

Spotlight on the Lifelong Learning Entitlement

Driving demand, boosting supply



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Summary and findings

The rapidly evolving global economy urgently requires a new approach to learning. Steps must be taken to ensure all the generations participating in the workforce can readily access formal education. In order to make the most of opportunities afforded by technological change, policy must ensure both that people can both retrain or reskill in new areas and professions, as well as upskill and develop within their existing jobs and occupations.

With this in mind, the UK government's Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) hopes to "empower more people to study in a way that works for them."¹ The policy has significant potential to revolutionise education opportunities and reshape how we approach tertiary education across the country.

The LLE is set to provide individuals with a loan entitlement to the equivalent of four years of post-18 education to use over their lifetime in England. It will be available for study at higher technical and degree levels (levels 4 to 6), and can be utilised across both college and/or university provision. The ambition is to help more people access high-quality courses that meet the skills needs of employers and therefore get them into good jobs.

In principle, learners will also be better able to balance their studies alongside other commitments such as work or caring responsibilities. They will be able to "step on" and "step off" their education journey, taking charge of their own training needs between the ages of 19 and 60. In theory, this will radically redefine what it means to be a student in higher education.

However, the LLE will take time to permeate the public consciousness. As the published 2025 launch date fast approaches, there is increased concern about how the LLE can feasibly be delivered in the set timeframes. By the admission of the Department for Education's Permanent Secretary, Susan Acland-Hood, the biggest risk to the feasibility of the LLE is "significant delivery challenges to meet the 2025 launch."²

A clear strategy is therefore needed to reach those most in need of new skills and give them the confidence to take up their entitlement. Education providers will simultaneously need the confidence and support to evolve their offering. Successful implementation will require a firm partnership and thoughtful delivery from all partners.

Drawing on expert contributions from the education sector and public polling, **our research proposes eight ways to enhance LLE adoption by 2030 – with a focus on boosting meaningful demand and high-quality supply for the more flexible, modular style of higher education.**

In order to drive demand for the LLE, policymakers will need to:

- 1. Boost awareness of the LLE:** Significant efforts will be required to ensure the wider public is familiar with the LLE and supported to navigate the options available.
- 2. Demonstrate the Return on Investment.** People are sceptical about taking out a loan, and need convincing that they will see a return on the time, effort and money invested in upskilling.
- 3. Fit learning around busy lives.** Finding the time to learn new skills is a major barrier for many adults, so the LLE must be as flexible as possible.
- 4. Reach those most in need of new skills:** The individuals that would most benefit from upskilling may struggle to access level 4 or 5 education without improved progression pathways from levels 1 to 3.

In order to create appropriate supply for the LLE, policymakers will need to:

- 5. Minimise the regulatory burden:** Awarding organisations may have a role in supporting providers and reducing any red tape associated with delivering the LLE.
- 6. Maximise the potential for modular learning:** There is scope to move further away from conventional degree structures and “parent course” requirements.
- 7. Clarify the practicalities of credit stacking:** The LLE depends on the portability of learning credentials, necessitating urgent collaboration between providers.
- 8. Reimagine the proposed skills transcript:** There is an opportunity to build a more dynamic picture of a student’s knowledge and skills.

Policy Context

Background

The first paper in our Spotlight series, *Spotlight on Workforce Skills*, which looked at the changing face of post-16 education policy in England, included a chapter on the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE). Within it we traced the policy context that led to the conception of the LLE policy, from its initial proposal in the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee report (2018) and the Augar Review of Post-18 Education and Funding (2019), to the then Prime Minister's announcement of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee in 2020, and ensuing Skills for Jobs White Paper that outlined the LLE proposal in more detail.

Since then, there has been significant progress in the policymaking process, including the long-awaited publication of the Government's consultation response, the results of the Office for Students' (OfS) short courses trial, and the "passage of the Lifelong Learning (Higher Education Fee Limits) Act 2023.

Lifelong Learning (Higher Education Fee Limits) Bill

This enabling legislation builds on measures within the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022 and is designed to 1) introduce a new method to limit college and university fees based on credit, 2) introduce the concept of a 'course year', and 3) to enable the Government to set maximum chargeable credits per course year. During debates, concerns raised by MPs included matters such as the individualisation of responsibility for upskilling; take-up of lifelong learning; administrative and funding issues, especially for colleges; and keeping up the real terms value of the funding.



