Impact of the pandemic on respondents education: by group .....	28
Figure 16: Impact of the pandemic on respondents job prospects: by group	29
Figure 17: Pandemic impact on job prospects: by year group .....	30
Figure 18: What are your current experiences of learning from home? .....	32
Figure 19: Correct home learning equipment by FSM eligibility .....	34
Figure 20: How, and to what extent, has your learning in post-16 education .... been disrupted in the past twelve months? .....	35
Figure 21: Mental ill health as a disruption to learning: by group .....	36
Figure 22: Financial hardship as a disruption to learning by EMA application	37
Figure 23: Respondents confidence and ability related to learning experiences since the pandemic. ....	39
Figure 24: Correct home learning equipment by FSM eligibility .....	41
Figure 25: SWEMWBS scores 2024 .....	44
Figure 26: Respondents feelings recently on a scale of 0-10 .....	45



Figure 27: Respondents' happiness yesterday on a scale of 0-10: by group. 45

Figure 28: Respondents' happiness yesterday on a scale of 0-10:  
by year group ..... 46

Figure 29: Respondents support needs in the past 12 months ..... 47

Figure 30: Where there has been an identified support need, have these  
been met? ..... 49

Figure 31: In your school/college are you aware of any students who can't  
afford to buy lunch/come to school hungry? ..... 50

Figure 32: Respondents experiences of food poverty during the last 12  
months..... 51

## Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
Additional Learning Needs (ALN)	<p>(1) A person has additional learning needs if he or she has a learning difficulty or disability (whether the learning difficulty or disability arises from a medical condition or otherwise) which calls for additional learning provision. (2) A child of compulsory school age or person over that age has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she— (a) has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or (b) has a disability for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010 which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities for education or training of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream maintained schools or mainstream institutions in the further education sector. (3) A child under compulsory school age has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she is or would be if no additional learning provision were made, likely to be within subsection (2) when of compulsory school age. (4) A person does not have a learning difficulty or disability solely because the language (or form of language) in which he or she is or will be taught is different from a language (or form of language) which is or has been used at home.</p>
Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)	<p>EMA is a financial allowance available to 16 to 18 years olds (and some 19-year-olds). It is a weekly allowance of £40, paid fortnightly to eligible Welsh domiciled learners attending schools or further education institutions in Wales or elsewhere in the UK. Payment of the EMA is linked to satisfactory attendance and achievement of agreed learning goals as stipulated by their school or further education institution (FEI). Learners are required to sign an annual EMA Learning Agreement with their school or FEI.</p>

FE	Further Education
LA	Local Authority
Free School Meals (FSM)	Up until September 2022, certain learners in Wales, including those whose parents receive various support payments such as Universal Credit, qualified to receive FSM. Wales has since begun a gradual rollout of Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM) to all primary school learners, to be completed by 2024. FSM eligibility (eFSM) is often used as a proxy indicator for socio-economic disadvantage and poverty.
SWEMWBS	Short version of the Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale.

## 1. Background

- 1.1 The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has affected the way we all live, learn, and work. Enforced social restrictions, the introduction of new ways of learning, and changes to assessments all have potentially long-lasting consequences, many of which are still beginning to emerge.
- 1.2 Available evidence<sup>2</sup> suggests that the impacts of the pandemic were not experienced equally, and this has served to further exacerbate preexisting inequalities. For this reason, future research needs to account for factors such as race, gender, rurality, economically status, Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and physical or mental health care needs.
- 1.3 In 2023, the Welsh Government conducted a scoping exercise to identify the need for research evidence about the ongoing and longer-term impacts of the pandemic on learners in Wales who were aged 0-19 at the start of the pandemic.
- 1.4 The scoping exercise found reports of poor mental wellbeing and heightened anxiety amongst learners now enrolled in further and higher education. Feelings of “imposter syndrome” amongst learners that had received [centre-assessed grades](#) rather than through formal examinations was also not uncommon, with questions raised regarding the ‘readiness’ of many learners entering post-16 education during and after the pandemic.
- 1.5 Whilst the surveys conducted through the [School Health Research Network](#) provide robust health and well-being data about learners in primary and secondary schools there is currently no equivalent research focusing on post-16 education<sup>3</sup>. A [Learner Voice Wales Survey](#)<sup>4</sup> designed to help the Welsh Government understand and respond to the views of learners in post-16 education was last conducted in 2015.

---

<sup>2</sup> [Covid Impact On Young People With Mental Health Needs | YoungMinds](#)

<sup>3</sup> [School Health Research Network \(shrn.org.uk\)](#) collects limited data from learners aged 16-18 in secondary schools that include a sixth form.

<sup>4</sup> [Learner Voice Wales Survey | GOV.WALES](#)

- 1.6 Whilst a more recent [survey of the effect of Covid-19 on post-16 learners \(2020\)](#)<sup>5</sup> has provided a baseline to understand the impact of the pandemic on learners in Wales, there remains a lack of ongoing data gathering in this space.
- 1.7 The Welsh Government conducted a survey of learners in Further Education (FE) to respond to the identified evidence gap. The research focused on improving understanding of the recent experiences of learners in FE aged 16-24.
- 1.8 This survey aimed to explore ongoing and emerging challenges that young people may be facing in their education. Specifically, these are related to mental wellbeing, progression, job prospects and access to resources including transport, home learning equipment and food.
- 1.9 These challenges may be as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic or for other reasons including the cost-of-living crisis. This report details the findings of this survey.
- 1.10 The research aimed to build on the findings of a survey that was conducted in 2020 amongst learners in further education. The 2020 survey focused specifically on learner wellbeing and digital inclusion. Comparison is provided to the findings of the 2020 research where appropriate.

---

<sup>5</sup> [Effect of COVID-19 on learners survey: results summary | GOV.WALES](#)

## 2. Methodology

- 2.1 An online survey was developed by the Schools Research Branch in Welsh Government in collaboration with policy colleagues and researchers working in relation to post-16 education.
- 2.2 The survey was produced using the Smart Survey platform. The questionnaire is available in appendix 1.
- 2.3 The survey had four main areas of focus: (1) information about past and current learning, (2) access to learning, (3) thoughts and feelings, and (4) support services. The survey also collected a range of demographic information from respondents.
- 2.4 The survey comprised of single choice questions, multi-choice questions and open-ended questions enabling both quantitative and qualitative analysis.
- 2.5 Cognitive testing<sup>6</sup> of the survey questions was undertaken with several learners currently in FE.
- 2.6 This survey was distributed to learners via schools, colleges, adult learning providers and work-based learning providers. It was also shared with relevant organisations<sup>7</sup> and through social media sites, Hwb<sup>8</sup> and Dysg<sup>9</sup>.
- 2.7 Responses could be submitted over six weeks between April and May 2024.
- 2.8 A total of 1,821 usable responses were received (following validation and data cleaning - see appendix 2 for more detail on the cleaning process).
- 2.9 Quantitative data analysis was undertaken using Microsoft Excel. The qualitative data was analysed thematically to identify common themes, topics and ideas amongst the responses.

---

<sup>6</sup> This approach was used to capture to capture learners thought processes and understanding in responding to the survey questions.

<sup>7</sup> National Training Federation for Wales, Bilingual Champions Group of Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, Careers Wales, ColegauCymru, NUS Cymru, Youth Work Wales, Qualifications Wales youth group, WJEC youth group and Welsh Youth Parliament.

<sup>8</sup> Welsh Government provides bilingual, digital services to all maintained schools through Hwb to support teaching and learning through the Curriculum for Wales.

<sup>9</sup> Dysg is the official education e-newsletter from Welsh Government. Dysg aims to provide updates and developments on education and training sectors in Wales.

## Limitations

- 2.10 Limitations of the study include the geographical spread of respondents. The highest proportions of respondents were from postcode districts in South Wales including Cardiff and Swansea. There were no respondents from the Gwynedd<sup>10</sup> area or from some postcode districts in South-East Wales, including Abergavenny, Bargoed and Treorchy.
- 2.11 Most respondents to the survey were either in a school sixth form or FE college. Numbers of respondents from apprenticeships and work-based learning providers were limited. Further research may be required to specifically target these learners to understand if their experiences differ from those reported in this research.
- 2.12 The 2024 survey was sent to 192 FE providers across Wales. It is undetermined whether all providers distributed the survey to their learners and the name of providers was not included as part of the data collection. Consequently, it is not possible to accurately determine the sampling frame or to ascertain if the respondent populations were similar across the 2020 and 2024 surveys.
- 2.13 The 2020 study was open all respondents in further education whereas the 2024 focused only on those learners aged 16-19. This meant that the 2020 study had a wider age<sup>11</sup> range of respondents than the 2024 survey. As a result, direct comparisons between the two datasets may be limited.

---

<sup>10</sup> Whilst the survey was open, an email was sent out to providers to request respondents from Gwynedd but this did not increase participation.

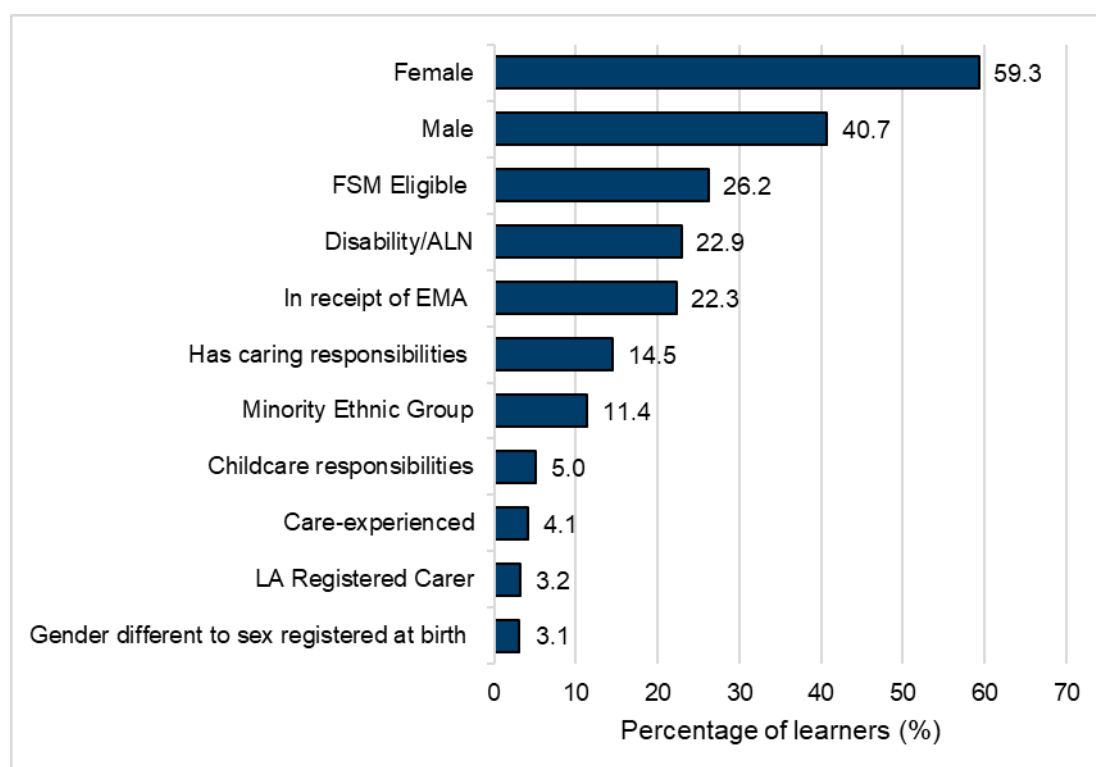
<sup>11</sup> Most survey respondents in 2020 were aged between 16-19 (71%), followed by 20-24 (8%), 25-34 (8%), 45-64 (6%), 35-44 (5%) and 65+ (2%).

### 3. Respondent profile

3.1 A total of 1,821 valid responses were received to the survey.

3.2 Respondent were asked a series of demographic questions with the responses shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 – Respondent profile (2024) (Base:1,821)



3.3 The male to female ratio of respondents was largely similar when comparing 2020 and 2024 (2020 results showed 36.1% male and 61.6% female respondents).

3.4 Around a quarter of respondents (26.2%) indicated that they had been entitled to free school meals (FSM) whilst a similar proportion (24.9%) reported having applied for, and/or received Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)<sup>12</sup>.

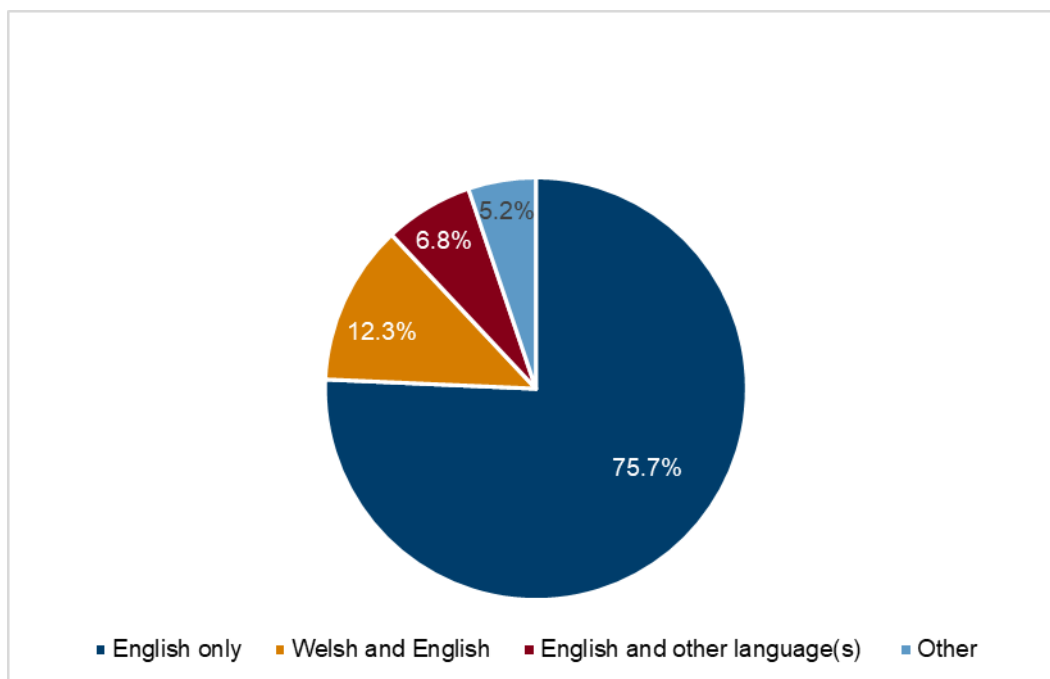
3.5 There was a higher percentage of respondents from a minority ethnic background in the 2024 results (11.4% in 2024 compared to 5.8% in 2020) and more respondents who identified as having a disability or ALN (22.9% in 2024 compared to 13.1% in 2020).

<sup>12</sup> No comparison data was collected on either FSM or EMA in 2020.



- 3.6 There were fewer respondents in 2024 who had childcare responsibilities (5.0% compared to 11.7% in 2020) and fewer respondents who said they were registered as a carer with their local authority (LA) (3.2% in 2024 compared to 14.1% in 2020).
- 3.7 Respondents were also asked about the language/s spoken at home. Three quarters of respondents reported that they only speak English at home and over 12% of respondents reported that they speak both English and Welsh.

Figure 2 – What language does your family normally speak at home? (Base: 1,183)

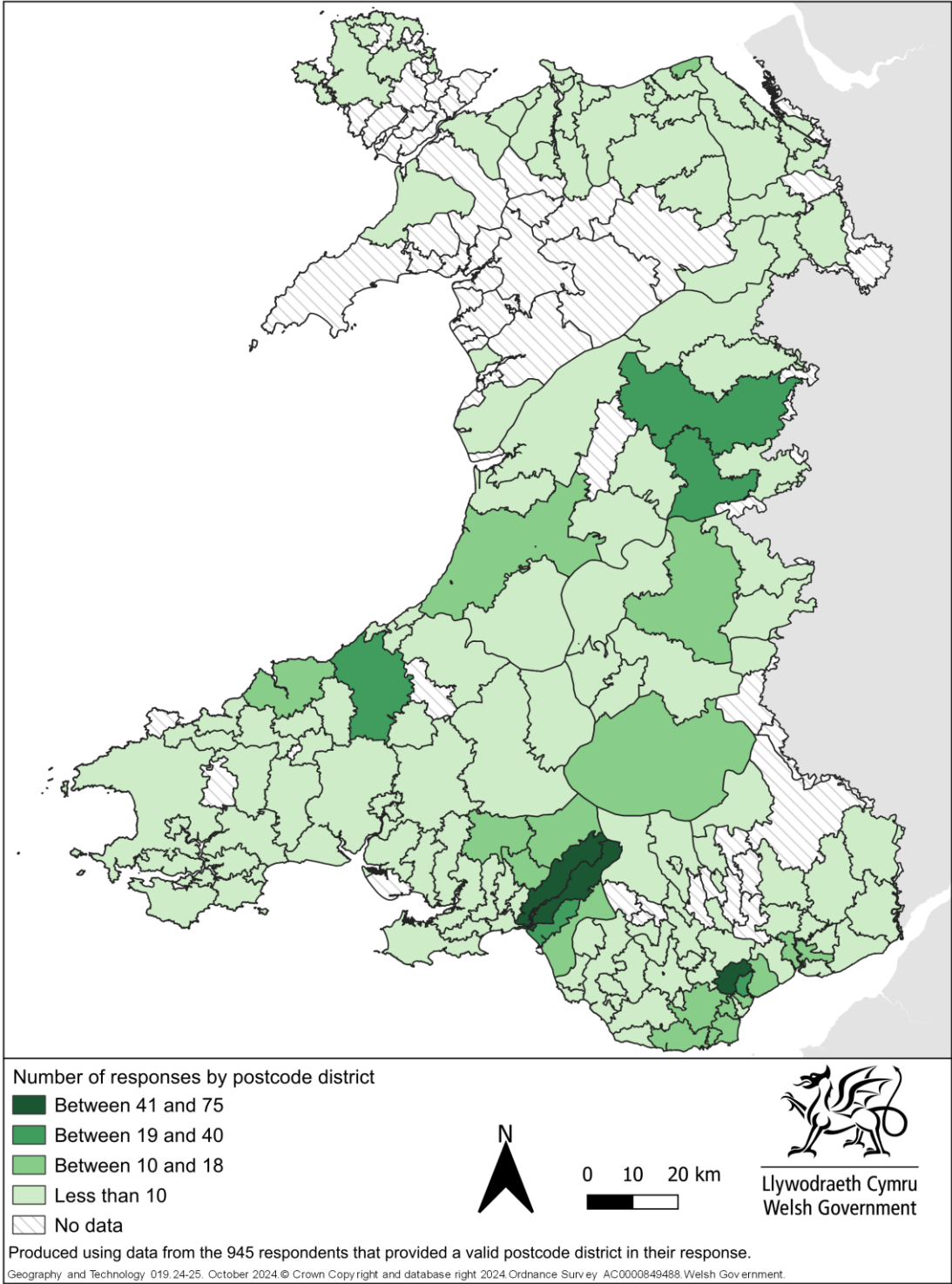


Note: 'Other' category includes: Other language(s) only (2.3%), Welsh only (2.1%), Welsh, English and other language(s) (0.5%), Welsh and other language(s) (0.3%).

