

## Contents

The **Skills Research Digest** monitors recently published skills and labour market research relevant to the work of the Department for the Economy and to the strategic and policy issues that we face in Northern Ireland.

In each case, we provide a short summary of the key points and web links to the full article or report\*. A full list of sources can be found at the end of the publication.

### Highlights this quarter include:

- The COVID-19 pandemic is both accelerating and providing an opportunity for workplace changes.
- AI, including three OECD reports on its actual (as opposed to its forecast) impact.
- Skills gaps and shortages, particularly in the growth areas of cyber security and green jobs.
- Young people's choices and the role of up-to-date, targeted careers information, advice & guidance.
- A new section on higher technical education (HTE), which is also a feature of England's new FE white paper.

*\* Links are correct at the time of publication, however it is likely that some will break over time. The list of sources has more general links, which should help the reader to track down the original report.*

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*The research summarised here presents the views of various researchers and organisations and does not represent the views or policy of the Northern Ireland Executive or those of the authors.*

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## 16–19 EDUCATION

**The Education Policy Institute (EPI) published [Measuring the disadvantage gap in 16–19 education](#) in England, offering a new metric for what is often described as a ‘Cinderella’ phase – one suffering undeserved neglect.**

- There is a gap equivalent to almost three A level grades between the best three qualifications of disadvantaged students and their peers; it rises to four grades for those disadvantaged over a longer period.
  - Disadvantaged students on average achieve half a grade less in every A level; for non-academic Level 3 (L3), such as BTECs, the gap is only the equivalent of a quarter of a grade per qualification.
- Disadvantaged students take fewer and lower-level qualifications and are more likely to take vocational and technical qualifications.
  - In recent years, the number they take has fallen more than among their peers.
- 86% of the 16–19 disadvantage gap can be explained by: prior attainment (39%); average prior attainment of students’ peers (12%); and the type of qualifications entered (33%).
  - 14% appears to be associated with differences between students rather than institutions.
  - Disadvantaged white British students have among the lowest attainment.
- Among the main types of provider, students at further education (FE) colleges have notably lower attainment than average, largely due to differences in prior attainment and type of qualification entered.

**The Social Mobility Commission published [The road not taken: The drivers of course selection – The determinants and consequences of post-16 education choices](#).**

- 80% of A level courses are ranked in the top 25% of earnings; 70% of students who combine academic and technical qualifications end up in jobs ranked in the top 50% of earnings.
  - 62% of classroom-based technical qualifications and 40% of apprenticeships are in the bottom 25% of earnings.
  - The technical qualifications with highest earnings potential are at L3, particularly apprenticeships.
- Men are more likely to take courses in higher-earning subject areas, such as engineering, construction and planning.
  - Women are more likely to study subjects associated with low earnings, such as retail, commerce, health, care and public services.
- The most privileged men are 28ppt more likely to take a course in the top 25% of earnings than men in the most deprived group; the equivalent gap for women is 31ppt.
- Prior attainment mostly explains why young people choose the highest-earning courses; however, some groups are more likely to choose the lowest-paying routes, regardless of their achievements.
  - Young people taking higher-level courses are usually better informed about education pathways and other opportunities open to them; disadvantaged young people are more likely to be disappointed by their choices.
- The cost of travel and how long the journey takes can influence a learner’s choice of provider and course, particularly for apprentices who need to travel to both study and work.

**The Scottish Government published [Course choice in Senior Phase – Young People in Scotland Survey 2019](#), carried out by IPSOS Mori on the choices young people make about their subjects or courses within school.**

- Enjoying a subject was the most common influencing factor.
  - Students from *less* deprived areas are more likely than those from *more* deprived areas to be influenced by subjects they enjoy and by what they need for college or university.
  - Those from *more* deprived areas are more likely to be influenced by their parents/carers and teachers.

- Girls are more likely than boys to choose subjects based on what they need for the future; boys are more likely than girls to choose subjects based on outside influence, e.g. their parents.
- Class/subject or guidance teachers are the most common source of guidance: class teachers for those from the least deprived areas, guidance teachers for those from the most deprived areas.
- Students are unlikely to list their friends as an important influencing factor.

**UCAS published [Where Next? What influences the choices school leavers make?](#), focusing on UK 18/19 year-olds accepted into HE.**

- 33% of applicants reported first thinking about HE at primary school.
  - Disadvantaged students were more likely to consider HE later, which might have limited their choices, especially for more selective subjects and higher-tariff providers.
- 83% decided on their degree subject before their university or college, highlighting the role of subject-specific outreach.
- 99% made choices at school based on their enjoyment of a subject, also the primary driver of degree choice.
  - However, over 50% said that high graduate employment rates had become more important to them since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 20% said they couldn't study an HE subject that interested them because they didn't have the relevant subjects for entry – medicine was the most cited.
  - 40% thought more information and advice would have led to better choices, and almost 33% said they hadn't received any information about apprenticeships from their school.
- 49% of English 18 year-olds with post-16 vocational qualifications enter HE but are significantly less likely to attend higher tariff providers than those with general qualifications (3% vs 27%).

UCAS also published [Fixed and Fluid Degree Subjects](#) – a table setting out pathways to various subjects. Future *Where Next?* reports will explore the journey of those who follow alternative pathways.

**The Nuffield Foundation published [Moving on from initial GCSE 'failure': Post-16 transitions for 'lower attainers' and why the English education system must do better](#), the report of a two-year project by the Universities of Manchester and Aberdeen.**

- 'Lower attainers' are not failures – 43% achieve a C+ in either English or maths; 21% have five A\*–C GCSEs or equivalent – but they are made to feel such and are overlooked in access to career support.
  - There are lower attainers across the socioeconomic spectrum, but young people from poorer backgrounds are over-represented.
  - Their experience is complex: they have few opportunities to study vocational subjects in Year 10/11; and they have to make critical decisions about careers and courses at age 15/16, during a 'pressure cooker' year.
- They are more likely than their higher-attaining peers to move institution, facing an array of options, but excluded from many due to sometimes unnecessary GCSE maths and English requirements.
  - Apprenticeships are not as accessible for lower attainers as many assume, with vacancies poorly advertised and vacancies for 16–18 year-olds as a whole remaining scarce.
  - Young people are aware of the difficulties of accessing an apprenticeship without personal contacts with employers, and many require GCSE English and maths.
- 25% start their post-16 phase at L1 or below – considerably more than their Key Stage (KS) 4 achievement would suggest; they are more likely to start low if they move to FE college.
- Post-16 structures and practices vary substantially across the country and within local authorities.
- Policymaking lacks a robust evidence base, hampered by complex datasets that don't easily enable tracking, exacerbating the disconnect between local reality and national perceptions.

## SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING & MATHS (STEM)

### COVID-related

**Equate Scotland published [COVID-19 impact report](#) on the experiences of over 150 women, students and employers in STEM, based on responses to a survey in September 2020.**

- **Female STEM students:**
  - 98% would like access to online training to support their studies, particularly interview skills, networking and help with CVs and applications.
  - 76% did not have an internship arranged; 14% did, but it was postponed or cancelled; only 9% had an internship arranged that went ahead.
- **Women in STEM:**
  - 19% had been furloughed, 1% had been made redundant.
  - 48% had childcare or caring responsibilities; 64% of these were also home-schooling.
  - 18% were working longer/later to fit in home-schooling and childcare.
  - 80% felt supported by their employer to work safely and effectively; 75% said their employer had enabled them to work flexibly.
- **STEM employers:** 72% had furloughed staff; 78% were looking to recruit in the next year, 50% in the next three months.
- Recommendations include ensuring that men are supported to fulfil caring responsibilities and are given the same expectations and encouragement in this regard as women.

## EMPLOYABILITY & CAREERS

### COVID-related

[19 January] **The Prince's Trust published [The Prince's Trust Tesco Youth Index 2021](#), based on an online survey of 2,180 16–25 year-olds in the UK in November/December 2020.**

- 23% don't feel confident about their future work; 24% say the pandemic has destroyed their career hopes.
- 60% say getting a new job feels impossible as there is so much competition; 54% say it is harder to ask for employment help as everyone needs it.
- 21% are scared that their skills and training are no longer useful.
- 48% of those not in education, employment or training (NEET) say they can't see an end to their unemployment; 65% say the longer they are jobless, the worse they feel about themselves.
  - 56% always or often feel anxious, 64% of those who are NEET.

**Unifrog published [Skills & Enterprise 2021: A report on students' skills development and attitudes towards their future careers](#), based on data from 700k UK school/college students active on the platform plus a survey of 6,253 students about the impact of the pandemic.**

- 70% of Year 13 students report that the COVID-19 pandemic is making it more difficult to develop career-related skills, particularly those that rely on in-person interaction, e.g. teamwork and leadership.
- 68% say the pandemic is making it more difficult to find a work experience placement.
- Independence has been the most logged competency during the pandemic.
- 72% believe that COVID-19 will make it harder for them to find a job in the future.
- Students are interested in a wider range of careers than in previous years, especially in the current growth areas of technology, science and healthcare.
- Job security is the most important factor for students choosing a career path (90% very/quite important).
- Recommendations include:
  - Put careers in context and help students anticipate what the work may look like in the future.
  - Create opportunities for students to interact with employers wherever possible.
  - Tackle students' perceptions around skills that are traditionally reliant on in-person interaction.
  - Embed skills in the curriculum and link them to the real world to make them relevant.
  - Encourage students to explore virtual work experience placements as they offer opportunities that may not have been available previously.

## Other research

**The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) published [The professional careers adviser workforce](#), commissioned by the Gatsby Foundation, examining careers guidance provision in schools and colleges in England.**

- There is no single source of data that provides a full, up-to-date picture of the size and nature of the careers guidance workforce; the most accurate data is from the 2011 Census of Population.
  - Recommendations are made for the collection and publication of workforce data, including staff numbers, regional distribution, qualification level and demographic characteristics.
- Across all datasets explored, careers advisers in schools and colleges are predominantly female (80–90%), and they tend to work slightly shorter hours on average than their male peers.
  - The highest proportion of female careers advisers is in secondary schools.
  - In FE, 85% of careers advisers are female compared to 66% of the entire FE workforce.
- Over 80% of careers advisers in schools are at least 40 years-old with an average age of 47.

**England's Department for Education published [International approaches to careers interventions: Literature review](#).**

- The report includes an overview of careers information, advice & guidance (CIAG) systems in eight nations selected for their high-quality provision: Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Republic of Ireland, Germany, Netherlands, Canada (Ontario) and Singapore.
- The three UK devolved nations share some commonalities:
  - CIAG policies can be traced to wider economic policies and there are similar policy and delivery frameworks.
  - In schools, teachers provide careers education – a statutory part of the curriculum – while external careers advisers support this with impartial guidance.
  - All three nations also have initiatives designed to ease transitions from education into employment, as well as CIAG services for adult workers in need of upskilling and retraining.
  - Services for young people and adults are typically run in the community, through careers advice centres and co-locations, such as Jobcentres and community hubs; services are also increasingly offered online.
- In contrast, the model for Germany reflects the country's federal approach of a top-down policy, with contributions expected from institutions, such as chambers of commerce and trade unions, and delivery left to each state to optimise.
- In Ontario, Singapore and, to some extent, Germany, programmes are centred around the individual thinking about their respective needs.
- Relatively consistent themes include:
  - Positive results are more evident on shorter-term outcomes, such as career readiness and attitude to school/education, as opposed to longer-term outcomes, such as career adaptability measures or education and employment outcomes.
  - Time is needed for effective counselling interventions.
  - Reflective approaches to counselling are generally favoured and can work with disadvantaged groups, although such groups may need to be specifically targeted or risk missing out.
  - Activities to raise aspirations to study at higher levels can have a positive impact, particularly experiential activities and those that involve a student counsellor.
  - Experimental designs prove complex to conduct, with many factors that can impinge on the purity of careers research.

*A further review is due later this year from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD).*

**The Poverty Alliance published [The poverty-related attainment gap: A review of the evidence](#), commissioned by the Robertson Trust, exploring the links between poverty, education and work pathways for young people in Scotland and the wider UK.**

- The poverty-related attainment gap starts in early years and widens over time; it appears to be increasing and risks being further compounded by the pandemic.
  - Inequalities continue into post-16 education and work pathways.

- There is strong evidence that one-to-one tutoring, mentoring and targeted careers education and guidance initiatives are effective; however these are lacking in Scottish schools.
- There is a lack of synthesised data on evidence-based approaches and interventions that support disadvantaged young people into work and training (including apprenticeships) post-16.
- Existing evidence on traineeships, supported internships and apprenticeship programmes for disadvantaged young people is largely positive.
  - Effective interventions also include providing a trusted, consistent adviser and personalised support.
  - More support and advice into this pathway are needed for specific groups, e.g. care leavers.

**England's Department for Education published [Process evaluation of the Essential Life Skills \[ELS\] programme: Final evaluation report](#).**

- ELS provides access to extracurricular activities – sports, arts, debating, IT – for disadvantaged children and young people.
- A separate report for providers on [Extracurricular activities to develop life skills: Findings and lessons for practice](#) includes the following:
  - Extracurricular provision can promote a range of specific benefits including enhanced confidence, resilience, relationships and social and emotional intelligence.
  - Outcomes for providers involved in running the programmes were also apparent, with new partnerships formed and teachers better equipped to run similar activities in the future.
  - Running activities across different institutions can promote integration and help build a sense of community.
  - Success factors include: use of local data and knowledge; pupil voice; drawing on local opportunities; and planning for a lasting legacy.

**The OECD published [How schools can help protect young people in a recession](#), summarising the evidence on effective career guidance, principles for effective practice and how well students are doing in different countries.**

- Three important teenage attributes act as indicators for whether they can be expected to do as well as possible in the jobs market:
  - What they think about their futures in work
  - How they explore their potential futures at home or at school
  - Whether they experience workplaces through part-time working, internships or volunteering.
- Key attributes of effective career guidance:
  - It ensures that young people still in education think about their futures in employment and are required to explore and experience potential futures.
  - It starts in primary school and builds an individual's capacity throughout their schooling and beyond, broadening and informing their aspirations and drawing connections between classroom and workplace.
  - It provides regular opportunities for young people to discuss and reflect on their prospective futures in order to develop self-understanding through face-to-face and digital activities.
  - It actively seeks to broaden career-related knowledge and interests, ensuring they have opportunities to explore occupations that are new and emerging, likely to be misunderstood or of strategic economic importance.
  - It challenges assumptions about what is reasonable for different types of people to do in work.
  - It provides easy access to trustworthy and understandable labour market information and, in advance of key decision points, ensures that impartial advice/guidance is available.
  - It systematically involves employers, employees and workplace experiences; employer engagement feels authentic and enables a realistic understanding of the labour market as it relates to all learners.
  - It listens to young people, helping them to actively explore potential careers and listening regularly to their assessments of whether provision is proving sufficient to their needs.
  - It recognises that schools have a democratic responsibility to equip all young people with the knowledge and skills needed to make informed decisions of relevance to their futures.

- It acknowledges that the ways young people think about jobs and careers are shaped by gender, social background, ethnicity, migrant status and sense of identity.
- It is designed to build psychological resilience as well as provide access to practical information and skills.

**CESifo published [Can Mentoring Alleviate Family Disadvantage in Adolescence? A field experiment to improve labor-market prospects.](#)**

- A nationwide German mentoring programme offers disadvantaged secondary students a university student mentor, with the aim of preparing them for a successful transition to professional life.
  - Regular meetings focus on developing their individual potential, career orientation, school assistance and leisure activities.
- A randomised controlled trial with 304 participants found that:
  - Highly disadvantaged adolescents benefited strongly from participation, measurably increasing their labour market prospects after one year on the programme.
  - By contrast, the programme didn't significantly affect higher socioeconomic status (SES) adolescents, whose labour market prospects were, if anything, lower following participation.
  - There was no difference in outcomes according to gender.
- Successfully establishing an additional attachment figure with whom low-SES adolescents can talk about their future was a key component.
  - Low-SES adolescents were more likely than their higher SES peers to perceive their mentors as an important source of information for occupational choice.
  - They were also more likely to see their mentor as helpful for improving school performance and solving non-school related problems.
  - Among the higher SES participants, the negative effect can be partly attributed to 'crowding out' of both participation in school social activities and parental involvement, which wasn't present in the low-SES sample.

## The Institutional Landscape

### THE FURTHER EDUCATION & SKILLS SECTOR

#### COVID-related

**Jisc published [Student digital experience insights survey 2020/21: Findings from UK further education](#) based on a survey of 5,372 students from colleges in England, conducted October–December 2020.**

- 48% were mixing on-site and online learning; 38% were studying mainly on campus; 14% were studying solely online.
- 68% rated the quality of online digital learning 'best imaginable', 'excellent' or 'good', and 71% similarly rated the support they received.
  - They were particularly positive about being able to access lecture recordings, which helped their note-taking skills, improved their understanding and encouraged further independent study.
  - Small-group work, collaborative tasks and discussions with peers and lecturers helped engagement.
- 50% said they were given the chance to be involved in decisions about online learning.
- Challenges included technical issues, difficulty concentrating, unsuitable study environments, isolation, wellbeing and mental health issues.
  - Digital access and privacy were issues for some.
- Student 'asks' include: learning sessions to be more interactive; lecturers to receive training and support in using online tools in a pedagogically sound and inclusive way; and opportunities to talk to their lecturers and fellow learners.

*Jisc conducted a similar survey with HE students – see page 11.*

## Other research

**England's Department for Education published [Remote and blended learning good practice: Further education colleges](#), based on ten case studies from seven FE colleges in England.**

- Each case study sets out details of practice relating to an aspect of remote and blended learning and provides signposts to associated tools and resources.

**The Association of Colleges published [The impact of competition in post-16 education & training: A study on sufficiency, efficiency, and effectiveness of post-16 provision](#).**

- The report presents the following working hypotheses:
  - Greater coordination of the post-16 system could ensure that investment is applied more efficiently, deliver substantial economies of scale and support greater choice and quality.
  - Colleges have rationalised and become highly efficient but the policy emphasis on easy market entry has cut the returns on investment, and the proliferation of smaller providers has kept average provider size down and led to less choice and worse outcomes.
  - With the right incentives and network strategy, markets can be supported by bottom-up coordination mechanisms, reducing the need for top-down, bureaucratic control mechanisms.
  - Greater stability and trust can reduce the need for external intervention.
  - The web of overlapping accountabilities, pulling in different directions, can create incentives for risk avoidance and compliance-driven behaviours that are not conducive to collaboration and innovation.
- A whole-market and place-based approach is recommended, which incentivises coordination between providers.
  - Even in the post-16 market system, students benefit from stable leading institutions; incentives should be aligning in such a way that market leaders drive coordinated outcomes.
  - Government's role is to manage a system of clear and robust accountabilities, setting rules and mechanisms and allowing places to develop an education and training market to meet local needs and demands.

