

# Lifelong Learning Commission

**INTERIM REPORT**



## **Lifelong Learning Commission Interim Report**

### **Foreword**

For well over a century, the Labour Party and trade unions have worked tirelessly to advance the interests of workers and ordinary people. Education has always been a core part of that agenda, because it is central to empowering people to participate fully in work, in the community and in democracy.

At a time when the world - and the workplace - is changing at an unprecedented rate, it is more important than ever that people from all backgrounds can access learning throughout their lives. However, years of austerity under Conservative-led governments have devastated funding for adult learning and left participation in lifelong learning at a low ebb.

Labour's plan for a National Education Service offers hope for the revival of accessible, 'cradle-to-grave' learning which is open to all regardless of age, background or circumstance. It offers hope for a system of lifelong learning which is not an 'optional extra' but an integral part of a dynamic, cohesive and learner-centred system.

That is why we are delighted to be a part of Labour's Lifelong Learning Commission, working with colleagues from across the post-16 education sector to develop proposals for reforms that would work in the interests of people, providers, communities and employers alike.

This interim report identifies some of the major issues with the current education system and seeks to set out a radical vision for lifelong learning in the twenty-first century. We hope that this, along with the Commission's final report later in the year, will inform Labour's National Education Service and that our society will become one where opportunities for high quality learning throughout life are available in every community.

Co-Chairs

Estelle Morris and Dave Ward

### **1) Background to Lifelong Learning Commission.**

***'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**

Lifelong learning has the potential to transform the life chances, social engagement and wellbeing of millions, as well as to transform Britain's economy. It has a critical role to play in delivering social justice and an engaged citizenry, as well as ensuring people can access and progress in the labour market.

However, millions of adults in the UK lack basic skills and millions more are unable to access education and training at all levels because of cost, a lack of time, poor advice, or simply because the opportunities don't exist or are too inflexible to access. This is at a time when Brexit, automation and the fourth industrial revolution pose huge challenges for the country – not just for industries and employers but also for communities, families and individuals.

High-quality lifelong learning has never been more important to ensure that everyone in Britain can reach their full potential and lead a fulfilling life, yet many people are not well served by the current system. Overall, the education system is still heavily frontloaded, with a focus on the first 18-25 years of life and very little attention after that. Education funding and policy disincentivises the participation of mature and part-time students and fails to meet the needs of many different groups and communities.

Significant questions remain on how best to create radical and credible policies that will build a system of lifelong learning which is genuinely inclusive and integrated across all types and providers of education. The Labour Party has therefore established the Independent Commission on Lifelong Learning to identify the most important barriers to a successful lifelong learning system, and to make recommendations that will tackle them. These will sit within, as well as strengthen, Labour's plans for a National Education Service first unveiled in its 2017 General Election Manifesto:

*'At a time when working lives and the skills our economy needs are changing rapidly, governments have the responsibility to make lifelong learning a reality by giving everyone the opportunity to access education throughout their lives. To meet this responsibility, Labour will create a unified National Education Service (NES) for England to move towards cradle-to-grave learning that is free at the point of use. The NES will be built on the principle that 'Every Child – and Adult – Matters' and will incorporate all forms of education, from early years through to adult education.'*

In 1945 the Labour Government established the National Health Service, creating one of the central institutions of fairness of the 20th century. The National Education Service aims to do the same for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, giving people confidence and hope by making education a right and not a privilege. At a time when technology is changing demand for different kinds of skills, and evolving patterns of work mean that people are more likely to pursue several careers during their working lives, it is crucial that our education system enables people to train and retrain throughout their lifetimes. As part of our dynamic industrial strategy, lifelong learning can also help to improve productivity and deliver growth across the whole economy while transforming the lives of individuals and communities.

The National Education Service Charter<sup>1</sup> recently set out ten guiding principles, 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 will guide the work of the Commission, and we will also consider 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'*.

