

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:

- New models for FE and HE, drawing on the pandemic experience: blended provision; hybrid working; personalised support; innovative assessment; new credentials.
- Changes to working conditions and practices, both in response to Covid-19 and with an increasing focus on wellbeing and job satisfaction; working time trends also risk contributing to inequality.
- The opportunities offered by new jobs in low-carbon industries and 'green careers', including the 'electrification revolution', described as 'the largest shift in industrial skills for the UK in a generation'.

**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

Covid-related

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD) published [Behavioural economics and the COVID-induced education crisis](#), looking at the relationship between students' decisions and their sense of belonging, numeracy and literacy levels and level of disadvantage.

- Implicit in much of the current discussion and some policy responses is that individuals within the education system will respond to crises as 'Homo economicus' – rational, self-interested agents with stable preferences.
 - However, research is increasingly showing that this does not apply very well to Homo sapiens, a species that is neither completely rational nor completely random in its decisions, but exhibits predictable biases that make it less likely to achieve its stated desires.
- Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data on 15 year-olds suggest three key findings:
 - Students who report a stronger sense of school belonging in PISA are also more likely to see value in education and aspire to higher education (HE); school belonging strongly correlates with school resources.
 - Students with higher literacy and numeracy levels also tend to have higher expectations.
 - In a context of economic distress, the most disadvantaged students are more prone to taking decisions that are more risk averse, less altruistic and more biased.

Other research

The Education Policy Institute published [A narrowing path to success? 16–19 curriculum breadth \[in England\] and employment outcomes](#), commissioned by the Royal Society.

- In general, students in England study a wide range of subjects during secondary school but, unlike in many other countries, this generally narrows in upper secondary to just a handful of subjects.
 - This approach has been effective in preparing for HE in the relevant subjects, but its impact on young people's success in the labour market is less clear.
- Dividing 16–19 studies into five groups – science, technology & engineering; maths; languages; humanities, arts & social sciences; vocational & professional – findings include:
 - The proportion of students with qualifications from at least three groups has halved since 2010, with most of the decline occurring between 2016 and 2019.
 - The decline seems to have been driven by England's decoupling of AS and A levels alongside a reduction in funding that has led to around 71 fewer teaching hours per student.
 - Since 2017, however, students taking three A level-equivalent qualifications have been 50% more likely to take a qualification from a different subject group.
 - Those with higher GCSE English and maths grades and lower levels of disadvantage are more likely to study a broader range of subjects post-16.
 - Without controlling for other differences, those who studied subjects from more groups had higher earnings in their mid-20s.
 - However, among similar young people, some breadth is associated with marginally higher earnings by age 26; it has no association with the probability of being in employment or education.

Skills Development Scotland published [A guide to meta-skills across the curriculum](#) for senior leaders and practitioners in schools and colleges.

- Meta-skills are 'innate, timeless, higher-order skills that create adaptive learners'.
 - Adopting the consistent use of meta-skills offers a common skills vocabulary for practitioners, learners, parents and other partners.
 - As young people progress through education, it is essential that practitioners nurture and develop their meta-skills so they can navigate an increasingly complex and unpredictable world.

- Schools and colleges should make meta-skills explicitly visible for all learners and create opportunities for them to recognise, understand, articulate and record their skills development.

College Development Network (CDN) published [Co-Creating the Learner Journey: School-College Partnerships \[SCPs\] and effective skills pathways](#) for the Scottish Government, based on analysis of data and 11 case studies.

- There were 73k SCP enrolments in Scotland in 2019–20 (up 20k from 2016–17).
 - If the upward trend continues after a 'Covid dip', 12% of school pupils will study with a college, including for Foundation Apprenticeships.
- Ten characteristics of successful SCPs include:
 - being: learner-centred; evidence-based; inclusive
 - having: a shared vision, values and aims; strong leadership; local authority engagement; industry partners.
- Nine recommendations include: the Scottish Funding Council should recognise SCPs as an integral part of the learner journey in their funding arrangements.

The UK Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) published [National Citizen Service \[NCS\] 2019 Summer Evaluation](#), covering both its impact and an assessment of its net Benefit Cost Ratios (BCRs).

- Participation in England's NCS increased levels of social trust, as measured by: how much they thought people could be trusted; comfort with a friend or relative going out with someone different to them; and the ethnic diversity of participants' social circles.
 - 76% of participants said that they now felt more positive towards people from different backgrounds to themselves.
- NCS had a statistically significant impact on: self-confidence; some measures related to teamwork and social skills; problem solving and decision-making capabilities; agency and attitudes to community involvement and engagement in public affairs; and all four Office for National Statistics wellbeing measures.
 - 90% were proud of what they had achieved; 85% agreed that NCS had helped them develop skills for the future; 78% said they were now more capable than they had realised.
 - 75% now 'feel better prepared for challenges that life may bring' and 70% 'feel better prepared for further education or training'.
- In terms of leadership, volunteering and aspiration to HE, the estimated gross benefit was £210.2m; the net BCR was 1.53 – i.e. for every £1 spent, it generated £1.53.
 - In terms of wellbeing, the estimated gross benefit was £419.7m and the net BCR was 3.05.

The Edge Foundation published [14–19 Diplomas](#), the latest in its series of *Learning from the past papers*.

- Diplomas were introduced in England between 2008 and 2010, but never reached full rollout; they cost £295.6m.
 - Although abandoned by the 2010 coalition government, they bear 'striking similarities' to England's new 'gold standard' T Levels.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING & MATHS (STEM)

The Hamilton Commission – co-chaired by Sir Lewis Hamilton and the CEO of the Royal Academy of Engineering – published [Accelerating Change: Improving representation of Black people in UK motorsport](#).

- The research specifically focused on engineering positions within the industry, as they represent a major group of occupations and offer the biggest opportunity for change.
 - The report explores young Black people's interest in engineering and motorsport and their attainment and progression in STEM subjects at school, post-16 and in HE, leading to motorsport jobs.
- Factors that contribute to only 1% of Formula One employees being from Black backgrounds include:
 - lower expectations of Black students' academic abilities leading to lower entries to STEM subjects
 - geographical factors making work experience difficult to access

- a lack of understanding of the careers that studying engineering can lead to and a feeling among Black students that motorsport 'isn't for them'
- hiring practices that favour students from a select group of universities, often those attended by practising engineers and recruiting managers.
- Recommendations include:
 - Working with Black community groups, young people and STEM activity providers to develop best practice guidance for STEM inspiration and outreach; additional activity support for non-formal 'supplementary schools' led by Black community groups.
 - Expanding motorsports apprenticeships to include higher/degree apprenticeships, as well as access to paid work placements and work experience.
 - Supporting scholarship programmes to enable Black engineering graduates to progress into specialist roles.

An animated [interactive summary](#) is also available.

EMPLOYABILITY & CAREERS

Covid-related

Prospects published [Early Careers Survey 2021: Careers advice and guidance](#), the third report of findings from a survey of 7,189 UK school, college and university students, graduates, apprentices and unemployed people, undertaken in January/February 2021.

- The report examines how students have interacted with careers services during the pandemic and where else they have looked for advice and guidance.
 - 78% of respondents were aged 16–24, 74% were female, 65% were white and 50% were first generation students.
- Findings include:
 - The internet was the most common source of careers advice during the last 12 months (79%), followed by family members (63%), teachers (51%), social media (43%) and friends (40%); only 30% turned to career professionals.
 - Careers services have moved to remote provision, but a significant number of students lack confidence online and digital exclusion is a concern.
 - For students in their final year, researching national (71%) and local (66%) companies is the most popular careers activity.
 - 76% said they received careers advice from school, 67% from college, 63% from university.

The first two reports, on [jobs, apprenticeships & postgraduate study](#) and [work experience](#), were summarised in Skills Research Digest 2021 Q2, p. 3.

City & Guilds Group published [findings](#) from a survey of 1k 16–19 year-olds in the UK, carried out in July 2021.

- Findings for 17–19 year-olds (391 of those surveyed) include:
 - 57% say their decisions about post-education have been impacted by the pandemic – 20% want to stay in full-time education longer than originally intended.
 - 13% intend to go into an apprenticeship and 22% into employment.
 - 40% intend to go to university, of whom: 14% say it's the 'easiest thing to do'; 14% worry it will be hard to get a job/apprenticeship; 44% think it's the best way to get a job; 39% say they know they will be paid well with a degree.
- Overall findings for 16–19 year-olds include:
 - 42% think apprenticeships are good value, 21% think degrees are.
 - 51% believe apprenticeships are good preparation for work, 15% think degrees are.

Our Scottish Future* published [The Opportunity to Start: How the UK and Scottish Government can help young people after the pandemic](#), setting out plans to support 18–24 year-olds into work.

- Existing plans 'are yet to have a major impact on the ground'; recommendations include:

- The Scottish Government to consider a Scottish Public Sector Guarantee for every unemployed under-25 year-old.
- The UK, Scottish and local governments to develop a shared action plan via a joint taskforce.
- Scottish and local governments to be given Kickstart Scheme funds direct, and Kickstart to be extended to September 2022.
- More incentives for SMEs to take on young apprentices.
- A long-term overhaul of youth opportunities.

**Our Scottish Future was set up by former Prime Minister the Rt Hon Gordon Brown to promote greater cooperation across the UK.*

Nesta published [Covid and the jobs of the future: Mapping Covid-19 disruption into sustainable growth industries in Scotland](#).

- Nesta worked with policy consultancy Rocket Science to develop a place-based approach to understanding the impact of Covid-19 in three local areas, and the different skill development transitions it may be possible to promote.
- Some common themes emerged:
 - The significance of information and insight around low-carbon opportunities and areas of decline – in terms of both ‘snap shots’ and trends – and presenting these in a way that is accessible, easy to understand, persuasive and appealing.
 - Identifying high-carbon activities and specifically targeting these for transition work.
 - Complementing this information with the development of forecasts of future demand in terms of employment opportunities around low-carbon activities.
- There were also three particular strands of research around information sharing:
 - Parents and teachers: the traditional perceptions of some, which may lead to young people being encouraged to look for work in areas with declining career opportunities.
 - Young people: there is scope to test out different ways of presenting and conveying information about labour market trends and exploring the impact of these.
 - Colleges and training providers: how they use information and insights about the labour market and exploring the kind of information that they find helpful and usable; how they can help to lead transitions and what can be done to mitigate the risks involved in developing and promoting new programmes of low-carbon based training.

Other research

The Social Market Foundation (SMF) published [A matter of perspective? Outlook inequality and its impact on young people](#), including a survey of 1k 16–25 year-olds in the UK in spring 2021.

- Findings include:
 - Despite the challenges of recent months, 60% are optimistic for the future and their prospects of realising their goals.
 - However, 43% said few/none of their career goals are achievable.
 - Disadvantaged young people have less belief in their ability to achieve goals – 43% expect to end up in a dead-end job, compared with 29% of those from ‘comfortable’ and 27% from ‘coping’ backgrounds.
 - 34% feel ill-equipped to compete in the jobs market; 14% have been put off applying for a job due to worries the employer wasn’t looking for ‘someone like them’.
 - 52% of disadvantaged young people feel their training and experience is inadequate.
 - Ethnic minorities are generally more positive about their chances of success in life.
 - 18% of disadvantaged young people see the education system as an obstacle rather than an enabler of their success (compared to 10% average).
 - 43% of advantaged vs 34% of disadvantaged young people know someone with the sort of job they’d like.
 - 58% believe all/most of their life ambitions are achievable – from 76% in Northern Ireland to 43% in Wales.
- Recommendations focus on: improving access to role models and peer support; parent upskilling; linking education better to the labour market; and extracurricular activities.

Prospects published [Most effective channels for delivering careers support to students](#), a survey of 258 careers professionals.

- 94% use email to contact students/graduates, 93% 1:1 video conferencing, 87% group video conferencing and 84% social media.
 - Video conferencing platforms are the most effective means of communication.
 - The most effective social media channels are Facebook (78%), LinkedIn (76%) and Twitter (76%).
- 65% plan to continue with virtual 1:1 sessions when students return to campus.
 - Benefits include greater flexibility and accessibility (75%) and increased engagement (31%).

Cedefop (the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training) published [Investing in career guidance](#) (revised edition), in which six international organisations* share their vision of the strategic role of career guidance in our changing world.

- Since the original booklet in 2019, the labour market has become even more turbulent.
 - Covid-19 has deeply disrupted the demand for workers and accelerated patterns of automation and digital transformation that are radically changing the character of work and increasing risks of joblessness and precarious employment.
 - Globalisation, demographic trends and growing efforts to create greener economies are changing the character of demand for skills in labour markets around the world.
- Career guidance has an essential part to play in recovery plans and in helping people of all ages and backgrounds to navigate such disruption.
 - Evidence reviews give policymakers confidence that investment in guidance can be expected to provide positive economic, educational and social returns to both individuals and society.
 - International data show, however, that in too many countries access to guidance is insufficient, particularly for those who are in greatest need.

**The European Commission, European Training Foundation, Cedefop, OECD, International Labour Organization and UNESCO.*

The Institutional Landscape

THE FURTHER EDUCATION (FE) & SKILLS SECTOR

Covid-related

The International Public Policy Observatory (IPPO) published [Mitigating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the further education sector: A rapid evidence review](#), commissioned by England's Department for Education.

- The UK FE sector includes general FE colleges, sixth form colleges, work-based learning providers, adult institutes and specialist and technical institutes.
 - A wide range of FE students have therefore been impacted by institution closures and reduced access during the pandemic, both in terms of learning loss and also their general wellbeing, with particular challenges for those from more vulnerable and/or deprived communities.
- There is evidence of impacts on:
 - the uptake and completion of apprenticeships
 - the pursuit of vocational qualifications
 - vulnerable cohorts of FE students
 - the mental health and wellbeing of FE students.
- Suggested mitigations include:
 - Strategies aimed at helping students to catch up on their learning.
 - Increasing the number of good-quality apprenticeships, as well as multi-agency measures coordinated locally.
 - Incentivising employers to provide high-quality apprenticeship programmes.

- Systemic reforms of funding along with guarantees of training provision for all young people and adults.
- Personalised support packages could help support disadvantaged young people both into employment and in accessing post-16 education.
- Questions that emerge include:
 - What are the most urgent needs with regard to the UK's apprenticeship schemes, given the highlighted declines in awareness, uptake and completion of such schemes during the pandemic?
 - To what extent has Covid-19 highlighted a growing gap between the FE and HE sectors, including in terms of support for those from the most deprived backgrounds?
 - Are there particular challenges relating to increased levels of 'blended learning' in the highly vocational/practical FE sector, and how should these be addressed?

See also IPPO's rapid evidence review for HE [p. 17].

Jisc published [Learner digital experience insights survey 2020/21: UK further education \(FE\) survey findings](#) based on a survey of 23,741 college/sixth form college students, conducted between October 2020 and April 2021. [A similar survey was published for HE – a summary of results for both is on p. 11.]

Other research

The Edge Foundation published [Debating the first principles of English vocational education volume 4](#).

- High-quality vocational education & training (VET) is a key element of equipping young people with the skills they need and making education relevant.
 - But at present the vision is fractured: due to rapid policy change and deeply ingrained cultural views, there is not yet a consensus about the role and place of VET in the broader education system and in society at large.
- The volume covers three debates, dealing with:
 - work-based learning and professional judgement
 - qualifications and assessment
 - trade unions and social partnership.

