

THE FUTURE IS OURS TO LEARN

Final Report of Labour's
Lifelong Learning Commission

Independent Commission for Lifelong Learning

Final report

November 2019

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Foreword

By co-chairs Estelle Morris and Dave Ward

For decades, the labour movement has embraced the life-changing potential of learning, and put education at the heart of its ambitious agenda for working people and communities.

From the ground-breaking Open University pioneered by Harold Wilson and Jennie Lee fifty years ago, to the Union Learning Fund which has supported millions of workers to improve their skills, the Labour Party and trade unions have a proud history of working together to push the boundaries of where, when and how people access learning.

The National Education Service, with its promise of accessible, cradle-to-grave education for all, is a chance to breathe new life into this agenda. It has set out a vision for a cohesive system where everyone can get the learning they need to participate fully in work, in their communities and – importantly in these times of political uncertainty - in democracy.

Crucially, the National Education Service will give lifelong learning equal prominence alongside early years and initial education, helping to reshape our education system so that all parts of it are valued, well-resourced and fit for the challenges of the 21st century.

Realising this vision is no small challenge. Almost a decade of austerity under successive Conservative-led governments has starved many adult learning providers of the support they need to thrive, and left participation in lifelong learning at a 20-year low. Too many people face practical and financial barriers which lock them out of learning and prevent them fulfilling their potential.

The Lifelong Learning Commission, an independent panel of experts drawn from across the lifelong learning sector and beyond, was established by Labour to examine these barriers and consider how to build a fairer, more accessible and more coherent system. We believe that the proposals set out in this report would give life to a bold and inclusive vision for lifelong learning that meets the needs of individuals, providers, communities and employers alike.

Our driving impetus throughout has been the steadfast belief that the transformative power of learning should be accessible to the many, not the few. It has been a real privilege to work with colleagues from across the post-16 education sector to help steer this work, and we are hugely grateful for all the contributions that have helped to shape our thinking.

We hope the Commission's work will provide the basis for a radical shift towards a truly collaborative approach to lifelong learning that ensures everyone – regardless of age, background or circumstance – is able to access the learning that best fits their needs and aspirations.

Executive Summary

Lifelong learning in England has undergone a prolonged period of neglect. The last decade has seen funding for adult education and skills slashed by billions of pounds in real terms, and too many potential learners find themselves locked out of the opportunities that returning to education can bring.

This situation is simply not sustainable. Tens of millions of working-age people are not qualified to Level 3 (equivalent to A-levels) or above. These qualifications have a strong and positive impact on the wages of workers, and many of those who lack them face being stuck in low-paid, low-skilled jobs, unable to transition to new industries. Meanwhile the Confederation of British Industry have warned that, although 75% of businesses expect to have job openings for workers with higher level skills in the coming years, more than half of all businesses (61%) are concerned that there will not be enough people to meet demand.¹

In the years to come as we seek to tackle the climate crisis, embrace the opportunities and meet the challenges of automation, and build the economy of the future, lifelong learning will have an essential role to play.

Labour established the Lifelong Learning Commission – an independent panel of experts drawn from across the post-16 education sector - to examine the barriers that prevent people from learning as adults, and consider how the National Education Service could develop a more progressive system for the future.

To inform its work, the Commission has drawn on existing evidence and invited input from all corners of the lifelong learning sector and beyond. We have made 16 recommendations which we hope will underpin a radical shift towards a fairer, more cohesive system.

Our report will not be the end of the conversation on how we make high-quality lifelong learning available to all, but it marks a bold and significant step in the new direction. Taken together, the proposals would represent the most significant expansion of lifelong learning in recent history.

Building a collaborative approach to lifelong learning

The Commission is firmly of the view that lifelong learning is a social justice issue. Increasing opportunities to participate in education across our lifetimes is a social and public good that can be shared by all members of society - as well as improving health, happiness and social cohesion.

To realise the potential of lifelong learning in supporting social justice, we need a significant, wide-reaching and long-term shift in how we approach it as a society. For too long lifelong learning has suffered from a lack of support and leadership at the heart of government. Shunted between departments and ministers, across governments of all stripes this vital policy area has never been a genuine priority. Embedding lifelong learning across the government's policy agenda and establishing clear mechanisms to support strategic, evidence-based policy making will be central to a successful approach.

¹ http://cbi.binarydev.net/index.cfm/_api/render/file/?method=inline&fileID=DB1A9FE5-5459-4AA2-8B44798DD5B15E77m p52

To ensure that the diverse needs of learners are effectively met, and promote long-term engagement in learning, we also need to move towards a much more collaborative model of delivery. Building a social partnership model where government (at all levels), providers, employers, trade unions and other local organisations that support learning all have a stake in the system will be key to underpinning the shift in approach.

Recommendations:

- Introduce a public duty for all policymakers to consider the impact of their policies on lifelong learning and social justice, and develop plans which contribute to the fulfilment of the aims of the National Education Service.
- Introduce an overarching, independent strategic body to coordinate activity across the National Education Service.
- Develop a stronger national framework to streamline regulation and facilitate collaboration between trusted providers.
- Require providers in receipt of public funding to set out principles for partnership working and collaboration with other providers and relevant stakeholders.
- Encourage a shift towards lifetime enrolment in learning, supported by groups of providers working in partnership.

Developing a new package of support for learners

We are committed to a vision of lifelong learning that can be accessed by all and that benefits all. That imperative stretches far beyond enabling people to gain qualifications – though that is important – and includes a broad spectrum of learning for a variety of different purposes.

As well as making education at lower levels more accessible, a successful lifelong learning system must enable learners to progress to higher levels and gain the knowledge, skills, and expertise that allow them to secure highly-skilled jobs. Higher level technical qualifications, those at Levels 4-5, have an essential role to play in our economy and are often in high demand from employers, but England has relatively few people qualified at these levels compared with nations like Germany and Canada. Part-time participation in higher education has also plummeted following the rise in tuition fee levels in 2012, and reform is needed if we are to address these damaging trends.

For many learners the idea of a three year, residential degree is neither practical nor desirable, yet our system of qualifications is biased in favour of those who complete single, more intensive programmes of study. However, this frontloaded approach is becoming increasingly out of sync with the demands of our modern economy. In our fast-changing world many, particularly older, people will need to access education in smaller pieces, picking up credits or short qualifications in specific areas that give them the knowledge and expertise needed to move to a new industry, or advance in their current one. We also need to better recognise the valuable role of informal learning, both as a fulfilling endeavour in its own right but also as a springboard for many into further learning.

In summary, it is clear that we need a new package of support for learners which breaks down the practical and financial barriers to engagement and ensures people can return to education again and again, at whatever level suits their needs at the time.

To that end, the Commission is proposing a universal learning entitlement that would ensure cost is not a barrier to returning to, or progressing in, learning. However, we recognise that making education free is not enough to make it fully accessible. We are calling for additional focus to be given to priority groups – for example those whose jobs are threatened by automation - and a reformed package of maintenance support that recognises the value of different types and modes of learning.

We also recognise the need for a comprehensive system of independent information, advice and guidance - fit for the 21st century - that supports individuals to access the opportunities that best fit their needs and take agency over their learning. Linked to this, we need a system of credit accumulation and transfer that recognises the value of different types of prior learning and supports people to progress.

Those who are currently in work must also be able to retrain and upskill without taking on an unacceptable risk to their livelihood. While workers currently have a right to request time off for education or training, it is highly constrained; it applies only to training that relates to their current role and employers have wide discretion in being able to deny such requests.² So we're calling for a new right for employees to have paid time off for training. We would also like to see increased funding for Unionlearn to support the vital work of Union Learning Reps in supporting learners in the workplace.

Recommendations:

- Introduce a universal, publicly-funded right to learn through life, underpinned by a minimum entitlement to fully-funded local level 3 provision and the equivalent of 6 years' publicly-funded credits at level 4 and above, with additional support for priority groups.
- Examine models of credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) which support people to accumulate and transfer achievements whilst ensuring quality and recognising that not all learning is qualification based.
- Work with employers and trade unions to introduce a right to paid time off for training.
- Introduce a national, NES-branded Information, Advice and Guidance service which is available both face-to-face and online, sited where possible within the local community, and underpinned by a professionally trained workforce which operates under a common framework and nationally agreed standards.
- Develop a personalised digital platform which allows learners to track the use of their learning entitlements and engage with providers, other learners and related services including careers advice and guidance.

² s63D Employment Rights Act 1996
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/18/part/6A>

- Develop means-tested maintenance support for adults to facilitate access to learning.
- Explore how to better support progression to postgraduate study as part of a broader approach to research and development spending and industrial strategy.

Building capacity in employers and the lifelong learning workforce

Finally, the role of lifelong learning is not simply one of government funding education providers and learners making use of new entitlements. A high-quality, integrated approach cannot be meaningfully achieved without the input of staff in providers or employers across the country.

Teacher numbers in further education have starkly fallen in the last decade, while pay has been stagnant in real terms and funding pressure on the further and adult education sectors in particular has become unsustainable. In building a better system, it is vital that the lifelong learning workforce is given the genuine, professional respect that we would expect for any teachers, and that government sets clear expectations about how staff in all parts of the education system should be treated.

The relationship between employers and lifelong learning also needs to fundamentally change. Although employer demand for skills is high, there has been a steady downward trend in the amount of formal training they offer to staff. Beyond the Apprenticeship Levy, there are billions of pounds in public funding that go to businesses to pay for a range of training activities, but there is little understanding of how well these operate, and what support they offers to workers and the wider economy.

Employers cannot simply act as the end-point of education, receiving highly educated and skilled people into their workforce without contributing to their education. Nor can we ask them to do more and pay more for lifelong learning without giving them a clear voice in how the system operates.

Instead, we need to renegotiate the role that employers play in the system. This must ensure they can play an appropriate role in the co-design and co-production of qualifications so that learning is meeting their needs. It must also include efforts to build their capacity to deliver learning – including a greater focus on ‘training the trainers’ - and be active partners in funding and providing lifelong learning.

Recommendations:

- Develop a package of support for building education and training capacity within employers, to include a national ‘train the trainers’ programme.
- Promote the integration of local skills, innovation and industrial strategies, and explore how mechanisms for localities signing off on employers’ skills development plans can be used to improve integration and accountability.
- Review the effectiveness of the current corporation tax relief in leveraging skills investment, and consider how tax relief might be extended to smaller employers – for example through R&D tax credits.

- Place a renewed focus on improving the conditions of staff in the lifelong learning sector, linking providers' labour standards to their eligibility for funding.

Section 1: Introduction

‘Education is what empowers us all to realise our full potential. When it fails, it isn’t just the individual that is held back, but all of us. When we invest in people to develop their skills and capabilities, we all benefit from a stronger economy and society.’

For the Many Not the Few – Labour’s 2017 Manifesto

Right now, the UK is experiencing an unprecedented period of stagnant productivity. Over the past twenty years, investment in training by employers and learners has halved, and we have an economy with high levels of employment but relatively low levels of employer-related training and basic skills compared to many other OECD nations.³

At the same time, automation and the fourth industrial revolution are changing people’s lives and careers, while issues like Brexit and climate change pose huge questions for our country – not just for industries and employers but also for communities, families and individuals.

Millions of adults in the UK lack basic skills.⁴ Millions more are unable to access education and training because of cost, a lack of time, poor advice, or simply because the right opportunities don’t exist or are too inflexible to access. Many adults are ill-served by the current system, which focusses heavily on the first 18 to 25 years of life. Education funding and policy is mainly designed around the needs and study patterns of young students rather than the very different needs of mature and part-time students, many of whom are combining their studies with a job or caring responsibilities. This has contributed to a loss of two thirds of part time higher education and half of adult education students in recent years. The Learning and Work Institute’s latest annual survey shows the lowest percentage of adults participating in learning in the survey’s 22 year history.⁵ Such low levels of skills and learning mean we face both an economic and civic crisis.

Lifelong learning has the potential to help us respond to these challenges. It can transform the life chances, social engagement and wellbeing of millions, as well as transforming Britain’s economy. It has a critical role to play in delivering social justice and an engaged citizenry, while also ensuring people can access the labour market effectively.

Through its plans for a National Education Service (NES), the Labour Party has set out an ambition to offer ‘cradle-to-grave’ education that is free at the point of use. One of the objectives of the NES is to revitalise and reshape lifelong learning for the new demands of the 21st century, but significant questions remain about how best to create radical and credible policies that will build a system of lifelong learning which is genuinely inclusive, accessible and integrated across all types and providers of education.

³ OECD, Getting Skills Right, OECD Publishing, Paris, (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264280489-en>.

⁴ Kuczera, Field & Windisch, Building Skills For All: A Review Of England, OECD (2016), <http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/building-skills-for-all-review-of-england.pdf>

⁵ Learning and Work Institute, Adult Participation in Learning Survey (September 2019), https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/LW_ParticipationSurveyReport_2018.pdf

The Independent Commission on Lifelong Learning was established to identify the most important barriers to a successful and sustainable lifelong learning system, and to make recommendations that will help tackle them.

The Commission is composed of experts in further, higher and adult and community education (FE, HE and ACE), invited to take part in a personal capacity, who have drawn on their substantial experience and a wide range of evidence in their discussions and recommendations. Recognising that we are not the first to consider how to improve lifelong learning in the UK, the Commission has built on existing evidence as well as inviting new submissions in response to the interim report, published in August 2019 (see list in Appendix 7). We would like to extend our gratitude to all those who contributed.

The Commission has sought to offer a number of detailed proposals to the Labour Party in order to build on, strengthen and further develop its ambitions for lifelong learning. Some of these recommendations are quickly implementable, while others will require substantial long-term shifts in culture and practice. The Commission is clear that further work will be required to inform implementation, but we have sought to set out a clear direction of travel which can influence Labour's approach to policy development.

Section 2: Why should Labour be concerned with lifelong learning, and why now?

‘Just as Nye Bevan and Attlee’s Government created the National Health Service in the aftermath of World War II, the next Labour Government will create a National Education Service. We will offer cradle to the grave education that is free at the point of use.’

– Jeremy Corbyn, Speech to the Association of Colleges, 14th November 2017

The Commission is firmly of the view that lifelong learning is a social justice issue. Increasing opportunities to participate in education across our lifetimes is a social and public good that can be shared by all members of society. We are committed to a vision of lifelong learning that can be accessed by all and that benefits all. That imperative stretches far beyond enabling people to gain qualifications – though that is important – and includes a broad spectrum of learning for a variety of different purposes.

As a society, we must aim to chart an ambitious future for Britain that builds bridges, not barriers, between individual and collective needs at every stage of people’s lives. That means integrating higher and further education into a unified framework for lifelong learning that supports this aim. It also means developing the right offer to meet the various needs of different types of businesses and self-employed people, from generic skills to very specific ones to match an increasingly digital, automated economy.

The role of government must be to ensure an inclusive framework that can deliver lifelong learning at all levels - nationally and locally – with the full involvement of civil society, trade unions, employers and the myriad of providers in further, higher education and skills. Just as siloed systems within education need to be tackled, so too do the barriers between education and other vitally important agendas. The NES and lifelong learning strategy should be built with an expansive approach that links clearly to other policy ambitions and ideas. That must include a future Labour government’s plans across its entire policy agenda – welfare, communities, local government, healthcare, industrial strategy and beyond.

Adult learning has significant benefits for our mental and physical health, social cohesion and civic and democratic participation.⁶ These benefits are invaluable at a time when our nation is divided, not just over Brexit, but by income inequality, the availability of job and educational opportunities, between homeowners and ‘generation rent’, between areas that benefit from good transport links and digital infrastructure and those that are more isolated. Lifelong learning is vital if we are to begin repairing these divisions. Education as a tool for social inclusion and participation – including for marginalised groups like those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) - is central both to our collective prosperity and to building a fairer society where no group or community is ‘left behind’.⁷

⁶ Foresight Office for Science (2017), ‘What are the wider benefits of learning across the life course?’: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/635837/Skills_and_lifelong_learning_-_the_benefits_of_adult_learning_-_schuller_-_final.pdf.

⁷ Duckworth, V. and Smith, R. (2019), ‘Transformative teaching and learning in further education’ <https://transforminglives.web.ucu.org.uk/files/2019/09/TTL-in-further-education-Summative-report.pdf>

The world around us is also changing rapidly, as is the nature of work⁸. Automation, technology, globalisation and demographic change are all having a fundamental impact on the UK economy and transforming employment. Although all nations will wish to equip their citizens with the skills to harness the power of the fourth industrial revolution, it is the UK alone that must grapple with the additional challenges presented by Brexit.

It is in this context of growing social and economic inequality, while facing unprecedented drivers of change, that the Commission seeks to develop a coherent lifelong learning strategy for the first time. The recognition of the importance of lifelong learning is not new, yet the UK has hitherto not implemented policies that have been successful in addressing barriers to lifelong learning.

There is a clear need for the UK to improve its performance with international comparators, but the changing nature of employment also means we must be responsive to future challenges. Adult learning can help individuals adapt to change, and to retrain when existing jobs are automated. As the retirement age rises, we must also equip people with the skills to maintain employment throughout a longer working life, in a way that supports their health and wellbeing.

Digital technology is changing how we work and live, but we can also harness its power to change how people learn and to build their skills, helping individuals and employers to be better equipped for the challenges ahead. It can offer new ways of tackling old problems, providing innovative means to engage, support and assess learners. New digital technologies will bring opportunities for more adaptive and responsive learning; more blended learning that may dramatically widen access to those currently excluded from education; and more tailored, niche learning opportunities for a variety of learners, skills and jobs. Our strategy must encompass such flexible modes of learning moving beyond a traditional, institution-based model of education while also considering how barriers to digital access (e.g. connectivity) can be overcome.

Brexit will require the UK to address the homegrown skills pipeline, from primary education right through to high level advanced skills. People already in employment will need to be skilled to fill vacancies caused by changes to immigration policy. But at present we don't have the information, advice and guidance infrastructure required, nor the mechanism to support people to reskill to respond to skills gaps in their locality.

The rise of the gig economy, and of self-employment more broadly, presents a further challenge to investment in skills, because it makes it harder to articulate the demand for skills and fragments the ownership of providing those skills. The Taylor Review of modern working practices⁹ recommended that the government must place as much emphasis on the quality of work as the quantity of work. The Commission views opportunities for training and education in employment as central to that. While Labour's agenda for 'fair work' and good jobs is clearly established, the impact of

⁸ The OECD's employment outlook 2019 suggests 12% of UK jobs are at high risk of automation, while a further 26% are at a significant risk of change due to technological advances. <http://www.oecd.org/employment/employment-outlook-2019-highlight-en.pdf> Occupations at the highest risk of automation are mostly low-skilled, while Frey & Osborne (2013) identified that skilled occupations which involve complex perception and manipulation tasks, creative intelligence tasks, and social intelligence tasks are less likely to be computerised.

⁹ Taylor, M, Good Work: The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices (2017), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/627671/good-work-taylor-review-modern-working-practices-rg.pdf

technology on the organisation of work will still be significant and wide ranging. A lifelong learning strategy fit for the future will be appropriate for use by all workers at all stages in all sectors.

From the Attlee government that built a new Britain from the ashes of the second world war, to the Wilson administration that forged a new Britain in the white heat of the technological revolution and saw the creation of the Open University, to the Blair and Brown governments that took our country into a new millennium with the promise of a 'Learning Age' and an enhanced role for trade unions through the Union Learning Fund (Unionlearn) - for more than a century the passion to transform the life chances of ordinary working people has been part of the labour movement's gene pool. Building a new lifelong learning system for the 21st century to sit at the heart of the NES will help continue this proud tradition.