The Commission aims to offer detailed proposals to the Labour Party in order to build on, strengthen and further develop the plans already set out for the National Education Service. Recognising that we are not the first to consider this subject, the Commission will build on existing evidence as well as inviting new submissions to inform our work. Much of the work will be delivered through working groups which examine the roles of different actors – people, providers and employers – within the education system, as well as the funding and policy changes required to build a better education system for the future.

The challenge facing the Commission is to ensure that all individuals can access the high-quality learning, education and training they need throughout their lives, to improve their lives and their life chances as well as those of their families, their communities and the wider economy. It is also important for the Commission to consider how better to integrate the different parts of the education system, ensuring that sectors and institutions are not driven

by conflicting and competing priorities, including for learners and funding. The scale of these challenges are significant, but there is much to take inspiration from.

Fifty years ago, the Open University blazed a trail for lifelong learning, giving life to a Labour government's ambitious vision for accessible education. Through innovative pedagogy and the embrace of technology, the 'University of the Air' brought higher education directly to people's homes and has since provided learning opportunities to over two million people. The Commission hopes to be just as bold and radical as it develops a fresh and exciting vision for lifelong learning in the 21st century.

## **2) What does Lifelong Learning mean?**

In the work of the Lifelong Learning Commission we aim to pursue a comprehensive vision that brings together all 'cradle to grave' learning - a deliberately 'expansive' model as opposed to a 'deficit' model of second chance learning for those that have failed or been failed by other forms of learning.

For the Commission, lifelong learning is therefore as much for people in work studying at levels 4-7 and undertaking Continuing Professional Development as it is for learners undertaking a course or qualification for the first time. It is also as much for informal learning and personal development, health, and community cohesion as it is for getting into and on at work, or for driving the economy and improving productivity. It is for learners in formal institutions including universities and colleges as well as for those learning in the workplace, in the community or at home. It includes the systems and services that provide Information, Advice and Guidance towards the right opportunities in any of these situations and personal circumstances.

This is a very big agenda, but intentionally so. Subsequently the Commission's work will have implications for further and higher education, adult learning, apprenticeships and also for broader economic and social policies including welfare to work, regional and local development, industrial strategy and economic policy as a whole. This is ambitious of course, but we believe it to be the right approach and worth the effort. Otherwise we would be restricted by the unnatural and divisive silos and systems that, often even with the best of intentions, get in the way of an integrated system for lifelong learning today.

Our guiding vision for lifelong learning is 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 well-being 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 therefore 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.*

In short, the warrant for our vision lies in 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.

We recognise that there are other complementary definitions and approaches too, covering areas ranging from adult education and 'second chance' learning to self-guided, work-based or distance learning, and also to suggestions that 'life-wide' learning may also be a relevant way of considering the many changes, challenges and different circumstances that individuals face as adults.

There are several international definitions that will also help us in this ambition. In 1996 UNESCO set out that *'Education throughout life is based on four pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be.'*<sup>ii</sup> The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) developed a framework in 1998<sup>iii</sup> that asked *'first (that) all learning should be recognised, not just formal courses'* also noting that *'systems for transferring credit are improving but gaps remain, especially in recognising informal learning'* and that *'good systems for informing and guiding learners, especially adults, remain elusive'*.

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals also state that *'lifelong learning is based on integrating learning and life. It includes learning activities for people of every age, in all contexts (family, school, community, workplace, etc.) and using different modalities (formal and informal education), which together respond to a wide range of learning-related needs and demands.'*<sup>iv</sup>

### **3) Why does Lifelong Learning matter to the Labour Movement?**

*'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

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.

In 'The Learning Age', David Blunkett placed creativity and imagination alongside the acquisition of knowledge and skills, setting out *'how learning throughout life will build human capital by encouraging the acquisition of knowledge and skills and emphasising creativity and imagination'*. He also placed Labour's economic ambitions at the core, identifying the need for *'a well-educated, well-equipped and adaptable labour force', 'to cope with rapid change and the challenge of the information and communication age'*.

