

# IMPACT REPORT

2023-2024

[learningandwork.wales](http://learningandwork.wales)



# INTRODUCTION

We are proud of the difference we have made during challenging times. A cost-of-living crisis following a decade of low growth has left many struggling to make ends meet and public services stretched. Restarting stalled economic growth in ways that benefit those on the lowest incomes must be part of the answer. Our work helped to highlight ways we can do this and make the changes demanded by the combination of changes including an aging population and advances in technology.

Rising economic inactivity after the pandemic constrains growth makes it difficult for employers to find the people they need, and limits people's opportunities. We helped build understanding of the challenge, including the rise of people out of work due to long-term sickness, and shape what needs to change. That included building the evidence of what works by evaluating the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) Restart and health-led trials, and working on the broader changes needed by supporting the Health Foundation's Healthier Working Lives Commission.

Weaknesses in the UK's skills base compared to other countries, particularly in intermediate skills and essential skills like literacy and numeracy, have held back both our economy and people's life chances for more than a century. Our research revealed the Government had cut adult skills funding in England by £1 billion since 2010 and that employers are spending 26% less on training per employee than in 2005. We argued that reform of the apprenticeship levy, a new Skills Tax Credit, and a widened Lifelong Learning Entitlement could make a difference.

We also looked at how to better support particular groups of people and different types of learning. That included campaigning for changes in the 21-hour rule that means too many young adult carers face a narrower range of learning

options than other young people if they need to continue receiving Carer's Allowance. And highlighting the difference English for Speakers of Other Languages can make, as well as how learning can support health through social prescribing, and testing a new Citizen's Curriculum in Wales.

The range of ways in which learning can make a difference were showcased in our Festival of Learning and Inspire! Awards.

Lastly, longer working lives will mean people will need to update their skills and change careers more often. Our research highlighted that around 5% of adults change sector or occupation each year, often facing a drop in earnings when doing so. We argued for better support for people to change career and update their skills.

None of this is possible without our excellent and dedicated trustees, partners and team. We thank them for their work over the year.

Fairness and prosperity demand a step change in learning, skills and employment. We will continue to make that case, build the evidence base, shape policy, and test new ways of working.

**Jeremy Moore, Chair of the Board, and  
Stephen Evans, Chief Executive**

# OUR MISSION

**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.**

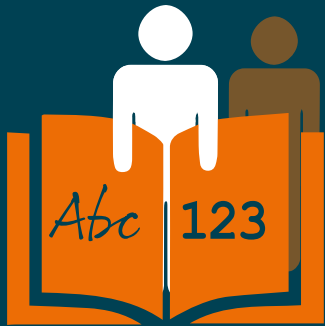
We research what works, influence policy and develop new ideas to improve practice.

Social and economic inclusion are at the heart of all we do.





# WHY WE'RE HERE



**1 in 2 adults** say they are learning or have done so in the last three years.

But 1 in 4 adults have not taken part in learning since leaving full-time education with stark inequalities.



**1.8 million** economically inactive people say they want a job, but support isn't widely available.

Only 1 in 10 out-of-work disabled and older people get help to find work.



**Apprenticeship numbers have fallen by 34%** since the introduction of the apprenticeship levy and other reforms. Only around one in two apprentices completes their apprenticeship.

**By 2035,**  
**1 in 3 adults** will still only be qualified to GCSE or equivalent level, behind many comparator countries and costing the economy £20 billion a year.



In the UK  
**9 million adults** have low literacy or numeracy skills  
Yet participation in adult English and maths learning dropped 62% in the decade to 2022/23.

Achieving an  
**80% employment rate** could boost the UK economy by  
**£23 billion** per year

the public finances by £8 billion, and household incomes by £830 per year on average.



**Employer investment in training has dropped 26% since 2005,**

with graduates 3 times more likely to get training at work than non-graduates.

# MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Our work is focused on six themes:



**Lifelong learning** improves work, health, wellbeing and citizenship. Yet participation in learning is unequal. Our focus is on the case for learning throughout life and the policy and practice to achieve this.



**Employment and social security** should ensure that everyone who can work has the chance. But economic inactivity has risen primarily due to long-term sickness. Our aim is for everyone who can work to get the support they need to access work and thrive in the workforce.



**Essential and life skills** like literacy, language, numeracy, digital, citizenship and health and financial skills are fundamental to life and work. Yet nine million adults lack functional skills and participation in learning them has fallen sharply. Our focus is on developing new ways to engage people and deliver learning.



**Good work and progression** help people's living standards and opportunities for development. Yet five million people are low paid and too many people become stuck in low pay. Our focus is on what works for supporting people in low pay, including careers advice and skills improvements.