**The Further Education Trust for Leadership (FETL) published [Voices from the Tightrope: The role of distress and the modern further education principal/chief executive](#), focusing on England.**

- FE leaders in England report being 'on the tightrope' between the external pressures they face and the need to protect staff, and between the need to perform and be positive and the need to 'hide' their distress.
- An online survey of 82 principals and semi-structured interviews with eight found that distress was a regular part of their everyday role, but that high levels were becoming more frequent.
- The top conflicts identified were:
  - Finance versus quality
  - Being a CEO versus a principal
  - Maintaining positive staff culture versus workloads and efficiency
  - Home life versus needs of the role
  - Conflicts brought on by external accountability requirements
  - Wishing to meet student need versus government mandated requirements.
- Apart from managing these conflicts, the top causes of distress were:
  - Threat of sanction
  - Leading through uncertainty
  - Constant changing of policy and regulation
  - Frequent crisis management
  - College finances where many outcomes were out of direct control
  - Feeling of helplessness combined with responsibility
  - Pressure caused through public perception and media.



**The Social Market Foundation, supported by FETL, published [Study buddies? Competition and collaboration between higher education and further education](#), focusing on England but with relevance to the devolved nations.**

- Some in England have voiced concerns that the attention to and support for FE colleges promised by the recent white paper [*see page 50*] will come at the expense of higher education (HE), failing to recognise their complementary roles.
  - While the debate on tertiary education is less noisy in the devolved administrations, they too face tensions between universities and colleges.
- Though there is substantial overlap, universities and colleges broadly occupy different roles:
  - A university education puts greater emphasis on research skills, independent study and wider non-academic experience.
  - FE colleges are seen as offering more practical, job-oriented guided learning, catering to older, less privileged cohorts.
- These differences offer significant scope for them to work together in the interests of learners, including through:
  - university validation of HE courses in colleges
  - articulation from college to university
  - addressing local skills needs by pooling resources and expertise
  - sharing expertise, e.g. colleges in widening participation and universities in research
  - sharing resources and facilities.
- To a significant extent, the benefits of collaboration have not been realised because of unproductive and excessively aggressive competition, which, while it might be seen as offering benefits for learners, has largely done more harm than good:
  - Encouraging institutions to focus on cheaper courses and leading to inefficient duplication
  - Leading to fragmentation rather than coordination, and a lack of scale and expertise
  - Disincentivising and undermining the goodwill necessary for effective collaboration.
- Obstacles to collaboration include: funding, regulation, incentives, power imbalance, trust and perceptions.
  - Where collaboration works well, it is facilitated by: shared mission and values; strong leadership and personal relationships; clear delineation of roles; and suitable geography.
- Policymakers need to: fix FE funding; improve the demarcation of roles in the 'messy middle'; increase financial incentives for collaboration; support restructuring where appropriate; and simplify regulation.
- Overall, a more effective approach would consider both sectors together as part of a single system, set aside the inherited institutional legacy and determine the best division of labour in the interests of learners.

## **HIGHER TECHNICAL EDUCATION (HTE)**

**The Learning & Work Institute (L&W) published [Making a market for the missing middle: Higher technical education](#), commissioned by the Gatsby Foundation.**

- The aim was to better understand the market failure in HTE in England; the project included stakeholder interviews (including colleges and universities) and situational appraisals in the South West and West Midlands.
- An expansion of HTE could play a vital role in addressing local and regional skills shortages, but a range of challenges impact on the ability to engage employers and build demand, including:
  - Employer awareness of HTE and the business value of higher technical skills
  - Demand for higher-level skills limited by the local economy
  - Graduate recruitment is the norm, although graduates lack practical experience compared to apprentices
  - Provider engagement with employers tends to be 'product driven', promoting programmes prioritised through national policy and funding

- Providers and intermediary services have limited resources to engage with employers, leading to a focus on long-standing relationships and/or larger employers
- Tension between meeting the specific needs of an employer and attracting a financially viable number of learners
- The rapid pace of industrial and technological change causing courses to lose currency and relevance
- The knowledge and industry experience of teaching staff rapidly becoming out of date, so that providers make decisions based on staff skills rather than employer needs.

*The report sets out approaches to expand the market for HTE, plus policy and funding changes that could support them.*

**Universities UK (UUK) published [Higher Technical Education – discussion paper](#) on how universities can increase their provision, based on a survey to understand the drivers and barriers.**

- Motivators for engagement include:
  - Strategic: an opportunity to develop partnerships with FE providers and enhance their role in the local landscape.
  - Student benefit: attracting a more diverse intake and supporting strong, flexible progression routes.
  - Employer engagement: helping to fill local skills gaps.
- Challenges include:
  - Ensuring a joined-up approach with apprenticeships; avoiding perpetuating the artificial divide between ‘academic’ and ‘technical’.
  - Engaging with employers who lack the necessary capacity or knowledge, especially small & medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
  - Attracting and retaining high-quality teaching staff.
  - The complexity of the quality assurance system; current ways of measuring continuation; the burden and inflexibility of the approval system.
  - Potential lack of demand from learners; the need for greater flexibility of provision (e.g. distance learning).
  - The current funding system, which needs to better underpin learner choice.

*The paper also considers HTE provision through HE/FE partnerships and Institutes of Technology.*

## HIGHER EDUCATION (HE): APPLICANTS & ADMISSIONS

### COVID-related

**Jisc and EmERGE Education published [The future of student recruitment](#), based on discussions with senior HE leaders in the UK, exploring some of the challenges the pandemic has created and how universities have responded.**

- If universities are to realise the vision of more personalised, flexible and end-to-end student recruitment in 2030, 2020’s experimental model must be maintained in a sustainable way.
  - The challenge will be to look holistically at the opportunities and be visionary in aiming for seamless student journeys, including recruitment and admissions as well as teaching and learning.
- Investment will remain an issue, and technology providers need to help ensure that HE institutions (HEIs) are investing in infrastructure capable of being integrated into other systems and evolving over time.
  - Edtech start-ups and universities will need to co-create technologies, working towards common goals but from different platforms.
- Investment in people will be critical because their experiences and ideas, in conjunction with the edtech solutions, will ultimately lead the sector to sustainable success.
- Evolution and renovation will be key, and success will come to those who are connected and listening to their learners and staff, as well as to solution providers.

*A market map of leading start-ups sets out some available solutions.*

## Other research

**The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published [Where next for university admissions?](#), a collection of essays.**

- Topics covered include:
  - The arguments for and against post-qualification admissions
  - The role of contextual admissions
  - Comparisons to international systems
  - The lessons to be learnt from the 2020 A level results.
- Contributors come from: UUK, UCAS, the Sutton Trust, the UK Council for International Student Affairs, the National Foundation for Educational Research, the University Guys, the National Education Opportunities Network and several universities.

HEPI also published a [blog post](#) by the Fair Access Coalition, a group of third sector organisations supporting access and progression, setting out '10 requirements for a fair admissions process'.

**The OECD published [Why do more young women than men go on to tertiary education?](#)**

- In recent decades, the share of women with a tertiary education has risen consistently, reversing the historical gender gap in favour of men.
  - In 2019, an average of 51% of 25–34 year-old women across the OECD held a tertiary degree compared to 39% of men.
- The gender gap in favour of women is wider among new entrants to tertiary education than among those graduating from upper secondary education in almost all OECD countries.
- Gender differences in programme orientation and educational performance in upper secondary education may give girls greater access to tertiary education than boys.
  - Only 46% of secondary vocational graduates are women, compared to 55% of general graduates; 30% of upper secondary vocational students are enrolled in programmes that don't provide direct access to tertiary education.
  - Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results show that 15 year-old girls consistently outperform boys in reading in all countries, with the gap amounting to 40 points in some countries.
- A greater variety of tertiary programmes and changing perceptions on the role of women in society may have encouraged more young women to pursue tertiary education.
  - Women are far more likely to study subjects relating to education, health and welfare; when many countries made nursing a degree profession, more women entered tertiary education.
- Young women have more to gain in the labour market than men from a tertiary degree, in both employment levels and earnings.
  - Young women's unemployment rates fall from 9% among those with upper secondary education to 6% among those with tertiary education, while the rates for young men fall from 6% to 5%.
  - Similarly, the earnings advantage is far higher: on average, 25–34 year-old, tertiary-educated women earn 52% more than those with upper secondary education, compared with 39% for men.

**The House of Commons Library published [International and EU students in higher education in the UK FAQs](#), setting out key statistics and policy issues, including the potential impact of Brexit and the net migration target.**

## HE: THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

### COVID-related

**The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) published [The impact of good practice in digital delivery on student engagement, progression and achievement](#), based on a range of surveys undertaken in the past year to gauge student opinion.**

- Despite difficult circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic, positive messages include:
  - Efforts to address digital poverty have helped to establish a more level playing field for all students.

- Routine availability of materials (such as lecture recordings) for students to revisit in their own time has been well received and students expect this to continue.
- Students who experienced enhancements – such as: online discussion forums; interactive quizzes or games; digital coursework submission and small-group assignments; and provision of well-structured and supported short videos – had a positive view of digital delivery.
- Good practice in digital delivery is associated with:
  - consistency of approach in course design, pedagogy and workload
  - opportunities for direct interaction with teaching staff to build relationships and receive support
  - an appropriate mix of hands-on practical experience (where possible) supplemented by digital tools that students can use to practise in their own time
  - a social and interactive academic experience for students.

*Six case studies are available to QAA members.*

**Jisc published [Student digital experience insights survey 2020/21: Findings from UK higher education](#) based on a survey of 21,697 students across the UK, conducted October–December 2020.**

- 81% were learning online, 72% of them from home.
- 68% rated the quality of online digital learning 'best imaginable', 'excellent' or 'good', and 62% similarly rated the support they received.
  - They were particularly positive about access to lecture recordings, which helped them study in ways that met their learning needs, improved their understanding and encouraged further independent study; there was frustration when these resources weren't made available in a timely way.
- 36% said they were given the chance to be involved in decisions about online learning.
- Challenges included technical issues, difficulty concentrating, unsuitable study environments, isolation, wellbeing and mental health issues.
  - Not all students felt well supported to develop the digital capabilities they needed to participate effectively.
  - There was less use than there might have been of more engaging activities such as small-group discussion, quizzes/polls and online research tasks.
  - Digital access and privacy were issues for some, including 18% of those studying mainly on site.
- Student 'asks' include: learning sessions to be more interactive; lecturers to receive training and support in using online tools in a pedagogically sound and inclusive way; and opportunities to talk to their lecturers and fellow learners.

*Jisc conducted a similar survey with FE students – see page 6.*

**Wonkhe published [The expectation gap II – students' hopes for learning and teaching in the next normal](#), analysis of a survey of 3,389 students conducted with Pearson in December 2020, exploring their recent academic experience and hopes for the future of learning and teaching.**

- Findings from their experience during autumn 2020 include:
  - 46% said that their course had been entirely online; 33% that it had been primarily online with some face to face; 14% that the term had started with some face to face but had moved online.
  - In the last week in which they had scheduled contact time, 37% had 6–10 hours of timetabled activity and 26% 3–5 hours; 19% had 10+ hours; 17% had under two hours, but they were mainly postgraduates.
  - 21% reported spending fewer than five hours a week in independent learning; 25% 5–10 hours; 11% 11–15 hours; 16% 16–20 hours; 27% 20+ hours.
  - Overall, only 40% said their experience had been of sufficiently good quality, rising to 56% for those who had benefited from a mixture of face to face and online.
  - Only 41% agreed/somewhat agreed that online activities were varied and engaging; 40% said they had adequate opportunities for interaction with other students on the course; only 35% had regular indicators of how they were performing.
- Their hopes for the future include:
  - Over 80% would like to see: recorded lectures; provision of all core learning materials on the 'virtual learning environment' or equivalent; online access to support services.

- 79% would like to continue online tutorials or check-ins with tutors.
- In qualitative responses, students said they particularly valued live-streamed or recorded lectures broken down into smaller parts, with tasks interspersed; some said that they liked the flexibility of virtual learning.
- 72% would welcome online tests to check their learning; 69% would like to see online discussion forums; 58% would like to continue with online seminars.
- Only 33% would like virtual placements and internships to continue; only 11% wanted virtual labs to continue, although 33% said they would like them to be provided in addition to physical labs.

**The Sutton Trust published [Covid-19 and the university experience](#), exploring the influence of socioeconomic background on undergraduate participation in wider university life during the pandemic, based on November 2020 and February 2021 polls of 900 UK students.**

- 39% took part in societies or sport in the autumn term, down 18ppt on 2018 and falling to 30% since Christmas; 47% didn't take part in any enrichment activities in the spring term.
  - 44% of middle-class students took part in student societies in the autumn compared to 33% working-class.
- 43% of students were living at home during the autumn, rising to 58% in February; the figures were 50% rising to 64% for working-class students.
  - 25% of students living at home in the autumn took part in extracurricular activities, compared to 32% of those living away from home.
- Students were 6ppt less likely to have undertaken work experience and 5ppt less likely to have paid work.
- 87% felt their development had been negatively impacted: 34% non-academic life skills; 18% academic skills.
- 76% were fairly/very worried about gaining skills and experience needed for employment; 71% about being able to take part in university social life; 70% about mental health and wellbeing; 64% about classes being online.
- 54% experienced financial issues during the autumn; 33% were struggling to cover their basic living and course expenses, rising to 39% for working-class students; 28% weren't aware of university support available.
- 6% of middle-class students and 10% working-class felt it unlikely they would complete the year.

### Other research

**The Sutton Trust published [The University of Life: Employability and essential life skills at university](#), exploring the range of activities offered and whether access differs by socioeconomic background.**

- Extracurricular activities include: paid work (79%); societies (61%); work experience (43%); and studying abroad (12%).
- 52% of working-class graduates had taken part in societies compared with 64% of middle-class; the work experience gap was 10ppt (36%/46%); the study abroad gap 4ppt (9%/13%).
  - 74% of Russell Group graduates took part in societies; 64% of graduates from pre-1992 universities; 46% from post-1992 universities.
- 62% of graduates felt their university course had helped them develop communication skills; 53% resilience; 43% motivation; 24% leadership skills.
  - 43% of those who had taken part in societies felt they had developed leadership skills compared with 29% who had undertaken work experience.
  - Working-class graduates were less likely to think societies had helped them to develop leadership skills, but more likely to think work experience had helped them develop confidence.
- 73% felt university had developed social skills; 45% networking skills; 45% job application skills; 39% interview skills.
  - 29% didn't feel that university had given them job skills: 33% working-class; 27% middle-class.

**The Edge Foundation published [Rethinking higher education: Case studies for the 21st century](#), exploring practice that 'reimagines' the traditional university experience and emphasises employability and preparation for the world of work.**

- The report provides a brief overview of the current landscape and touches on some overarching issues, including:
  - Young people are still not getting adequate access to up-to-date and impartial information, advice and guidance (IAG) for post-18 options, including apprenticeship and training opportunities.
  - Students expect a supportive university environment, support in getting into high-paying jobs, and, increasingly, strong institutional values and ethics.
  - Jobs and the way we do them are changing rapidly; students must be prepared to thrive in a complex labour market to tackle interdisciplinary issues – interpersonal and communication skills and creativity are highly sought after by employers.

*The case studies are: Cardiff National Software Academy; Dyson Institute of Engineering & Technology; Minerva Schools at Keck Graduate Institute (USA); Eden Project Learning; and University of Salford.*

**Advance HE published [Employability: Breaking the mould](#), a new employability case study series.**

- It includes examples of virtual placements, the creation of placements in university settings, and students mapping and plotting their employability journeys or work-related learning experiences.

**HEPI published [A short guide to non-continuation in UK universities](#).**

- Even before COVID-19, there was increasing focus on non-continuation for three reasons:
  - **Regulatory changes:** the access issue has broadened to cover access, retention and progression.
  - **Resources:** a recent squeeze on teaching income means the income lost when a student drops out matters more than before; further freezes or perhaps even cuts to teaching resource are widely expected.
  - **Metricisation:** continuation data feature in the Teaching Excellence & Student Outcomes Framework (TEF), are provided on the Discover Uni website, and are set to be part of England's Office for Students' (OfS) new quality regime.
- The UK has the highest completion rates for undergraduates among OECD countries: 72%, compared with the average of 39%.
  - Adding an additional three years to the original course duration boosts all countries' data, although generally more so for lower performing countries; it adds relatively little to the UK total, but the UK continues to perform best at 85% (average 67%).
- Student characteristics and study modes matter: women have higher completion rates than men; black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME), LGBT+, mature and disabled students have lower rates; part-time students are less likely to complete than full-time; some online provision has particularly poor completion rates.
  - More selective institutions have higher rates.
- Recommendations include: use data better; focus on specific groups; ensure easy re-entry routes; consider staging qualifications within higher-level courses; and reassess maintenance support.

**QAA published [The Quality Evaluation and Enhancement of UK Transnational Higher Education Provision 2021–22 to 2025–26](#), a new handbook commissioned by UUK and GuildHE.**

**QAA Scotland published [Evaluation of the Impact of the Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the student experience enhancement theme](#), a report of QAA's three-year 'enhancement theme' launched in 2017.**

- The student experience enhancement theme aimed to:
  - identify any issues that would benefit from intervention
  - help prioritise interventions to improve the student experience
  - evaluate the effectiveness of those interventions, including reporting on the ways in which the student experience was improving.
- The report draws on 90 case studies, institutional reports and interviews with key sector groups and bodies.
- The theme has contributed to a more evidence-informed culture in Scottish HEIs.

**The Institute of Labor Economics (IZA) published [The Importance of Peer Quality for Completion of Higher Education](#), based on a literature review and Danish data covering all students entering HE between 1985 and 2010.**

- The study uses high school grade point average as a predetermined measure of student ability; findings include:
  - Peer ability is an important determinant of dropout decisions and of later labour market outcomes.
  - In general, high-ability students are less susceptible to the ability composition of their peers, however high-ability peers have beneficial impacts on the completion rates of lower-ability students.
  - Low-ability peers significantly increase the risk of dropout of similarly low-achieving students.
  - The effects of peer quality vary substantially across field and level of study: there are significant peer influences in STEM, social science and arts programmes, but less impact in health.