Although the focus is on England, views were drawn from other countries (including Northern Ireland) and have wider relevance. Three earlier reports can be found [here](#).

The Education & Training Foundation published [Experiences of Education for Sustainable Development \[ESD\] in the Further Education and Training Sector: A workforce survey report](#), based on responses from 830 members of England's FE and training sector workforce.

- 85% agreed that the sector had a valuable role to play in the achievement of sustainability goals, and 94% believed that all learners should be taught about sustainability.
- 61% – from a range of subject specialisms – reported that they already actively incorporate sustainability themes into their teaching to some extent.
- However, 68% believed that the current post-16 education system doesn't adequately educate learners on sustainability, and only 35% thought that the curriculum requirements supported its teaching.
- 30% felt sustainability was an issue for all parts of their organisation; 24% didn't know what their organisation's approach was to sustainability.

Findings from an audit of ESD content in the most popular FE qualifications, conducted at the same time as the survey, are to be published alongside case studies that look at how educators and leaders are developing their ESD practice across a variety of subject specialisms.

WorldSkills UK published [Drivers of technical excellence in the skills economy](#), analysing technical and vocational education and training (TVET) policy and governance and the role of WorldSkills in Austria, Brazil, France, Hungary, India, Japan and South Korea.

- World-class skills systems are underpinned by internationally benchmarked standards supporting local and national productivity and economic growth.

- WorldSkills plays a critical role in establishing global standards: its competitions help establish international benchmarks in a way that is often more agile and tailored to employer needs and technological changes than can be achieved through updates to national policy.
- Teaching excellence is underpinned by pedagogic adaptations that take into account employer needs, technological changes and shifts in industry practice; access to and investment in high-quality professional development are critical.
 - WorldSkills provides a 'third space' that enables trainers to experiment with pedagogy and technology in a way that drives innovation.
- The most successful skills systems comprise networks of macro-, meso- and micro-level actors and organisations across local, national and international contexts; they can respond most efficiently to shifting economic needs, technological change and industry developments when employers and training providers are structurally linked.
 - WorldSkills can provide a key mechanism for connecting employers and training providers, and responding to economic, technological and practice-related change.
 - It can act as a bridging organisation, supporting training providers in innovative practice and embedding training in workplaces, while helping key actors to work across local, national and international contexts.

The findings are intended to feed into the Centre of Excellence pilot programme, designed to embed international best practice in teaching, assessment and learning in UK technical education.

Cedefop published [Review and renewal of qualifications: Towards methodologies for analysing and comparing learning outcomes](#).

- The paper forms part of Cedefop's 'Comparing VET qualifications' project, which seeks to develop robust and scalable methods for analysing and comparing the content and profile of qualifications.
 - Focusing on the dialogue between VET and labour market stakeholders, the paper analyses existing methodologies and outlines how to develop these further.

Cedefop also published [Analysing and comparing VET qualifications](#), a briefing note outlining the main objectives addressed, the solutions identified and their implications for researchers and policymakers.

HIGHER EDUCATION (HE): APPLICANTS & ADMISSIONS

Covid-related

[July] **The Sutton Trust published [A Levels and University Access 2021](#), summarising how the pandemic had disrupted education for university applicants in England, changed the nature of A level assessments and affected the transition from school to university.**

- Key findings include:
 - UCAS application rates from all four nations had increased by the June deadline: Northern Ireland's was highest at 52.3% (+4.1ppt on 2020); England 43.9% (+2.6ppt); Wales 37.9% (+4.3ppt); Scotland 36.1% (+3.8ppt). *[NB A substantial number of Scottish HE applicants are not included in UCAS's figures.]*
 - 27% of working-class HE applicants had struggled with insufficient study space at home, compared to 16% of middle-class; 7% reported lacking sufficient internet access.
 - 69% felt they had fallen behind with their studies; many felt they had fallen behind compared to their peers.
 - 56% of this year's applicants felt that the disruption would negatively impact their chance of getting into their first-choice university, particularly those applying to Russell Group institutions.
 - 23% of private school teachers, 17% at more affluent state schools and 11% at the least affluent schools said that parents had approached or pressured them about their child's grade.
 - Fewer students than in 2020 anticipated that their grades would be harmed and more agreed that the system was as fair or more fair than a typical year.
 - 36% of state school applicants felt unprepared for HE, compared to 17% from private schools.

Prospects published [How has COVID affected students' gap year plans?](#), findings from a survey of 304 students and graduates in August 2021.

- Nearly 50% said that they didn't plan to take a gap year, with the most common reason being a simple lack of interest (38%), followed by the cost (31%).

- Of those still planning to take a gap year, 51% said they would do so during 2021/22.
 - The rest planned to take it in 2022/23, 20% of them because of the pandemic.
- A very small minority had already taken their gap year, with most of them remaining within the UK to either work, study or volunteer.
 - All suggested that they not only achieved what they set out to do, but also that they were pleased that they went ahead with their gap year despite the pandemic.
- The top reasons for taking a gap year were: to take time out before starting university, work or an apprenticeship (51%); to destress (50%); to learn new skills (49%); to gain work experience (48%); to develop confidence (42%).
- Survey respondents said that they planned to work (87%), travel (47%) or volunteer (40%) during their gap year.
 - However, 24% agreed/strongly agreed that they decided to take a gap year because they couldn't get a job or apprenticeship.
 - Similarly, 22% said that they planned to take a gap year because of a lack of work experience opportunities, while 10% didn't get into their preferred university.
- A large proportion still planned to travel during their gap year, although 82% said they would stay within the UK; however, 61% were worried about travel restrictions and 26% said that some of their gap year experience would be virtual.

Other research

UCAS published [Where next? Who doesn't plan to start a full-time undergraduate degree in autumn?](#), based on a survey of the 58% of students who were due to get their Level 3 results in August but were not holding an offer for autumn 2021.

- 38% had a live UCAS application but weren't holding an accepted offer, while 62% didn't have a live application.
- 78% said they were interested in or committed to starting an apprenticeship, with 22% saying it was their main plan: 17% of those with a live application and 25% of those without.
 - Among those with a live application: 27% were planning a gap year; 20% part-time undergraduate study; 14% a higher or degree-level apprenticeship.
 - Among those without a live application: 22% were planning a gap year; 20% additional Level 3 study; 17% a higher or degree-level apprenticeship; 15% employment.
 - The level of commitment was similar to that expressed by this year's HE entrants, with 76% committed to their firm choice and not exploring other options.
- 74% had received information about full-time undergraduate study and 53% about higher or degree-level apprenticeships; 37% wanted more information about gap years and 35% about employment.
 - 58% of white respondents had received information on apprenticeships, compared to 45% of those from an ethnic minority group.

Unite Students published [Applicant Survey June 2021](#), based on responses from 1k university applicants, following similar surveys in 2017 and 2019.

- This cohort is less socially confident than those of previous years and they are much more keen to contact flatmates in advance; they are slightly less keen on social events.
- The social opportunities offered by university are extremely important to them: making friends and meeting new people is the top thing they are looking forward to at university.
- They feel less ready for and less well informed about going to university compared with 2017.
- They are more likely to report a mental health condition or neurodiversity and are more likely to have anxiety or an eating disorder than previous cohorts; the cohort as a whole has slightly lower wellbeing than in previous years.
- They are less likely to drink too much or take drugs, but more likely to have issues with eating.
- They have a stronger preference for going to staff and specialist services with problems rather than other students, although many still do want peer support.
- Almost all want a sense of belonging when they are at university but the majority are anxious about fitting in.

- They have a stronger drive towards face-to-face learning than the 2019 cohort.
- They are slightly more confident about getting a graduate job than the 2017 cohort.

Universities UK International (UUKi) published [International Student Recruitment: Why aren't we second?](#), investigating the UK's declining status as an international study destination.

- The UK was still ranked second in 2018, but only had a small lead on Australia and had lost market share in 16 out of the 21 top sending countries and territories between 2010 and 2018.
- Compared with Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the US, France, Germany and the rising Asian destinations China, Japan and Malaysia, the UK provides an attractive environment for international students and its offer is broadly comparable.
 - However, it is expensive in terms of tuition fees, student visa fees and health surcharge.
 - Unlike other national study campaigns, the Study UK campaign does not provide detailed and prominent information on the different UK nations, or offer a scholarship search tool.
 - The UK's Graduate Route offers slightly fewer benefits in terms of length of stay or routes to permanent residency compared to other English-speaking study destinations.
- A country analysis focuses on eight recruitment markets where the UK should maintain its position (Nigeria, Saudi Arabia), regain its position (India, Pakistan) or develop its position (Brazil, Indonesia, South Korea, Vietnam).
 - Students take into consideration cost effectiveness, return on investment and career options when choosing a study destination abroad.
 - The factors that influence their decision the most include affordability – especially scholarship availability – post-study work opportunities, welcome and safety, and quality of education.
 - However, each factor's magnitude varies from country to country and understanding each context is crucial for a targeted approach to improve the UK's recruitment performance.

Part 1 was published in July 2020. The UK Government's [International Education Strategy](#), updated in February 2021, has a target of at least 600k international students by 2030 (there are currently ~550k).

The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) and UUKi published [The costs and benefits of international higher education students to the UK economy](#) with research by London Economics.

- 496k international students were studying at UK HE institutions (HEIs) in 2018/19, equivalent to 20% of all HE students.
- The benefits of hosting international students significantly outweigh the cost.
 - On average, the UK is better off by an average £390/person – from £140/person in Northern Ireland, to £460 in Scotland and England's North East, and up to £760 in London.
- The overall net benefit of £25.9b is spread across every part of the UK.
- Net economic impact was estimated at £71k per typical EU-domiciled student and £102k per non-EU student.
- International student numbers are down significantly due to uncertainty caused by Covid-19 and the Brexit impact on tuition fees for EU students.
 - HEPI and UUKi are calling for the UK to be promoted as a welcoming, diverse, accessible study destination and for a reduction in financial barriers.

The report lists findings for each of the 650 Westminster constituencies.

HEPI published [The Humanities in Modern Britain: Challenges and opportunities](#), focusing on student enrolment, graduate employment and funding.

- The proportion of UK students studying humanities subjects fell from around 28% in 1961/62 to around 8% in 2019/20, while enrolment numbers fell by around 40k in the last decade.
 - This declining popularity extends to schools and colleges, with the number of humanities A levels falling more than the decline in the 18 year-old population.
- Although their employment prospects are weaker than those of graduates in some other areas, humanities graduates are just as likely to be employed; their salaries fall in the middle of the range.
 - Their numerical and digital skills are an important area of weakness.

- Funding for the humanities has been mostly stable in recent years, but there are significant challenges approaching, related to Brexit, the policies of the current UK Government, the pandemic and the particularly low unit of resource in Scotland.
- The report proposes:
 - A levels should be reformed so that pupils have to continue a humanities subject, maths and a foreign language to the end of their compulsory education.
 - Professionally valuable skills (e.g. digital and numerical) should be more fully embedded in undergraduate humanities degrees.

CESifo published [Matching in the Dark? Inequalities in student to degree match](#), using data from schools, universities and tax authorities in England to analyse undergraduate enrolment qualifications and graduate earnings for an entire cohort of 140k students.

- Both unobservable preferences and market failures are responsible for student choices; therefore, understanding whether a student is truly mismatched requires either perfect knowledge about their preferences or assumptions about the circumstances in which it is believed they are mismatched.
 - The researchers assumed it is optimal for society that the highest quality students should attend the highest quality courses and that students have no subject preferences.
- Students are ranked based on their end-of-secondary qualifications; degrees are ranked according to the qualifications of the median student and the median earnings of previous graduates.
 - The measures of match are created by taking the difference between the percentile ranking of the student and the degree.
 - Percentiles are then plotted for students by socioeconomic status (SES) and gender; the average SES/gender match gaps are then estimated, conditional on individual characteristics and prior achievement.
- Low SES students consistently undermatch, taking degrees with lower-attaining peers and lower potential earnings than their richer counterparts.
 - In the top quintile of the achievement distribution, disadvantaged students are eight percentiles lower matched than more advantaged students.
 - The largest inequalities are around the 90th percentile of the achievement distribution – rather than the top – where disadvantaged students are 9–11 percentiles lower matched than more advantaged counterparts.
- The gaps are not driven by subjects studied: even when they have similar prior achievement and are studying similar degree subjects, low SES students study at lower ranked institutions.
 - A major determinant of SES inequalities in mismatch is secondary school attended: the SES match gap for students from the same school is reduced by up to 79%.
 - This implies that factors correlated with secondary school, such as peers, school resources, information inequalities and parental sorting play an important role in student match.
- In terms of gender, there are only modest differences in academic match between males and females, but there are sizeable gender gaps in earnings match.
 - After accounting for prior attainment and demographics, high-attaining women take degrees around eight percentiles lower in potential earnings than men, equivalent to £25,800 per year for degrees at the top of the median earnings distribution.
 - Almost the entire gender gap in earnings can be accounted for by degree subject choice rather than university attended.

HE: THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Covid-related

The UPP Foundation's Student Futures Commission published [Turbocharging the Future](#), an interim report collating the evidence seen so far on teaching and learning, student experience and student mental health relating to the start of term in September 2021.

- The Commission was set up to help the sector navigate through the next academic year and beyond, based on up-to-date evidence and analysis about what works and what students want.
- The areas where the sector will want to prioritise resources include:

- Assessment, where new approaches have allowed many to 'showcase their ... capability and progress' in ways that have been 'something of a revelation to students and academics alike'.
- Counteracting the negative framing of digitally enhanced learning.
- Addressing the potential for a worsening mental wellbeing crisis among students, but also exploiting the 'amazing initiatives' that have been put in place to head off mental health problems, including attention on transitions.
- How to foster a sense of belonging through service, volunteering, extracurricular activities and more authentic communication.
- The digital inequality, financial poverty and lack of wider community support experienced by those from poorer backgrounds and non-traditional students more generally.

Jisc published [Student digital experience insights survey 2020/21: UK HE survey findings](#) based on a survey of 38,917 university students, and [Learner digital experience insights survey 2020/21: UK FE survey findings](#) based on a survey of 23,741 college/sixth form college students; both were conducted between October 2020 and April 2021.

- 49% in FE and 63% in HE reported problems with wifi; 21% and 30% had difficulty accessing online platforms/services; 16% and 24% struggled to pay mobile data costs.
- 66% in FE and 67% in HE rated the quality of online and digital learning best imaginable/excellent/good.
- 49% of students in college and 35% in university were given the chance to be involved in decisions about online learning although 44% and 39% felt their concerns were not being heard.
- Students need to know what to expect: just over 50% in FE and 41% in HE said they received guidance about the digital skills needed, and not all were assessed on these.
- However, not all learners had opportunities to engage in more transformative activities or experience the best that digital approaches can offer; recommendations include:
 - Learning should be designed with delivery (online and hybrid or face-to-face) in mind: poor learning design has its own negative impact on learners' wellbeing.
 - Collaborative activities increase learner engagement and provide vital opportunities to develop key employability skills; small groups work best and feel safer socially.
 - Be mindful of the volume of work and independent study asked of learners.
 - Ensure learning platforms are clearly structured and easy to navigate: consider adopting a common framework/template; provide orientation exercises and show learners where they can access resources.
 - Make support for online learning and digital development visible online: institutions provide a lot of support, but some of this was less visible or easily accessible to learners when studying online.
 - Staff need to be well supported too, as learners at all institutions turned to tutors for help; very few cited e-learning and library staff as services they would turn to for help.
 - Get learners involved: learners can provide insight into what works and doesn't work well for them, as well as useful suggestions for how their learning can be improved.