**Apprenticeships and technical education** should be open to all who can benefit from them. Yet the number of apprenticeships has fallen, access to them is unequal and the quality of provision variable. Our focus is on the quality of and access to apprenticeships and technical education that works for adults and young people.



**Social justice and inclusion** because life chances should not be constrained by background. Yet social mobility is lower than in other countries. Our focus is on advocating for better support for groups that often miss out and trying new ways of delivering this with partners.

# SHAPING POLICY

We encourage evidence-based policy development and use our insights to improve service design and delivery. Highlights of our achievements during 2023-24 include:


- Influencing thinking on how to support people to switch careers, including highlighting the 'career changer pay penalty'.
- Continuing to influence thinking on how to reverse the decline in employer investment in skills.
- Helping to secure an increase in the Care Leavers Apprenticeship Bursary.
- Building support for our campaign to prevent young adult carers being penalised from the rule which prevents people studying more than 21 hours per week from claiming Carer's Allowance.
- Influencing and informing the development of devolved Adult Education Budget policy in London, the West Midlands and other mayoral combined authority areas, through a range research and evaluation projects.
- Securing a firm commitment to Wales as a nation of second chances, and piloting a Citizens' Curriculum for Wales.
- Supporting Medr, the new Commission for Tertiary Education in Wales, to understand its lifelong learning duties through learner focus groups.
- Being called to give evidence by a number of Committees, including the Work and Pensions Committee on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and the importance of localised employment support for economically inactive people.
- Establishing and leading a new partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions, Communities that Work, Institute for Employment and 10 housing associations to test Jobs Plus, a community-based approach to employment support.

In addition, we responded to inquiries and Government consultations, and submitted evidence to, and presented at, All-Party Parliamentary Groups including the APPG for Youth Affairs and APPG for Adult Education.

## #EmpSkills24



## OUR MEDIA COVERAGE

 **MORE THAN  
550  
PIECES OF MEDIA COVERAGE**

for our campaigns and unique research and analysis, with our commentary of labour market statistics featuring regularly in national news. We achieved significant national media coverage in print, online and broadcast for our policy research, including in The Telegraph, The Times, The Financial Times, The Economist, The i, BBC News, BBC Radio 4 and BBC Radio 5 Live.


THE  TIMES  The Economist

Our work has also been featured in sector press including FE Week, FE News, Education Journal, People Management, Municipal Journal, LocalGov, Children and Young People Now, Wonkhe, Inside Housing and The Stage.

**MORE THAN  
258,000**

website views in the year. We had spikes around report publications, including the Adult Participation in Learning Survey and our events, including our Employment and Skills Summit, Lifelong Learning Week and Festival of Learning Awards. Our L&W Wales website drew 9,700 users.



 **18,200**  
@LearnWorkUK followers  
and 4,709 @LearnWorkCymru followers.

 **15,900**  
with 87,800 minutes of footage viewed.

 **5,869** followers  
7,598 page views and 3,159 unique visitors.



# BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

We maintain a range of networks, advocate through coalitions, and convene people and organisations to focus on burning issues, and to increase our influence and impact. Highlights during 2023-24 include:

- Our Better Work Conference brought **100 stakeholders** together to explore different dimensions of job quality, including mental health, worker rights and flexible work.
- Our online Employment and Skills Summit, sponsored by Clarion Futures, Youth Futures Foundation, Edge Foundation and City and Guilds, attracted more than **150 attendees**.
- Our annual English, Maths and ESOL conference, delivered in person for the first time since 2019 to 100 participants, focussed on Multiply delivery and using technology in essential skills teaching.

We also held webinars as part of Lifelong Learning Week, focusing on career change and health, and policy roundtables on disability employment and employer investment in skills.

In Wales, we held a **webinar on the future of Fair Work** with the Deputy Minister for Social Partnership as the headline speaker with around **60 attendees**. We also launched our research into **employment support in Wales** at the Pierhead Building in Cardiff Bay, with contributions from several Members of the Senedd and around **70 attendees**.





# INSPIRING ADULTS TO LEARN

Festival of Learning in England and Adult Learners' Week in Wales have celebrated the best in adult learning and inspired people to learn for more than 30 years, inspiring similar celebrations around the world.

We partnered with the West Midlands Combined Authority to deliver their inaugural **West Midlands Adult Learning Awards**, with the ceremony taking place in May 2023. We also worked with the GLA to deliver the **Mayor of London's Adult Learning Awards** for the second time, with a celebration in November for adult learners and their supporters.

