

Strategic plan 2021-24

April 2021

Learning and Work Institute

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Our vision is for a prosperous and fair society in which learning and work provide opportunities for everyone to realise their potential and ambitions throughout life.

We live in a country of great strengths: one of the richest in the world; with world-leading industries including science, creative industries, and green technology; and some of the world's best universities and educational establishments.

The decades ahead are filled with opportunity. Green growth can create new jobs as we move to a net zero economy by 2050; advances in technology will lead to new industries and new ways to live and work; and the UK has significant scope to improve productivity. Access to learning and work are central to these opportunities: skills and employment support can both help new industries to grow and help people find fulfilling jobs and careers.

However, we face significant challenges too. Economic growth has been weak since the financial crisis, holding back living standards and limiting the resources available for public services. Talent may be evenly distributed across the country, but opportunity is not: social mobility is lower than in other countries and inequalities between groups and areas stark.

Falling participation in learning and unequal access to education and work have contributed to these challenges. More than a million fewer adults are taking part in learning than a decade ago, meaning we risk falling further behind other countries in the years ahead. Nine million adults have low literacy or numeracy in England, and the UK lags other countries in intermediate skills. These shortfalls limit life chances, social inclusion and economic growth.

The pandemic has also had a profound effect, in many ways increasing existing inequalities. Government action helped to limit the economic impact, but the number of people out of work still rose substantially. Some groups and areas have been affected more than others, with young people hit by a double whammy of disrupted education and a weaker labour market. At the same time, people's interest in learning was highlighted during lockdowns, with an increase in participation in learning, particularly online.

As we enter the decades ahead, the tectonic plates of our economy and society are shifting, at times accelerated by the impacts of the pandemic:

- **Changing economy.** Technology is advancing and the world is ever more connected. This means a rising bar for skills both to find work and to get on at work, but also new ways for people to learn. Changing trading relationships will also lead to changes in the economy, as will the move to net zero emissions by 2050;
- **Changing demography.** Our population is aging, increasing demand for healthcare and the number of people with caring responsibilities: learning can contribute to health and wellbeing. Longer working lives combined with a changing economy, increases the need for people to update their skills and retrain more often; and

- **Changing society.** We have more ways than ever to connect with people locally and globally: this can expose us to a wider range of views or trap us in an ‘echo chamber’ with only those who share the same views. There is also an increased awareness of the number of people suffering from loneliness. Learning can help people make new friends and social connections, and be more active citizens.

We want the 2020s to be a decade of recovery and renewal. We want more people engaged in learning, improving our skills base, increasing employment, and ensuring wider and fairer access to good quality work with opportunities to develop and progress. That is essential for increasing prosperity, building connections between people and communities, and widening opportunity so that no one’s life chances are limited by their background.

Learning and work need to be golden threads running through our approach to improving health and wellbeing, increasing employment and careers, building connected and active communities, and ensuring a prosperous and fair society.

How we make a difference

Learning and Work Institute has a heritage of more than a century and a focus on the future.

Our work is centred on: **leading the debate** so it focuses on the key challenges; **influencing policy** so it increases and widens opportunity; **testing new ideas** to engage people in learning and work; and **building and spreading good practice** for policymakers and practitioners.

Our mission

- We are an independent policy, research and development organisation dedicated to promoting lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion.
- We research what works, influence policy, develop new ways of thinking, and help implement new approaches.
- Working with partners, we inspire people to learn and help transform people’s experiences of learning and employment.

Our work priorities

- **Lifelong learning.** Learning through life, for any reason and none, improves work, health, wellbeing and active citizenship. People learn in many ways, including blended use of technology and with family and community. Yet participation in learning is unequal and has fallen. We will focus on making the case for learning for adults, including through Festival of Learning in England and Adult Learners’ Week in Wales, as well as support for retraining and upskilling.
- **Employment and social security.** At its best, work can provide income, meaning, purpose, connections and the opportunity to progress. But unemployment increased

during the pandemic, with young people and older people among those hardest hit. Employment support, allied with health, skills and other services, can help people find work. We will focus on support for groups, like young people and disabled people, and areas that have lower employment. We will look to build and disseminate the evidence base and advocate for effective policy and delivery.

- **Essential and life skills.** Capabilities like literacy, language, ESOL, numeracy, digital, health literacy, citizenship and financial skills, are fundamental to life and work. Yet one in five adults have low functional skills and fewer people are taking part in learning to improve these skills. We will focus on building support for all adults to gain these capabilities and developing new ways to engage people and deliver learning.
- **Good work and progression.** Work should be good quality and provide progression and development opportunities. Increases in the minimum wage have reduced the prevalence of low pay. Yet living standards have stagnated for millions since 2008 and levels of progression from low pay are limited. We will focus on developing and spreading good practice for people in low pay to progress, including careers advice and skills improvements, and exploring the role and impact of the minimum wage.
- **Apprenticeships and technical education.** Everyone who could benefit should be able to access a high-quality apprenticeship and world-class technical education. Yet participation in both is lower than in other countries and quality too often variable. We will focus on increasing and widening access to high quality apprenticeships, and how to expand technical education, including higher technical education.
- **Social justice and inclusion.** Everyone should have the chance to go as far as their efforts will take them - life chances should not be constrained by background. Yet we have stark inequalities by group and area, and lower social mobility than other countries. We will focus on advocating for better support for groups that too often miss out, particularly young people, and trying new ways of delivering this with partners.

Our programmes

Our work priorities interact, so we will develop cross-cutting programmes focused on:

- **Priority sectors.** We will look at the skills and employment needs and opportunities of a small number of sectors. These may include green growth, high growth sectors and foundation sectors such as social care. We will identify how skills and employment support can support these sectors and widen access to work in them.
- **Levelling up.** There are significant and persistent inequalities in pay, work and learning between places and groups. We will consider what levelling up might mean, how it might be delivered, and identify successful policy and practice.
- **Community and connection.** Isolation affect many: technology can build connections or leave people more isolated or trapped in 'echo chambers'. How do we build more connections between people and greater community engagement? How can learning help? How could this be integrated with other support in a local area?

How we work

We aim to maximise our impact and reach through the quality of our work and by working in partnership. That is underpinned by:

- **A fundamental commitment to equality and diversity:** We will seek to understand, challenge and address inequalities in access to and achievement in learning and work.
- **Strong leadership:** Our Trustees and senior staff need a wide spread of skills and experience as well as allowing for the diversity of voices that our work encompasses.
- **Professional and skilled team:** We need a strong and thriving team with experience, credibility and relationships across all of our priorities.
- **Partnership:** We will build strong relationships with a wide range of supporters and partners, including working with international networks, to inform our work.
- **Secure and diverse funding:** We will be clear about the work we want to carry out, the costs involved and the funders and partners we aim to work with.
- **Clear measurement of impact:** We will build clear measurements of the impact we want to achieve into our work, aiming to maximise its collective impact.

Our values

- **Ambition:** the leading and powerful voice for lifelong learning and economic inclusion.
- **Expertise:** using evidence-based thinking to deliver real-world change in learning, skills and employment.
- **Independence:** an unshakeable commitment to being open-minded, honest and fair.
- **Collaboration:** putting partnership and networking at the heart of what we do.

What we do

- Research and evaluation
- Policy advice and guidance
- Statistics and analysis
- Developing and testing new approaches and innovation
- Campaigns and advocacy
- Events