Section 3: Learning lessons from around the UK

Education policy is a devolved matter. As such, it would be inappropriate for a UK Government to introduce an NES that is UK-wide. This was recognised in the 2017 Labour manifesto which spoke of creating a new system for England.

However, as the NES is developed it is vital that England learns the lessons from different policy approaches in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and also considers the potential impact that an England-only NES might have on the education systems of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, including:

- Funding implications; changes in public expenditure on education in England feed through into changes in funding in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland via the Barnett Formula.¹⁰
- Tax implications; for example, the apprenticeship levy is charged to companies across the UK with the use of the revenue raised being devolved to the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive, so changes in the revenue-raising aspects of the levy would affect all four nations.
- Cross-border movement of learners; there is substantial cross-border movement of learners – and therefore funding - especially in higher education. For example, almost half (46%) of full-time UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants at providers in Wales in 2018 were from England, Scotland or Northern Ireland.¹¹
- Shared institutional arrangements; several bodies and initiatives in higher education operate on a UK-wide basis – for example the Quality Assurance Agency, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), UK Research and Innovation and the Research Excellence Framework.
- Institutions operating in more than one UK country; several education providers – including the Open University, Workers' Educational Association and City & Guilds - operate across more than one country of the UK, meaning changes in policy in England will have a direct impact elsewhere. Large businesses will also have to interact with the skills system in other parts of the UK as well as England.

UK-wide comparison of lifelong learning participation and outcomes

While finding comparable data is often tricky in light of the divergent practice for collection of education statistics since devolution, the Commission has undertaken some analysis of available data (see Appendix 4), which highlights some interesting differences between the nations in terms of participation and outcomes:

- **Scotland has the highest proportion of the working-age population qualified to higher education (HE) level (44%).** This compares to 39% in England and 35% in both Wales and Northern Ireland and is higher than any English region except London. Excluding London and the South East, only 35% of the working-age population in England is qualified to HE level.

¹⁰ See The Barnett Formula, House of Commons Library Briefing Paper 7386 (2018) for a summary of how this operates <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7386/CBP-7386.pdf>

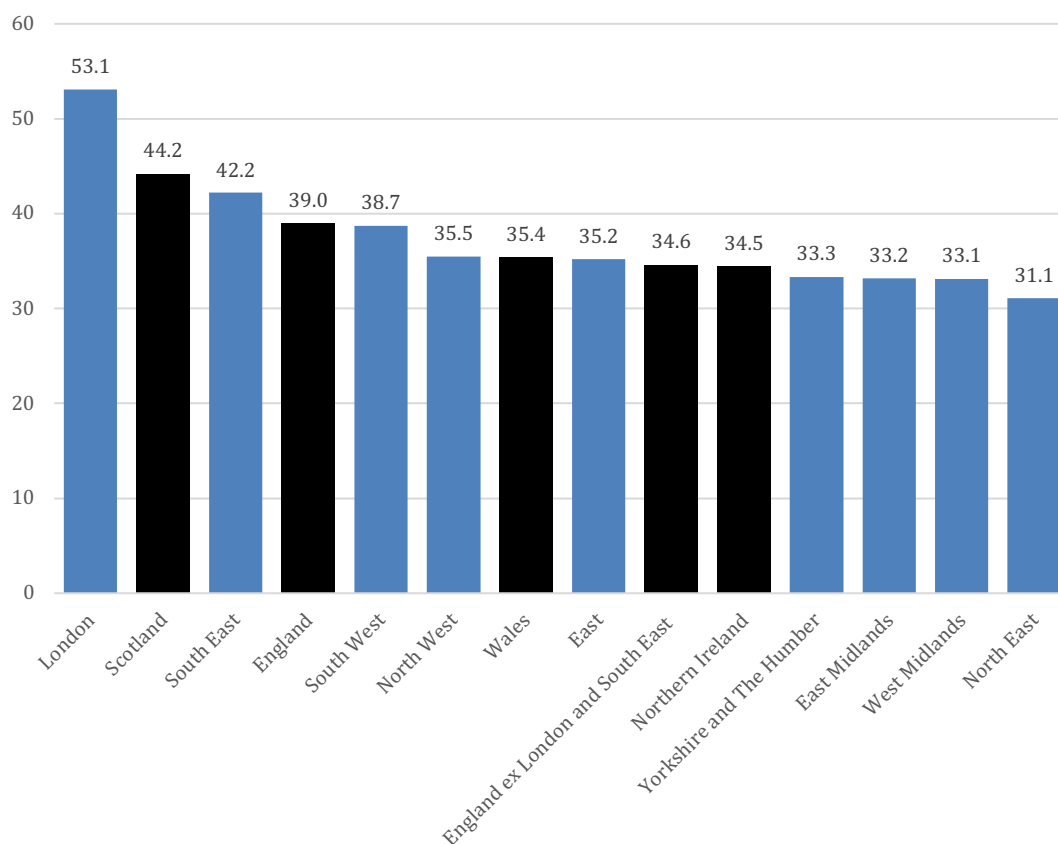
¹¹ Figure 4, End of Cycle Report: Patterns of Geography, UCAS (2019) <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-end-cycle-reports/2018-end-cycle-report>

- **21-year-olds with no previous HE experience are almost 50% more likely to participate in HE by the age of 30 in Scotland** than in England (17% compared to 12%).
- **England has substantially lower participation rates in part-time higher education** than the other three UK nations; people from England are less than half as likely to be engaged in part-time HE at university than people elsewhere in the UK. These differences largely emerged following the 2012/13 funding reforms in England.
- **Wales has the highest adult participation rate in apprenticeships** with, for example, over twice the over-25 participation rate in England and four times the rate in Scotland. There are very low numbers of over-25s engaged in apprenticeships in Northern Ireland.

Qualifications held by the working age (16-64 year-old) population

Scotland has the highest proportion of the working age population qualified to higher education level (NVQ4 or above), a higher proportion than any English region except London. As Figure 1 shows, while England has a significantly higher proportion of the working age population qualified to higher education level (NVQ4 or above) than Wales or Northern Ireland, this advantage is driven by London and the South East. Figure 2 illustrates that the story is similar at other qualification levels

Figure 1: Percentage of 16-64 year olds with NVQ4 or above (2018)¹²



¹² Annual Population Survey, ONS (2018), <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/aps>

Figure 2: Percentage of 16-64 year olds holding qualifications

Country	NVQ4+	NVQ3+	NVQ2+	NVQ1+	Other	None
England	39.0	57.7	75.0	85.6	6.8	7.6
Ex. London & South East	34.6	54.5	73.3	85.0	6.8	8.3
Scotland	44.2	59.7	75.0	83.5	6.8	9.7
Wales	35.4	55.1	74.0	84.9	6.5	8.6
Northern Ireland	34.5	53.5	72.4	81.0	4.6	14.5

Overall higher education participation rates

We can estimate overall participation in university-based higher education by comparing HESA data on participation with Office for National Statistics (ONS) population estimates.¹³

Looking at the overall all-age participation rate, England is significantly behind the other three nations of the UK with a markedly low level of participation in part-time HE. Note that this data excludes all students entering HE courses at colleges. This is significant for Scotland as the data consequently excludes 36% of undergraduate entrants to higher education (mostly on sub-degree courses).

Figure 3: Entry rate into undergraduate HE in HEIs in 2017/18 by mode of study (per 1,000 18-64 year olds)

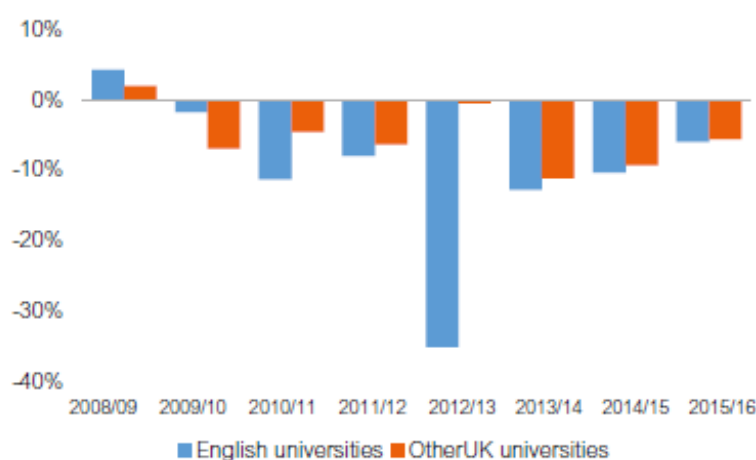
Country/Region	HE participation rate	FT participation rate	PT participation rate
Wales	18.5	11.8	6.7
Scotland	15.3	10.1	5.1
Northern Ireland	17.2	12.1	5.1
England	13.5	11.0	2.5
East Midlands	12.1	9.9	2.2
East of England	12.9	10.4	2.5
London	16.3	13.9	2.4
North East	13.8	10.1	3.7
North West	12.8	10.6	2.2
South East	13.3	10.8	2.5
South West	12.2	9.7	2.5
West Midlands	14.4	11.6	2.8
Yorkshire and Humber	11.8	9.4	2.3
UK	14.0	11.0	3.0

Note: HESA data - excludes students entering HE courses at FE colleges. After allowing for this, Scotland has substantially higher HE participation than any other country in the UK.

As Figure 4 below shows, there has also been significant divergence in trends in mature and part-time HE between England and the rest of the UK since student funding reforms in England in 2012/13.

¹³ Office for National Statistics, Population Estimates for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: mid-2017, (June 2018)
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates>

Figure 4: Trends over time in the number of part-time undergraduate entrants to universities in England and in the rest of the UK¹⁴



When comparing levels of participation in learning across the UK, a recent survey from the Learning and Work Institute has showed that adult participation in learning is at its lowest point in two decades. It shows that only 35% of adults in England are either currently learning or have done so in the past three years, compared with 34% of adults in Scotland, 40% in Wales and 30% in Northern Ireland.¹⁵

By English region, the West Midlands continues to have the highest proportion of adult learners, at 43%; an increase of three percentage points since 2017. The South West has seen the largest decrease in participation rates since 2017, dropping five percentage points to 29% and making it the region with the lowest proportion of adult learners in 2018. The gap between the best and worst performing regions has increased from 7% in 2017 to 14% in 2018, suggesting an exacerbation of regional differences in learning participation.

Lessons for England from the rest of the UK

The Commission carefully considered a number of the policy and funding initiatives which have taken place elsewhere in the UK in recent years and identified a number of key lessons which have informed our work in developing a new lifelong learning system.

In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the infrastructure supporting adult and lifelong learning has diverged from that in England where a greater reliance on higher fees and loans at Level 3 as well as in HE has led to significant falls in participation. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland there remain systems with free tuition and fee grants – usually means tested and applicable to programmes above a specified intensity – alongside some learning grants and loans for student support. As Figure 4 above shows, it is only England that has seen both a big increase in fees and a major fall in part-time HE.

¹⁴ Fixing the Broken Market in Higher Education, The OU (2017), <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Fixing-the-Broken-Market-in-Part-Time-Study-final.pdf>

¹⁵ Learning and Work Institute, Adult Participation in Learning Survey (September 2019), op. cit.

In other areas and levels of learning, Scotland has retained a system of Learning Accounts – operated by Skills Development Scotland whilst Wales has recently trialed a new ‘Right to Lifelong Learning’. The *2018 Progressive Agreement* between the (Labour) First Minister, Mark Drakeford, and the (Liberal Democrat) Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams, included commitments to “deliver an increase in the number of part-time and postgraduate students, ensuring that more students from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit from these opportunities” and explore how to “deliver a new Welsh right to lifelong learning, investing in the skills people need throughout their lives, for individual, societal and economic benefit”.¹⁶

This was referenced in the Minister for Education’s strategic guidance to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) in March 2019.¹⁷ Policy development around the *Right to Lifelong Learning* is currently at an early stage, with preparatory work underway by Welsh Government officials and the Learning and Work Institute, but the clearly stated policy intention has set a positive and ambitious tone for lifelong learning in Wales.

The Welsh Government also commissioned a *Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales* (“the Diamond Review”) in November 2013. Chaired by Professor Sir Ian Diamond, then Vice Chancellor of the University of Aberdeen,¹⁸ the panel published its final report in September 2016¹⁹ and most reforms were implemented from the 2018/19 academic year.²⁰

The element of the Diamond recommendations of most relevance to the Commission was the increased level of support for part-time higher education, aimed at “*promoting improved uptake of part-time study in a way that encourages widening access*”. The Diamond Review concluded that:

Part-time HE study is a positive choice that best suits the circumstances of many students. The Review Panel believes that this route to HE should be encouraged, not least as longer working lives and demand for ever-higher skills and changing career patterns for individuals have become the norm. The Review Panel recognises the positive aspects of the current part-time funding system in Wales for part-time study and aims to build on them”.

The reforms extended maintenance support, including maintenance grants, to all part-time students studying towards a higher education qualification on the same basis as for full-time students. While it is still early days, since the introduction of this support there has been a substantial increase in the number of part-time students in the first

¹⁶ 2018 Progressive Agreement: Agreement between the First Minister and the Minister for Education, Welsh Government (20 December 2018), <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-12/FM%20Agreement%20with%20Kirsty%20Williams%20%28E%29.pdf>

¹⁷ HEFCW Remit Letter 2019-20, Welsh Government (20 March 2019), https://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/about_he_in_wales/WG_priorities_and_policies/HEFCW%20Remit%20Letter%202019-20%20Final.pdf

¹⁸ Other members of the panel included Gavan Conlon (London Economics), Beth Button (NUSW), Gareth Griffiths (Airbus UK), Rob Humphreys (OU), Gareth Jones (Plaid Cymru), Glyn Jones (Grŵp Llandrillo Menai), Ed Lester (SLC), Sheila Riddell (University of Edinburgh), Colin Riordan (Universities Wales and Cardiff University), David Warner (Swansea Metropolitan University) and Michael Woods (Aberystwyth University)

¹⁹ Review of Higher Education and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales: Final Report, Welsh Government (September 2016), <https://gov.wales/review-higher-education-funding-and-student-finance-arrangements-final-report>

²⁰ Welsh Government response to the recommendations from the Review of Student Support and Higher Education Funding in Wales, Welsh Government (November 2017), <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/response-to-the-recommendations-from-the-review-of-student-support-and-higher-education-funding-in-wales.pdf>

year of the new system with a 35% increase in the number of part-time undergraduates in 2018/19, despite only new entrants being eligible.²¹

Conclusions

Lessons for the NES around lifelong learning that can be drawn from the experience in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland include:

- **Recognition of flexible part-time further and higher education in financial support systems.** The impact of recognising part-time study in financial support systems can be seen most clearly in Wales where there has been a dramatic positive impact on lifelong learning following the extension of maintenance grants and loans to part-time students last year. The experience of Scotland with the part-time fee grant, which supports part-time HE participation rates that are twice as high as in England, is also instructive.
- **Investment in part-time higher education pays access dividends.** Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland all invest directly in part-time higher education via the teaching grant to institutions, allowing fees to be kept at affordable levels, with the result that far more adults are able to access lifelong learning and the opportunities that it provides.
- **A need to trial new learning entitlements as well as free tuition and learning grants** in order to stimulate the provision of and demand for, adult and part time learning.
- **Impact of a strong partnership between colleges and universities.** Scotland shows the importance of a strong collaborative relationship between colleges and universities for a strong and successful post-18 system: a quarter of entrants to university in Scotland previously studied sub-degree qualifications at Levels 4 and 5 in Colleges, with significantly better progression from lower qualification levels as a result.

²¹ Jump in part-time students accessing support following introduction of most generous support package in the UK, Welsh Government (31 January 2019), <https://gov.wales/jump-part-time-students-accessing-support-following-introduction-most-generous-support-package-uk>

Section 4: A new, radical vision for lifelong learning in England for 21st century

In response to the challenges and opportunities outlined in the previous sections, the Commission has set out a clear, expansive vision to inform the development of a radical system of lifelong learning in England for the 21st century, as follows:

Lifelong Learning should ensure that all individuals can access the high-quality education and training they need throughout their lives, to improve their lives and their life chances as well as to benefit their families, their communities and the wider economy.

Lifelong Learning therefore must be a force for good: the good of individuals, communities, the economy and for society as a whole. Throughout their lives everybody needs to develop their knowledge and understanding, their skills and talents, and their own personal development as individuals and citizens. People's needs will vary and change according to their stage in life, their particular circumstances and responsibilities, and what is happening in their life, their work, their community and the world around them. Transitions in life and in careers can create particular needs for learning support.

The wellbeing of our communities and society depends on an engaged, educated and skilled population. Communities and wider society face changes, transitions and disruptions which people need to understand and navigate, and which create demands for learning support, locally and nationally.

In order to meet all these varied and changing needs we need a lifelong learning system that is comprehensive and joined up with other areas of public policy, including health, families, employment, the environment and the economy. It must be flexible and agile enough to fit with people's lives, now and in the future. It must also be coherent so that people can access and navigate their way through learning of many different kinds and in many different ways, both formal and informal, throughout their lives.

This complements the ten guiding principles set out in the National Education Service Charter²², affirming that education has intrinsic value in giving all people access to the common body of knowledge we share, and practical value in allowing all to participate fully in our society. These principles, together with Gordon Marsden's descriptions of a National Education Service as 'education of the people, for the people, by the people' as well as 'a national offer and a covenant to invigorate, enable and empower', have guided the Commission throughout its work.

In short, our vision centres on conceptualising, valuing and investing in lifelong learning as an essential 'public good'. We do not underestimate the challenge in realising this vision but argue that its transformative potential – socially and economically - underpins our call to action.

Our vision is an inclusive one. We are clear that a vibrant and dynamic lifelong learning system relies on partnership and collaboration between many different actors

²² Labour Party, 'The National Education Service Charter' (2019), <https://www.labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Charter-of-the-National-Education-Service.pdf>

and providers involved in further education, higher education, adult and community education, prison education, union learning and work-based learning. We place equal value on formal and informal learning, digital and face-to-face learning, and qualification and non-qualification based opportunities, recognising that all have an important place in meeting the diverse needs of learners, communities and employers.

In addition to the vision statement, the Commission believes that a new system of lifelong learning should be underpinned by three key principles, as follows:

- National strategy and oversight,
- Focus on place and local need, and
- Harnessing the digital dimension

National strategy and oversight

The status of lifelong learning, and in particular of further and adult and community education, has been undermined by serious under-investment, neglect, uncoordinated interventions and a failure by government to articulate clearly its purpose, value and benefits.

Over the years, key parts of our lifelong learning infrastructure have been eroded as a result of policy and funding decisions. For example, the precipitous drop in part-time higher education learners since 2012, linked to the student funding reforms, has led some providers to shift focus away from part-time provision, while many libraries and adult learning centres have closed in recent years due to funding cuts. This decline in delivery capacity has only served to reinforce a view that lifelong and adult learning is somehow less worthwhile and less valued than other parts of the education system.