Importantly, the Learning Age also recognised the wider contribution and role of learning in society to *'help make ours a civilised society, develop the spiritual side of our lives and promotes active citizenship. Learning enables people to play a full part in their community. It strengthens the family, the neighbourhood and consequently the nation. It helps us fulfil our potential and opens doors to a love of music, art and literature. That is why we value learning for its own sake as well as for the equality of opportunity it brings.'*

This echoed the great self-help movements in working class communities concerned with how people could be enriched and inspired at the same time as their working lives were improved. Ethics, citizenship and practical improvement were twined together for figures like John Ruskin and William Morris. They inspired the passion for education in the early careers of both Nye Bevan and Clement Attlee and helped create beacons of adult learning such as the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), Birkbeck and Ruskin colleges and the Open University, Harold Wilson's great achievement with Jennie Lee.

All of these landmarks and traditions offer important ideas for today – including for the people and places left behind by industrial and technological change. As Angela Rayner has recently pointed out:

*'Education has always been at the heart of Labour's offer to the British people, and as we face the challenges of this century and our exit from the European Union, we must once again place education at the heart of our programme for government. Politicians talk of preparing the next generation for the jobs of the future, but too often we ignore the generations who are already here. They are the people who didn't get the skills they needed the first time around and have been paying the price for it ever since. These are the people who live in communities that many have called 'left behind', but we are yet to do the difficult work of bringing them together with the rest of the country.'*

That is why we need a systematic, radical plan of action covering all communities and parts of the country as well as a whole age spectrum. One that recognises regional and local inequalities as well as changing patterns of work, including the gig economy and long-term structural economic changes. That includes the consequences of previous as well as coming industrial revolutions. That also means valuing skills input to education from compulsory education to giving people second chances in their 20s and continuing opportunities to be educated, retrain, and develop new career pathways right through into their 60s.

Labour aims to chart an ambitious future for Britain that builds bridges, not barriers, between our individual and collective needs at every stage of people's lives. That means integrating higher and further education into a unifying framework for lifelong learning so that learners and employers both benefit. It also means getting the right offer to meet the various needs of different employers and self-employed people, from generic skills to very specific ones to match an increasingly digital automated economy. We must ensure there are inclusive frameworks that can deliver that lifelong learning - at all levels, nationally and locally, involving civil society, trade unions, employers and the myriad of providers in further, higher education and skills.

But just as the siloed systems within education need to be tackled, so too do the barriers between education and other vitally important Labour agendas. The NES and lifelong learning strategies should also be built with an expansive approach to other policy ambitions and ideas. To Labour's plans for welfare reform, as well as to plans for improving communities and local government and to its vision for an active Industrial Strategy. To the Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell's plans for a National Transformation Fund, a National Investment Bank and a network of regional development banks to 'rebuild Britain's industries after years of neglect'.

#### 4) Why is it important to think about Lifelong Learning now?

The Commission is firmly of the view that lifelong learning is a social justice issue. Increasing opportunities to participate in learning 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.

Adult learning has been shown to have significant benefits to mental and physical health, as well as improving social cohesion and fostering civic and democratic participation.<sup>v</sup> These benefits are invaluable at a time when our nation is divided, not just over Brexit, but divided by income inequality, the availability of job and educational opportunities, between homeowners and ‘generation rent’, between well-connected, prosperous cities and isolated towns, coastal and rural communities. 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’.<sup>vi</sup>

The world around us is also changing rapidly, as is the nature of work. Automation, technology, globalisation and demographic change are all having a fundamental impact on the UK economy and people’s employment. People are changing jobs and careers more frequently and the impact of new technology is expected to accelerate this trend. Although all nations will wish to equip their citizens with the skills and knowledge to harness the power of the fourth industrial revolution, it is the UK alone that must grapple with the principle challenges presented by Brexit.