POLICY CONTEXT (CONTINUED)

Lifelong Loan Entitlement Consultation

In February 2022 DfE began a consultation on a lifelong loan entitlement, seeking views on the key design principles of the LLE and how it will require the current system in England to change.

The Government's response was published in March 2023, and marked a significant milestone in the LLE's policy development. Headline points included:

- **Student eligibility:** From 2025, people under 60 will be able to access loans equivalent to four years of post-18 education (£37,000 in current tuition fees). Returning students will have access to any remaining funding once previous student loans are taken into account.
- **Course eligibility:** The LLE can be used flexibly to pay for full or part-time study, for a variety of different courses, including Higher Technical Qualifications which will be funded from launch in 2025, before expanding to further level 4, 5 and 6 qualifications from 2027.
- **Transferring credits:** Modules must be part of a full course so they can be stacked towards full qualifications if desired. Students who have completed modules will receive a standardised transcript, to facilitate the possible transfer of credits between different providers. The government has not mandated a credit framework.
- **Removing ELQ:** The "Equivalent or Lower Qualification (ELQ) exception rule" will be removed. Previously, people could not be funded to return to study at an equivalent or lower level of qualification than they had already received. Under the new system, they will have finance available to do so.
- **Maintenance loans:** Maintenance loans will also be available for students studying many more technical and part-time courses, including modules, for the first time. The new budget for targeted grants will be set out at the next Spending Review, alongside further detail on the entitlements. Distance learners will continue to be ineligible for maintenance.
- **Funding:** The Government has made £20 million available to support around 80 colleges and universities across England to prepare for the changes. The funding will be used to support providers to deliver courses in areas such as digital, health & science and engineering.

POLICY CONTEXT (CONTINUED)

Short Courses Pilot

The OfS, in collaboration with the DfE, ran a pilot scheme trialling higher education short courses as part of the government's approach to delivering the LLE. This was seen by the sector as the first real-life test of demand for the LLE, with it providing finance to students undertaking shorter, more flexible training options.

It was reported³ that as of February 2023, since the start of the programme in September 2022, there had only been 33 applications for student finance as part of the trial. Meanwhile fewer than two thirds of the providers initially involved were still accepting enrolments.⁴ While we are only in the first year of the three-year trial, the numbers so far suggest that stimulating demand for the LLE is set to be a significant challenge.

Accounting Officer Assessment

In August 2023, the Department for Education published the Accounting Officers' assessment of the LLE. This process typically scrutinises significant policy proposals to ensure value for money, propriety, regularity and feasibility of implementation.⁵

The assessment found that the LLE proposals are "likely to deliver value for money", and that the mechanisms for rolling out the LLE has met the "regularity" and "propriety" measures. In short, there is Parliamentary authority for the scheme and transparent policymaking practises are being followed.

However, the assessment did note that "the main feasibility risk of the LLE is meeting the 2025 delivery timescale." There was an acknowledgement that the design and delivery of the system is highly complex, with multiple interdependencies across the whole of the HE and FE landscape.

What the sector is saying

The LLE's policy development remains a live issue of great importance to the Further and Higher Education sectors. There have been a wealth of policy briefings and reports published in the first half of 2023 exploring the LLE and what is required to make it a success. These reports include:

- the [Higher Education Policy Institute's \(HEPI\)](#) analysis concluding that without tweaks – and more detail on the credit transfer mechanism – the policy does not go far enough;
- the [Russell Group's briefing](#) highlighting the need for support and autonomy for HEIs, as well as 'wrap-around' support for LLE learners;
- and the [Learning and Work Institute's paper](#), which calls for quality careers advice and additional help with costs.

Next steps

The consultation response set out next steps, including stakeholder engagement on careers information, advice and guidance, publishing guidance on courses eligible for additional entitlement (autumn 2023), working with Advanced Learner Loan providers to embed relevant changes, and an OfS consultation on the introduction of a new third registration category. In 2024, there will also be a technical consultation on how to determine funding for wider modules from 2027.

