



# Digital student: online learners survey report

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## About the survey

- › The survey was designed using googleforms and made available during the week of 4–10 July 2016
- › The survey was part of a week of activities designed to engage online learners
- › OLsuccess engaged predominantly older learners who were studying a fully online course: it failed to engage other kinds of online learner
- › Questions for the survey were derived from an extensive literature review and refined with the support of the study Advisory Group

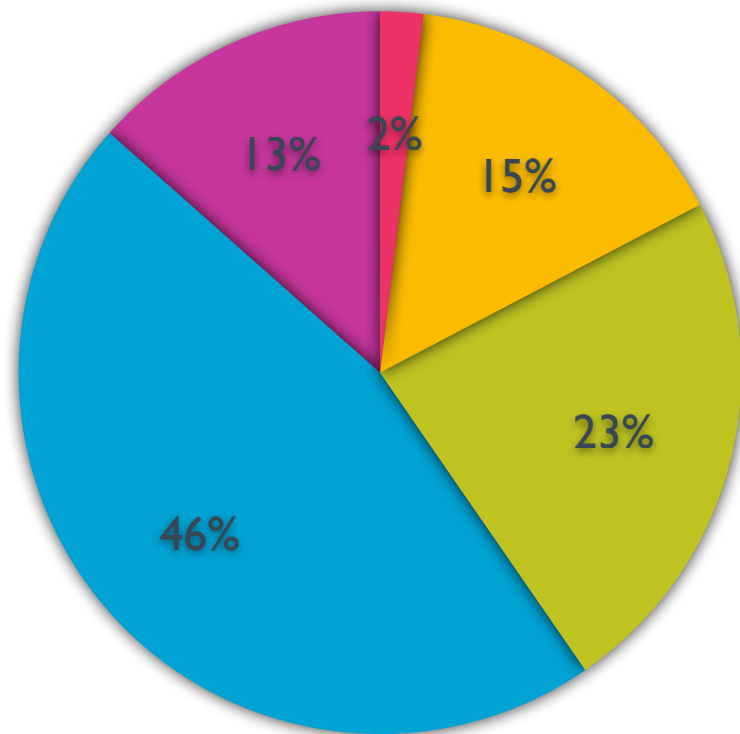
<http://digitalstudent.jiscinvolve.org>

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- » Age range, country of residence, and predominant mode of online learning
  - » Preferences and challenges in learning online
  - » Definitions of success
  - » Confidence and enjoyment
  - » Attitudes to collaboration
  - » Places of learning; sources of support
  - » Access to resources; use of web and media services
  - » Design of the online learning environment
  - » Tips, tricks and strategies for online learning success
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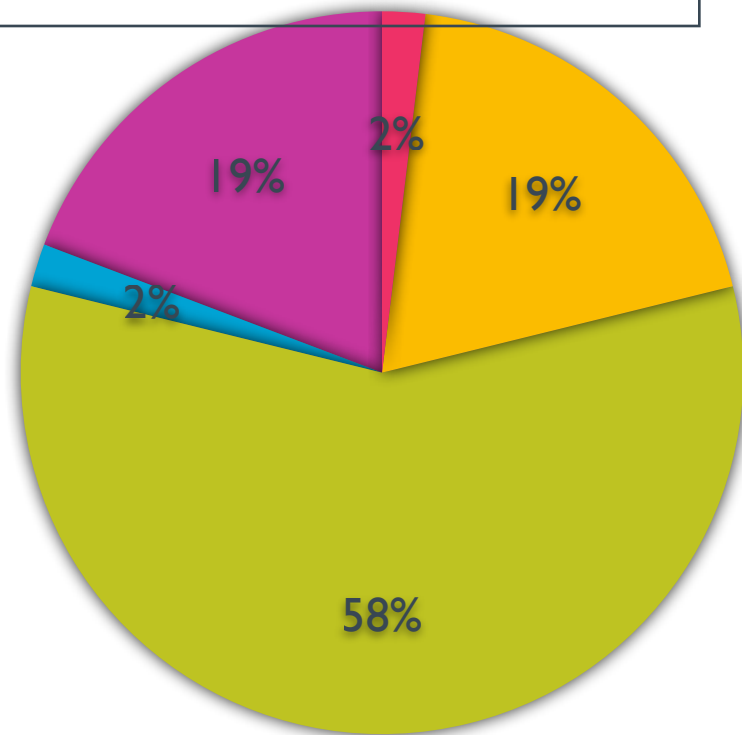
# Findings

16-24 25-34 35-44 45-60 over 60



Our respondents were predominantly older online learners with the mode being 45-60 and the median 35-44.