The OECD’s 2018 Future of Work report<sup>vii</sup> suggests 12% of UK jobs are at high risk of automation, while a further 26% are a significant risk of change due to technological advances. Occupations at the highest risk of automation are mostly low-skilled, while Frey & Osborne<sup>viii</sup> have identified that skilled occupations which involve complex perception and manipulation tasks, creative intelligence tasks, and social intelligence tasks are less likely to be computerised.

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.

The 2013 OECD PIACC report<sup>ix</sup>, which compared the level of adult skills in 24 countries, highlighted a number of concerning issues with the UK’s performance. England is the only country where the oldest age group has higher proficiency in both literacy and numeracy than the youngest age group. England and Northern Ireland have some of the highest proportions of adults scoring at or below Level 1 in numeracy, likewise parents’ educational attainment in these countries has a stronger than average impact on adults’ proficiency in both literacy and numeracy. Although the UK has done fairly well at increasing attainment at higher skills levels for younger people this success is slowing significantly. The proportion of 19 year olds with a Level 3 qualification rose from 40% in 2004 to 60% in 2013 but has changed little since.<sup>x</sup> Higher education participation has increased significantly since the 1990s, but the UK still enters a slightly lower proportion of its population into HE than the OECD average.<sup>xi</sup>



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 people adapt to change, and to retrain when existing jobs are automated. As the retirement age rises, we also have to 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 in adult vocational learning, 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 home grown 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. Furthermore 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 presents a further challenge to investment in skills and education, 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 practices<sup>xii</sup> recommended that 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 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.

We note the recent publication from the independent review of Post-18 Education and Funding, chaired by Philip Augar, which included a number of recommendations to the government in relation to the wider tertiary sector, level 4/5 provision, flexible credit based delivery and 'lifetime learning'. While the Commission will consider the review's outputs, we are clear that we are starting from a different place with very different terms of reference. Our aim is to develop proposals for a much broader, more radical system with a longer-term settlement stretching into the 2030s.

## **5) What is wrong with the current system?**

The adult learning sector is characterised by a disjointed framework in which provision is driven by funding, and entitlements are narrow and prescriptive. It isn't really one sector, it is made up of many parts (comprising FE, HE, Adult and Community Learning and private training provision) with conflicting and competing priorities including for the funds and students that flow from them. There is no overarching strategy for the changes and reforms made to any part of the system, nor sufficient thought given to the synergies between complementary policy areas.

Furthermore, even where changes have been made for sound policy reasons, the implementation has not always been up to scratch; or unintended consequences have

dogged the reforms leading to greater complexity, failure to achieve the expected impact or inefficient use of resources. The Commission believes that learners must be placed at the heart of the system and in doing so we must move away from a competitive marketplace in education toward a collaborative model that positions education as a public good within a holistic public policy making environment.

### *Funding*

Lifelong learning has faced significant financial pressures in recent years with both government funding and employer investment falling and the wider context of financial austerity impacting negatively upon support services and complementary departmental spending which facilitates adult participation. A 2018 IFS report on education spending<sup>xiii</sup> highlighted that since 2010, the further education sector has had to make deeper cuts than any other area of education and in addition the total funding for adult education and apprenticeships fell by 45% in real terms between 2009–10 and 2017–18.

In contrast higher education spend has increased - from £15.1 billion under the 2011 system to £17.3 billion under the current system - driving increased participation rates for full time students but resulting in major falls in part time and adult learning and lower number of graduates overall. Furthermore the market based approach has meant that the distribution of student number growth has been uneven across institutions and regions.