The FE report is based on responses from 39 colleges in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, the HE report on responses from 41 universities across the UK, with an average of 949 responses from each.

Student Minds published [University Mental Health: Life in a pandemic – Listening to higher education communities throughout 2020/2021](#), a collation of the organisation's learning about students' experiences gathered since March 2020.

- The report is structured using the themes from Student Minds' *University Mental Health Charter* (2019): live, learn, work and support, in recognition of the need for a whole-university approach.
 - Recommendations are provided under each of the four key headings.
- A final section on 'inequalities and intersectionality' focuses on the disproportionate impact of the past 18 months on particular groups – an issue it is to examine in more depth.

Other research

England's Office for Students (OfS) published [Evaluation of the Mental Health Challenge Competition: Interim report to the Office for Students](#), looking at the first ten projects funded.

- 157 staff had received training to improve support and signposting for students; 623 students had been involved in co-creating activities to shape and inform the projects, which had helped improve their awareness of the support services available.
 - The programme had directly supported 3,703 students to date.
- Staff, students and sector stakeholders were generally positive about the programme, and there was early evidence that it was achieving its ambition to drive a 'step change' in support for students.
 - For example, the programme had helped to fund new types of support and to strengthen the prioritisation of mental health in funded institutions.
- There was evidence that the programme was helping to improve collaboration between HE providers and support organisations.

A further 18 projects have recently been awarded funding.

UCAS published [Next Steps: What is the experience of LGBT+ students in education?](#) in partnership with Stonewall.

- 40k 2020 applicants identified as LGBT+, comprising 7.2% of total UK-domiciled applicants, and 2.5 times the national adult average.
 - 17% were from the most disadvantaged areas (POLAR4), compared to 13% of non-LGBT+ students, i.e. those that selected heterosexual or 'prefer not to say', or chose not to answer this question.
 - 12% were from the lowest group in UCAS's Multiple Equality Measure, compared to 7% of non-LGBT+ students.
 - 30% declared a disability (12% non-LGBT+) and 13% a mental health condition (2.9%).
- In a separate survey of 3k school/college students who identified as LGBT+:
 - 47% said that their experience at school/college was good, and 41% said their experience was neutral; 12% said that they did not have a good experience, of whom 70% said it was because their identity was not reflected in things they learnt.
 - Students identifying as transgender were more likely (17%) to report having a bad experience, mostly citing bullying; combined with lower attainment and higher rates of mental health conditions, this highlights the additional issues faced by this group.
 - Students intend to be more open about their sexual orientation and gender identity in HE, with levels of openness increasing from 64% at school/college to an expected 82% in HE, although some still feel uncertain.
 - When researching their choices: 31% paid specific attention to LGBT+ services; 30% to LGBT+ societies; and 21% to support networks for LGBT+ students.

ELife published [Equity, Diversity and Inclusion: Alternative strategies for closing the award gap between white and minority ethnic students](#), a study investigating students on University College London (UCL) cell biology courses.

- There is a gap in the UK of 13.4ppt between white and Black, Asian and ethnic minority undergraduates attaining first-class and upper-second marks.
 - Such gaps have been reported for every university in the UK and in many other countries, in both undergraduate and postgraduate taught degrees and many other courses.
- The difference at UCL was derived largely from marks awarded for exams, where there was a 13ppt gap for first- and second-year students, rising to nearly 17ppt in the final year.
 - In contrast, the gap in coursework grades was just 1–2ppt in the first two years and 5ppt in the final year.

HEPI published [What is the student voice? Thirteen essays on how to listen to students and how to act on what they say](#).

- It features contributions from student representatives, academics, a vice-chancellor, a former National Union of Students president and survey experts, plus interviews with the OfS Student Panel.

The Economic & Social Research Institute (ESRI) published [Academic satisfaction of international students at Irish higher education institutions: The role of region of origin and cultural distance in the context of marketization](#) in the *Journal of Studies in International Education*, based on Eurostudent VI data from the Republic of Ireland (RoI).

- The experiences of international students vary according to their region of origin.
 - International students have higher levels of academic satisfaction than Irish students, but differences between students from diverse regions of origin persist.
 - Self-perception of being a 'detached customer' rather than an equal partner in education has the strongest association with academic satisfaction, suggesting that commercialisation trends affect both international and domestic students.

The Institute of Labor Economics (IZA) published [Study Abroad Programmes and Students' Academic Performance: Evidence from Erasmus applications](#) based on data from the University of Bologna in Italy.

- Erasmus mobility does not delay graduation at the home university and has a positive and significant impact on undergraduates' final degree marks.
 - It improves graduation results for undergraduate students in STEM and for those who apply for the Erasmus grant in the first year of their studies.
 - The positive impact on graduation performance appears to be stronger for those who visit foreign universities of relatively lower quality compared with their home university, and for those who stay abroad for more than six months.

GRADUATES & GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

Covid-related

The Warwick Institute for Employment Research (Warwick IER) published [Covid-19 and graduate careers](#), a survey in September and December 2020 of just over 4k graduates from the Futuretrack longitudinal study [participants graduated in 2009/10 – see details below].

- Impacts on income included:
 - The earnings of most graduates were not greatly affected by the pandemic, with over 33% reporting increased earnings between March and December 2020.
 - The 16% who reported a decline in personal income tended to be: lower paid; self-employed; working in the hardest-hit sectors, e.g. transport, tourism, hotels & catering and construction.
 - Graduates of creative arts and design were disproportionately represented among those reporting a decline in personal income.
 - Those with a first degree in maths or computing were much less likely to have experienced any decline in income.
 - Many who were self-employed felt increasingly vulnerable, while others who had considered or had the option of self-employment felt less inclined to make this move.
- Impacts on general wellbeing included:
 - Many reported that the impact on their mental health was causing them to re-evaluate their career aspirations and future plans.
 - Others were experiencing pressures to move from insecure jobs that they loved, where their insecurity had been exacerbated by the restrictions.
- Those who remained optimistic about their long-term career prospects were most likely to be: male; under 21 when they began their undergraduate degree; from managerial and professional backgrounds; medicine & dentistry or maths & computing graduates; working in a workplace with high graduate density; employed in manufacturing or in 'other public services'; to have professional qualifications.
- Those with low levels of optimism about their future career prospects were most likely to be: over 26 when they began their undergraduate degree; art & design, languages or historical studies graduates; working in a workplace with low graduate density; caring for adults; to have experienced unemployment.

Other research

Warwick IER published [Ten years on – The Futuretrack graduates](#), the fifth stage of a study into the relationship between knowledge and skills acquired in HE, transitions into the labour market and career outcomes.

- The [Futuretrack](#) study, supported by the Nuffield Foundation, has followed a large and diverse group of people who applied for a three- or four-year undergraduate degree course in the UK in 2005/06.

- This fifth stage aimed to investigate their subsequent career development and the factors that had affected or obstructed their longer term labour market integration.
- Objectives included:
 - Assessing the relevance of knowledge and skills gained on undergraduate degree programmes to career trajectories
 - Revealing the educational, demographic and socioeconomic opportunities and obstacles encountered in career development
 - Clarifying the variables that underpin differential access to graduate earnings and the graduate premium
 - Investigating the longer term impact of debt on access to opportunities, and their evaluations of their investment in HE.
- Just over 6k graduates responded to an online survey between March and October 2019, over 2% of UK-domiciled leavers from three/four-year full-time undergraduate degree courses in 2009/10; 200 also participated in telephone interviews between September 2019 and January 2020.
 - Findings examine: graduate versus non-graduate jobs; graduate earnings; student debt; postgraduate education; career motivations; social mobility; and what lies ahead.
- Policy implications and recommendations include:
 - Detailed, up-to-date analysis of earnings differences by degree subject and the knowledge and skills acquired can provide useful indicators on the emergence of skills shortages or over-supply of graduate labour.
 - Employers, professional associations and government policymakers must address the continuing and growing gender gap in graduate earnings.
 - Gender pay gap reporting should be extended to organisations with fewer than 250 employees and should identify the gender pay gap within the highly qualified workforce.
 - An effective means of recognising and monitoring the wider benefits of graduate study to individuals, communities and wider society should be developed.
 - HEIs, employers and policymakers need to consider how to prevent the 'seeming ossification of social mobility' to achieve fairer access to opportunities.
 - Tough penalties should be applied to HEIs that fail without good reason to deliver improved access and retention for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
 - Long-term longitudinal studies of graduates and further cross-cohort comparisons of graduates' careers and opportunities should continue.

Warwick IER also published [What a difference a year makes: The impact of Covid-19 on graduate careers](#), summarising the main findings from this report and its Covid-19 and graduate careers report summarised on p. 13.

The Chartered Management Institute (CMI) published [Work Ready Graduates: Building employability skills for a hybrid world](#), findings from research and feedback from HEI academics, UK businesses and undergraduate students.

- Nearly 80% of employers believe graduates aren't work ready on entering the employment market.
- There are 11 key employability skills that employers agree are critical in equipping graduates to progress in the workplace: team-working; critical thinking & problem solving; communication; self-management; flexibility & adaptability; initiative & self-direction; digital skills; resilience; emotional intelligence; innovation & creativity; and entrepreneurial skills.
 - Only 27% of students are completely confident they can demonstrate these skills.
 - Students on non-business related courses say university equips them with just two of the 11.
- All students need to develop employability and career management skills, but 29% of students do not believe their university offers support with career management skills.
 - Employability skills must be underpinned with general career management support, however only 28% of students are completely confident about how to search for jobs, 25% about applying for a job, and 18% about how to write a CV.
 - 41% of non-business students have a LinkedIn account and only 29% of all students are interested in showing their qualifications via digital badging.

- Analysis of the Higher Education Statistics Agency Graduate Outcomes survey found that 64% of graduates with CMI-accredited degrees were in highly skilled roles 15 months after graduating, compared to 57% of graduates with non-accredited business degrees.
- The following actions are recommended to enhance student employability:
 - Provide all students with access to core employability skills, regardless of their degree course.
 - Ensure students are able to measure and track their employability skills gain.
 - Ensure students can showcase their employability skills in an increasingly digital workplace.
 - Use existing and emerging national and regional networks to connect students and employers.

Advance HE published [Employability: A review of the literature 2016–2021](#), to identify specific impact and evidence in relation to embedding employability within HE. [The full report is available to members only.]

- The review illustrates the dominant themes and discusses how employability has been theorised, critiqued and challenged; it includes cohort studies, case studies, international comparative studies and analysis of employability outcomes in large-scale datasets.

It is part of Advance HE's six-month longitudinal [Student Success](#) project on access, retention, attainment and progression, and embedding employability in HE.

IZA published [For Some, Luck Matters More: The impact of the Great Recession on the early careers of graduates from different socio-economic backgrounds](#), analysis based on data from the UK Destination of Leavers from HE survey between 2002/03 and 2011/12.

- When students from less advantaged family backgrounds graduate during a recession they are more likely to become unemployed, work part time and earn less than students from more advantaged families.
- The widening of the SES gap during periods of high unemployment is large – low SES graduates are less likely to stay in education by 8.6% and more likely to be unemployed by 7.4% – irrespective of degree classification and university attended.
- Even among graduates who become employed, tight labour demand conditions at graduation widen SES differences in access to full-time positions, professional occupations, graduate jobs and salary.
 - Graduates from low SES backgrounds who enter the labour market during a recession are less likely to find a job with a new employer, and more likely to continue working with a previous employer, often in a job not related to their qualification.
- Professional networks established while at university are important in explaining some of these socioeconomic gaps in outcomes.
 - Disadvantaged graduates are less likely to enrol in postgraduate courses and more likely to become unemployed when graduating in difficult economic conditions.
 - Differential access to professional networks, particularly university job placements and internships, is an important channel through which SES differences in outcomes may persist.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies published [London calling? Higher education, geographical mobility and early-career earnings](#), research undertaken for England's Department for Education.

- At age 27, around 35% of graduates and 15% of non-graduates have moved away from the 'travel to work area' where they lived at age 16; all else being equal, graduates are 10ppt more likely to have moved by age 27 than non-graduates.
 - Graduates of more selective universities are more mobile, even controlling for characteristics and subject.
- In general, places with high average earnings attract graduates through migration; graduates who grow up in places with low average earnings are more likely to move away.
 - For a given level of average earnings, cities attract and retain more graduates than other areas.
- By enabling people to move to labour markets that offer better career opportunities, HE appears to reduce inequality of opportunity.
 - However, ethnic minorities and those from low SES backgrounds are less likely to move, and the effect of HE on mobility is much weaker for these groups.

- On average, male graduates who move earn 10% more at age 27 than otherwise similar graduates who do not move; for women, the estimated gain is 4%.
- Moving is associated with very large gains among graduates of law, technology, languages, business and economics, particularly for those who move to London.
 - This suggests that moving to certain areas might be necessary to take full advantage of the returns to some degrees.
- Cities that gain large numbers of graduates through migration tend to already have relatively high levels of HE participation.
 - In contrast, places with low levels of HE participation further lose graduates through migration.

The Bridge Group and the UPP Foundation published [*Staying local: Understanding the value of graduate retention for social equality*](#), based on national data and the experiences of graduates at four universities: Sunderland, Hull, Lincoln and Exeter.

- Nationally, 51% of graduates remain local after graduation; 76% of commuter students stay on, along with 39% of non-commuters.
 - Whether they stay or leave, graduates are just as likely to be in paid employment and on track with future plans.
- Graduates who stay are more likely to be from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, to be 'first-in-family' and to be aged 25+ on entry to HE.
 - Commuter students comprise 33% of the student population and share the same characteristics; they are also more likely to be from Black, Asian or other ethnic minority backgrounds.
 - Nationally, they are less likely to achieve a first or 2:1 degree, but equally likely to be in paid employment 15 months after graduation.
- Graduates who stay tend to think about 'success' in ways not captured by standard performance metrics, with decisions to stay local guided by considerations of wellbeing, financial independence and health.
 - They: use their social networks to get graduate jobs; capitalise on lower living costs to save towards property; want a 'meaningful' career; want to live in an appealing place and environment.
 - Unlike many from higher socioeconomic backgrounds who 'move out to move up', they can't necessarily afford to take unpaid internships or risk not being able to cover living costs.
 - They may have caring responsibilities, health challenges or a lack of financial support, and yet have achieved a degree and local graduate work.
 - The lack of recognition for this form of 'success' acts as a disincentive for universities to support their graduates to stay on.
- Local employers are often themselves local graduates; they assume that most graduates want to move away, but, by providing a supportive environment and through a positive relationship with the local university, can help talented graduates to take their first career steps.
 - Graduates make a considerable contribution to their local economy through their skills and spending; they are also active members of their communities, while valuing the civic amenities supported by universities.
- Recommendations include:
 - Rethink the metrics used to measure graduate success, so that such students are valued by universities.
 - Ensure that the right kind of advice is available through university careers services.
 - Create a positive business environment for SMEs that are hiring and progressing graduate talent.
 - Invest in the social and cultural spaces that can help retain graduates, and in the public transport and high streets that can make life outside London and the South East easier.

