



Report from the  
**Commission on  
Sustainable Learning**  
for Work, Life and a Changing Economy



**The Commission was brought together to explore the UK skills problem.** Our approach was holistic and practical. We set out to investigate how the current system meets the country's skills needs, to explore what actions need to be taken so the sector can meet the needs of our future economy, and to provide practical recommendations for change.

The 24 recommendations made in our final report are based on the expertise and vast experience of 18 Commissioners and over 50 witnesses, existing evidence and research, and the background provided by our own interim report.

The recommendations fall under eight themes: *pathways for learners at 16; performance measures; career advice and guidance; apprenticeships; lifelong learning; employer engagement; a regional approach; and funding.*

The Commission's first report found that the economy could benefit by as much as £22bn each year if current skills deficiencies are addressed. With this in mind, we gathered evidence for our final report on the factors leading to current skills deficits, and the policies which could facilitate a reversal in such trends and create a high-skill, high-wage economy everywhere.



# Recommendations

To remain a competitive economy in the coming years, we need to reverse current skills trends. We need to better meet current skills needs while simultaneously preparing for the needs of our future economy. Factors including technological advancements and demographic changes are likely to exacerbate the current difficulties in the future.

Yet, our education system is a step behind our economy. Going forward, it needs to be a step ahead, preparing young people for a future of life-long learning and regular re-training, while simultaneously offering high-quality, visible opportunities for adult learners looking to train or re-train. Too many young people are leaving formal education without the skills valued and required by employers. At the same time, many older people are without the skills they need to be fully productive in their jobs.

Our first report found that there were three major factors leading to low productivity levels in our workforce: skills gaps, skills shortages and skills under-utilisation. The current education system, with its emphasis on academic knowledge, struggles to instil a broad range of technical and career-focussed skills amongst young people. Adult learners looking to re-train or up-skill suffer from a lack of high-quality, affordable, visible pathways to help them progress in learning and in work. Combined, this has led to skills gaps and skills shortages which many employers are struggling to overcome.

Our education and training needs to change. Based on the evidence heard by the Commission, 24 recommendations, falling under the following eight themes, are key to fixing our education and skills system.



# 1 Pathways for learners at 16

**Offer increased and improved technical and career-focussed pathways for learners at 16.**

As a country, we can no longer afford to prioritise the academic route through education and into work. Three pathways must be available: a purely academic curriculum, a broad career-focused route that can be taken on its own or in combination with A levels, and a more specialised option that allows learners to prepare for a particular occupation.

Technical and career-focussed qualifications need far more visibility within the system and learners should be afforded increased and improved opportunities to combine the academic with technical and career-focussed qualifications and move between the pathways as appropriate.



# 2 Performance measures

**The way we measure our schools and colleges needs to evolve to support the pathways for learners at 16.**

The academic route pursued by so many in our education system and encouraged by school and college performance measures is unlikely, by itself, to produce the future skills needs of our economy.

These changes are also likely to fundamentally disrupt and distort the nature of education and work. Increasingly, individuals are likely to move between careers, re-training and up-skilling as necessary.



# 3 Career Advice & Guidance

**Our career advice and guidance structures must improve in order to enable the changing nature of work, career changes and requisite upskilling.**

Factors including technological advancements and demographic changes are likely to make current difficulties worse. These changes are also likely to fundamentally disrupt and distort the nature of education and work. Increasingly, individuals are likely to move between careers, re-training and up-skilling as necessary.

Our career advice and guidance is not as good as it should be and fails to support individuals of all ages looking to improve their skills and opportunities. A properly-resourced all-age career advice and guidance needs to be offered to all.



# 4 Apprenticeships

**The introduction of the apprenticeship levy has brought about a fundamental shift in the way we invest in apprenticeships and a substantial increase in that investment.**

This shift is welcome but more needs to be done to support employers of all sizes still struggling to engage. We welcome the government's commitment to reviewing the levy. This should be broad and explore how the levy could be used to support a more holistic approach to workforce development.



# 5 Lifelong Learning

**To support higher productivity as we face increasingly fast rates of technological change we urgently need to promote lifelong learning and individuals' ownership of their own lifelong learning.**

Individuals need to be encouraged and supported to invest. We need to develop flexible provision that meets the needs of older learners, and free provision needs to be available for qualifications up to level 3 is made available for individuals of all ages without such qualifications.

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# 6 Employer Engagement

**Skills under-utilisation is predominantly a demand side issue.**

We need employers to embrace lifelong learning and they too need to be encouraged and supported to invest. Fostering more employer engagement, collaboration between education and training providers and employers, is necessary to respond to market intelligence.

There is insufficient communication and cooperation between education and skill training and employment and too much disconnect between the education system and the world of work.



# 7 A Regional Approach

**An increased focus on the move towards a regional approach would boost successful regional economies and represents an exciting opportunity to reconsider the way this country spends its education budget.**

The introduction of Local Enterprise Partnerships has helped provide region-specific labour market intelligence and increase collaboration between education and employment and there are some exceptional examples of best practice; there is a need for more of this.



# 8 Funding

**To achieve these aims, we call for a fundamental rethink of the national education budget.**

We support the Association of College's call for a long-term target to be set for education funding as a percentage of GDP, ensuring a clear mechanism for sustainable investment.

16-18 funding needs to be scaled up to narrow the gap between pre and post-16 by raising 16-to-18 funding per student by 5% a year for five years from 2019-20 to 2024-25. Funds spent on improving skills provision will be recuperated in future benefits to the economy. Regular funding cuts have had a major impact on our ability to offer skills training and provision.



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# Witnesses and sessions

The Commission launched its inquiry in June 2018. Four oral evidence sessions were held, with evidence provided from a range of expert witnesses. The Commission also spent time in the North East meeting with local leaders, education providers and students. Recognising that many of the skills deficits are region-specific, we made sure to visit regions across the country, hearing from students, education providers, employers, Local Enterprise Partnership members and local authorities.

We visited and held sessions at the Festival of Education at Wellington College, Sunderland College, Nottingham University and London Southbank University and Gateshead. Members of the Commission also met with parliamentarians, government ministers and shadow ministers with an interest in education and skills to discuss the Commission's work. We are extremely grateful to everyone who contributed to this inquiry and offered their thoughts, their vast expertise, and in many cases their personal stories.