### *Falling participation in further education and adult learning*

There has been a catastrophic loss of adult learners in recent years. The total number of learners aged 19+ in further education fell from 4.7 million in 2004 to 2.2 million in 2016, with much of this decline due to fewer people taking low-level qualifications because of a focus by policy makers on qualifications at Level 2 and above.<sup>xiv</sup>

Informal and entry level opportunities provide exposure to the benefits of learning – unlocking self-confidence, improving health and wellbeing, and having a positive impact on other areas of an individual's life – for example helping a child with homework or participating in social activities. They also offer a route to further learning and progression. Worryingly the Learning and Work Institute's annual survey suggests participation in adult learning is now at its lowest level in 20 years.<sup>xv</sup>

This falling participation has significant implications for equality of access to education; mature students are more likely to be from disadvantaged backgrounds and areas which are underrepresented in higher education; they are more likely to possess non-traditional qualifications; and they are more likely to have caring responsibilities, be disabled, and be from Black and minority ethnic (BME) groups.<sup>xvi</sup>

There has also been a decline in the amount of training employees receive away from the day-to-day work environment. The percentage of workers reporting they had received 'off-the-job' training in the past 4 weeks decreased from 10.1% in 2000 to 6.77% in June 2016. Yet, as the labour market changes and industries come and go, the importance of lifelong learning is growing.<sup>xvii</sup>

### *Unequal distribution of skills*

UK cities are home to the majority of high skilled people and jobs but also the majority of low-skilled people and low-skilled jobs.<sup>xviii</sup> For example, cities in the North and the Midlands alone account for 62% of all the low-skilled jobs and 66% of all the low-skilled people in urban Britain.<sup>xix</sup> However at the other end of the spectrum, people living outside major cities and the South East today are less likely to have a degree than people living in Inner London were 25 years ago.<sup>xx</sup> There has also been a 27% decline in the number of people accessing higher education in coastal towns since 2010/11.<sup>xxi</sup>

This has an impact on productivity; the average UK region displays the lowest productivity across all G7 countries.<sup>xxii</sup> There is also a strong positive relationship between productivity and education levels across UK regions. The least (Northern Ireland) and most (Greater London) productive regions are respectively those with the lowest and the highest levels of educational attainment.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Despite recent moves to devolve power and funding to combined authorities in England through a system of directly elected metro mayors, regional structures are relatively weak and have less control over funding compared to international counterparts. Furthermore the mayoral system does not cover the whole of England, and mayors must make agreements with central government for devolution of funding; there is no automatic right to it. Local authorities can only raise two taxes, council tax and business rates. This hampers the ability of sub-national government to make positive interventions to meet the skills needs of their localities.

The UK not only has a high level of regional inequality, but inequalities within regions are also stark. For instance, Learning and Work Institute's Youth Opportunity Index (looking at employment and education outcomes for young people in England) shows that there is no clear north-south divide, with highly ranked regions containing poorly performing local authorities.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Changes in the UK labour market have led to changes in entry and progression routes for lifelong learning; many traditional occupational routes have been eroded and guidance in relation to new pathways is insufficient.<sup>xxv</sup> As the Industrial Strategy Commission<sup>xxvi</sup> identified, uneven skills distribution and a mismatch between skills supply and employment demand is a major weakness of the UK economy. The commission's report suggests that the government's industrial strategy should "seek to increase both the overall supply of general technical skills and develop the specific skills needed for particular sectors and places."

Inequality in education and skills levels is also evident by class; young people with high-skilled parents are almost three times as likely to have a Masters degree as those with low-and-mid skilled parents, despite the widening of access to Bachelors degrees.<sup>xxvii</sup> Furthermore, those who are already highly-qualified are much more likely to access learning throughout their life - during 2016-18, 22-64 year olds with Master's degrees were almost three times as likely to report having recently received work-related training as their counterparts with qualifications below GCSE A\*-C-equivalent levels.<sup>xxviii</sup>

#### *Apprenticeship and further education reforms*

As participation in adult learning, in-work training and part-time higher education has declined sharply, the government has shifted its policy focus significantly towards apprenticeships, with substantial reforms enacted aiming to put employers in the driving seat for designing and purchasing the apprenticeship programmes they need.

The introduction of an apprenticeship levy on large employers (less than 2% of UK employers are included in the levy) has produced more complexity as two wholly different systems are now in operation for funding apprentices. Although there is broad support for the principle of statutory employer contributions, this complexity has led to frustrations with how the levy is currently being implemented.