POLICY CONTEXT (CONTINUED)



2023	2024	2025	2027
<p>DfE: Guidance on courses eligible for additional entitlement.</p> <p>DfE: Review qualifications currently funded by Advanced Learner Loans (ALLs) to determine which ones should be included within the scope of the LLE.</p> <p>DfE: Review qualifications currently funded by Advanced Learner Loans (ALLs) to determine which ones should be included within the scope of the LLE.</p> <p>HM Government: Update on Sharia-compliant student finance.</p> <p>OfS: Consultation on the development and introduction of a new third registration category for providers offering LLE-funded courses and modules.</p>	<p>Likely General Election.</p> <p>DfE: Technical consultation on modular funding.</p>	<p>New Spending Review period begins.</p> <p>LLE formally launched and available: includes full courses formerly funded by the higher education student finance system and full courses formerly funded through Advanced Learner Loans.</p> <p>Also some “job-specific” technical qualifications at levels 4 and 5, including Higher Technical Qualifications.</p>	<p>DfE: Modular student finance will be extended to levels 4 to 6 where the Government “can be confident of positive student outcomes”.</p>

Driving Demand for the LLE

The LLE is responding to a clear policy challenge. There is an urgent need to upskill the British workforce, with an estimated 30.5 million UK workers lacking “the full suite of skills they will require in 2030 to perform their jobs well”.⁶ This is reflected in public opinion, with 77% of people agreeing “that today’s economy makes the ability to learn new skills more important than ever.”⁷

However, the LLE can only deliver for the our economy if people choose to use it. As indicated by the OfS’ short courses pilot, the introduction of the LLE is unlikely to change established behaviours overnight - and efforts must be made to ensure the public is genuinely empowered to train or retrain using their entitlement.



To drive demand for the LLE, we propose the following priorities:

1. Boost awareness of the LLE

The general population has limited understanding of how to access education opportunities, or where to seek guidance. Public awareness will therefore be a key challenge when rolling out the LLE.

According to our polling, whilst **64% of the public were interested in undertaking a course to learn new skills, only 4% claimed to know exactly what type of courses are available and only 5% know what institutions offer programmes** that develop skills. By extension, there will likely be low “organic” take-up of the entitlement without substantive efforts to market the initiative.

Moreover, adults looking to reskill and upskill via the LLE could find it difficult to navigate the financing on offer, and how it can be applied across a multifaceted modular system. Whilst young adults may benefit from a support network offered by a school or college, those with no - or no recent - experience of higher education may find the LLE confusing to navigate. In short, there are a variety of intersectional disadvantages, ranging from geography to socioeconomic contexts, that may inhibit take-up.

Research by Phoenix Insights found that understanding of the student loan system varied considerably across age groups. Whereas 76% of 18–24-year-olds described themselves as having either a “good” or “very good” understanding of the loan system, only 50% of 45–54-year-olds described themselves as having the same level of understanding.⁸ This disparity of understanding in turn increases the likelihood of LLE take-up being dominated by “traditional” student cohorts, pursuing full time, residential, honours degrees. In other words, a continuation of the status quo.

To support the LLE in meeting its ambitions, learners of all ages and backgrounds will need clear and accessible information, advice and guidance. This should be a priority, to ensure that individuals - particularly mature prospective students and those from underrepresented backgrounds - feel confident navigating the education system, applying for student finance, and making appropriate decisions about their onward learning journey.

Recommendation: Launch a national, multi-channel campaign, supported by policymakers, providers and employers, in order to share clear information and guidance for interested individuals.

2. Demonstrate the return on investment for learners

The LLE requires a high degree of investment from a learner, both in terms of their time and in accepting new debt. However, there is widespread aversion to borrowing money for learning. Our polling found that, **54% of adults said it was unlikely that they would take out a government loan** to finance a training course. This rises to 60% of those in the 45-54 age range.

“There is a real challenge if you are an older person - perhaps with family responsibilities, already in a job and perhaps with a mortgage - facing the prospect of borrowing some money, when you’re not absolutely sure what the return is going to be and whether it’s going to change your job prospects or not.”