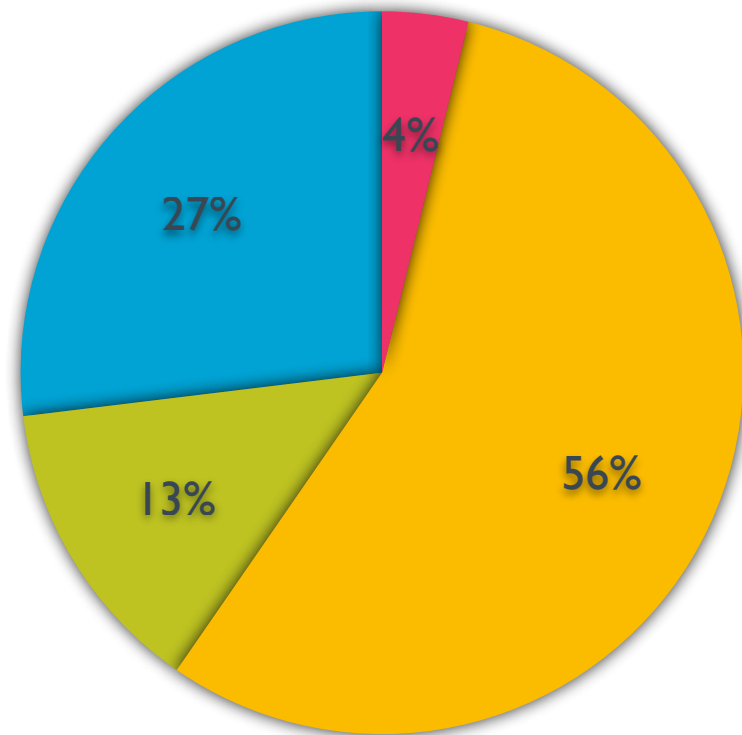
# Demographics: country of residence



Our respondents were distributed around the UK but most lived in England. Although all our #OLsuccess publicity was via Jisc contacts and UK mailing lists, 10 (almost a fifth) lived outside of the UK.

# Demographics: mode of study

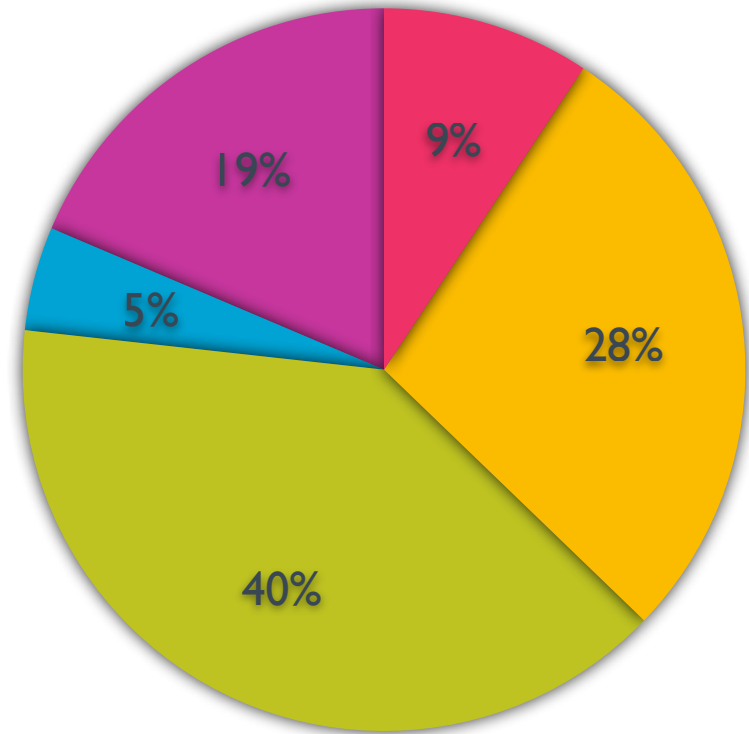
● f2f course   ● online course   ● informal   ● not learning



Of our 52 respondents just 2 were studying a f2f course with an online component, while 29 were studying an online course, 14 learning online but not as part of a formal course of study, and 7 said they were not currently learning online.