A recent National Audit Office report<sup>xxix</sup> on the apprenticeship reforms highlighted a number of concerns:

- The DfE underspent on the apprenticeship programme in both 2017-18 and 2018-19, by a total of £900m
- Yet the average cost of training an apprentice is around double what was expected

- The programme has not driven growth in overall apprenticeship numbers.
- The fall was particularly marked for level 2 apprentices aged 25 or over, with 55% fewer starts in 2017/18 compared with 2015/16
- The programme's equality and diversity targets are unambitious. In 2017/18, only 22.6% of new apprentices were from the most disadvantaged areas, with no targets relating to gender equality
- Some levy-paying employers are replacing their professional development programmes with apprenticeships so the additional value of the levy is not realised

The push toward apprenticeships as the primary choice for training has been at the expense of shorter, more flexible modes of training. Not all adults are in a position to be able to commit to the minimum duration required by an apprenticeship, and apprenticeships are often not the most appropriate form of learning for adults who already have substantial employment experience.

As government spending and the levy raised from large employers has been directed to apprenticeships, funding for non-apprenticeship adult learning at Level 3 and above has been administered through advanced learner loans (ALLs). Take-up has been significantly lower than expected and over half (58%) of the ALL budget allocation – equivalent to over £1bn in funding - has been underspent since their introduction.<sup>xxx</sup> With such a large underspend the loans system cannot be said to be working efficiently for adults. This has a knock-on effect onto the courses that are then available for adults to take – as enrolments fall, courses are cut, the workforce shrinks and there is less choice available for adults looking to learn. It also undermines the capacity of local FE colleges to educate lifelong learners - learning has to be accessible and available in a variety of learning modes to enable adults to participate.

#### *Higher education reforms and part time and adult learning*

The higher education system has become more expensive, with the burden of cost shifted toward individuals through increased tuition fees. This has been justified by an instrumental take on the value of higher education, whereby the individual benefits from higher earnings and so should pay. Notwithstanding the uncertainty around determining whole life earnings of today's graduates, this market based approach runs counter to the Commission's view that education is a public good for collective benefit so has intrinsic value.

The reforms to the higher education fees and loans system have had an adverse impact on part-time study. Those who study part-time are much more likely to be mature students than those who study full-time, as it allows people to combine work and caring responsibilities with their study. These students tend to be more debt averse and are reluctant to use student loans to finance study. A lack of maintenance support for the vast majority of part-time and distance learners combined with higher fees has led to huge falls in the number of part-time students.

HESA data shows that there were 261,510 UK-domiciled part-time undergraduate entrants at HEIs in England in 2008/09; 211,120 in 2011/12 and 84,055 in 2017/18. This means that there has been a drop in 60% in the number of part-time students since funding reforms were introduced in 2011/12 and 68% since 2008/09. The Sutton Trust's report on the decline in part-time HE<sup>xxxi</sup> shows that numbers of mature students aged over 35 fell from 95,000 to 39,000 in the same period

## **6) How will the Commission's work be taken forward?**

The Commission has met regularly since its formation. Building on the vision statement, a number of key themes have begun to emerge from our initial discussions about the potential building blocks for a fairer and more accessible system of lifelong learning. These include:

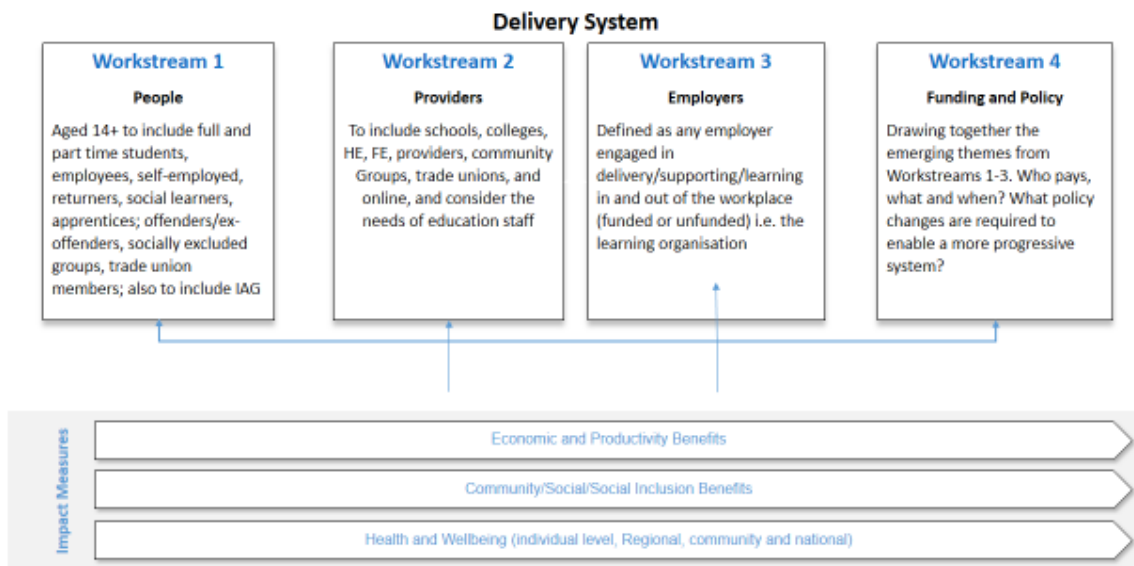
- A long-term, strategic approach to system design that reinforces the intrinsic value of education at all levels and ensures that different actors (e.g. people, providers, employers) are clear about their roles and responsibilities within the system as a whole.
- A set of clear entitlements to learning – some universal and some tailored according to need – supported by appropriate funding and infrastructure, which reinforce that all citizens have a right to learn throughout their lives
- Mechanisms to support cooperation and coherence across the education system, as well as to ensure that lifelong learning is embedded within other areas of public policy (e.g. health and social care)
- A shift in the relationship between learners and providers from short-term transactional enrolment to a lifelong, mutually beneficial relationship
- A new, independent, national Information, Advice and Guidance service which helps people to understand their learning entitlements and options for progression
- Support for businesses and employers to extend engagement with, and delivery of, lifelong learning opportunities – including work to build capacity and measures to incentivize greater employer investment in training
- Development of integrated policies that address job quality, fair work and a living wage, progression, industrial strategy, innovation, business support and skills in a joined-up way.
- An initial assessment of the costs and benefits of our proposals, taking into account cross departmental responsibilities and the wider benefits of learning.

To take forward the work of the Commission and explore these emerging themes in more detail, four workstreams have been established (see Figure 1). The overarching purpose of these working groups is to provide a forensic, detailed focus and collation of insights, across the broad range of challenges and opportunities presented to the Commission.

Three of these workstreams focus on key stakeholder groups - people, providers and employers – and their key areas of focus going forward are outlined below. A fourth workstream will draw together the findings from the other three workstreams and consider what funding and policy changes are required to facilitate their recommendations.

**Figure 1: LLC Workstream Model**

### Workstream Model



#### Key areas of focus for workstreams

The people workstream will explore:

- The role of lifelong learning in supporting people to participate fully - in the labour market, in democracy and in civic life.
- Potential models of entitlement for lifelong learning, and how these can support people from different groups and backgrounds
- How to facilitate freedom of choice for people who wish to learn, including examining parallels in other areas of public policy and internationally
- How to move to a more collaborative model for providers which facilitates easy transitions between institutions and ensures that students' interests are paramount
- The potential role of long-term enrolment in learning which allows people to dip in and out of learning across the life course
- How to embed lifelong learning as a policy priority, and within other public services
- Underpinning lifelong learning with a comprehensive system of information, advice and guidance.