SMF published [*Signal failure: How can we get more value and less waste from our education system?*](#)

- In the context of the job market, 'signalling' occurs when a person benefits from an educational achievement, not because it changes them materially to increase their productivity, but because it reveals something about their pre-existing traits or skills.

- Even if the person is no different, the achievement allows them to demonstrate, prove or 'signal' something about themselves that was always true.
- This signal – provided it is hard to fake by those without the trait – can then be used as a filter for employers seeking to recruit for a particular set of traits or skills.
- The extent and significance of signalling is difficult to estimate and strongly contested; however, it is at least plausible that 20–40% of the wage benefit of education is due to signalling.
 - It is likely to be greater for HE and will vary across individuals, course choices and careers; without undermining the benefits of education, this means money and time might be wasted in an 'arms-race' to demonstrate pre-existing talent.
- Three possible policy approaches:
 - **Risk mitigation** by: encouraging shorter, more modular courses and offering more opportunities to try/change courses; investing in guidance, work experience and education breaks to discourage students 'following the herd'; greater investment in adult education; developing links to employment and employment-relevant skills; creating incentives to hire less formally qualified people and using hiring practices that emphasise demonstrable skills.
 - **Structural change** by: reducing time spent on credential-generating testing; dispersing the acquisition of signals away from the 'crunch age' of 18; reducing stratification in education; developing more ways of demonstrating merit.
 - **Better understanding** of the issue through: studies comparing returns to education for different groups; regular surveys on the perceived value of different qualifications; direct measures of 'learning gain'.

SMF is inviting those interested to form a community to explore these topics and develop policy options.

HE: TEACHING, RESEARCH & INSTITUTIONS

Covid-related

IPPO published [Mitigating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education: A rapid evidence review](#), commissioned by England's Department for Education.

- The most immediate impacts typically relate to students, including pronounced negative effects on their mental health, learning and finances.
 - There is evidence of impacts in: access to HE; students' mental health and wellbeing; the quality of learning; future job and research prospects.
 - However, other impacts are likely to be felt in time, such as the effects on research programmes generating new knowledge and on initiatives aimed at widening access to HE.
- Suggested mitigations include:
 - A mix of mentoring and support with applications to mitigate the disruption to initiatives designed to widen participation and improve access for students from historically excluded groups.
 - Financial incentives or support, either on their own or combined with information, motivation and support.
 - Expanding provision of easily accessible, short-term interventions for mental health problems, including cognitive behavioural therapy, psychosocial support and mindfulness.
 - Schemes that support graduates into work through partnerships with employers for students whose job opportunities have been reduced because of disruption to their courses.
 - Establishing a planning process to deal with future pandemics.

See also IPPO's rapid evidence review for FE [p. 5].

The OECD published [The state of higher education: One year in to the COVID-19 pandemic](#), looking at the comparative statistics it has collected to track developments across a number of systems.

- The pandemic has exposed the need for HEIs and policymakers to re-examine their established educational and policy models; new policy measures and institutional choices are needed to:
 - make more innovative use of blended provision for traditional student populations
 - offer new credentials fitted to mature learners focused on reskilling and upskilling
 - achieve balanced and sustainable internationalisation

- ensure that the funding of HE is robust to disruptions and equitable for learners.
- Weighing the benefits and risks, policymakers will need to re-examine and revise the policies for which they are responsible, including: the funding of institutions and students; the ways in which instructional staff are supported and rewarded; the monitoring and assurance of quality; and the ways in which learning is credentialled and verified.
- Digitalised learning risks creating new inequalities among learners, while also creating new models of learning and new ways of credentialling learning.
 - This will require student support systems to adjust to reduce risks of new inequalities while permitting innovative models of learning and credentialling to emerge.
- Academic career structures may also need to be adjusted to incentivise instructors to make effective use of digitalisation in teaching.

Other research

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education published [Hybrid Futures: Hopes for higher education](#), the third in its *Quality Compass* series to help institutions respond to future challenges and opportunities.

- It explores:
 - what UK HE might look like with hybridised models of education delivery
 - the meaning of new terms, e.g. 'hybrid', 'hyflex' and 'smart campus'
 - where digital pedagogy fits into wider HE
 - how physical spaces will be used post-Covid
 - strategy relating to EdTech.

Advance HE published [Hybrid Higher: Hybrid working and leadership in higher education](#), findings from a rapid, generative project in June 2021.

- The project examined the challenges and opportunities of the prospect of large-scale hybrid working, and how to achieve a 'purposeful balance' between virtual and in-person engagement.
- Three areas of focus are:
 - **Operational effectiveness:** ensuring an operating model that maintains or enhances the institution's core capabilities around research, education, enterprise and stakeholder engagement.
 - **Leadership, team cohesion & motivation:** the challenge of leading with purpose, focus and engagement when team members have mixed modes of participation, and achieving both individual and collective commitment.
 - **Fairness & inclusion:** designing and facilitating fair and flexible working practices that suit all locations and underpin a culture of inclusion where no groups or individuals are disadvantaged.

The UPP Foundation and HEPI published [The Public Attitudes to Higher Education Survey](#), findings from a February 2021 survey of 2k adults across England.

- 33% thought that getting a degree from a university was important; 23% thought it unimportant.
 - 46% would want to go to university if they were leaving school now; 26% wouldn't.
 - Depending on the age of the child, 55–70% wanted their children to go to university.
- 27% would prefer the proportion of the population going to university to reduce, 17% to increase and 36% to stay the same, with younger groups far more in favour of an increase than older ones.
 - 61% said that enjoying a subject was a good enough reason to do a degree in it; 54% thought going to university would lead to participants making friends from a wider range of backgrounds.
- 43% thought the impact of universities was positive; 11% thought it was negative.
 - Conservative voters and Brexit 'leave' voters were more likely to express negative views, and significantly more likely to think that academics couldn't be trusted to act in the national interest.
 - However, more people overall and across a majority of all subgroups by voting intention and political voting, said that universities were going in the right direction.
- 55% preferred a system whereby anyone could speak at a university as long as they didn't break the law; a further 24% thought they should be allowed to speak regardless.

- However, when presented with specific scenarios, net -25% thought those expressing racist opinions should be allowed, net -26% violent Islamic extremism and net -49% Holocaust denial.
- Public views on the curriculum changed dramatically depending on how the argument was presented: people were more inclined to support changes to the curriculum when it was framed as a broadening of perspectives, rather than the removal of western-centric viewpoints or 'decolonisation'.

The report uses a non-traditional way of segmenting people's views: salary improvers; career delayers; elite promoters; university pessimists; research supporters; university optimists; broadly uninterested.

The OECD published [Micro-credential innovations in higher education: Who, what and why?](#) and [Quality and value of micro-credentials in higher education: Preparing for the future.](#)

- The number and diversity of micro-credential offerings and learner interest in them have expanded substantially in recent years, accelerated by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The term 'micro-credential' is not in widespread use in HE, but institutions are offering a diverse range of short learning programmes that would meet the criteria.
 - HEIs tend to develop short learning programmes for advanced, postgraduate and professional education, providing them with a source of revenue that is less regulated by governments.
 - HE leaders see micro-credentials as complementary, and plan to develop them mainly by building on existing programmes or by creating new ones through partnerships.
- Digital platforms are becoming an increasingly important channel, strengthened by the pandemic.
 - The past year has also seen a strengthening of 'own-brand' online learning ecosystems and environments provided by private companies whose primary business is not education or training.
 - Private providers are viewed both as allies and competitors by HEI leaders, who are emphatic that micro-credentials will need to be developed on an economically viable basis.
- Learners who take HE micro-credentials tend to be more educated, more skilled and have greater levels of financial and social support from employers.
 - Evidence on the outcomes is limited, but some studies indicate that shorter programmes provide at least a temporary labour market boost, and stacking micro-credentials may improve prospects.
- Governments see the value of micro-credentials in upskilling and reskilling the labour force and widening access to HE – some have already made substantial investments.
 - Key challenges: ensuring that the benefits are made available across the population; providing a framework for understanding and recognition of micro-credentials; ensuring learners have the information they need to choose appropriate programmes.

The British Academy published [EU Higher Education Staff and Students in the UK](#), examining the impact of the changing landscape on its ability to attract and retain people.

- In 2019/20, 17% of HE staff were EU nationals, while 5.5% of undergraduates and 6.8% of postgraduates had been resident in an EU member country prior to commencing their studies.
 - EU HE staff accounted for at least 10% of staff in every region in the UK with the highest percentage in Northern Ireland (33.4%).
- In 2019/20, four of the top five disciplines with the highest shares of EU staff were in SHAPE* disciplines: modern languages; economics & econometrics; classics; politics & international studies.
 - The top three disciplines or groups of disciplines with the highest shares of EU students were also in SHAPE: business & management, creative arts & design and social sciences.
- In 2018/19, 30,501 students came to the UK through the Erasmus+ programme to study or complete an internship while 4,090 HE staff members came to the UK from EU countries.
 - 66.7% of incoming undergraduate students and 63.0% of incoming postgraduate students through the Erasmus+ programme opted to study a SHAPE subject.
 - The UK's new Turing Scheme will seek to provide mobility opportunities within and beyond the EU; however, its exclusive focus on outward student mobility restricts opportunities for HE staff as well as the UK's ability to attract EU staff and students.
- The UK Government should consider how to address the detrimental effect of changes to tuition fee status and eligibility for student loans, and the end of freedom of movement and the new immigration system.

*SHAPE: Social Sciences, Humanities & the Arts for People & the Economy.

WORKFORCE ISSUES

Covid-related

Durham University published [Inside UK Universities: Staff mental health and wellbeing during the coronavirus pandemic](#), findings from a survey of 1,182 staff employed across 92 UK universities, undertaken in March 2021.

- 50% reported high levels of anxiety, compared with 32% among the national population; 33% reported low levels of happiness (14% nationally); 36% reported low life satisfaction (12%).
- 53% of those on fixed-term or hourly contracts reported poor mental health compared with 45% of those on permanent contracts.
- 62% from ethnic minorities reported poor mental health compared with 45% of white respondents.
- Factors that may alleviate the burden of poor mental health and wellbeing and that fall more within the remit of institutions include social inclusion and the alignment between skills and task demands.
 - Factors that fall more within the remit of government and policymakers include autonomy and the value that is placed on universities and their staff.

Advance HE published [Research briefing: Staff wellbeing and institutional support in the transition to remote working](#), based on a survey of over 1,300 HE staff from October to December 2020. [The full report is available for members only.]

- 23.9% reported low satisfaction with their work-life balance, 18.0% with their life and 12.9% with their job.
 - Staff who said their institution or department had supported them to carry out their job remotely had a higher satisfaction level in all three measures.
- Academic staff reported much lower wellbeing compared to professional and support staff.
- Staff felt their institution could improve support by: providing (better) equipment and practical resources; improving the response and decision-making of senior leadership; reducing or properly acknowledging the increased workloads; checking in with staff or doing so more regularly.

CDN published [Digital Capability: A Scottish landscape review](#), a research study into the impact of Covid-19 on the digital skills of staff in Scotland's colleges.

- Between March and June 2020, colleges moved 'so rapidly and effectively' to online learning, teaching and student engagement, that they overtook digital development ambitions that had been planned to take several years.
- Adaptable visual resources were created to help colleges further develop the digital capabilities of staff, including a set of baseline digital competences for lecturers and support staff.

The Workplace

RECRUITMENT

Covid-related

The Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD) published its [Resourcing & Talent Planning Survey 2021](#), based on responses from 1,018 UK-based HR/people professionals.

- 26% of organisations didn't attempt to recruit at all in the last 12 months, compared with just 4% in 2020.
 - Among those that did attempt to recruit, the median number of permanent vacancies halved to 15 in 2020, while short-term vacancies fell from eight to three in all sectors.
 - However, 21% increased their recruitment activity as a result of the pandemic.
- Nearly 50% currently offer apprenticeships and 40% graduate programmes; around 30% offer college-leaver routes or intern schemes, down from nearly 40%.
 - 27% are attempting to attract experienced workers through career-returner programmes (up from 19%), and 21% mid-career change programmes (up from 16%).

- 33% have developed more talent in-house compared with the previous year, most commonly by upskilling existing employees (57%).
- Only 29% undertook initiatives to improve retention, down from 55%.
 - 60% increased homeworking in response to the pandemic; 71% advertised at least some vacancies as 'open to flexible working' and 49% as 'open to location'; 27% are recruiting more widely in the UK.
- 62% have a formal diversity policy (up from 52%); 24% of those recruiting have attracted a more diverse workforce.
 - 25% are very/extremely active in trying to recruit more diverse candidates to their board; 25% aren't active.
- 75% of those that use recruitment technologies said their use increased due to the pandemic.
 - 54% used video interviews, 28% online induction processes, 27% online assessments, 24% applicant tracking systems and 20% onboarding platforms.
 - 37% said that using technology had helped reduce unconscious bias.
- 46% said they had a workforce planning strategy based on a robust understanding of current and future workforce needs; 43% tended to take an ad hoc approach to recruitment.
 - 13% measured the return on investment of their recruitment activities, while 20% calculated the cost of labour turnover and 27% collected data to identify retention issues.

Other research

Prospects published [What puts graduates off applying for a job?](#), findings from a small-scale survey of 94 students and graduates.

- Seven themes were identified:
 - Unrealistic expectations from employers about work experience/skills (22%)
 - No clear salary information (21%), e.g. salary listed as 'competitive'
 - Undesirable parts of the job (19%), e.g. no option to work from home, low pay, location, lack of autonomy
 - Poor quality job adverts (14%): not concise, not enough information, jargon, not inclusive
 - Complex/unappealing application/recruitment process (14%)
 - A company's reputation (12%) – poor reviews about working for the company/poor ethics
 - No information about diversity/disability/inclusive workforce (3%).

Prospects published [Sustainability increasingly important to young talent](#), findings from a survey of 275 young international graduates entering employment.

- 66% had good awareness of the concept of a company's societal or environmental mission; 53% were familiar with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 25% had heard about them.
- 86% said that a company's overall purpose would fairly/totally encourage them to join; 28% that it would be the driving force behind their commitment to the company.
 - 51% said that they would find it fairly engaging if part of their compensation was linked to the achievement of that purpose, while 25% would find it totally engaging.
- Asked which corporate social responsibility issues a company must commit to, good working conditions came out top (94% important/priority).
 - That was followed by: measuring/controlling its environmental impact (90%); respecting principles of diversity/inclusion (89%); the fight against corruption and respect for human rights (86%); dialogue with local stakeholders (87%); 'green' products/services (80%); supporting local employment (69%).

The Centre for Economic Performance (CEP) published [The demand for executive skills](#), a discussion paper drawing on job specifications for top managerial 'C-suite' searches across thousands of firms.

- There is a lack of evidence about the specific skills valued in senior managerial labour markets.
 - This limits the understanding of how top managers contribute to firm performance, and whether different managerial skills may matter differently across organisations and over time.

- It provides little guidance to shape the appropriate skill formation in potential future candidates.
- The study maps the text of each executive search into six skill clusters reflecting cognitive, interpersonal and operational dimensions.
 - The demand for specific skills is highly heterogeneous across firms: firms spend considerable effort in specifying the skills and capabilities they look for in potential candidates.
 - The demand for executive skills has evolved over time: firms have become increasingly more likely to demand social skills – the capability to interact, persuade and relate to others – relative to more traditional operational and administrative capabilities.
 - The demand for social skills is particularly evident in larger and more information-intensive organisations.