## **HE: WIDENING PARTICIPATION**

### **COVID-related**

**UCAS published [What Happened to the COVID Cohort? Lessons for levelling up in 2021 and beyond](#), analysing end-of-cycle data from 2020.**

- Despite the feared impact of COVID-19, more students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds across the UK entered HE in 2020 than ever before, even in the most selective universities and courses.
- Reasons for the increase include:
  - Students – particularly mature ones – saw HE as a stable option during a turbulent time for jobs.
  - More students met their offers on centre-assessed or estimated grades than on their original results.
  - Governments increased capacity across HE.
  - There was an immense UK-wide effort to offer more support than ever.
- However, challenges remain:
  - **Learn lessons from 2020:** without sustained effort, students hoping to enter HE in 2021 could become the forgotten COVID cohort – less visible than last year’s but starting from an equally bad (or worse) position.
  - **Tackle the impending squeeze on places:** progress in narrowing the disadvantage gap has slowed since 2015; combined with a rising 18 year-old population, this presents a potential pinch on HE and apprenticeship places, which could have a greater impact on disadvantaged students.
  - **Level up access opportunities:** the annual admission of 70 more of the most disadvantaged English 18 year-olds to each higher-tariff provider could all but eliminate the equality gap in a decade; based on the current rate of progress, the gap won’t be eliminated until 2352.
- Eight recommendations to ensure 2020 lessons are learnt include:
  - Improve the information UCAS collects from applicants to enhance understanding of an individual applicant’s circumstances.
  - Better tailor course provision and support, particularly for mature students and those with mental health conditions, learning differences or disabilities.
  - Increase the number of HE places and apprenticeships to reflect the growing 18 year-old population and ensure disadvantaged students do not miss out.
  - Consider how post-qualification admissions might improve the application experience and outcomes for disadvantaged students; use admissions reform to explore how technical education and apprenticeships could be integrated into the process.
  - Explore the benefits of a UK-wide shared apprenticeships admissions service, connecting all post-secondary options in a single location.

**Scotland’s Commissioner for Fair Access published [COVID-19: Impact on fair access to higher education – interim report](#), on the direct impact of public health measures and the indirect impact of actions taken by colleges and universities to mitigate their worst effects.**

- COVID-19 has exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities in access to HE.

- In 2020 it is likely that, because of the limited supply of qualified applicants from socially deprived communities (and other disadvantaged groups), a majority of the extra funded places created at universities were filled by applicants from more privileged social groups.
- Universities may face additional challenges in terms of support for underprepared students: the inflation in Higher grades and increase in first-year places led to students being admitted to university who would otherwise probably have gone to college for HN (Higher National) programmes.
- The move to online delivery of outreach activities and bridging programmes has probably undermined their effectiveness.
- 'Digital poverty': students from deprived backgrounds are less likely to have access to suitable IT, reliable wifi and quiet study space, and efforts to provide equipment cannot fully compensate.
- It has been difficult to reproduce the full first-year experience for students, which – especially for those from more deprived backgrounds who are least familiar with university life – provides a key transition from school to HE.
- Financial hardship has increased, particularly for students whose parents cannot subsidise their studies and who must support themselves by taking part-time jobs.
- Many universities are reluctant to revisit their minimum entry requirements or change policies on contextual admissions, despite the evidence that exam grades have become less reliable and students from more deprived communities have suffered the greatest disadvantage.
- Recommendations include:
  - Outreach activities should have priority in the return to face-to-face delivery and increase funding for outreach at all levels.
  - Make the 2020 increase in the number of funded places for Scottish students permanent, to avoid disadvantaged applicants being squeezed and to provide additional resources needed to meet the post-COVID demand for upskilling and retraining.
  - Universities should consider whether their minimum entry requirements need to be further adjusted.
  - Undertake research into the impact of teacher assessment on grades awarded to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.
  - Consider a COVID-19 recovery fund to address digital poverty, financial hardship and poor mental health among students.
  - Reaffirm the interim target of 18% of entrants in Scotland to come from the 20% most deprived areas by 2026.

## Other research

### The University of Durham published [\*Fair Admission to Universities in England: Improving policy and practice.\*](#)

- Highly selective universities in England are increasingly taking into account socioeconomic and educational contexts when making decisions on admissions but need to go further to create a level playing field.
- Recommendations for universities include:
  - Aim to become progressively bolder in the use of contextual data when making admissions decisions.
  - Commit to the contextualised assessment of all selection criteria, including GCSE grades, entrance test scores, personal statements, references, portfolios of work and interview performances.
  - Continue to improve academic support and inclusive approaches to teaching and learning for all students, but especially those from disadvantaged or under-represented groups.
  - Increase communication about the ethical case and evidence behind contextualised admissions and inclusive teaching and learning.
- Recommendations for national policymakers:
  - Enable a shift to post-qualifications admissions.
  - Replace the area-based POLAR metric with individual-level measures of socioeconomic disadvantage.
  - Make it a requirement for universities to record and report on disadvantaged applications and decisions.



- Continue to help develop and disseminate evidence of good practice in the use of contextual data, academic support systems and inclusive teaching.

**England's OfS published [An independent evaluation of Uni Connect's impact on intermediate outcomes for learners](#), based on the first three waves of a longitudinal survey of over 4,000 learners.**

- Uni Connect is an outreach programme funded by the OfS, which supports 29 partnerships of universities, colleges and other local partners across England.
  - The programme aims to increase the number of young people from under-represented groups who go into HE through the provision of high-quality, sustained outreach.
- Among the findings that are of general interest:
  - The fundamental principle of Uni Connect – to provide sustained support throughout KS4 and KS5 – appears to be well founded.
  - Knowledge, attitudes and intentions towards HE differ by learner characteristics and more could be done to address the needs of specific sub-groups.
  - Financial concerns, especially perceptions of cost, continue to deter some learners from considering HE, exacerbated by a lack of awareness of financial support and the financial benefits, particularly among learners from more disadvantaged and BAME backgrounds.
  - Prevailing views about the types of people who go to and 'fit in' at HE, and a lack of understanding of the non-financial benefits, are also acting as deterrents, particularly for disabled learners.
  - Parents/carers and family members often share their own perceptions of HE when advising young people; these – often partial – views can strongly encourage or deter learners.
  - Uni Connect is fulfilling an important role in ensuring that young people, and in some instances their parents, have access to accurate and impartial IAG to inform their decision making.

*The results of a survey of school and college staff can be found [here](#).*

**England's OfS also published [An independent review of evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect partnerships](#).**

- There is strong evidence that multi-intervention programmes have a positive, sustained impact on learners' knowledge and awareness of HE and their confidence in their decision-making abilities, and on the likelihood that they will successfully progress to HE.
- Individual 'light touch' interventions are less effective when run as one-off or stand-alone activities, but workshops and masterclasses have a positive impact when run as a series.
- IAG has most impact when tailored and embedded in a support programme.
- Learners relate to and are influenced by people 'like them'; activities such as campus visits and mentoring have most impact when supported by student ambassadors; face to face has more impact than online.
- Interventions can achieve different outcomes for learners at different stages: exposing learners to university life can be negative if not appropriately timed and tailored to the learner's stage and wider characteristics.

*Consultation on a new approach to Uni Connect will result in [a number of key changes](#) to the programme.*

**England's OfS published [Effectiveness in implementation of access and participation plan reform: Part 2](#), exploring how reforms are driving change in provider behaviour.**

- The [first report](#) found that plans showed increasing commitment to the access and participation agenda through more strategic and whole-provider approaches.
- Part 2 comprised a review of stakeholders; among the more widely applicable findings:
  - The reforms appear to have accelerated momentum in access and participation that had been building for several years.
  - Staff stakeholders cited several other influential factors, including sector-wide efforts to address the BAME awarding gap, the Black Lives Matter movement and innovative responses to COVID-19.
  - Governing bodies appear to be increasingly prioritising the access and participation agenda, driven by changing regulation; this is resulting in additional resources for implementation.
  - The targets to reduce gaps in access and participation are felt to have been stretching, with the OfS pushing for increasing ambition, backed up by its dashboard covering a range of inequalities.

- The five-year plans provided a framework for a more ambitious and strategic approach, drawing in stakeholders, including students, and facilitating investment in infrastructure and more evidence-informed, long-term initiatives.

A [commentary](#) by the OfS Director for Access & Participation is also available.

**England's OfS published [Evaluating the delivery of the OfS investment in the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes \[TASO\]](#), a baseline report for a study that will run until 2024.**

- TASO is an independent evidence hub for HE professionals to access research, toolkits and evaluation guidance to eliminate equality gaps within 20 years; it is a member of the UK What Works Network.
- Among the findings:
  - Although 80% of respondents agreed that the use of evidence was embedded in their business as usual, this high percentage couldn't be fully corroborated by evidence from the interviews.
  - Most providers don't have specialist evaluators or may only have one member of staff responsible for the breadth of evaluations, from access to progression.
  - Providers use evidence and research across all stages of the student journey, but much more for activities around access than for continuation, attainment and progression.
  - 90% of universities use evidence around access 'practically always'/'quite often', compared to 75% of FE colleges.
  - Levels of evidence-sharing across the sector are relatively low, particularly on what didn't work.

**The Royal Society published two reports to understand the under-representation of ethnic minority students and staff in STEM HE and among early career research fellows.**

- [Ethnicity STEM data for students and academic staff in higher education 2007/08 to 2018/19](#) found significant variation in rates of progression and outcomes across ethnic minority groups, though black staff and students have consistently poorer outcomes than white and Asian students.
  - The proportion of black students entering undergraduate and postgraduate education has increased over the past decade, as it has for other minority ethnic groups, but they are leaving STEM in greater numbers at all stages of the career pipeline.
- [The profile of postdoctoral researchers in the UK eligible for Royal Society early career fellowship programmes](#) found that applicants for the three UK early career fellowship schemes are not fully representative of the ethnicity and gender profile of the eligible pool.
  - There is low representation of BAME groups for UK nationals in the eligible pool and among applicants to the Society's schemes, and little to no representation of black postdoctoral researchers.

**HEPI published [Designing an English Social Mobility Index](#), offering a methodology for comparing the contribution of individual HE providers to social mobility.**

- Analysis of individual university contributions to social mobility has usually been limited to the numbers of pupils taken from particular socioeconomic groups or from low participation areas.
  - Increasingly, universities are also assessed in terms of graduate earning power, which is sometimes used as a proxy for their contribution to both social mobility and to productivity.
- The paper draws on the US Social Mobility Index to create a methodology that focuses on value added and reflects the data available in England, measuring social mobility based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation, student continuation and graduate salaries.
- The two universities that lead the ratings, with overall scores almost double the third-placed institutions, are both 'pre-1992' institutions.
  - They are followed by three Russell Group institutions; two more pre-1992s, two MillionPlus universities and one post-1992.
- The base dataset for access and continuation rates is the OfS Access & Participation Plan data, which only covers English institutions; however, the principles could be applied in other UK nations.
- The measure could help universities independently determine and evaluate their plans for how they will contribute in the context of their overall mission.

**The University of Nottingham launched the [EDI \[equality, diversity & inclusion\] Resource Bank](#), an open-access database to support individuals, teams and institutions in developing and implementing diversity strategies across the UK.**

- The bank hosts materials on EDI-related initiatives and reports from organisations and HEIs, enabling users to understand and critique their local environment in relation to the national picture.
  - Anyone can upload and share examples of good practice.

## GRADUATES & GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

### COVID-related

**High Fliers Research published [The Graduate Market in 2021](#), its latest annual review of vacancies and starting salaries of the UK's 100 leading employers.**

- COVID-19 led to graduate recruitment being cut by 15.1% in 2020, compared to original targets; the number of graduates recruited was 12.3% lower than in 2019 – the largest fall for 11 years.
- 57% of employers recruited fewer graduates than in 2019 or hired none at all.
  - Recruitment fell in 13 out of 15 of the most sought-after industries and business sectors, including accounting & professional services, engineering & industrial and the public sector.
- The latest targets suggest that the number of jobs on offer in 2021 could increase by 2.5%; public sector employers are expected to be the largest recruiters, with a record 5,400 entry-level vacancies.
- 50% have cut their graduate recruitment budgets for 2020–21.
  - Employers have reduced the number of universities actively targeted; 17% have stopped targeting individual universities.
- 50% hope to be able to deliver in-person vacation placements and internships in summer 2021.

### Other research

**UUK and GuildHE published [Protecting the value of UK degrees: Reviewing progress one year on from the Statement of Intent](#) on behalf of the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment.**

- The report demonstrates significant progress over the past 18 months in universities' efforts to tackle grade inflation.
  - There had previously been a steady rise in the proportion of 1st and 2:1 degrees; however, in 2018/19 there was a levelling off.

**Prospects published [How and why do students' career interests change during higher education?](#), based on a 2019 survey of 663 students graduating that year.**

- 40% agreed or strongly agreed that they 'knew what they wanted to do for a career' when they started university; by the time of graduation this figure was 64%.
- 61% reported that their career interests had changed during their time at university.
  - The most common changes were: clarification within a single standard industrial classification (SIC) (30%); shifts to a different SIC (19%); becoming more decided (12%); and rejecting a plan, leaving them unsure (5%).
- The most common influences on career interests were the curriculum (46%), placements (14%), work experiences (7%) and co-curricular activities (6%).
  - Respondents rarely mentioned friends and never mentioned family as influential in their career interest development during university.

**The Economic & Social Research Institute (ESRI) published [Does university prestige lead to discrimination in the labour market? Evidence from a labour market field experiment in three countries](#), on whether employers in the UK, US and Australia prioritise university prestige over relevant skills when reviewing IT and accounting job applications.**

- 2,400 applications were submitted from fictitious graduates in one of the three countries; accounting and IT sectors were chosen as they allow for easier measurement of skill match.
  - The high-prestige university chosen in the UK was from the Russell Group; the low-prestige university for each country was still high quality but did not feature strongly in domestic or international rankings.

- Findings from responses received include:
  - Job applications that closely matched the job description were 79% more likely to receive a call-back than applications with a low skill match.
  - University prestige did not matter across sectors of the labour market and across countries.
  - No differences in call-backs were detected between female and male fictitious applicants.
- In skill-intensive sectors of the labour market, skills, and not university prestige, predicted recruitment outcomes for applicants with a bachelor's degree.
  - The findings cannot be generalised to less skill-intensive sectors, or to other labour market outcomes, such as hiring decision, promotion and salary.
- It is suggested that:
  - For universities, a focus on skill building and teaching quality may compensate for limited academic prestige.
  - For students – in skill-intensive sectors of the labour market – learning well is more important than attending a more prestigious university.
  - Students might therefore consider the match with an institution more broadly and not rely solely on prestige.

**England's Department for Education published [The returns to undergraduate degrees by socio-economic group and ethnicity](#) by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, based on Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data.**

- Average returns to undergraduate degrees at age 30 are positive for all socioeconomic and ethnic groups but are especially high for privately educated graduates (women 36%; men 27%), partly due to the institution chosen.
  - Returns for state-educated women at age 30 are around 27%; for state-educated men, 6%.
  - For state-educated students from the poorest 20% of families, the figures are 31% and 7%.
- South Asian students have high returns: Indian women 27%/men 16%; Pakistani 40%/36%; Bangladeshi 30%/14%.
  - Pakistani graduates have the highest returns of all ethnic groups, even though they have the lowest median age-30 earnings.
- Returns for black Caribbean women are 9%; black African women 20%; other black women 23%; white British women 28%.
  - Black African men 15%; black Caribbean men 7%; other black men 4%; white British men 7%.
- Subject choice explains a substantial amount of the variation by ethnicity: Asian students systematically choose more lucrative subjects than white British students.
  - However, large unexplained earnings gaps between socioeconomic and ethnic groups remain; in particular, graduate men from all non-white ethnic groups earn significantly less than white British graduates.

**The OECD published [How does earnings advantage from tertiary education vary by field of study?](#)**

- In all OECD countries, tertiary-educated workers earn more on average than those with only upper secondary education; however, these averages mask important variations between fields of study.
  - On average, tertiary-educated workers with a degree in the best-paid field of study (medical and dental health) earn nearly twice as much as those with a degree in the worst-paid field of study (arts and humanities).
  - In 33% of OECD countries with available data, arts and humanities tertiary graduates earn less than those with only upper secondary education.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how vital health care and teaching are for society; however, average earnings of tertiary graduates in some related fields, such as nursing, were much lower than most other fields in 2017.
- There is no clear correlation between the relative earnings advantage for a field of study and the share of graduates in that field.
  - On average, a far smaller share of recent graduates chose to study information & communications technology (ICT) than arts & humanities, despite ICT graduate earnings being about 52% higher.

- This may be due to the selectiveness of some fields, students' personal interests or misinformation about the labour market.
- Policymakers need to consider ways beyond market mechanisms to increase the attractiveness of fields of study that offer essential skills for society.

**IZA published [Informed Choices: Gender gaps in career advice](#), exploring gender differences in access to informal information about the labour market.**

- In an experiment, undergraduate students were asked to send messages via an online professional networking platform seeking information from 10k working professionals about their career paths.
  - Students used preformulated questions recommended by their career centre.
  - Analysis focused on two attributes shown to differentially affect the labour market choices of women: the extent to which a career accommodates work–life balance; and whether it has a competitive culture.
- The information professionals provided on work–life balance depended on student gender:
  - Professionals – regardless of their own gender – were more than twice as likely to volunteer information on work–life balance issues to female students than to males.
  - Most of these responses were negative and increased students' concerns about the issue; the responses appear to have crowded out other information about the career.
  - When students asked specifically about work–life balance, female students received 28% more responses than males; the differential emphasis on work–life balance in responses to the broad question was therefore not entirely driven by perceptions that female students care more about it.
- However, professionals mentioned workplace culture to male and female students at similar rates, both in response to specific questions and to general queries.
- A follow-up survey found that female students were less likely than males to want to follow their preferred career path, with nearly 50% of the gap due to the emphasis on work–life balance in the responses they had received.

**Cedefop (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training) published [The role of work-based learning in VET \[Vocational Education and Training\] and tertiary education: Evidence from the 2016 EU labour force survey](#), for the 27 EU member states (EU-27), the UK, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland.**

- The report focuses on work-based learning in formal initial education and training and provides new evidence on:
  - how many young graduates experienced work-based learning as part of their highest education attained (prevalence)
  - who they are (profiling of their sociodemographic characteristics)
  - how well they do in the labour market (labour market outcomes)
  - comparisons with their peers who have not participated in work-based learning.
- Work-based learning is more common than might be expected: in the EU-27, almost 66% of young graduates with a medium-level qualification experienced work-based learning as part of their studies; among tertiary education graduates, it was almost 50%.
- There is a positive association between work-based learning and employment status: in most countries and on average, graduates with some work-based learning have higher employment rates than those without.
  - There is a strong employment premium, particularly for graduates with an apprenticeship experience.
  - Although similar outcomes are apparent for any graduate who has had work experience, it is easier to influence work-based learning as part of an education experience.