The providers workstream will explore:

- The long term infrastructure needed to ensure an integrated system that provides clarity, is well understood and ensures real choice is available to address a range of needs.
- The potential roles and responsibilities of all types of provider within this integrated single system. This includes further education colleges, sixth-form colleges, higher education institutions - including on-line and flexible providers such as the Open University - adult and community learning providers, residential, specialist providers, independent training providers, employers, and schools as appropriate.
- Incentives to replace the emphasis on competition with a focus on collaboration and models that address community needs as well as regional and national priorities.
- How achievement and progression to level 3, and beyond to levels 4 and 5, can be supported and achieved as part of the operational framework of delivery.

- How a system of credit accumulation and transfer could support the operational framework while safeguarding quality and standards.
- Regulatory arrangements to provide a streamlined and coherent model of regulation that supports wider policy objectives and underpins confidence in the system.
- How to develop a culture that recognises institutional autonomy but facilitates and fairly rewards the development of a high quality and well-motivated workforce.

The employers workstream will explore:

- The establishment of a clear role for employers within the broader NES framework, and how to ensure that they are meaningfully engaged in the development of lifelong learning policy.
- How to reduce and overcome current barriers to employer involvement in delivering lifelong learning opportunities.
- Measures to build capacity within employers so that they can engage fully with lifelong learning opportunities at all levels.
- The potential role of tax credits and other financial incentives in leveraging employer engagement in training.
- How to develop a flexible system which ensures employers can access the training they need to thrive.
- How to support constructive employer relationships with other stakeholder groups (e.g. local authorities, providers, trade unions).
- The potential role of local authorities and trade unions in working with employers as advocates and gatekeepers of community and employee interests.
- How to balance the skills needs of employers with freedom of choice for learners.
- Potential ways of working which minimise red tape while safeguarding quality.

In addition, the Commission is undertaking comparative work to identify policy lessons from across the UK which could inform our recommendations. This work will also consider the impact of any recommendations on people, providers and employers who live or operate in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

## 7) What next?

The Commission aims to publish our final report in September so that it can feed into the Labour Party's national policymaking structures and its Annual Conference. But to assist us in our recommendations we would like to know what others think and recommend too.

We have put together a series of broad questions to help guide any responses and we **welcome any feedback sent to [labourlifelonglearning@gmail.com](mailto:labourlifelonglearning@gmail.com) by no later than Thursday 22 August 2019.**

- 1) Have we got our scope and ambitions right? If not what else should we be considering?
- 2) What are the most important problems for us to address in our thinking on the LL Commission?
- 3) Is there particular evidence from other approaches within the UK and/or beyond that we should be considering?
- 4) What implications do you think the direction of travel indicated in this interim report might have for other departments of government (apart from the Department for Education) and other devolved and regional stakeholders? Which would you think should be prioritised and most relevant for cross-departmental working and agreement?

## **Annex 1: Terms of Reference for the Lifelong Learning Commission**

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

### **Terms of reference**

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 B: Membership of Independent Advisory Panel

### 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 – 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 – 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 – Former Chair of the Board and Trust, Association of Colleges

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

Tom Wilson – Chair of UFI, Former Head of Unionlearn

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<sup>ii</sup> UNESCO, 'Learning, the treasure within' (1996) <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000109590>

<sup>iii</sup> OECD 'Lifelong Learning for All: Policy Directions' (2001), [http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=DEELSA/ED/CERI/CD\(2000\)12/PART1/REV2&docLanguage=En](http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=DEELSA/ED/CERI/CD(2000)12/PART1/REV2&docLanguage=En)

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<sup>xi</sup> Department for Education (2018), 'Participation Rates in Higher Education 2006/07 to 2017/18' [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/744087/Main\\_text\\_participation\\_rates\\_in\\_higher\\_education\\_2006\\_to\\_2017.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/744087/Main_text_participation_rates_in_higher_education_2006_to_2017.pdf) (p.10)

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<sup>xiii</sup> Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), (2018) 'Annual Report on Education Spending in England': <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/comms/R150.pdf>

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