APPRENTICESHIPS & TRAINEESHIPS

Warwick IER published [*The Benefits of Hindsight: Assessing the impact of apprenticeship reforms on employer behaviour*](#), the final report of research commissioned by the Edge Foundation and Gatsby Foundation on the impact of reforms introduced in England in 2017.

- The reforms included: introduction of the apprenticeship levy; the introduction of end point assessment; the stipulation of 20% off-the-job training for all; and the creation of a Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers.
 - Data came from large-scale employer surveys and interviews with 23 levy and non-levy-payers.
- There has been a large expansion in apprentice numbers over the past 20 years and a change in their composition: they are increasingly aged over 25, working to higher level standards and were existing employees before their apprenticeship.
 - Apprenticeships are increasingly becoming the preserve of larger organisations.
- Following the introduction of the reforms:
 - There was a significant fall in the number of apprenticeship starts and an acceleration of pre-existing trends towards older and higher level apprentices.
 - There was a reduction in apprenticeship recruitment by non-levy payers.
 - There were specific barriers in particular sectors, e.g. backfilling costs.
- Some impacts may have been transitional as the new system bedded in, but others are more structural, some reinforcing pre-existing trends.
- Levy payers:
 - Most were very positive about the reforms as it gave them a dedicated apprenticeship funding pot; some had planned extensively for its introduction.
 - Many expanded the number, level and standards of apprenticeships, primarily to spend the levy.
 - Many moved into higher level apprenticeships, mainly to replace or complement graduate and other existing higher level training.
- Non-levy payers, who mostly said the reforms passed them by:
 - They need apprentices to meet their workforce requirements, and have years of positive experience of training apprentices to draw on.
 - However, some were concerned by the 10% they paid towards the cost of training.
- The reforms have increased the financial investment of levy-paying employers in apprenticeships, and stimulated their preference to use it to train existing staff at higher levels.
 - This may generate higher level skills benefitting the employer, apprentice and economy – or it might result in a lower number of apprentices, fewer trained by smaller employers, and less younger and lower level apprentices.
 - There is a need to consider how the training needs of young people at lower levels and those in smaller firms can be met.
- The impact of the pandemic:
 - Most apprenticeship recruitment was unaffected as recruitment decisions for 2020 had already been made.

- In the medium term, there are likely to be knock-on effects as employers wait for apprentices to complete before taking on new ones.
- Employers were optimistic about recruitment levels returning to normal in 12–18 months.

Cedefop published [Apprenticeship governance and in-company training: Where labour market and education meet](#), 21 short papers written by apprenticeship experts from EU member states plus Iceland and Norway.

- Part I includes papers on apprenticeship governance in relation to cooperation of the two parties involved in apprenticeship: the education side (VET actors) and the labour market side.
 - The papers describe and analyse how apprenticeship governance is set up to give room to labour market actors to work together with education in selecting which occupations should be reached through apprenticeships (or which should be the apprenticeship specialities or programmes), how to develop curricula that reflect labour market needs and how to express demand for apprenticeships.
- Part II includes papers on in-company training and provision in apprenticeships.
 - The papers describe and analyse how the in-company part of training is designed and run (on what basis, by whom), also reflecting on the comparability of learning experiences or outcomes in the workplace and the role of apprenticeship in-company trainers and other company staff in these processes.
- Among the conclusions:
 - The participation of labour market actors needs to be strengthened in many countries, especially those with strong traditions in school-based VET.
 - Stakeholder participation is needed for greater transparency, improved trust and increased value but it is important to avoid lengthy and heavy processes.
 - Participatory processes and structures are also needed at regional and local levels, underpinned by feedback loops with national level ones.
 - In-company training requirements need to ensure comparability of learning experiences for all apprentices.
 - A shift in stakeholder and company attitudes towards quality training at the workplace is necessary – the more employer motivation is linked to long-term benefits, the greater the chances of providing quality and broader training.

Cedefop published [Enablers and disablers of cross-border long-term apprentice mobility: Evidence from country- and project-level investigations](#).

- Apprenticeships have been a central feature of European VET policies since 2010; during that time, specific policy priorities have evolved, including making cross-border long-term mobility of apprentices (CBLTMA) for learning purposes a reality.
 - CBLTMA may last a minimum of six months and typically up to 12 months, and may be combined with training at a VET provider.
- In 2019, Cedefop launched a study that explored CBLTMA in the EU through desk and field research in six countries and three projects, including focus groups with social partners; it developed an analytical framework on three levels:
 - Framework level: wider contextual factors that can be shaped by national government policies, global economics and historical events
 - System level: including dimensions related to the design and governance of apprenticeships
 - Implementation level: including dimensions related to learner mobility policy, such as financial and non-financial support for mobility.
- Country-level investigations found a number of dimensions that need to be considered at each of the three levels, e.g.:
 - Framework: the overall size and training capacity of companies; skill shortages and migration issues
 - System: the objective of apprenticeships; curricula, standards and qualifications
 - Implementation: support and continuing initiatives; employer interest; apprentice interest.
- Messages from focus group discussions with social partners include:

- Mobility in apprenticeships is more complex and challenging than in school-based VET and HE due particularly to the nature of the relationship between the apprentice and the company.
- Employers are concerned about a brain-drain creating severe skills shortages; social partners, notably unions, are also concerned about mobility being used for regular work purposes abroad.
- The main obstacle for employers of all sizes in letting an apprentice go abroad long-term is linked to the loss of productive capacity; other concerns are about the quality and comparability of the learning experience.
- CBLTMA is complicated to organise and difficult to argue for, particularly since there is no or limited tradition of it in companies and the benefits aren't evident for them.
- Many young people don't want to go abroad for a long period and prefer short-term mobility for fear of losing the employment opportunity with their home company.
- Suggestions for the future include:
 - CBLTMA policy could be pursued at sectoral level, in which strategies may become more concrete and it is easier to establish contacts between different countries.
 - CBLTMA should be part of a broader (sectoral) strategy (e.g. to modernise, attract learners, survive) – employers need to see the benefits on a larger scale.
 - Long-term mobility should not be promoted at the expense of short-term, which could be used as a stepping stone.
 - Mobility needs a framework to minimise administrative and bureaucratic work and make sure that apprentices are safe and undergo training while in a company abroad.

SKILLS GAPS & SHORTAGES

Covid-related

The CBI (Confederation of British Industry) published [Skills for an inclusive economy: CBI/Birkbeck Education & Skills Survey 2021](#), based on responses from 252 UK businesses of all sizes and sectors, gathered in April.

- 53% intended to increase investment in training over the next year, while 3% planned to lower it (balance of +50%); +35% planned to increase their investment relative to before the pandemic.
- Firms expected to increase their need for entry-level (+31%), intermediate (+38%) and higher (+39%) skills, as well as postgraduate (+18%) and other workplace skills (+41%).
 - Around 77% were confident about recruiting people at each level, but firms were less confident about accessing people with skills not attached to national qualifications.
 - Drivers of skills gaps included: competition (51%); lack of qualified candidates (50%); poor careers advice (37%); and lack of awareness of different routes, such as apprenticeships (37%).
 - The biggest priorities for the next three to five years were: industry-specific technical knowledge (60%), leadership & management skills (58%) and digital skills (44%).
- 90% rated online learning as an effective tool: 67% had increased online training; 59% had decreased classroom-based training.
- Only 33% had applied or were intending to apply to England's Kickstart scheme; 33% were undecided; 22% weren't planning to apply.
 - Most cited business pressures (33%), lack of placement infrastructure (24%) and too much bureaucracy (22%).
- 50% had increased investment in adult education and lifelong learning over the past five years; 60% would do so in the next five years.
- 71% had links with schools, colleges and universities, down from 91% in 2019.
 - 79% of those engaged provided work experience, 72% careers advice and motivational talks.
- 69% rated 'soft' skills and behaviours as a top three factor when recruiting school/college leavers; 82% rated attitudes and aptitude for work when recruiting graduates.
- 67% offered apprenticeships, down from 85% in 2019; +42% expected to expand their provision in the next 12 months.

The CBI published [A Perfect Storm](#), its insights on labour market shortages and what to do about them.

- Vacancies are higher in almost every sector than before Covid, and unemployment is close to historic lows.
- 33% of companies that responded to the CBI's July 2021 manufacturing survey were concerned that skilled labour would limit output in the quarter ahead – the highest share since the mid-1970s.
 - This share was similar among SME manufacturers, 33% citing concerns – a joint-record high.
 - There is also evidence of labour market tightness in the services sector.
- Recommendations include:
 - Add urgent agility to the UK's training systems by: better targeting of *[England's]* Lifetime Skills Guarantee and National Skills Fund at shortage occupations; introducing time-limited additional flexibility to the apprenticeship levy, so that firms can divert funds to train more people for shortage roles.
 - Create the time for training to have an impact through limited, temporary access to visas, by: updating the Shortage Occupations List in line with the Migration Advisory Committee's September 2020 recommendations; making skilled HGV drivers eligible to be added to the Shortage Occupations List.
 - Business to accelerate efforts to transition to the UK's new long-term economic model by: stepping up investment in training; accelerating efforts to draw on talent from across the whole of society; doubling down on investment in capital, digital and automation as soon as balance sheets allow; being open to redesigning jobs to make them more attractive.

Other research

The High Value Manufacturing Catapult, University of Warwick Manufacturing Group and Faraday Institution published [The Opportunity for a National Electrification Skills Framework and Forum: Transitioning the UK workforce for the green industrial revolution in transport and energy](#).

- Together with industrial digitalisation, the 'electrification revolution' represents the 'largest shift in industrial skills for the UK in a generation'.
 - The rapid transition to the production of fully electric vehicles creates competency gaps at all levels with particular emphasis on engineering and manufacturing roles that will need to be filled with core and specified training.
 - There needs to be quick and effective reskilling, upskilling and 'new-skilling', plus a unified national skills structure.
- Specialist skills for electrification do not currently exist at scale in the industry.
 - There is an unmet need for design engineers, development engineers, systems engineers, electronics technicians, vehicle technicians, specialist skills in batteries, power electronics and electric machines, plus in procurement, cost estimating and supplier quality.
- The aims of a National Electrification Skills Framework and Forum include:
 - Encouraging a common purpose to meet shared challenges and objectives across the UK.
 - Providing a common requirement and approach to meet employers' education and training needs.
 - Stimulating industry growth by providing a skills base before demand becomes critical – this is a step change for UK education and represents a new approach to delivering skills.
 - Providing new opportunities for workers to transfer from other, shrinking, industries.
 - Encouraging provider partnerships so that resources can be shared to aid provision.
- Employers, training providers, accrediting bodies and learners are encouraged to get involved.

Tech Nation published [Jobs and Skills Report 2021](#), based on analysis of UK data from the Adzuna job search engine covering the period from 2020 up to June 2021.

- UK tech employs ~3m people, 9% of the UK workforce.
- Demand for tech jobs was 42% higher in June 2021 than in June 2019, before the pandemic.
 - Tech-related vacancies represent 13% of all UK vacancies (up 0.7ppt from 2020).
 - Over 36% of tech sector jobs are in non-tech occupations, e.g. HR, legal, finance and sales.

- Over 66% of adverts in all tech jobs are for senior positions; data scientists, front-end developers and IT system architects are in most demand.
- The top 20 skills in demand across sought-after tech roles are listed, e.g.:
 - For data scientists: machine learning, analytics, artificial intelligence (AI), statistics and Python
 - For IT system architects: architecture, Amazon Web Services, business and data management.
- The average tech salary is up to 50% higher than for all vacancies in the UK and is increasing.
 - The median salary offered for senior tech roles is twice that of junior tech roles.

The Scottish Government published [Digital Economy Business Survey 2021](#) of over 3k Scottish businesses from February to April, to assess how the level of digitisation has evolved since 2014 and 2017.

- Findings related to skills include:
 - Only 30% feel fully equipped with the cyber security skills they need to deal with or prevent cyber threats, and only 20% with digital technology skills.
 - 21% said their existing staff were fully equipped with skills to meet the business's digital technology needs (down 5ppt from 2017 and 16ppt from 2014); 15% had considerable skills gaps (down 4ppt from 2017).
 - Businesses were slightly more certain than in 2017 about the specific digital skills gaps they faced.
 - 26% said they needed to improve basic technology skills, e.g. email, internet navigation, MS Office.
 - Digital skills gaps: prevent the business from fully exploiting efficiencies; impact on the ability to adopt the latest methods and technologies.
 - 29% were developing their employees' digital technology skills (down 5ppt from 2017) and 22% were planning to do so in future.
 - 46% were not currently developing their employees' digital skills and had no plans to do so (up 1ppt from 2017) – 65% said it was not applicable for their business needs.

TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

Learning & Work Institute (L&W) published [Learning at work: Employer investment in skills](#), an audit of investment in the UK, exploring how training varies by type of employer, category of employee and type of training.

- UK employers invested £42b in skills in 2019 (including wage costs) and 61% provided training, a higher proportion than in many European countries; however, the proportion and total investment has been falling after a decade of low growth.
 - Employer investment is relatively thinly spread, with the cost per employee (£1,530) half the EU average and the number of days spent training at its lowest since 2011.
 - There would be another 20m training days (on top of the existing 99m) if training had stayed at 2011 levels, and an extra £6.5b invested each year if investment per employee rose to the EU average.
 - Smaller businesses and employers in lower wage, lower productivity sectors are less likely to provide training, and investment has fallen most in these sectors.
- While a relatively high proportion of UK adults participated in job-related training compared to the EU average, low-paid and low-qualified workers are less likely to access training; there has also been a decline in participation over the last decade with the sharpest declines among young people.
 - An extra 1.2m people would receive training each year if people with low qualifications were as likely to participate in training as those qualified to degree level.
- Employer investment in training has fallen more sharply during the pandemic than in the financial crisis; consumer services firms were twice as likely to report a decline than other service firms.
 - Young people have also seen large falls in training during the pandemic, particularly those working in the private sector.
 - The fall in apprenticeship starts is also likely to disproportionately impact young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and participation fell further among skilled trades workers and plant and process operatives.

- Government involvement in England amounts to up to £6.8b per year through three main channels:
 - Funding training provision, including the £1.5b p.a. Adult Education Budget and the new National Skills Fund, worth £3b over five years and so far focused more on learning at Level 3
 - Setting the framework and rules for the £2.7b apprenticeship and levy system
 - Tax relief on the costs of training for companies and the self-employed, which passively follows employer investment decisions, meaning the majority supports those with higher qualifications and firms making a profit.
- Incentives for employers to invest in skills are increasingly skewed toward more highly skilled, highly paid workers.

In short, policy isn't working as well as it should. The next report will analyse policy options for change.

The Open University and TrainingZone published [Management readiness in 2021: Leaving no stone unturned](#), a 'white paper' on preparing for the post-pandemic workplace. [An email address is required to access the full report.]

- The pandemic has accelerated a shift from task-focused management towards more human qualities, such as ensuring employee wellbeing and engagement.
 - The workplace will demand a diverse set of skills: clear communication, direction, empathy and honesty, alongside new skills of being able to manage the rapidly changing digital workplace effectively.
- The paper explores how to help existing managers prepare for the future of work, how to build confidence and capability, and the skills needed to prepare future managers.