Rebuilding this infrastructure, so that we are able to deliver on our vision, is a significant challenge that requires a clear national strategy and oversight. A successful lifelong learning system needs a long-term, strategic approach to system design and delivery which:

- reinforces the intrinsic value of education at all levels and encourages a change in culture towards lifelong learning,
- ensures that providers, and other players, are clear about their roles and responsibilities within the system as a whole,
- aligns and integrates with other policies and plans to address fair work, industrial strategic planning, digital infrastructure and access, skills, health and wellbeing, and social inclusion and participation,
- is informed by the best available evidence and research, and underpinned by robust evaluation processes.

By creating a stronger national framework we believe it would be possible to streamline regulation and to facilitate collaboration within and across different parts of the education sector. Many providers, particularly those whose core purpose includes providing public value and serving a community or communities, and whose objects are aligned with those of the government's lifelong learning vision and strategy, should be viewed as trusted partners, working with government to achieve shared objectives.

The government, through its agencies, should therefore work with a set of assured providers who are grant funded. These providers working in partnership with each other and with other local services such as health and housing, should provide the core of lifelong learning in their community. As long as they retain quality and achieve agreed outputs, they should have long-term assurance of funding, without repeated

tendering processes. Such a model would have benefits for the learner, provider and the funding agency.

Recommendation: *Develop a stronger national framework to streamline regulation and facilitate collaboration between trusted providers*

Focus on place and local need

The Commission's thinking is centred on a shift towards greater strategic partnership and collaboration at both a national and local level. We recognise that there will always be some inevitable tension between national oversight and local agenda-setting – an issue worsened in recent years by piecemeal reform which has blurred the roles and responsibilities of various actors within the education system, contributing to greater inequality both between and within regions.

However, we are clear that coordination at both levels is required to respond to the various learning needs of our society. Local and regional economies and industries create different demands for skills. Similarly, different communities have different social and wellbeing needs. It is therefore vital that, both locally and regionally, people have a voice in developing an offer that effectively meets their needs. Communities, including employers, should feel a real ownership of their local institutions and work with them to ensure the full range of local educational needs are met.

Our core institutions and trusted partners should be valued as key partners and assets in their community, supporting planning as well as delivery. Government should afford greater status and respect to such community institutions, as this would in turn support the cultural shift required to bring greater esteem and respect for lifelong learning.

The precise role of different providers will vary according to the local context and history, but in general adult and community education provides mainly (but not exclusively) local pre-entry and entry-level learning; further education colleges provide general, vocational and technical qualifications up to level 5; sixth form colleges (SFCs) provide 16 – 19 qualifications; universities offer undergraduate and post-graduate education including an important role in delivering technical skills at levels 4 and 5; and independent training providers deliver apprenticeships, sector and technical specialist provision. Many of these providers also deliver vital services for society's most marginalised learners such as prison education, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND).

A provider's strength may depend on estates and resources, including staff expertise, and on relationships with business and community which have developed over many years. Institutions will develop their strategic and curriculum plans based on their specific mission and purpose. Some will focus on vocational and technical education; some may specialise in, for example, land-based education; others will focus on world-class research and some on community education. Many will focus on local and/or regional needs and demand, where others may have a national and/or international focus.

Matching local and national, current and future needs with provision requires local and regional planning and oversight alongside national strategy and oversight. Partnership in an integrated system also means joint working with other services including health, housing, social integration and vulnerable families to ensure comprehensive place-based approaches. The key principle should be that there are no gaps which leave

learner needs unmet locally, and that partnership arrangements enable different providers to work to their strengths.

Harnessing the digital dimension

Achieving social inclusion and increasing engagement with learning means reaching out to people in new and innovative ways and ensuring they are equipped to engage with the changing world. We won't achieve better outcomes for learners, communities and employers by simply working in the same ways we have always done; it is important that our lifelong learning system is able to evolve in response to changing needs and priorities and technology has a key role to play in this.

It is also crucial that, in our increasingly digital world, our system supports people to develop the digital skills that allow them to engage fully – as learners, citizens, workers and consumers. Digital skills are central to facilitating social justice and ensuring that people are not left behind by the fourth industrial revolution.

Embedding digital technology within our lifelong learning system can bring a number of important benefits to learners and providers, including:

- **Opening up new opportunities and methods for skills development:** e.g. through virtual or augmented reality (VR/AR) or simply by making learning easier to access through mobile devices.
- **Improving levels of engagement and retention:** innovative design, gaming and the use of tablets and mobile phones all have the potential to increase engagement and allow learners to access learning more flexibly.
- **Reducing time to achieve competence:** e.g. through provision of real time feedback; using learner progression data to pinpoint where efforts and interventions can be most effective; or freeing up tutor time for teaching activity.
- **New models of assessment:** virtual assessments can be far less daunting than the traditional formal external test, but are no less rigorous or objective being based on learner data.
- **Adaptive and responsive learning:** learning software can monitor learners' progress and respond flexibly by tailoring content to the areas where most help is needed. This can apply to a range of learning from basic maths and English to sophisticated areas like medicine and accountancy.

The Commission is clear that digital learning should complement, not replace, face to face learning which will often remain an important dimension of learning – particularly for certain groups who may need specific support (e.g. older learners). We see the use of digital technology as an aide to learning, not as a cheap alternative. Providers (including their teaching staff) will need to be properly equipped and trained to make the most effective use of technology, and a strong focus will need to be placed on the importance of developing digital skills. This will require commensurate investment.

Finally, whilst we need to meet local and national requirements, we also need to recognise that many employers work in an international environment and education institutions are increasingly globally linked, both digitally and in practice. Both nationally and locally, strategies need to recognise the importance of global networks and utilise technology to broaden learner experience and opportunity.

Section 5: Building a lifelong learning culture

In the past, lifelong learning has in many cases been treated as something of a bolt-on to wider education approaches rather than a central priority for business and policy-makers, resulting in underinvestment and piecemeal reform. In addition, government policy has often dictated objectives to the various actors who support and deliver learning, rather than involving them in constructing a shared strategy.

Realising the Commission's vision will therefore require a significant, wide-reaching and long-term shift in how we approach lifelong learning as a society. A cultural change is needed to fully recognise the value of lifelong learning as a public good, and strategically reposition it as an integral undertaking – for individuals, for employers and across government and civil society.

Achieving this shift in culture will mean changing how lifelong learning is conceptualised, promoted, funded, delivered and consumed. It will rely on a collective determination to tackle major existing impediments including bureaucracy, complexity, instability and a lack of capacity to actually develop and deliver more skills.

Our central aim must be to develop a strong, self-reliant and high-trust system that has full buy-in from all those who play a part in it. To achieve this, it is important that we are clear about the rights, roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders. Building a social partnership model where government, individuals, providers, employers and trade unions all have a stake in the system, derived from entitlements and responsibilities, will be key to underpinning the shift in approach.

Previous attempts to try to arrive at a settled distribution of responsibilities between state, employer and individual – for example by the National Skills Task Force in 2000 and the 2006 Leitch Review of Skills – have run into issues when governments failed to provide consistent support to these settlements, or abandoned them in pursuit of arbitrary national targets for qualification achievement and learner volumes. The government therefore has a crucial role to play both in setting the tone for change and in ensuring the long-term sustainability of a new culture for lifelong learning.

This shift must also include a renewed focus on the treatment and professionalism of those delivering lifelong learning. The recent cuts to education funding have led to real-term cuts in education staff pay, with those in further and adult education hit hardest. Addressing this is critical if we are to attract and retain the experienced workforce we need, especially those with the relevant industry experience required to ensure currency in teaching of key technical skills. Staff must be properly rewarded and supported to be an equal partner in the development of the vision that we have articulated.

Embedding lifelong learning across public services

The Commission is of the view that rethinking and creating a comprehensive intergenerational lifelong learning system requires building out from the National Education Service to other areas of public policy in order to inspire people of all ages into learning. This means ensuring that national and local government embed lifelong learning into their agenda – both proactively ensuring that policies promote learning and that there are not unintended negative consequences arising from any new policy. A drive to embed lifelong learning that reaches into and across generations and diverse communities needs to be at the heart of education reform. For parents wishing to read to their toddlers and help their growing children with homework, people wishing to learn skills to support their new hobby, or for those aspiring to develop occupational expertise in a new field, finding, accessing and affording appropriate provision is, currently, a real challenge.

Assuming that our prospective learners have been able to identify the ‘right course’ or learning opportunity, a range of other factors (including but not limited to class, gender and ethnicity) affect whether they will be able to participate. For some, particularly those living in our rural communities, the lack of public transport will be a barrier. For some, existing work and family commitments mean that they need to access online provision but the lack of superfast broadband connectivity in their area makes this difficult. For others undertaking ‘self-directed learning’, they are impeded by the closure of their town library. For many, if not all, cost is likely to be a major consideration.

It is, therefore, impossible to build a truly integrated lifelong learning system if education is ‘boxed-off’ from other aspects of the public realm. The plea for ‘join-up’ is not new, but the scope and potential for generating meaningful articulation of what this means in practice is under-developed. However, there are useful models to build upon; for example, a pioneering initiative at the Bromley by Bow Centre²³ in a disadvantaged area in East London shows how education, health and social policy

Case study: Bromley by Bow Centre, London

The Bromley by Bow Centre combines a community centre with a GP practice/health centre offering wide-ranging services and opportunities for local people, including education and training, social and sporting activities, and support for those looking for jobs. The availability of ‘social prescribing’ is a key aspect of the offer, with a GP, nurse, or other healthcare able to refer patients to a specialist link worker to talk about the issues affecting them and to identify appropriate services often including education and training, with a view to improving health, well-being and life-chances.

can be effectively linked to benefit individuals.

Duckworth and Smith show clearly in their FE: Transforming lives and communities project²⁴ that there are substantial social, as well as economic, benefits to lifelong learning, and that foregrounding it not only within the formal education system but also within other policy areas would have positive side effects.

²³ See <https://www.bbbc.org.uk/>

²⁴ Duckworth, V. and Smith, R. (2019), op. cit.

Earlier research by the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, funded by the then Department for Education and Skills, '*reveals many of the ways in which education underpins the maintenance of personal well-being and social cohesion. It prevents or inhibits decline and, more positively, reinforces on a continuing and usually unspectacular basis the health of individuals or communities, to an extent that is largely unrecognised or at least left deeply implicit.*'²⁵

A joined-up approach which explicitly recognises the social as well as economic benefits of lifelong learning is long overdue, and sits at the heart of the culture change we want to see. To do this requires a focus on lifelong learning not only in education policy and the formal education system, but also through a properly resourced, integrated, co-operative and transparent National Education Service that is articulated with, and supported by, wider areas of public policy.

Recommendation: *Introduce a public duty for all policymakers to consider the impact of their policies on lifelong learning and social justice, and develop plans which contribute to the fulfilment of the aims of the National Education Service.*

Developing a learner-centred system

When thinking about how to reconfigure lifelong learning, the Commission has taken individuals as its starting point. Ensuring that individuals can access the skills and learning they need – whether for employment or personal fulfillment – is fundamental to the success of the National Education Service.

Our existing education system is implicitly front-loaded and fundamentally designed around a model of learners progressing through particular educational gateways at specific ages – GCSEs at 16; A-Levels at 18; a degree at 21. The need for further study is often described in terms of a deficit model designed to help those that have not successfully passed through these gateways.

However, this “norm” only functions for around a minority of learners; for instance, three fifths (60%) of school students do not achieve a ‘strong pass’ (grade 5) in GCSE English and maths at 16²⁶, and 40% of 19 year olds do not reach Level 3.²⁷ The current system provides far too few chances to progress from this position, with those over the age of 23 not eligible for full state funding for their first Level 3 qualification, and young people over the age of 19 not eligible for full funding for their second. This is despite the significant improvement to life chances and choices that holding a full Level 3 qualification offers. The take up of Advanced Learner Loans has remained low since their introduction; in 2014/15, the take up was only £149 million out of an allocation of £397 million.

In other words, people in their mid-twenties who do not feel comfortable taking out a student loan to fund their education are effectively locked out of progressing beyond Level 2. Research shows that tuition fee loans are not an effective panacea for tuition

²⁵ Schuller, T., Brassett-Grundy, A., Green, A., Hammond, C. and Preston, J., Learning, Continuity and Change in Adult Life (2002), <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/83569.pdf>

²⁶ Department for Education, Key Stage 4 including Multi-Academy Trust performance (revised), (January 2019), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/774014/2018_KS4_main_text.pdf

²⁷ Department for Education, Level 2 and 3 attainment in England: Attainment by age 19 in 2018 (April 2019), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/791405/L23_attainment_2018_main_text.pdf

fees, and that increased fees have created a further barrier to education, particularly for mature students.²⁸

We know from research that adopts a 'life course' perspective about the importance of life-stage (not just age) in affecting individuals' propensity, and motivation for learning. Increasingly diverse biographical trajectories mean that people want and need to engage at different times in their lives and for different reasons. Any lifelong learning system predicated on standard age-related, front-loaded provision is simply inadequate.

The pace of change in relation to work and technology also means that this frontloaded system is increasingly insufficient to meet changing needs. Our approach to lifelong learning must be based on serving not just the 1/3 of learners that progress sequentially at different age points but also the 2/3 of the population who do not progress in that way.

A universal, funded entitlement to learn

In January 2019, the International Labour Organisation's Global Commission on the Future of Work²⁹ called for *'the formal recognition of a universal entitlement to lifelong learning and the establishment of an effective lifelong learning system.'* They argued that: *'leveraging the transformations under way to open doors and create opportunities for human development requires that workers have an entitlement to lifelong learning.'* The Commission strongly supports that view. The aim of a universal entitlement is to move learning from something that belongs to the state or other providers and is to be "given" to people, to something that belongs to all citizens from birth to death.

Creating a universal entitlement entrenches learning as one of the fundamental rights that constitute citizenship in the 21st century, and acts to shift the balance in the education system toward the learner, enfranchising those who at present do not engage in learning as adults and are not well served by the system. It also recognises that while every citizen's life path is different, lifelong learning is especially crucial at transitional points such as returning to work, mid-life and retirement.

Our view is that the entitlement should include as a minimum:

- Access to fully funded local learning appropriate to need for all groups at all ages up to and including Level 3 – including modules of learning, and learning in the community, as well as full qualifications
- The equivalent of 6 years' publicly funded credits at level 4 and upwards which can be used for full time, part time and modular studies.

In order to deliver on these objectives, a Labour government would need to make it a central policy aim to ensure the availability of minimum levels of provision in all areas, including community learning, to meet local demand for learning up to level 3. The lack of adequate funding in further and adult education in the last decade has led to a drastic drop in the availability of provision, the number of learning hours per student per week, and overall capability and sustainability of provider infrastructure. Without

²⁸ Department for Education, Post 18 Choice of Part-Time Study (May 2019), (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/80438/2/Post_18_Choice_of_Part-Time_Study.pdf); Department for Education, Impact of the student finance system on participation, experience and outcomes of disadvantaged young people (May 2019), (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/80507/8/Impact_of_the_student_finance_system_on_disadvantaged_young_people.pdf)

²⁹ International Labour Organisation, Global Commission on the Future of Work: Work for a Brighter Future, (2019) https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---cabinet/documents/publication/wcms_662410.pdf

consistent levels of provision, access to the rights proposed would be unequal, so the government would need to support providers in rebuilding capacity in order to meet demand and ensure equality of access.

The general right we propose for local access to learning up to level 3 and 6 years' credits at level 4 and above is unequivocally aimed at the adults, part time learners and other priority groups that have found it difficult to participate in learning in the past decade. Our objective and focus is to rebuild this participation and to ensure that our proposed entitlements prioritise these learners first. The Commission's intention is that the entitlements would be used primarily in a non-linear fashion to encourage and enable people to return to learning over their lifetime and reach those who have fallen out of the system or who aren't normally engaged.

Further thought and close monitoring of behaviour including that of individuals, employers and providers will be required as the entitlements are implemented, to ensure they properly support this principle of lifelong engagement and do not unintentionally divert resources elsewhere. If the proposed entitlements generate new behaviours from other groups and institutions, any response should be guided by these priorities. Accordingly, if there is a need to manage annual volumes, a Labour government should budget to meet likely demand and guarantee funding for these defined priority groups first.

To support engagement, additional focus could also be given to certain groups identified within the National Education Service strategy. The Commission has suggested a number of groups it believes should be prioritised, including:

- Prisoners & ex-offenders
- ESOL learners
- Adults without L1 & L2
- Those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- Post-state-pension retirement groups
- Those with specific roles in supporting the UK's climate transition

Other examples might include socially and economically vulnerable groups such as those affected by mass redundancies, new migrants, single parents³⁰ and labour market returners. Labour should set out its priority groups clearly and in advance as part of its NES strategy, and consider how best to support them to effectively utilise their entitlement.

In order to enable a fully flexible and accessible system, Labour should ensure that providers adopt a consistent approach to the acceptance of credits as evidence of prior learning. Labour should also seek to safeguard quality by ensuring only providers that have an adequate track record in terms of the quality of provision and their own workforce standards be considered for public funding.

We also recognise that while levels are a useful way to describe the qualification system, they are not the be all and end all because learners, and indeed employers, sometimes have other needs which the entitlement needs to be flexible enough to accommodate.

³⁰ Marie's example on the Further Education: Transforming Lives website highlights the benefits of engaging in lifelong learning as a single parent:

<https://transforminglives.web.ucu.org.uk/2017/10/02/marie-education-and-empowerment/>

It will be government's responsibility to ensure that all citizens are informed about their entitlement, particularly at common transitional life points including retirement, via both direct communication and awareness raising activities. The right to learn should be incorporated into wider legislation governing workers' rights and entitlements regarding flexible working arrangements.

Recommendation: *Introduce a universal, publicly-funded right to learn through life, underpinned by a minimum entitlement to fully-funded local level 3 provision and the equivalent of 6 years' publicly-funded credits at level 4 and above, with additional focus on defined priority groups.*

Alongside the personal learning entitlement, it is crucial to recognise that many learners face other practical and financial challenges which can prevent them from engaging in learning. The ambitions of the new lifelong learning system will be frustrated unless we can be clear that potential learners will not be discouraged from engaging because of issues like caring responsibilities, transport fares or the cost of materials. Labour should therefore ensure adequate, means-tested maintenance grants available to adults at all levels and all modes of study.

Recommendation: *Develop means-tested maintenance support for adults to facilitate access to learning.*

Support for all higher-level learning

Alongside the entitlement model, the Commission believes it is also necessary to think about where additional support may be required to facilitate study at level 4 and above.

There is an acknowledged shortfall of people educated to level 4 and 5 in the UK. This is partly because of low progression from levels 2 and 3, but in recent years there have also been sharp declines in levels 4 and 5 study overall as well as among mature and part-time learners. Between 2009/10 and 2016/17, the numbers of mature students studying on other undergraduate courses fell by 67%. The Commission expects that the entitlement will help to reverse this trend and believes that stronger support for provision at these levels will generate significant social, economic and individual benefits. However, given the additional costs of providing to certain groups – e.g. mature, part-time and commuter students whose needs may be more complex – there may be a case for a direct funding premium to support providers in catering to these groups.