Roundtable contributor, May 2023

Efforts must therefore be made to demonstrate the value of lifelong learning, particularly with respect to earning potential. Research shows that higher-level qualifications such as level 4 and 5 are associated with higher earnings when compared to level 3 qualifications; this should be broadly communicated to prospective students to explain the value of further skills training, particularly in areas with skills shortage.⁹

Employers will have a significant part to play here. **53% of our respondents believe that learning new skills is only worthwhile if they are in demand from employers. Similarly, 46% of the public said that they would most trust their colleagues and employers for advice** when it comes to what training course to complete. Learners need to feel confident that they will be rewarded with better job opportunities after completing their studies, and be supported in pursuing technical pathways that will legitimately boost their employment prospects.

Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) can play a convening role here. LSIPs are set to facilitate learner, provider and employer collaborations that focus on upskilling to meet local economic needs. There is then a further opportunity from 2025 - when both LSIPs are due to be reviewed, and the LLE is due to launch - to fully integrate LLE guidance across LSIP networks, and to further promote the benefits of learning new skills to prospective students.

Recommendation: Utilise LSIPs to amplify employer endorsements for the LLE, and ensure there is a wide range of possible technical training options with clear industry relevance.

3. Fit learning opportunities around busy lives

The LLE seeks to “empower more people to study in a way that works for them.” Policymakers must therefore appreciate that individuals are fundamentally time-poor, and need truly flexible learning opportunities that fit around their existing schedules. **31% of the under-45s questioned said a lack of time was the biggest barrier to learning new skills.**

This reality is in tension with the 30 credit minimum set out in the current eligibility criteria. By setting the minimum course size at 30 credits, the government risks excluding a significant proportion of learners from the LLE. As it stands, 30 credit modules necessitate approximately 300 hours of learning to complete. Even if broken down into smaller “bundled” modules, this is still a significant amount of time for learners that have simultaneous working or caring responsibilities. Not to mention the associated time, effort, and cost required to physically travel to and from in-person teaching hours.

Instead, the government should explore the growing appetite for shorter courses - and even microcredentials. Microcredentials have an important role to play in lifelong learning, as they enable learning, assessment and accreditation in a shorter period of time. This could allow a learner to engage periodically with more focused professional development. To borrow wording from the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education, microcredentials “widen access to learners who might not have considered a more traditional approach to achieving a qualification, as well as potentially assisting with meeting skills needs for employers and learners.”¹⁰

There is a growing momentum for these kinds of courses, with research from HolonIQ projecting that non-degree credentials (including microcredentials) will be the most conferred award in US Higher Education in the next ten years.¹¹ Indeed, our own research found that **72% of the public think a microcredential course would help an employee find a job in a new industry**, implying a significant enthusiasm for this mode of delivery. We would urge the government to keep pace with public appetites, and allow the LLE to fully embrace flexible learning models.

Recommendation: Reduce the 30 credit minimum requirement for eligible modules, in order to broaden access to short courses and microcredentials.

4. Reach those most in need of new skills

The Minister for Skills, The Rt. Hon Robert Halfon MP, has said that “the opportunity to study, train, retrain and upskill [...] to respond to changing skills needs and employment patterns [...] is key to breaking the cycle of lower skills and lack of opportunity which effects too many of our communities”; but there is a real risk that uptake of the LLE will actually widen higher and further education inequalities further.

Our research shows that **51% of those with a postgraduate university degree were interested in taking out a loan to learn more, compared to just 31% of those who had left schools after GCSEs** or equivalent. This is corroborated by the OECD, which found that only 20% of adults with low skills participate in low skills job-related adult learning, whereas participation of adults with medium and high skills is much higher (37% and 58% respectively).¹²

Adults with low skills therefore find themselves in what the OECD describes as a ‘low-skill trap’ - stepping in and out of employment, with limited opportunities for development and quality training. Targeted advice and guidance is necessary to support those with lower skills levels to upgrade their learning via the LLE. This will help individuals to increase their employability, and also catalyse the productivity gains promised by a more highly skilled workforce.

In particular, consideration must be given to the foundational skills required of a prospective LLE student. Individuals without adequate skills from level 3 qualifications, or who have been away from formal education for an extended period of time, may initially find level 4 to 5 modules too demanding. For context, only an estimated 66% of UK adults aged 19-64 have achieved level 3 qualifications.¹³

This suggests that a significant proportion of the population will not be able to access the LLE's offer without additional support. We must seek to ensure that the LLE can adequately tackle existing inequalities, rather than simply moving around funding for those who already have access to higher and further education.