Eurofound (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living & Working Conditions) and Cedefop published [Innovation in EU companies: Do workplace practices matter?](#), a policy brief investigating the practices of innovative companies and examining the evidence linking them with innovation.

- Analysis is based on data from the European Company Survey 2019, plus case studies from 2020.
- Key findings include:
 - Practices associated with innovation in companies are based on a people-centred approach that seeks to develop employees, give them autonomy and include them in organisational decision-making.
 - Establishments where management facilitates employees to work autonomously and where self-directed teams are prevalent are more likely to innovate in their market than where the predominant model is managerial command and control.
 - Establishments that offer comprehensive training and learning opportunities are more likely to innovate than those where the scope for skills development is limited; this is true of all forms of training – formal and non-formal, internal and external.
 - Enhancing line managers' skills for innovation leadership and support can facilitate innovation behaviour – manager training should be a priority.
 - Skills are crucial for both incremental and radical innovation; employees need to be proactive in their engagement with learning, and management needs to support, nurture and provide the conditions for learning to occur.

Cedefop published [Skill development in the platform economy: Comparing microwork and online freelancing](#), based on surveys of workers from two major platforms.

- The study particularly examines differences between micro-workers and online freelancers in their workplace learning activities and self-regulated learning strategies.
- It considers key personal and environmental factors, particularly: the perceived complexity and interdependence of their job tasks; the personal motivations underpinning their decisions to take up crowdwork; the intensity of engagement in crowdwork; and the degree to which they self-regulate their learning in their daily work on the platforms.
 - Crowdwork occurs within internet-based platforms (e.g. Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), People Per Hour, Upwork) which act as intermediaries between people or organisations who post tasks and workers who perform them.

AUTOMATION & AI: IMPACT ON WORK

The DCMS published a [National AI Strategy](#), 'recognising the power of AI to increase resilience, productivity, growth and innovation across the private and public sectors'.

- It aims to:
 - Invest and plan for the long-term needs of the AI ecosystem to remain a science and AI superpower
 - Support the transition to an AI-enabled economy, capturing the benefits of innovation in the UK, and ensuring AI benefits all sectors and regions
 - Ensure the UK gets the national and international governance of AI technologies right to encourage innovation, investment and protect the public and our fundamental values.
- Continuing to develop, attract and train the best people to build and use AI is at the core of maintaining the UK's world-leading position.
- To close the skills gap, the focus will be on attracting and training the best people who *build AI, use AI and want to be inspired by AI*, e.g.:
 - Increasing diversity through postgraduate conversion courses in data science and AI
 - Empowering employers and employees to upskill and understand the opportunities for using AI in a business setting
 - Broadening the routes that talented AI researchers and individuals can work in the UK.

The Scottish Government published [Scotland's AI Strategy](#) in March 2021 – see Skills Research Digest Q1 2021, p. 34.

The Government of Ireland published [AI: Here for Good – A national Artificial Intelligence strategy for Ireland](#).

- The strategy is underpinned by three core principles: adopting a human-centric approach to application of AI; staying open and adaptable to new innovations; and ensuring good governance to build the confidence and trust to enable innovation to thrive.
- 'AI education, skills and talent' is the sixth of eight strands; the objective is 'a workforce prepared for and adopting AI'.
 - It aims to ensure 'a future-oriented workforce and population with the skills to drive the development, deployment and use of AI'.
 - It includes teaching digital and technical skills in schools, delivering FE and HE programmes tailored to address AI skills needs, and attracting and retaining international talent.
 - Employers will be helped to expand workplace AI upskilling and reskilling, including through apprenticeships.

IZA published [Digging into the Digital Divide: Workers' exposure to digitalization and its consequences for individual employment](#), based on data from Germany from 2011 to 2016.

- Technological progress such as digitalisation, automation and AI are fundamentally changing working environments, and have prompted fears of mass employment losses and technological unemployment.
- The study focuses on how employees are affected by the initial introduction of technologies at work, comparing those in businesses investing in cutting-edge digital equipment (e.g. smart factories, internet of things) with employees in companies that are not making such an investment.
- Findings include:
 - The employment stability of existing staff is lower in investing than non-investing establishments, however most displaced workers easily find jobs in other firms.
 - Employment reactions to digitalisation are most pronounced for: both low- and high-skilled workers; workers with non-routine tasks; and female workers.
 - It is important to tackle the digital divide among different groups of workers.

IZA published [How do workers adjust when firms adopt new technologies?](#), analysis based on data linking employers' technology adoption to social security data in Germany.

- The study looks at how workers adjust to investments in new digital technologies, such as AI, augmented reality and 3D printing, and compares those employed by 'technology adopters' with those by 'non-adopters'.
- There is evidence for improved employment stability, higher wage growth and increased cumulative earnings in response to digital technology adoption.
- The beneficial changes do not occur equally across worker groups:
 - IT-related expert jobs with non-routine analytical tasks benefit most from technological upgrading, coinciding with highly complex job requirements, but not necessarily with more academic skills.
 - Workers with vocational training, rather than academic skills, benefit most from technological upgrading; this might reflect the strength of the German vocational training system or indicate supply shortages for enough workers with academic skills.
- The type of digital technologies also makes a difference:
 - Older digital 3.0 technologies relate to a significant increase in workers' employment stability and translate into higher cumulative labour earnings.
 - More recent digital 4.0 and related technologies are associated with significantly pronounced wage growth without corresponding growth in employment days and earnings.
- The changes particularly benefit those working for service providers rather than manufacturers:
 - Manufacturing-related technologies, e.g. industrial robots, tend to be more labour-saving than those adopted by service providers, e.g. personal computers and AI.

Cedefop published [Job loss and COVID-19: Do remote work, automation and tasks at work matter?](#).

- The paper explores two possible determinants of the variation in future (short- and long-term) employment loss due to the pandemic: the potential of a job to be carried out remotely and the extent to which a job is at risk of being substituted by automation in the near future.
- For different occupations and EU member states, work from home and low risk of replacement by technology both provide a shield against job loss due to Covid-19.
 - However, no such relationship emerges at the sectoral level.
- At the country level, these links are stronger in the short term, where the effects of the pandemic are still intense, and fade away as countries are expected to gradually recover from the crisis; at the occupation level, these relations are instead strengthened in the medium-term future.
 - This may indicate that, as protective measures (e.g. furlough schemes and rescue packages) are gradually lifted, workers in certain occupations – particularly those related to lower levels of skill and qualifications – will experience intense difficulties in returning to work or finding a new job.
 - This may have severe consequences for social cohesion in and between different EU countries, and stresses the need for a strong safety net to protect the most vulnerable parts of the EU workforce.
- When employment loss is related to tasks performed, wherever social, intellectual and ICT skills are important for a larger proportion of jobs, employment loss is expected to be relatively less.
 - This stresses the importance of social and digital skills for the future of (post-pandemic) work in the EU.

The European Commission's newly announced Pact For Skills is a massive initiative towards skills upgrading to facilitate the shift to an era of digitisation, automation and green technologies in the EU.

SKILLS POLICY

Covid-related

The Higher Education Authority, RoI, published [Attitudes to Upskilling](#), on research carried out in May 2021 with 1k adults aged 16+ to explore the impact of the pandemic.

- 37% felt that the pandemic had made them consider upskilling or reskilling; however, cost, time and confidence were barriers for people considering a change.
 - 27% worried that there was little future in what they did.
- 51% aspired to having broader career options than they currently had; 50% said the idea of working in new technology appealed very strongly to them.

- 45% said they would like the opportunity to retrain to work in a more progressive and evolving sector – particularly those under the age of 50 and in the pre-family or family-life stages.
 - 43% said they were unlikely to consider a change in their career, due to the cost and time it might take them.
 - 33% said they didn't have the confidence to think about applying for different work – particularly those aged 25–50, and those who had been involved in a caring role in recent years, but who aspired to return to the workforce.

Although dated June 2021 it was published on 1 September.

Other research

L&W published [Focus on results: How a greater focus on outcomes could contribute to England's learning and skills systems](#); drawing on experience in Australia, Canada, Ireland and the US, it makes five recommendations:

- Focus on four core economic and social outcomes, based on US Workforce Development Board measures: employment six months after completion; median earnings six months after completion; progression to further learning six months after completion; social outcomes.
 - Each would be measured at provider or local area level for all participants and for priority groups, and compared to the national average; added value measures (such as comparisons with outcomes in areas with a similar economy) should be developed.
- Develop ambitious labour market & skills agreements between national and local government, identifying: national and local priorities; budgets to be devolved; provision eligible for funding; analysis of target groups; outcome measures; and a strategy for evaluating impact.
 - A data dashboard, similar to Australia's, should show performance against the outcome measures.
- Introduce outcome agreements for colleges and providers, building on Ireland's model and broader than England's proposed Accountability Agreements, with scorecards for economic and social outcomes.
 - This could start with up to ten trailblazers, rolling out to all colleges and large providers by 2025.
- Take an open data approach, including developing a skills & employment data lab and a public-facing outcomes website, similar to trainingproviderresults.gov in the US.
- Be ambitious in simplifying funding and maximising freedoms and flexibilities, to ensure providers have the tools to achieve improved outcomes.

The report is supported by England's Association of Colleges.

The UK Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy and England's Department for Education published [Green Jobs Taskforce: Report to government, industry and the skills sector](#) by the independent taskforce convened in November 2020.

- The report is a 'call to arms' for the UK to: invest in achieving net zero and its environmental goals; build pathways into green careers for people from all backgrounds; ensure that workers and communities dependent on the high-carbon economy are supported.
- Recommendations around education and skills include the following.
 - Promote the effective teaching of climate change and the knowledge and skills required for green jobs: ensure teachers have the necessary expertise; co-create modular programmes that maximise accessibility; promote exemplary resources; and support schools to mainstream climate education into existing qualifications.
 - Attract and retain talented teachers to teach key subjects: every school to receive a financial incentive to recruit or promote 'green skills champions'; incentivise workers with strong subject expertise to retrain as teachers; ensure doctoral students have the skills needed to research, innovate and create the knowledge required for net zero transition.
 - Ensure green careers advice and pathways are a continuous offer for all: roll out a 'green careers launchpad' during COP26, supplemented by a significant and sustained green careers marketing campaign that aims to break down stereotypes and inspire those from under-represented backgrounds; actively promote green skills, education and training through Jobcentre Plus.
 - Building on existing work to review green apprenticeships, map, review and enhance other training pathways (e.g. traineeships, T levels, internships and Skills Bootcamps) to ensure they support a diverse, inclusive and net zero-aligned UK workforce.

The Taskforce has 17 members representing industry, academia, trade unions and the skills sector. Its evidence and recommendations were considered in the development of the Government's [Net Zero Strategy](#) [published 19 October].

Eurofound published [Tackling labour shortages in EU member states](#), documenting public and social partner interventions.

- Labour shortages increased in the EU between 2013 and 2019; while the vacancy rates dipped from 2.3% in Q3 2019 to 1.7% in Q3 2020, the pandemic accentuated long-standing shortages in sectors such as healthcare and ICT.
- In the post-Covid recovery, the construction, energy, manufacturing and transport sectors are likely to be impacted by the transition to a climate-neutral economy, requiring additional labour and new skills.
- Measures to address shortages include: fostering geographical or occupational mobility; addressing skills shortages and underinvestment in skills; improving working and employment conditions; and providing better matching procedures.
- In designing policies to address labour shortages, a clear assessment of the main drivers of shortage at national, regional and sectoral level is critical; in order to achieve sustainable outcomes, policy measures should tackle the underlying causes of shortages.
 - Individual employers can play a critical role, particularly through their influence on the creation of profiles of the workforce and skills required, and the working conditions and levels of pay offered.

ADULT & LIFELONG LEARNING

L&W and Nesta published [What works for adult online learning: An evaluation of the CareerTech Challenge](#).

- The challenge was launched by Nesta and England's Department for Education in October 2019 to support the development of new solutions to helping people find rewarding future careers.
 - 11 tech start-ups and established education providers were awarded £145k-£250k to design and implement innovative tech solutions that can build career adaptability skills and/or motivation to learn for people who are most vulnerable to workforce changes.
 - The entire challenge was run through the pandemic in 2020 and 2021.
- Enablers of successful provision were:
 - Bite-sized learning, short courses and opportunities to engage in learning that fitted around other commitments and appeared to be more successful in motivating adults to persevere with learning.
 - Personalisation supported learners to maintain engagement; tools that drove learners to self-identify key strengths and weaknesses were highly useful in supporting learners to continue on to further learning.
 - Interventions that used trusted messengers – e.g. tutors – who directed adults towards online learning interventions were generally more successful at maintaining engagement among adults who were more used to engaging in learning outside of the workplace; employer referrals generally worked poorly.
 - Peer learning provided learners with opportunities to engage in 'live' events and share experiences of learning, but only worked effectively for those who were comfortable engaging with peers; other learners valued the relative anonymity that comes with online learning.
 - Learning design and content were a vital factor in maintaining engagement and enjoyment: gamified content, clear video and audio content and interactive online content were all highly valued.
- A number of newly acquired skills and strengths were identified by learners, including: skills reflection; progression; agency; core skills; and confidence in learning.

Nesta published [Learning How to Learn: Building a FutureFit adult learning system for thousands of workers across Europe](#).

- FutureFit is a major training and research project, led by Nesta and supported by Google.org, focused on creating an effective adult learning system to help tackle inequality and social exclusion.
 - In partnership with some of Europe's largest unions, leading researchers, employers and adult learning experts, FutureFit reskills workers at risk of job displacement and is conducting an extensive evaluation of what works, so that solutions can be scaled.

- Based on the journey of 1,109 learners in five participating countries*, a FutureFit learning framework has been developed to unlock the necessary skills for the jobs of the future; it comprises:
 - Two learning infrastructure mechanisms: multi-stakeholder partnerships and inclusion
 - Four learning mechanisms: communities of practice; personalised learning aligned with labour market needs; digital mentoring; and learning mindset
 - Three essential skills that need to be unlocked: digital skills; interpersonal skills; and learning agility.

**The Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, Denmark and Finland.*

Lloyds Bank published the third annual [Essential Digital Skills \[EDS\] Report 2021](#), based on an Ipsos MORI survey of 4,129 adults aged 18+ in the UK between March and April.

- The EDS framework has three progressive tiers: Foundation Level (comprising seven tasks), Skills for Life (29 tasks) and Skills for Work (17 tasks).
- In Northern Ireland:
 - 79% have the Foundation Level and can do all seven tasks (down 5ppt from 2020) (81% in UK, down 2ppt).
 - 77% have full Skills for Life (down 2ppt) (79% in UK, up 1ppt).
 - 11% have no Foundation Skill (up 4ppt) (6% in UK, down 3ppt).
- Across Northern Ireland and Scotland, 67% have full Skills for Work (up 26ppt) (64% UK, up 16ppt).
- Across the UK, over 33% of those aged 65+ believe their digital skills improved in the last year.
 - Fewer over-65s are totally digitally excluded.