# Demographics: study sector

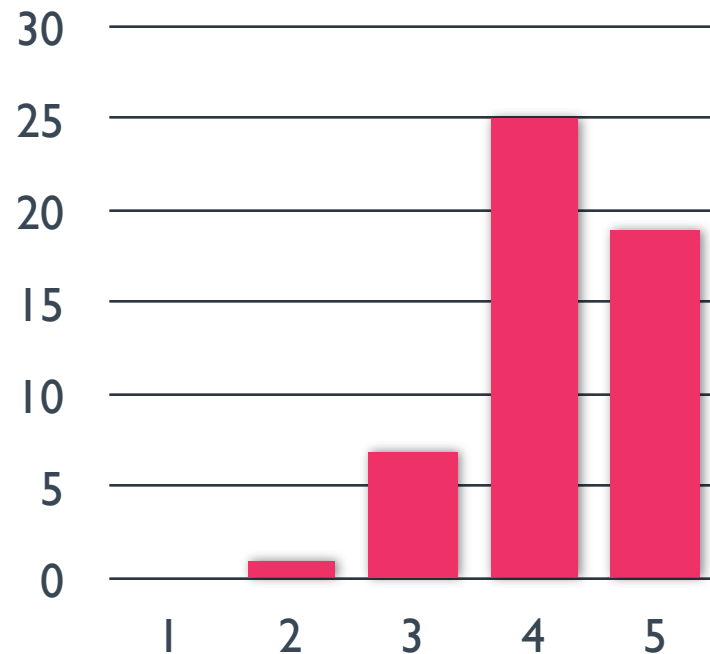


Of those respondents who said they were taking a course, 2 were studying in FE and 17 in HE. 4 were studying in a work- or skills-based context, 12 in a professional development context, and 8 'for interest only'.

# Finding: ‘how confident an online learner are you?’

■ Confidence score 1-5

Our respondents were confident online learners, with the mode being a self-assessed score of 4 (where 5 was the highest score).

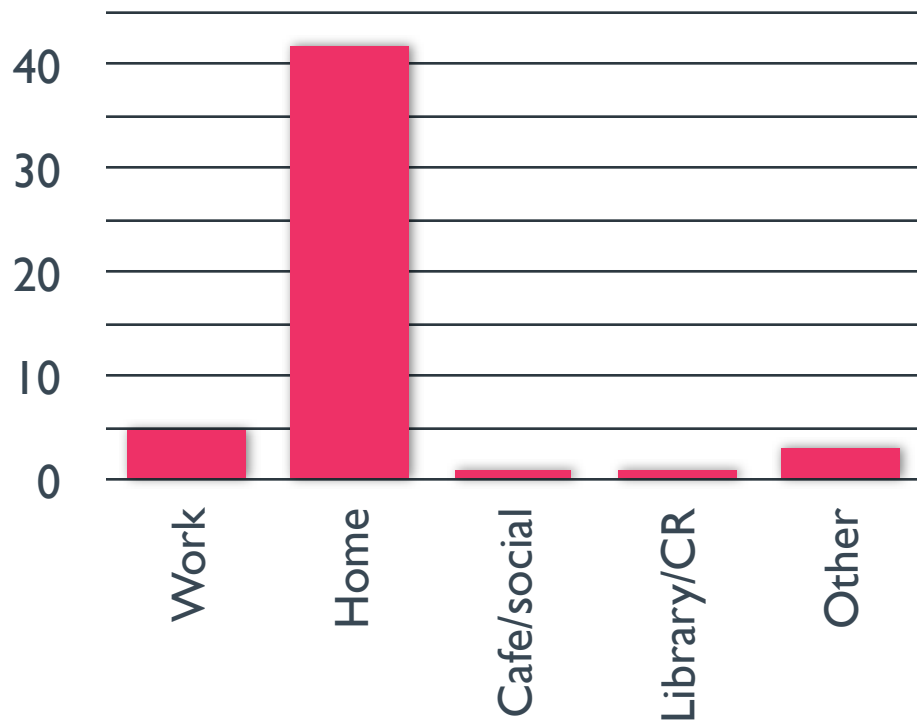


- Our survey sample was small (n=52)
  - Participants were self-selecting from an open call to ‘online learners’ issued via twitter and Jisc mail lists.
  - Our sample was skewed towards older, confident, ‘fully online’ learners in HE and professional development. We were not successful at reaching younger learners on traditional university and college courses who are being required to undertake online learning as part of those courses.
  - Our sample cannot provide a representative view of the experiences of online learners. However, it can be used as indicative of some of the issues facing learners in online settings.
  - The two learners studying f2f and the one younger learner gave responses that were not systematically different from the norm and so have been left in the sample for analysis: where their responses seem worthy of comment this has been given.
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# Finding: 'where do you prefer to study online?'