In England, [Festival of Learning](#) was supported by NOCN, City Lit, the Education and Training Foundation, Skills and Education Group and Phoenix Insights. Award winner announcements took place in July, and the 10 winners and 7 finalists were selected from nearly 200 nominations. **The awards ceremony livestream has been viewed more than 1,500 times.** Award winner stories received **widespread sector press coverage.**

[Lifelong Learning Week](#) took place from 6 to 10 November 2023 and featured a different theme each day, including **career change, creativity and culture, health and learning for the future.** During the week, we also published our annual **Adult Participation in Learning Survey** and hosted our annual **English, Maths and ESOL Conference.**

## Festival of Learning



# 100+

partners including;



Wales  
**TUC**  
Cymru



# 15,000

people engaged with the campaign



#InspireCymru2022

Inspire! Learning & Tutor awards

# 12 million

X (Twitter) Impressions

In Wales, Adult Learners' Week involved 150 partners and a mix of over **600 online and in-person courses, tasters, events and learning resources**. **Over 15,000 people engaged with the campaign** throughout September. Learning opportunities were delivered by a range of stakeholders including The Open University in Wales, Amgueddfa Cymru | Museum Wales, UNISON Cymru, The Digital College, Adult Community Learning providers, Wales TUC, Working Denbighshire, Reaching Wider Partnership, Swansea MAD and others. We worked with Welsh Government to organise a multi-media marketing campaign which signposted hundreds of people to advice, guidance and events hosted on the Working Wales and Adult Learners' Week websites. **Our online campaign platform** hosted free courses, special events, learner stories and links to further information. **There were 34,000 page views throughout September, and our content generated over 12 million impressions on X/Twitter.**

We held the Inspire! Adult Learning Awards and the Inspire! Tutor Awards in September and March respectively with contributions from then **Minister for Education, Jeremy Miles** and **John Griffiths MS**. The awards were attended by **over 200 guests** in City Hall, Cardiff and the award winner success stories generated **61 pieces of media coverage** including ITV news, S4C and Radio Wales.





# DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS

## Valuing lifelong learning

In its 27th year, our Adult Participation in Learning Survey showed that, almost one in two adults (49%) say they took part in learning in the last three years – the highest rate since the survey began in 1996. This was driven by rising numbers learning independently and for leisure, but with fewer formal opportunities to learn following government cuts and stark inequalities in who participates in learning.

Our multi-year strategic partnership with Ufi VocTech Trust established partnerships in four places across the UK to test and learn what works to increase adult participation in learning, including greater adoption and use of technology.

In Wales, we reviewed adult learning partnerships to inform governance ahead of the transition to regulation by the Commission on Tertiary Education and Research. We coordinated the work of Taith, the new international learner exchange programme in Wales for adult education.





## Improving outcomes for young people

As co-chairs of the Youth Employment Group, we have regularly convened our members and called for a Young Person's Guarantee.

Our evaluation of the Youth Employment Service North East is helping to improve outcomes for young people with autism.

Our research for Welsh Government helped to ensure that supported employment coaches are able to offer young people the help they need to move into employment.

We trained and supported groups of care experienced young people to research and campaign on issues that are important to them. As a result, care experience has been recognised as a protected characteristic by their local authorities.

We launched our Driving Change in Higher Education project to support universities to introduce new policies and support to improve young adult carers' experiences and outcomes. In partnership with Carers Trust, our campaign to exempt young adult carers from the 21 hour rule in the benefit system has gained good support and is raising awareness of the challenges that young adult carers face in accessing further education.