“We need to see more thinking about how LLE fits into the whole tertiary education offer, including FE and apprenticeships, at every level and particularly at Level 3 and below, because demand at Level 4 depends on pathways for adults to take from lower levels.”

David Hughes, Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges

In the current system, students aged 19 and over can access Advanced Learner Loans (ALL) to fund tuition across a range of approved qualifications at Level 3. Between 2014/15 and 2021/22, an average of 85,950 learners a year in England have taken up ALL support to access Level 3 studies.¹⁴ This is important for low-skilled adults who might otherwise be locked out of progressing to more advanced levels of study - and should be retained in some form as the funding system evolves.

Recommendation: Ensure support for level 3 learning remains in place, after Advanced Learner Loans are ultimately absorbed into the LLE.

Boosting Supply for the LLE

When it comes to delivering the LLE, the government is just one agent of change. Education providers have a critical role to play in facilitating lifelong learning, and the existing system will need to evolve in light of the current proposals.

“Further Education and Higher Education providers should not sit passively. We have to create a new category of opportunity, and work at creating demand by creating attractive offers for students. To a certain extent we have to show that there are different pathways to achievement, with different providers and different combinations of modules.”

Roundtable Contributor, May 2023

Nevertheless, there remain a number of outstanding questions as to how the LLE will work in practice. And if providers lack the confidence to participate, the full number of routes available to learners will not be realised.



To boost supply for the LLE, we propose the following priorities

5. Minimise the regulatory burden

There is widespread concern that the associated administrative and bureaucratic burden of the LLE will become overwhelming for providers of all sizes. This anxiety is exacerbated by a current lack of regulatory clarity.

Providers have particularly voiced concerns about the compatibility of modular provision with the Office for Student (OfS)'s continuation, completion and progression metrics. In the context of modularity, it is very difficult to attribute a drop-out rate to individual courses or institutions. The numbers risk conflating a deliberate choice to step away from education after completing a module, with an unintended departure from formal education.

“One person’s flexibility is another’s drop out.”

Roundtable Contributor, May 2023

This lack of clarity will in turn have an impact on providers as they decide whether or not to pilot the delivery of these modules.

Providers are acutely aware of the implications that such experiments might have on their metrics, and in the context of an increasingly high stake accountability system, are understandably minded to feel risk-averse. The OfS therefore needs to consider alternative approaches to quality assurance, and to communicate with the sector as soon as possible.

The Office for Students (OfS) is set to develop a new, permanent third registration category for the start of the 2025/26 academic year, to incorporate providers who are not currently on the OfS register. Potential providers - and particularly smaller, specialist organisations offering perhaps only a small number of courses or modules - are concerned about what requirements this will entail, the costs involved, and how they will manage the associated workload.

We would suggest there could be a role for awarding organisations. Learning from existing practices across general and vocational qualifications, responsibility for quality assurance could be delegated to appropriate awarding bodies. For example, Ofqual regulates Pearson rather than each individual exam centre when it comes to the delivery of GCSEs. A similar model for level 4/5 modular delivery would reduce the risk of a bottleneck in OfS “third category” approvals, and perhaps offer potential providers a higher level of support when navigating regulatory processes. Indeed, this model is already in use for a lot of HND, HNC, and HTQ delivery.

Recommendation: Consider the role that AOs could play in driving demand, reducing regulatory burden and assuring quality for LLE modules and courses.

6. Maximise the potential of modular learning

Under current proposals, eligible modules have to belong to a “parent” course – meaning that modules have to be put into a full programme. However, this restriction risks reinforcing status quo provision of degree courses, and disincentivises education providers from offering truly responsive training courses.

“The parent qualification requirement risks making the system less nimble than it needs to be in the technological age.”

Roundtable contributor, May 2023

There are industries and subject areas where it is desirable to undertake individual components of learning - such as learning a new coding language - that would naturally lend themselves to a short course, without needing the progression to a full qualification.

Allowing for shorter, stand-alone courses would encourage providers to be more agile in the face of emerging skills shortages. For example, with the rapid rise of generative AI in recent months, there is a corresponding demand for the relevant technological skills. The LLE could better respond to the needs of employers and industry - as well as the interests of learners - if a provider could more quickly facilitate a new module that is independent of existing curricula.