- 3.8 Respondents were asked to provide the first part of their postcode. The distribution of respondents can be seen in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3 – Geographical distribution of survey respondents by postcode district

**Geographical distribution of survey respondents by postcode district**



## 4. Findings

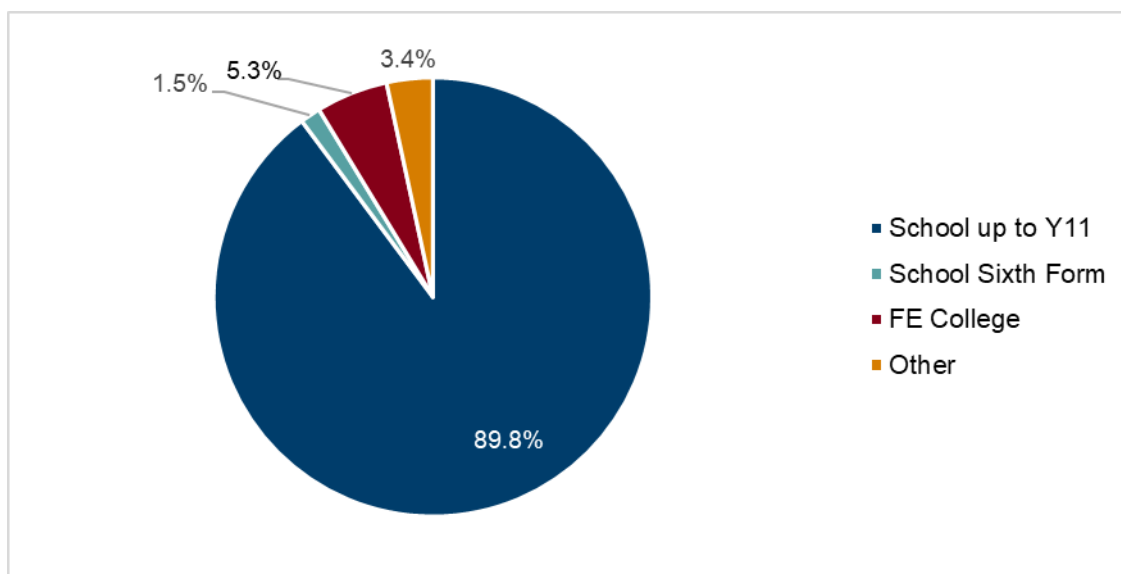
### 4.1 Information about past and current learning

#### What type of learning were you doing in March 2020?

4.1.1 Learners were asked questions about their past and current learning choices. March 2020 was a time when schools, colleges and universities were forced to close because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Learners were asked questions about their past and current learning choices. The survey aimed to understand if individuals' learning choices changed because of this, and if so, how?

4.1.2 Figure 4 shows that almost 90% of respondents (89.8%) were in compulsory secondary education (up to year 11) in March 2020.

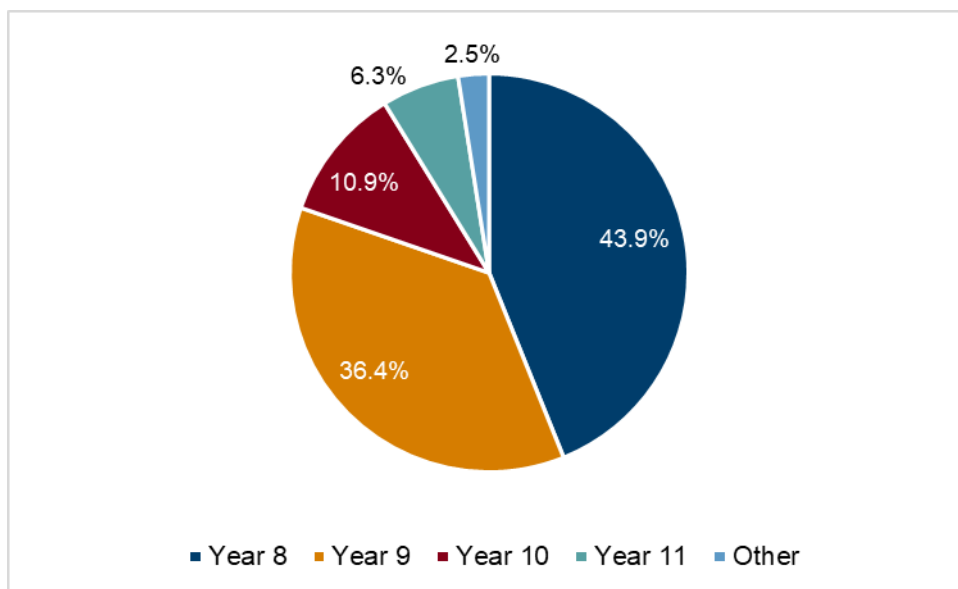
Figure 4 – What type of learning were you doing in March 2020? (Base: 1,643)



Note: 'Other' in Figure 4 includes the following types of learning: Adult learning, Apprenticeship, FE college and work based, Traineeship and University.

4.1.3 Four-fifths (80.3%) of respondents to the survey were in years eight and nine at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 5 – In March 2020, which school year were you in? (Base:1,425)



Note: 'Other' includes school years 7, 12 and 13.

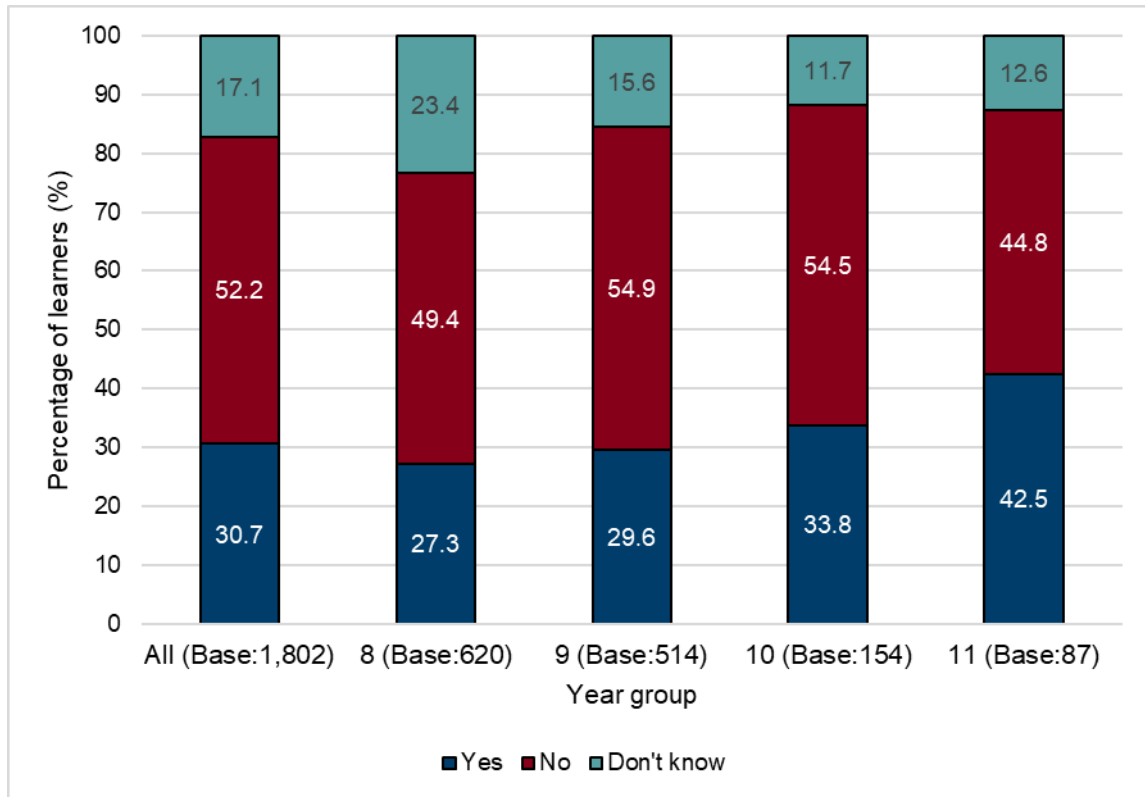
Note: Years 7, 12 and 13 omitted due to low number of responses.

### **Did your plans for your education change in any way because of the pandemic?**

4.1.4 Learners were asked if their plans for their education changed in any way because of the pandemic. Over a third of respondents (37.0%) confirmed that this had been the case.

4.1.5 Figure 6 shows that around three in ten respondents reported that plans for their education changed because of the pandemic. For those respondents that had been in year 11 in March 2020, this Figure rose to 42.5%.

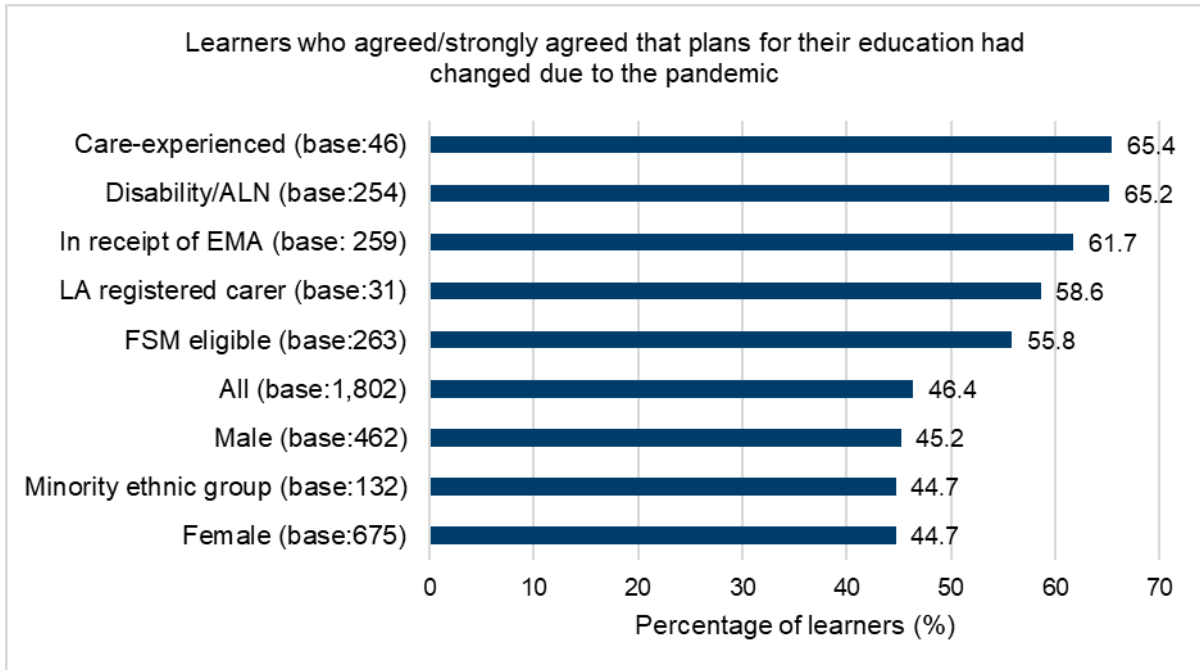
Figure 6 – Did your plans for your education change in any way because of the pandemic?



Note: There is a low base number for respondents in year 11.

4.1.6 Comparison between demographic groups (Figure 7) showed that this was particularly evident for care-experienced learners (65.4%) or those with a reported disability/ALN (65.2%). Over half (55.8%) of learners who were eligible for FSM felt that their plans had changed because of the pandemic.

Figure 7 – Change in education plans due to the pandemic: by group



Note: There is a low base number for care-experienced learners and learners registered as a carer with their local authority.

4.1.7 Those respondents indicating that the pandemic had caused changes to their education were asked to specify how. Table 1 below shows a decline in the quality of education and a negative impact on mental to be the most frequently given reasons for changes to a planned learning course.

Table 1 – Did your plans for your education change in any way because of the pandemic?

If 'yes' was this due to any of the following? Please select all that apply (Base: 553)	Number of learners	Percentage of learners
The pandemic impacted the quality of the education I received. As a result, I did not achieve the grades needed to follow my original planned learning course	207	37.4
The pandemic negatively impacted my mental health, and I was unable to follow my planned learning course as a result	179	32.4
The pandemic changed plans for my education in some other way	82	14.8
I chose to take a break from learning due to the pandemic.	71	12.8
I received grades decided by my school/college (rather than centre assessed grades from external exams) that were lower than expected and this restricted my options	65	11.8
The learning course I was planning to do did not run because of the pandemic	57	10.3
I received grades decided by my school/college (rather than centre assessed grades from external exams) that were higher than expected and this widened my options	51	9.2
The pandemic impacted my physical health, and I was unable to follow my planned learning course as a result	50	9.0
Financial need due to the pandemic meant that I could not follow my original planned learning course	30	5.4
Caring responsibilities due to the pandemic meant that I could not follow my original planned learning course	29	5.2

4.1.8 Seventy-one respondents (12.8% of all respondents) indicated that they chose to take a break from learning due to the pandemic. Some of these learners explained this was necessary to provide support for family members, especially those with essential workers or siblings with special needs. Struggles with anxiety, depression and an overall deterioration in mental health led to others taking time out. Many also found online learning to be less effective, with issues such as poor quality of education, lack of structure, and difficulties in concentrating leading to the decision to take a break. Comments included:

“As a young carer with a sibling on the autistic spectrum, it was difficult to look after him whilst doing online classes. Additionally, having a parent as an essential worker (nurse) added pressure in balancing schoolwork and helping my family.”

“Down to mental health reasons, I was struggling during lockdown because it just felt lonely, also couldn’t focus at home so I just didn’t do the work.”

“I had to support family members, and I had many responsibilities during the pandemic that affected my education. my mental health was slowly deteriorating.”

“While many people found it beneficial to work at home because they felt more productive in a relaxed setting, it was the exact opposite for me. I need an educational space, or workplace of some kind to keep my mind on task, and for there to be someone above me to give feedback and criticisms for me to adjust my work.”

4.1.9 Qualitative responses from respondents provided further evidence of personal experiences and reflections on how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted individuals' education and career paths. Responses centred around the following themes:

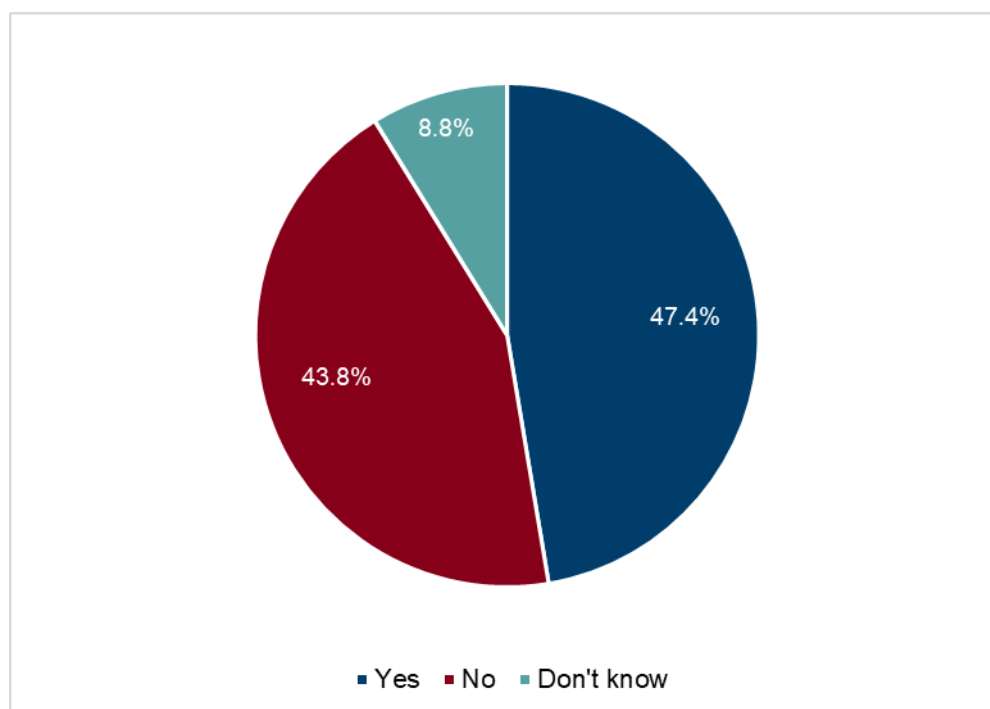
- Homeschooling challenges: Some individuals were homeschooled during the pandemic, but their families were not qualified to teach, affecting their education quality.
- Mental health impact: The pandemic negatively affected mental health, leading to issues such as burnout, lack of focus, and increased anxiety.
- Career changes: Several people changed their career paths due to the pandemic, either because of burnout or realising the instability of their chosen fields.
- Online learning difficulties: Many faced challenges with online learning, including lack of access to computers, ineffective school programs, and difficulties with motivation.
- Impact on grades: The pandemic impacted grades due to various factors such as cancelled exams, reduced study time, and less effective learning environments.
- Shift in educational views: Individuals' perspectives on education changed, with some focusing more on life skills and others reconsidering their academic and career goals.
- School transitions: Some learners had to move schools or countries, which disrupted their education and required them to adapt to new environments.
- Cancelled activities: Extracurricular activities and practical components of courses were often cancelled, affecting learners overall educational experiences.



