

STRATEGIC PLAN

2024-2029



Learning and Work Institute is an independent policy and research organisation focused on lifelong learning and better work.
Our vision is for a fair and prosperous society where learning and work enable everyone to realise their potential.
 We research what works, influence policy and develop new ideas to improve practice.





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Lifelong learning and work that meets people's needs are central to tackling the challenges we face and making the most of the opportunities ahead for people, employers and communities.

Better work and improvements in skills can help to kickstart productivity and raise living standards after a decade of stagnation. Lifelong learning can help improve health and wellbeing, enabling people to make the most of longer lives and easing the pressures of an aging population on health services. Changes in our economy, like the transition to net zero, will create new jobs, demand new skills, and require more people to change careers. Fairer access to learning and good work can help improve social mobility, so everyone gets the best chance in life.



But today access to learning and work is unequal. Older people and those from lower socioeconomic groups are far less likely to take part in learning. One in five adults has low literacy or numeracy. Employment rates are much lower for some groups, like disabled people. Too many people are trapped in low paid or insecure work that doesn't meet their needs. Partly this is the result of long-term undervaluing and underinvesting in learning and work.

That needs to change. Lifelong learning and better work must be core building blocks of a fair and prosperous society.

Our vision would mean that by 2040



More adults are participating in learning, achieving this by substantially reducing inequalities between groups and areas.

Measured by L&W's Adult Participation in Learning Survey and other adult learning surveys.



Everyone has the essential skills and capabilities like literacy, numeracy and digital that they need for life and work.

We will measure this through international surveys like PIAAC and data on participation in essential skills learning in UK nations.



The UK has the highest employment rate in the G7, with 80% of working-age adults in work, achieving this by narrowing employment gaps between groups and areas.

We will measure this through the Labour Force Survey employment rate.



More people are in work that meets their needs, supporting wellbeing, development and good living standards.

We will measure this through a basket of measures including the proportion of people: paid below the Real Living Wage; who would like to work different hours; and getting training at work.



How we make a difference

Learning and Work Institute is an independent policy and research organisation focused on lifelong learning and better work.

We research what works, influence policy and develop new ideas to improve practice.

Social and economic inclusion are at the heart of all we do as we work towards a fair and prosperous society.

Our priorities for 2024-2029

Lifelong learning

Learning is good for careers, health and wellbeing, civic engagement and much else. But while people are increasingly engaging in learning independently, more formal opportunities for adults to learn have been in decline. Some groups - like older people, those out of work and those with lower qualification levels - are far less likely to participate in learning than others.

Lifelong learning will further rise in importance with an aging population, longer working lives, need for career change, and to support community connections and integration. But participation can be held back by: attitudes to learning, including whether people think it will benefit them; cost and availability, with public funding cuts limiting opportunities (including a 20% real-terms reduction in England since 2010); and time, including fitting learning around work and home life.

We want to change this by:

- advocating for adult learning through campaigns like Festival of Learning and Adult Learners' Week;
- shining a light on the reasons adults do or don't take part in learning to inform policy and practice;
- and arguing for wider entitlements to lifelong learning, including better support for retraining and to allow time for learning.

We will measure success by: participation in learning by demographic characteristics and area; take-up of our policy asks; and engagement with our adult learning campaigns.



Our priorities for 2024-2029

Essential skills

One in five adults has low literacy or numeracy, and core capabilities such as these and health and financial literacy and citizenship are unequally distributed between demographic groups. This holds back people's life chances and is higher than in many comparator countries.

These skills are fundamental to life and work, but on current trends it would take 20+ years for everyone who could benefit from essential skills learning to take part. Take-up can be held back by: societal attitudes and previous learning experiences; undervaluing the benefits to life and work; and lack of funding, policy and employer focus on these core capabilities.

We want to change this by:

- raising awareness of essential skills needs and impacts through adult learners' stories and making the business and economic case for prioritising this area;
- building and disseminating the evidence base for engaging adults in essential skills learning;
- and further testing our Citizens' Curriculum as a new way of delivering essential skills and capabilities.

We will measure our success by: take-up of our policy goals; increased participation in essential skills provision; and take-up of the lessons of our work in practice.



Our priorities for 2024-2029

Employment

The UK's employment rate is relatively high by international standards, but is far from world leading in particular because some groups, like disabled people, and areas of the country have much lower employment rates than the average. An 80% employment rate would be the highest in the G7 and in line with international best practice. It would bring economic benefits, improve the public finances, and boost living standards and life chances. It could only be achieved by narrowing gaps between groups and areas.

Employment is held back by: limited access to support (only 1 in 10 out of work disabled people get employment support each year); lack of join up between work, health and skills services; insufficient social infrastructure like childcare and transport; the benefit system, including work incentives and requirements; need for more evidence on what works for some groups; differences in local labour markets; and how engaged employers are in inclusive job design and recruitment processes.

We want to change this by:

- making the case for widening support to find suitable work to groups who currently miss out, in particular disabled people;
- improving employment support by evaluating programmes, disseminating evidence and identifying new ideas to trial;
- and focussing on how work, skills and health services can work better together to support more people into work.

We will measure our success by: take-up of policy and practice recommendations; employment support reaching more people from groups who miss out today; and engagement in our convening activities and communications.



Our priorities for 2024-2029



Better work

Most people are satisfied with their work and a flexible range of employment opportunities gives people more chance to find work that suits them. But some people would prefer more secure work but are unable to find it, finding flexibility can be a one-way street in favour of employers. Furthermore, despite rises in the minimum wage many people in work find themselves struggling to make ends meet while many people find themselves stuck in low paid work, unable to progress, often linked to socioeconomic background.

The reasons too many people are stuck in insecure or low paid work include: limited employee power can make flexibility a one way street; low and unequal investment by employers in training, linked to low productivity and high staff turnover business models; insufficient employment rights in some areas and lack of progress improving poor employer practices where they exist; and limited focus in public policy on helping people progress at work, with insufficient evidence on what works.

We want to change this by:

- building and disseminating the evidence on what works in aiding progression at work; considering how to promote healthy and inclusive workplaces and better work;
- building analysis and evidence to better understand employer investment in training and how to increase it;
- and exploring how to widen access to high quality technical education and apprenticeships.

We will measure success by: take up of policy recommendations; development and dissemination of best practice; increased and more equal employer investment in training.

Our values



Ambition

The leading and most powerful voice for lifelong learning and better work.



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.

How we work

Our work involves a mix of: research and analysis; evaluation; policy; development; events; and campaigns. We aim to maximise our impact and reach through the quality of our work and by working in partnership, underpinned by:

A fundamental commitment to equality and diversity: We seek to understand, challenge and address inequalities in access to and achievement in learning and work.

Strong leadership: Our Trustees and senior team need a wide spread of skills and experience, as well as reflecting the diversity of voices that our work encompasses.

Professional and skilled team: We need a strong and thriving team with knowledge, credibility and relationships across all of our priorities.

Partnership: We build strong relationships with a wide range of supporters and partners, including working with international networks, to inform our work.

Involvement: We seek to ensure that those whom our work seeks to benefit are involved in our work, maximising the voices of lived experience.

Secure and diverse funding: We are clear about the work we want to carry out and aim to work with a wide range of funders and partners.

Clear measurement of impact: We build clear measurements of the impact we want to achieve into our work, aiming to maximise its collective impact.

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Published by National Learning and Work Institute
Unit 1.23, St Martins House, 7 Peacock Lane, Leicester LE1 5PZ
Company registration no. 2603322 | Charity registration no. 1002775

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