■ Preferred place to study online

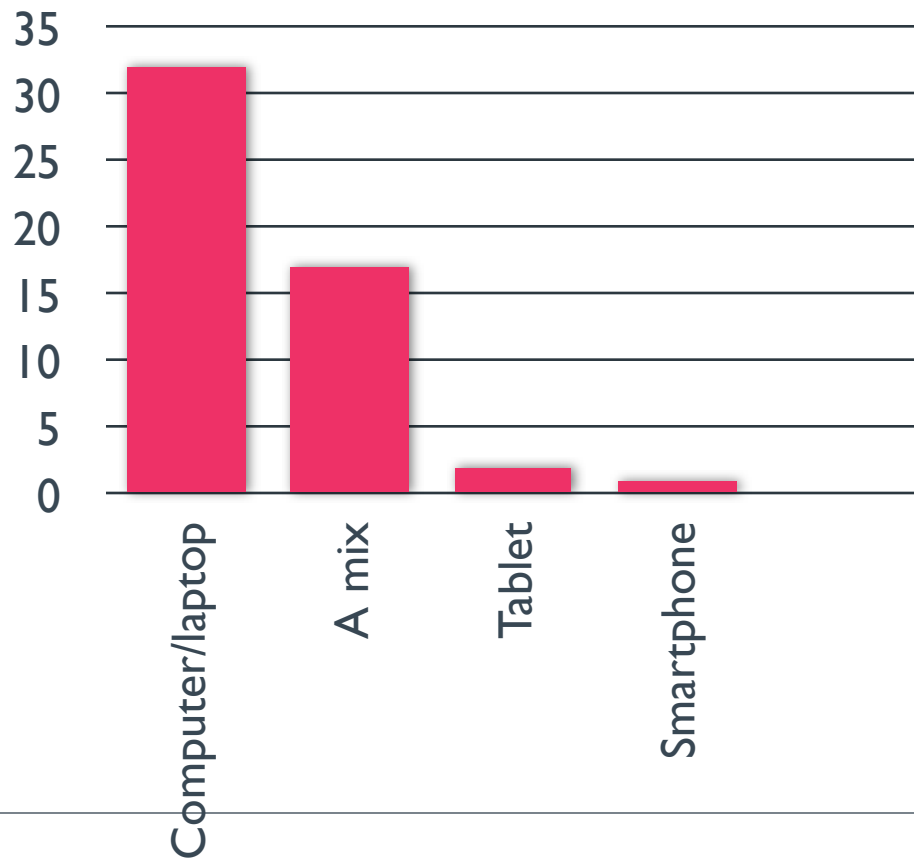
Studying at home clearly dominated our responses. The fact that only one participant chose 'library or computer room' probably indicates how few were studying in college-based settings. 'Other' spaces included 'Anywhere I have a good internet connection'



# Finding: 'how do you prefer to access online learning?'

■ Preferred mode of access

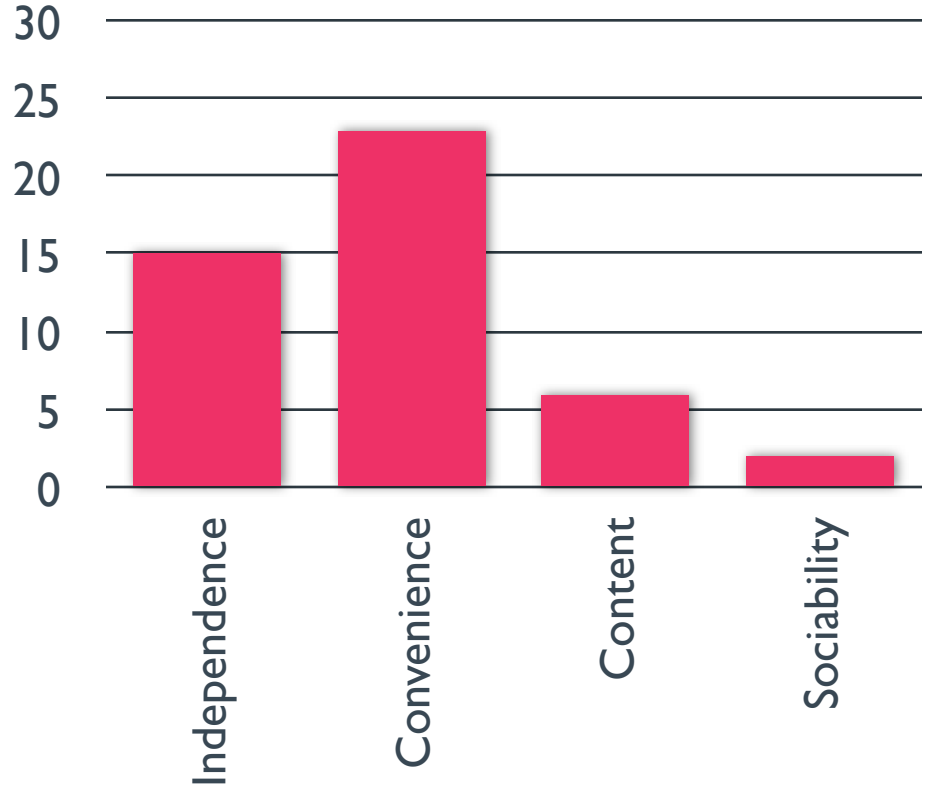
Computer/laptop access clearly dominated, though a significant number are using a mix of devices to access online learning.