### Were you able to return to your original planned learning later?

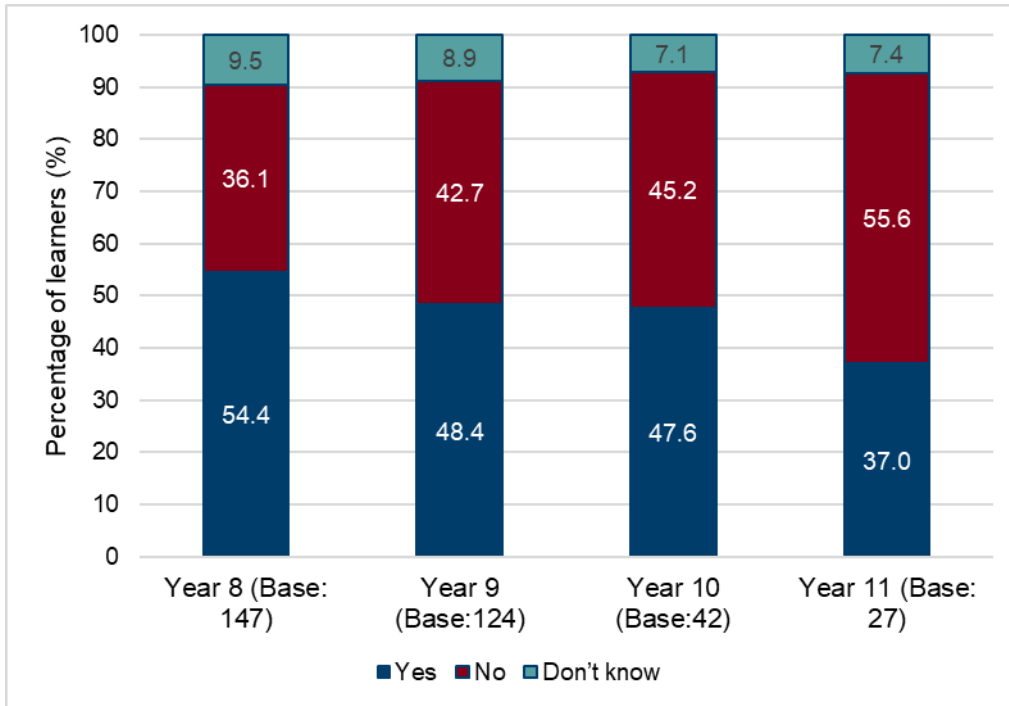
4.1.10 Those respondents whose plans for their education had changed because of the pandemic were asked if they had since been able to return to their original planned learning. Figure 8 below shows that only around half (47.4%) had done so.

Figure 8 – Were you able to return to your original planned learning later? (Base:454)



4.1.11 Respondents who were younger at the start of the pandemic were more likely to be able to return to their planned learning. Figure 9 shows this was the case for 54.4% of respondents in year 8 in March 2020 compared to just 37.0% of those in year 11.

Figure 9 – Return to original planned learning by year group

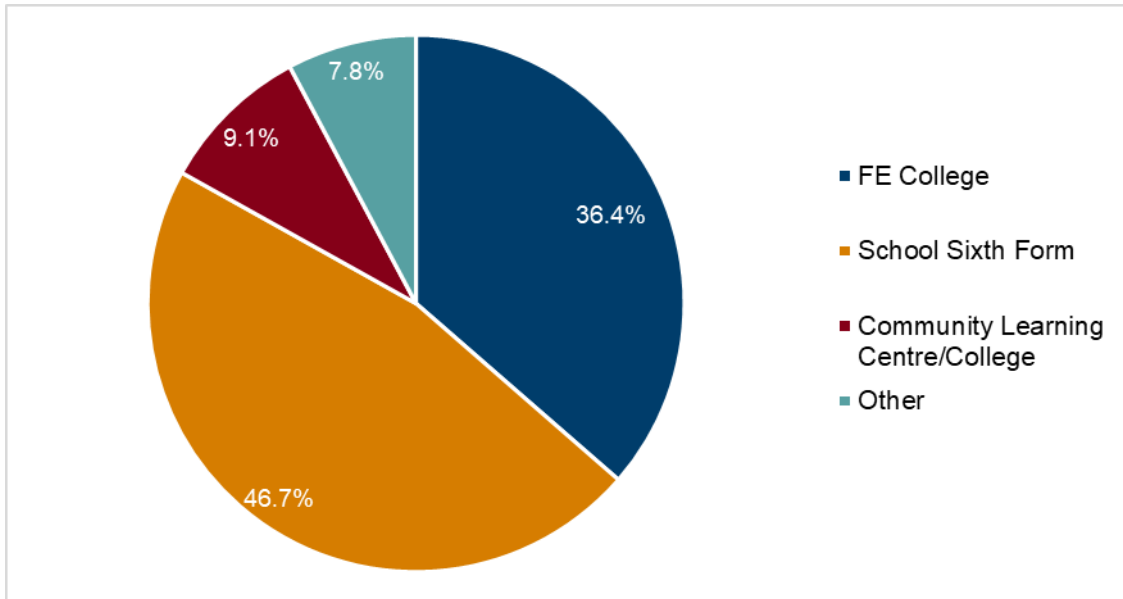


Note: There is a low base number available for respondents in year 10 and year 11.

**Which type of learning provider are you with now?**

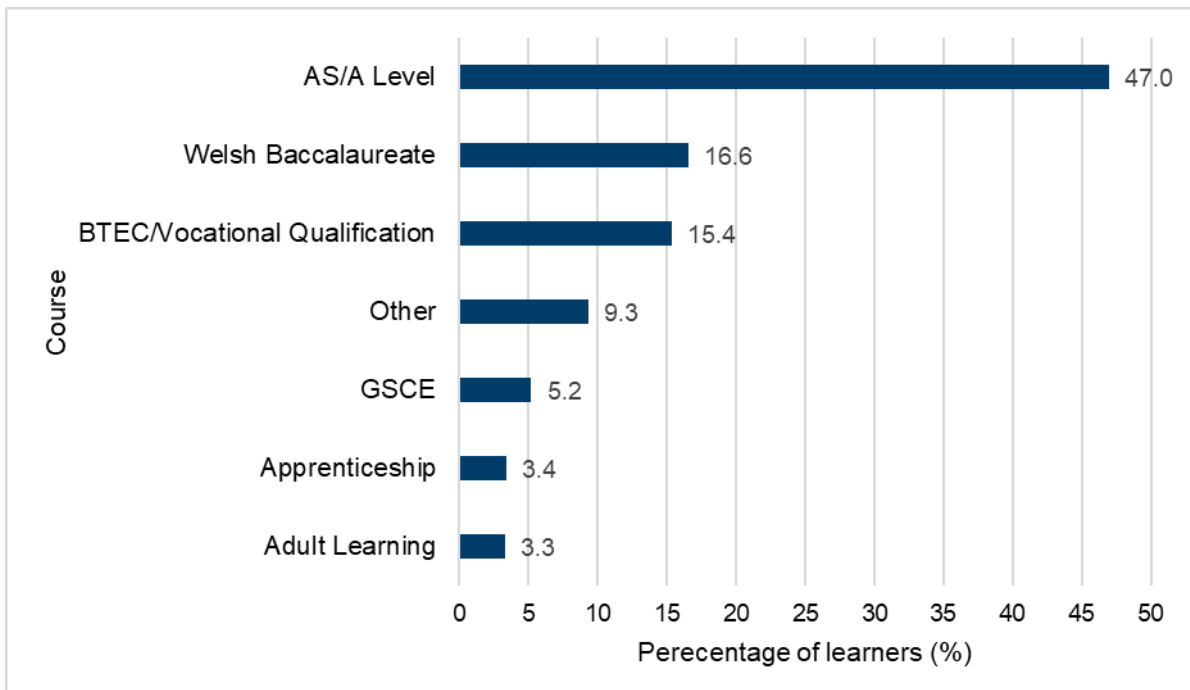
4.1.12 In the 2024 survey, most respondents reported that they are now in a school sixth form (46.7%) or an FE college (36.4%) (as can be seen Figure 10).

Figure 10 – Which type of learning provider are you with now? (Base: 1,601)



Note: 'Other' includes the following types of providers: Apprenticeship, Not in FE – School up to Y11, working or other, Traineeship, University or Work Based Provider.

Figure 11 - What are you currently studying? (Base:1,485)



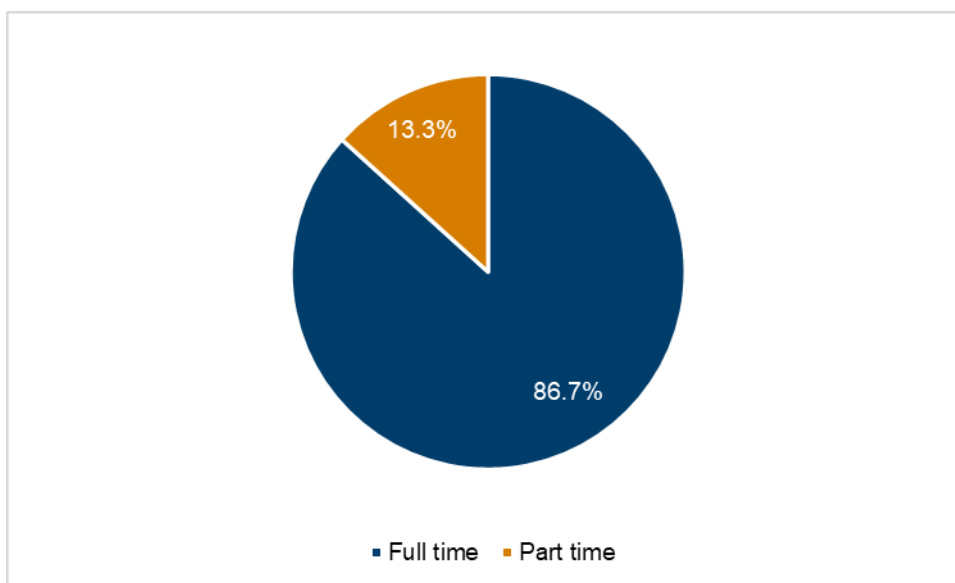
Note: Multiple choice question.

Note: 'Other' includes English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Level 4 or above, Access to Higher Education.

4.1.13 Almost half (47%) of learners that responded to the survey were currently studying AS and A Levels. Around one in six (16.6%) were studying Welsh Baccalaureate and a similar proportion (15.4%) BTEC and other vocational courses (Figure 11).

4.1.14 . The majority of learners (86.7%) in the 2024 survey reported that they were in full-time education whilst just 13.3% were studying part-time (Figure 12).

Figure 12 – Are you studying full-time or part-time? (Base:1,598)

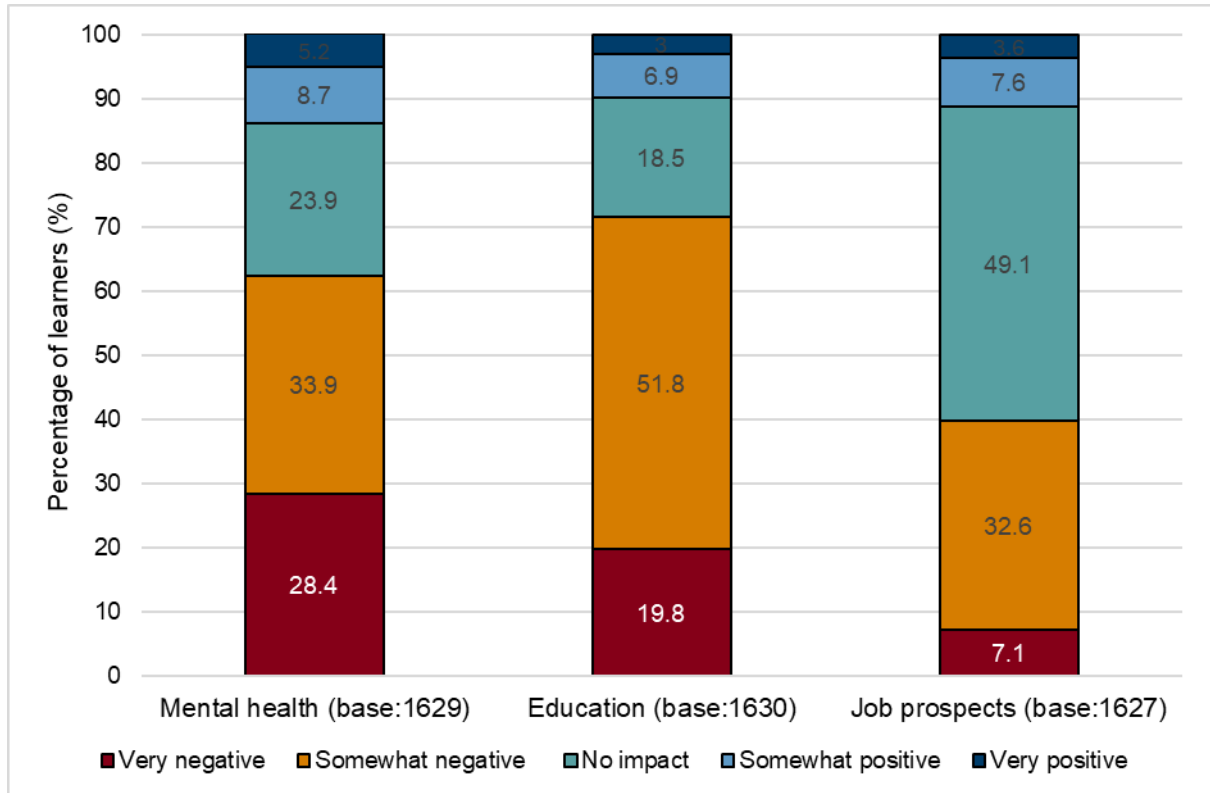


**Overall, what impact do you feel that the pandemic had on you?**

4.1.15 Learners were also asked what overall impact they felt that the pandemic had on their education, mental health and job prospects.

4.1.16 Almost three quarters (71.6%) of learners felt the pandemic had negatively (somewhat negatively or very negatively) impacted their education. Four in ten learners felt their job prospects had been negatively impacted and over 60% (62.3%) felt the pandemic had a negative impact on their mental health (see Figure 13).

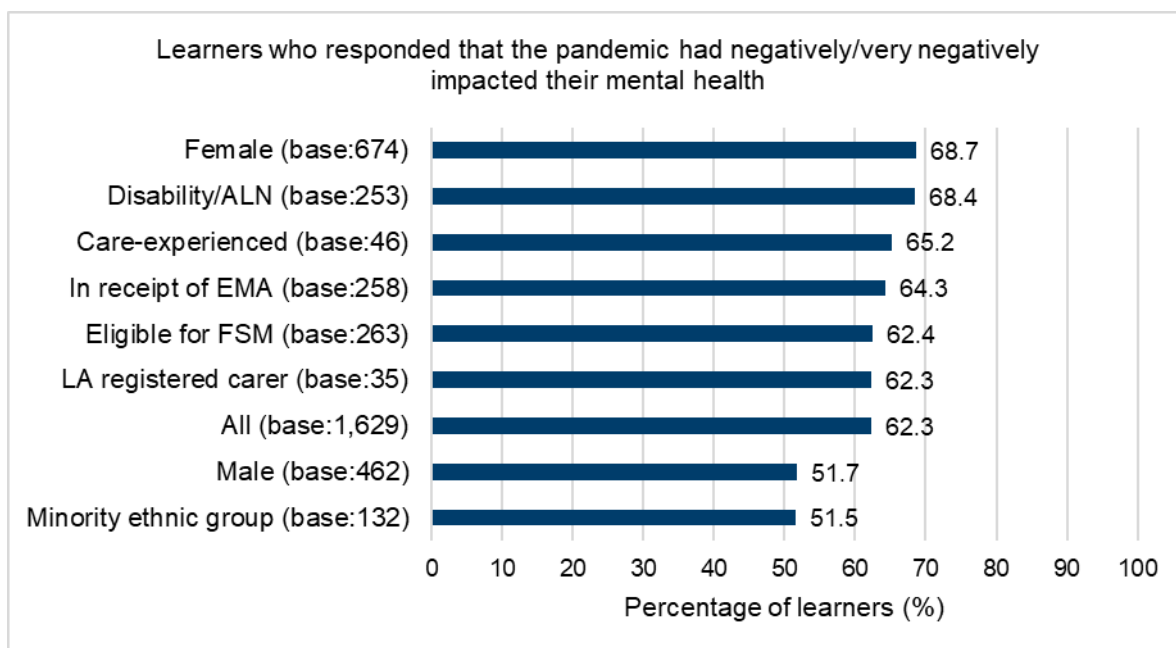
Figure 13 – What impact do you feel that the pandemic had on your education, mental health and job prospects?



4.1.17 Figure 14 below shows that whilst 51.7% of respondents identifying as male said their mental health was somewhat negatively or very negatively impacted by the pandemic, the rate for those identifying as female was 68.7%, representing a margin of 17%.

4.1.18 Over 60% of respondents who were eligible for FSM, in receipt of EMA, were care-experienced, or had a disability/ALN also reported that the pandemic had a somewhat or very negative impact on their mental health.

