

LEARNING

Proportion of adults who do not learn increasing

■ MORE THAN a third of Britain's adult population have done no learning since they left full-time education, a survey from the adult learners' organisation NIACE has revealed.

The majority – three in five – have not participated in learning in the past three years and the older you are, the less likely you are to learn.

One in five – 19% – are currently learning. This is a dramatic fall in participation since 2010 when the figure was 43%.

The survey shows that people in the highest socio-economic classes are the most likely to participate in learning – but the gap is not as big as it used to be.

It also shows that those in employment or looking for work are more likely to be involved in learning than those who are not looking for work, either because they are retired or for some other reason.

Four out of 10 of those in work or looking for work are learning, but only 1 in 4 (24%) of those out of work but not looking are learning, as are 14% of retired people.

Three quarters (74%) of those aged 18-24 have participated in learning in the last three years. Of those aged 25-49 the proportion

is 40%; for the 50-74 group it is 26%; and for those aged 75 or more it is only 7%.

About one half (49%) of those who left full-time education at 21 or older are learning, compared with 23% of those who left school at or before 16.

These are depressing findings, said U3A chairman Ian Searle. "There is still a perception that learning is for the young, training is for the middle aged, and vegetating is for the old.

"A great many people of all ages think learning is not for older people.

"This is quite wrong. The benefits of learning in later life have been demonstrated in research over the years.

"It is not just the pleasure it gives to learners, but the health benefits. It helps to keep older people fit and healthy in body as well as mind.

"The NIACE survey shows that you are less likely to participate in learning if you are retired, or outside the labour market, or in a low-skilled job, or did not do well at school.

"This is a tragedy, because these are the people who can benefit most from learning."

■ Details of the survey are at www.niace.org.uk