Ensuring that learners can access level 4-6 learning is important in its own right, but is also crucial in terms of progression to postgraduate-level qualifications. In the UK, demand for postgraduate learning is set to continue to increase in the coming years, in large part because of our increasingly technology-based economy. In the area of research and development alone, the UK will need growing numbers of highly educated individuals if it is to meet the government's ambitions to develop a true knowledge economy. To meet the target of 2.4% of GDP being spent on R&D, we will need to educate at least 260,000 more researchers (PhD/Level 8). The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) Working Futures report estimated that between 2014 and 2024 there will a 30% increase in the number of workers

holding a Level 7 or 8 qualification, but Research Councils and universities must have the financial support to deliver this.³¹

Finally, those who wish to undertake a Master's degree must currently self-fund by paying for their course directly or taking out a Master's Loan. However, the loan amount available (£10,280) is, for many learners, insufficient to support both their fees and living costs. This substantially disadvantages those from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds and in so doing prevents the UK economy from benefiting from the talents of all of its people. Although the Commission recognises that the proposed entitlement model may facilitate some students to undertake some level 7 study, it is expected that this would not normally be the case and further support may be required to ensure study at level 7, and progression to level 8, is not frustrated. Growth of degree apprenticeships could provide a useful mechanism to facilitate progression and mobility in this area.

We have not developed specific proposals for supporting postgraduate learning, but our view is that Labour should give further thought to how it might support progression to these levels of study as it considers its broader approach to research and development spending and industrial strategy.

Recommendation: *Explore how to better support progression to postgraduate study as part of a broader approach to research and development spending and industrial strategy.*

Lifelong enrolment

At present, many parts of the education system are structured in such a way as to frame the learner-provider relationship as one that exists for a relatively short period of time, usually while pursuing a course of study for a defined period or length of credit. With notable exceptions in adult and community learning, which tends to be less transactional, it is often the case that when the learner has completed their initial period of study, usually when they are younger, their relationship with that provider ends.

The Commission believes there could be great value in shifting that relationship from being time limited to one of lifelong enrolment, as is already being attempted and considered in different educational systems across the world. We know from existing behavioural economics research that keeping participants enrolled in a system (for example with pensions) leads to greater long-term engagement.

Lifelong enrolment would mean providers being responsible for embedding a relationship with learners that would allow them to offer new opportunities to those with whom they have nurtured a relationship for many years. While international examples of this approach have mainly focused on higher education, we believe that there is great potential for the principle to apply to a wide range of provider types.

Indeed, if lifelong enrolment is to be meaningful and effective where the greatest need is, changes in the connections between providers at different levels will be required; this could include encouraging institutions at all levels to partner up into families of diverse providers and develop learning communities. This partnership approach to

³¹ UKCES, Working Futures 2014-2024 (2016), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/514285/Working_Futures_Headline_Report_final_for_web_PG.pdf

enrolment could help to underpin the focus on place and local need, with providers working together to nurture continued engagement of local people in learning.

Case study: London South Bank University (LSBU)

LSBU has established a 'family' of like-minded specialist education providers, offering learners the opportunity to transfer between technical, vocational and academic pathways. The LSBU family includes a modern university, a further education college, an 11-19 academy and university technical college (UTC) - both with an engineering specialism. LSBU is also establishing a new Institute for Professional and Technical Education (IPTE) to provide a one-stop-shop for employers and learners who wish to participate in apprenticeships.

The recasting of the relationship between institutions and learners that we favour would be based on five building blocks:

- An opportunity for individuals to take online self-assessments, in order to understand their own learning needs
- A right upon enrolment to lifetime access to beginner and taster content, free of charge, whether at institution or system level – with public universities, colleges and other reputable providers encouraged to work together to provide these opportunities.
- The encouragement of those who complete courses to act as ambassadors or learning mentors in order to persuade others of the benefits of getting involved in lifelong learning
- An ability to access some of the wider facilities that the provider 'family' may have – e.g. sports or cultural facilities
- Lifelong enrolment would mean – within reason – taking the time required to finish the course.

Recommendation: Encourage a shift towards lifelong enrolment in learning, supported by groups of providers working in partnership.

Supporting employee rights to training

In order to ensure that people can access the lifelong learning opportunities from which they would benefit, Labour needs to encourage employers to invest in learning for their staff. While this should certainly include work-related training, it should also extend beyond this in recognition that learning of all kinds can have significant positive impacts on the confidence, motivation and engagement of employees. The current right to request time off for training is too weak and does not support enough workers to benefit from learning. It should be transformed into a right for all workers to access paid time off for training.

The details of such a scheme need to be carefully designed in consultation with trade unions and employers to ensure that it is not unduly burdensome or bureaucratic but in principle:

- a) it should cover a wide range of qualifications, not just limited to workers' current jobs;
- b) workers should be able to save up their rights from year to year within limits, such as moving to a new employer;

- c) it should be open to all workers including those in the gig economy, and
- d) priority should be given to the lowest paid and least skilled who currently have almost no chance to train.

The Commission recognises that additional support will be required to ensure that extending employee rights in this way does not adversely affect small and medium-sized businesses. It will be necessary to explore ways for employers to share risk and resource in order to facilitate such an approach and to determine how this right to learn, and the support required to access it, should be extended to people who are self-employed. Wherever possible we should look to build on existing practice, such as the entitlement to maternity allowance for people not eligible for statutory maternity pay.

Recommendation: *Work with employers and trade unions to introduce a right to paid time off for training.*

Section 6: Navigating the lifelong learning system

Ensuring that the right people can access the right learning at the right time is key to the success of any lifelong learning system. Central to this is ensuring that people are inspired to want to learn, aware of the opportunities available to them, and supported to identify and access the learning which will most effectively meet their needs.

The government has a central role in promoting lifelong learning, but promotion alone will not ensure effective matching of people with opportunities. We need to shift the focus towards inspiring adults to consider learning as a possibility - something that may never have crossed their radar before - and develop a meaningful, long-term engagement with learning.

IAG for the 21st century

Research for the Department for Education into how and why adults decide to undertake learning found that before actively contemplating learning, most adults are focused on sustaining their lives and do not see personal value in learning. It will not be enough to engage people to simply identify a list of barriers such as cost, lack of childcare, and present solutions to these, if active consideration is not on the cards. An effective Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) system will therefore need to cater for adults in the phase of pre-contemplation as well as those actively considering engaging in learning.³²

One of the strengths of the UK education sector is the diversity of provision – with courses varying in length, mode of teaching and learning, and type of study. This diversity helps to accommodate the diverse needs and interests of the millions of learners who engage with the system in the National Education Service, but with this flexibility of provision comes the risk of greater complexity for the learner and potential for unevenness in quality. In that context, it is imperative that learners should be able to understand and navigate the diverse education landscape; independent, fully funded IAG is central to that.

Our vision is for a NES-branded IAG framework, building substantially on the National Careers Service, which reaches into every aspect of public policy and is designed and delivered by a professionally trained careers workforce. We believe that this new IAG service should deliver nationally agreed standards of service but be flexible enough to meet local, sectoral and technological needs and – crucially – that it should be sited wherever possible within the community. We see, for example, an exciting opportunity to reinvigorate the public library service by co-locating NES IAG within its infrastructure, but other examples might include SureStart and Jobcentre Plus sites.

The current lack of high quality IAG poses several serious risks to the NES. Failure to implement it could:

- Entrench privilege. This could shut out people who do not have the social capital or connections to navigate the education landscape, leaving those who do with even more opportunities and prospects.
- Limit aspirations and opportunities. Without the inside knowledge of all the opportunities available to them, learners may be unaware of potential

³² Department for Education, Decisions of adult learners (September 2018), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/742108/DfE_Decisions_of_adult_learners.pdf

pathways, or be less able to evaluate their quality, so halting or impeding progression.

- Fail to meet societal needs. In a world where the shelf life of skills is getting shorter, the NES must be able to future-proof the economy and society. It can only do that if IAG exists to connect people with the right opportunities to upskill and retrain.
- Undermine provision. If parts of the NES are unable to reach individuals best suited for those pathways, then it risks inhibiting the diversity and effectiveness of the sector.

IAG is not simply an add-on to the NES, it is the interface that prospective learners will often interact with first to understand their options and entitlements and give them subsequent support with their progression through the system. Furthermore it will work to engage those who have not considered education as an option, and open up the possibilities of learning to new audiences.

In recent years, the government has hollowed out the infrastructure and funding for independent IAG for prospective learners. Previous support services such as AimHigher and Connexions existed to support young people with their options but have been cut. This chronic underinvestment has placed the burden on parents and teachers to assist students, with all the associated risks highlighted above. Any new system must not simply be a revival of former schemes, however successful. New schemes must be coordinated under the framework of the NES to ensure they fulfil eligibility, quality and accountability criteria and are open to independent inspection.

The recent report of the Post-18 Review of Education and Funding³³ (the Augar Review) made only modest recommendations on IAG, suggesting that *‘every secondary school is able to be part of a careers hub, and that training is available to all careers leaders and that more young people have access to meaningful careers activities and encounters with employers’*. This recommendation fails to acknowledge the millions of adults who must have access to IAG and is a missed opportunity to shed light on the inconsistent picture of independent IAG across the UK.

The Commission believes that a new system of IAG to support the NES should be based on some key principles:

- Bespoke and person-centred - the learner and their journey must be at the centre of any new IAG scheme. The advice and guidance given at every stage must be fully informed about learners’ current situation and future entitlements and should give them the full range of options. Individual learning needs must be assessed and the correct mechanisms put in place to support learners. The key aim must be to ensure that they are making the right next steps in education, by providing not just careers advice, but also advice about learning needs, further study, and flexible options including part-time study.
- Accessible and inclusive - access to independent IAG must be freely and easily accessible to all regardless of background. Age, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, socioeconomic background, or any other characteristic should not form a barrier to anyone accessing IAG. On the contrary, IAG must be cognisant of structural inequalities and must tailor support to help those who need it the most.

³³ Independent Panel Report, Post-18 Review of Education and Funding (May 2019), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-18-review-of-education-and-funding-independent-panel-report>

- Versatile and comprehensive - the education sector is dynamic and evolving and any IAG system must be agile and responsive to change. Any new structure must have the flexibility to adapt to existing infrastructure as well explore new frontiers in order to interact with people who have not accessed education in traditional ways. At every stage, learners must be able to access the full range of options available to them.
- Well-resourced and independent - IAG must be given fully independently, without prejudice, and solely in the interest of the learner. The use of existing structures should be maximized where possible. However, meaningful investment in IAG must be made to ensure that already stretched staff aren't taking on further responsibilities without recognition or relevant remuneration, nor making their workloads unmanageable.

These principles combined will ensure that the independent IAG system effectively serves the interests of the learner, society and the economy.

In order to satisfy the principles above, any new IAG system or structure will require extensive coordination across existing providers and agencies, whilst investing in new infrastructure to support this work.

The new system should be based on a truly cross-sectoral approach that sees colleges, community providers, employers, training providers and universities operating under the same framework. It should also recognise the important role of trade unions and voluntary organisations in signposting learners to engage with the service.

To ensure consistency, the majority of the IAG workforce – though based in education providers, employers and community settings – should be nationally employed and in receipt of a common professional qualification and registered status, as well as being subject to a clear set of nationally agreed standards. All organisations funded by the NES working with adults should have a statutory duty to deliver these standards.

In addition to these key principles, the Commission has identified some specific initiatives that it believes could effectively underpin the entitlement model outlined in section 5. The first is a right to face-to-face careers and study guidance interviews at key points over a person's lifecourse. Such interviews would be available more frequently for those with lower levels of qualifications on a sliding scale, with those at level 4 and above receiving two interviews at appropriate transition points in their careers.

The second is the creation of a new NES branded course and learning hub, modelled on the OU's OpenLearn, and which enables easy access to introductory and taster sessions both online and face-to-face.

The Commission is clear that this blended approach of physical and digital IAG infrastructure is vital in ensuring that learners are well supported. There is a wealth of information publicly available for prospective learners online. NSS data, Discover Uni (previously Unistats), LEO (Longitudinal Educational Outcomes data) and league tables provide statistics, metrics and data intended to inform student choice but with no bespoke advice or guidance accompanying it there are huge limitations in its effectiveness in supporting learners to navigate the system and make genuinely informed choices.

Digital technology also has an important role to play in ensuring a dynamic and responsive IAG system - for example through the use of algorithms to develop

recommendations for courses based on people's previously expressed interests - although the Commission is clear that this should not be at the expense of investment in skilled IAG professionals to provide support in person.

Recommendation: *Introduce a national, NES-branded Information, Advice and Guidance service which is available both face-to-face and online, sited where possible within the local community, and underpinned by a professionally trained workforce which operates under a common framework and nationally agreed standards.*

Allowing learners to take control of their learning

The Commission recognises that, for the entitlement to be effective, we need a mechanism by which individuals can engage with it in a way that both empowers and enhances their learning.

Several countries are experimenting with forms of individual learning accounts (ILAs) as a means to give learners agency and a sense of ownership in accessing and managing their learning journey. In the UK, learning accounts have had mixed success. ILAs were introduced under the last Labour government, but were found to be vulnerable to fraud.³⁴ On the other hand, in Scotland and Wales, accounts have been found to be an effective system of channeling funds to learners. Unionlearn also found that collective learning accounts, where groups of individuals (e.g. workers) pooled their entitlements to create a funding stream for a provider to run a particular course, were popular with employers and helped to raise awareness and appetite for learning.

It is clear to the Commission that many of the previous issues with learning accounts have arisen as a result of poor implementation rather than flaws in the concept itself. However, while accounts offer some clear benefits and advances in technology would make fraud more difficult, it would be wrong to risk the proposed new entitlement being associated with the failings of previous attempts to implement accounts effectively. We therefore believe that in order to really attract and engage learners we need to move on from accounts.

We also believe that we can learn useful lessons from abroad; Singapore for example, has created SkillsFuture - a national movement for lifelong learning - to help articulate and deliver its entitlement to learning.³⁵

However the universal right to learn proposed by the Commission goes beyond anything other countries are offering and requires a delivery structure that is equally groundbreaking. Technology has opened up opportunities for a more integrated and innovative approach.

We therefore propose the development of a new personalised digital platform which would combine the personal ownership element of an account alongside the new digital capability to track and manage the use of the individual entitlement. We believe it is crucial that every adult citizen feels a powerful sense of ownership which will encourage greater take up of learning opportunities and build a strong foundation of public support for the National Education Service, in the same way that there is strong public support for the NHS.

³⁴ National Audit Office, Individual Learning Accounts, (October 2012), <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/individual-learning-accounts/>

³⁵ See <https://www.skillsfuture.sg/AboutSkillsFuture>

The Commission's vision is of a personalised digital platform which would allow learners to:

- track how they use and invest their full 6 year equivalent entitlement,
- engage with providers via lifelong enrolment to apply for entitlement accredited courses,
- engage in existing and new online educational activities
- enrol for life with institutions or provider family groups
- receive personalised learning/career information based upon the data on their learning preferences which has been collected via the portal
- interact with other learners and celebrate their own learning

In developing the platform, Labour could draw on existing models such as the national apprenticeships hub³⁶, and adopt a cross-departmental approach to ensure the platform integrates effectively with other online public services.

If lifelong learning is going to become more attractive, in particular to the hard to reach, than the myriad of other activities available to people in the early 21st century, it has to be presented in a way that reflects the importance of digital engagement, social media and harnesses the potential of artificial intelligence. The new digital platform will aim to do this.

Recommendation: *Develop a personalised digital platform which allows learners to track the use of their learning entitlements and engage with providers, other learners and related services including careers advice and guidance.*

³⁶ <https://www.apprenticeships.gov.uk/>

Section 7: Fostering strategic partnerships to support lifelong learning

Our education and skills system is extremely complex with multiple players and stakeholders (see Appendix 5). At the heart of the complexity is the reality that we need to provide educational opportunities at different levels to people of different ages. Education is not a ladder that leads higher rung by rung, but a scramble net that serves the needs of learners climbing across and indeed sometimes down in terms of level – not just upwards.

Currently, our education institutions are not supported to function within an integrated and co-ordinated environment, making these non-linear transitions and the provision of advice and guidance challenging. The education system is characterised by silos and varying regulatory regimes that add to the complexity. As well as joining up with other public policy agendas, the Commission believes that the National Education Service should support a cohesive system which facilitates smooth transitions between different education providers and learning opportunities.

To realise our vision and ambitions for learner entitlements, we must also ensure that there are sufficient learning opportunities for people to access. While online and blended learning will play a crucial role, for many people access must be local and actively supported. A key element of this is the need for adequate funding for learning opportunities, and for the staff, infrastructure and facilities to support them. Equally important, though, institutions must be supported to work together to create clear pathways and meet the needs of all learners through their respective missions and specialisms, for the long-term and strategic good of local, regional and national economies.

Developing a collaborative model for delivery

In order for providers and employers to work together effectively in a new lifelong learning system, it is important that each of them has a clear understanding of what is expected in terms of their role in the design and delivery of learning. There therefore needs to be a national long-term strategic framework for an integrated and cohesive post-16 education system, which encompasses both further and higher education.

To achieve this, we must move away from a funding model that incentivises individual institutions to compete against each other in pursuit of resources. The Office for Students was set up to oversee the ongoing marketisation of higher education. Whilst the diversity of the HE sector is, in many regards, a strength, the level of fragmentation created by the increasing marketisation of higher education is not beneficial for the learner or the international reputation of UK universities. It also undermines universities' historic civic status and their ability to contribute to their communities.

In FE, low levels of funding, together with the rigidity and complexity of funding streams and the rules, regulation and performance measures that accompany each stream create a situation where providers must compete. When payments in further education are related to completed qualifications and funding cuts have severely reduced the amount of contact time available, this can push providers to compete for the learners most likely to succeed rather than those who might benefit most. Such competition can exist between all types of providers within the system, and too often it focuses on the provider interests rather than the best interests of the learner.

Rather than being forced to compete, institutions should be incentivised to work collaboratively and for the long-term and strategic good of local, regional and national economies, and the funding and regulatory environment should support this. Therefore within their strategic plans every institution in receipt of public funding should set out principles for partnership working and collaboration, which may be place-based and/or sector-based. On the basis of these strategic plans, publicly funded institutions would be expected and supported to work together to establish and commit to collaborative and/or partnership models and plans, where each institution plays to its strengths and can deliver on its core mission.

Developing collaborative networks of providers will help ensure appropriate coverage of the types and levels of learning required, and fulfil support needs. There are many models for such networks that, if co-ordinated and funded properly, could significantly progress social justice and enhance productivity by making full use of the inherent potential with our diverse communities.

Recommendation: *Require providers in receipt of public funding to set out principles for partnership working and collaboration with other providers and relevant stakeholders.*

National framework, local delivery: building local learning partnerships

In the majority of cases, we anticipate that collaboration would be explicitly focused on serving the needs of a local or regional community and economy. In these circumstances we expect that local and regional government structures and stakeholders will also play a key role in discussions and agreements of the collaboration models and outputs that will best serve local needs.

The Commission believes that trusted local partners, working where necessary with small niche providers and large national providers to address specific needs, could deliver most local lifelong learning.

Embedding a strong role for trade unions in this collaborative model can also bring major benefits. Union learning reps have experience of engaging hard-to-reach learners through peer support and are uniquely placed to raise awareness and support community participation in learning.

Collaboration between universities and FE colleges is long established. Many already employ progression agreements, which facilitate access to individual universities from partner colleges. In recent years, however, some of these arrangements have been undermined by changes to university recruitment patterns and growing competition for students between universities and those FE colleges which offer degrees and other higher education. It is therefore vital that funding arrangements incentivise collaboration rather than competition, as specified above.