## HE: TEACHING, RESEARCH & INSTITUTIONS

### COVID-related

**England's OfS published [Gravity assist: Propelling higher education towards a brighter future](#), the report of a government-commissioned review of digital teaching and learning (DTL).**

- In polls, 47% of teaching staff and 58% of students had no experience of DTL before the pandemic; by December 2020, 92% of students were learning fully or mostly online.
  - 67% of students were content with the DTL; 61% said it was in line with their expectations; 29% said it was worse than expected; 48% had not been asked for any feedback.
- Only 21% of staff were very confident they had the skills needed for DTL; 49% of students were very confident they had the skills to benefit from it.
  - 36% of teachers and 24% of students had no access to technical support; 23%/15% lacked the right technology.
- The six components of successful DTL are:
  - Appropriately designed pedagogy, curriculum and assessment
  - Student access to the right digital infrastructure
  - Staff and students are helped to build the necessary digital skills
  - Strategic – rather than piecemeal/reactive – harnessing of technology
  - Inclusion for different student groups embedded from the outset
  - A consistent underpinning strategy.

*The report includes recommendations to achieve high-quality DTL, and six things every university or college leader should consider ahead of 2021/22.*

**Times Higher Education (THE) published its October–November 2020 [Digital Teaching Survey results](#), with responses from 520 HE staff from 46 countries, including 334 from the UK** [registration may be required to view the article].

- Only 26% had a reasonable or a lot of experience of online teaching pre-pandemic; 36% had none.
  - 47% had been well supported by their institutions – 33% disagreed; 61% strongly agreed that their workload had increased following the transition to online teaching.
- More than 50% said the initial move to online teaching had a negative effect on their mental health, and nearly 60% believed it had affected their students' mental health.
- Only 20% thought that their students valued remote education as much as face to face, but less than 33% thought tuition fees should be discounted when instruction moves online.
- Less than 20% regarded the two-track physical and online approach to teaching as sustainable, while 40% regard an online-only future as sustainable.
- Respondents were mostly unsure whether good online teaching results in stronger learning than traditional teaching, but more than twice as many disagree as agree.
- Over 75% would like online meetings to continue beyond the pandemic.

**The National Centre for Universities & Business and University Commercialisation & Innovation published [Innovating during a crisis: The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on how universities contribute to innovation](#), based on a survey of 62 UK university leaders in August/September 2020.**

- The pandemic has caused significant disruption to many universities' activities that help to drive innovation in the economy; during the first national lockdown:
  - 88% said that over 10% of their innovation projects had been delayed; 36% said over 10% of projects with external partners had been cancelled
  - 48% reported that the scale and scope of projects was being reduced
  - those involving sectors such as aerospace, automotive manufacturing and creative industries were hardest hit.
- Reasons cited include: a lack of financial resources to support collaborations; insufficient government funding for such activities; and the inability to access the necessary facilities and equipment for work.
- Aspects explored include new ways of working developed during the pandemic that universities would like sustained, and actions governments can take to enable universities to play a strategic role in the economic recovery.

**QAA published a range of documents to support the changes to learning, teaching and assessment needed in light of COVID-19:**

- [18 January]:
  - [Advice for higher education providers on the 2021 national lockdown – safety net policies](#)
  - [Ongoing implications of the pandemic for placements and practice-based courses](#)
- [5 February] [How good practice in digital delivery and assessment has affected student engagement and success – an early exploration](#)
- [8 March] [Advice on doctoral standards for research students and supervisors.](#)

## Other research

### England's Department for Education published [Estimating the impact of EU exit on UK higher education across all institutions.](#)

- Removing tuition fee support for EU-domiciled undergraduates would reduce overall demand for UK HE by approximately 13,090 first-year students per year (21% of all EU student enrolments) – a loss of £80.7m in overall tuition fee income\*.
- However, removing the home fee status for EU-domiciled (undergraduate and postgraduate) students would generate *additional* fee revenue of approximately £114.6m.
- Restricting the right to work in the UK post-graduation for EU-domiciled students would potentially result in 6,640 fewer EU student enrolments (11%) – a reduction in fee revenue of £88.0m.
  - Restricting the right for EU-domiciled students to bring dependants would further reduce tuition fee income by approximately £8.4m, with 590 fewer enrolments (1%).
- The estimated combined impact of these policy changes would be to reduce tuition fee income from EU sources by approximately £62.5m, with 35,540 (57%) fewer first-year EU enrolments.
- However, the aggregate impact on fee income masks significant variation by university cluster (and level of study), with some benefiting in aggregate while others would be worse off by £42.5m–£66.5m.

\*A weighted average UK tuition fee series was constructed to address the variation in fees charged by each nation.

### Jisc and EmERGE Education published [The future of revenue diversification in higher education with HackerU](#), as part of their 'From fixes to foresight' series, exploring how universities can use technology to enhance revenue diversification by 2030.

- Financial sustainability is the biggest existential threat facing HE.
  - The number of UK universities in deficit has grown from 24 in 2015/16 to 119 in 2018/19.
  - The impact of COVID-19 has exacerbated the challenge, with the London School of Economics (LSE) predicting a £2.6b shortfall in 2020/21.
- The paper, based on discussions with over 30 senior HE representatives from around the world, plus edtech start-up founders and sector experts, shares technology-enabled 'revenue diversification strategies' and what organisations need to do to make them work.
- Global examples of innovation suggest that the future of revenue diversification should focus on online offerings, instead of the historical emphasis on physical assets; examples include:
  - The University of Bath is partnering with Wiley to provide online postgraduate degrees.
  - Southern New Hampshire University, Arizona State University and Grupo Tirandentes in Brazil are investing in early stage edtech companies to support innovations in teaching and learning.
  - The Open University's (OU's) partnership with FutureLearn to offer micro-credentials has helped to diversify its learners.
- For revenue diversification in HE to evolve by 2030, it must be:
  - aligned to the university's core mission, focused on increasing the reach and impact of high-quality education delivery
  - sustainable and long-term, capable of meeting the size of the challenge ahead
  - highly scalable, harnessing the power of technology.

### Jisc published [Powering UK Higher Education](#), a three-year plan developed with sector leaders to support UK universities towards a 'technology-empowered future'.

- It has four strategic themes:
  - **Empowering culture and leadership** through: 'inspiring and transformative' thought leadership; data-informed decision making; improved efficiency and effectiveness; increased digital confidence among staff and students.
  - **Reimagining learning, teaching and assessment:** personalised and adaptive learning using data, analytics, underpinning technologies and 'compelling' new digital resources; 'new paradigms' for assessment; reimagined course and curriculum design that take advantage of online learning.
  - **Reframing the student experience:** enhanced experience and greater equity in access and participation; using data to support wellbeing; informed and tailored career insight; employability skills for the fourth industrial revolution; labour market information, data and research to support students and partnerships with employers.
  - **Transforming infrastructure:** secure and resilient high-speed connectivity; extended connectivity and cyber security services to help close the digital poverty gap; research into the intelligent campus, learning spaces and digital platforms, including helping universities achieve net zero targets.

*The plan builds on Jisc's cross-sector [Learning and Teaching Reimagined](#) report published in November 2020 and summarised in [Skills Research Digest Q4 2020](#).*

**The OU published [Innovating Pedagogy 2021: Exploring new forms of teaching, learning and assessment, to guide educators and policy makers](#), its ninth annual report.**

- Ten innovations are proposed that are already in use but have not yet had a widespread influence on education, including:
  - Integrating gratitude in learning
  - Using 'chatbots' so learners can make progress without a teacher
  - Equity-oriented pedagogy
  - Student-teacher co-created teaching and learning
  - Hip-hop based education
  - Telecollaboration for language learning, enabling a student to tutor another in their first language, while also learning their collaboration partner's language as part of the same exchange
  - Evidence-based teaching, using research evidence to inform decisions about the best pedagogical approach.

**QAA published [Using Data to Enhance Outcomes](#), based on a survey of 83 QAA member institutions and 32 qualitative interviews by Shift Learning, analysing the development and use of data-led quality assurance and enhancement in UK HE providers.**

- There are three critical challenges:
  - Data management – managing and using large quantities of data in effective planning and decision making
  - Getting staff 'buy-in' – how to create a data-informed culture in which staff willingly engage with and use data
  - Monitoring the impact of data and evidence – establishing best practice in measuring and evaluating outcomes.
- Recommendations on overcoming barriers to data-led quality enhancement include:
  - Speed up continuous quality improvements through regular online 'pulse surveys' to gather and act on students' feedback.
  - Consult with staff to identify skills gaps and plan a training offer that meets provider needs.
  - Verify, contextualise and triangulate findings to engender confidence in data.

**HEPI published [Mixed Media: What universities need to know about journalists so they can get a better press](#).**

- University stories have become a newsroom favourite, and this is only going to grow: media scrutiny of HE has intensified and is now more in line with other parts of the public and private sector.
  - However, media stories have become markedly more 'consumery' in style, with newspapers and broadcasters eager to report on the day-to-day experiences of students, good and bad.
- Universities ably promote their successes, but those they talk about most are in research.



- Educating the next generation is of just as much interest, and universities should work with the media to ensure newsworthy stories about advances in teaching methods, new resources and campus life.
- Debate on the future shape of education will become more intense as we emerge from the pandemic; discussion is already underway about the role of exams and the nature of qualifications, online learning and catch-up.
- Universities need to be a part of this debate – not just academics speaking about their research in the field, but leaders and senior administrative officers on how they see things.

## WORKFORCE ISSUES

### COVID-related

**Advance HE published [Gender differences in UK HE staff experiences of remote working](#), based on a survey of 1,310 staff members in October 2020. [The full report is available to members only.]**

- Staff said that working remotely had helped them engage with their administration, meetings, conferences and career development activities.
- There were gender differences:
  - Women were more likely to say remote working had allowed them to attend more conferences and take on more career development activities.
  - Men were more likely to say it had helped them engage with their research and teaching.
  - Men found it easier than women to adapt to remote working in general.

### Other research

**The OECD published [Teachers and Leaders in Vocational Education and Training](#), seeking to fill gaps in knowledge of this workforce and provide new insights into the strategies and policies that can support them.**

- Often referred to as a 'dual profession', VET teachers require both pedagogical and industry knowledge.
- The landscape of teaching and learning in VET is changing, as are the skills the labour market needs, reinforcing the need for VET teachers to keep abreast of new pedagogical approaches and classroom technology *and* keep up to date with the realities of the workplace.
- VET teacher shortages are significant in many OECD countries – half of FE college principals in England report shortages.
- While training is crucial to prepare and develop VET teachers, many countries struggle to cover the full mix of skills they need.
- VET teachers often face barriers to accessing training due to lack of support or incentives and conflicts with their work schedule.
  - Similarly, the complex responsibilities VET leaders face are not always matched with sufficient access to relevant training opportunities and targeted support.

**IZA published [The Gender Wage Gap \[GWG\] Among University Vice Chancellors \[VCs\] in the UK](#), drawing on linked employer–employee data between 2000 and 2020.**

- The GWG has been closing gradually in the UK, but convergence is slower among top earners.
- The role of university VCs was traditionally dominated by men, although this has been changing.
  - Women have more than doubled their representation in the role in the last 20 years.
  - However, it remains male dominated and characterised by gender segregation across institutions: 63 of the 115 universities in the report's sample had not employed a female VC in the 20 years considered.
- The substantial GWG of 12 log points initially experienced by women VCs became statistically non-significant over the period.
  - Initially women continued to receive a lower wage when replacing an outgoing male VC, whereas no differential was apparent between incoming male VCs and the women they replaced.

- The closure in the gap is due to change in the attributes of male and female VCs and the universities they lead – in particular, the financial performance of universities employing female VCs: institutional differences in VC wages are quite large, and relatively few VCs move between VC jobs across institutions.
- From a broader labour market perspective, GWGs can converge rapidly in high-wage occupations, at least in circumstances where, due to the average age of those in the job, caring responsibilities for young children are less prevalent.

**Advance HE published [Onwards and Upwards? Aurora longitudinal study](#), the final report of a five-year study on the impact of the [Aurora](#) leadership programme for women working in HE in the UK and the Republic of Ireland (RoI), based on a survey of 3,796 participants.**

- Over 7k women have taken part in Aurora since its inception.
  - Alongside action learning sets and mentoring support, participants explore four areas associated with leadership success: identity, impact and voice; politics and influence; core leadership skills; and adaptive leadership skills.
- Recommendations include:
  - Ensure that those working part-time or with caring responsibilities continue to be considered for leadership roles.
  - Institutions should consider strategies to ensure the skills, confidence and ambition gained from the programme are fully integrated into the workplace.
  - Create opportunities for women to disseminate and implement their learning back into the institution.
  - Institutions should commit to an ongoing review of gendered workplace practices and politics that are hampering women's efforts to benefit from their learning from the programme.

**Advance HE published [Academic career progression: Rethinking pathways](#), a set of four case studies on institution-wide strategic development and practical, local initiatives supporting career development and transition into a career in HE. [The full report is available to members only.]**

*One of the case studies is from Ulster University.*

## The Workplace

### RECRUITMENT

**The Centre for Ageing Better published [Shut Out: How employers and recruiters are overlooking the talents of over 50s workers](#), the first report in a series from its Good Recruitment for Older Workers (GROW) project, in partnership with the IES.**

- The ways in which employers recruit are changing rapidly and it is important that any new trends and behaviours are inclusive to all ages.
- Employers can demonstrate their commitment to age-inclusive recruitment through: inclusive branding; creating a positive candidate experience; and ensuring that long-term trends, such as the increasing use of technologies, are evaluated for their effect on diversity and inclusion.
- A summary of existing evidence plus insights from interviews with employers and recruiters highlighted the following:
  - Employers don't consider age diversity to be 'a problem' in their organisations, despite evidence of negative perceptions towards older applicants.
  - Few employers consider age when looking to improve diversity and inclusion in recruitment.
  - Informal and opaque criteria such as organisational 'fit' have the potential to disadvantage older workers.
  - If employers do consider age in recruitment, it is often in the context of recruiting younger workers.
  - Despite many employers stating that diversity and inclusion were important, few had organisational strategies aimed at making the recruitment process more diverse and inclusive, especially in the context of age.

- Measures that could make the recruitment process more inclusive for older workers include:
  - Circulate job adverts widely to ensure they reach people from a broad range of backgrounds.
  - Consider the impact on people from multiple under-represented groups, e.g. older women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds with disabilities.
  - Use application processes that reduce explicit and implicit age cues, such as standardised application forms rather than CVs.
  - Collect and analyse the age profile of the current workforce, as well as job applicants, to evaluate whether adverts are attracting candidates of all ages and to identify and improve under-representation.
  - Structure the interview process using multiple decision-makers, predefined questions and scoring mechanisms to mitigate the impact of potential age bias.
  - Ensure that the criteria against which cultural 'fit' will be assessed are transparent and clearly communicated to applicants.
  - Recognise the importance of age-inclusivity explicitly and build a workplace culture that acknowledges contributions of people of all ages.
  - Challenge any negative perceptions and assumptions made in the workplace about older workers and explicitly celebrate contributions of workers of all ages.

*GROW will also explore older workers' own experiences and the effect of language in job adverts.*

**Openreach published [The Impact of Hidden Bias in Job Adverts on Female Applicants](#), based on a study of the language used across its engineering recruitment channels.**

- A consciously unbiased job specification (advert A) helped to attract 50% more female job applicants than the company's traditional advert (advert B).
  - 50% of respondents were more interested in the role described in advert A; 12% were more interested in the role described in advert B; 38% were equally interested in both roles.
- Nearly 40% of women had no interest in the job described in advert B, but only 13% said this when shown advert A; the proportion of women interested in pursuing the job rose from 36% to 56%.
- A strong majority of respondents believed that the company described in each advert appeared to value gender, diversity and equality 'definitely' or 'somewhat' (80% advert A; 65% advert B).
  - However, considerably more felt that it was 'definitely the case' for advert A (47%) compared with advert B (26%).

## APPRENTICESHIPS & TRAINEESHIPS

### COVID-related

**The OU and the 5% Club published [Build The Future Apprenticeship Survey](#) conducted in January 2021 with over 600 small and large private, public and third sector employers in England about their apprenticeships plans. [An email address is required to access the full report.]**

- The aim was to understand changing attitudes and approaches to apprenticeships and skills development since the first lockdown and since the OU's *Business Barometer* in August 2020 [a summary of which was included in [Skills Research Digest Q3 2020](#)].
- 89% of those who hire apprentices agree that apprenticeships enable their organisation to proactively build its future.
  - 70% say that apprenticeships and work-based learning will be vital to their organisation's recovery from COVID-19 disruption (up from 50% of employers surveyed in August 2020).
  - 66% say apprenticeships have enabled their organisation to 'bounce back' from the pandemic more quickly.
  - 80% say that learn and earn opportunities make their organisation more agile.
- 72% of all employers and 67% of SMEs plan to hire more apprentices over the next year (up from 61% and 55% respectively).
  - 50% of employers who don't currently hire apprentices now plan to do so in future.
  - 81% of employers in the information and digital services sector – but only 48% in the arts, recreation and entertainment sectors – are planning to hire more apprentices over the next year.

- Uncertainty remains a deterrent for some employers: 52% believe work-based learning schemes such as apprenticeships are too much of a commitment while COVID-19 disruption remains.
  - Employers in East of England (47%) and London (46%) are most likely to be planning apprentice redundancies; those in the South West are least likely (26%).

## Other research

**L&W published [Apprenticeships at Level 4 and above](#), commissioned by England's Department for Education, exploring social mobility, employers' motivations and barriers and apprentices' experiences.**

- Between 2014/15 and 2018/19, the proportion of L2 starts in England fell 23ppt to 37%; L4+ increased 15ppt to 19%.
- In 2018/19, 25% of starts at apprenticeship levy-paying employers were at L4+, compared with 11% at non-levy payers.
  - Interviews suggest that the levy has been part of the motivation for larger employers to offer higher-level apprenticeships.
- Employers are using L4+ strategically to meet their business needs, including developing knowledge and skills, filling skills gaps, encouraging retention and facilitating progression.
  - Employers are also increasingly familiar with apprenticeships and can access more L4+ standards.
- The main barriers for employers include: managing the 20% off-the-job training requirement for senior staff; a shortage of progression routes, e.g. in construction; and a lack of appropriate standards or local provision.
  - Providers also encounter challenges, including attracting qualified tutors and changes to funding caps that make some higher-level standards financially unviable.
- In 2018/19, 60% of apprentices on L4+ programmes were aged 25+; however, 76% on L5 were aged 25+ (and 45% were aged 35+), far higher than at L4, L6 and L7.
  - In comparison, only 22% of first-year undergraduates were aged 25+.
  - 48% of apprentices were women, rising to 61% at L5.
  - 16% of L4+ apprentices were BAME, rising to 20% at L7, compared with 13% at L2/3 (15% of the working-age population; 30% of first-year undergraduates).
- 30% of all apprentices from the most affluent areas were on L4+, compared with 18% from the most deprived areas.
  - This reflects lower achievement rates, regional differences in availability and poor transport links.
- Barriers preventing access were: lack of awareness; misconceptions about quality; managing the apprenticeship alongside workload; and wider commitments such as childcare.
  - Employer support, including from line managers and colleagues, was crucial to managing the workload; support needed to be agreed at the outset and maintained through good provider communication.

