

## The Gender Debate

*New research from the LSC South West shows a gender gap in attitudes towards adult education*

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Women are more enthusiastic about learning and skills than men, according to new research from the Learning and Skills Council South West (LSC).

Published today, the research reveals the extent of the gender gap in attitudes towards adult education. Findings highlight that participation in adult education among men has fallen by five per cent while the number of women in adult education is increasing<sup>1</sup>. In fact, 84 per cent of women have stated that they feel that further training, skills or a qualification would give them an advantage in the workplace, showing the thought they put into increasing their employability.

60 per cent of women claim that they actively seek advice from peers and colleagues about increasing their skills compared to nearly half of men who say they don't, demonstrating the fundamental attitudinal differences between male and female approaches to learning. Could men learn a thing or two from women before they get left behind?

One of the main barriers to adult learning for both men and women is money. The Adult Learning Grant (ALG) has been designed by the LSC to help adults to overcome the financial barriers to learning. ALG allows adult learners up to £30 a week to help with the extra costs that learning can bring.

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<sup>1</sup> Findings taken from the NIACE survey on adult participation in learning 2008: *Counting the Cost*

Dr Linda Papadopoulos whose new book *What Men Say, What Women Hear*, backs these findings, says: "Socially, the roles of British men and women are becoming increasingly equal, with women claiming their independence both at work and at home, and even the introduction of the house-husband. However, it seems that there is still a significant inconsistency in attitudes to adult learning, where men seem more unwilling to engage with education and training as a means of improving their employability and career prospects."

The research shows that men are less likely to seek advice about their skills, much as they are less likely to go to the doctor or ask for directions when they are lost than women. There is a common trend in men's behaviour that shows a resistance to accepting support and a determined effort to overcome challenges independently, that is seemingly also reflected in men's approach to education and training.

Malcolm Gillespie, LSC Regional Director - South West, said: "It's very interesting to see these differences between the sexes when it comes to adult learning and, even more so, to understand the foundations for such contradictory attitudes. We hope that the Adult Learning Grant can continue to encourage adults to seek training and learning opportunities and over time close the gender gap by offering both men and women the financial support that enables them to return to learning. The grant can be used to help with anything from the cost of books and materials, through to childcare costs, and really does give critical support to adults who might not otherwise have the opportunity to go back to learning."

To find out how a new skill or qualification could benefit your career prospects, discover the many different courses that are available, or find out whether you are eligible for financial support, visit [www.direct.gov.uk/alg](http://www.direct.gov.uk/alg) or call 0800 121 8989 today.

**- ENDS -**

**Dr Linda Papadopoulos is available for interviews along with an LSC spokesperson.**

**For more information please contact:**

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**Notes to Editors:**

This press release applies to England only.

### **Learning and Skills Council**

The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We are responsible for ensuring the availability of high-quality education and training for everyone. We have a single goal: to improve the skills of England's young people and adults to world class standards. Our vision is that young people and adults in England have knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. We work nationally, regionally and locally to deliver this ambition on behalf of learners and employers.

ALG is available to low income adults in England aged 19 or over who are studying full time for their first full level 2 (5 GCSE's at grades A\* to C or an NVQ2 or its equivalent) or a first full level 3 (2 A levels or an NVQ3 or its equivalent) qualification.