



Report summary
Characteristics and barriers of adult learners

2023

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PDF

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Official title of the full report: Characteristics of Adults who Return to Education and Training, and Understanding the Barriers to Adult Learning

Author of the full report: Social Research and Demonstration Corporation

Why this study

This study looks at Canadian adults over 25 years of age who had work experience and went back to post-secondary education (PSE). It examines why they wanted to go back to PSE, and the obstacles they may have faced.

What we did

The report used findings from several sources, including:

- a review of existing research
- the Longitudinal and International Study of Adults
- the Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies
- tax data

The report examined:

- adults who were between the ages of 25 to 62 years who went back to PSE between 2012 and 2014
- typical learners who were between the ages of 18 to 24 years who were in PSE between 2012 and 2014
- adults who have worked before and wanted more PSE, and
- adults who wanted to go back to PSE but could not

What we found

Adults who went back to PSE later in life were less likely than typical learners to:

- be born in Canada
- have parents who went to PSE, and
- use loans, grants, bursaries, or scholarships to pay for more PSE

Adults who went back to PSE later in life were more likely than typical learners to:

- be married or have a partner
- have children
- have previously attended PSE when they were between 18 to 24 years old
- have a job or career experience
- earn more money at work, and
- use money earned from work, private bank loans, or lines of credit to pay for more PSE

Adults who wanted to go back to PSE as an adult but did not were more likely than typical learners to:

- have parents who went to PSE, and
- have great skills in numeracy, literacy, and problem-solving

The factors that stopped adults from taking more PSE when they were older included:

- being too busy
- having no time to do school work
- taking care of children or family
- not enough money to pay for more PSE, and
- no support from their employer

What it means

The findings of this research will help the Government of Canada to:

- understand why adults may not be able to return to PSE later in life, and
- encourage adults to keep developing their skills by going back to PSE

Contact us

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