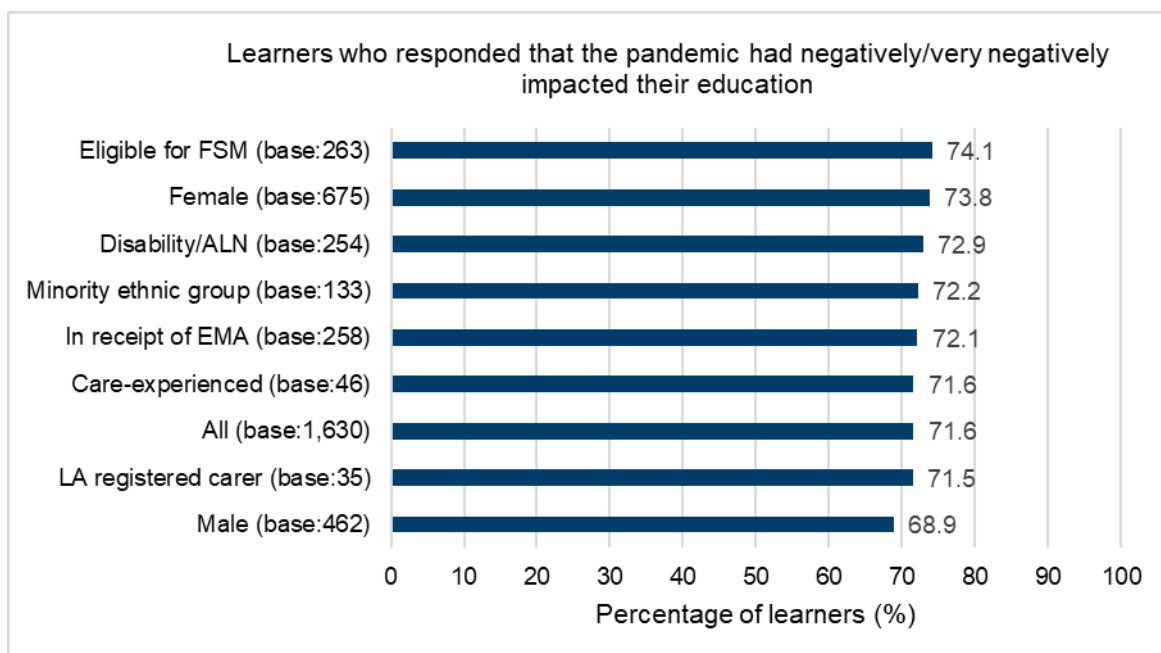
Figure 14 – Impact of the pandemic on respondents mental health: by group



Note: There is a low base number for care-experienced learners and learners registered as a carer with their local authority.

4.1.19 Figure 15 shows that over two thirds of respondents in each group reported that the pandemic had a negative impact on their education.

Figure 15 – Impact of the pandemic on respondents education: by group

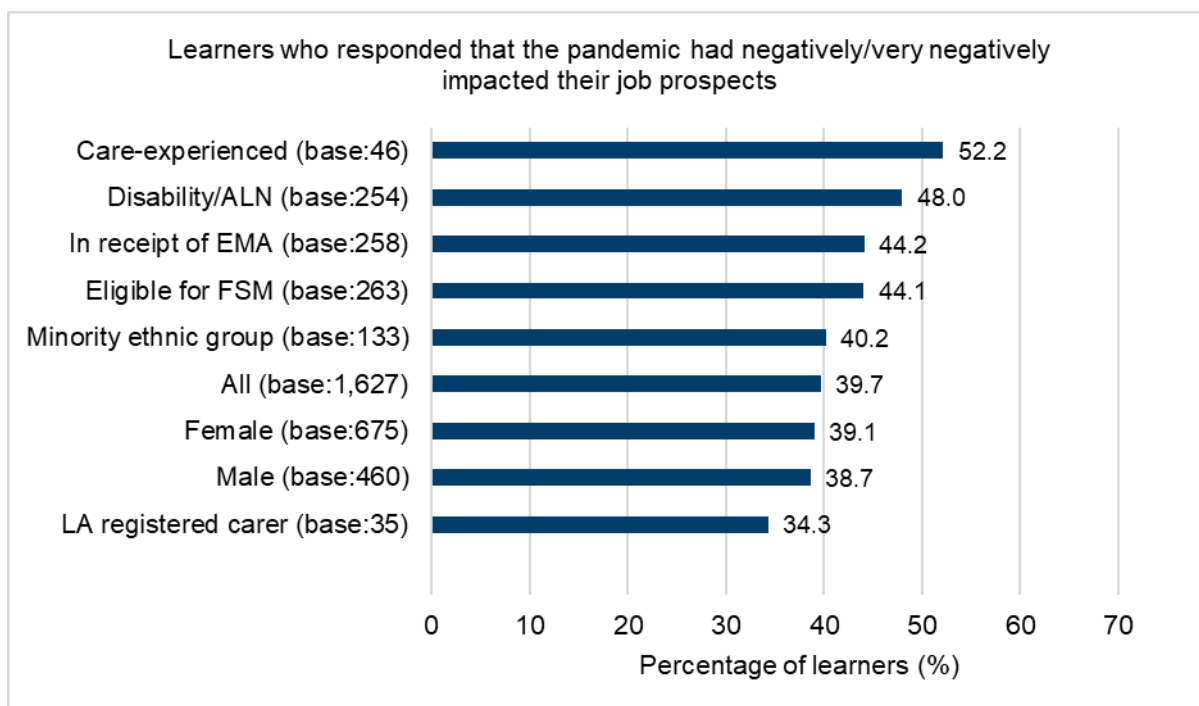


Note: low base number for care-experienced learners, and learners registered as a carer with their local authority.

4.1.20 Figure 16 shows those respondents who were care-experienced or identified as having a disability/ALN were the most likely to report that the pandemic impacted their job prospects (52.2% and 48.0% respectively).

4.1.21 Male respondents were consistently the least likely to report negative pandemic impacts to their mental health, job prospects or education.

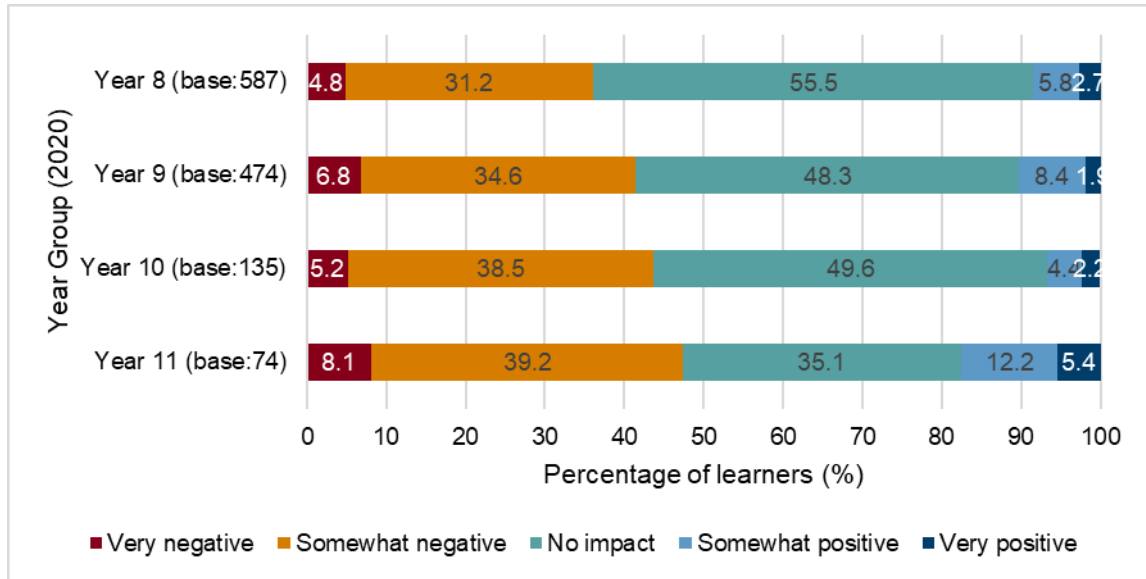
Figure 16 – Impact of the pandemic on respondents job prospects: by group



Note: low base number for care-experienced learners, and learners registered as a carer with their local authority.

4.1.22 Figure 17 shows the reported impact of the pandemic on the job prospects of respondents by year group. Almost half (47.3%) of learners who were in year 11 in 2020 reported that the pandemic had a very negative or somewhat negative impact on their job prospects, compared to 36% of learners who were in year 8 in 2020. It is evident that respondents in year 11 in 2020 felt a greater impact on their job prospects than those in the years below them.

Figure 17 – Pandemic impact on job prospects by year group in 2020



Note: low base number for learners in year 11.

Note: There were no significant differences between year groups when the impact of the pandemic on the education and mental health of respondents was analysed so these have not been included.



## 4.2 Access to learning

4.2.1 In the 2024 survey, learners were asked about their current experiences of learning online, learning at home and any disruptions to learning they have recently faced.

### **How is your course currently delivered and what would be your preferred method of delivery?**

4.2.2 Around two-thirds (67.9%) of respondents reported their current learning course to be taught entirely face to face. This was also the preferred method of learning for 59.3% of respondents with a small percentage preferring online learning (Table 2).

Table 2 – How is your course currently delivered and what would your preferred method of delivery be?

Type of learning	Current delivery number	Current delivery %	Preferred learning number	Preferred learning %
All face-to-face	1,068	67.9	929	59.3
Mostly face to face with some online teaching resources	384	24.4	387	24.7
Equal amounts of online learning and face-to-face teaching	59	3.7	158	10.1
Mostly online with some face-to-face	32	2	61	3.9
All online learning with no face-to-face teaching	31	2	32	2
Total	1,574	100	1,567	100

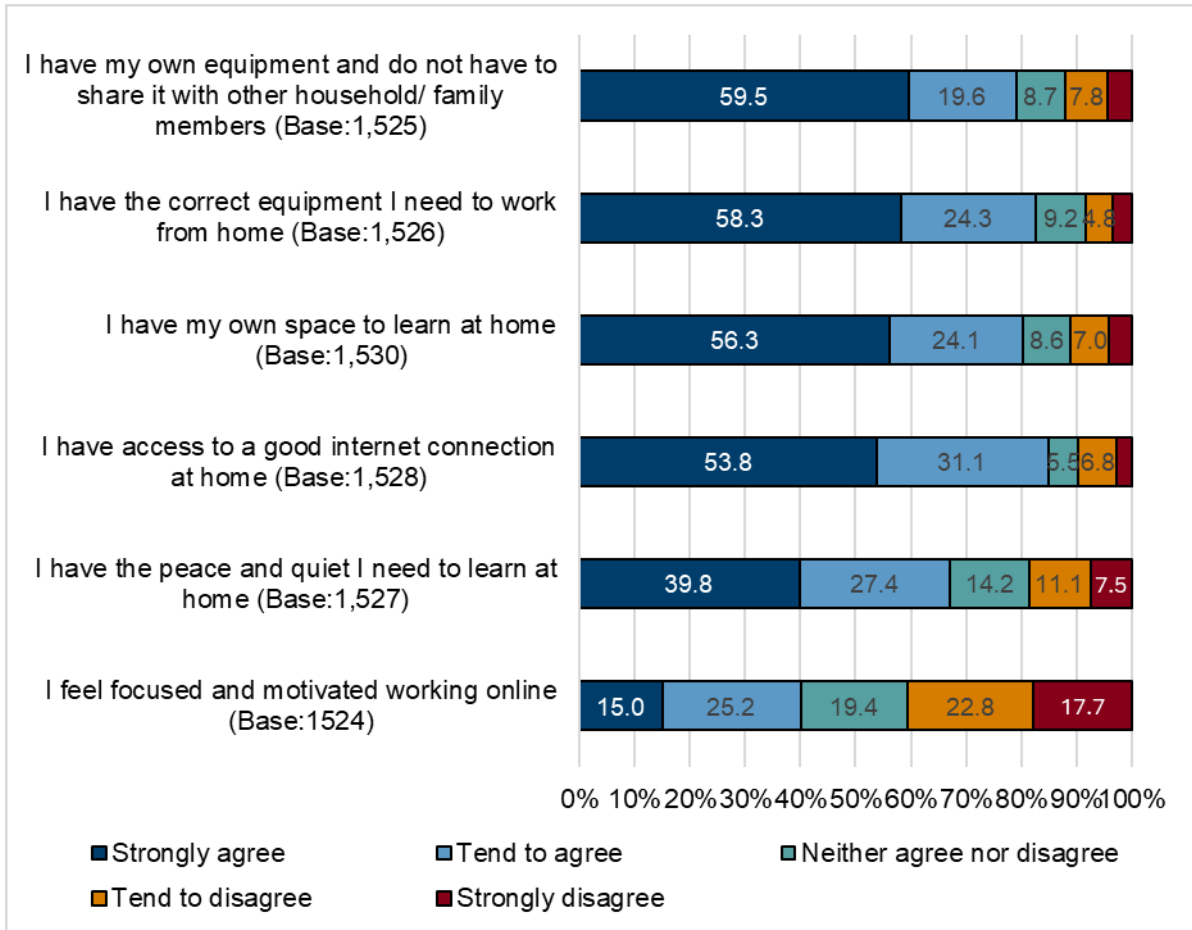
### **What are your current experiences of working from home?**

4.2.3 Respondents were asked about their current experiences of learning from home.

Around 80% of respondents indicated that they either had access to adequate space, equipment and internet connection to enable them to work from home.

4.2.4 Around two-thirds (67.2%) of respondents 'strongly agreed' or 'tended to agree' that they have the peace and quiet they require to work from home.

Figure 18 – What are your current experiences of learning from home? Please tell us the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the statements below.



4.2.5 Some comparisons are available against responses gathered in 2020. Table 3 shows a slight decline in the proportion of respondents indicating agreement with each of the statements.

Table 3 - Comparison of experiences working from home (2020 and 2024)

Statement	2020(%)	2024(%)	Difference (%)
I have access to a good internet connection at home	93.5	84.9	-8.6
I have the correct equipment I need to work from home	84.6	82.6	-4
I have my own space to learn at home	83.8	80.4	-3.4
I have my own equipment and do not have to share with other household/family members	80.6	79.1	-1.5
I have the peace and quiet that I need to work from home	72.5	67.2	-5.3

Note: this table shows respondents 'agreeing' or 'tending to agree' with statements.

Note: The qualifier of 'good' was an addition to the 2024 question which may have influenced the response.

Note: The qualifier of 'correct' was an addition to the 2024 question which may have influenced the response.

Note: As a result of the self-selecting convenience sample method, it is not possible to assess whether the group that responded to each survey was similar, so the comparison is only indicative.

4.2.6 Four in five respondents (80.9%) reported that they used a tablet to learn from home and 70.1% had a laptop. 52.9% of respondents reported that they used a smartphone to learn from home. Just 33 respondents indicated that they did not have access to any equipment to enable them to learn from home (Table 4).

Table 4 – 'What equipment do you use to learn from home? Please select all that apply' (Base:1,821)

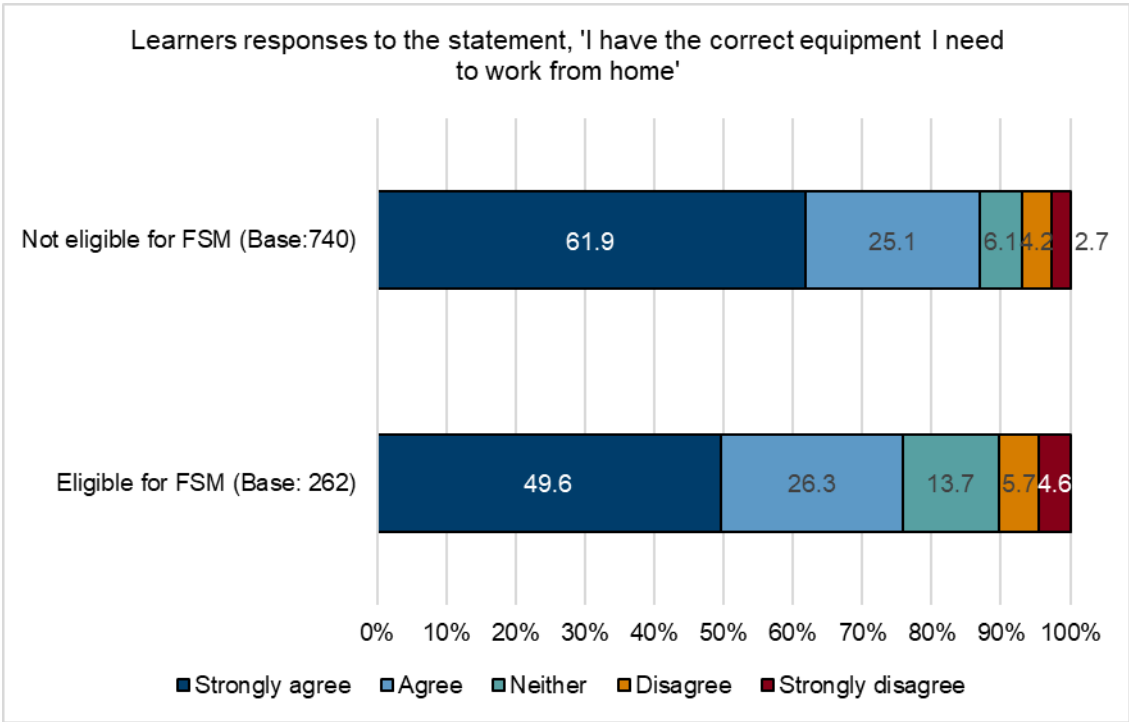
Equipment	Number of learners	Percentage of learners (%)
Tablet	1,473	80.9
Laptop	1,276	70.1
Smartphone	964	52.9
None	33	1.8

Note: home learning equipment usage is not necessarily indicative of ownership.

Note: multi-choice question.

4.2.7 Figure 19 shows just half (49.6%) of those respondents who reported that they had been previously eligible for FSM 'strongly agreed' that they had the correct equipment that they need to work from home. This compares to 61.9% of those respondents who were not eligible for FSM.