## High-quality, accessible apprenticeships and technical education

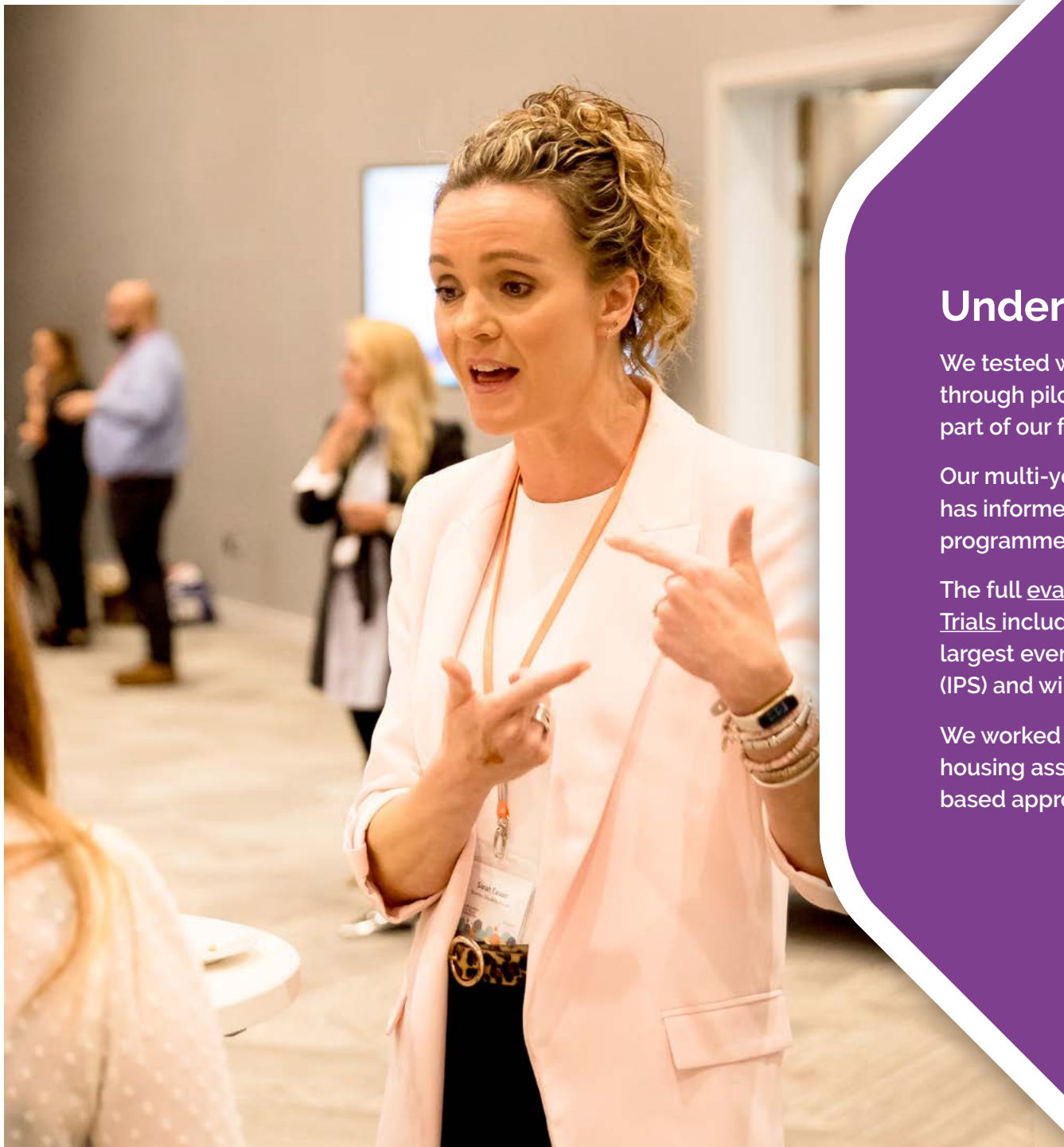
We continued working with the Strategic Development Network (SDN) to deliver the Government's T-Level employer support programme.

We undertook further [research on apprenticeships](#) for St Martin's Group and presented our findings on the barriers apprenticeship employers face and how employers can support apprenticeship completion at an industry leaders event.

We published [research on behalf of WorldSkills UK](#) on how young people can acquire the world-class technical skills the UK needs to be a global leader in advanced manufacturing.

We reviewed the vocational education and training system in Wales, drawing on European best practice on initial and continuing vocational education to inform the new tertiary commission.





## Understanding what works

We tested ways of helping people reskill and change career through pilots in Edinburgh, Belfast, Tees Valley and Wales as part of our flagship programme, New Futures.

Our multi-year national evaluation of DWP's Restart scheme has informed DWP's thinking about future employment programmes.

The full evaluation of the Work and Health Unit's Health-led Trials included a process evaluation led by L&W. This was the largest ever evaluation of Individual Placement and Support (IPS) and will help inform further rollout.

We worked with DWP and others to develop pilots with housing associations and partners to test Jobs Plus, a place-based approach to increasing employment.



## Improving employment opportunities

We published new [analysis](#) which found that people who are unemployed are 10 times more likely to be in work 6 months later than economically inactive people, and only 1% of people economically inactive due to long-term sickness are in work 6 months later. We called for a UK employment rate of 80% to be achieved through extending employment support, working with employers on recruitment and job design and investing in social infrastructure like health, skills and childcare.

As a partner in the Health Foundation's [Health Equals](#) campaign we made the case for support to help people stay in work, and a focus on interactions between health, wellbeing and work. We also formed a new collaboration alongside the Institute for Employment Studies and Royal Society for Public Health to be the research partners for the [Commission for Healthier Working Lives](#), supported by the Health Foundation.