**Cedefop published [The next steps for apprenticeship](#), essays exploring the technological, demographic and societal 'megatrends' shaping labour markets, highlighting key messages.**

- Safeguard the purpose and function of apprenticeships to build a strong identity: for example, there is a significant risk that 'fake' apprenticeships will become the norm.
- Embrace convergence between general and vocational education: in general education, real-life environments are used to support critical thinking, complex problem solving, creativity and entrepreneurialism.
  - Equally, much apprenticeship provision has acquired a stronger academic foundation, recognising the need for VET programmes to offer platforms for lifelong learning.
- Aim high: many systems are focusing on pathways into tertiary qualifications – a permeability that is attractive to both learners and employers.
- Adapt to the new world of work (industry 4.0, globalisation, structural adjustment, labour movements, gig economy), including by focusing afresh on the role of intermediary organisations.
- Lean in to change: in one case study, project working driven by personal interests enables apprentices to address company challenges under the guidance of a coach.

- Digitalisation also requires change in apprenticeships; new qualifications can strengthen social and communication skills.
- Support measures and structures to ease participation: for example, by introducing greater flexibility and 'peripheral' policy initiatives to support refugee learners.

## SKILLS GAPS & SHORTAGES

**L&W published [Disconnected: Exploring the digital skills gap](#), based on surveys of 1,000 employers and 2,000 young people.**

- Of the businesses:
  - 92% said that a basic level of digital skills – proficiency with common software and ability to process digital information and content, communicate digitally and learn new digital skills – was important; 82% of job vacancies ask for digital skills.
  - 27% said that most of their workers required advanced digital skills – a good knowledge across a range of skills, as well as in-depth specialist knowledge; 60% expected their reliance on advanced digital skills to increase in the next five years.
  - 23% said that their current workforce lacked basic digital skills and 37% advanced digital skills; 76% said that a lack of digital skills would affect their business profitability.
- Of the young people:
  - 88% said that digital skills would be essential for their career; 62% were confident they had the basic skills employers needed, but only 18% that they had the advanced digital skills needed.
  - 51% were interested in a career that would require advanced digital skills.
  - 70% said they wanted an employer that would invest in their digital skills.
  - 62% of young males were interested in a digital career, compared with 42% of young females, with a similar gap in their confidence.
  - On the eve of the pandemic, 9% had no access to a laptop, desktop or tablet at home, rising to 21% in households from lower socioeconomic groups.
- While there has been steady growth in participation in undergraduate computer sciences, and rapid growth at postgraduate level:
  - participation in ICT subjects in school has declined in recent years, as have enrolments and achievements in FE
  - apprenticeship starts in ICT have remained broadly stable.
- The UK suffers from low levels of employer investment in skills.

**The UK Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) published [Cyber Security Skills in the UK Labour Market 2021](#).**

- 50% of businesses say that people in charge of cyber security lack the confidence to carry out the basic tasks laid out in the [Cyber Essentials](#) scheme, such as storing or transferring personal data.
  - 33% of businesses have more advanced skills gaps, in areas such as forensic analysis and security architecture.
  - 32% have a skills gap in incident response yet don't outsource the activity.
  - Cyber security skills are poorly understood and undervalued, both on boards and within IT teams.
- Outside the cyber sector, 86% of those who work in cyber roles have transitioned from a non-cyber role.
  - Although 49% of the workforce within the cyber sector have worked in a cyber role elsewhere, 47% of cyber firms face problems with technical cyber security skills gaps among existing and potential staff.

DCMS also published [Understanding the Cyber Security Recruitment Pool](#).

**ScotlandIS published [Scottish cyber security cluster analysis report](#), a snapshot of the sector taken in September 2020.**

- 70% of Scottish universities offer courses in cyber security.

- There are around 230 cyber security companies in Scotland, ~48% of which are Scottish founded or headquartered, and the cyber security workforce has seen steady growth in the last three years.
  - Salaries are competitive (4th in the UK), which helps to attract and retain talent.

**The Institute for Public Policy Research published [Skills for a green recovery: A call to action for the UK construction sector](#), analysing what the industry needs to do to recruit, train and retain the workforce necessary to achieve net zero climate emissions by 2050.**

- Construction is central to the Government's ambitions but faces large and persistent skills gaps and shortages.
  - 750k construction workers could retire or be about to retire over the next 15 years, but not enough is being done to replace them; just 20.3% of workers are under 30.
- Research among stakeholders and practitioners working on the Thames Tideway Tunnel found:
  - Skills/employment programmes in the infrastructure sector suffer from a lack of collective action among firms and leadership in government, resulting in the supply of workers and training not meeting demand.
  - The workforce already has the knowledge and technical capability to build the infrastructure for net zero but faces a two-fold challenge: a lack of skilled workers; and the need to transform values and attitudes so that all firms and employees are habituated in 'greening'.
- The Government needs to:
  - legislate to allow industry to procure responsibly, so that the sector becomes an attractive place to work
  - produce sector-specific guidance on skills and employment interventions
  - reform the Treasury's Green Book methodology for new infrastructure projects to provide specific guidance on how to account for investment in skills and employment in line with national priorities
  - commission the production of a new National Infrastructure & Construction Skills Demand Pipeline
  - increase funding for FE and expand apprenticeship opportunities, including a 'green apprenticeship fund' for SMEs, offering a 50% wage subsidy.

**Friends of the Earth published [An emergency plan on green jobs for young people](#), with a focus on green apprenticeships.**

- One year's unemployment for an 18–20 year-old will result in lost earnings of £42k–£133k over the next 20 years.
  - If all currently unemployed 16–24 year-olds in the UK remained unemployed for one year, it could result in £32b–£39b in wage scarring.
  - For an average-sized local authority area in England and Wales this represents £86m–£105m in lost local earnings.
- Significant skills gaps and shortages in sectors essential for delivering net zero climate goals threaten to derail efforts to decarbonise buildings, transport and energy.
- Rapid roll-out of a green apprenticeship scheme would cost £6.2b–£10.6b over five years.
- A £40b per annum green infrastructure programme to meet climate goals could create over 1m jobs over the next two years.
- Recommendations include:
  - A 'green opportunity guarantee' ensuring all young people are offered a job, an apprenticeship or training.
  - Diversity bursaries of £1,500 paid to green apprentices from historically disadvantaged groups; employers to be paid a diversity bonus of £1,000.
  - A network of national and regional centres of excellence for zero carbon skills created at FE colleges, serving as hubs for green apprenticeships and traineeships.
  - England's Skills Bootcamp programme expanded to target green skills development at unemployed young people.
  - New apprenticeship standards rapidly developed where necessary, along with additional modules for existing standards, e.g. electric vehicle maintenance for car mechanics.

**The Edge Foundation published its eighth bulletin on [Skills shortages in the UK economy](#), focusing on skills in the green and digital sectors.**

- It features summaries of:
  - Employment and skills challenges and how to tackle them ([L&W](#), December 2020)
  - Employer Skills Survey 2019 ([Department for Education](#), October 2020)
  - Business Barometer 2020 ([OU](#), September 2020)
  - Youth Voice Census 2020 ([Youth Employment UK](#), June 2020)
  - *Learning for Life: Funding a world-class adult education system* ([CBI](#), October 2020)
  - *The Future of Jobs* report ([World Economic Forum](#) (WEF), October 2020)
  - Post-COVID-19 *Skills & Employment Trends* report ([The Skills Network](#), November 2020)
  - *The Green Economy – driving a revolution in sustainable skills?* (article by the Edge Foundation)
  - *UK Consumer Digital Index 2020* ([Lloyds Bank Group](#), May 2020)
  - *Tech Nation Report 2020* (March 2020) and *Jobs & Skills* report ([Tech Nation](#), September 2020).
- It includes a case study of Ada, the National College for Digital Skills.

Edge also published a [summary](#) of key messages from its bulletin series, with sector summaries for: engineering, digital, creative, hospitality, health & social care, construction, logistics and green.

**Design Skillnet and Skillnet Ireland published [Design Practice in Ireland Report](#), to inform the creation of a skills and development map for Irish designers for the next three years.**

- The sector is undergoing significant challenges including a changing definition of design due to technology.
  - Design roles have doubled in the past five years and are expected to increase to 65k–70k by 2025; with Ireland generating only 1,300 design graduates each year, a significant shortage is imminent.
  - Design is also permeating every industry, with growing numbers of designers working in-house in a broad range of sectors and organisations.
- There is a critical need to invest in skills for design professionals.
  - Of the ~37,500 professional designers working in the RoI, an estimated 25k will need upskilling and continuing professional development (CPD) to support their careers so they can retrain and remain employable.
  - 68% of designers have skills gaps and unfulfilled training needs – investment in training has not kept pace with the rapid evolution of the sector.
  - Professional designers are often expected to span multiple disciplines and display a breadth of skills.
  - Business, management and leadership skills are a priority for designers now immersed in solving complex business problems and looking to have influence.
  - Core skills such as problem solving, creativity, ideation and research-driven design are crucial.
  - A culture of continuous learning and development is needed for the sector to be at the forefront of emerging skills.
  - Professional designers who had engaged in recent training still identified skills gaps and training needs for current and future roles.
- Recommendations to address the skills deficit include:
  - Develop a CPD framework to meet the business challenges and skills needed to respond to rapid shifts in technology and establish a learning and development culture supported by the framework.
  - Communicate the benefits of active career development for both employers and designers.
  - Encourage employers to adapt recruitment practices to attract a greater diversity of talent from equivalent standard sectors: consider cross-sectoral upskilling opportunities, and identify and develop conversion programmes, rapid upskilling and reskilling.

The report aligns with the recommendations of [Together for Design](#), published in June 2020 by RoI's Expert Group for Future Skills Needs and summarised in [Skills Research Digest Q2 2020](#).

FutureLearn published an interactive [Transferable Skills Matcher](#), matching the ten most in-demand jobs in the UK and globally to the skills most mentioned in job descriptions.

Cedefop published an updated [Skills Forecast](#) – projections of future trends in employment by sector covering the period up to 2030 and taking account of developments up to May 2019.

- Data can be sorted by trends in labour force, employment and job openings, and by country, occupation and sector.
  - Countries covered include the UK, although UK data and information will be gradually phased out.

## TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

### COVID-related

The Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD) published [Digital learning in a post-COVID-19 economy: A literature review](#), on how digital learning can support upskilling and reskilling.

- There are nearly twice as many different supporting technologies today compared with ten years ago, including emergent forms such as game-based learning, artificial intelligence (AI) and extended reality immersive technologies.
- Digital learning was used by 57% of organisations in 2020 (pre-pandemic), compared with 29% in 2015; this is higher than trainer-led learning (36%) and in-house development programmes (51%).
  - In the UK, it is most common in large organisations (250+ employees) and the private sector.
  - Among those already invested in digital learning technologies, 64% have ramped up their use over the past two or three years; however, pre-pandemic, most organisations were using online learning for less than 20% of their total learning activity.
- In the workplace, the top areas of growth are in: video; mobile; blended learning; user-generated content; micro-learning; and curated content.
  - Virtual and augmented reality are used by only 4% and 2% of employers respectively.
- The overall global market for online learning is projected to reach US\$350b by 2025, driven by:
  - technological change and advances (e.g. improved access to high-speed broadband and increased learner familiarity with the technology)
  - learner expectations around flexibility of study
  - cost and resourcing considerations – employers are demanding shorter, faster and cheaper development programmes and courses that can be better integrated with work
  - the widespread requirement for reskilling and upskilling due to technological and organisational change.
- Barriers to further expansion and effective use fall into three main categories:
  - Technological, e.g. disparities of access to reliable devices or wifi, and cybersecurity risks
  - Instructional, e.g. poor digital competence among instructors
  - Learner, e.g. feelings of isolation and lack of time for learning.
- COVID-19 has forced a faster and far more widespread shift to digital learning, with employers adapting and moving learning online, with some attempting to move to fully online provision.
  - There has been some forging of new partnerships between government and private/public sector organisations to include digital learning within reskilling programmes.
  - However, the disruption and recession have led to reductions in overall provision and spending in around 25% of employers.
- Good-quality digital learning can be as effective as traditional approaches; however, learners from low-income and under-represented backgrounds may experience poorer outcomes on average.
  - Returns on investment can be significant, but matching content, tools and learners appears to be critical, as with more traditional methods.
- The success factors explicitly linked to using digital media fall into three categories:
  - Programme design (e.g. an easy-to-use digital platform and some form of social interaction)
  - The level and nature of support (e.g. building a community of learners and careers support)



- Boosting learner engagement (e.g. recognising learning in a way that is valued by learners and personalising content).

The report includes recommendations for employers and government. CIPD also published [Impact of COVID-19 on the L&D \[learning & development\] profession](#), which sets out the barriers faced by L&D practitioners and their insights into the future of learning in an increasingly technology-enabled world.

**The IES published [Career development in organisations to navigate changes in work and skills, on the challenges caused by pre-existing trends and changes that have been amplified by the pandemic](#). [The full report is available to members only.]**

- The paper questions whether long-standing approaches to career development are adequate and offers suggestions for employers considering how to better prepare their businesses and workforces for the future.

## Other research

**Kineo, part of the City & Guilds Group, published [The Learning Maturity Model: Understanding your learning culture](#), a guide to a four-stage model based on its market insights.**

- The stages are labelled:
  - **Chalk & talk** – a young learning culture with little emphasis on upskilling workers; training technology is minimal; most training occurs in-house; unlikely to have a dedicated learning and development team.
  - **Brilliant basics** – committed to developing a learning culture; opportunities extend beyond mandatory and compliance training to personal and professional development; likely to use a learning management system to host and track online training, including conventional e-learning courses and tutorials.
  - **Investors in people** – a maturing learning culture that sees a strong correlation between professional development and improved business performance; training goals include developing future leaders and giving employees new skills that enable them to move into new roles and take on 'stretch' assignments and challenges; encourages self-directed learning.
  - **Future gazers** – a mature learning culture; actively encourages learners to engage with self- and professional development as part of their workday routine; may be early adopters of AI technologies and immersive training platforms; digital learning is ingrained in the learning culture alongside or supplanting face-to-face learning.
- Factors determining maturity level include: the training types needed and used; training and learning goals; platforms and technologies used; and measurement and assessment.
- Trends influencing business and learning include: the growth of the globally dispersed, remote, contract and freelance workforce; and the competing pressures of automation and the talent gap.

**CIPD published [Employee resilience: An evidence review](#).**

- The factors that predict resilience most strongly are:
  - **Self-efficacy**, which can be developed through good management – such as goal setting, professional development and coaching – or through seeing others succeed.
  - **Positive affect and optimism**: moods such as joy, cheerfulness, enthusiasm and alertness and the belief that one will generally experience good outcomes.
  - **Sense of coherence**: the belief that what happens in one's life is comprehensible, manageable and meaningful.
  - **Social support**: help or advice from managers or co-workers – the latter is especially powerful.
  - **Leader-member exchange**: positive interpersonal relations between managers and their reports, especially important during adverse situations when subordinates look for reassurance, directions and support.
- Resilience can be developed through learning interventions that:
  - are based on experiential learning that draws on the principles of cognitive behavioural therapy to develop self-awareness, critical reflection, relaxation and mindfulness
  - combine with related practices, such as goal setting, coaching and small-group discussions
  - are relatively intensive.

**Education & Employers and CIPD published [The Value of Volunteering: Volunteering in education and productivity at work](#).**

- 80% or more volunteers reported benefits to communication, influencing and relationship skills with over 50% seeing benefits to leadership and other skills.
  - 79% reported improvements to their sense of mission; 68% reported greater motivation at work.
  - 26% reported greater productivity, with 44% reporting manager recognition for the impact.
  - More than 33% said volunteering had helped them apply for different or more senior roles.
- Volunteers reported greater benefits when:
  - employers actively introduced volunteering opportunities
  - line managers supported volunteering and recognised the benefits
  - employers managed 'volunteering-as-skill-development' strategically, integrating it into human resource (HR) appraisal and staff development.
- Over 50% of those volunteering just two days a year or less reported benefits in at least one of: work satisfaction, productivity, promotions, earnings or job applications.
  - Shorter and more flexible activities, such as taking part in career insight talks, had medium- or high-strength benefits for eight out of the 11 skills analysed.
- When employers helped with volunteering, 66% of volunteers were more likely to speak positively about their employer and 50% were more satisfied at work.

**IZA published [Employee Training and Firm Performance: Evidence from ESF \[European Social Fund\] grant applications](#), comparing the effects of training on firms, based on a large training grants programme in Portugal.**

- Companies may find it difficult to estimate the returns to their training activities; the relationship between personnel improvements and gains in productivity and sales may be difficult to establish, leading to uncertainty that can further discourage training.
- The study contrasts companies that received grants with those that applied but were unsuccessful, comparing many potential outcomes over several years before and after the grant decision.
  - The grants supported the training of employees of different skill levels, from factory workers to managers, and in diverse areas, including innovation, marketing and international trade.
- The additional training driven by the programme led to economically and statistically significant improvements in several dimensions of business performance.
  - Sales, value added, employment, productivity and exports increased for those that received the training grant compared to the control group.
- However, total (accounting) investment and profits appear not to be positively affected by training, although these variables are subject to measurement error.
- Training does not have a weaker effect for firms with less-educated workforces – in some cases, including employment, the effects are even stronger for such firms.
  - This suggests that training may not only have a positive contribution on efficiency, it may also contribute towards the employability of those less well educated, with positive effects on equity.
  - This may be particularly important as the world of work undergoes major transformation driven by new technologies and the pandemic crisis.

## **AUTOMATION & AI: IMPACT ON WORK**

**The Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) published [UK AI Council: AI Roadmap](#), a report by an independent expert committee advising on the Government's national strategic direction on AI.**

- 16 recommendations are offered under four 'pillars':
- **Skills & diversity**
  - Scale up and commit to an ongoing ten-year programme of high-level AI skill building, including research fellowships, cross-discipline PhDs, industry-led master's and L7 apprenticeships.
  - Make diversity and inclusion a priority, making data-led decisions about investment.

- Commit to achieving AI and data literacy for everyone: an online academy for understanding AI, with trusted materials and initiatives, would support teachers, school students and lifelong learning.