Confidence in the standards of each module could then still be maintained through the inclusion of awarding organisations. If they were to play a role in quality assuring provision and certification short-course attainment, then a thriving ecosystem of microcredentials would be more likely to emerge.

Recommendation: Reconsider the requirement that LLE funded modules are part of a designated full course, to ensure that new technologies can be rapidly incorporated into the system.

7. Streamline credit stacking arrangements

The success of the LLE depends on the portability of different pieces of learning between providers. Hence, credit stacking arrangements need urgent clarification and sector-wide adoption.

The existing system is predominantly designed around linear trajectories through whole programmes. As there is no equivalent to the national curriculum for further or higher education, individual providers establish unique teaching and learning sequences. This means that credit transfers are labour intensive and fraught with complications, even when a student is transferring between programmes at the same institution.

With the LLE set to disrupt the traditional pathways through level 4 and 5 education, we will need new means of verifying how knowledge has been incrementally acquired over a range of different courses. In other words - how credits from a variety of modules from a variety of providers can be “stacked” over a person’s lifetime.

When reflecting on this task, providers’ recurring questions include:

Do credits issued by different institutions hold the same value?

Did the learner grasp and retain key concepts as part of their earlier study?

Was the learner’s earlier study relevant to the next course they take?

Is the pre-existing credit already awarded at the right level for the new qualification?

Do credits have a “shelf life” or depreciate over time?

Which provider is responsible for issuing the final qualification?

How do providers reconcile vastly different entry requirements?

These mechanisms will be fundamental to student satisfaction. Learners will, understandably, be interested to know how their respective modules can contribute to an end-qualification that is recognised by prospective employers. Moreover, providers are sensitive to the administrative costs associated with credit transfer activities. Delivering continuous, inter-provider collaboration and communication will require significant resources.

“If the vision is for significant growth in modular provision then serious consideration of the support, financial and otherwise, that providers may need to continue to facilitate modular provision will be needed.”

Roundtable contributor, May 2023

To begin to resolve these challenges, the government will need to develop guidance for providers so that consistent records are maintained – whilst keeping in mind the bureaucratic burden this incurs. This standardisation process will require intense engagement between government and education providers, as well as high-quality, ongoing collaboration between the providers themselves.

BOOSTING SUPPLY FOR THE LLE (CONTINUED)**Case Study:**

The European Commission has developed a 'EU Standard of constitutive elements of micro-credentials', which identifies the key information required to track different units of learning.¹⁵ UK policymakers might usefully reflect on these requirements:

- Identification of the learner
- Title of the micro-credential
- Country/region of the issuer
- Awarding body
- Date of issuing
- Notional workload needed to achieve the learning outcomes (in ECTS, wherever possible)
- Level (and cycle, if applicable) of the learning experience leading to the micro-credential (i.e. EQF and/or national qualifications framework; Overarching Framework of Qualifications of the European Education Area)
- Learning outcomes
- Form of participation in the learning activity (e.g. online, onsite or blended, volunteering, work experience)
- Prerequisites* needed to enrol in the learning activity
- Type of assessment (e.g. testing, application of a skill, portfolio, recognition of prior learning, etc.)
- Supervision and identity verification during assessment (e.g. unsupervised with no identity verification, supervised with no identity verification, supervised online or onsite with identity verification)
- Quality assurance of the credential and, where relevant, of the learning content
- Grade achieved
- Integration/stackability options (e.g. standalone, independent micro-credential / integrated, stackable towards another credential)
- Further information

Recommendation: Work with the sector to establish clear principles for credit transfer mechanisms, with agreed standards on information sharing.

8. Reimagine the proposed skills transcript

Ultimately, there is both a need and opportunity to rethink how we record learner journeys. As it stands, all LLE funded modules will need to “be assessed and come with a standardised transcript on completion”. This in turn will support the credit transfer mechanisms outlined above and facilitate labour market currency.

There is significant scope here to develop an imaginative and forward-thinking way of visualising an individual’s achievements. Digital skills “wallets”, such as Credly by Pearson¹⁶, play an important part in capturing an individual’s complete further and higher education journey in real time. Learning from the rise of alternative credentials such as badging and online certification, as well the underlying blockchain technologies, this could encourage a more dynamic and coherent record of modules completed via the LLE.

