



## **SKILLS AND THRILLS**

Forget the image of couch potato Brits, spending their days watching reality TV and eating junk food. The fact is that over four in ten (42%) of us have got off our sofas and are currently learning new skills to help us find better jobs, broaden our horizons, make new friends or just take time out from life

This research, carried out by Gumtree.com, the UK's largest community classified site shows that Brits are embracing knowledge to unprecedented levels. Gumtree.com has explored this emerging trend to discover why we're yearning for learning and how people are helping each other out with 'skill swap' schemes.

Psychologist Dr David Lewis says: "Gone are the days when we learned one skill and stuck to it for life. 77% people surveyed\* recently said they were likely to take up one or more skills in the near future – and that is because people are starting to recognise that it is the new currency in our multi-cultural society, a currency that they can trade to improve themselves and help others."

"We want to learn new languages to try out when we travel or escape it all for a few hours by learning gardening tricks. It is also becoming increasingly popular for professionals to change careers two, three or more times during their lifetime - learning new skills is the perfect route to making these life-changes."

The research\* demonstrates that full-time workers are most likely to take up a new skill, with 52% currently learning compared with 30% of people who aren't working.

### **Back to school**

There seem to be three main reasons for this return to learning:

- A growing recognition that being multi-skilled makes people more attractive to prospective employers as well as allowing them to switch jobs more easily
- Acquiring new knowledge – especially in creative areas like acting, singing, painting and pottery making – has become an increasingly popular form of relaxation
- For the sheer fun of it! The intellectual pleasure and excitement in acquiring knowledge is a great escape from modern life

A clear sign that a sense of community is alive and well in the UK, people are increasingly offering to teach their skills in exchange for others.

Gumtree.com has seen a huge 54% increase in the number of people using its Skill Swap section\*\*, as they trade their own skills for others.

Gumtree spokesperson Sophy Silver comments on the research: "It's fantastic to see so many people taking up new skills and using sites like Gumtree.com to find courses and tutors.

"From what we've seen, practical skills are really on the up with people taking up skills like plumbing, woodwork, electrical and mechanical engineering. Languages are also incredibly popular as we travel and explore more, with Japanese, Spanish and French topping the bill for skills searched on Gumtree.com."

Dr Lewis adds: "Trading skills opens up a whole new world – people who travel a lot can learn a new language and help someone else design a website in return. People who need a break from the toils of modern life can relax by swapping knitting for another skill."

### **Top tips for swapping skills**

- Only look for things you want to learn – if you try and learn something you aren't interested in, you'll end up bored and unmotivated
- Do it for yourself! Look for skills you have an interest in, not things you think you should know or to keep up with your friends
- Take an objective look at what you can offer other people – you might think that cooking for example is something everyone can do, but the truth is someone out there will really benefit from what you can teach them
- Build in time to your schedule to learn the new skill properly – no one ever became an expert overnight! Mastering any subject takes effort, energy and above all time – so plan your time accordingly and don't go for something hugely time-consuming if you can't commit to it
- It might be worth considering whether any of your friends are interested in learning the same skill – you can then set up small groups to learn and teach together. This is great for motivation and creates a healthy sense of competition as well!

Gumtree's Skill Swap is a great place to find a huge array of skills – some more unusual postings include:

- Wanted: journalism skills. Will swap for professional massage tuition
- Teach me the best of plumbing and I will build a website for you
- IT skills in exchange for belly dancing lessons
- Are you a carpenter? If so, I will swap my physiotherapy skills for a course
- Help an autistic boy learn communication and eye contact skills
- Your female naturist modelling for my Thai cooking

### **Notes to Editors:**

\* NIACE briefing sheet – Adult Participation in Learning

\*\* Between November 2005 and September 2006

**The top 10 skill searches on Gumtree:**

1. Japanese
2. Spanish
3. French
4. Italian
5. German
6. Chinese
7. Polish
8. Korean
9. Russian
10. Massage