- **National, cross-sector adoption**

- Increase buyer confidence and AI capability across all sectors and all sizes of company.
- Support the UK's AI start-up vendor community with greater access to data, infrastructure, skills, specialist knowledge and funds.
- Enable robust public sector investments in AI, building capability in the use of data, analytics and AI to ensure intelligent procurement as part of projects for public benefit.
- Use AI to meet the challenges of net zero carbon emissions and to help keep the country safe and secure.
- Build on the work of NHSX (a joint unit of NHS England and the Department of Health & Social Care) and others to lead the way in using AI to improve outcomes and create value in healthcare.

- The other pillars are: research, development & innovation; and data, infrastructure & public trust.

A [UK AI strategy](#) is to be published later in 2021.

**The Scottish Government published [Scotland's AI Strategy Trustworthy, Ethical and Inclusive](#), setting out short- and long-term priorities.**

- A [Scottish AI Playbook](#) provides a guide to the principles, practices and actions to be used.
- Actions will be taken in three parallel 'tracks': establish collective leadership via a new Scottish AI Alliance; create the foundations for success; and build an AI Powerhouse.

*It complements Scotland's new digital strategy [see page 52].*

**The OECD published [The impact of Artificial Intelligence on the labour market: What do we know so far?](#).**

- Recent developments in AI have stoked new fears about large-scale job loss, and concerns about employee wellbeing and the broader work environment.
  - However, AI also has the potential to complement and augment human capabilities, leading to higher productivity, greater demand for human labour and improved job quality.
  - From a theoretical perspective, the impact of AI on employment and wages is ambiguous, and it may depend strongly on the type of AI being developed and deployed, how it is developed and deployed, and on market conditions and policy.
- However, the empirical evidence based on AI adopted in the last ten years does not support the idea of an overall decline in employment and wages in occupations exposed to AI.
  - While AI is capable of performing some non-routine cognitive tasks, some bottlenecks to adoption remain, and many tasks still require humans to carry them out; thus, much of the impact of AI on jobs is likely to be experienced through the reorganisation of tasks within an occupation.
  - Certain groups of workers may be more capable or better positioned to take advantage of AI's benefits, to use it in a way that is complementary to their work and avoid its negative impacts.
- AI is likely to reshape the work environment of many, by changing the content and design of their jobs, the way workers interact with each other and with machines, and how work effort and efficiency are monitored.
  - AI can play an important role in facilitating human-machine collaboration, helping workers in tedious or physically demanding tasks while allowing them to leverage uniquely human abilities.
  - However, the same AI applications could also entail significant risks for the work environment, especially if applied badly or with the single motivation to cut costs.

**The OECD published [What happened to jobs at high risk of automation?](#), examining trends in 21 countries over the past decade.**

- All countries experienced employment growth over the past decade and those that faced higher automation risk in 2012 experienced higher employment growth over the subsequent period.
- Within countries, most occupations also saw growth; however, growth has been much lower in high-risk than in low-risk jobs (6% vs 18%).

- Despite being more concentrated in high-risk occupations, low-educated workers have not been more negatively affected than other education groups, due to a decline in their numbers as part of general upskilling.
  - Low-educated workers have, however, become more concentrated in high-risk occupations.
- Job-tenure has fallen more in high-risk occupations – an effect pronounced among older workers.
- Two broad policy conclusions:
  - Anxiety around a jobless future may be overblown – at the country level there is no indication that higher risk of automation is associated with lower employment growth.
  - Policy, in the form of training, must focus on the low-educated, who may not share evenly in the benefits of automation; this is particularly important, with the severe impact of COVID-19 on jobs.

**The OECD published [Demand for AI skills in jobs: Evidence from online job postings](#), drawing on data from the UK, Canada, Singapore and the US to investigate trends from 2012 to 2018.**

- The total number of AI-related jobs increased over time in the four countries, and a growing number of jobs required multiple AI-related skills, increasing from a maximum of 7–9 in 2012 to 10+ in 2018.
  - Skills related to communication, problem solving, creativity and teamwork gained relative importance over time, as did complementary software-related and AI-specific competencies.
  - Skills that saw a sudden and marked increase (a ‘burst’), e.g. cluster analysis, data mining and neuro-linguistic programming, confirmed a trend in demand for deep learning-related skills.
- AI-related skills were in demand, to varying degrees, across almost all sectors.
  - Information & communication, financial & insurance activities and professional, scientific & technical activities were the most AI-job intensive.

## SKILLS POLICY

### COVID-related

**The Migration Policy Institute Europe published [COVID-19 and the Demand for Labour and Skills in Europe: Early evidence and implications for migration policy](#), providing details on policy responses to emerging skills needs and the impact of COVID-19 on the future of work.**

- Europe’s skills needs are changing rapidly: the knowledge economy is growing, and structural and technological changes are driving a reduction in middle-skilled jobs while increasing demand for both high- and less-skilled workers.
- The high levels of unemployment and disruptions to global migration and travel caused by the pandemic will make it harder to address the skills and labour challenges Europe was already facing.
  - People working in low-paid, more precarious jobs have been harder hit than those in more highly skilled roles, with a disproportionate impact on demographic groups such as immigrants, women and older workers.
  - Despite the weakening of the labour market, some skill needs are proving difficult to meet – those who have lost their jobs cannot always readily transfer to the jobs that are available.
- In recent years, the EU and several member states have introduced policies to upskill residents and attract skilled workers from outside Europe; these objectives rely on sustained investments:
  - to improve education and training (including reskilling and upskilling initiatives)
  - to ensure that immigrants can successfully integrate into the labour market.
- To ensure Europe can remain competitive, investment is needed in:
  - policies focused on keeping people in work and meeting longer-term skills needs
  - building the skills of resident workers
  - migration to contribute to meeting labour market needs, even in the short term for high-priority roles such as health and social care workers.
- Employment, skills and migration policies need to address three main concerns: the situation of migrants and other workers resident in the EU; short-term skill needs; and longer-term skill needs.
  - Consider how to design or improve policies aimed at retaining international students after their studies.

## Other research

### **City & Guilds Group and Burning Glass Technologies published [Building bridges towards future jobs](#), exploring how matching occupations through 'skills adjacency' can facilitate future transitions into new employment.**

- The study includes a YouGov survey of 2,041 employed or furloughed adults in GB in January 2021.
- The weakened economy and jobs market means that many people are pessimistic about the UK jobs market.
  - 70% of women and 60% of men believe the jobs market is going to be worse in 2021 than 2020.
- However, despite the number of employers currently reducing their workforces, there are still jobs that can serve as 'steps into' new careers, allowing people to build on their existing skills.
  - Online posts for ~200 occupations have increased or remained relatively stable, and sectors such as digital, construction, engineering, land and health are actively recruiting.
- 34% wanted to change their career, 11% because COVID-19 has fundamentally altered their job.
  - 26% said it was 'fairly likely' that they would pay for training.
  - The most effective way to change careers is to harness transferable skills – 36% have some understanding of where their skills would be useful, but 32% have no idea.
  - Concerns about changing careers include: worry about starting over (34%); salary of other careers (26%); lack of knowledge about other jobs/sectors (21%); lack of confidence (19%); not knowing where to start (19%); cost of retraining (18%); and thinking they are too old to learn new skills (12%).
  - 25–34 year-olds are the most reluctant to change careers.
- Recommendations include:
  - Create a flexible funding system that supports modular short courses linked to 'step into' jobs
  - Employers should consider a more flexible approach to workforce development and recruitment
  - Clearer and more effective ways to help identify and understand transferable skills
  - Embed lifelong learning into the heart of all skills policy
  - Embrace digital solutions.
- Through a partnership with FutureLearn, City & Guilds has developed 'Skills Bridges', which support people to identify their transferable skills and bridge from one occupation to another.
  - Upon completion, they receive a City & Guilds digital credential, enabling them to access jobs boards and showcase their skills across social media platforms.

*A similar approach is advocated by the WEF – see the item on a skills 'taxonomy' on page 37.*

### **Skillnet Ireland published [A Micro-Credential Roadmap: Currency, cohesion and consistency](#), exploring how micro-credentials can contribute to upskilling and reskilling demands.**

- Findings from the first National Micro-Credential Survey that took place in summer 2020 among Irish employers and employees include:
  - There are differing levels of maturity in current knowledge: 49% of employers and 37% of employees had heard of the term micro-credential; 80% of employers said they never/rarely came across them on job applications; 20% of employees had earned one.
  - 64% of employers and 63% of employees were extremely/very interested in learning more.
  - Employees' top three motivators for engaging with micro-credentials were: improving skills relevant to their job; keeping up to date with developments in their sector; and achieving an internal promotion.
  - Employers saw micro-credentials as a way of recognising and rewarding personal growth and progression among their workforce, rather than to quantify existing skills or to increase competitiveness.
  - Most employers anticipate expenditure on future micro-credential based CPD to be the same (64%) or less (22%) than their current CPD spend.
  - The most common constraints for businesses considering micro-credentials were time and cost.
  - Many organisations are seeking new forms of certification and approaches to CPD, even where such systems are not in place.

- Recommendations towards establishing the RoI as an 'international hub of excellence' in micro-credentials include:
  - Advancing stakeholder understanding and increasing collaboration across sectors.
  - Completion of capability mapping of current CPD provision to identify where micro-credentials might support a more agile, flexible and 'stackable' approach to training and development.
  - Piloting models of co-design, co-development and co-delivery of micro-credentials.

**The WEF, in collaboration with PwC, published [Upskilling for Shared Prosperity](#), exploring the disconnect between current education programmes and the skills that employers need now and in the future.**

- Under an 'accelerated' scenario that assumes skills gaps are closed by 2028, upskilling could boost global GDP by \$6.5 trillion by 2030; a 'core' scenario closes them by 2030, boosting it by \$5t.
  - In the UK, the accelerated scenario would boost GDP by 3.4% and the core scenario by 3.0%.
- As the fourth industrial revolution reshapes the future of jobs, 38% of the additional GDP under the accelerated scenario will be created in the business services and manufacturing sectors.
  - Other sectors that have suffered from low wage growth and output for decades – e.g. health & social care – could reap significant benefits, reducing inequality and polarisation.
  - In agriculture and construction, improved productivity could reduce the total number of jobs, but upskilled populations employed in these sectors could see significantly improved job quality and gain skills that would allow them to enter the newly expanding markets of tomorrow.
- Upskilling could propel the transition to an economy where human labour is increasing complemented and augmented by new technology, rather than replaced by it.
  - Jobs requiring creativity, innovation and empathy will increase, as will the need for IT skills.
  - The UK could see a 0.6% rise in jobs under either scenario.
- Four key areas demand new approaches to upskilling and urgent action:
  - All stakeholders: build a strong and interconnected ecosystem committed to a comprehensive upskilling agenda and give people the opportunity to participate.
  - Government: adopt an agile approach to driving national upskilling initiatives, working with business, non-profits and education.
  - Business: anchor upskilling and workforce investments as a core business principle and make a time-bound pledge to act.
  - Education providers: embrace the future of work as a source of reinvention to normalise lifelong learning for all.

*Detailed recommendations are offered for each area.*

**The WEF published [Building a Common Language for Skills at Work: A global taxonomy](#).**

- Accelerated by COVID-19 and the ongoing global recession, 50% of all employees will need reskilling by 2025, with 40% of current workers' core skills expected to change.
- New data-driven methods demonstrate the power of using a skills-based approach to reskill, upskill and redeploy talent.
  - Breaking job roles down into required skill sets can allow employers to better understand viable job transition pathways based on the level of similarity in the skills required for different roles.
- The taxonomy enables providers, employers and governments to align around a common language; it consists of:
  - a set of definitions of commonly used terms
  - a categorisation of skills clusters and groupings
  - mechanisms for adoption in assessment, hiring, learning and redeployment
  - examples of how the taxonomy has already been used in the 'reskilling revolution'.

## ADULT & LIFELONG LEARNING

England's Department for Education published [Decision making of adult learners below Level 2](#), the report of a qualitative study undertaken by L&W, based on 48 telephone interviews and focus groups with 39 participants.

- Most were motivated to enrol on courses for career-related reasons: more job security; more money; more work autonomy; a more stimulating or stretching job.
  - Women in particular wanted to be a role model for their children or to better provide for their families.
  - Some adults sought to preserve or improve their mental health, sense of self-worth and confidence.
- The main barriers to learning were:
  - The financial costs (other than course fees), e.g. childcare, transport, learning materials
  - Non-financial costs, including personal time and energy
  - Dispositional fears, including being too old to learn, class sizes, feeling stupid or unsupported in the classroom
  - Employer attitudes and behaviour
  - Institutional factors, e.g.: lack of support for dyslexia; ineffective teaching; inflexible provision; unrepresentative marketing materials; lack of information online about practical support available.
- The following made entering or continuing learning feasible or easier:
  - Practical factors, e.g.: not having to pay a fee; free childcare; living near a learning provider
  - Employer attitudes and behaviour, e.g.: communicating the benefits for in-work progression; offering flexible working hours
  - Receiving information, advice and encouragement from tutors, relatives or partners
  - Being immersed in a positive and supportive learning environment
  - Having a range of learning options to choose from.
- Many participants said they would prefer face-to-face classes to fully online or blended learning.
  - The most common reasons cited were immediate access to tutor and peer support, and specialist support for learning difficulties and disabilities.
  - For some, learning online was the most attractive option because it was flexible; others said they would be unwilling to consider online learning because they feared technology or had limited IT capability; others were willing to consider it if tutors provided high-quality support.
  - Blended learning emerged as an attractive option, combining the flexibility of online learning with the personal interaction of face-to-face learning.

The OECD published [Future-Proofing Adult Learning in London, United Kingdom](#), shedding light on major challenges facing the city and analysing its capacity to design effective, future-ready adult programmes; the findings are widely applicable.

- London is among the leading OECD cities in recognising skills as a fundamental driver of economic growth and resilience.
  - The Greater London Authority has made adult learning a priority with the development of its [Skills for Londoners Strategy](#).
  - Major obstacles to participating in adult learning are time constraints, work and family responsibilities and financial constraints.
  - These barriers can be addressed through: targeted information and guidance on the benefits of skills development; the creation of flexible, shorter or modular types of learning programmes; targeted financial support; better aligning adult learning programmes with labour market needs.
- To future-proof its adult learning system and deliver 'on- and off-ramps' for workers to transition into new jobs or careers, the report recommends:
  - **Creating an adult learning ecosystem** by: examining opportunities for further devolution to foster an integrated and joined-up offer; providing quality IAG about careers and jobs, e.g. a 'made in London' platform for employers and workers and increased use of technology in careers counselling and training.

- **Bringing employers on board** to increase investment in learning by: strengthening workplace training and apprenticeships, actively involving employers and introducing new support measures for SMEs; ensuring firms make use of available skills, promoting and rewarding high-performance practices and establishing peer-learning platforms.

**IZA published [Central Exams and Adult Skills: Evidence from PIAAC \[Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies\]](#), on the relationship between the type of exit exam at the end of secondary school and the cognitive skills of adults, and labour market outcomes.**

- Central exams are associated with substantially higher test outcomes, although critics warn that this may simply reflect differences in students' test-taking ability, rather than actual differences in knowledge and skills.
  - If that were so, central exams might not genuinely improve the productive skills of adults.
- PIAAC data, and data on reforms of exam regimes since 1960 for 30 countries participating in PIAAC, were analysed.
  - Central exams increase the cognitive skills of adults by about 7% of a standard deviation.
  - Effect sizes are very similar for numeracy and literacy, and only slightly higher for problem-solving skills.
  - There is no significant impact on earnings, employment or the probability of holding a tertiary degree.

**England's Department for Education published [Evaluation of Career Learning Pilots: Flexible Learning Fund](#), testing different approaches to training for working adults with low–intermediate skills.**

- 21 out of 29 projects recruited below target; 5,362 learners participated against a target of 26,475.
- Career progression was a key motivating factor for many learners.
- Around 50% were on fully in-person courses, 20% were fully online, 25% a mixture.
  - More than 50% of the online learners said that they would not have been able to do the same course if it were delivered entirely in person.
  - Around 20% had chosen a flexible course to fit around their work schedule, rising to 44% of those whose course was online; 10% had chosen it to fit around childcare responsibilities.
  - Learners were most likely to drop out of their course because it was difficult to juggle learning with work, childcare or other caring commitments.
- Determinants of learner satisfaction were:
  - Quality of content: tailored to real-world scenarios; volume and complexity allowed learners to work around other commitments; supporting materials looked professionally designed.
  - Quality of teaching: personalised, e.g. providing additional support where needed; tutors were responsive; the experiences were consistent with what had been 'sold' during recruitment.
  - Level of accessibility: timing; location; workload; the extent to which content was user-friendly.

**England's Department for Education published [Cost and outreach pilots evaluation](#), testing different approaches to engaging adults in learning, including fee subsidies.**

- Subsidies played a significant part in enrolments, particularly by enabling learners to start sooner because they no longer had to save to pay fees.
  - Subsidies of 100% and 75% had similar and strongly motivating effects compared to 25%.
- Subsidies act as an incentive for both individuals to enrol and for employers to support participation.
  - Subsidies can support individuals who work in sectors and occupations traditionally less likely to invest in training, and in SMEs where employees may find it more difficult to negotiate time off.
  - Subsidies also facilitate participation by adults who are resistant to taking out loans.
- However, flexible delivery, targeted outreach and tailored IAG are also important for these groups.
- When designing and running career learning opportunities for adults, an integrated local approach is critical, with clear strategic leadership and a well-developed partnership in which all partners are clear about their roles and buy in to the programme.



- Flexible learning opportunities and IAG are essential to engage working adults and those with other commitments.
  - 17% of learners said that they hadn't received enough information about their course before starting; they were then more likely to report that the course didn't meet their expectations and to be dissatisfied with delivery.
  - 38% said that, by the end of their course, they still didn't know where to look for information to advance or change their career.
  - 24% would have liked more support while on their course; many were unaware that additional support might have been available from their provider.
  - Informal peer support was key to enabling some individuals to sustain their learning; providers could take steps to facilitate it and extend it to distance learners.
- Employer engagement impacts what is offered, how and to whom: it can build demand by ensuring that courses reflect local business needs, and secure employer investment, either directly through contributions or indirectly by releasing staff.
  - Engaged employers may also be willing to offer work placements and work experience.

**CIPD published [Skills to grow: The case for enhanced ILAs \[Individual Learning Accounts\] in Scotland](#), drawing on international best practice and recent experience of schemes in Scotland.**

- ILAs offer flexibility, individualisation and adaptability that can support learners throughout their working lives, e.g. in early career progression, as an opportunity to learn to work with new technologies, or as a means of accessing retraining for the transition to low-carbon industries.
- In iterations seen so far, ILAs have been most effective as a tool for stimulating demand for lifelong learning among adults aged 25+, extending or reigniting engagement with the skills system.
  - To be most effective, however, they will need to be combined with supply-side reform and effective quality assurance mechanisms and made fully compatible with other forms of support.
- The level of funding for ILAs and the design of learning offers are often not well constructed to maximise impact.
  - While a focus on tuition costs will undoubtedly lower a crucial barrier for some, there are other persistent financial barriers that prevent engagement with the skills system.
  - Increasingly, online provision works differently from in-person learning, and may attract a different cohort of learners, with different ambitions and expectations.