L&W published [Migration and English Language Learning after Brexit](#), exploring the future of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

- Among the findings:
 - Too little attention has been given to the level of English needed for people to integrate socially and economically – its role in helping people advance and work at their level of education and ability is rarely considered.
 - ESOL learners include newly arrived asylum seekers and people who have lived in the UK for much of their life; some want to learn English quickly so that they can find work or renew their professional lives, while others want to achieve citizenship.
 - Different learning options are often talked about in terms of type of learner, but might be more usefully considered as options that suit people at different stages.
 - Barriers include affordability, transport, childcare, combining with work, confidence and health as well as awareness of what's on offer and eligibility for funding; the evidence points to the need for provision to go to the learner where possible.
 - Policy has largely lacked a spatial dimension, while providers [*in England*] lack the flexibility to use Adult Education Budget funding for currently ineligible learners; a balance needs to be struck between different policy objectives across migration, economic development and social integration.
 - Net migration has fallen, but economic recovery may lead to an increase; future patterns will be as complex as ever, although the balance between basic and higher level needs may change.
 - Those on family visas, asylum seekers, refugees and those on the Youth Mobility route may all need ESOL provision and at a higher level, including tailored to particular occupations.
- Suggested areas for the development of ESOL policy and practice:
 - Provision should reflect different needs and motivations for learning English, with routes open between formal and less formal learning as needs change; local hubs can help coordinate a varied local offer.
 - Providers should work to develop an enhanced ESOL and vocational learning offer.
 - Multiple strategies are needed to address barriers to ESOL learning, with funding supporting community and workplace delivery, and an enhanced online learning offer for those learners who can benefit.
 - Eligibility for fully funded ESOL should be extended to excluded groups, to ensure early access to language learning, which benefits learners, society and the economy.

EMPLOYMENT: WORKING PRACTICES

Covid-related

The UK Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) published [COVID-19 Employer Pulse Survey: Interim summary report](#), based on three surveys of a total of 3,921 employers in Great Britain between June 2020 and April 2021.

- The aim of the survey was to understand: how employers were supporting and managing the health of their workforce; how they were engaging with government schemes and guidance; and whether they had altered certain business practices in response to Covid-19.
- Among the findings:
 - 71% said that some or all employees were not working from home; if employees had to self-isolate, they would get statutory sick pay (46%), receive full pay (34%) or be furloughed (29%); 11% said employees would have to take holiday or unpaid leave.
 - 24% of those who didn't have their entire workforce working from home said that vulnerable employees were able to work from home, while 29% said that none of their vulnerable employees could do so; 24% said they had no vulnerable employees and 1% didn't know.
 - Depending on the wave, between 10% and 15% said they had used occupational health services in relation to Covid-19, with between 3% and 8% never having previously given their employees access to these services.

Acas (Advisory, Conciliation & Arbitration Service) published [Employer expectations of working practices after coronavirus \(COVID-19\), Great Britain: June 2021](#), based on a poll of 2,030 senior decision-makers.

- 55% expect an increase in staff working from home/remotely part of the week; 54% expect an increase in employee requests for flexible forms of working; 49% expect an increase in staff working from home/remotely all week.
 - 47% expect an increase in emphasis on health & safety practices.
 - 40% expect greater need for management and staff to work more collaboratively.

Acas published new [guidance](#) for employers on how to consider, discuss and introduce hybrid working.

CIPD published [findings](#) from a survey of 2k employers asking about changes to employees' terms and conditions.

- 22% had made changes between March 2020 and July 2021.
 - The most common changes were to: location (49%); hours (47%); pay (44%); redundancy terms/pay (22%); access to enhanced contractual entitlements/incentives (20%).
 - Among firms that had made changes to pay, 50% had improved it while 38% had reduced it; 44% of firms that had changed working hours had reduced them, while 24% had increased them.
- 19% had changed terms and conditions through consultation, negotiation and voluntary agreement; 3% – the equivalent of 42,960 UK businesses – had done so through 'fire and rehire'.

CIPD published new [guidance](#) for employers making changes to terms and conditions, stressing the importance of consulting and seeking voluntary agreement. The legal and ethical risks associated with 'fire and rehire' were also highlighted.

The Work Foundation and Newcastle University Business School published [Hybrid and Remote Working in the North of England: Impact and future prospects](#), based on the [Understanding Society: Covid-19 Study, 2020/21](#).

- The report explores the scale and implications of the shift to hybrid working, focused on local, mainly medium-sized employers in manufacturing and professional services.
- There is substantial variation in experience among workers and employers, and distinct challenges and benefits for different sectors of the economy.
 - In June 2020, only 16% of those working in manufacturing in the North of England worked remotely all the time, compared with 50% of professional services staff.
 - Employers who shifted to remote working during the pandemic were largely able to maintain productivity.
- Findings include:

- Increased autonomy for employees has led to improved trust between employees and managers.
- For many workers, remote working is positively impacting their lives, enabling them to achieve better work–life balance; however, the blurring of boundaries between work and home was a concern for almost all respondents.
- Mental health issues were exacerbated for some by the isolation of exclusive remote working.
- Employee preferences are likely to drive the shift to enduring hybrid working post-pandemic, however businesses report much uncertainty around what this transition will look like in practice.
 - Some form of face-to-face interaction will be important for a range of reasons, including: to sustain organisational culture; induct new staff; maintain formal and informal connections between staff; and enable managers to better gauge worker wellbeing.

Cedefop published [Adapting business practices to new realities in the middle of a crisis: First findings from the COVID-19 European company survey](#), based on over 1,200 responses.

- While the disruption caused by the pandemic was more severe in some parts of the economy than others, most EU companies changed their core business activities and adapted infrastructure and work organisation.
- Telework arrangements became a reality in 70%, with most expecting the increase to be structural, at least in the medium term.
 - Most were positive about the shift to telework and only a small minority were negative about its efficiency and effectiveness.
- The approach to managing staff shifted more often towards creating a work environment conducive to autonomy than towards control arrangements.
 - The pandemic contributed to changes in work tasks, but typically this affected only a minority of employees.
- Changes in skills needs appear to be more pronounced, affecting 75% of companies.
 - Most adapted their training strategy in 2020, mainly by a focus on supporting individual employees.
- While the pandemic contributed to learning needs, it also disrupted corporate training activities.
 - In a context of practical constraints linked to social distancing, less investment in equipment and many businesses prioritising to keep business afloat, the share of workers participating in training provided or funded by employers declined substantially.

Cedefop also published [Shifting Our Perspective on Learning: Why we need to focus on the interplay between jobs, work and learning in the COVID-19 world](#), a briefing note looking at findings from this and a 2019 survey.

Other research

Acas published [Flexibility in the workplace: Implications of flexible work arrangements for individuals, teams and organisations](#), based on a literature review and interviews by the Alliance Manchester Business School.

- Flexible working can increase both personal and team effectiveness.
 - Flexible workers: actively ‘craft’ their work environments to improve their own efficiency and colleagues’ effectiveness; engage in more citizenship behaviour (e.g. helping out colleagues); and are more focused in their work effort.
 - Homeworkers can be more efficient than office workers due to fewer distractions, although they may have problems with communications and team coordination.
- Employees who have been allowed to work flexibly tend to demonstrate greater commitment and a willingness to ‘give back’ to the organisation.
 - They can be more willing to work overtime, change work hours and take work home; however, there are potential negative effects for the individual, as this can lead to work intensification.
- Flexible working benefits employees due to a reduction in occupational stress through less work–life conflict, commuting stress and interruptions.
 - However, there is also the potential for work intensification, conflicts with co-workers and disrupted information flow; there may also be a lack of social support to help employees cope with these stressors.

- The negative effects can be mitigated by increasing employees' level of control.
- Managers fear that teams with flexible workers will be more difficult to manage; they expect flexible workers to be 'flexible with flexibility' or this can impact on availability of staff resources.
- The extent to which team effectiveness is affected by flexible working depends critically on how it is managed: managers need to ensure fairness and consistency and avoid ad hoc arrangements; they need to build trust and confidence in their teams.
- Flexible working has the potential for improved organisational performance, but there is a tendency to undervalue flexible workers or perceive them as lacking in ambition.
- Formal policies for flexible work can be effective if used consistently across the organisation.
 - Inconsistency can lead to perceptions of unfairness and disrupt working relationships.
 - Those working flexibly feel that more senior roles might not be open to them in the future as flexible workers.

The DWP published [Summary: Sickness absence and health in the workplace: Understanding employer behaviour and practice](#), based on a survey of 2,564 GB employers and follow-up qualitative research undertaken in 2018.

- When deciding whether or not to invest in employee health and wellbeing, employers cited maintaining the organisation's reputation (79%) and satisfying legal obligations (69%) as the most important motivations.
 - 83% reported that they knew what to do to improve employee health and wellbeing and 45% understood their legal responsibilities very/fairly well.
- 25% of large employers and 47% of small employers used the internet for information on how to retain employees with long-term health conditions; 49% and 7% accessed formal, paid-for sources of advice; and 31% and 9% used legal sources.
- 72% and 44% took a proactive approach to managing employee health and wellbeing.
 - 70% and 20% provided health and wellbeing promotion programmes to improve physical activity or lifestyle; 76% and 14% provided employee assistance or staff welfare/counselling programmes.
 - Those that offered comprehensive health and wellbeing provisions also offered occupational health services, generous sick pay and other employee benefits and perks.
- 61% overall delegated responsibility for managing sickness absence to line managers, but only 44% of these provided training for the role.
 - Some employers, usually large, had centralised processes and structures to manage sickness absence.
- Some employers lacked confidence in managing returns to work, particularly in more complex cases, and reported not knowing how to instigate or conduct a return-to-work conversation.

CIPD published [Mental Wellbeing and Digital Work: An evidence review](#).

- Bullying and interpersonal conflict cause major problems for mental wellbeing, so proactive, effective approaches to resolving conflict should be high on the agenda.
 - On the positive side, employers and managers should also look for ways to build social cohesion and support, for example through team building and good leadership.
- Working long hours can have a major influence on mental wellbeing, and in a digital age there is a real risk employees feel they have to be 'always on'.
 - Poor work-life balance is closely related to unmanageable workloads, although the effect of this on wellbeing can be mitigated by well-designed jobs, in particular giving people autonomy.
- There are certain psychological states – such as feeling unfairly treated at work and not being able to comprehend or find meaning in events – that can be closely related to mental ill health.
 - Leaders do well to measure these via staff surveys and keep them in mind when communicating to the organisation or designing HR processes, especially during times of organisational change.
- To prioritise effective action, it is important to consider what aspects of organisational life are most influential; the report includes estimates of the effect on sickness absence of key risk factors – e.g. bullying or long working hours – and improvement measures.

CIPD also published a [scientific summary](#).

The International Network on Leave Policies & Research at the University of Vienna published the [17th International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2021](#), comparing the policies of 47 countries.

- It covers maternity, paternity and parental leaves; leave to care for sick children and other employment-related measures for working parents; and early childhood education and care policy.
- In the UK:
 - The leave policy is 'implicitly matriarchal, eschewing gender equality for the idea that women should be the main carers of young children'.
 - 52 weeks of maternity leave is the longest period of all countries reviewed, but is the worst paid.
 - Parental leave is the least generous in Europe, with four unpaid months per parent, and only usable at the rate of four weeks per year.
 - There is also a 'shared parental leave' option, but this is for mothers to transfer some of their maternity leave to their partners, rather than leave that gives equal rights to men and women.
- Only seven of the countries offer more than two months' paid leave to fathers, whereas less than four months is generally considered too short for mothers.
- Nordic countries have the most generous leave.
 - Iceland gives each parent six months at 80% of earnings; if there is only one parent, they get the whole 12 months.
 - Sweden – the first country in the world to introduce parental leave, in 1974 – offers 18 months of leave, with 13 months at just below 80% of earnings.

EMPLOYMENT: WORKING TIME

Covid-related

The OECD published [Employment Outlook 2021: Navigating the COVID-19 crisis and recovery](#), including a detailed review of statutory and negotiated regulations governing working time and an overview of trends in working time patterns.

- Working time is a crucial variable shaping the labour market and its adaptability to shocks, affecting key outcomes such as wellbeing, productivity, wages and employment.
 - Understanding how different regulatory settings shape working time outcomes is crucial for policymakers seeking to balance equity, efficiency and welfare considerations.
- Key insights include:
 - Where it exists, the legal right to request teleworking can cover all employees or only some categories; in the Netherlands, Portugal and the UK employees have an enforceable right, while in other countries employers can easily refuse to accommodate such requests.
 - The way in which teleworkers' working conditions are regulated – comprehensively or not, through dedicated legal frameworks or national/sectoral collective agreements, etc. – also vary, which affects access in practice.
 - While the use of teleworking remained limited until the Covid-19 outbreak, it was higher on average in countries where there was an enforceable right to request it, and highest in countries where this right was granted through collective bargaining.
 - During the Covid-19 crisis, countries introduced policies enabling longer working hours, more paid leave, averaging arrangements and easier telework; the incidence of teleworking rose from 16% in 2019 to 37% in March/April 2020.
 - The prevalence of very short hours of work is higher and of very long hours lower for women and low-educated workers; however, while gender differences in working hours have been narrowing, educational gaps have been widening since 1999.
 - Flexible working hours arrangements, which allow workers to choose their schedule, are most often used by highly educated and highly paid employees; the education gap has widened over the last decade, while the income gap has narrowed.
 - By contrast, the incidence of variable scheduling – whereby workers have no control over their schedule – is highest for employees without tertiary education and low-paid employees.
 - Prior to Covid-19, teleworking arrangements were most often used by men, highly educated and highly paid employees in most OECD countries; disparities between educational and income groups widened during the first lockdowns.

- Available data for ten OECD countries show that the share of workers defined as 'time poor' rose from 1.4% on average in the 2000s to 1.8% in the 2010s for men, and from 1.3% to 1.8% for women.
- Overall, 43% of workers were dissatisfied with the amount of time they spent working in 2015.

Other research

SMF published [A question of time: Current working hours, preferences, and the case for a four-day week](#).

- 80% of workers would not favour a four-day week if it meant earning less; the onus is on advocates of the policy to explain how shorter working hours can be paid for with no loss of income for workers.
- 11% of workers would be willing to sacrifice some income for more leisure time; they are more likely to be found in sectors like banking and construction, and in managerial and professional roles.
- Those that stand to benefit from a four-day week initially are more likely to be socially advantaged – higher earners, those in higher occupational classes and men.
 - Some increases in inequality may be an acceptable price to pay for some workers to see improvements, or other strategies may be needed to offset these inequalities.

The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) published [Changing times: The future of working time in Scotland](#), proposing a roadmap towards shorter working time.

- The Scottish Government has committed to exploring a shorter working week as a step towards a 'wellbeing economy'.
- Shorter working time with no loss of pay stands to improve individual wellbeing, narrow the gap in how people work 'part time' and 'full time', and rebalance how unpaid work is shared.
 - International evidence suggests that, if managed effectively, the transition to shorter working time can also support workplace innovation that maintains or even boosts productivity.
- 83% of working-age people in Scotland support the introduction of a four-day working week, ranging from 90% of those in office-based work to 70% among those in manual work.
 - 85% think introducing a shorter working week would have a positive effect on their own wellbeing; 66% think shorter working time would have a positive overall effect on productivity.
 - 88% would be willing to participate in a trial in their workplace, 93% office-based to 86% manual.
- Four recommendations for the Scottish Government:
 - Expand the four-day week pilot to trial shorter working time across a range of sectors, including non-office workplaces.
 - Create a new working time commission.
 - Work with employers and workers to develop new sectoral fair work agreements as the foundation of renewal deals, in return for trade union-bargained minimum terms & conditions.
 - Prioritise 'living hours' as a key part of existing business schemes.

