WEBINAR

Labour market evidence programme

Supporting people to retrain locally: Lessons from the evidence

Wednesday 21 October 2026 | 2pm – 3pm

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Elizabeth Gerard
Deputy Director, L&W

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Speakers

Elizabeth Gerard, Deputy Director, L&W

Dr Jess Elmore, Head of Employment and Better Work, L&W

Jim Riccio, Principal Research Fellow at MDRC

Simon Joos, Work and Skills Specialist at Manchester City Council

Patrick Milnes, Head of Policy for People and Work at British Chamber of Commerce

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Dr Jess Elmore
Head of Employment and Better Work, L&W

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What works in local retraining: Rapid evidence assessment



Key findings

Jess Elmore

21 October 2026

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Key findings at a glance

	Evidence strength
Work-based learning is more effective than classroom-only training Placements and workplace training improve employment outcomes more than classroom learning alone	High: causal
People out of work gain the most They are more likely to see long-term earnings gains than people already in work	High: causal
Wraparound support keeps people on track Many participants need practical and pastoral help to complete training and progress	High: causal
Training tied to local demand works better Sector-specific courses shaped by local employers outperform more generic training	High: influence
Some questions remain open Evidence is thinner on ideal programme length and structure, the effect of financial support, and the impact of context	Limited

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Workplace experience rather than classroom-only training

Strongest results in Flanders
Training combined with workplace experience led to more job outcomes than classroom-only courses, including for people with fewer qualifications.

Backed by wider reviews
What Works Growth found in-firm and on-the-job training generally outperformed classroom-based alternatives.

Lack of placements
In the ERA programme, limited work experience reduced the benefit of training; many people could not afford unpaid roles.

Why it works

Skills plus experience
Participants build occupational skills and employment experience at the same time

More employer contact
Time in the workplace opens up access to real job opportunities

Employers see ability first-hand
Direct observation reduces hiring uncertainty and potential discrimination

Evidence rating: high (causal). Sources: Flanders quasi-experimental impact study; What Works Growth, Evidence Topic: Employment Training; UK Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) evaluation.

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Local demand and employer input make retraining work



Target in-demand sectors

Programmes tailored to local labour market intelligence and employer needs are more effective.

In practice

New Orleans Career Pathways moved provision into IT and healthcare when oil industry jobs fell.



Use expert providers

Sector-specific training beats generic courses, but providers need technical expertise.

In practice

Per Scholas was the most successful WorkAdvance site, helped by strong local employer relationships and sector knowledge



Bring employers in early

Employers who co-design courses trust that learners will be job-ready and commit more.

In practice

In Skills Bootcamps, a short lead-in left employers outside existing networks feeling under-involved.

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Targeting and support help people complete training

High: influence

Identify who will benefit most

Select those most likely to benefit and not those likely to succeed without support.

In practice

WorkAdvance used rigorous multi-day screening to find participants with the right characteristics

High: causal

Offer wraparound support

Childcare, travel, digital access and pastoral help remove barriers to completion.

In practice

The New Futures pilots provided extensive pastoral support to career changers

Moderate: influence

Use skilled coaches

Staff need strong local labour market knowledge and skill in spotting learning needs.

In practice

The Elevate pilot used skilled job coaches to help older workers identify transferable skills

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Different groups need different kinds of support

People in work	Flexible delivery (evenings, blended, self-study) and tailored careers guidance
Older workers	Confidence-building and help to identify transferable skills
People furthest from work or learning	Intensive pastoral support
Parents and carers	Flexible delivery and help with caring responsibilities

Evidence rating for tailored support: moderate. Examples: New Futures pilots (Belfast, Edinburgh, Tees Valley, Wales); Elevate pilot, West Midlands, aged 50+.

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Recommendations

1 Match provision to local demand

Use employer insight and vacancy data to pick sectors; build in review points

Senior decision makers

2 Commission sector-specific training

Choose providers with technical expertise and strong employer links

Policy staff

3 Involve employers throughout

Co-design content early; secure placements, mentoring and work trials

Policy and delivery staff

4 Screen and target participants

Pair literacy and numeracy checks with careers guidance and screening

Policy and delivery staff

5 Provide flexible, wraparound support

Assess barriers at enrolment; offer childcare, travel and pastoral help

Delivery staff

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Thank you!

Please visit our Resource Hub or scan the QR Code

URL: https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/labour-market-evidence-programme-landing-page/

Get in touch:

labourmarketevidence@learningandwork.org.uk

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The full report lists all studies included in the review.



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Jim Riccio

Principal Research Fellow

MDRC

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Simon Joos
Work and Skills Specialist
Manchester City Council

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MANCHESTER
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Member
Global Network of
Learning Cities

Manchester: A UNESCO City of Learning

Supporting adult residents to retrain, progress and thrive

Our central learning

Retraining works best as a supported journey, not simply a course.

GET THE NATION LEARNING

What the status enables

MANCHESTER CITY OF LEARNING

01

SHARED MISSION

Learning as a right, not a privilege

Inclusive growth, wellbeing and opportunity at every stage of life.

02

PARTNERSHIP PLATFORM

A whole city learning network

Providers, employers, universities, communities and public services align around shared priorities.

03

DELIVERY FRAMEWORK

From recognition to coordinated action

The 2026–2030 action plan connects local need, economic change and learning opportunities.

30 months	775+	117	24,750+
visible momentum	collaborators	projects	people engaged (excluding festivals)

Retraining is a connected journey



The value of City of Learning is the connection between the stages.

Residents should not have to bridge gaps themselves.

What works: three design principles

EMPLOYER LINKED

MANCHESTER CITY OF LEARNING

1

Start with a credible destination

Use employer demand, vacancies and progression routes to make the return on learning visible.

2

Design around real lives

Build in flexibility, advice, pastoral support and accessible entry points.

3

Connect learning to progression

Treat outreach, learning and transition as one joined up offer.





Where retraining breaks down / the council response

BARRIER	WHAT IT MEANS	COUNCIL RESPONSE
Fragmented offers	Residents face multiple criteria, programmes and referral routes.	**Coordinate pathways and information so the system feels joined up.**
Rigid provision	Time, work, caring and funding rules restrict participation.	**Champion modular, blended, flexible and bite sized learning with clear value.**
Low confidence and access	Prior experience, cost, devices or connectivity can limit engagement.	**Use trusted outreach and combine learning with practical support.**
Weak employment relevance	People may not invest time without a credible outcome.	**Use labour-market evidence, employer co-design and where possible, connect recruitment opportunities.**

The council adds most value by making the whole system easier to access and more accountable for progression.

Three transferable lessons

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01

Not just the course.

02

Outreach, advice, support and transition.

03

Align the system around residents, not programme boundaries.

Retraining is not primarily a course design challenge. It is a system design challenge.



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Patrick Milnes
Head of Policy for People and Work
British Chambers of Commerce

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Q&A

Please use the Q&A function!

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