**FutureLearn published [The Future of Learning Report](#), drawing on a survey of 4,400 adults in the UK, USA and Australia and 15 interviews with sector experts.**

- Among the ten global learning trends identified:
  - Women are statistically more likely to take an online course than men, and more women believe that education has the power to make the world a better place.
  - Younger generations show the most interest in online learning, as well as the greatest trust and belief in the power of education to have a positive impact on the world.
  - Respondents are excited and optimistic about inclusive education, and the experts agree real progress is being made towards the accessibility and inclusivity of learning.
  - Young people trust in, and use, social media platforms to educate themselves generally as well as specifically on current affairs and political movements.
  - Online learning is becoming the norm and, following COVID-19, its popularity is here to stay.
  - Online learning is particularly valuable for those 'locked out' of opportunities due to poor qualifications; people are likely to take an online course to get ahead at work.
  - People expect to change jobs and industries throughout their career – a trend heightened by the post-COVID-19 jobs landscape.
  - There is now a wider acceptance of different types of qualifications, such as micro-credentials, due to current formal qualifications not matching industry expectations and skills demand.

## THE CHANGING NATURE OF WORK

### COVID-related

**Demos published [The Nowhere Office](#), by Julia Hobsbawm, Chair of its Workshift Commission.**

- The Nowhere Office is already here, representing a change to unproductive and harmful ways of working that must be recognised, valued and experimented with; predictions and recommendations include:
  - **Place:** the balance of time spent in the office will be around 20%; policymakers will need to rethink tax structures around home-based energy bills, travel and commuting.
  - **Time:** flexibility is happening; managers need to end presenteeism and redraw what success looks like.
  - **Social health:** far wider conversations than wellbeing are needed, linked not just to productivity and growth, but to the meaning and belonging we derive from what we do and why.
- A commission on social health is needed to examine the modern metrics, including: a new way to pay for time spent working and less anxiety about failing to spot shoddy work or the workshy.

*'... we have an opportunity to ... address some of the fundamentally irksome and inadequate ways of working we have all put up with for too long'.*

**Demos published [Post Pandemic Places](#), the latest report from its People's Commission on Life After COVID-19, based on a poll of 20k British adults conducted in December 2020 and focus groups in February 2021.**

- Most people think that what is on offer to them locally has become more important, particularly those who have had to spend more time in their local area than before.
  - 65% of the working population – 37% of adults – had their daily location forcibly altered as a result of the pandemic at some stage during 2020, either through working from home or furlough.
  - 36% thought they would spend more time in their local area after the pandemic and 10% less.
- 57% of those required to work from home want to continue doing so part of the time, 22% all the time; there is support for having more local desk space for remote office workers.
- Recommendations for government include:
  - Use a move to more remote working as a tool for area regeneration and to widen economic participation.
  - Fulfil the intention of making all jobs flexible by default, explicitly including location flexibility.
  - Introduce tax incentives for 'remote working vouchers', redeemable at premises of an employee's choice.

**IES published [Working from home under Covid-19 lockdown: Transitions and tensions](#), as part of a Work After Lockdown research project funded by the Economic & Social Research Council.**

- The analysis draws on data collected between July and December 2020, including from the national Understanding Society COVID-19 Survey and 1,035 responses to an online wellbeing survey of those working from home who are usually office based.
  - The project is focused on those who work in local government and the legal profession.
  - Themes explored are: managing change; learning and development; employee health, wellbeing, performance and productivity; working effectively from home; and future demand for hybrid and flexible working.
- Workers have proved they are highly adaptable in these unusual times:
  - 88.5% of employees felt that they had got more or as much work done as in the office.
  - 64% rated the ability to work flexibly as the best feature of working from home.
- The worst aspects of working from home include:
  - 82% miss the informal contact with colleagues that the pressure of working from home has squeezed.
  - Maintaining this high productivity has taken its toll on mental health.
- The main 'learnings' for employers include:
  - Employer focus is now needed on wellbeing to support people and sustain performance.
  - Strong workforce demand for hybrid working requires employers to re-engage with flexible working and consider how to design jobs and workspaces for the future.

- The line manager has a pivotal role – employers must develop training that strengthens the new people management skills this shape of work demands, as it is vital for resilience, continuity and growth.
- Five recommendations are made for employers on organising work in a post-pandemic world:
  - Focus on wellbeing interventions and practical adjustments to workloads and working practices that remove burdens, ease intensity and promote work–life balance.
  - Re-engage with flexible working for the existing workforce and review the implications for recruitment policy and practice.
  - Define what a hybrid working pattern looks like in every job role and develop approaches to managing hybrid working in practice.
  - Develop standards for good line management – emphasise the social and interpersonal skills needed to support, motivate and engage people through changing circumstances.
  - Provide training that strengthens the management skills and capabilities that a future of hybrid and flexible working demands.

**IES also published [Out of sight, not out of mind: The importance of line management in the virtual world for employee wellbeing and performance](#), on the implications of COVID-19 and the lockdown for management practices, the employment relationship and wellbeing. [The full report is available to members only.]**

- The pandemic’s significant and rapid shift to how and where work is done changed relationships between line managers and employees, with implications for management skills and practices and potential knock-on effects for employee wellbeing and productivity.
  - It is important for organisations to consider how managers adapt to these remote conditions.
- A line manager’s role is pivotal for both employee wellbeing and organisational performance, however even before the pandemic, line managers were ‘squeezed’ due to the expansion of tasks they undertake beyond traditional supervisory roles; this can also be detrimental for line managers’ own wellbeing.
  - Recommendations are made for line managers and HR.

**McKinsey Global Institute published [The future of work after COVID-19](#), examining the long-term impact across several work arenas and in eight economies, including the UK.**

- Grouping occupations based on physical closeness, the frequency of human interactions and where work is done shows impact concentrated in four work arenas with high levels of proximity:
  - Leisure and travel venues, employing more than 60m in the eight countries
  - On-site customer interaction including retail and hospitality (150m)
  - Computer-based office work (300m)
  - Production and warehousing (350m+).
- In less dense work arenas, such as outdoor production sites, COVID-19’s effects may fade quickly.
  - Arenas such as medical care and personal care, with high levels of physical proximity, may also see less change because of the nature of the occupations.
- COVID-19 accelerated three trends that could persist to varying degrees with different implications:
  - **Hybrid remote work** could continue: 20–25% of workers in advanced economies could work from home 3–5 days a week, reducing demand for urban mass transit, restaurants and retail.
  - The growth in share of **e-commerce and the ‘delivery economy’** is likely to continue, disrupting jobs in travel and leisure, hastening the decline of low-wage jobs in shops and restaurants and increasing jobs in distribution centres and last-mile delivery.
  - **Automation and AI** enlisted to cope with COVID-19 disruptions may continue to grow, putting more robots in manufacturing plants and warehouses and adding self-service customer kiosks and service robots in customer interaction arenas.
- In the advanced economies studied, the four work arenas most affected by proximity account for about 70% of the workforce, although there are variations that result in different potentials for remote work and job displacement.
- Large cities may feel the impact, as remote work reduces demand for transportation, retail and food service, and smaller cities that were declining before the pandemic may benefit.

- Workforce transitions may be larger in scale than estimated before the pandemic, and the share of employment in low-wage job categories may decline.
- Companies have a new opportunity to reimagine how and where work is done, thinking through specific work arenas and occupational activities.
  - Speedy and effective worker redeployment will be needed, e.g. by recruiting and retraining based on skills and experience rather than academic degrees.
- Policymakers could consider prioritising equitable access to digital infrastructure as well as new ways of enabling occupational mobility.
  - As the share of independent workers grows, more innovation may be required to secure benefits for them.
- The pandemic will eventually fade, but the agility and creativity of policymakers and businesses evident during the crisis will need to continue, to find effective responses to workforce challenges.

## Other research

**The Institute for the Future of Work published [The Good Work Monitor](#), a new tool that ranks each local authority in England, so that policy responses can be tailored to local need.**

- Good work: *'promotes dignity, autonomy, equality ... has fair pay and conditions ... where people are properly supported to develop their talents and have a sense of community'*.
- Key insights include:
  - Good work correlates strongly with good health, and bad work is associated with 'deaths of despair' and COVID-19 mortalities.
  - Marked local differences in prosperity, demand, education and inequality at a local authority level sit behind a patchwork of access to good work.
  - Inequalities in access to good work and health have become more pronounced through the pandemic, and there are some distinctive new challenges.

**The International Labour Organization published [World Employment & Social Outlook: The role of digital labour platforms in transforming the world of work](#).**

- Digital labour platforms can be classified into two broad categories:
  - Online web-based and location-based platforms, where tasks or work assignments are performed online or remotely by workers, including: services (e.g. legal, design) on freelance platforms; complex tasks on competitive programming platforms; short-term tasks on micro-task platforms.
  - Location-based platforms, where tasks are carried out in person in specified physical locations, including taxi, delivery and home services, domestic work and care provision.
- A comprehensive international overview is provided of the platform business model and business strategies, based on analysis of the terms of service agreements of 31 major online web-based and location-based platforms, and on the experiences of workers and clients on these platforms.
  - The report also explores regulatory gaps with regard to platform governance, and reviews multiple initiatives undertaken by governments and social partners to bridge these gaps.

## EMPLOYMENT: RIGHTS, RESPONSIBILITIES & WAGES

### COVID-related

**The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) published [People at the heart of the recovery: The 2020 CBI/Pertemps Employment Trends Survey results and what they mean for business](#), based on responses from 248 businesses across the UK gathered in August 2020.**

- 33% expected to freeze pay, while 29% expected to raise it in line with inflation.
- 34% of those impacted by the National Living Wage thought that the Low Pay Commission should take a cautious approach, with large firms more cautious than SMEs (40%/32%).
- The main current threats to the UK's labour market competitiveness were believed to be access to skills (54%) and the ability to move UK-based workers across the EU (53%).
- 74% expected flexible working to become more common within their organisations.

- 38% had significantly or slightly increased their focus on diversity and inclusion over the previous 12 months, while 62% reported no change.
  - 45% had taken new steps to address the experiences of BAME employees in the workplace, most commonly starting to assess recruitment, retention and progression (17%).
- The top drivers behind employee engagement were considered to be effective line management (53%) and shared company-wide values (52%), with flexible working also important (36%).
- 82% had increased communication during the pandemic; 64% had increased flexible working to prioritise work–life balance; 54% had increased mental health and wellbeing assistance.
- The top three priorities for the year ahead were to maintain/achieve high levels of employee engagement (55%), business transformation/restructuring (48%) and retaining talent (40%).

**CIPD published its 17<sup>th</sup> [Reward management survey](#) findings, which focus on the impact of COVID-19 and the ensuing economic fallout in the UK on reward practices.**

- The findings are grouped into six themes, each of which can be downloaded separately:
  - [The impact of COVID-19 on finances, pay decisions and forecasts](#)
  - [Management of base pay, variable rewards and recognition](#)
  - [Employee financial wellbeing](#)
  - [Employee benefits](#)
  - [Reward fairness](#)
  - [The Living Wage](#)

**The Centre for Economic Performance (CEP) published [Covid-19 and the self-employed – ten months into the crisis](#), its third such policy brief, based on 1,100 responses in February 2021.**

- 57% of self-employed workers reported earning less than £1,000 a month, down from 62% in April 2020, but up from 31% in January 2020.
  - 31% were not sure if they were eligible for the Government’s support scheme.
- 6.3% of self-employed people moved into employment, but these were mainly managers who could be either self-employed or employed.
- Around 10% of respondents had tested positive for COVID-19 over the previous year, of whom 25% didn’t self-isolate; of those who did self-isolate, 40% reported a drop in income.
- Given the choice, most self-employed workers would choose to remain self-employed if they were offered a similar employee position.

**The Centre for Progressive Policy published [Pay, productivity and social value: Why key workers deserve a better deal](#), focusing on the adult social care sector in the context of COVID-19.**

- Key worker incomes are not determined by an efficient market: they are subject to power imbalances and policy decisions.
  - In many key worker sectors, labour productivity and true ‘market’ value is difficult to meaningfully quantify, while the wages are at odds with the importance of such roles to society.
- Key findings:
  - On average, the death rate for key workers from COVID-19 between March and December 2020 was 40% higher than for the average working-age person.
  - Care workers and home carers had a death rate over three times higher, yet their hourly earnings are nearly 30% below the median; over 33% are employed on zero hours contracts.
  - Most care workers are paid less than £10 an hour, yet existing research suggests the social return on investment is between £1.20 and £6.50 for £1 spent.
  - Health and social care occupations have seen below-average increases in pay over the period 2011–20 despite increasing demand; increasing turnover suggests that the current pay model is not working.
  - Better remuneration in more deprived places where demand is high and growing would contribute towards inclusive growth and levelling up.

A technical appendix can be found [here](#).

**Demos published [Build Back Stronger](#), the final report of its Renew Normal Commission, including recommendations relating to employment.**

- The report offers five key lessons that the Government 'must' take forward:
  - **There is consensus for change:** attempts to return the UK to the way things were before the pandemic will fail, because this is not what the public want or what business will invest in.
  - **Level up people, not just places:** the things people learnt to value, like green space, are less available to those in poorer areas, with disabled and ethnic minority groups often less able to access them.
  - **Community makes us stronger, not just happier:** community networks are a vital component of national resilience, regularly out-performing national schemes during the pandemic.
  - **Remote working and online shopping are here to stay:** while it has not been perfect, the reality is that we are not going back to how things were before.
  - **We need to redesign the places where we live and work:** it was already increasingly clear that we needed to increase civic space, adapt to climate change and accommodate the needs of an ageing population; this raises huge questions for the physical infrastructure of the country.
- Among the recommendations:
  - A comprehensive approach to 'level up' people, including: a higher minimum wage; strengthened employment rights; more flexible working to improve wellbeing; a community development programme and support for volunteering to improve equality of social capital.
  - An 'everybody in' strategy for the digital world and a 'minimum digital living standard'.
  - Promote flexibility in all parts of the labour market and support the economy through this transition.
  - New local co-working hubs on high streets for public servants, to help create jobs and civic pride in left behind towns.

**Eurofound (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living & Working Conditions) published [Industrial relations and social dialogue UK: Working life in the COVID-19 pandemic 2020](#), including a section on the impacts of the crisis on wages and wage setting.**

- It provides a historical account of what has happened, the political context, government response, disputes, major developments and legislation.
  - Aspects include the growth in working from home, the impact on work-life balance, jobs and pay security, health and wellbeing and anxiety about returning to work.

*See page 53 for related reports on other countries in Europe.*

**IES published [Laid low: The impacts of the Covid-19 crisis on low-paid and insecure workers](#), the final report of a project funded by Standard Life Foundation.**

- The report is based on analysis from the Labour Force Survey, research with 40 low-paid workers conducted after the first lockdown in 2020, and findings from workshops and interviews with stakeholders involved in research, advocacy and public policy on low pay.
- In the current lockdown it is likely that around 4m low-paid workers are temporarily laid off or working fewer hours – this is twice the rate of work disruption for staff who are not low paid.
  - Employment loss has been driven by falls in a range of lower-paying jobs, particularly food services and manufacturing, hospitality, residential care and construction; but even in sectors less affected, the lowest paid have lost out.
- Action is needed in four main areas, including: reform and investment in employment and skills services for those in low-paid work and disadvantaged groups that have lost their jobs; and making work better for those in low-paid and less secure work.
  - Increased investment is needed in work-related training, to support transitions to better work and to improve the prospects of those in low-paid roles.
- A significant portion of the £2b remaining in England's new 'National Skills Fund' should be used to help to develop and co-fund:
  - Sector-based training pathways in industries with high numbers of low-paid staff; this could learn from the Work Advance model in the US and from local and national work in the UK, particularly related to major construction projects (e.g. HS2)

- Demand-led retraining support in growth sectors, including health services, the green economy, technology and finance
- Outreach support to engage low-income and lower-qualified workers, who are often least likely to take up training support; build on the pilots funded by government in 2020 [see p39], in particular by encouraging workplace promotion of skills and training support, and tailoring messages to the needs of different groups.

**Eurofound published [Employment and labour markets – COVID-19: Implications for employment and working life](#), assessing the initial impact on employment in Europe up to Q2 2020 and policy measures implemented to limit the negative effects on businesses, workers and citizens.**

- The main focus includes short-time working schemes and income support measures for the self-employed, plus the involvement of social partners and the role of European funding.
- Key findings include:
  - By July 2020, nearly 50% of EU workers had moved to exclusive or partial telework, opening up new labour market ‘gulfs’ as the more highly educated and those in urban areas were better placed to work from home.
  - Young people experienced the sharpest decline in employment, while workers aged 25–54 and older male workers were most likely to see their working hours cut.
  - Workers with precarious employment conditions were hardest hit: the number of temporary contracts in the EU-27 fell by 17% from spring 2019 to spring 2020 – over 75% of the drop in aggregate EU employment.
- The need to avoid another ‘lost generation’ of young people must be a priority for policymakers when designing active labour market policies to mitigate the fallout from the crisis.
- It will be critical to establish permanent short-time working or similar systems that can be activated in crisis situations and allow for the structural adjustment of economies and human resources.

## Other research

**L&W and Carnegie UK Trust published [The future of the minimum wage](#).**

- The National Minimum Wage (NMW) has been one of the most successful policies of recent decades, having helped to significantly reduce extreme low pay and, through the National Living Wage (NLW), low pay, with little if any negative impact on employment.
  - However, it has done little to tackle in-work poverty, which has grown over the last decade.
- The UK Government has set a bold target to increase the NLW to 66% of median hourly pay by 2024, with the stated objective of ending low pay in the UK.
- Recommendations include:
  - Temporarily reducing or rebalancing employer National Insurance Contributions for low-paid workers
  - Extending the NLW to workers aged 21+, with a single higher Youth NMW for those under 21
  - Further research on differentiated subnational or regional minimum wages
  - Situating future policy within a broader good work agenda accompanied by measures to boost employer investment in skills and reduce inequality in access to training.