Recently, the Department for Education has supported three pilots of closer collaboration. The most integrated of these involves a college becoming a subsidiary of a university, whilst maintaining its own identity and FE character. This removes competition between the two and facilitates educational pathways built around the needs of the learner rather than financial priorities. These and other models could provide templates for the future.

Devolution

The Commission believes that devolution is an important feature of a local, democratically accountable lifelong learning system that works in the interests of local communities and individual students and is based upon the principles of collaboration and cooperation.

Devolution should empower communities to shape services in a way that works for them but the process of devolution to Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) in England has been piecemeal and dependent on each area making deals with central government. This has led to an increasingly complex and variable system of local and regional accountability, making it harder for students, staff and communities to understand how they can shape education policy and hold decision-makers to account. More areas should be supported to take on devolved powers so that their communities can benefit from having influence over what happens in their area.

We acknowledge that there is a potential tension between giving more control to local areas and creating a postcode lottery. We would not wish to see learners excluded from learning opportunities purely because of where they live. A criticism that has been made of the current MCA system is that it creates duplication and is inefficient, with each MCA needing to set up its own administrative processes taking vital funds out of the system. It is clear that any process of devolution going forward should be more strategic so as to minimise these inefficiencies, and to focus on getting the best outcomes for the people and employers within local areas.

Our collaborative lifelong learning system will allow local partners to work together to identify regional skills needs, ensure there is provision available to meet those needs and match up individuals with learning opportunities through the independent information, advice and guidance service. MCAs could have an important strategic role here in coordinating the planning and commissioning of services – so for instance that health, housing, care and justice services at a local level are working to support the education agenda.

For example, the strategy being developed in Greater Manchester, led by the mayor and the combined authority³⁷ is beginning to show the benefits of taking a city-region, holistic and inter-related approach to policy reform. Focusing on the connectivity between post-16 education and skills, work and employment, transport, housing and the environment is helping to shape the future of the city-region with benefits for citizens, the wider community and economy.³⁸

The autonomy of the devolved nations and regions must be respected and there has to be scope for governments and authorities to flex their offer to benefit their residents. However the role for national government is to work to eradicate inequalities between regions and nations of the UK so that learners are not disadvantaged on the basis of where they live. Equality of access to education, and the inclusivity of the system must be as much at the heart of devolution as democratic accountability is.

³⁷ The Greater Manchester Strategy: Our People, Our Place (2017), https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/1084/greater_manchester_summary_full_version.pdf

³⁸ See the Final Report of the Industrial Strategy Policy Commission (November 2017) <http://industrialstrategycommission.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/The-Final-Report-of-the-Industrial-Strategy-Commission.pdf>

Sector and specialist partnerships

As well as fostering local partnerships, it is important to consider how employers, sector bodies and groups with specialist interests could also work more effectively to support a cohesive lifelong learning system.

Employers' inputs are valuable, but without the means to deliver coordination and the ability to pool expertise and resources, strategic engagement with other stakeholders in relation to workplace learning and skill formation is extremely hard to achieve. This is particularly true in sectors dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – yet 60% of all UK private sector employment is in SMEs, and 33% is in firms with fewer than 10 people. This means that collective employer organisation is not a 'nice to have', it is an essential prerequisite for progress.³⁹ Thus, as the MCAs and many of the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) are finding, unless employers are organised, delivery of local skills plans and the development of local industrial strategies is extremely difficult.

In the absence of collective organisation and representation in many sectors, the government finds itself trying to either deal with individual employers (with massive transaction costs attached for both parties, particularly in sectors dominated by SMEs) or has relied upon one-off, self-nominated clubs of employers (for example, the apprenticeship trailblazer groups) to design new qualifications and inform policy development.

One way to facilitate better partnership working for engagement and delivery of lifelong learning and a starting point for a new approach to building collective capabilities would be to investigate greater public investment in and support for Group Training Associations (GTAs). These could assist smaller employers to pool their training efforts and to have access to a collective training resource and expertise that individually they would struggle to support.

Sectoral deals being created under the Industrial Strategy offer another opportunity both to secure employer thought and action on skills, and to link skills issues much more directly than hitherto to innovation, investment and productivity. Similarly, the Labour Party's plans for major infrastructure investments and the Green Deal offer another set of foci around which collective planning and action on skills could be organised. This also chimes with Labour's wider policies on reviving sectoral collective bargaining – which will require the re-creation of effective sectoral employer organisations.

Trade unions also have a vital role to play in supporting employer and sectoral engagement with learning and skills – both through collective bargaining (e.g. for quality apprenticeships) and through the Union Learning Fund (ULF). The national network of Union Learning Reps (ULRs) is uniquely placed to identify and help address learning needs within the workplace. Their contribution is recognised as valuable by employers – 77% say that engagement in ULF learning has a positive

³⁹ Keep, E. (2012) Education and industry: taking two steps back and reflecting, *Journal of Education and Work*, 25:4, 357-379, DOI: [10.1080/13639080.2012.708727](https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2012.708727) and Keep, E. (2015). Governance in English VET: On the functioning of a fractured 'system.' *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 10(4), 464–475. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745499915612185>

effect in their workplaces⁴⁰ – but there is scope to greatly increase their role through increased investment.

The Commission is keen to learn from and build on existing successful schemes. The ULF is a good example of what has to be done to make learning accessible to those who, for generations, have been deprived of learning opportunities and have grown up thinking of schools, colleges and universities as elitist, “not for likes of us” and are struggling to progress in the current world of work.

Workplaces, community centres, sports and social clubs – even pubs are all centres where people gather – and can all be places where people can re-engage with learning. With the help and experience of trade unions, the role of the ULF and a revived network of “Community Learning Champions” could help embed lifelong learning in the heart of the community where it belongs.

Incorporating a stronger element of social partnership, including through bolstering this traditional involvement of trade unions - both in encouraging workplace participation and in policy making along with sectoral skills bodies as is widely the case in other successful countries’ skill systems - will be essential in achieving a cohesive and inclusive approach.

Achievement and Progression

We believe that this single system - based on shared vision and objectives, and encouraging collaboration and partnership based on local, regional and national needs - must be matched by an infrastructure of achievements and qualifications which provide multiple pathways for learners, with enhanced flexibility and clear articulation between levels. It must be simple for people to transfer from one pathway to another and to find provision, supporting their progression and next steps, and avoid gaps and ‘dead-ends’.

If we are to create a truly flexible and responsive system, it will be necessary to improve both the availability and accessibility of higher technical routes. These routes – which should include applied general pathways as well as job-based qualifications - must be opened up to adults, allowing part-time and flexible study which is equitable with other higher education routes. This would be a marked change in direction from the current government’s drive towards T-levels and apprenticeships which are relatively inflexible.

Qualifications are important credentials which must be an integral part of our system and available to all those who need them. They must be valid and reliable, but our emphasis on funding large whole qualifications has created a rigid system with narrow pathways and too many dead-ends. Such qualifications are also slow to develop and slow to adapt so that the whole system is not agile enough to adapt to the changing needs of employers and individuals. Work to strengthen partnerships must include a close examination of how to facilitate an effective system of credit accumulation and transfer which allows learners to build on their previous achievements.

It is also important to consider how non-formal learning, where learners’ achievements are not qualification-based, but which still lead to positive outcomes and progression, can be recognised and valued within the system. Consideration of social metrics (e.g. wellbeing) for both formal and informal learning may provide a useful way of

⁴⁰ Measuring the success of Union Learning (2017), Unionlearn, <https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/sites/default/files/publication/Measuring%20Success%202017.pdf>

quantifying economic and social outcomes for learning, putting both types on an equal footing.

Recommendation: *Examine models of credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) which support people to accumulate and transfer achievements whilst ensuring quality and recognising that not all learning is qualification based.*

Section 8: Encouraging meaningful employer engagement

All workplaces are learning environments and for many adults, provide the main or only opportunity through which they can access structured training and development as well as learning on the job..

Countries that do well in the international league tables of adult learning tend to be ones where demand for skill in the workplace is high, and employers are providing considerable volumes of both formal and informal learning opportunities within work. This is not simply about off-the-job courses; learning in and on the job, from colleagues and practice, delivers huge volumes of skills and knowledge.

Research has consistently shown that managerial grades get significantly more education in the workplace than those in non-managerial grades.⁴¹ Where staff do get workplace training, it tends to focus on workers doing their current job better rather than developing new skills⁴², and there are often few opportunities for developing a career path.⁴³

We also know, through the work of Unionlearn, that the support offered to individuals in the workplace can act as a catalyst to encourage adults to return to learning in an environment within which they feel comfortable. The support offered by ULRs – who are able to engage with their peers in a relatable way - is a unique resource for promoting, sign-posting, engaging and supporting people in learning - in many cases supported by workplace or union learning centres which allow ready access to learning opportunities.

However, UK Labour Force Survey (LFS) data suggests that, while the overall proportion of the workforce receiving training has remained fairly stable between 1997 and 2017, there has been a significant downward trajectory in the number of hours of training being offered to employees. Between 1997 and 2017, the UK (excluding London) witnessed a fall of 61 per cent in the number of training hours per person being trained, and a 65 per cent fall in the number of training hours per persons employed.⁴⁴ Reliance only on training on-the-job has risen; LFS data shows that whereas in 1997 only 28 per cent of training across the UK outside of London was on-the-job only, by 2017 this had risen to 45 per cent.

At the same time, employer investment in skills also appears to be falling, with estimates of the real terms decline in the UK over the last decade ranging between 15 and 30 per cent,⁴⁵ though the long term impact of the apprenticeship levy on this is as yet unknown.

The steady downward trend in formal employer training activity, which is true across most sectors of the economy, needs to be set against a backdrop in which all four UK national governments have been exhorting and, in some instances, financially incentivising employers to undertake more training. The state and individuals (often

⁴¹ Cutter, J., Time to Tackle the Training Divide (2007), TUC Organisation and Services Department, <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/extras/trainingdivide.pdf>

⁴² Kuczera, Field & Windisch, (2016), op. cit.

⁴³ Hudson et al., In-Work Poverty, Ethnicity And Workplace Cultures, Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2013), <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/work-poverty-ethnicity-and-workplace-cultures>

⁴⁴ See <https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/series/series?id=2000026#!/access-data>

⁴⁵ Green, F., Felstead, A., Gallie, D., Inanc, H. and Jewson, N. (2016), The Declining Volume of Workers' Training in Britain. British Journal of Industrial Relations, 54: 422-448. doi:[10.1111/bjir.12130](https://doi.org/10.1111/bjir.12130)

through loans) have increasingly been filling a gap left by an employer retreat from investment in workforce skills. UK employers also spent less than many of their overseas rivals on training; with spending per employee two-thirds lower than the EU average.⁴⁶ There is no lack of appetite for skills in the workplace either⁴⁷; workers generally want to access more skills and training than they are offered at work.⁴⁸

The reasons for the decline are complex and manifold, but they can be attributed at least in part to:

- The distinctive structure of our economy – we have a higher proportion of workers in service sector employment and fewer in manufacturing than some other EU countries, and we have an usually high proportion of workers employed in micro-businesses, whose recording of training activity and investment may not be as accurate as that for larger employers.
- A general tendency within the UK to view labour as a cost to be minimised, with financialisation of assets, digitisation of industry, and the ability of firms to profit from low-skill, low-wage employment models all reducing the incentives to invest in staff.

Furthermore, many firms simply do not possess the capacity to engage meaningfully with lifelong learning. They often lack managerial capacity in ways that lead to weak take up of both technical innovation and leading edge management practices. Overall, the proportion of UK workplaces that have adopted high performance work practices as defined by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) remains low.

There are also particular concerns about the capacity of many UK SMEs because they have a limited ability to develop and sustain adequate models of human resource management (HRM) and employment relations. Many companies need help to establish even the most basic training capacity.

Some employers may be open to making greater investments in workforce skills if the need to do so - for example because of technological change - could be demonstrated. Roughly half of UK employers who responded to the Employer Skills Survey (ESS) said that at present they do train, but could see no need to do more; or did not train and could see no need to.⁴⁹ Both these groups might be persuaded of the need to engage in training in the light of profound technical change impacting on their businesses, and if they are not able simply to recruit the skills that they need.

These factors also speak to the opportunity for the development of new and closer partnerships between employers and providers to work together to design and generate new forms of occupational expertise.⁵⁰ In thinking about what we want from employers and how best we might support this, we have been guided by the following broad principles:

⁴⁶ Keep, E., (2015), op. cit.

⁴⁷ For example, see Simon's story on the Further Education: Transforming Lives website:

<https://transforminglives.web.ucu.org.uk/2016/12/13/simon-employer/>

⁴⁸ Cutter, J., (2007), op. cit.

⁴⁹ Skills Strategy for Londoners: Evidence Base, GLA Economics, (2018),

<https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/skills-strategy-evidence-base.pdf>

⁵⁰ Fuller, A. and Unwin, L., Improving Workplace Capacity as the Prerequisite for Effective Work-based Learning: A Co-production Approach, Work-based Learning as a Pathway to Competence-based Education UNEVOC Network Contribution, (2019),

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Wietske_Kuijter/publication/332370361_Bridging_Demands_on_Education_Innovation_and_Practice-based_Research_The_Case_of_Dutch_Vocational_and_Professional_Education/links/5cb0492892851c8d22e52d42/Bridging-Demands-on-Education-Innovation-and-Practice-based-Research-The-Case-of-Dutch-Vocational-and-Professional-Education.pdf#page=70

1. A recognition that change will need to be incremental, cumulative and carefully managed – we want to avoid yet more top-down re-organisation and to encourage long-term, organic change that can win support from employers and employees alike. Our goals will not be achieved in a single ‘big bang’, but in stages over a 10-year period, with appropriate piloting and evaluation of changes.
2. A determination to tackle major existing impediments, including bureaucracy, complexity, instability and a lack of capacity to actually develop and deliver more skills, with the aim of building a strong, self-reliant and high trust system that can provide high quality and responsive provision. Too often in the past, government policy has dictated objectives to employers and other stakeholders, rather than involve them in constructing a shared strategy.
3. A more flexible and responsive attitude towards employers, unions and other stakeholders, giving them more involvement in, and responsibility for, skills – at the same time as recognising that many employers require support to help them overcome limitations in the training expertise and capacity necessary to deliver effective workforce development. We want a system that works for all employers, not just large firms.
4. A belief that employers, unions and other stakeholders should work together to design their own skills system, appropriate to their locality and sector. The plans for these should be signed off and monitored by the relevant local/regional and national bodies.
5. Employee rights (such as learning entitlements) should mesh with employer rights (such as access to tax relief on skills investment) in order, for example, to facilitate collective learning agreements. We want to incentivise employers to act as ‘good citizens’.
6. An overall strategic belief that relying on incentives, encouragement and support to motivate employers will deliver real gains, and also a presumption that, properly supported, employers and unions would not seek to game the system of funding and monitoring. Those few who did try should face major sanctions.
7. The urgent need to build capacity within firms, unions and other stakeholders to enable them to engage with learning, formulate appropriate strategies and invest effectively in long term education and training, broadly conceived, which will build workplace skills as well as lifelong learning skills.

What we are aiming for a system in which we build higher levels of trust and cooperation, as is the case in most countries that have successful education and training systems.

What do we want employers to deliver?

Before we can decide what to do, we need to be clear what we are trying to achieve. It can be argued that there is an underlying set of requirements in relation to the kinds of activities and inputs that the system needs to see from employers:

1. Co-design (e.g. qualifications, curricula, learning outcomes)
2. Co-investment (the levy, training of the adult workforce)
3. Co-production (T levels, apprenticeships, adult workplace learning)

One of the real weaknesses of English skills policy over the last 30 years or so has been the tendency to view employers as semi-detached ‘customers’ of the skills

system rather than as an integral part of the system itself.⁵¹ This approach is deeply problematic. As much research and various official inquiries (such as Sir Frank McLoughlin's Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning) have demonstrated, high quality vocational learning can only be delivered if providers and companies work together as co-producers and interact via a 'two-way street' approach.⁵²

Employers own training efforts need to be married to, and delivered in close cooperation with, those elements of education and training that are delivered in and outside the workplace by other providers (schools, colleges, universities, and independent training providers of various kinds). At present, all too often employers' training efforts, particularly as they pertain to adult workers, are not seen as forming an integral component of the education system.

Our proposals focus on arriving at a clear allocation of responsibilities so that everyone knows what is being aimed for, capacity building to enable employers, unions and other stakeholders to be able to do more and creating the right incentives to help encourage and support organisations to want to do more.

Who does what? Renegotiating the role of employers

The World Economic Forum argues that in relation to the fourth industrial revolution, "Businesses will need to put talent development and future workforce strategy front and centre to their growth. Firms can no longer be passive consumers of ready-made human capital. They require a new mind-set to meet their talent needs and to optimise social outcomes".⁵³ In the UK, the Industrial Strategy Commission has argued that a new coordinated approach to skills policy is foundational to delivering key priorities, including the green economy, a sustainable health and social care system, supporting high value industries and ensuring growth across the whole country.⁵⁴

Making these kinds of statement is relatively easy, while converting their underlying sentiments into reality is a much tougher proposition. As noted above, in the UK the overall trends on employers' provision of training indicates retreat and retrenchment rather than the acceptance of the need for greater responsibility and investment, and in the face of this reality many adult workers, especially among the lower paid, are concerned about how to pay for re and up-skilling. This suggests that reaching a new, explicit settlement in relation to skills will be an important element underpinning progress. For example, it is essential that individuals and the state, as well as other employers, are very clear on what can and cannot be expected by way of skills development from the individual's current employer.

Incentives to encourage employers to do more

We believe that government needs to re-examine the functioning of the current corporation tax relief offered on investment in skills in order to ensure that it is exerting

⁵¹ Keep, E., (2012), op.cit. and Keep, E., (2015), op. cit.

⁵² CAVTL, It's About Work: Excellent Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (2013), [CAVTL-Its-about-work-Report.pdf](#)

⁵³ World Economic Forum, The Future of Jobs: Employment, Skills and Workforce Strategy for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (2016), http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs.pdf

⁵⁴ Industrial Strategy Commission, (2017), op cit.

the maximum leverage on employers' training decisions, and to investigate how tax relief might be extended to smaller employers.⁵⁵

One model is the research and development (R&D) tax credit system, which covers both large and small firms. There is evidence that this has, over time, had a beneficial effect on private sector investment in R&D.⁵⁶ One issue is that it has rewarded firms that had the capacity and motivation to invest in R&D, and a similar tax credit-based approach to skills would probably benefit those who were already more capable of designing and delivering training rather than those who currently had little or no inclination or ability to train.

This suggests that in addition, we need some more general thinking about incentives (positive and negative) that could be deployed to support employers to think about providing more and better adult training.

Public procurement and the planning regime are two examples that already exist in the UK although the evidence on their impact has been mixed. In some instances (for example, the Olympic Park, and Hinckley Point) an obsession with apprenticeship volumes has proved difficult to turn into actual numbers on the ground and a more flexible and open-ended approach which asked those tendering to think through what additional training they could provide within their contract might be more productive. Given Labour's pledges around major Green Energy investment and other infrastructure projects, making the most of these investments to leverage greater lifelong learning will be important.

Recommendation: Review the effectiveness of the current corporation tax relief in leveraging skills investment, and consider how tax relief might be extended to smaller employers – for example through R&D tax credits.

Enabling employers to be co-producers

For many years now, even when skills policy has been addressing areas of activity which relies directly on employer buy-in, such as apprenticeships and the T level work placements, engagement with employers in relation to co-design and co-production has been poor. Instead, the tendency has been to rely heavily on external providers, working under an outcomes-based accountability and funding regime, that focuses on the number of qualifications awarded rather than on the extent and quality of the on and off-the-job training available to learners.

Successive governments have promoted apprenticeships as a key policy and mechanism for adult training but evidence indicates that all too often they are being used to accredit employees' existing skills rather than enabling them to engage in substantial new learning and development.⁵⁷ The introduction of the apprenticeship

⁵⁵ Reed, Howard, Tax Relief on Training: options for reform (for Unionlearn), (2011), <https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/sites/default/files/publication/tax%20relief%20on%20training%20report.pdf>

⁵⁶ Bloom, Nicholas, Griffith, Rachel and van Reenen, John, (2002), Do R&D tax credits work? Evidence from a panel of countries 1979-1997, *Journal of Public Economics*, 85, issue 1, p. 1-31, <https://EconPapers.repec.org/RePEc:eee:pubeco:v:85:y:2002:i:1:p:1-31> and Fowkes, R., Sousa, J., and Duncan, N., Evaluation of Research and Development Tax Credit: HMRC Working Paper 17 (March 2015), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/413629/HMRC_WorkingPaper_17_R_D_Evaluation_Final.pdf

⁵⁷ Fuller, A, Leonard, P, Unwin, L & Davey, G. 2015, Does apprenticeship work for adults?: the experiences of adult apprentices in England, Institute of Education, <https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv:68132>

levy has the potential to support adults to re-skill; however, there is a strong case for reviewing the levy's implementation to ensure its potential for realising more ambitious approaches to workplace learning and training is realised. Employers' own, in-house capacity has rarely been seen as a source of concern for policy makers, and we know very little about the capability of firms' human resource development or learning and development functions, although anecdotal evidence suggests that in some firms it may be very weak or non-existent.

If government wants a step change in employers' training activity then this means acknowledging that helping to upgrade the workplace as a site of learning will be important.⁵⁸ As Fuller and Unwin suggest, improving capacity is a pre-requisite for effective work-based learning.⁵⁹ This suggests that we need to:

- recognise and professionalise trainers at all levels, through the creation of a significant national programme on the training of trainers - something that exists in almost every other country that has an apprenticeship system, and which used to be a major component of the Manpower Services Commission's (MSC) role in the UK;
- better support cooperation and a co-production approach between employers and providers; and
- provide business support and improvement services that can aid the adoption of new technologies whilst also enabling work re-organisation and job re-design that can deliver better workplace learning opportunities.

As experience in Finland has demonstrated, it is possible, over time, to develop an integrated package of support that can help enable firms to adopt new technologies and to combine this with elements of work re-organisation and job re-design.⁶⁰

New technologies for learning are also an important part of this equation. For example, the appropriate use of distance and blended learning; adaptive, flexible, self-directed, modular learning; the use of AI, big data, gaming and storytelling are all valuable methods which are increasingly used to attract and engage learners in the workplace. The Ufi Charitable Trust has substantial experience of such models, which have a proven track record in building vocational skills.⁶¹

Recommendation: *Develop a package of support for building education and training capacity within employers, to include a national 'train the trainers' programme.*

Locating adult skills within the wider context of economic and industrial policy

As suggested above, the starting point for a new conversation with employers should not be confined to skills policy, important thought that is. If skill is a derived demand (derived from business need) then it is important that economic policy, industrial policy, innovation and employment policy can mesh together in ways that encourage higher levels of demand for skills across the economy and a more skills-rich working environment.

⁵⁸ Ewart Keep & Ken Mayhew (2014) Inequality – 'wicked problems', labour market outcomes and the search for silver bullets, Oxford Review of Education, 40:6, 764-781, DOI: [10.1080/03054985.2014.979580](https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2014.979580), Keep, E. (2015) op. cit. and Keep, E., Improving Skills Utilisation in the UK – Some Reflections on What, Who and How?, SKOPE Research Paper No. 124, <http://www.skope.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Keep-2016.-Improving-Skills-Utilisation-in-the-UK-Some-reflections-on-What-Who-and-How.pdf>

⁵⁹ Fuller & Unwin, (2019), op. cit.

⁶⁰ Keep, E. (2016), op. cit.

⁶¹ See <https://www.ufi.co.uk/projects/completed-projects> for examples

This broader concept of workplace skills will equally help to build wider adult and community learning and promote civic and social development. Such a model is already emerging – in Scotland and Wales, and also within some of the MCAs, particularly Greater Manchester and Greater London. Efforts are underway to develop integrated policies that address job quality, fair work and a living wage, progression in employment, an industrial strategy, innovation, business support and improvement, and skills in a joined-up way.

The key point to note is that without this wider, more connective and supportive policy environment, skills policy is liable to once again fail to deliver on its promises. It cannot be left to do all the heavy lifting on its own. Joining up different policy strands would help to create mutually reinforcing incentives, while developing shared employer understanding and capacity across a range of policy areas would be far more efficient and cost effective than trying to create separate collective mechanisms for each area. It would also allow an integrated 'offer' from government to employers rather than a plethora of uncoordinated and competing schemes, programmes and initiatives.

While policy borrowing from other countries is unworkable, policy learning can help support the development of coordinated national approaches.⁶² One example worth exploring is the Singapore government's Industrial Transformation strategy, which focuses on 23 sectors, each of which is developing their own sectoral Industrial Transformation Roadmap (covering skills, innovation, investment and international competitiveness), linked to a new skills framework.

It would also be worthwhile to discuss with the MCAs, particularly those that are furthest down the road in developing their Local Industrial Strategy (LIS), how they might pilot and test out different models of local/regional employer engagement and capacity building and in developing new ways to involve employers in steering local skills policies and programmes.

The Commission also believes that localities should be assigned the task of signing off employers' skills development plans. At present, the development of policies and capacity at local levels even in the Mayoral Combined Authorities is still at a very early stage, and the different MCAs are experimenting with a range of approaches. It is simply too soon to know how successful these will be and there is as yet no clear model that can be held up as the answer or be copied from. However, the principle is important in ensuring employers are both fully integrated and accountable to their local communities.

Recommendation: *Promote the integration of local skills, innovation and industrial strategies, and explore how mechanisms for localities signing off on employers' skills development plans can improve integration and accountability.*

Timescales, structures and culture

An absolutely central element in making progress on any of the areas outlined above is a recognition on the part of government and its agencies that a medium to long-term approach is needed. Furthermore, there must be an acknowledgement that the results

⁶² Raffe, D., 'Policy borrowing or policy learning? How (not) to improve education systems', CES Briefing No. 57, Edinburgh University, Centre for Educational Sociology (2011), https://www.ces.ed.ac.uk/old_site/PDF%20Files/Brief057.pdf

of interventions and of capacity building exercises are liable to be cumulative and will at first build quite slowly, especially given the low base from which we are starting. Change is a lengthy journey where persistence and incremental change pay off; one of the frustrations of skills policy in over the years has been the tendency for policy makers to tear up existing initiatives in the futile search for a quick fix.

The Commission's preferred model of policy development will require supportive institutional structures at national, local and sectoral levels. The bodies that variously deal with research and development in lifelong learning, funding, accountability and oversight of policy implementation, and managing the interface between government, other stakeholders and localities will need to be adequately resourced and staffed by those with real expertise and a deep understanding of how systems work. Developing these relationships at a local level will require new mechanisms; this may include the establishment of new appropriate local or regional bodies to facilitate decision-making, and the devolution of a cross-sectoral budget from the NES which will fund all relevant learning in the locality. Overall, though, we need to be aiming for a world in which trust between the different actors is high and bureaucracy is minimised.

What we propose differs from what has gone before, because what we advocate is the principle of a collective approach within which each group of stakeholders – education and training institutions and providers, government (at a variety of levels), citizens and students, trade unions, employers and bodies that represent them, all have a clearly defined set of rights, roles and responsibilities that entail mutual obligations, co-production and cooperation. The idea that no single group is in the 'driving seat' and that there will be a relationship of trust and cooperation between all parties is central to achieving our objectives.

We are also advocating an entitlement for employers to tax credits, help in building their own training capacity, and support for businesses to enable better work organisation and job design and higher levels of productivity and innovation. In return, we expect to see employers fulfil their responsibilities to train (monitored in terms of meeting specified performance criteria), including groups who are currently marginalised and excluded (e.g. those with special needs, the unemployed). This collective, partnership approach will mitigate risk for individual employers and enable the development of collective capacity across the economy and labour market.

Section 9: Building capacity for effective design and delivery

As outlined in earlier sections, the Commission acknowledges that in order to realise our vision for lifelong learning, significant shifts will be required in terms of how policy and funding is designed and implemented, how success is measured, and how different actors are supported within the system.

Building on many of the key themes emerging from earlier sections of this report, the Commission has identified five key principles which we believe should guide funding and policy reform for lifelong learning:

1. Boosting cooperation

Current structures lead to institutions and other stakeholders operating in a series of silos. This creates complexity and confusion, and is the enemy of real integration or coherent and systemic approaches to addressing local need. More support and incentives are required to encourage institutions to work together. A market-led approach cannot facilitate the collaboration and partnership working needed to enable more strategic, efficient approaches based on the needs of learners and local, regional and national priorities.

The Commission is clear that institutional autonomy and diversity of mission are central to the outstanding international reputation of our higher education system and should remain firmly enshrined in law and in practice. This independence of mission also has an important role in our further education sector. Within this context, we believe also that the government should put in place funding and regulatory frameworks that encourage institutions to value partnership and collaboration both with other institutions and with civic partners, trade unions and employers.

2. Increasing stability

Stakeholders involved in the delivery of post-16 education have been subject to a relentless, permanent revolution in terms of what government require from them since the 1980s. What providers need is settled objectives and stability in order to enable confident decision-making and useful engagement with partner organisations.

For employers, there needs to be a recognition that change will need to be incremental, cumulative and carefully managed – we want to avoid yet more top-down re-organisation and to encourage long-term, organic change that can win support from all relevant stakeholders. Our goals will not be achieved in a single ‘big bang’, but in stages over a 10-year period, with appropriate piloting and evaluation of changes.

3. Funding durability

Those delivering education need sustained, long-term funding to enable effective planning. The Commission favours a series of three-year settlements based on government’s strategic objectives in lifelong learning, together with an element of ring-fenced capital investment aimed at revitalising the infrastructure. Priority must be given to:

- Providing stable and sufficient funding to meet demand for the new personal learning entitlement
- Restoring the decaying infrastructure within further and adult education
- Funding an independent Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) service embedded across community services

- Funding projects which meet Labour's key aims of achieving durable, confident, cooperative, exemplar and strategically focused institutions
- Recalibrating the current regulatory infrastructure so that burdensome administration is removed from front line teachers and their institutions and focus is on ensuring institutions meet Labour's key aims.

4. Tackling impediments

Reducing unnecessary complexity and instability must be a priority in order to secure effective engagement from the full range of actors we need for an integrated lifelong learning system. Too often in the past, government policy has dictated objectives to employers and other stakeholders, rather than involving them in constructing a shared strategy that truly works for everyone.

Addressing the lack of capacity to actually develop and deliver more skills is also crucial - many employers require support to help them overcome limitations in the training expertise necessary to deliver effective workforce development.

5. Shared responsibility

We need a more flexible and responsive attitude towards employers, unions and other stakeholders, giving them all more involvement in, and responsibility for, skills alongside providers and the state. For employers, we also have to recognise that we want a system that works for all employers, not just large firms, and design in effective means for SME engagement in skills policy. Ultimately, shared responsibility will support the building of a strong, self-reliant and high trust system that can provide high quality and responsive provision.

Developing infrastructure to support the new lifelong learning system

Policy and funding decisions in recent years have had a significant negative impact on the state of the infrastructure for the delivery of lifelong learning in England.

The damage has been most acute in further and adult and community education, where a severe lack of adequate funding over the last decade has led to a drastic drop in provision. Not only has the amount of available provision dropped dramatically, but the drop in funding per student in further education for those aged 16 years and over has led to a significant fall in the learning hours per student per week. Alongside this reduction in funding per student, cuts in capital and infrastructure investment in further education have severely undermined the provider infrastructure, both in terms of the physical estate and in terms of the workforce.

It will therefore be necessary to make a significant investment in rebuilding capacity and infrastructure to support the local delivery of education and skills. Recent history shows us that learning entitlements only work if provision of learning is adequately funded. There is little point in having a theoretical entitlement to learning that doesn't exist locally.

It will be necessary to undertake a holistic assessment of the infrastructure needed to deliver lifelong learning. This will encompass staff, estates, plant and equipment of existing institutions but also venues that host informal learning, such as libraries, community centres, resident's associations or children's centres. There will be a need to match up local availability to local demand. This might include using venues such

as schools to open up spaces for lifelong learning outside of their core hours. We believe Labour's planned National Transformation Fund should be applicable to lifelong learning infrastructure given the benefits to the economy that we have identified. There is also a potential for trade unions and employers to work together in unlocking spaces for the provision of learning to the local community as well as to employees.

The Commission is also clear that a high quality lifelong learning system will need to be underpinned by good research and evaluation. This will provide evidence for the continuing improvement of the system in the future and to assess the impact that policies and funding are having. Having a solid evidence base will help stabilise the policy environment and bring to an end the constant policy churn.

Developing the lifelong learning workforce

The Commission recognises the pivotal role of the lifelong learning workforce in delivering the changes we want to see. If we don't have highly qualified, experienced and fairly rewarded staff delivering education and IAG, then we won't have a lifelong learning system that delivers a high quality education which meets the needs of individuals, employers and communities. If staff aren't supported to access professional development, engage with industry or develop their digital skills, they won't be well placed to provide the best opportunities to learners.

For too long, staff working in many parts of post-16 education have been undervalued. The value of their pay has declined while workloads have risen and job insecurity – as in many other parts of the economy – has become more prevalent. Years of underfunding across the system has also led to a loss of human capital from providers through job cuts and reduced access for many staff to continuing professional development opportunities.⁶³ The Commission believes it is imperative that this trend is reversed and providers within the NES should be required to set a positive example when it comes to labour standards as a condition of receiving public funding.

Finally, education staff are a vital resource for driving improvement and cementing partnership working. The staff voice should also be incorporated into the process of reform and taken seriously as a key partner in realising our vision.

Recommendation: Place a renewed focus on improving the conditions of staff in the lifelong learning sector, linking providers' labour standards to their eligibility for funding.

Strengthening the role of trade unions

Since its inception, the Union Learning Fund has helped many thousands of workers return to learning. The nationwide network of ULRs plays a crucial role in promoting learning, offering peer group support and offering IAG. They have developed a network of workplace and union learning centres which take learning out to the workforce and wider community, helping non-traditional learners to return to learning in a supportive, non-threatening context. They also help to develop links with learning providers and negotiate resources and support from employers.

⁶³ University and College Union, Counting the Costs of Casualisation in Further, Adult and Prison Education (2019), https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10335/Counting-the-costs-of-casualisation-in-further-education-Jun-19/pdf/ucu_casualisation_in_FE_survey_report_Jun19.pdf

The Commission therefore believes that trade unions are uniquely placed to provide a useful link between employers, providers and the local community, and their role should be expanded and fully embedded within the new lifelong learning system. Funding for UnionLearn should at least be returned to its previous high, and further increases should be considered moving forward to support all working people to access education.

Regulation and Oversight

Regulation is clearly necessary to protect the public and use of public funds. However, the current system of regulation across lifelong learning is highly complex, bureaucratic and multi-layered. Often there are dual arrangements with one body overseeing financial regulations with others overseeing educational quality. There are technical and administrative differences between schools, colleges and universities, many of which are historic and which obviate the possibility of an integrated system. Regulatory arrangements, success measures, and expectations vary across sectors, even where these are recruiting the same cohorts of students.

Institutions have differing legal status. All FE colleges are not-for-profit exempt charities (though some designated institutions are registered charities). Most universities are also exempt charities, although there is a growing group of new for-profit and not-for-profit providers. Most adult and community education providers are based in a local authority or are third sector bodies often formed as spin-offs from LA provision. Some ITPs are also charities or not-for-profit, including some large national charities and providers, whilst others are private for-profit organisations. Whether the provider receives funding through grants or through contracts based on outcomes may depend on the status of the provider as well as the funding stream.

This piecemeal approach has led to multiple layers of oversight; for example, FE colleges currently receive public funds from six different streams and have five different inspectors and regulators (in addition to banks and awarding bodies). The increasing marketisation of education in recent years has, perhaps ironically, led to higher levels of regulation and restriction. At the same time it has driven competition rather than collaboration, and homogenisation rather than diversity. It is time to look again at whether the benefits of marketisation are outweighed by the damage done to our education sector and its ability to work as a whole.

As outlined in Section 4, we believe that a stronger national framework which treats providers and employers as trusted partners in the delivery of lifelong learning would allow for regulation to be streamlined, help to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy and facilitate the healthy collaboration between providers that is currently missing from the system.

Although the Commission does not wish to unnecessarily add new organisations to the skills and education landscape, we do feel there is a strong need for the National Education Service to have an overarching, independent strategic body – distinct from the Department for Education – to coordinate activity across the education system. As previously stated, piecemeal policy initiatives spearheaded by successive ministers have often created unnecessary complexity, so there is a clear role for a body that can provide continuity, experience and policy memory to inform future policy development.

This body would oversee the activities of regulators and funding bodies, and provide a mechanism for consultation and engagement with stakeholders across the different parts of the NES, as well as with other policymakers in other public services. It could also collate, commission and disseminate research, providing regular reports to track

progress over time and ensuring that new policy for lifelong learning is properly evidence-based. NHS England could provide a useful model for this and establishing a similar overarching body for education would help reinforce Labour's ambition for the NES to be an 'NHS for education'.

Recommendation: *Introduce an overarching, independent strategic body to coordinate activity across the National Education Service.*

Section 10: Summary of recommendations

The Commission has made 16 key recommendations throughout this report which we believe would support a radical, dynamic and accessible system of lifelong learning that is fit for the 21st century.

We recognise that some of these recommendations will be easier to implement than others. Some require changes to primary legislation, some require further work to be undertaken to inform implementation, while others will primarily rely on investment and political will.

To inform Labour's approach to policy development, we have ordered our recommendations into what we believe should be short and medium-term priorities.

Short term (1-2 years)

1. Introduce an overarching, independent strategic body to coordinate activity across the National Education Service.
2. Develop a stronger national framework to streamline regulation and facilitate collaboration between trusted providers.
3. Introduce a universal, publicly-funded right to learn through life, underpinned by a minimum entitlement to fully-funded local level 3 provision and the equivalent of 6 years' publicly-funded credits at level 4 and above, with additional support for priority groups.
4. Examine models of credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) which support people to accumulate and transfer achievements whilst ensuring quality and recognising that not all learning is qualification based.
5. Introduce a public duty for all policymakers to consider the impact of their policies on lifelong learning and social justice, and develop plans which contribute to the fulfilment of the aims of the National Education Service.
6. Require providers in receipt of public funding to set out principles for partnership working and collaboration with other providers and relevant stakeholders.
7. Develop a package of support for building education and training capacity within employers, to include a national 'train the trainers' programme.
8. Work with employers and trade unions to introduce a right to paid time off for training.