Figure 19 – Correct home learning equipment by FSM eligibility

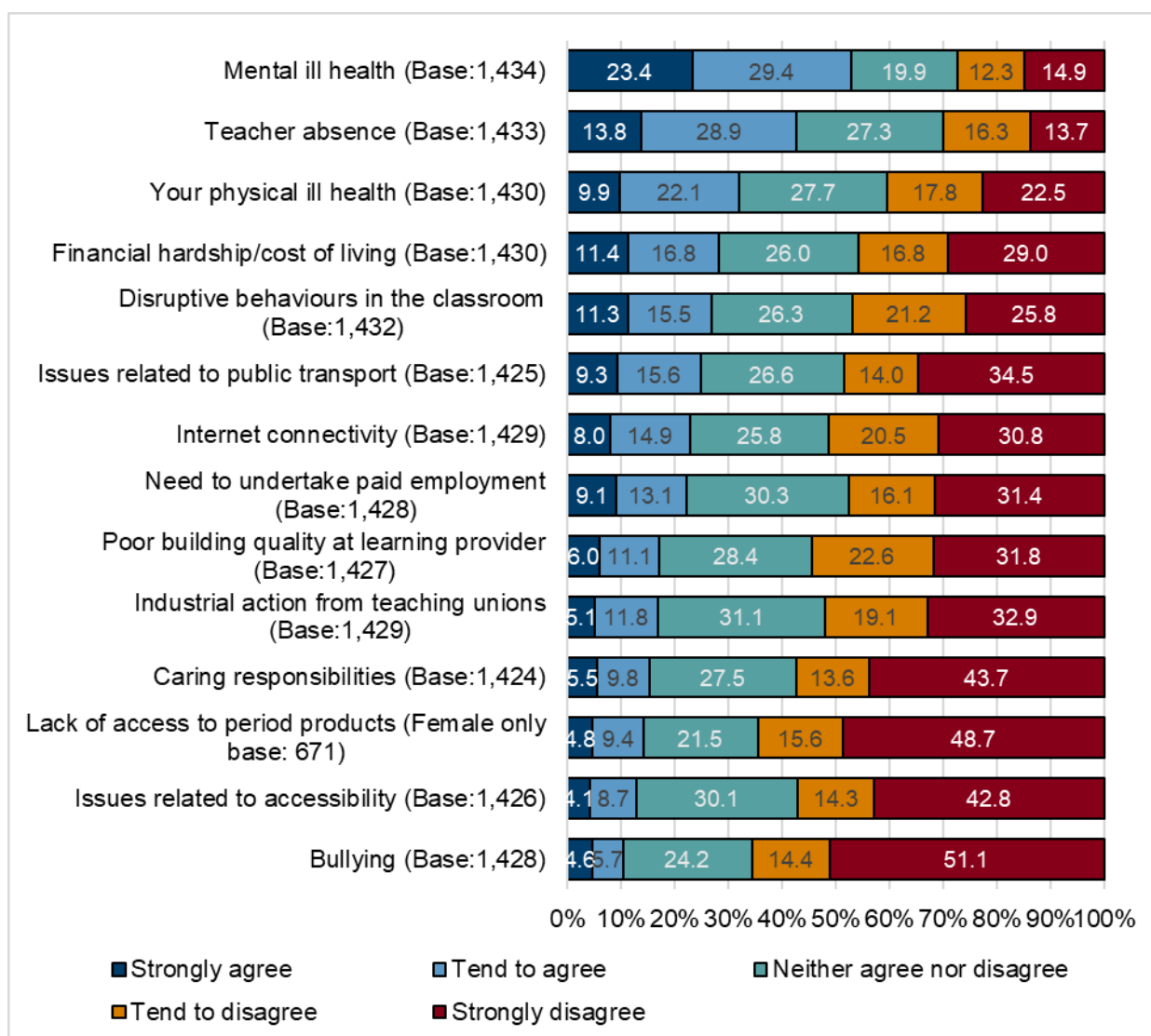


### 4.3 Disruption to learning

4.3.1 This section of the survey sought to explore factors that might have stopped respondents from learning at their best over the previous twelve months.

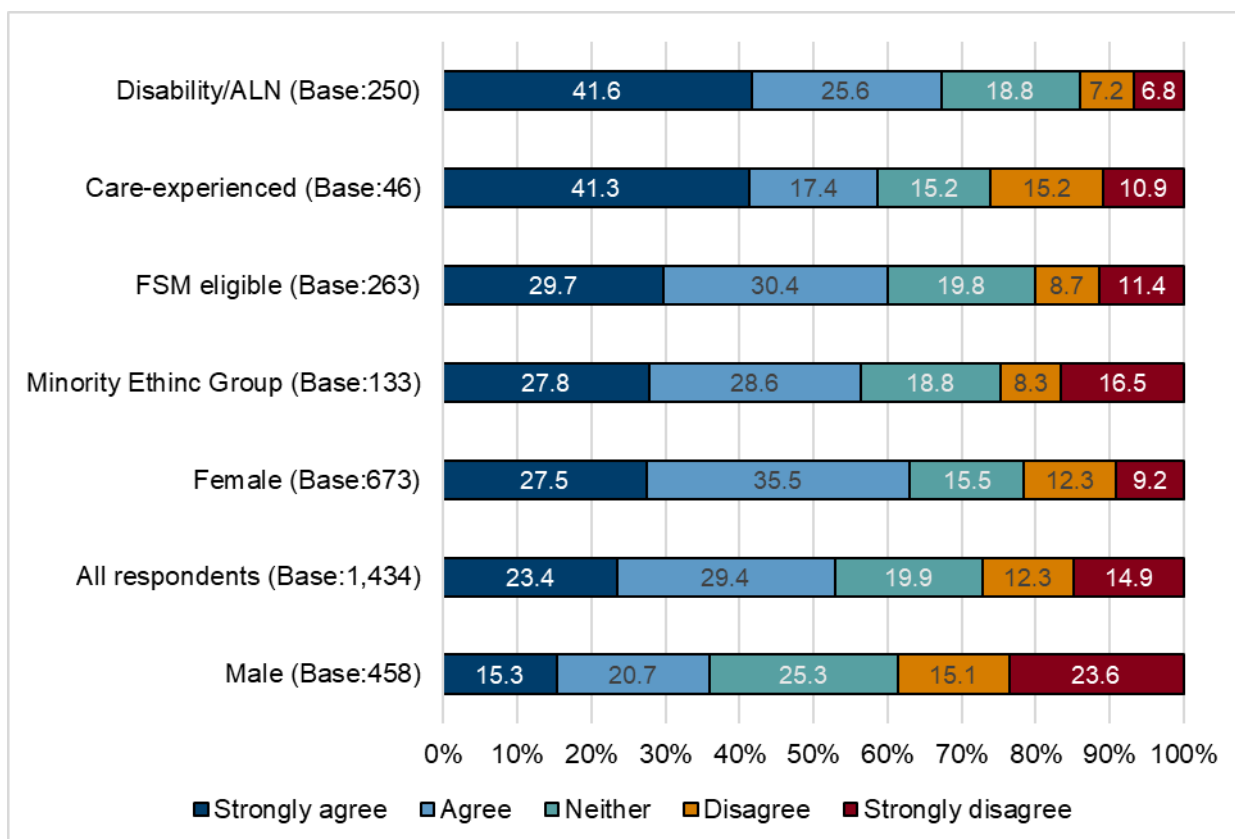
4.3.2 Figure 20 shows more than half (52.9%) of all respondents agreed that their learning had been disrupted due to mental ill health including stress and anxiety. More than two-fifths (42.7%) also agreed that teacher absences had been a cause of disruption in the previous twelve months.

Figure 20 – How, and to what extent, has your learning in post-16 education been disrupted in the past twelve months?



4.3.3 Amongst those respondents who reported having a disability or ALN, the proportion that experienced disrupted learning due to mental ill health rose (from 52.9%) to two thirds (67.2%). Female respondents were also found to be far more likely than males to report disrupted learning due to mental ill health (63.0% and 36.0% respectively) (see Figure 21).

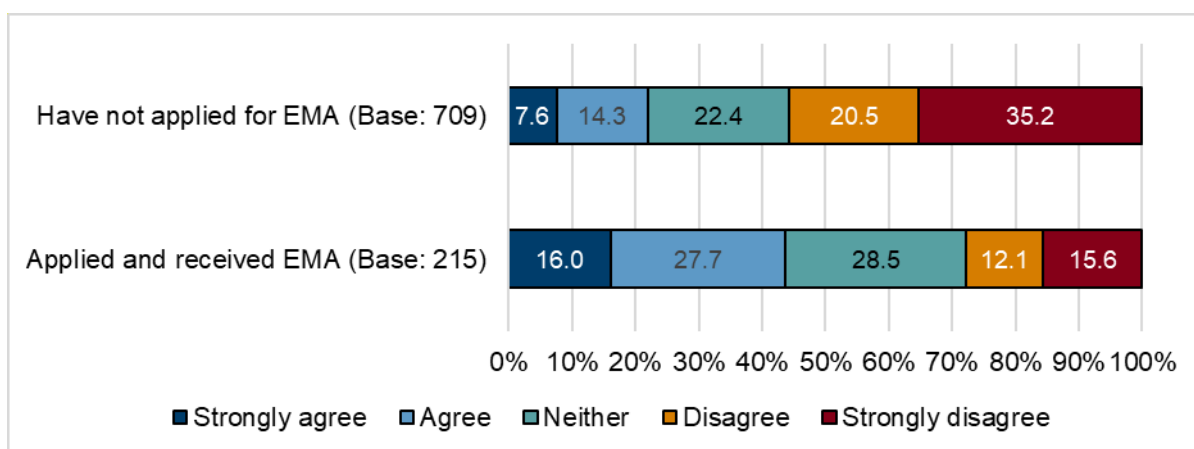
Figure 21 – Mental ill health as a disruption to learning by group



Note: low base number for care-experienced learners.

4.3.4 Figure 22 shows respondents in receipt of EMA to be twice as likely than those that had not applied for EMA to report their learning to have been disrupted due to financial hardship/cost of living (43.7% and 21.9% respectively).

Figure 22 – Financial hardship as a disruption to learning by EMA application



### Which of the following challenges do you face about public transport?

4.3.5 Respondents were asked to identify the specific challenges that they experience with public transport. Table 5 shows reliability, cost and travel time were reported as the biggest issues and affected three quarters or more of the respondents.

Table 5 – Which of the following challenges do you face about public transport?

Challenge	Number of respondents	Percentage of all respondents % (Base:1,821)	Percentage of respondents where transport was a disruption % (Base:255)
Reliability	222	12.2	87.1
Cost	200	11.0	78.4
Travel time	191	10.5	74.9
Availability	159	8.7	62.4
Comfort and cleanliness	102	5.6	40.0
Safety	50	2.7	19.6
Issue with accessibility	31	1.7	12.2
Other	24	1.3	9.4

Note: These respondents had previously identified transport as a disruption to their learning (see Figure 8).

4.3.6 Eighty-eight respondents provided additional comments regarding additional challenges that they face to their education because of an ALN.

4.3.7 Learners with autism and/or ADHD reported that they often struggle with concentration, motivation, and emotional regulation. They also described having to face social challenges and bullying, which impact their mental health and ability to learn.

"I struggle with my concentration and have to take breaks every hour to keep productive, but often school don't accommodate for this."

4.3.8 Learners with dyslexia and/or dyspraxia often work more slowly than their peers and reported struggles with writing, reading, and understanding tasks. Learners also shared experiences of physical pain and fatigue, which can hinder their focus and productivity.

4.3.9 Some learners reported that their schools or colleges had failed to provide the necessary support and accommodations for their additional learning needs. This lack of support can lead to increased stress, lower academic performance, and negative impacts on mental health.

"I'm autistic and need to use a computer for exams the school constantly doesn't provide it resulting in increased stress right before an exam."

4.3.10 Learners with physical disabilities, such as hearing impairments or mobility issues provided examples of where they may struggle with accessing learning materials and participating in classroom activities.

"With my deafness, it affects how normally I can work as a group or when the teacher is talking or showing us something with audio."

4.3.11 Mental health issues, such as anxiety, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or depression, were reported by learners to result in difficulties with to concentration, motivation, and emotional management. These challenges were reported to be exacerbated by a lack of understanding and support from educators.



## 4.4 Thoughts and feelings

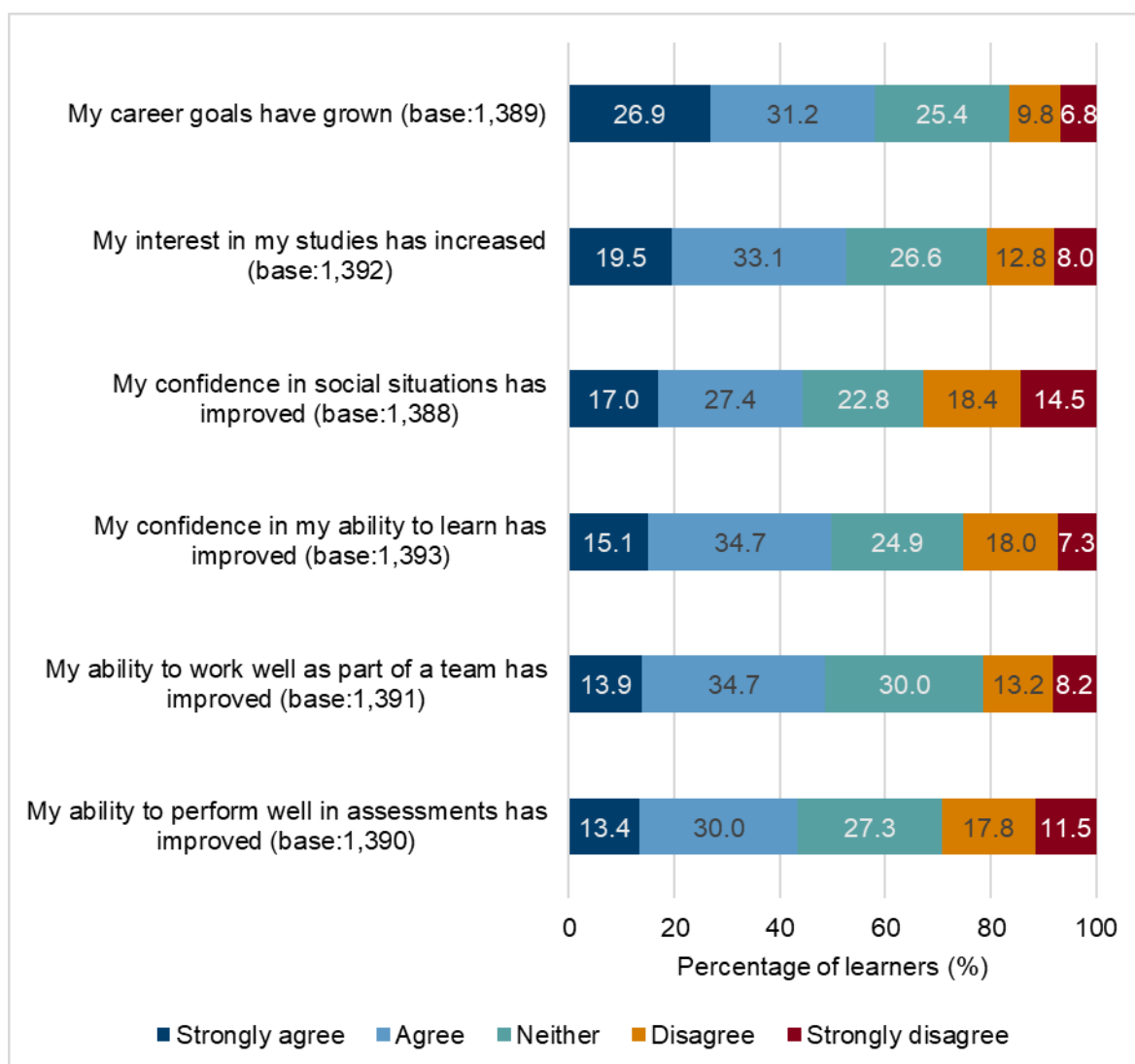
4.4.1 This section sought to understand more about the wellbeing of respondents and any impact that the COVID-19 pandemic may have.

### Describe your learning experience since the pandemic

4.4.2 Figure 23 shows over half of respondents reported that their career goals have grown (58.1%) and that their interest in their studies has increased (52.6%).

4.4.3 Almost half of respondents (48.6%) reported that their ability to work well as part of a team has improved since the pandemic.

Figure 23 – Respondents confidence and ability related to learning experiences since the pandemic



4.4.4 It is evident that some learners are still struggling with their confidence in social situations as almost one-third (32.9%) of respondents strongly disagree or disagree that this has improved since the pandemic.

4.4.5 Respondents were positive about their current feelings (Figure 23). Almost half of learners (49.8%) reported that their confidence in their ability to learn has improved whilst over half of respondents (52.6%) of respondents reported that their interest in their studies has increased.

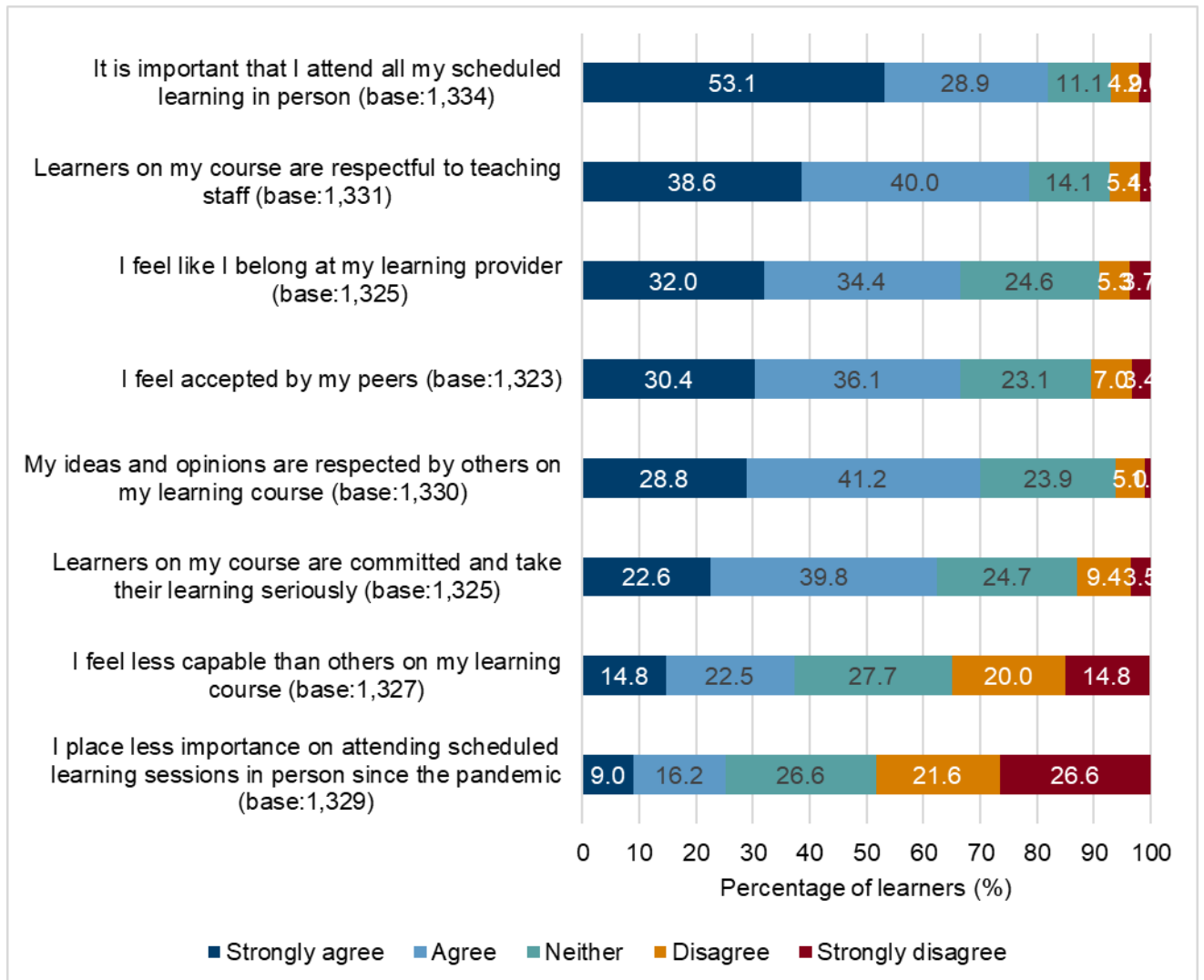
4.4.6 Almost 60% of respondents (58.1%) reported that their career goals have grown since the pandemic.