In Wales, we evaluated an ESF-funded programme run by Gower College, which has worked with 5,500 people, including many people who are in part-time, low paid or insecure work. It includes in-work employment support, building on our evaluation of the Welsh Government's [In Work Support Service](#).

Our [Which way now for employment support in Wales?](#) report examined the complexities of the current policy landscape and set out suggestions for improvements.

We worked with the West Midlands Combined Authority to develop a blueprint for Adult Employment and Skills Hubs across the region.





## Helping people on low pay to progress and build skills

Our [Better Work Network](#), a policy and practice-based initiative in London and across the UK, increased membership to over 800 members.

We published new research with the Equality and Human Rights Commission on the [future of work](#) showing that ethnic minorities, older workers and disabled people are overrepresented in the gig economy, self-employment and industries at risk of automation.

We co-hosted a roundtable on employer investment in skills with Edge Foundation and His Majesty's Treasury, and hosted a Fair Work in Wales seminar, sharing our research on trends in job quality and evidence on what works to help people to access better work.



## Improving literacy, numeracy and life skills

We modelled essential skills needs down to ward level in England, and engaged MPs with data on their local areas at a parliamentary event hosted by the Adult Literacy Trust.

We supported devolved areas in England develop adult learning and essential skills policy, evaluating Multiply in the West Midlands and delivering work for the Greater London Authority on the use of remote learning on migrant communities' access to adult education provision, and on the impact of the rising cost of living on adult education.

As part of our work with the British Army, our evaluation of the Army Foundation College (Harrogate) demonstrated clear benefits for young people gaining level 2 and 3 qualifications, including English and maths.

In our role as South East Regional ESOL Co-ordinator, we delivered an ESOL capacity building programme. This was funded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and delivered with the Education and Training Foundation, Learning Unlimited and local authorities to support new and experienced ESOL practitioners and volunteers across the region.

In Wales, we took part in the ESOL Reform Implementation Group set up by Welsh Government. We hosted an ESOL conference in Cardiff and grew our ESOL Network by coordinating professional learning, and helping practitioners to come together with policymakers to understand the challenges facing the sector.



## International work

We remain active in the European Association for the Education of Adults and the European Basic Skills Network, sharing insights from our work with adult learning providers, practitioners and policymakers across Europe. At EAEA's annual conference in Zagreb, we facilitated a workshop on green skills for adults, drawing on findings from the Adult Participation in Learning survey. We chaired the RegALE project dissemination event in Brussels, highlighting effective practice in adult learning at the regional level. At EBSN's annual conference in Pecs, we shared insights from our work on effective practice in adult literacy and numeracy in London. We were delighted to host a meeting of the EAEA Executive Board, and UK adult education stakeholders, in Manchester, and to participate in an expert seminar in Berlin, advising the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research on the future direction of its adult literacy strategy.

In Wales, we have an ongoing exchange with partners in the Republic of Ireland through the Taith Programme, which included a practice sharing event as part of Adult Learners' Week.



# LOOKING AHEAD

Learning and Work Institute has a new strategic plan to guide our work for the next five years.

Our priorities for 2024-2029 are:

- Lifelong learning
- Essential skills
- Employment
- Better work

Our vision is for a fair and prosperous society where learning and work enable everyone to realise their potential.

## Our vision would mean that by 2040:



**More adults are participation in learning**, achieving this by substantially reducing inequalities between groups and areas. We will measure this with 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 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.

# OUR FUNDERS

Abri

Adult Learning Wales

Age UK

Cardiff University

Chwarae Teg

City & Guilds

Clarion Futures

Commonweal Housing

Department for Education

Department for Work and Pensions

Ecorys UK

Education and Training Foundation

Education Audiovisual and Culture Exec Agency

European Association for the Education of Adults

Gower College Swansea

Greater London Authority

Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Guys & St Thomas Charity

Leicestershire Cares

Ministry of Defence

National Lottery Community Fund

NHS South East

NOCN

Nuffield Foundation

Open University

Phoenix Group

South East Strategic Partnership for Migration

Skills and Education Group

Sovereign Network Group

The Edge Foundation

The Health Foundation

The St Martin's Group

Trade Union Congress

Trust for London

Ufi VocTech Trust

Welsh Government

West Midlands Combined Authority

Youth Futures Foundation



**learningandwork.wales**

**enquiries@learningandwork.org.uk**



@LearnWorkUK @LearnWorkCymru @learnworkuk.bsky.social



**Stay informed. Be involved. Keep engaged.**

Sign up to become a  
Learning and Work Institute supporter

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

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without the written permission of the publishers, save in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency.