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Adult learners drop to lowest level under Labour

The proportion of adults in learning has dropped to its lowest level since before the government came to power, a national survey has found, **writes Tony Tysome.**

Some 19 per cent of adults said they were studying in this year's survey of 5,000 people aged 17 and over conducted by the National

Institute of Adult Continuing Education. It is the first time the proportion has dropped below 22 per cent since 1996.

The results, published as part of Adult Learners' Week, show that adult participation rates are declining among people from the poorest backgrounds, with 11 per

cent of people in this category learning compared with 13 per cent eight years ago.

Niace said results for older people also raised particular concern, with 8 per cent of 65 to 74-year-olds in learning compared with 12 per cent in 1996.

Alan Tuckett, Niace's director,

blamed the decline on "the relentless focus of funders on achievement targets" that narrows the range of courses on offer to adults.

Meanwhile, another survey jointly conducted by Niace and Leicester University researchers has found that many employees

rate on-the-job training more highly than traditional courses.

A quarter of employees who responded to the survey said training courses were of little value in improving their performance, while a third thought that studying for qualifications had not helped them at work.

But more than half thought that learning by doing a job or being shown by colleagues was the most effective means of improving work performance, with 90 per cent agreeing that they had picked up most of their skills through on-the-job training.