**ESRI published [The impact of the 2016 minimum wage increase on average labour costs, hours worked and employment in Irish firms](#), funded by the RoI’s Low Pay Commission.**

- In 2016, the Irish minimum wage increased from €8.65 to €9.15 per hour; this led to higher labour costs among firms with over 50% of employees on the minimum wage – however, these firms account for just 3% of all businesses.
  - These firms also saw some reduction in overtime hours offered to part-time employees.
- Compared to a firm with no minimum wage employees, a firm that pays all workers the minimum wage experienced a 5% increase in average weekly labour costs.
- There was no evidence that firms reduced their number of employees in response to the minimum wage increase.

- It is possible during periods of strong economic growth, as was the case in 2016, to make meaningful increases in the minimum wage without creating significant adverse consequences for employment or competitiveness.
  - A similar increase could have different impacts if introduced in a period of lower wage growth.

**CEP published [Wage responses to gender pay gap reporting requirements](#).**

- In 2017, the UK Government introduced a requirement that all firms and public sector bodies with 250+ employees were to report annually on several features of their gender pay gap.
  - Proponents argue that increasing the information available to workers and consumers places pressure on firms to close pay gaps; opponents argue that such policies are poorly targeted and ineffective.
- The policy led to a 1.6ppt increase in female hourly wages relative to those of men due to changes in the wages of individual workers who remained at affected firms after the policy's introduction.
  - The effect was primarily driven by a fall in male wages rather than a change in workforce composition.
- Survey evidence shows significant gender differences in the response to pay gap information: female workers are less likely to choose to work at employers with high pay gaps, and they draw different conclusions from pay gap reports.
  - Female workers are more likely to interpret differences as being due to seniority or family-related differences, such as childcare responsibilities; male workers to differences in occupations.

**The Chartered Management Institute published a short [Gender Pay Gap Reporting: Policy Briefing](#), exploring why such reporting is crucial in 2021, the impact the pandemic has had on the policy area, and the cost to business for implementing the regulations.**

**CIPD published [Employee engagement: An evidence review](#).**

- Four key areas are covered:
  - Work engagement: whether people feel vigorous, dedicated and absorbed in their work, and other measures carrying the label 'engagement'
  - Organisational commitment: in particular looking at employees' psychological feelings ('affective' commitment)
  - Organisational identification: how employees psychologically associate with their organisations
  - Work motivation: factors that lead people to be interested and committed to their job.

*The publication comprises a discussion report and 'scientific summaries' covering each of the four areas.*

**CIPD published [Talking about voice: Insights from case studies](#), building on previous research\* by exploring the 'employee voice' practices of five organisations.**

- 'Employee voice' means different things to different people, making designing suitable initiatives more complex, as people have different goals and expectations for what it can achieve.
- Some employee voice mechanisms are rarely used due to lack of end-user input and failing to consider the lived experience of operational workers; the designers had focused on mechanisms they could control rather than those that employees considered important.
- For many organisations, the mechanism was one-way (top down) – an opportunity for employees to engage in the management agenda; few saw it as an opportunity for employees to directly influence decisions.
- Developing employee voice can involve an uncomfortable journey, requiring people to change their behaviours, attitudes and relationships with others.
- Key considerations include: senior buy-in and recognition of its importance to wider strategies and goals; developing management capability; focusing on developing a culture of trust, transparency and open communication; managing the balance between initiative overload and going at the right pace.

\*[Talking about voice: employees' experiences](#), which is summarised in [Skills Research Digest Q1 2019](#).

**CIPD published [a series of three reports](#) outlining how employers can act to improve race inclusion in the workplace, drawing on a survey of employee views and experiences.**

- [Report 1 – Talking about race at work:](#)



- 35% of respondents felt there was a need to talk about ethnicity – 23% of white British respondents and 40% of those from BAME groups.
- Trust in senior management is a bigger differentiator than ethnicity in levels of comfort talking about race.
- Those who don't talk about it say the three key reasons are: they don't feel a need (42%); they don't think race is an issue in their workplace (33%); others don't see it as an issue (24%).
- [Report 2 – Encouraging ethnicity data disclosure:](#)
  - 47% of employees have been asked to disclose their ethnicity, 44% of them during the application process and 21% on joining.
  - 84% are comfortable disclosing their ethnicity to an employer.
  - 32% think their employer will use the data to make positive changes, 30% think they will say they are acting on inequalities but make no obvious change; 30% think they won't do anything with the data.
- [Report 3 – Ensuring equality of career progression opportunities:](#)
  - 51% said that their career progression had met or exceeded their expectations; 36% said it had failed to do so.
  - Over 50% agreed that everybody had the opportunity to achieve their potential at work, regardless of racial or ethnic identity or background.
  - The three key reasons given for not progressing as expected were: 'My skills and talent have been overlooked' (38%); 'I experienced poor-quality line management from my immediate manager' (36%); 'I was not part of the "in group"' (32%).

**CEP published [The true returns to the choice of occupation and education](#), a discussion paper exploring which occupations are best for wellbeing.**

- Subjective wellbeing was analysed in a large representative sample of UK workers to construct a measure of 'full earnings' – the sum of earnings and the value of non-pecuniary rewards – in 90 different occupations.
- The distribution of full earnings is not equivalent to that of earnings, therefore amenities are not fully captured in wages.
  - The dispersion of earnings underestimates the extent of inequality in the labour market by a significant margin: the dispersion of full earnings is 33% larger than the dispersion of earnings.
  - The gender and ethnic gaps in the labour market are larger than data on earnings would suggest.
- The ranking of occupations in terms of their full earnings is not identical by education.
  - The true returns to completed secondary education are underestimated by earnings differences.
  - Managerial jobs provide substantial rewards for workers at all levels of education, however lower ranked administration positions are associated with positive job amenities for the less educated, but negative amenities for the better educated.
  - The variance in non-pecuniary amenities is strikingly larger for those with a degree.
  - While education provides larger rewards on average, it is also riskier in terms of labour market rewards.

**The Fair Work Convention published [Fair Work in Scotland](#) – analysis of data for dimensions of the Scottish Fair Work Framework: security, opportunity, fulfilment, respect and effective voice.**

- Disabled workers, ethnic minorities, women and young workers often experience poorer work outcomes and are often more heavily concentrated in precarious and low-paid work.
- In the five years before COVID-19, both effective use of skills in the workplace and participation in workplace learning decreased.
- Recommendations include improving workers' access to training and more effective use of their skills.

**Eurofound published [Working conditions and sustainable work: An analysis using the job quality framework](#), a 'flagship' report summarising research conducted from 2017 to 2020.**

- On average, working conditions in the EU have improved since 2000, including working time quality and the physical environment, especially in occupations with high exposure to physical risks.

- Jobs now require more skills and offer more autonomy, reflected in an improvement of the 'skills and discretion index'.
  - This is one of seven job quality indices developed by Eurofound, based on aspects that have 'an independent influence on health and wellbeing'; the others are: physical environment, work intensity, working time quality, social environment, prospects and earnings.
- Although digitalisation helps to address some job quality issues, it also creates new challenges.
- Development of workers' skills is hampered by unequal access to and uptake of employer-paid training.
  - Older workers participate less in training, and there is a growing gap between employees with different contractual statuses: full-time vs part-time and permanent vs fixed-term contracts.
- Persisting gender segregation in the labour market is reflected in differences in job quality.
  - Career prospects have generally improved for men and women; however men have maintained their advantage – the likely cause is the unequal sharing of care responsibilities, manifested in longer career breaks and different working time arrangements for women.
- The pandemic has exacerbated trends and highlighted the importance of achieving job quality for all.

A set of [case studies](#) and a working paper on [Trend and inequalities in job quality](#) were also published.

## International Comparisons

### COVID-related

The OECD published [Lessons for Education from COVID-19: A policy maker's handbook for more resilient systems](#), presenting the current situation in 40+ education systems across all phases and looking at flexible learning, educator skills and student equity.

- The effects of the pandemic are likely to have a significant educational and economic impact for years to come.
  - Merely returning education to the 'old normal', which was already failing to meet the needs of all learners, is not an option.
  - Policymakers must support all actors in the system to maintain the momentum and 'leap forward' into a better normal.
- Three 'launch pads' are identified:
  - Learning does not need to be constricted within an educational institution, but, with the right relationships and mindsets, can occur anywhere and at any time.
  - Education systems are not too heavy to move and, although it is challenging, it is possible to reach agreements that can make significant change happen.
  - Only resilient education systems that plan for disruption and withstand adverse events can fulfil the fundamental human right to education, whatever the circumstances, and foster the human capital required for successful economies and societies.
- Three key lessons are outlined in detail:
  - Education actors should nurture resilient mindsets that value people and processes over classrooms and devices.
  - Educators need new skills and knowledge to capitalise on new education priorities and means of delivery.
  - Addressing learning gaps now will minimise disruption in students' educational journeys.

A new 'framework of responsiveness and resilience in education' is due out by the end of 2021.

### Other research

The WEF published [Global Gender Gap Report 2021](#), the 15<sup>th</sup> edition, benchmarking 156 countries.

- Progress is tracked towards closing the gap on four key dimensions: economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; and political empowerment.

- The average distance completed to parity is 68%, down 0.6ppt on 2020 due to a decline in the performance of large countries; at the present rate, it will now take 135.6 years to close the gap worldwide.
- The gap in political empowerment remains the largest, with only 22% closed to date, and having widened by 2.4ppt since 2020; it will take 145.5 years to attain gender parity in politics.
- 58% of the gap in economic participation and opportunity has been closed, with marginal improvements since 2020; it will take another 267.6 years to close completely.
  - The proportion of women in skilled professions continues to increase, but income disparities continue and there is a lack of women in leadership positions.
- Iceland remains the most gender-equal country, with 89.2% of its overall gap closed; the UK has dropped two places to 23<sup>rd</sup> (77.5%); the RoI has also dropped two places, to 9<sup>th</sup> (80.0%).

## Government

### NORTHERN IRELAND

**L&W published [A higher skills ambition for Northern Ireland: Skills for growth and social inclusion](#), commissioned by awarding organisation Open College Network Northern Ireland (OCN NI).**

- Economic growth has tended to be weaker in Northern Ireland over the last decade than in the UK as a whole: it has both significantly lower productivity and a lower employment rate.
  - Economic and educational inequality endure, while relative poverty and health inequality remain a significant issues.
  - Coronavirus and a new trading relationship with the EU will change and add to these economic and social challenges.
- Further development of learning and skills will be essential to ensure viable long-term solutions to promote economic prosperity and social inclusion.
  - Specifically, learning can help to increase employment, improve productivity, grow incomes, support community cohesion, improve wellbeing and reduce health inequalities.
- Northern Ireland faces significant challenges:
  - High proportions of people with no/low qualifications (31% vs the UK's 26%)
  - Low proportions with high-level qualifications (32% vs 38%)
  - The likelihood of a substantial over-supply of labour at lower qualification levels by 2030.
- It is projected that, by 2030, 24.5% of the working-age population will have no/low qualifications (UK 21.0%); 36% will be qualified to Level 4+ (43%).
  - A similar picture emerges in comparison to RoI and other countries as well as to the OECD average.
  - The country's low literacy levels are projected to improve gradually, but at a slower rate than the OECD average; numeracy is already and will remain even more problematic.
- Five policy recommendations:
  - Consider how to build learning into wider policy areas and to create a learning society.
  - Set a higher ambition: the Programme for Government should set out measures to address relative skills gaps; the focus should be on progression from low to intermediate skill levels and supporting the development of higher skills.
  - Ensure greater investment in learning and skills from a mix of stakeholders including government, employers and individuals, with a clear balance of responsibilities.
  - Enable a collaborative partnership approach with stakeholders including government, local authorities, employers, the learning and skills sector and civil society; cross-community and cross-border partnerships are also important.
  - Regularly commission independent progress reports and monitor developments compared to the wider UK, RoI and other international comparators.

The Department for the Economy is currently working on a new Skills Strategy to 2030. A [report](#) by the OECD was summarised in [Skills Research Digest Q3 2020](#).

**The Independent Commission on the College of the Future published the [Northern Ireland College of the Future](#), the last of its nation-specific reports.**

- The report builds on the OECD's 2020 [report](#) on Northern Ireland's Skills Strategy [as mentioned above], which called for a fundamental shift in the role of colleges within the education and skills system and how they work collaboratively with schools and universities.
- In anticipation of the Executive's Skills Strategy consultation, the Commission is calling for colleges to be placed at the heart of economic policy.
- Recommendations include:
  - Establish a central oversight body and a skills advisory board to support the effective implementation, coordination and oversight of a higher ambition for skills.
  - Develop a single governance structure across colleges to streamline accountability and funding and maximise their impact across all aspects of the Northern Ireland economy and society.
  - Invest sustainably in colleges to: redress historical inequalities between college funding and that of schools and universities; and maximise colleges' contribution to business and community support by uncoupling funding from the headcount of individual students.
  - Commit to a statutory right to lifelong learning and develop and implement a digital action plan with a network of 'community hubs' to address digital exclusion.
  - Define the college and university offer to avoid unnecessary competition and duplication and to allow for the improvement of curriculum pathways, progression routes and careers advice and guidance across the system.

The [UK-wide report](#), published in October, was summarised in [Skills Research Digest Q4 2020](#).

## ENGLAND

**England's Department for Education published its much-anticipated FE white paper, [Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth](#), with a number of key measures.**

- Put **employers at the heart of post-16 skills**, including:
  - Work with providers and stakeholders to develop new local skills improvement plans.
  - Pilot a strategic development fund to support colleges to reshape their provision for local priorities; establish college business centres to work with employers in a designated sector on business development and innovation.
- Provide **advanced technical and higher technical skills**, including:
  - Use the new £2.5b National Skills Fund to support upskilling and reskilling, including an offer for all adults to achieve their first full L3 qualification as part of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee.
  - Open Institutes of Technology in every part of England by the end of this parliament.
- A flexible **Lifetime Skills Guarantee**, including:
  - From 2025, introduce a flexible 'Lifetime Loan Entitlement' to the equivalent of four years of post-18 education (consultation in 2021).
  - Stimulate the provision of HTE and incentivise more flexible and modular provision; make it as easy to get a loan for an approved Higher Technical Qualification (HTQ) as for a full-length degree.
  - Stimulate credit transfer between institutions and courses.
- **Responsive providers** supported by effective accountability, governance and intervention, including: simplified and streamlined funding and increased funding certainty, including by moving to a multi-year funding regime.
- Support **outstanding teaching**, including:
  - A national recruitment campaign for FE teachers
  - Initial teacher education based on employer-led standards
  - Improved professional development and support for progression.

FETL published [Honourable Histories](#), covering 30 years of FE policy in England, from the local management of colleges through incorporation to the present day, while looking ahead to the next phase and the factors shaping the current policy scene.

The Edge Foundation launched a new series of monthly papers looking at historic policy initiatives that have influenced and driven change across the education system in England.

- [Paper No.1 – The Connexions Service](#) looks at the policy initiative that ran between 2011 and 2012, aiming to reduce social exclusion among young people and provide impartial IAG.
- [Paper No.2 – Entry to Employment](#) focuses on the work-based Entry to Employment (E2E) programme for young people who were NEET, which ran from 2002 to 2010.

Each paper offers a neutral summary of the policy context at the time, its successes and challenges.

HEPI published [Student Finance in England from 2012 to 2020: From fiscal illusion to graduate contribution?](#), a 'debate paper'.

- In December 2019, the Office for Budget Responsibility concluded that student finance in England (and the 2012 student loan scheme on which it rests) was based on a 'fiscal illusion'.
  - 62% of the total of student loans would never be paid back and only 17% of graduates would fully repay their loans.
  - This leaves the current scheme for financing HE in ruins and its rationale for existence, its financial outcomes and even its terminology untenable.
- The current scheme cannot be 'fixed' in any way that is politically or economically effective, but a hybrid scheme involving a more even balance of grants and loans would inevitably face the same financial difficulties.
- Recommendations include:
  - Abolish the current individualised loan scheme.
  - Continue to allow undergraduates to study without upfront fees but retain the principle that graduates should continue to contribute to the cost of their education.
  - Base the contribution on a graduate's ability to pay as well as on political decisions about the right percentage of the pooled costs to be paid by graduate contributions.
  - Possibly levy graduate contributions on those who gained their degrees in the era of grant-funded study.

## SCOTLAND

### COVID-related

[1 March] SPICe (Scottish Parliament Information Centre) published [COVID-19: Scotland's colleges and universities](#), a briefing summarising guidance and support for universities, colleges, students and staff in the first months of 2021.

### Other research

The Scottish Government published [A changing nation: How Scotland will thrive in a digital world](#), a refreshed digital strategy developed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA); the first strategy was published in 2011.

- Eight principles for a digital nation include 'a skilled digital workforce'.
- Digital education and skills actions include: supporting upskilling and reskilling; establishing the [Scottish Digital Academy](#) as the skills provider of choice; creating a data science competency centre.

It complements Scotland's new AI strategy [see page 34].

The Scottish Government published [The Strategic Framework for a Cyber Resilient Scotland](#).

- Learning and skills, and research and innovation, are two of six 'cross-cutting enablers'.
- A learning and skills action plan will be implemented for 2021–23; actions will include:
  - Better coordinating the role of industry in supporting skills development
  - Growing access to cyber security skills and careers for women, neurodivergent people and those from BAME backgrounds and disadvantaged communities

- Improving links between academia and industry.

Scotland's first cyber resilience strategy was published in 2015 and a [learning & skills action plan](#) in 2018.

## WALES

[No relevant material sourced for this quarter's release.]

## REPUBLIC OF IRELAND (RoI)

The Department of Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science (formed in August 2020) published [Update on the Reform of the Higher Education Authority \[HEA\] Act, 1971: A shared approach](#); the reform began in 2018.

- The core objectives of the HEA legislation are to:
  - Maintain and enhance the reputation of the HE sector, including international reputation
  - Advance equality, diversity and inclusion in HE
  - Promote and safeguard the interests of students
  - Provide a comprehensive governance and accountability framework to safeguard exchequer investment in the sector and ensure accountability by HEIs for that funding
  - Promote and support HEIs in achieving excellence in teaching, learning and research in HE.
- The report includes an exploration of different approaches to governance of HEIs adopted internationally.
  - There have been changes in emphasis between academic and corporate/business dominated governance.
  - Corporate governance is normally the responsibility of a governing authority and academic governance the responsibility of an academic board or council.
  - In recent years, there has been a move towards 'shared governance' between the corporate, executive and academic strands.
  - Recent trends have also been towards smaller governing authorities, which have a higher level of external membership and are competency based rather than representational.

## EUROPE

Eurofound published [Working life in the COVID-19 pandemic 2020](#), with individual [country reports](#) for the EU-27, the UK\* and Norway.

- It discusses the policies of governments and social partners to cushion the socioeconomic effects.
  - The country reports highlight policy areas that have been accelerated or disrupted due to the crisis and explore the impact on industrial action, working time and wages.

\*The UK report is summarised on page 45.

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