Indeed, this is likely to appeal to the public. **85% of people said that a certificate or diploma is important to them when completing a training course** - of which, 39% would not even consider completing a training course that did not offer this. In the context of the LLE, students will be keen to evidence their incremental learning to ensure their efforts are recognised by employers and future education institutions.

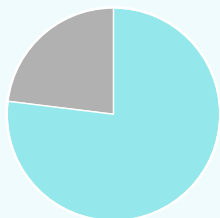
There is perhaps also a role for technologies such as blockchain to underpin credentialing verification and support with credit transfer. Blockchain acts as an incorruptible digital ledger that cannot be fraudulently altered at a later date. Or, in other words, a continually evolving database that encodes personal information in perpetuity. This technology has been used in financial services for a number of years now. In the context of the LLE, blockchain could increase security and transparency in the system, by independently recording and verifying that a learner has been issued a valid digital credential – reassuring employers that the individual definitely has the skills they lay claim to.

Being ambitious about the format and scope of this transcript will help bring the LLE to life for the British public. It will clearly record educational achievements, outline an individual’s skill sets, and support the onward learning journey.

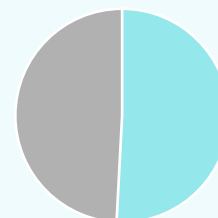
Recommendation: Reimagine the standardised skills transcript as a dynamic digital skills wallet, which records an individual’s collective achievements in real time.

What the public say

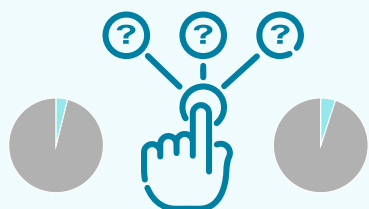
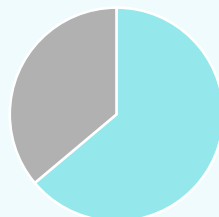
77% of people agree "that today's economy makes the ability to learn new skills more important than ever."



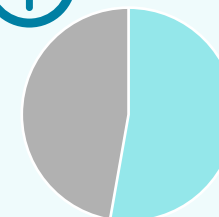
51% of those with a postgraduate university degree are interested in taking out a loan to learn more, compared to just **31%** of those who had left schools after GCSEs or equivalent.



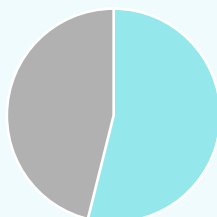
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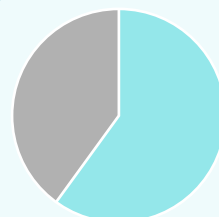
53% of our respondents believe that learning new skills is only worthwhile if they are in demand from employers.



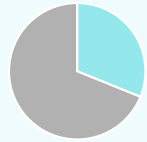
54% of adults say it is unlikely that they would take out a government loan to finance a training course.



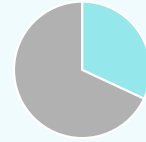
This rises to **60%** of those in the 45-54 age range.



WHAT THE PUBLIC SAY (CONTINUED)



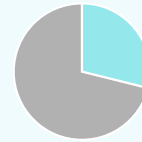
Under 45s are most likely to cite a lack of time (**31%**),



Over 45s also feel their career wouldn't require new skills (**32%**) and that they had spent too long in their current career (**29%**) to change anything.

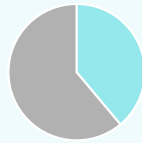
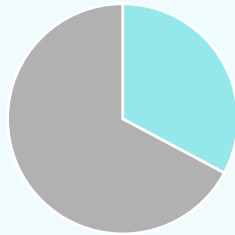


...whereas over 45s are mostly likely to cite a lack of motivation (**38%**).

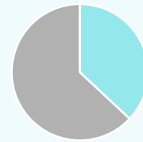


33%

Flexible learning options are essential for **33%** of respondents when considering a training program.



Similarly, **39%** think it is essential for a course to offer a certificate or diploma on completion, and **37%** think it's essential to have official accreditation.