# Finding: 'what do you like most about learning online?'

■ Most liked about online learning

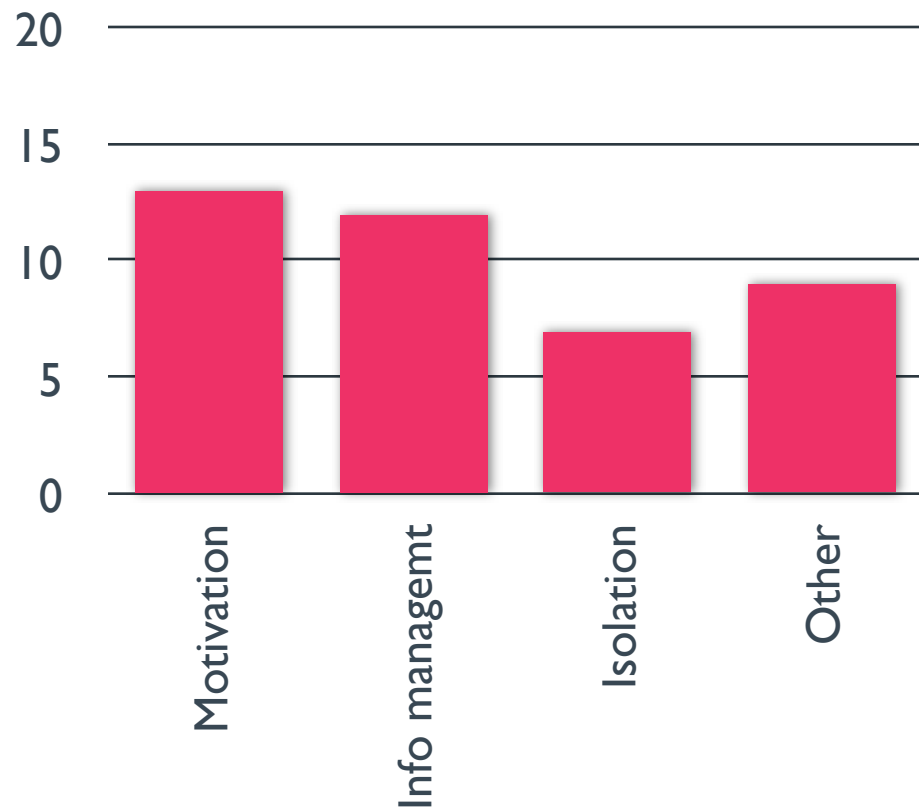
This finding suggests our participants are independent rather than social learners online. Other 'likes' included:  
'Availability of learning materials unavailable elsewhere.'  
'Video content is more suited to my learning style' and  
'The subject is online learning, so I am "meta-learning"!'  
One online learner (taking a formal HE course) just wrote 'I hate it'.



# Finding: 'what do you find hardest about learning online?'

Found hardest in online learning

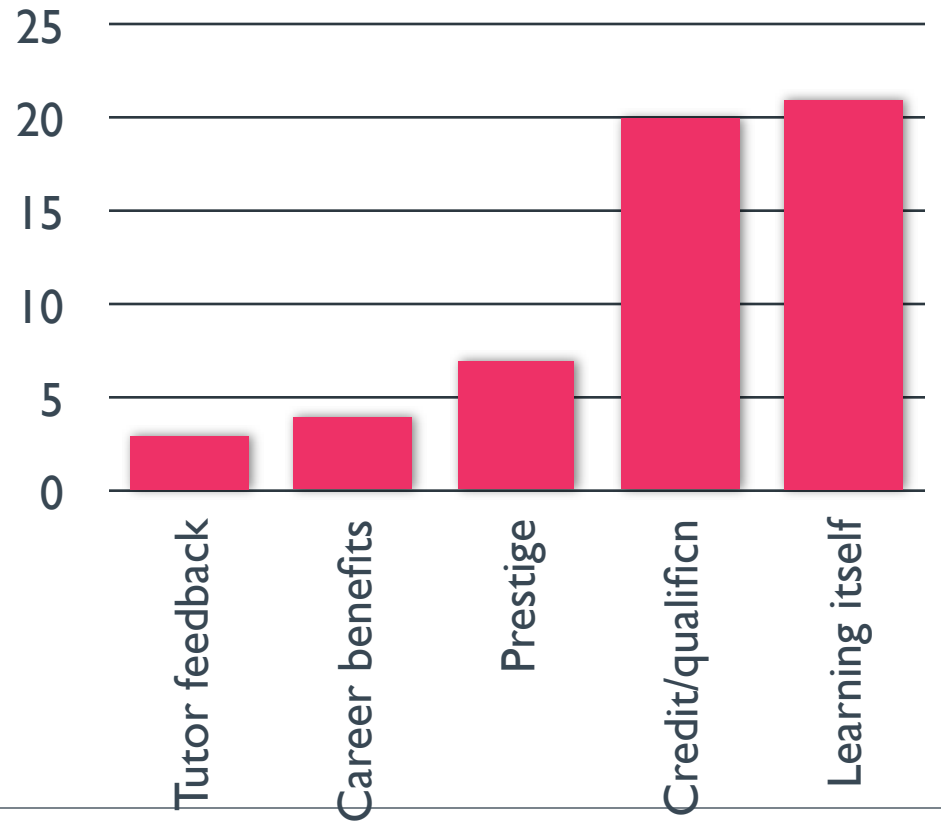
'Other' issues included:  
'varies depending on the part of the course'  
'Too much screentime in addition to work'  
'Over-investing'  
'Knowing when to stop!'  
'I feel less supported than FTF (campus-based) students'



# Finding: ‘what makes you feel successful?’

■ Online learning rewards

Most learners in our sample judged their success either by gaining a qualification (extrinsic) or by their enjoyment of the learning (intrinsic). There was no significant correlation between intrinsic/extrinsic and other factors e.g. mode of study. ‘Other’ issues mentioned were intrinsic rewards such as self-satisfaction and pride. The prestige of the provider institution was a significant issue in generating feelings of success.

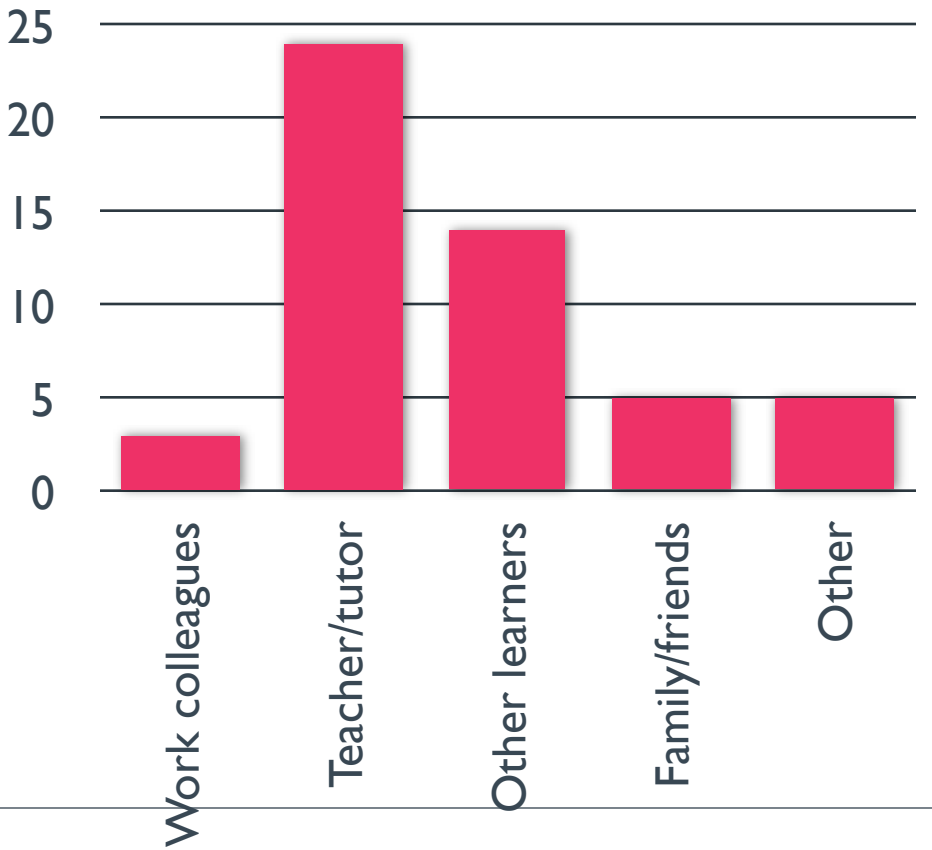




# Finding: ‘whose support is most important?’

■ Most important support

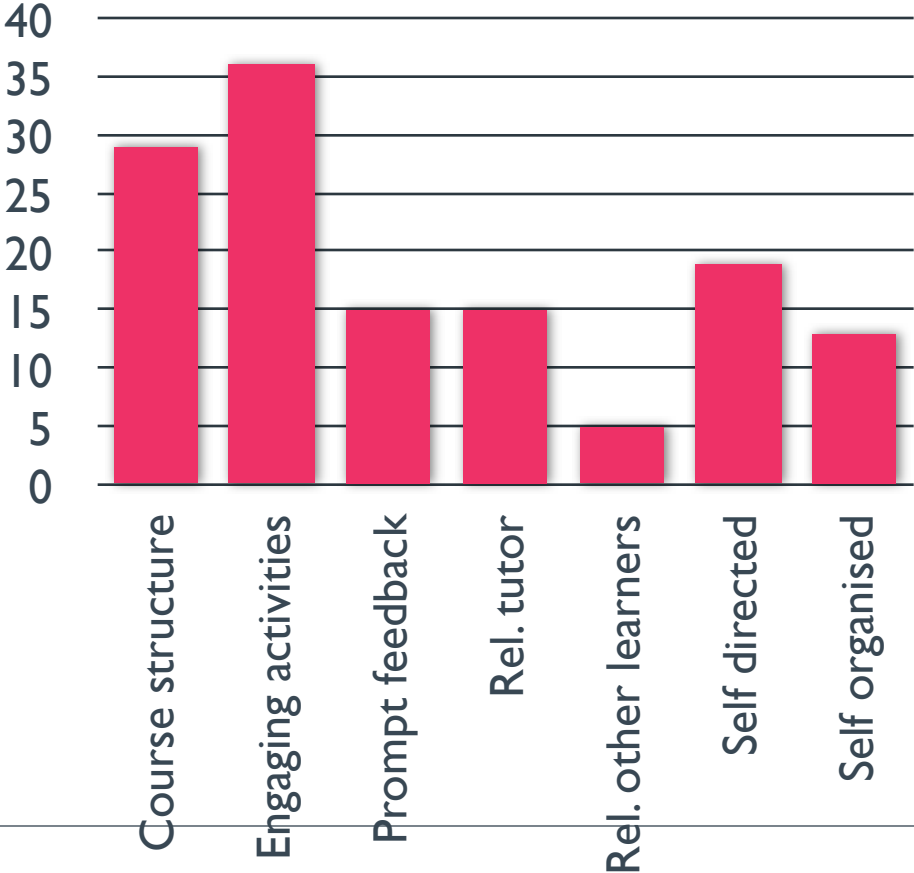