Medium term (3-5+ years)

9. Introduce a national, NES-branded Information, Advice and Guidance service which is available both face-to-face and online, sited where possible within the local community, and underpinned by a professionally trained workforce which operates under a common framework and nationally agreed standards.

- 10.** Develop a personalised digital platform which allows learners to track the use of their learning entitlements and engage with providers, other learners and related services including careers advice and guidance.
- 11.** Promote the integration of local skills, innovation and industrial strategies, and explore how mechanisms for localities signing off on employers' skills development plans can be used to improve integration and accountability.
- 12.** Review the effectiveness of the current corporation tax relief in leveraging skills investment, and consider how tax relief might be extended to smaller employers – for example through R&D tax credits.
- 13.** Place a renewed focus on improving the conditions of staff in the lifelong learning sector, linking providers' labour standards to their eligibility for funding.
- 14.** Develop means-tested maintenance support for adults to facilitate access to learning.
- 15.** Explore how to better support progression to postgraduate study as part of a broader approach to research and development spending and industrial strategy.
- 16.** Encourage a shift towards lifetime enrolment in learning, supported by groups of providers working in partnership.

Taken together, we believe that these recommendations form an ambitious but achievable agenda for an incoming Labour government that wishes to give lifelong learning the central role it deserves.

There are a number of areas throughout the report which the Commission has identified as important but where we have stopped short of making specific recommendations. However, we believe that the report has set out a clear direction of travel towards a more collaborative, more cohesive system of lifelong learning which values the contribution of different stakeholders and ensures that learners are well supported to engage in the learning that best suits their needs.

Section 11: Funding for a new lifelong learning system

As part of our approach to policy development, the Commission is committed to costing each of our LLC proposals. As far as has been possible these are presented in Appendix 3. However, it has not been possible to fully cost every aspect of our thinking, nor of the wider impact of some of our recommendations. Where it has not been possible to identify costs we have explained why, identifying the reasons and issues.

In some cases we are recommending further policy thinking in areas that will affect lifelong learning and other areas of education but that are not the Commission's primary consideration.

Costs, Benefits and Investment

In line with our thinking and principles the Commission strongly believes that there are major economic and social benefits to our policy recommendations. We believe that a more educated workforce will be a more productive one and that investment in learning entitlements, improved IAG services and infrastructure will bring significant economic and social benefits. For example the Learning and Work Institute has estimated that an increase in adult basic skills and at L2, L3 and L4+ could see an annual benefit of £20 billion by 2030.⁶⁴ The Post 18 Review of Education and Funding also pointed to the economic benefits that higher education could help to achieve if the UK's productivity performance was significantly improved.⁶⁵

We believe that investment in learning and skills will help to address poor productivity, improve labour market access and progression and tackle regional inequalities as well as improving health, happiness and social cohesion. All of these will significantly improve the overall performance of the economy and create new resources that can be reinvested into education or in other vital public services. At the heart of this should be an improved system of lifelong learning, with new learning entitlements and well-funded part time and adult focused provision.

Our proposals are for England only. We hope that devolved administrations and other organisations in Wales, Scotland and N. Ireland find our proposals interesting and relevant to each country's ambitions to improve their own lifelong learning opportunities and systems but we recognise that there are different approaches and responsibilities in each country within the UK. We acknowledge these and have studied and learned from them (see Section 3 and Appendix 4). However, we have not attempted to cost out any financial consequential in each devolved setting stemming from our proposals in England.

⁶⁴ Evans S., and Eggleston C., 'Time for Action: Skills for Economic Growth and Social Justice', Learning and Work Institute (2019), https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/LW_timeforaction_skills-for-economic-growth-social-justice_WEB.pdf According to the Learning and Work Institute, increasing the proportion of people with functional literacy and numeracy to 90%, the proportion of people with Level 2 and 3 qualifications (to 20% and 30% respectively); and maintaining the expected rate of progress in high qualifications, so that by 2030 43% of people have Level 4 qualifications or higher by 2030 would boost the UK economy by £20 billion per year and support an additional 200,000 people into work, along with significant taxpayer savings.

⁶⁵ Post-18 Review of Education and Funding (May 2019), op.cit.

Other departments and budgets

Our recommendations are not just for the shadow education team. The Commission feels strongly that some of the costs (and benefits) should be more widely shared across a number of different policy areas and spending departments. The departments for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), Health and Social Care, and Communities and Local Government are just some of the likely beneficiaries of an improved system of lifelong learning.

We have also made very few recommendations for lifelong learning at level 7 and above (postgraduate qualifications including masters qualifications and PhDs). Whilst we recognise that these are levels of education and skills that are vital to our economy and society as well as to individuals and to employers and public services, we think this deserves further policy thinking beyond the purview of this Commission. The links to Labour's Industrial Strategy, as well as to plans for increased research and development spending and on public services more generally, mean that lifelong learning at these levels need to be more fully considered in those contexts as well. However, we are clear that any funding policies developed in these areas and at these levels of learning must be consistent with the aims set out in this report.

Appendix 1: Terms of reference

The Labour Party's manifesto commits to a Commission on Lifelong Learning ("the Commission"). The work of the Commission will form part of the ongoing policy development of the National Education Service ("NES").

An independent panel of experts, along with a secretariat, will produce two written reports: an interim paper outlining the current challenges, and a final report that will make detailed policy recommendations. The process will allow for an expert panel to draw on evidence from across the sector to inform the overall work, with a secretariat function that can produce a high-quality report including policy recommendations.

Aims

The final report of the Commission will:

1. Define and set out the need for a system of lifelong learning that will support individuals, communities, and our economy, locally, regionally, and nationally, and the essential role this will have a National Education Service;
2. Develop the policies on further education and lifelong learning from Labour's 2017 General Election manifesto and amendments to the Higher Education and Research Bill, and also produce:
 - Detailed policy options on developing and implementing a system of integrated lifelong learning;
 - Opportunities for political communications and campaigning;
 - Further work on funding models that would ensure that education is free at the point of use for all those who need it;
3. Broaden the case for a system of lifelong learning that is free at the point of use beyond arguments around tuition fees to the personal, social, and economic imperatives of ensuring that all people and all communities can access opportunities and the skills they need;
4. Be both a radical and credible plan for a system of lifelong learning that can be implemented by the next Labour government as part of a National Education Service.

Appendix 2: Membership of the Lifelong Learning Commission

Co-Chairs:

Estelle Morris - Baroness Morris of Yardley

Dave Ward - General Secretary, Communication Workers' Union (CWU)

Panel Members:

Graeme Atherton – Director of the National Education Opportunities Network

Amatey Doku – Former Vice President Higher Education, National Union of Students

Kirstie Donnelly – Managing Director, City and Guilds

Vicky Duckworth – Professor in Education, Edge Hill University

Stephen Evans – Chief Executive, Learning and Work Institute

Alison Fuller – Professor, Vocational Education and Work, UCL Institute of Education

Ewart Keep – Director of Centre for Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance (SKOPE), Oxford University

Mary Kellett – Former Vice Chancellor, Open University

David Latchman – Master of Birkbeck, University of London

Seamus Nevin – Chief Economist, Make UK (formerly EEF)

Dave Phoenix – Vice Chancellor, London South Bank University

Carole Stott – Chair, Association of Colleges (AoC) Charitable Trust, formerly Chair of the Board of the AoC

Matt Waddup – National Head of Policy and Campaigns – University and College Union

Tom Wilson – Chair of UFI, Former Head of Unionlearn

Appendix 3 – Costing the Commission’s proposals

Level 3 entitlement

Our overall aim should be to close the gap to the OECD average at L3 (or equivalent) - i.e. a rise of approximately 12% (to 76%) in working age population qualified to L3 and L4+ (currently 64% vs OECD average of 76%) in 10 years.

N.B. According to the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee, only 18% of UK adults hold L3 as their highest qualification compared to OECD average of 39%⁶⁶. So we should make a particular effort at L3.

We are estimating a take up of approximately 1.5% of the L1-2 qualified population each year. All courses should be fully grant funded and learners taking a two year full time course should be funded at the same rate as 16-18 year olds*. However our costing is based on the average costs of Level 3 for adults as many learners will be achieving L3 in the workplace and/or in a shorter timeframe. Depending on pattern of study and take-up we assume costs of £300m in 2019-20 rising to some £650m annually by 2023-24.

This covers all learners who may go in to L2-3 study, though it is likely to be skewed towards those already qualified to Level 2. An uptake rate of 1.5% of learners not qualified to L3 would put us on track to meet the goal of catching up with the OECD average within a decade.

Level 4+

Our aim at L4 and above is to restore the ‘peak’ participation levels of approximately 590,000 in 2008/09 of part-time undergraduate student numbers in England.

N.B. an estimated 198,000 students started part-time undergraduate courses at English providers in 2017-18.

We are assuming that in the first five years uptake of L4-6 study, outside of traditional full-time higher education, which is beyond the scope of this report, will also be 1.5% of learners not qualified to L4. This will set us on the path of returning to peak participation within a decade.

We are also aiming to abolish fees for all part time learners. The cost of doing so for current levels of demand is £0.5 – 1 billion, rising to some £2 billion* in 2023-24 in line with our assumptions about rising uptake.

Any changes to the ELQ rule are likely to cause a further, though relatively small, increase in uptake. We anticipate that over the course of five years this could be funded through the £2 billion spending that we propose, but additional resource may be required in the longer term as more adults retrain.

* *N.B* This is based on the average cost of L4-5 apprenticeships under current funding arrangements, starting at around £6,000 a year, and rising with inflation. This is higher than the average part time tuition fee award in higher education, and represents the impact of higher costs in delivering a range of technical and vocational education qualifications.

⁶⁶ House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee, ‘Treating Students Fairly: The Economics of Post-School Education’ (2018), <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/ldeconaf/139/139.pdf>

***some of the progress to targets/ambitions will be met through apprenticeships (but LLC has not considered apprenticeships policy including the levy).*

Costings for grants and new maintenance/learning support

The cost for new maintenance support (grants) for adult and part time learners is estimated at approximately £0.5 billion per year, though this is likely to grow as demand increases.

Costings for new funds and investment

Infrastructure fund - £1 billion capital fund over 3 years, with key priorities to include:

- Provision and improvement of spaces for lifelong learning (this should sit alongside a duty for FE and HE funders and regulators to ensure opportunities and spaces/places for part time and lifelong learning when making capital grants).
- Building capacity for research and evaluation to inform future policy development

ICT Innovation fund - £1 billion over 3-5 years for developing new and innovative uses of technology to improve access to or delivery of lifelong learning. This will support the development of the personalised digital platform outlined in Section 6, as well as helping to unlock the benefits of digital technology for delivering as outlined in Section 4.

Other costs

Childcare support for parents in training: £57million per year.
£24 million to reverse cuts to UnionLearn in the first instance.

Summary of costs

Summary of overall costs annually per from 2020/21:

L3 entitlement:	£300m rising to £600m by 2023-24
L4+ entitlement:	£0.5 – 1bn rising to £2bn by 2023-24
Maintenance :	£500m in 2019-20
Infrastructure/capital :	£330m per year for 3-5 years
ICT fund:	£200m per year for 3-5 years
Childcare:	£57m
Union Learning Fund	£24m annually reversing cuts

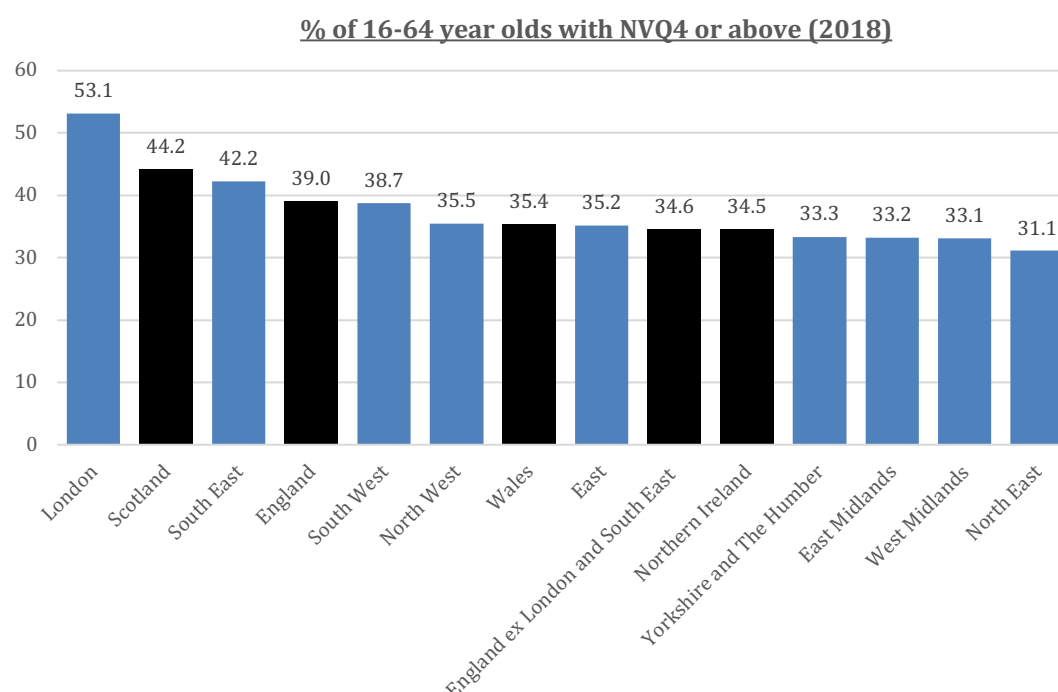
Appendix 4: Supplementary data on lifelong learning outcomes across the UK

The information contained in this Appendix supports the points made in Section 3 of the report, and is based on analysis carried out by the Commission.

Qualifications held by the working age (16-64 year-old) population⁶⁷

Scotland has the highest proportion of the working age population qualified to higher education level (NVQ4 or above), a higher proportion than any English region except London.

While England has a significantly higher proportion of the working age population qualified to higher education level (NVQ4 or above) than Wales or Northern Ireland, this advantage is entirely driven by London and the South East.



1. The story is similar at other qualification levels

Country	NVQ4+	NVQ3+	NVQ2+	NVQ1+	Other	None
England	39.0	57.7	75.0	85.6	6.8	7.6
Ex. London & South East	34.6	54.5	73.3	85.0	6.8	8.3
Scotland	44.2	59.7	75.0	83.5	6.8	9.7
Wales	35.4	55.1	74.0	84.9	6.5	8.6
Northern Ireland	34.5	53.5	72.4	81.0	4.6	14.5

Higher Education Initial Participation Rate

The UK Government publishes significantly more data on the higher education initial participation rates (HEIPR) in [England](#) than the administrations in the other three nations publish for the other nations of the UK. [Scotland](#) only publishes a limited

⁶⁷ Annual Population Survey, ONS (2018), op. cit.

amount of data, [Northern Ireland](#) only publishes data for 18-year-olds and [Wales](#) does not publish any comparable data (and stopped publishing any participation rate data in 2012/13).

Looking at comparisons between Scotland and England for 2016/17:

- a) 21-year-olds in Scotland are 35% more likely to participate in HE for the first time by the age of 30 than 21-year-olds in England: the HEIPR for adults aged 21-30 is 8.9% in Scotland versus 6.6% in England.
- b) This is despite significantly more young people in Scotland participating in HE by the age of 20: 48.8% in Scotland compared to 43.2% in England.
- c) Taking this into account, adults without any HE by the age of 20 are 50% more likely to participate in HE by the age of 30 in Scotland than they are in England.
- d) By the age of 30, the HEIPR in Scotland is 57.7% compared to 49.8% in England.

Overall HE participation rates

We can estimate overall participation in university-based higher education by comparing HESA data on participation with Office for National Statistics (ONS) population estimates.⁶⁸

Looking at the overall all-age participation rate, England seems to be significantly behind the other three nations of the UK due to low participation in part-time HE. Note that this data excludes all students entering HE courses at Colleges. This is significant for Scotland as the data consequently excludes 36% of undergraduate entrants to HE (mostly on sub-degree courses).

The relatively low HE participation rate in England is mainly due to low participation at HEIs in sub-degree courses, in turn driven by the very low part-time participation rate.

Entry rate into undergraduate HE in HEIs in 2017/18 by mode of study (per 1,000 18-64 year olds)

Country/Region	HE participation rate	FT participation rate	PT participation rate
Wales	18.5	11.8	6.7
Scotland	15.3	10.1	5.1
Northern Ireland	17.2	12.1	5.1
England	13.5	11.0	2.5
East Midlands	12.1	9.9	2.2
East of England	12.9	10.4	2.5
London	16.3	13.9	2.4
North East	13.8	10.1	3.7
North West	12.8	10.6	2.2
South East	13.3	10.8	2.5
South West	12.2	9.7	2.5
West Midlands	14.4	11.6	2.8
Yorkshire and Humber	11.8	9.4	2.3
UK	14.0	11.0	3.0

Note: HESA data excludes all students entering HE courses at FE colleges. This has a substantial impact on Scotland – 36% of undergraduate entrants to HE in Scotland attend FE colleges. After allowing for this, Scotland has substantially higher HE participation than any other country in the UK.

⁶⁸ Office for National Statistics, *Population Estimates for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: mid-2017*, June 2018, op. cit.

Entry rate into undergraduate HE in HEIs in 2017/18 by level of study (per 1,000 18-64 year-olds)

Country/Region	Degree	Other undergraduate
Wales	11.8	6.8
Scotland	11.4	3.9
Northern Ireland	13.3	3.8
England	11.6	1.9
East Midlands	10.5	1.6
East of England	11.1	1.8
London	14.1	2.0
North East	10.5	3.3
North West	11.2	1.7
South East	11.5	1.9
South West	10.5	1.7
West Midlands	11.8	2.6
Yorkshire and Humber	10.1	1.7
UK	11.6	2.4

Entry rate into undergraduate HE in HEIs in 2017/18 (per 1,000 18-64 year olds)

Country/Region	FT degree	FT other	PT degree	PT other
Wales	10.3	1.6	1.5	5.2
Scotland	9.3	0.8	2.1	3.1
Northern Ireland	11.8	0.2	1.5	3.6
England	10.5	0.5	1.1	1.4
East Midlands	9.3	0.6	1.2	1.0
East of England	9.9	0.5	1.2	1.3
London	13.3	0.5	0.8	1.5
North East	9.5	0.6	1.0	2.7
North West	10.2	0.5	1.0	1.2
South East	10.3	0.5	1.2	1.4
South West	9.3	0.4	1.2	1.3
West Midlands	10.6	1.0	1.2	1.6
Yorkshire and Humber	9.1	0.4	1.0	1.3
UK	10.4	0.6	1.2	1.8

Part of this is due to differences in where sub-degree qualifications are undertaken, with the vast majority of Welsh sub-degree provision being in HEIs rather than FE colleges.⁶⁹

- England: 17.1% of HE students are studying sub-degree qualifications with 42.4% of these students in colleges.
- Wales: 23.7% of HE students are studying sub-degree qualifications with 3.8% of these students in colleges.
- Scotland: 31.4% of HE students are studying sub-degree qualifications with 71.7% of these students in colleges.

⁶⁹ QAA, Sub-Bachelor Higher Education in the UK, 2017 (p32) https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/about-us/sub-bachelor-higher-education-in-the-united-kingdom.pdf?sfvrsn=f0e9fe81_6

- Northern Ireland: 32.0% of HE students are studying sub-degree qualifications with 64.1% of these students in colleges.

HE participation rates for those aged 21 and over

A similar pattern can be seen for HE initial participation rates for those aged 21 and over. Note that data by domicile is currently unavailable so the data below has been put together on the basis of provider location.

HESA data on movement across borders (below) suggests that the proxy of provider location will overstate full-time participation rates in (especially) Wales and Scotland – both net importers of students from the rest of the UK – and makes participation rates in Northern Ireland appear significantly lower than they really are (though the age patterns in this cross-border migration are unclear).

Country of provider	University-based HE participation entry rate (per 1,000 21-64 year olds)		
	Total	Full-time	Part-time
England	4.9	2.5	2.4
Wales	10.3	4.3	6.0
Scotland	7.8	3.2	4.6
Northern Ireland	6.7	1.7	5.0

Note: The HESA data excludes all students entering HE courses at FE colleges. This has a substantial impact on Scotland – 36% of undergraduate entrants to HE in Scotland attend FE colleges. After allowing for this, Scotland has substantially higher HE participation than any other country in the UK.

Movement of students across borders

There is substantial migration of full-time students between different parts of the UK. For example, looking at movement of full-time students between England and Wales, HESA data shows that:

- 11,475 full-time undergraduate English-domiciled entrants in 2017/18 are studying in Wales. This is equivalent to 45% of undergraduate full-time entrants in universities in Wales.
- 7,720 full-time undergraduate Welsh-domiciled entrants in 2017/18 are studying in England. This is equivalent to 35% of Welsh-domiciled full-time entrants.
- Net migration of full-time undergraduate students from England to Wales is 3,755 (11,475 minus 7,720).

Total students (2017/18)

Provider location	Domicile				In-migration
	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	
England	436,945	8,530	2,175	3,800	14,505
Wales	12,205	25,590	70	165	12,440
Scotland	5,645	165	49,320	1,035	6,845
Northern Ireland	505	25	55	14,440	585
Out-migration	18,355	8,720	2,300	5,000	

Net migration	-3,850	3,720	4,545	-4,415
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Full-time students (2017/18)

Provider location	Domicile				In-migration
	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	
England	354,575	7,720	1,570	3,575	12,865
Wales	11,475	14,085	55	160	11,690
Scotland	4,950	120	32,630	985	6,055
Northern Ireland	335	15	30	8,920	380
Out-migration	16,760	7,855	1,655	4,720	
Net migration	-3,895	3,835	4,400	-4,340	

Part-time students (2017/18)

Provider location	Domicile				In-migration
	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	
England	82,370	810	605	225	1,640
Wales	730	11,505	15	5	750
Scotland	695	45	16,690	50	790
Northern Ireland	170	10	25	5,520	205
Out-migration	1,595	865	645	280	
Net migration	45	-115	145	-75	

Apprenticeship participation comparison

By age, Wales has the highest apprenticeship participation rate for those aged 19 and over, with very high rates of participation for those aged 25 and over. Scotland and especially Northern Ireland have low rates of apprenticeship participation at ages 25 and over. Wales also has very large numbers of young people engaged in Traineeships at ages 16-18.⁷⁰

By age (rate per 1,000 population), 2017/18

⁷⁰ Author's analysis based on: Department for Education, Further Education and Skills: England, 2017/18 Academic Year, November 2018 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/further-education-and-skills-november-2018>; Skills Development Scotland, Modern Apprenticeships Statistics: Full Year Report 2017/18, June 2018 <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/44711/modern-apprenticeship-statistics-quarter-4-2017-18.pdf>; Stats Wales, Learning Programme Starts in Work-Based Learning Provision 2017/18, February 2019; <https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Post-16-Education-and-Training/Further-Education-and-Work-Based-Learning/Learners/Work-Based-Learning/learningprogrammestarts-in-workbasedlearning>; Department for the Economy, Apprenticeships NI statistics from August 2013 to October 2018, February 2019; Office for National Statistics, Population Estimates for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: mid-2017, June 2018 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/mid2017>

Age	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
16-18	56.9	50.7	42.3	27.5
19-24	27.2	19.6	31.5	20.6
25+	5.4	2.8	12.2	0.7
Total	10.8	7.8	16.3	5.8

Note: Due to data limitations, the age ranges for Scotland and Northern Ireland are 16-19, 20-24 and 25+

By level (rate per 1,000 population), 2017/18

Age	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
Level 2	4.6	2.5	6.8	2.7
Level 3	4.8	4.8	6.8	3.1
Level 4+	1.4	0.5	2.7	N/A
Total	10.8	7.8	16.3	5.8

By age/level, 2017/18

Age	England			Wales		
	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4+	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4+
16-18	33.4	21.8	1.7	27.6	14.3	0.5
19-24	10.9	13.0	3.3	14.3	14.8	2.4
25+	1.8	2.5	1.1	4.3	5.1	2.8

Appendix 5: Overview of providers engaged in lifelong learning

Education and training institutions of all kinds play a critical role in making our lifelong learning system a success. The range and type of organisations providing lifelong learning is complex; they include further education colleges, universities and higher education institutions (HEIs), sixth form colleges, adult and community education providers, specialist institutions and independent training providers, as well as employers and trade unions.

FE colleges, adult and community education and universities form the core of our lifelong learning infrastructure but there is significant and rapid growth from specialist for-profit and not-for-profit providers, with independent training providers now providing a substantial portion of apprenticeships and other provision.

FE Colleges

The NIACE 2009 “Learning Through Life” report of the Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning identified FE colleges in particular as the “institutional backbone for local lifelong learning”⁷¹. The more recent Augar Report also recognised the core role of FE colleges and recommended that they should have a protected title similar to universities.⁷²

There are around 2.2 million people a year studying at their local college. Colleges educate more 16-18 year olds than schools, over 700,000, in addition to over 1.4 million adults⁷³. They offer a range of provision, including basic skills, a substantial amount and range of vocational and technical courses and qualifications, apprenticeships, academic courses including GCSEs and A levels, and undergraduate courses focusing in particular on HNDs, HNCs and Foundation Degrees for local students. Some provide adult education in the community (although this has declined dramatically in the last decade) and some also provide ‘leisure-learning’ day and evening courses. Most college students are local, including around 150,000 students who study higher education at their local college. The replacement of grants with Advanced Learner Loans for those wishing to undertake a Level 3 qualification after the age of 19 has reduced the number of adults studying in FE colleges.

There are a number of specialist colleges, with specialisms such as special educational needs, adult education, residential adult education, land-based, and creative and performing arts.

Ofsted notes that since 1 September 2015, a total of 94 general FE colleges, sixth form colleges and other providers have been subject to a merger, creating fewer, but larger colleges. In 2018 there were 178 FE colleges (FECs) and 61 Sixth Form Colleges (SFCs) and this number continues to reduce⁷⁴.

⁷¹ Schuller, T. and Watson, D., Learning Through Life: Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning (2009), <https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Learning-Through-Life-Summary.pdf>

⁷² Post-18 Review of Education and Funding (May 2019), op. cit.

⁷³ AoC College Key Facts 2017/18
<https://www.aoc.co.uk/sites/default/files/AoC%20College%20Key%20Facts%20201718%20%28web%29.pdf>

⁷⁴ Ofsted Annual Report 2017-18
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/761606/29523_Ofsted_Annual_Report_2017-18_041218.pdf

Higher Education

There are 141 higher education institutions. In addition to higher education, 60 of these offer further education provision inspected by Ofsted. In 2017/18, UK and EU students at UK HEIs comprised 1.5m full-time and 270,000 part-time learners at undergraduate level; and a further 340,000 full time and 230,000 part-time postgraduate students; a total of adult 2.34m learners.

Most universities, particularly modern or Post-92 universities offer a range of lifelong learning, principally in the form of part-time degrees and through distance learning provision but also at Level 4 and 5 and as part of higher and degree apprenticeships.

In recent years, funding and regulatory changes have negatively impacted a number of student groups at universities and colleges who are generally lifelong learners. The increase in university student fees in 2012 resulted in a massive decline in part time students. In 2011/2 there were nearly half a million people in the UK studying part-time at undergraduate level comprising more than a quarter (29%) of the UK undergraduate population. Nine out of ten were aged between 21 and 65 and were therefore identified as lifelong learners. Most were studying vocational courses and in continuous full-time employment. In 2012/3, following a decade of slow decline, the numbers of students recruited to undergraduate part-time courses in England suddenly fell by 40% in two years (2010–11 to 2012–13): equivalent to 105,000 fewer Lifelong Learners.

Adult and Community Education

Adult and community education (ACE) providers deliver community learning, education and training and apprenticeships. In 2018, there were 222 community learning and skills providers, made up of 139 local authorities, 72 not-for-profit organisations with charitable status and 11 specialist designated institutions. Between them they were delivering training to around 650,000 learners in over 300 places.

According to Ofsted most ACE providers specialise in engaging learners who are economically and/or socially disadvantaged, and they largely offer courses at level 2 or below, including courses that do not lead to a formal qualification. Learning often takes place in community settings, such as schools, libraries and children's centres. Ofsted also noted a wide range of activity to support adult learners in their communities, including for example support for people recovering from drug and alcohol misuse; family learning; and supporting social and employment skills for people with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Independent Training Providers

The number of independent providers can change as funding and regulatory requirements change. In 2018 Ofsted reported that the number of ITPs including employer providers had more than doubled, from just over 490 providers on 31 August 2017 to nearly 990 on 31 August 2018. Ofsted attributed this mainly to the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in May 2017. ITPs offer a significant number of apprenticeships plus employer-based professional development and study programmes to around 675,000 people mostly over 19 years old. ITPs offer some adult skills provision often through partnerships with FE colleges, usually with the college sub-contracting provision to an ITP.

Employers

Employers also play a key role, particularly in providing on the job training. They only offer government-funded training to their own employees. For example, the British Army receives funding to train approximately 25,000 learners and BT PLC for 1,400 learners. A small number of large employers directly provide apprenticeship training.

Trade Unions

Trade Unions have a long history of supporting education for non-traditional learning. Over the past twenty years, through the Union Learning Fund (ULF) they have developed national networks of Union Learning Reps offering peer group support on the ground. Importantly they have the same life experiences as the people they are working with so understand the struggles they face. ULRs are in a unique position for promoting, sign-posting, engaging and supporting members in learning. In many cases they have developed workplace / union learning centres so that workers have ready access to learning opportunities.

Independent evaluation of Round 18 of the ULF by the Marchmont Observatory found that every £1 of ULF money benefited the Exchequer to the tune of £3.40. Impact studies have identified examples of how workplace ULRs can engage people who would have otherwise not participated in learning:

*"I wouldn't have done it so well – it's so handy... and its free as well – that's a big thing. There are benefits in that it is proper learning... I'd do other courses – for my career path – so ones with management roles. Especially in finance and administration which now is a growing need."*⁷⁵

*"Outside is hard – I'm a mother and work full-time. Travelling to college and finding the time and money to do that would be tough - so studying inside the Learning Centre was ideal for me."*⁷⁶

*"I just wanted to thank you for... my Adult Evening Education classes. Whilst this essentially is helping me pick up a new transferrable skill, it has also had a great impact on my mental health and wellbeing. The boost to my self-esteem and social interaction continues to help both personally and during my working day."*⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Dean, A., Crews, A., Graham, F. and Stevens, H., Union Learning Survey Results, Marchmont Observatory, University of Exeter (2018), <https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/sites/default/files/publication/Union%20Learning%20Fund%202018%20Learning%20Survey.pdf>

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Appendix 6: How might the new system work for people in practice?

To illustrate how the Commission's proposals might work and benefit people in practice, we have tried to consider how individuals in different position might interact with it in a number of short pen portraits below. These fictionalised perspectives have drawn from the panel's experience in working with learners and potential learners; further real-life examples of the way in which further education and lifelong learning can help learners can be found as part of the Further Education: Transforming Lives project⁷⁸.

Danielle's story

Danielle is a busy, 38 year old mum of four. Before having her first child ten years ago, she graduated with a degree in graphic design and worked for a London advertising agency. However, she stopped work after having children and hasn't engaged in any learning since her degree.

Now living in the midlands and with her youngest child due to start school next year, Danielle is thinking about returning to work to provide a second income for the family. In recent years she has started up a personal blog and wants to build on this experience in her career. However, while she is fairly confident with using technology, she feels that her overall industry skills and knowledge are out of date and is nervous about returning to the workplace.

On social media, Danielle has seen stories about people like her who have benefitted from the National Education Service and this has sparked her interest in returning to learning. She visits the NES website where she is able to find out more about available courses both locally and online, and book an appointment to talk to an IAG professional. After a discussion with the adviser, she opts to use some of her learning entitlement to undertake a part-time level 5 course in web design and development, which helps her secure a job with a local web design agency. In the years after she completes her level 5 course, Danielle continues to receive information about other relevant learning opportunities offered by the provider and its local partner institutions. After a few years, Danielle decides she would benefit from a level 4 course in project management offered by the local college. She secures paid time off for training from her employer and embarks on the course.

Danielle's job role develops over the years and, with the help of some leadership training funded by her employer, she progresses to become a middle manager. When the company's fortunes change and she is made redundant at age 48, Danielle decides she is ready to start her own design consultancy. She visits an NES IAG adviser to discuss her options for training to support this goal and enrolls on a business and management module at the Open University.

Samira's story

Samira didn't enjoy high school at all – she felt her teachers were unsupportive and lacked cultural understanding, and became disillusioned with education. She missed a lot of school, didn't do well in her exams and left with little idea what to do next.

After leaving school Samira enrolls on a level 1 course at her local college, and this is the start of a more positive learning journey for her. She goes on to study a level 2 training programme with a local voluntary agency. These experiences reignite her

⁷⁸ <https://transforminglives.web.ucl.ac.uk/>

interest in learning and inspire her to enrol at college to gain her GCSEs. Samira feels the culture at the further education college is more inclusive and she enjoys the way she is encouraged to use her personal experiences to inform her learning in the classroom.

Through the college, Samira later secures an internship with a local bank and this placement helps to boost her self-confidence. She enrolls at university and goes on to become a primary school teacher. Her positive experience in further education has made her keen to be an advocate and role model, inspiring others within her local community to pursue adult learning.

Alan's story

Alan left school when he was 16 with only a few qualifications, and studied construction at his local college. He has been in the industry ever since and, now 56, works as a plant operator in the north east. Since leaving college, Alan hasn't done any formal training except for the mandatory safety training his role requires, and is worried that he's viewed as a bit of a dinosaur by his employer.

Alan wants to keep working full time for at least another ten years but knows he won't be able to keep up with the physical demands of his current job for too much longer. He recognises that he may have to look outside his current industry to find a suitable alternative, and that he may have to retrain to do so. Although he has a good memory, likes learning new things and uses a smartphone regularly, he is nervous about returning to formal learning because he dreads the prospect of written assessments and has never had much access or exposure to other forms of technology.

Alan's Union Learning Rep encourages him to do an IT course and the 'Getting on at Work' course at his employer's local union learning centre to boost his digital and employability skills. Studying in this supportive learning environment with encouragement from his peers helps to demystify learning and gives Alan the confidence to consider further education. He takes the plunge and speaks to an IAG adviser about his options for retraining, and he eventually decides to pursue a new career path as a health and safety adviser. Alan enrolls on a distance learning course for a level 3 certificate and subsequently uses his entitlement to undertake a level 6 diploma in occupational health and safety.

Later, as Alan's career comes to an end, he decides to enter learning once more to help ease his transition into retirement and enrolls on a photography course at his local college.

Marie's story

Marie is 23; she recently moved to the south west to escape an abusive relationship, and has been living in a women's refuge with her young son. Marie left school with decent A-levels and had started a degree in accountancy, but dropped out during her second year when she became pregnant and hasn't studied since.

Marie's experiences have knocked her confidence and in recent years she has drifted in and out of low-skilled work, but she is determined to make a fresh start and build a new life for her and her son. At a local mother and toddler group, she is signposted to the NES and decides to return to learning. She speaks to the local university and they agree to accept the credits from her first year of study, so she is able to resume her degree course where she left off using her learning entitlement. As a single parent, she has access to childcare and maintenance grant support which helps her to manage financially during her studies.

After she graduates, Marie works as an accountant for several years but over time, she becomes increasingly dissatisfied with her job and wishes she had chosen a profession that is more people-focussed. At 37, she decides to change career direction completely and, following a discussion with an IAG adviser, opts to pursue a career in midwifery. Marie registers for an access to midwifery course at her local FE college which helps to refresh her study skills and build her confidence to progress onto a full degree apprenticeship.

Adil's story

Adil is a 29 year old living in Manchester. He left school with a good set of GCSE results but decided against going to college as he wanted to work and earn a wage as soon as possible. He started off as a kitchen porter and has since become a fast food chef, but has learnt everything he knows on the job and has no formal catering qualifications. Adil struggles with his mental health and during a recent bout of depression, he resigned from his job leaving him unemployed and increasingly socially isolated.

Adil's GP has recommended he get involved in some learning to help rebuild his confidence and develop new social relationships. He refers Adil to an IAG adviser who discusses his ambitions to one day manage his own restaurant, and helps him enrol in a level 3 advanced cookery course at his local college to begin working towards that goal. This boosts his confidence and he continues to use his learning entitlement to enrol on a level 4 diploma in culinary arts. His college is supportive when, for health reasons, he needs to take some time out during his studies and return to learning at a later date.

After a few years, Adil feels he is ready to take the next step and expand his skills into management of his own restaurant. He uses his entitlement to enrol at university to study two part-time level 6 modules in culinary arts management which stand him in good stead to begin the process of starting his own business.

Jimmy's story

Jimmy offers a teacher's perspective. His work in further education with often disaffected adults has highlighted how developing mutual respect with learners is essential in building a positive and productive learning environment. This means moving beyond the instrumentalist approach to education and considering the wider needs and interests of learners.

Jimmy recognises that simply recreating a school environment in the further education college isn't the way forward. Instead, he offers a distinctive learning experience that includes a more democratic approach where learners are encouraged to take leadership roles in group activities, helping to facilitate the development of confidence and essential skills like organisation and critical thinking.

There is also a well-defined pastoral aspect to the programme of study he delivers, and the college encourages him to take a holistic approach to meeting the needs of diverse students. His focus on transformative teaching and learning draws on students' background stories to identify and address barriers to learning more widely with employment and the community.

The college has a dedicated IAG professional who is able to support Jimmy's learners to consider their option for progressing into further learning. The college also has well-developed partnerships with other local institutions and public services, providing support and other learning opportunities to learners during and after his course.

Appendix 7: Contributors

Since the Commission was established, we have sought views from across the post-16 education sector and beyond to inform our work. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all the individuals who have engaged with us and whose contributions helped shape the Commission's thinking, as well as to the following organisations for their input:

- Association of Colleges
- Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)
- Careers and Enterprise Company
- Centenary Commission on Adult Education
- Collab Group
- Further Education Trust for Leadership (FETL)
- GMB
- Good Things Foundation
- Hoxex
- The Institutes for Adult Learning
- Jisc
- National Education Union
- National Union of Students
- NCFE
- NESTA
- ODILS Learning Foundation
- Open University Students' Association
- OPPS Developments
- PBC Associates Ltd
- Trades Union Congress
- Universities UK
- Unite the Union
- Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW)
- West Yorkshire Combined Authority (Future Ready Skills Commission)

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