#### **How do you currently feel about your learning provider?**

4.4.7 Figure 24 shows 70% of learners agreed or strongly agreed that their ideas and opinions were respected by other learners on their course.

4.4.8 Respondents value the ability to attend their courses in person, with over 80% (82%) of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement 'It is important that I attend all my scheduled learning sessions in person'. Similarly, almost half (48.2%) of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement that they place less importance on attending scheduled learning sessions in person since the pandemic. However, a quarter of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

Figure 24 – Please respond to the following statements about how you currently feel:



## **Mental wellbeing - how have you felt over the last two weeks?**

4.4.9 In line with the approach taken in the [2020 report](#)<sup>13</sup>, the survey employed a validated scale to get a snapshot assessment of the mental wellbeing of the sample in the form of a short version of the [Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale](#)<sup>14</sup> (SWEMWBS - see Appendix 3 for information on how the scale is scored).

4.4.10 Survey respondents were asked to describe their experiences over the past two weeks as follows: ‘Here are some statements about feelings and thoughts. Please select the answer that best describes your experience of each over the last two weeks.’ “I’ve been feeling optimistic about the future.”

- “I’ve been feeling useful.”
- “I’ve been feeling relaxed.”
- “I’ve been dealing with problems well.”
- “I’ve been thinking clearly.”
- “I’ve been feeling close to other people.”
- “I’ve been able to make up my own mind about things.”

4.4.11 When converted using SWEMWBS scoring methodology the scores ranged from a minimum score of 7 (lowest wellbeing score) to a maximum score of 35 (highest wellbeing score), therefore higher scores indicate higher positive mental wellbeing.

4.4.12 The mean value of the score for survey respondents was 21.7. This is almost two points (1.7) higher than the mean score in 2020 (20) which indicates a higher positive mental wellbeing of respondents in the 2024 sample (see Table 6).

4.4.13 As a reference, the [Health Survey for England \(2021\)](#)<sup>15</sup> reported a mean score for the same metric of 25.7 for 16-33 year olds. Therefore, survey respondents in both the 2020 and 2024 surveys scored substantially lower.

---

<sup>13</sup> [Effect of COVID-19 on learners survey: results summary | GOV.WALES](#)

<sup>14</sup> The WEMWBS was developed to enable the monitoring of mental wellbeing in the general population and the evaluation of projects, programmes and policies which aim to improve mental wellbeing. Although the scale was not designed to monitor mental wellbeing at an individual level, research (in adults) suggests that it could detect clinically meaningful change.

<sup>15</sup> [Loneliness and wellbeing - NHS England Digital](#)

- 4.4.14 The SWEMWBS score for respondents to this survey was lower than the wellbeing score reported in the [SHRN 2021/2022](#)<sup>16</sup> survey (23) and the [2023 SHRN](#)<sup>17</sup> wellbeing score (23.5).
- 4.4.15 The SWEMWBS score for each of the recorded demographic groups in 2024 is slightly higher than those recorded in 2020, apart from the score for respondents with childcare responsibilities.
- 4.4.16 The highest group wellbeing score was for male respondents (22.7) and the lowest was for learners registered as carers with their LA (19.2). Male learners were the only respondents who had a higher wellbeing score than the mean value score for all survey respondents.
- 4.4.17 The wellbeing score gap between males and female respondents was wider in 2024 than in 2020. Female respondents in 2024 had a score 1.9 points lower than males, compared to 1.1 difference between the groups in 2020.
- 4.4.18 Only respondents with childcare responsibilities had a lower wellbeing score in 2024 than in 2020. Instead of having an above average wellbeing score (as in 2020), they had a below average wellbeing score (a decrease of 0.8).

Table 6 – Comparison of SWEMWBS scores 2020/24

Group	2020 score	2024 score	Difference
Male	20.9	22.7	1.8
All respondents	20.0	21.7	1.7
White	20.1	21.6	1.5
Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority	19.9	21.1	1.2
FSM eligible	N/A	20.9	N/A
Female	19.8	20.8	1.0
In receipt of EMA	N/A	20.8	N/A
ALN	19.1	20.3	1.2
Childcare responsibilities	21.0	20.2	-0.8
Caring responsibilities	19.7	19.9	0.2
Care-experienced	N/A	19.4	N/A
LA registered carer	N/A	19.2	N/A

Note: those fields marked with 'N/A' were not included in the 2020 survey so comparison cannot be made.  
 Note: the number of learners with caring responsibilities who responded to this question was very small at 45.

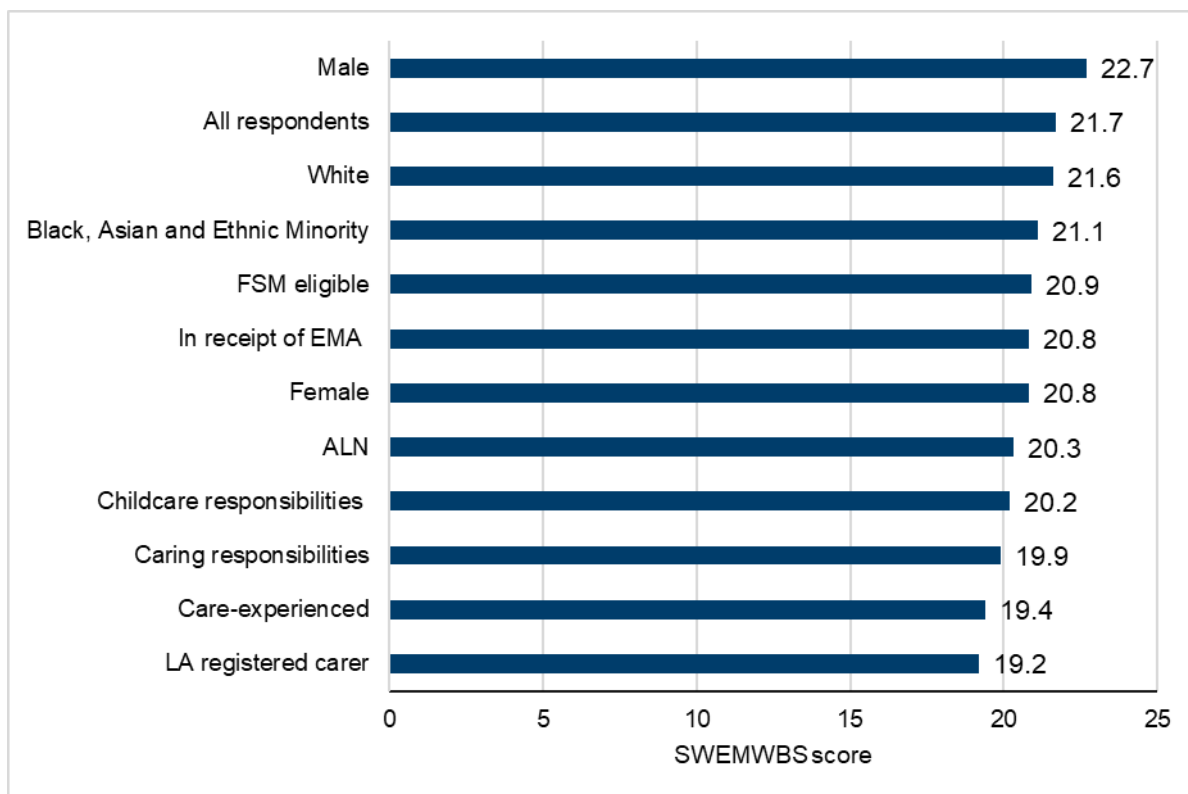
<sup>16</sup> [SHRN-2021-22-National-Indicators-Report-FINAL-en - School Health Research Network](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Children's Health & Well-being Dashboard](#)

Note: the number of LA registered carers who responded to this question was very small at 27.

Note: As a result of the self-selecting convenience sample method, it is not possible to assess whether the group that responded to each survey was similar, so the comparison is only indicative.

Figure 25 – SWEMWBS scores 2024



4.4.19 Table 7 presents wellbeing scores of respondents by year group, and it is evident that there are no notable differences between year groups.

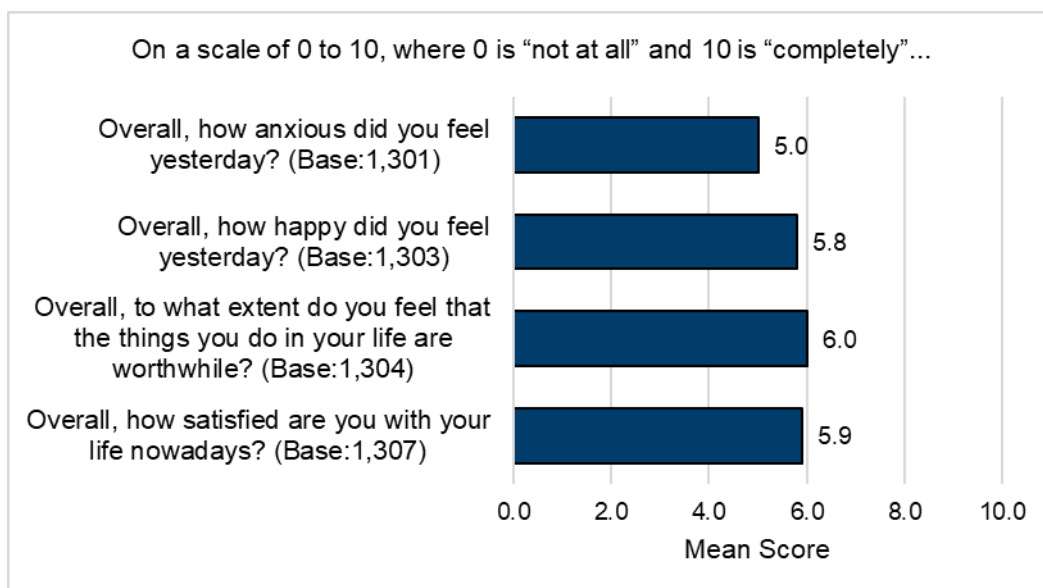
Table 7 – SWEMWBS scores: by year group

Year Group	SWEMWBS score
Year 11 (Base:57)	20.8
Year 10 (Base:114)	21.1
Year 9 (Base:399)	21.6
Year 8 (Base:485)	21.3

### How are you feeling about your life?

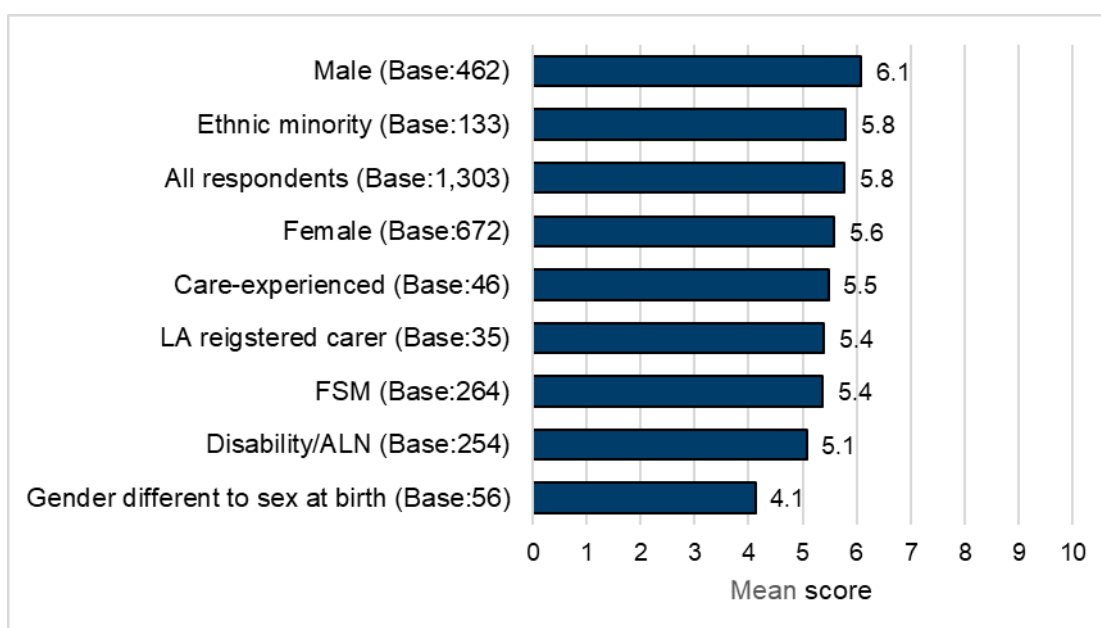
4.4.20 Respondents were asked four questions about their feelings on aspects of their life and were asked to respond on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is “not at all” and 10 is “completely”. Figure 26 provides the mean scores awarded for each of the questions.

Figure 26 – Respondents’ feelings recently on a scale of 0-10



4.4.21 The response to the question “Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday” was further analysed by demographic group as can be seen in Figure 27 below. Male respondents achieved the highest mean score whilst those respondents whose gender was different to the sex they were assigned at birth scored the lowest (mean scores of 6.1 and 4.1 respectively).

Figure 27 – Respondents’ happiness yesterday on a scale of 0-10: by group

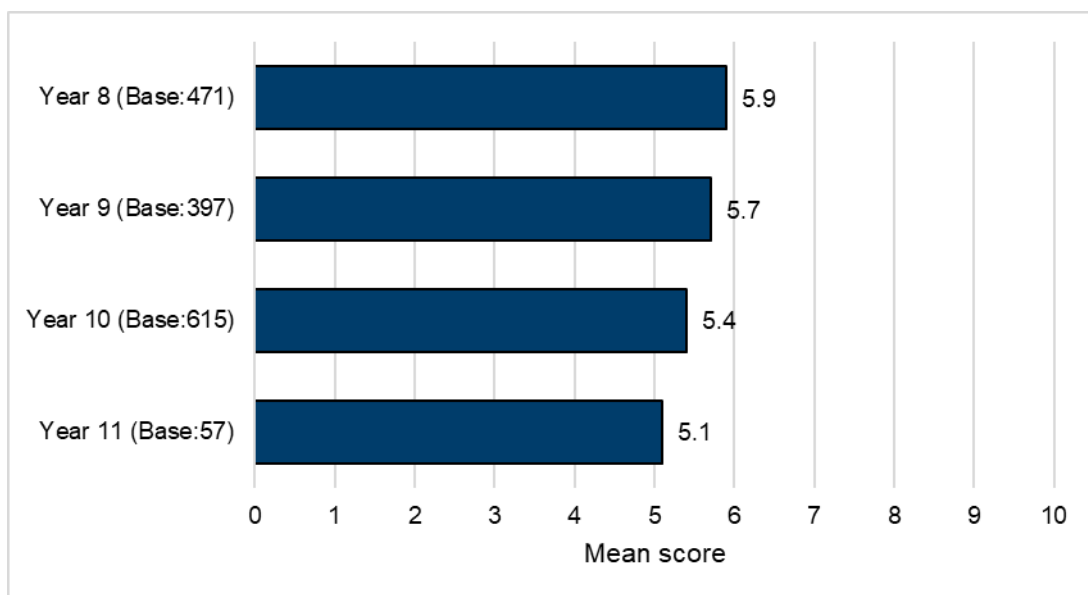


Note: low number of responses from care-experienced learners, learners registered as a carer with their local authority and learners who reported that their gender is different to the sex they were registered at birth.

Note: '0' is not at all and '10' is completely.

4.4.22 The results were also looked at by the year group that respondents belonged to at the start of the pandemic. Those who were in year 11 in March 2020 were found to have the lowest reported levels of happiness. Happiness levels were found to increase in relation to year group. Those who were in year 8 at the start of the pandemic scored the highest current happiness score.

Figure 28 – Respondents' happiness yesterday on a scale of 0-10: by year group



Note: low number of responses from respondents in year 11.

Note: '0' is not at all and '10' is completely.



## 4.5 Support services

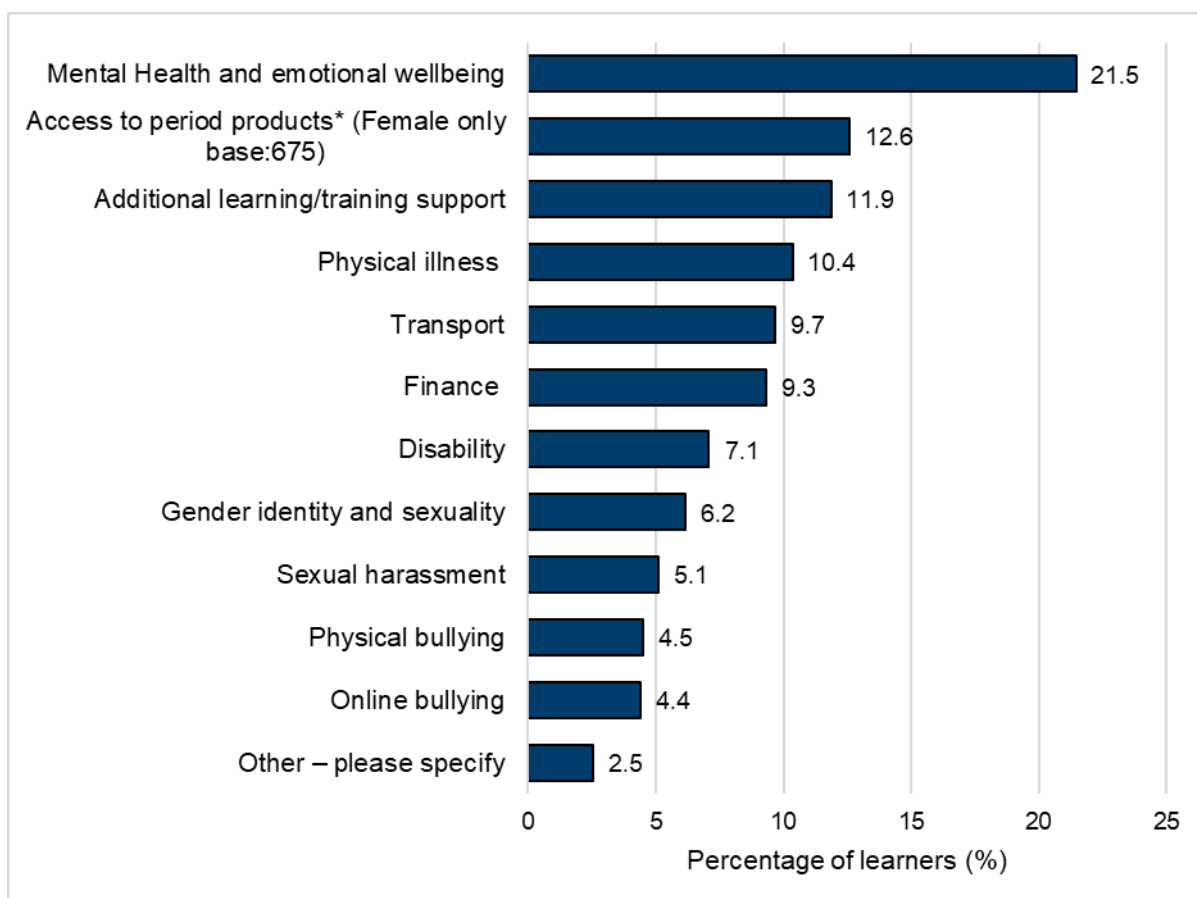
4.5.1 This section of the survey sought to understand more about any issues where learners might have questions, be struggling, or require additional support.

### Have you needed help in the past twelve months?

4.5.2 Figure 29 shows more than one in five learners (21.5%) reporting that they had needed help with issues relating to their mental health and emotional wellbeing in the previous twelve months.

4.5.3 Around one in sixteen (6.2%) respondents reported to have needed help with gender identity and sexuality in the previous twelve months. Amongst those learners who identify as a gender different to that assigned at birth, this figure rose to more than half.

Figure 29 – Respondents support needs in the past 12 months (Base:1,821)



4.5.4 Table 8 provides a gender breakdown for support needed in relation to bullying and sexual harassment. In all cases support was more likely to be needed by females than males.

Table 8 - Gender differences in experiences of bullying and harassment

	Male (%) (Base:463)	Female (%) (Base:675)
Physical bullying	5.2	7.1
Online bullying	4.5	7.3
Sexual harassment	6.5	7.4

4.5.5 Those learners that identified as a gender different to their sex assigned at birth were most likely to have needed help in relation to both physical bullying (one in six respondents) and sexual harassment (one in eight respondents).

**How are your support needs being met?**

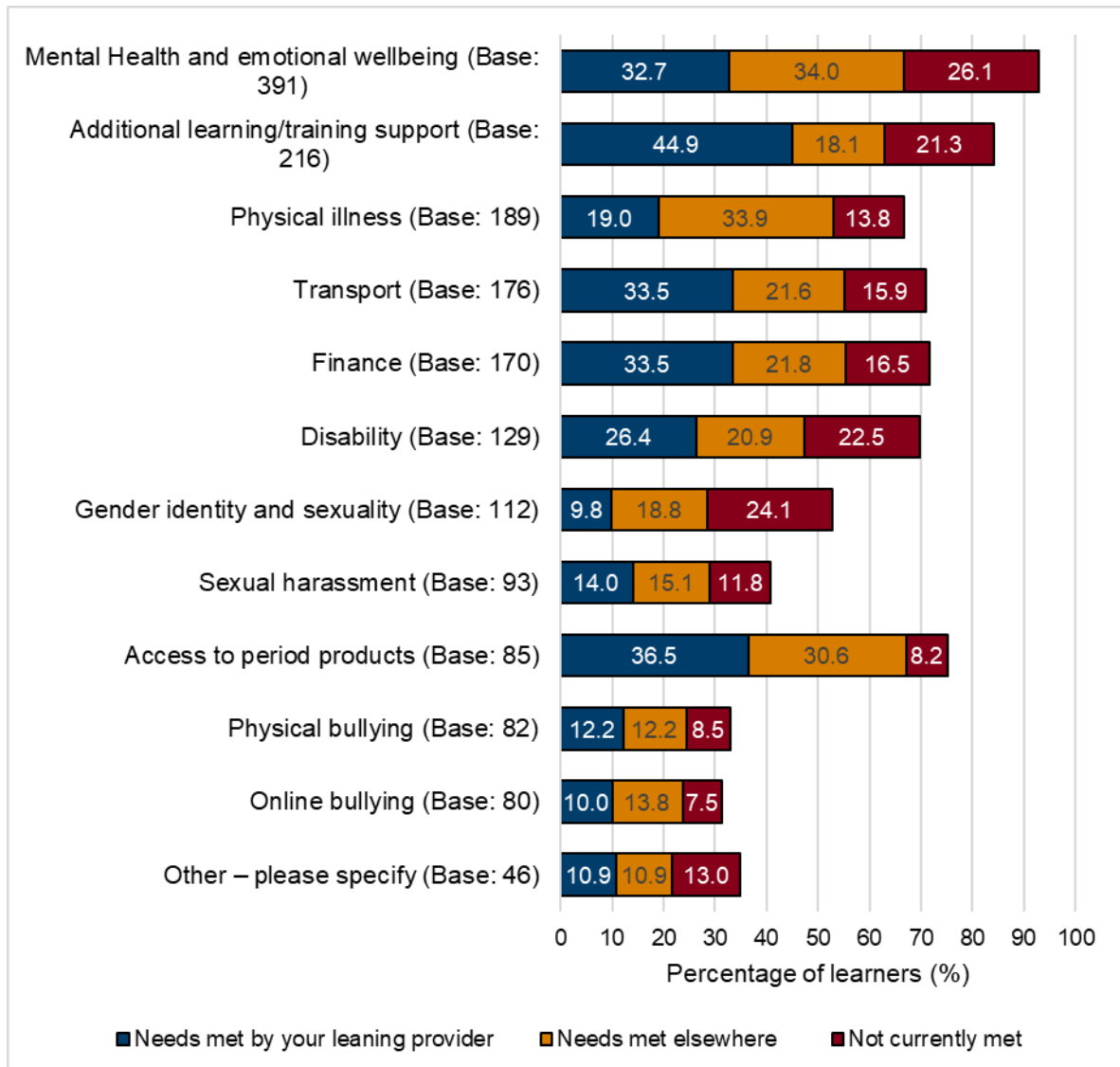
4.5.6 Where respondents identified a support need, they were asked whether that need was met by their learning provider, elsewhere or not currently met.

4.5.7 As Figure 30 shows, around a third (32.7%) (see Figure 30) of respondents that needed help with their mental health and wellbeing reported that this need was met by their learning provider.

4.5.8 Similar proportions of respondents found their support needs met from their learning provider on topics including transport, finance, and access to period products.

4.5.9 Much lower proportions of respondents reported that learning providers were able meet their support needs regarding bullying, harassment and gender identity.

Figure 30 – Where there has been an identified support need, have these been met?



Note: Multiple choice available.

Note: low base number for sexual harassment, access to period products, physical bullying and online bullying.

## Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)

4.5.10 Respondents were asked about EMA and food poverty. Around a quarter (23.4%) of respondents reported that they had applied for and received EMA (Table 9).

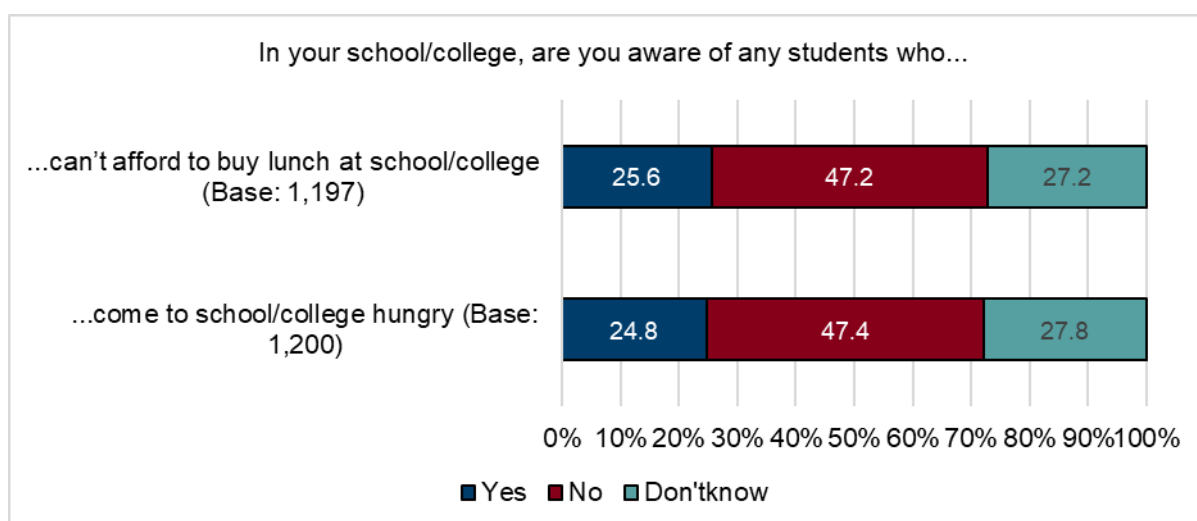
Table 9- In the past 12 months, have you applied for Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)?

EMA Application	Number of learners	Percentage of Learners (%)
Yes – applied and received	259	23.4
Yes – applied but rejected	56	5.1
Yes, I am awaiting the outcome	16	1.4
No	775	70.1
Total	1,106	100.0

## Food poverty

4.5.11 Around a quarter of respondents reported an awareness of other students within their learning provider who either can't afford to buy lunch at school/college (25.6%) or come in hungry (24.8%) (see Figure 31).

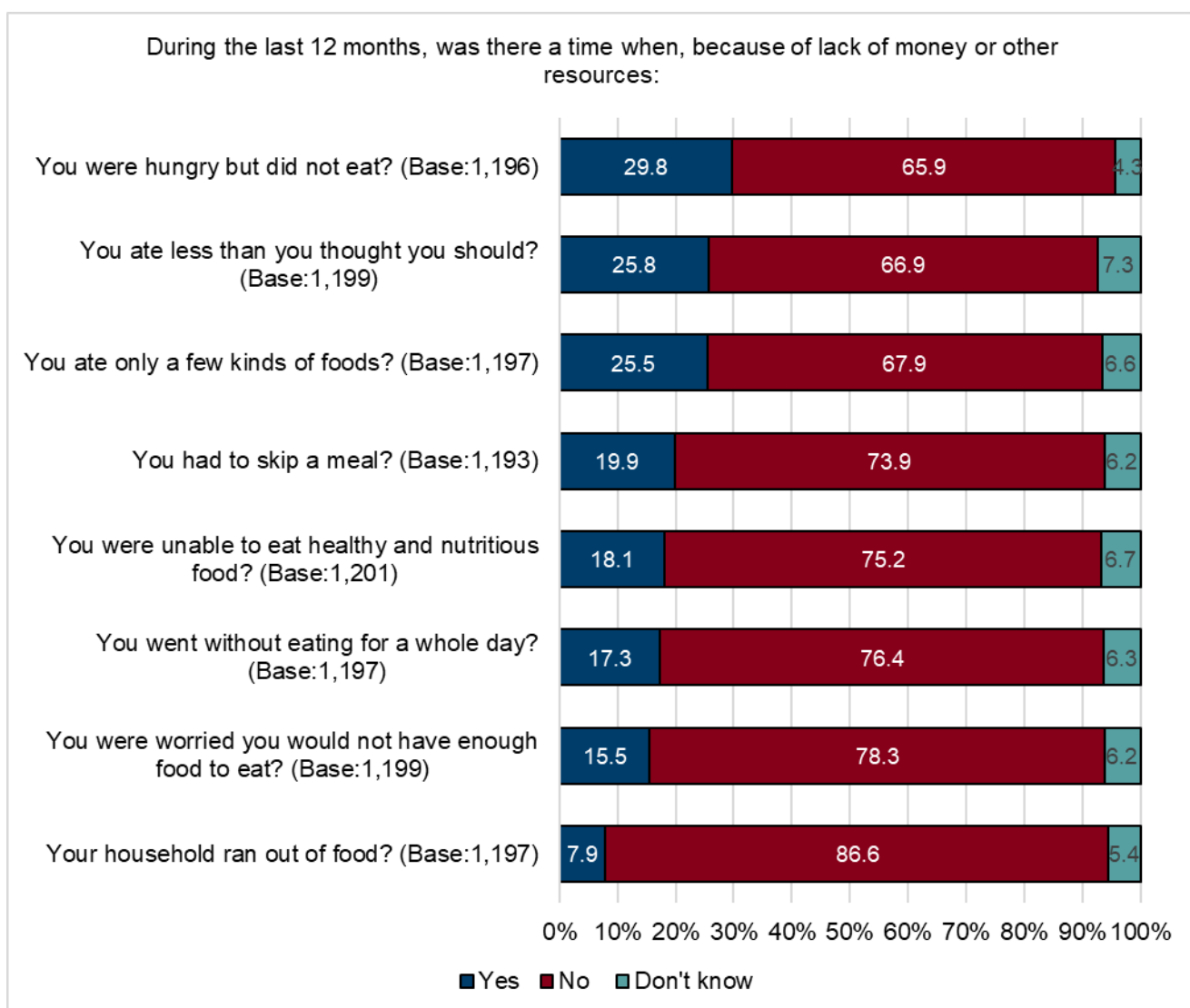
Figure 31 – In your school/college are you aware of any students who can't afford to buy lunch/come to school hungry?



4.5.12 Figure 32 shows the proportion of learners that reported their ability to eat sufficient healthy and nutritious food to have been impacted by finances.

4.5.13 Three in ten (29.8%) reported that during the last twelve months they were hungry but did not eat whilst over a quarter of learners (25.8%) had eaten less than they thought they should.

Figure 32 – Respondents experiences of food poverty during the last 12 months



## 4.6 Other Comments

4.6.1 A total of seventy-two respondents provided further open comments about their experiences in FE. Themes of the comments included pandemic impacts, mental health, finance and ALN.

4.6.2 Impact of COVID-19: Many learners mentioned the negative impact of COVID-19 on their education and social skills. For example, one learner stated,

"Covid [sic] messed a lot of things up for individuals in year 11 of 2020 as GCSEs were cancelled and guidance from teachers was non-existent". Another learner mentioned, "During covid [sic], us as students lost social skills but also may not have had the education they needed".

4.6.3 Mental Health and Support: Several learners expressed concerns about mental health and the lack of support. One learner said,

"I think more help and opportunities should be available to people struggling with mental health". Another mentioned, "I feel like there are not enough mental health resources at school, especially for those doing well in their subjects".

4.6.4 Financial Concerns: Financial issues were a common theme, with learners worried about the cost of education and living expenses. One learner stated,

"Worries about financing higher education so changing plans for the future especially because of a lack of money (cost of living)". Another mentioned, "The cost of transport is a barrier to me having free choice to attend the college I wanted to go to".

4.6.5 Support for ALN: Learners with ALN felt unsupported. For example, one learner said,

"I have been waiting for a neurodevelopmental assessment for three years. My primary and secondary school did not acknowledge my struggles". Another mentioned, "More support and understanding is needed to those with additional needs and disabilities".

## 5. Conclusions

The findings from the survey highlight several key conclusions:

- 5.1 Poor mental health and emotional wellbeing presents a significant challenge amongst learners in post-16 education. Whilst SWEMWBS scores between 2020 and 2024 suggest some improvement, they remain significantly under those recorded for both the general population (25.7) and for 2023 SHRN respondents (23.5) (see section 4.4.14 for more detail). Further data collection over time is required to understand if this gap is diminishing.
- 5.2 There was much higher prevalence of mental health and wellbeing difficulties amongst female respondents than amongst male respondents. Furthermore, female respondents reported disruption to their education as a result and achieved lower wellbeing scores than male respondents.
- 5.3 Whilst learners felt providers were attempting to meet their mental health and wellbeing support needs there remains a significant unmet demand.
- 5.4 Impacts of the pandemic remain prevalent amongst learners currently in FE. Over a third of respondents indicated that their education plans changed due to the pandemic. This was particularly evident for care-experienced learners, those with disabilities or additional learning needs, and learners eligible for FSM.
- 5.5 Seven in ten learners felt the pandemic had a negative impact on their education. More than six in ten believed the pandemic to have negatively impacted their mental health and four in ten their longer-term job prospects. Given that these learners have successfully progressed into post-pandemic FE, consideration must be given those who may have already transitioned out of education.
- 5.6 The decline in the quality of education and negative impact on mental health were the most frequently cited reasons for changes in planned learning courses. Learners reported struggles with anxiety, depression, and overall deterioration in mental health. Additional support may be required for these most vulnerable groups to enable them to successfully progress.

- 5.7 Respondents were generally satisfied with the predominantly face-to-face delivery of courses. Whilst a very small proportion said they preferred learning that is mostly or all online, most respondents preferred face-to-face learning.
- 5.8 Access to the necessary equipment and facilities to learn from home effectively was found to be high overall although some disparity remains for those who have reported being eligible for FSM whilst at school.
- 5.9 Learners' face mounting financial pressures with concerns around the cost of living. One in ten learners reported seeking support with finances in the previous twelve months and around a quarter of were in receipt of EMA. Reported impacts of financial worries include disruption to education, inability to eat sufficient healthy and nutritious food, inability to meet transport costs and concerns about higher education funding.
- 5.10 These conclusions suggest that the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and had a profound impact on learners' educational experiences and mental health. Further research may be required to fill the ongoing evidence gap in post-16 education whilst targeted support may be needed to address the identified challenges and support learners in their educational journeys.



## **6. Recommendations**

- 6.1 Additional research is required with learners undertaking further education via apprenticeships or employability programmes. This will aid understanding of whether the experiences of these reflect those of the respondents to this study who were predominantly from FE colleges and school sixth forms.
- 6.2 An additional piece of research conducted specifically with learners who identify as having a disability or ALN would be beneficial, as it was evident these learners were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.
- 6.3 Additional research is required with learners who were in year 11 in March 2020. It has been noted that there were fewer respondents who were in year 11 in March 2020 than other year groups in this survey. Therefore, it is recommended that further research is conducted which focuses on these learners, to explore whether their learning journeys are fully understood and supported.
- 6.4 Whilst there is a regular data collection in place to collect HWB data amongst secondary learners (SHRN) there is currently no such collection for post-16 learners. The findings from this report suggest mental health and wellbeing to be a significant issue particularly amongst certain groups (including female learners and those who reported having ALN). Comparison with 2020 also indicates some change to SWEMWBS scores. It is recommended that consideration be given to the development of a repeat collection to enable the monitoring of mental health and wellbeing for groups of learners.
- 6.5 Over a third of respondents reported that their original plans had changed due to the pandemic. Further research is needed to understand the impact for those who transitioned out of compulsory education during the pandemic and have not re-engaged.
- 6.6 There is evidence in this report that the impacts of the pandemic on learners vary between year groups. Further monitoring of emerging data is necessary to understand the differential impacts of the pandemic to specific year groups.

## 7. Appendix 1 – Survey

### Survey of learner experiences in post-16 education

#### A. Introduction

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has affected the way we all live, learn and work. We would like to understand more about the experiences of learners like you, in post-16 education since the pandemic. The information that you share will help us in identifying any additional support that may be needed.

We would like to hear from you if you live and study in Wales, are aged 16 to 24, undertaking your learning in a school sixth form, further education college, or undertaking work-based or adult learning in college or in the community.

We will use the information collected in this survey to prepare a report which will be published on the Welsh Government's Research and Statistics webpage; however, your response will be anonymous, and it will not be possible to identify you in any publication of the findings. Most questions ask for your opinion on statements, but there is a space for comments at the end. The survey should take around 15 minutes to complete. All questions are optional.

Within the survey the term '**learning provider**' means school sixth form, college, training provider or community-based venue where you are studying.

The term '**learning course**' means a course or qualification you are undertaking as part of the learning you are doing in school, college, with a training provider or in the community.

If you want more information about how your responses will be processed please see: [Survey of learner experiences in post-16 education: privacy notice](#). Thank you in advance for your help, your views are important to us.

If you have any questions, please contact [schoolsresearch@gov.wales](mailto:schoolsresearch@gov.wales)

#### B. Information about your past and current learning

In this section we are looking to understand more about your past and current learning choices. March 2020 was a time when many schools, colleges and universities were forced to close because of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are interested to know if your learning choices changed because of this, and if so, how?

1. What type of learning were you doing in March 2020? (single response)			
I was studying in a school – up to and including Year 11 (Routed, Go to 1a)		I was on a traineeship programme	
I was studying in a school sixth form (Routed, Go to 1b)		I was not in education or studying at that time	
I was doing an apprenticeship with a Further Education College		I was studying at university	
I was studying in a Further Education Institution ('college')		Not sure	
I was doing an apprenticeship with a work-based learning/ training provider		Other please specify	
I was doing an adult learning course in a community learning centre or college			

1a. In March 2020, which school year were you in? (conditionally asked Q1=1) (single response)					
8	9	10	11	Other (please specify)	Don't know

1b. In March 2020, which school year were you in? (conditionally asked Q1=2)  
(single response)

12	13	Other (please specify)	Don't know

2. Did your plans for your education change in any way because of the pandemic?

Yes	No (skip to x)	Don't know (skip to x)

2a. If 'yes' was this due to any of the following? Please select all that apply	
I received grades decided by my school/college (rather than centre assessed grades from external exams) that were higher than expected and this widened my options	
I received grades decided by my school/college (rather than centre assessed grades from external exams) that were lower than expected and this restricted my options	
The learning course I was planning to do did not run because of the pandemic	
The pandemic impacted the quality of the education I received. As a result, I did not achieve the grades needed to follow my original planned learning course	
The pandemic negatively impacted my mental health, and I was unable to follow my planned learning course as a result	
The pandemic impacted physical health, and I was unable to follow my planned learning course as a result	
I chose to take a break from learning due to the pandemic	
Caring responsibilities due to the pandemic meant that I could not follow my original planned learning course	
Financial need due to the pandemic meant that I could not follow my original planned learning course	
The pandemic changed plans for my education in some other way. Please tell us more.	

2b. What was the reason for this? E.g. reduced learner experience, to support family members etc. (conditionally asked Q2=7) (open ended)

2c. Were you able to return to your original planned learning later? (conditionally asked Q2=2-8) (single response)			
Yes, I have been able to go back to my original plans	No, I have taken a different path as a result i.e. a change of subject or qualification	Prefer not to answer	Don't know

3. Which type of learning provider are you with <u>now</u> ? (single response)			
School sixth form		Community learning centre or college	
Further Education College		Not sure	
Work-based provider		Other please specify	
I am on a traineeship programme			

4. What are you currently studying? Please select all that apply: (multiple response)			
GCSEs	<input type="checkbox"/>	ESOL (English as a Second or Other Language) course	<input type="checkbox"/>
AS and/or A levels	<input type="checkbox"/>	Apprenticeship	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vocational qualification, such as BTEC or City and Guilds	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other adult learning course	<input type="checkbox"/>
Welsh Bacculaureate	<input type="checkbox"/>	Level 4 or above qualification (degree level course)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access to HE	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other please specify	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not sure	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

5. I am currently studying: (single response)			
Full time	<input type="checkbox"/>	Part time	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. Overall, what impact do you feel that the pandemic had on your...?					
	Very negative	Somewhat negative	No impact	Somewhat positive	Very positive
Education					
Job prospects					
Mental health and wellbeing					

### C. Access to learning

In this section we are looking to understand more about your current experiences of learning online, learning at home and any disruptions to learning that you have recently faced.

Please answer these questions thinking about your learning experience at the time of filling in this survey, please select one option in each column which applies to you.

7. Please select how your course is currently delivered and what your preferred method of delivery would be.	My learning course is <u>currently</u> delivered (select one option in this column)	My preferred method of learning would be (select one option in this column)
All face-to-face		
Mostly face to face with some online teaching resources		
Equal amounts of online learning and face-to-face teaching		
Mostly online with some face-to-face		



All online learning with no face-to-face teaching		
---	--	--

8. We would also like to know more about your <u>current experiences</u> of learning from home. Please tell us the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the statements below. (single responses)					
	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
I have access to a good internet connection at home					
I have my own space to learn at home.					
I have the peace and quiet I need to learn at home.					
I feel focused and motivated working online.					
I have my own equipment and do not have to share it with other household/ family members.					
I have the correct equipment I need to work from home					

9. What equipment do you use to learn from home? Please select all that apply	
Laptop	
Tablet	
Smartphone	
None	
Other – please tell us	

### Disruption to Learning

We would like to know about anything that has stopped you from learning at your best.

10. Please tell us the extent to which you agree or disagree that your learning in post-16 education has been disrupted by the following <u>in the past twelve months</u> ? (single responses)					
	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
Teacher absence					
Your physical ill health					
Mental ill health e.g. stress and anxiety					
Industrial/ strike action from teaching unions					
Financial hardship/cost of living					
Internet connectivity					
Disruptive behaviours in the classroom					

Poor building quality/maintenance at your learning provider					
Need to undertake paid employment					
Caring responsibilities					
Bullying					
Lack of access to period products					
Issues related to accessibility e.g. someone to help take notes in class					
Issues related to public transport					
Other – please specify					

10a. Which of the following challenges do you face about public transport? (tick all that apply) (Conditionally asked question)				
availability	reliability	Cost	Safety	Issue with accessibility
Travel time	Comfort and cleanliness	Lack of availability	Other	

10b. If you have challenges due to an additional learning need, please tell us more

#### D. Thoughts and feelings

In this section we are looking to understand a bit more about your wellbeing. We also want to learn about your thoughts in relation to your learning and whether these have changed since the COVID-19 pandemic.

11. Please respond to the following statements about your learning experience <u>since the pandemic</u> .					
(single responses)					
	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
My confidence in my ability to learn has improved.					
My ability to perform well in assessments such as exams and practical assignments has improved.					
My confidence in social situations has improved.					
My ability to work well as part of a team has improved.					
My interest in my studies has increased.					
My career goals have grown.					

12. Please respond to the following statements about how you currently feel: (single responses)					
	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree

			nor disagree		
It is important that I attend <u>all</u> my scheduled learning sessions in person.					
I place less importance on attending scheduled learning sessions in person since the COVID-19 pandemic.					
Learners on my course are respectful to teaching staff.					
My ideas and opinions are respected by others on my learning course.					
Learners on my course are committed and take their learning seriously.					
I feel accepted by my peers.					
I feel like I belong at my learning provider.					
I feel less capable than others on my learning course.					

13. Here are some statements about feelings and thoughts. Please select the answer that best describes your experience of each over the last two weeks. (single responses)

	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
I've been feeling optimistic about the future.					
I've been feeling useful.					
I've been feeling relaxed.					
I've been dealing with problems well.					
I've been thinking clearly.					
I've been feeling close to other people					
I've been able to make up my own mind about things					

14. Next I would like to ask you four questions about your feelings on aspects of your life. There are no right or wrong answers. For each of these questions I'd like you to give an answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is "not at all" and 10 is "completely". (single responses)

	Not at all 0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Compl etely 10
Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?											
Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?											
Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?											

Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?											

E. Support Services

In this section we are interested to understand more about any issues where you might have questions, be struggling, or require additional support. (Links to a range of support services are provided at the end of the survey).

15. The next question is about whether you have needed help with anything in the last 12months and if your needs were met	In the past 12 months, have you <u>had</u> a need for help with any of the following? (tick all that apply)	Please select if your needs were met by your leaning provider'? (tick all that apply)	Please select if your needs were met elsewhere (tick all that apply)	Please select if these support needs are not currently being met (tick all that apply)
Mental Health and emotional wellbeing				
Additional learning/training support				
Gender identity and sexuality				
Physical illness				
Disability				
Access to period products				

Physical bullying				
Online bullying				
Sexual harassment				
Transport				
Finance				
Other – please specify				

15a.

In the past 12 months, have you applied for Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)? (single response)

The EMA is means tested and available to young people above compulsory school age, 16-18 years, who are studying a full-time academic or vocational course.

Yes – applied and received	Yes – applied but rejected	Yes, I am awaiting the outcome	No	Don't want to say



16. In your school/college, are you aware of any students who...			
	Yes	No	Don't know
...come to school/college hungry			
...can't afford to buy lunch at school/college			

17. During the last 12 months, was there a time when, because of lack of money or other resources:			
	Yes	No	Don't know
You were worried you would not have enough food to eat?			
You were unable to eat healthy and nutritious food?			
You ate only a few kinds of foods?			
You had to skip a meal?			
You ate less than you thought you should?			
Your household ran out of food?			
You were hungry but did not eat?			
You went without eating for a whole day?			

18. Is there anything we haven't asked you so far in this survey that you would like to comment on? Please use the free text box below. (open ended)

F. Demographics (a little about you)

Through this section we are looking to understand a bit more about you. We only ask what is necessary for analysing the survey responses effectively. As a reminder, all responses are voluntary in this survey.

19. What language does your family normally speak at home?	
Welsh only	
English only	
Other language(s) only (please specify)	
Welsh and English	
Welsh and other language(s) (please specify)	
English and other language(s) (please specify)	
Welsh, English and other language(s) (please specify)	
I do not want to answer	

20. Are you undertaking your course (or part of it) through the medium of Welsh or bilingually?	
Yes	
No	
Don't know	

21. Were you eligible for free school meals at any time between the ages of 11 and 16?	
--	--

Yes	
No	
Not applicable i.e. Finished school before 1980, or went to school overseas	
I don't know	
Prefer not to say	

22. What is your sex? * A question about gender identity will follow	
Female	
Male	
Prefer not to say	

23. Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?	
Yes	
No	
If 'No' enter gender identity	
Prefer not to say	

24. How do you describe your ethnic group?	
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	

Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	
White	
Other ethnic group	
Prefer not to say	

25. Do you consider yourself to be disabled or to have a learning difficulty?	
Yes	
No	
Prefer not to say	

26. Do you look after, or give any help or support to, anyone because they have long-term physical or mental health conditions, or illnesses, or problems related to old age?	
Yes	
No	
Prefer not to say	

27. Are you registered with your local authority as a carer?	
Yes	

No	
Not sure	
Prefer not to say	

28. Do you have childcare responsibilities as a primary care giver (e.g. parent/guardian)?	
Yes	
No	
Prefer not to say	

29. Are you care experienced? (This is anyone who is currently in care or has previously been in local authority or kinship care for any length of time at any point in their life).	
No	
Yes	
Prefer not to say	

30. What is the first part of your postcode? E.g. CF23 or HR5

7. Closure and re-contact

31. Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey. If there is anything about this survey that you would like to comment on, or if you would like to explain any of your answers, please use the free text box below.

## 8. Accessing Support

The links below provide information which would be useful in accessing a range of support.

### Financial support

[Contact us - Home \(citizensadvice.org.uk\)](https://citizensadvice.org.uk) Provides advice on financial support and can signpost you to other agencies who may be able to help you - 03444 77 20 20 (9am to 5pm, Mon - Fri).

[Education Maintenance Allowance | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales) - Provides information on how to apply for the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). The EMA is means tested and available to young people above compulsory school age, 16-18 years, who are studying a full-time academic or vocational course.

[Free and impartial help with money, backed by the government | MoneyHelper](https://moneyhelper.org.uk) - explains financial matters including loans and borrowing, bank accounts and financial emergencies in simple terms.

### Mental health and wellbeing support

[C.A.L.L. Mental Health Helpline - Community Advice and Listening Line \(callhelpline.org.uk\)](https://callhelpline.org.uk) A dedicated mental health helpline for Wales, it can provide you with confidential listening and emotional support, and help you contact support that may be available in your local area. Call 0800 132 737 or text 'help' to 81066.

[Mind Cymru - Mind](https://mind.org.uk) For information on types of mental health problems, where to get help, medication, alternative treatments and advocacy. Call 0300 123 3393, email [info@mind.org.uk](mailto:info@mind.org.uk) or text 86463

[Mental Health Support - Public Health Wales \(nhs.wales\)](https://nhs.uk) Signposting to services for anyone worried about their own or someone else's mental health

[Papyrus UK Suicide Prevention | Prevention of Young Suicide \(papyrus-uk.org\)](https://papyrus-uk.org) Young suicide prevention society. HOPELINEUK 0800 068 4141 (Monday to Friday, 10am to 10pm, and 2pm to 10pm on weekends and bank holidays).

### Other support services

[Contact Live Fear Free | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales) Get in touch with Live Fear Free advisors free of charge by phone, online chat, text or email. Live Fear Free can provide help and advice to anyone experiencing domestic abuse or sexual violence or who knows someone who needs help. For example, a friend, family member or colleague.

[dewis.wales](http://dewis.wales) Dewis Cymru is an information hub of organisations that offer support services, information, and advice. Services can be searched by local area and by the type of support services required, such as housing advice and food support.

[How we can help | How Samaritans can help you | Samaritans](#) Offering a safe place for you to talk any time you like, in your own way – about whatever's getting to you. Call for free on 116 123 or email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

Careers Wales can help you to plan your career, prepare to get a job, and find and apply for the right apprenticeships, courses and training.



## **Appendix 2 - The data cleansing process**

There were six stages of data cleansing, these included the removal of:

1. Any return that falls outside of the data collection period.
2. Any blank returns.
3. Where respondents have answered question one but all remaining fields are non-responses.
4. Responses that were suspected to be duplicate.
5. Responses where the time taken to respond to the survey was less than one minute.
6. Any remaining responses deemed invalid from a spot-check (this included two respondents who listed their role as 'retired', one respondent who had entered spam responses, one teacher and one respondent who answered that they were not in education in 2020).

### **Appendix 3 - Methodology for scoring the Short Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale**

The SWEMWBS is scored by first summing the scores for each of the seven items, which are scored from 1 to 5 as follows:

- “None of the time” = 1 point
- “Rarely” = 2 points
- “Some of the time” = 3 points
- “Often” = 4 points
- “All of the time” = 5 points

Each of the response option was coded to reflect above scoring pattern. Note that the scale is positively scored, meaning a higher score suggests higher positive mental wellbeing.

The variables were labelled as follows and the descriptive statistics for each are presented below:

- “I’ve been feeling optimistic about the future.”
- “I’ve been feeling useful.”
- “I’ve been feeling relaxed.”
- “I’ve been dealing with problems well.”
- “I’ve been thinking clearly.”
- “I’ve been feeling close to other people.”
- “I’ve been able to make up my own mind about things.”

The scale is scored by summing responses to each item. The responses, from 1 to 5, are aggregated to form the Index, which can range from 7 (those who answer ‘None of the time’ on every statement) to 35 (those who answer ‘All of the time’ to all statements). SWEMWBS scores are typically presented as means, medians and as the 10th and 90th centiles. They are not further classified into categories.