All three learners who found the support of ‘work colleagues’ most important were taking professional courses. ‘Other’ responses were either ‘all of these’ or in two cases ‘textbooks’ and ‘archives of material’.



# Finding: ‘what factor most important in your success?’

Most important success factors

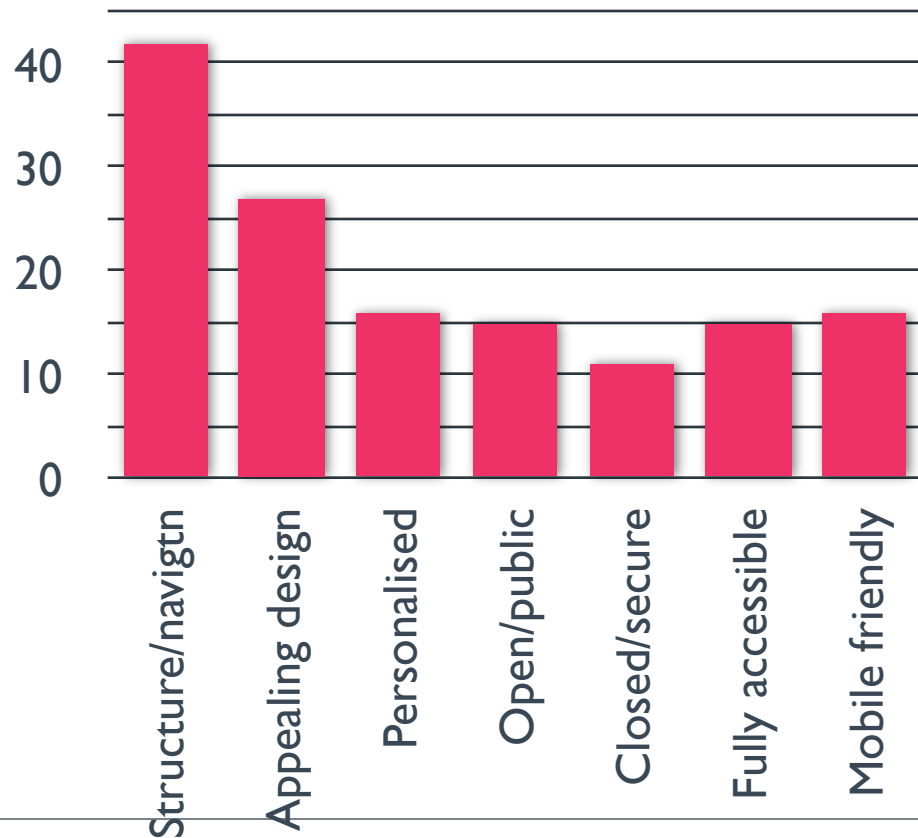
Participants could choose any number of factors. Course related factors were chosen significantly more than self-related factors, which were chosen rather more than relationship factors. ‘Course structure’ and ‘engaging activities’ were selected by more than half of respondents, and all those who chose only one factor chose ‘engaging activities’. ‘Other’ factors related to content.



# Finding: ideal course design features

Most desirable features of course design

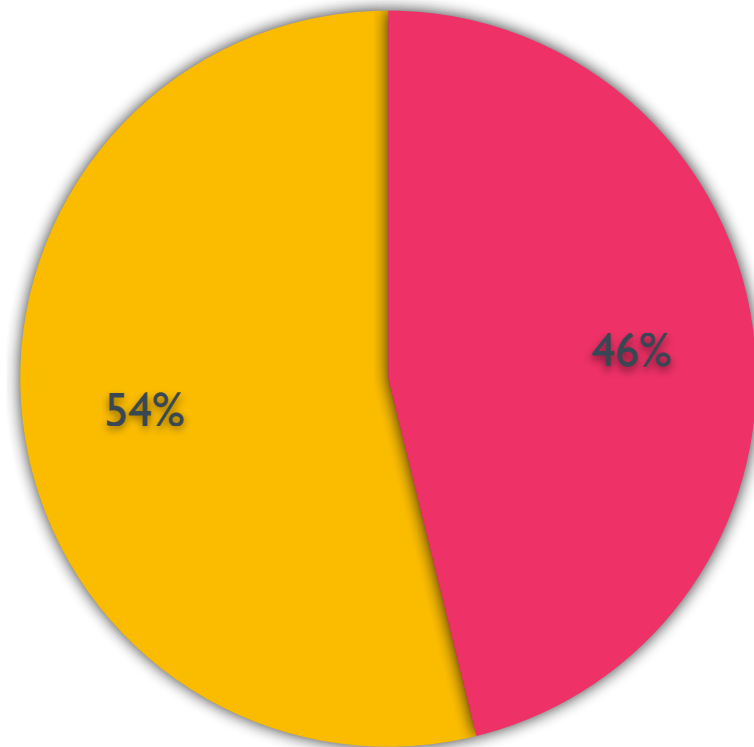
Participants could choose any number of factors. The only 'other' feature mentioned was an offline alternative to text.



# Finding: 'How do you prefer to use online resources?'

● Find myself    ● Use recommended

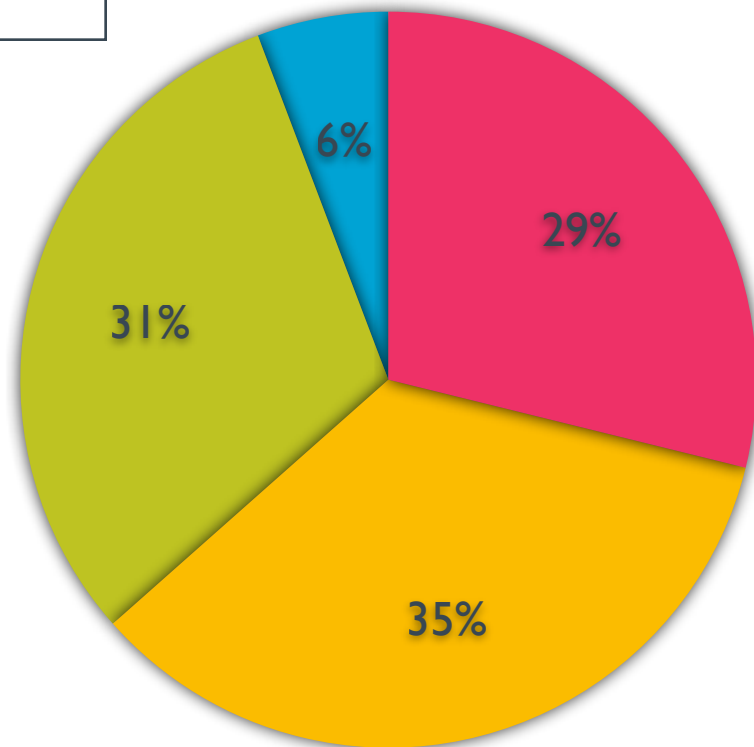
Slightly more of our participants preferred to use recommended resources than to find resources online for themselves: the preference would almost certainly have been stronger with a less confident and experienced group of learners.



# Finding: 'How do you like to use your social media?'



Our participants were fairly evenly split between using their social media informally for learning, using it as a core/essential element of their learning, and keeping it quite separate from their learning, with informal use marginally the more popular. Among the three participants who said they did not use social media at all, one was the only 16–24 year old in our sample!



**Conclusions  
can only be very limited because of the  
limits of our sample**

- Many online learners use tablets and mobile devices, typically alongside a computer/laptop: mobile access is valued.
- There is a division between online learners who prefer independence/flexibility and those who prefer social learning. We found a strong preference for the former, even in our confident and experienced sample.
- Course tutors were by far the most significant source of support, even in our confident and experienced sample.
- We need to understand and support the qualitatively different motivations that online learners bring to their studies, and maximise the intrinsic rewards (enjoyment, pride etc) that many value.
- We need to understand how online learners manage their motivation, make sense of large volumes of information, and deal with isolation.
- Course design factors – especially navigation, content, engaging activities and appealing design – are experienced as critical to success.
- Online learners are fundamentally divided on whether they prefer open/closed courses, integrated/separate from public/social media, self-sourced or recommended resources etc – this may reflect differences in confidence.