Recommendations

Launch a national, multi-channel campaign, supported by policymakers, providers and employers, in order to share clear information and guidance for interested individuals. Significant efforts will be required to ensure the wider public is familiar with the LLE and is supported to navigate the options available.

Utilise LSIPs to amplify employer endorsements for the LLE, and ensure there is a wide range of possible technical training options with clear industry relevance. This will help demonstrate the return on investment. People are sceptical of taking out a loan, and need convincing that they will see a return on the time, effort and money invested in upskilling.

Reduce the 30 credit minimum requirement for eligible modules, in order to broaden access to short courses and microcredentials. Finding the time to learn new skills is a major barrier for most adults, so the LLE must be as flexible as possible so people are able to fit learning around busy lives.

Ensure support for level 3 learning remains in place, after Advanced Learner Loans are ultimately absorbed into the LLE. The individuals that would most benefit from upskilling may struggle to access level 4 or 5 education without improved progression pathways from levels 1 to 3.

Consider the role that AOs could play in driving demand, reducing regulatory burden and assuring quality for LLE modules and courses. Awarding organisations could play an important role in supporting providers and reducing any red tape associated with delivering the LLE.

Remove the requirement that LLE funded modules are part of a designated full course, to ensure that new technologies can be rapidly incorporated into the system. There is scope to move further away from conventional degree structures and “parent course” requirements.

Work with the sector to establish clear principles for credit transfer mechanisms, with agreed standards on information sharing. The LLE depends on the portability of learning credentials, necessitating urgent collaboration between providers.

Reimagine the standardised skills transcript as a dynamic digital skills wallet, which records an individual’s collective achievements in real time. There is an opportunity to build a more dynamic picture of a student’s knowledge and skills.

Acknowledgements & Methodology

Public Polling

Public First conducted polling for Pearson on consumer attitudes to local skills. The poll was carried out between 18th November – 21st November 2022. The sample size was 2003 respondents nation-wide, with data weighted by interlocking age and gender, region, and social grade to nationally representative proportions.

Policy Roundtable Discussions

We held two policy roundtables in May 2023. The series were chaired by Chris Cuddihy, Director of Government Relations at Pearson and each event ran for one hour. Attendees included senior figures from government, education providers, higher education institutions, employers, and representative bodies.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & METHODOLOGY (CONTINUED)

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Holly Brown	UCAS	Rose Stephenson	HEPI
Iain Mansfield	Policy Exchange	Rowan Fisher	Universities UK
Jane Gratton	British Chambers of Commerce	Dr Sarah Marquez	Luminate Education Group
Joanna Burton	Russell Group	Tom Lee	Department for Education
Jonathan Woodhead	Birkbeck		


Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/student-finance-to-be-radically-transformed-from-2025>
- 2 <https://feweek.co.uk/lifelong-loan-entitlement-faces-significant-challenges-to-meet-2025-launch-warns-dfe-perm-sec/>
- 3 <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/whats-happening-with-the-short-courses-trial/>
- 4 [Courses available in the higher education short courses trial - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- 5 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-for-education-major-projects-accounting-officer-assessments/accounting-officer-assessment-lifelong-loan-entitlement-lle>
- 6 *The economic case for reskilling in the UK: How employers can thrive by boosting workers' skills*, McKinsey (2020)
- 7 Public First Opinion Polling November 2022
- 8 *Never Too Late To Learn*, Phoenix Insights (2023)
- 9 A comparison of earnings related to higher level vocational/technical and academic education, Centre for Vocational Education Research (2019)
- 10 *Microcredentials Characteristic Statement*, QAA (2022)
- 11 *The Future of Post-Secondary Education in the US*, Holon11Q (2023)
- 12 *Engaging low-skilled adults in learning*, OECD (2019)
- 13 *Education and training statistics for the UK*, Department for Education (2022)
- 14 *Further education and skills*, Department for Education (2022/23)
- 15 *A European Approach to Micro-Credentials*, European Commission (2020)
- 16 Credly by Pearson: <https://info.credly.com/>

Spotlight on the Lifelong Learning Entitlement

The Pearson “Spotlight” series takes a look at current policy issues across education and skills. Each report is informed by a range of evidence from policy roundtables, independent polling, interviews, and desk research. We welcome ideas for future Spotlight papers. For more information on the series please contact:

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