IZA published [Working Time Mismatch and Job Satisfaction – The role of employees' time autonomy and gender](#), based on longitudinal data from the German Socioeconomic Panel.

- Working time mismatch is the difference between actual and desired working hours; it has a negative impact on employees' job satisfaction.
 - Working time mismatches can arise in the form of over-employment or under-employment.
- However, working time autonomy has a positive moderating impact on the link between mismatch and job satisfaction.
 - Women in particular seem to benefit from the moderating role of working time autonomy.
- Policymakers and employers should consider creating more opportunities – regardless of gender and family status – to offer employees working time autonomy in order to reduce the negative implications of over-employment on job outcomes.

EMPLOYMENT: FAIR WORK & WAGES

Covid-related

The RSA (Royal Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, Manufacturing & Commerce) published [Back to Work: Sick pay and self-isolation in a post-lockdown world](#), based on a poll of 2k adults across Great Britain.

- Another wave of Covid-19 would push 26% of workers over the edge financially, rising to 49% among those on zero-hours contracts.
- 32% feel pressured to work with Covid symptoms, rising to 54% of those who use gig economy apps (e.g. Uber) to seek work.
 - 81% of those on zero-hours contracts would be more likely to self-isolate if sick pay were paid at 80% of their income.
 - 42% of 18–24 year-olds are feeling the pressure to work with symptoms, compared with 30% of 35–44s.
- Both Conservative and Labour voters support introducing the real living wage across the board and paying workers more to isolate.
- Just 22% of Conservative voters said they would be able to survive on statutory sick pay, and 33% fear they'll be pressured into work with symptoms of the virus; however overall, they are against raising statutory sick pay, feeling that the current level is adequate.

Other research

The DWP published the report of its independent In-Work Progression Commission: [Supporting progression out of low pay: A call to action](#).

- People on low pay should be proactively encouraged and enabled to take up learning through a progression and learning plan.
 - Employers, Jobcentres and England's National Careers Service advisers and their equivalents in the devolved nations should work with individuals to develop and action these plans.
 - For people on Universal Credit, these plans may be achieved, for example, through a wider use of Jobcentre claimant commitments.
- The DWP should review the Mid-life MOT to ensure it is easy to use for those in low pay and that it is used more often and more widely by all employers, as well as by Jobcentres, to help older workers assess their career and skills needs.
- Governments across the UK should ensure that apprenticeships are accessible and attractive to more established workers, especially those who have been in their role for significant periods of time, and older workers.
- Governments across the UK should oversee the development of subsidised sector-specific bridging courses to enable low-skilled workers to gain access to higher level training and progression.
 - This should be done in partnership with skills bodies, sector representative bodies and employers, and the courses should be robust enough to count towards sector-specific apprenticeships.

The Resolution Foundation published [Workertech and low pay: An overview of research on low-paid workers in the UK](#).

- Low-paid workers are more likely to be young, on a part-time or insecure contract, or work in retail and hospitality; many have had their incomes and hours reduced during the pandemic.
- In normal times, low-paid workers are more likely to be underemployed than higher paid workers, and many lack control over their work schedules and face last minute changes to their shifts.
- Low-paid workers struggle to permanently exit low pay, in part because they are less likely to receive training, and because the training they do receive is more likely to be of an inferior quality.
- Workers on low pay are often excluded from employment protections, and often face abuses of the protections they are legally entitled to.
 - Many also lack formal support structures to seek redress for labour market abuses, access to technology and communication, and have lower levels of wellbeing than higher paid workers.

CEP published [Living wages and age discontinuities for low-wage workers](#), on the impact of introducing the Living Wage Rate on wages and hours.

- The Living Wage, which is considerably higher than the UK mandated minimum wage, is a policy tool being considered at a governmental level.
 - For example, the Welsh Government recently set up the Social Care Fair Work Forum, including ensuring all care workers are paid the Living Wage.
- The report considers what happens when a wage floor significantly higher than a nationally legislated minimum is imposed.
 - It examines data between 2011 and 2019 when the Living Wage was sequentially introduced into parts of a large service sector firm with hundreds of establishments across the UK.
- Findings include:
 - The Living Wage had a strong impact on boosting wages.
 - There was no aggregate impact on total hours worked; however, there was an increase in the age-wage discontinuity from age-related pay grades, with exposed establishments reallocating hours away from workers who were just over the age 18 cut-off.

The Institute for Social & Economic Research published [Occupation flexibility and the graduate gender wage gap in the UK](#).

- Developed countries have made significant progress towards gender equality in the workplace; however, a substantial gender wage gap persists, averaging about 15.5% for the UK in 2020.
- Three 'stylised facts' illustrate the patterns related to the gender wage gap and occupation flexibility:
 - While the graduate gender pay gap is small in the period close to labour market entry, it widens over the life cycle as women's earnings growth stagnates after childbirth.
 - Graduate women increasingly worked in flexible occupations over the life cycle and across successive cohorts over time, whereas graduate men moved out of flexible occupations and did not change their participation patterns.
 - There is a significant wage penalty arising from working in flexible occupations, conditional on education and age, for both graduate men and women (but not for non-graduates).
- Over the life cycle, the increase in the gender wage gap was primarily driven by increased labour demand for men, particularly in inflexible occupations and especially pronounced up to age 44, increasing the wage premium from working in such occupations at older ages.
- More recent cohorts of women had higher preferences for working in flexible occupations; this largely drove the increase in women's participation in flexible occupations (at any given age), and contributed to increasing the flexibility wage penalty and the gender wage gap.
- Both marriage and childbirth were associated with women being less likely to work.
 - In contrast, men were less likely to work in flexible occupations and more likely to work in inflexible occupations after marriage, while men were more likely to work after fatherhood, especially in inflexible occupations.

IZA published [The gender gap in earnings losses after job displacement](#), a study of labour market outcomes of displaced men and women based on data from Germany.

- 'Job displacement' is a form of job loss that stems from shifting economic and business conditions; it leads to large and persistent earnings losses.
- After a mass layoff, women's earnings losses are about 35% higher than men's, with the gap persisting five years after job displacement.
 - This is partly explained by women being more likely to take up part-time or marginal employment following job loss, however even full-time wage losses are almost 50% (5ppt) higher for women.
 - Parenthood magnifies the gender gap: while fathers of young children have smaller earnings losses than men in general, mothers have much larger earnings losses than other women.

CIPD published [Ethnicity Pay Reporting: A guide for UK employers](#).

- In the absence of legislation, CIPD believes that employers should aim to voluntarily compile ethnicity pay reports in order to improve inclusion and tackle inequality in the workplace.
- Based on six principles outlined in the guide, it recommends that employers publish annual ethnicity reports based on three key components:
 - A uniform set of eight commonly defined statistics to profile pay by ethnicity

- A supporting narrative to explain the nature and causation of any pay differentials and gaps by ethnic group evident in their statistics
- An action plan of initiatives defined to reduce and remove any such gaps over time.

IZA published [The role of the workplace in ethnic wage differentials](#), analysis based on matched employer–employee data from the Workplace Employment Relations Survey for 1998, 2004 and 2011 for full-time employees in Great Britain.

- In 2001, only 6% of employees aged 16+ were non-white; in 2021 it is 12%; however, labour market conditions remain challenging for ethnic minorities.
 - Unemployment and economic inactivity are more prevalent among ethnic minorities of working age than for white individuals, and those in employment experience substantial wage gaps.
- There is substantial ethnic segregation across workplaces: 62% of workplaces in GB employed no ethnic minority workers; however, this does not contribute to the aggregate wage gap between ethnic minorities and white employees.
 - Instead, most of the ethnic wage gap exists between observationally equivalent co-workers.
 - Ethnic minority employees are less satisfied with their earnings than white employees, even after accounting for potential differences in non-pecuniary rewards that might compensate for relatively low wages.
 - Ethnic minorities are more likely to feel over-skilled in their role.
- Non-white male employees earn, on average, around 10% less than observationally equivalent white employees; the wage penalty for non-white female employees is around 6%.
- The use of job evaluation schemes within the workplace is associated with a smaller ethnic wage gap.
 - The average ethnic wage penalty is around 50% as large in workplaces with a formal job evaluation scheme compared to those without.
 - Increased transparency in the workplace can therefore help increase fairness in wage setting.

IPPR published [Delivering a fair work recovery in Scotland: Securing a living income for all](#), the second in a series.

- Fair work can contribute to financial security across four key dimensions: decent rates of pay; sufficient and reliable hours; good working conditions, including job security, fulfilment and voice; and opportunity to develop and progress.
- However, work is still not a reliable route to financial security: 20% of Scottish workers surveyed typically receive two weeks' notice or less of their working hours; 10% feel their work does not offer them a stable and predictable income.
- Key groups face specific challenges:
 - A combination of high childcare costs, the undervaluation of part-time work and a lack of good-quality flexible and part-time jobs sustains gendered inequalities.
 - For too many working families, and particularly for lone-parent households, a living income is out of reach, even with social security support.
 - Disabled and chronically ill people are often stuck 'between a rock and a hard place', unable to rely on work or social security for a reliable income that can support a decent standard of living.
 - More than 33% of workers under 30 in Scotland routinely receive fewer than two weeks' notice of their working patterns; fewer than 33% have a union or employee association at work; 48% were paid less than the real living wage coming into the Covid-19 crisis.
 - Deep racial inequalities persist: Black and ethnic minority workers in Scotland are 38% more likely than white workers to experience low pay.
 - Progression is a vital route to a living income for low-paid workers, but 70% of workers in 'routine' occupations in Scotland in 2010–11 remained in routine work in 2019; 40% of workers reported lower real-terms rates of pay in 2019 than in 2010.
- Recommendations are made across three key dimensions:
 - Driving up job quality: hours, pay, wellbeing and progression
 - Improving social infrastructure and reducing barriers to getting into and getting on at work
 - Transforming Scotland's labour market to provide good jobs and routes into them.

The Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission and ESRI published [Monitoring Decent Work in Ireland](#), research examining inequalities in access to employment, job security and seniority.

- The review of international approaches and a consultation process with 33 organisations in the RoI looked at: access to work; adequate earnings; employee voice (representation and job control); security and stability of work; equality of opportunity and treatment in work; and health and safety.
- Young people, people with disabilities, Travellers and Eastern European migrants are at much higher risk of disadvantage around employment:
 - In 2019, 33% of 18–24 year-old workers had a temporary contract, compared to 6% of 25–64s.
 - 34% of the general workforce worked in a professional/managerial job, but only 14% of Eastern European workers.
 - There was a 32ppt gap in the employment rate for those with disabilities (41%) compared to the national average (73%).
 - In 2016 the unemployment rate of Irish Travellers was 80%, the highest of all ethnic groups.
 - In 2019, 22% of employees had low hourly pay, however this was up to 60% of 18–24 year-old workers, 38% of Eastern Europeans and 32% of lone parents.
 - Workplace discrimination was reported by 20% of ethnic minority workers – almost three times the average (7%) – and by 14% of workers with a disability and by 11% of non-Irish workers.

International Comparisons

Covid-related

The OECD published [The State of Global Education: 18 months into the pandemic](#), including data collected from OECD member and partner countries.

- It covers:
 - the impact of Covid-19 on learning outcomes and examinations
 - how education budgets were adjusted to respond
 - the consequences for labour market opportunities and the transition from education to work.

Other research

IZA published [Did the 'Bologna Process' Achieve Its Goals? 20 years of empirical evidence on student enrolment, study success and labour market outcomes](#), based on a literature review.

- In 1999, 29 European countries (including the UK) created the European Higher Education Area to promote student mobility and employability and to increase HE competitiveness (the Bologna Declaration).
 - The Bologna Process initiated a large variety of national HE reforms in 49 participating countries, including by introducing the two-cycle degree structure of Bachelor (BA) and Master (MA).
- The literature is 'surprisingly small, selective and ambiguous'.
 - While enrolment seems to have increased in countries implementing the reform more quickly, the evidence on study success is mixed and hardly available regarding student mobility.
 - The results on employment outcomes are more consistent, with BA graduates having lower labour market returns than graduates with MA or traditional degrees.

The OECD published [Education at a Glance 2021](#), a compendium of indicators on the state of education around the world, providing data on structure, finances and performance.

- The 2021 edition includes a focus on equity, investigating how progress through education and the associated learning and labour market outcomes are impacted by dimensions such as gender, SES, country of birth and regional location.
 - A specific chapter is dedicated to Target 4.5 of SDG 4, on equity in education*.
- The [United Kingdom Country Note](#) includes the following key findings:
 - In 2020, 59% of 25–34 year-old women had a tertiary qualification compared to 52% of men; the 7ppt difference compares to the OECD average of 13ppt; however, only 21% of new entrants to ICT degrees were female in 2019 (OECD average 20%).

- The percentage of 25–64 year-olds with tertiary education ranges from 38% in north-east England to 68% in Greater London – one of the highest regional variations across OECD countries with available data.
- In 2018, spending on education in the UK was 6.1% of GDP – 1.3ppt higher than the OECD average.
- In 2020, maximum statutory salaries in England were 152% higher than minimum salaries, depending on career stage, compared with Scotland, where maximum salaries were 26% higher.

*A [blog](#) summarises six key takeaways on equity.

Eurydice published [Adult education and training in Europe: Building inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications](#) covering 42 education and training systems, and statistical data from international surveys.

- The report aims to contribute to a better understanding of the state of adult learning in Europe and encourage reflection on how to respond to current and future challenges.
 - Qualitative data covers 27 EU member states plus Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, N Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and Turkey (not the UK).
 - It assesses whether countries’ strategies successfully promote access to learning opportunities among adults with low levels of basic skills and qualifications.
 - It presents mapping of publicly (co-)funded adult education and training programmes, plus existing guidance and support measures for the least qualified.
- It explores interlinked areas, including: national governance and policy frameworks; publicly subsidised adult learning provision; financial support and incentives; approaches to achieving flexible learning pathways; arrangements for the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning; and initiatives aimed at awareness-raising, educational outreach and guidance.
 - A substantial proportion of adults in Europe have low levels of literacy, numeracy and/or digital skills.
 - Most learning activities in which adults take part have a non-formal character.
 - Low-qualified adults participate less in education and training than those with higher levels of educational attainment.
 - Just over 50% of countries have concrete national targets for adult basic skills or qualification.
 - Pathways to recognised qualifications are becoming more diversified across countries.
 - Modularisation is quite common in many countries but credit-based programmes are less widespread.

Government

NORTHERN IRELAND

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

ENGLAND

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

SCOTLAND

SPICe (Scottish Parliament Information Centre) published [Further and Higher Education in Scotland: Subject profile](#), an overview of institutions, funding, governance, qualifications, major policy developments and emerging issues for the new parliamentary session.

A useful guide to the landscape, especially for anyone new to the Scottish system.

WALES

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

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND (RoI)

The Government of Ireland published [*Ireland's Higher Education Research System: A review by the Higher Education Research Group*](#) based on a review in 2019–20.

- Themes examined include external research collaboration and HE, including with the UK and the impacts of Brexit.
 - The RoI's post-Brexit research engagement needs to be reformulated in terms of opportunities within the EU-27, Ireland–UK, on an all-island basis and globally.

The Government of Ireland published [*'Adult Literacy for Life' – a 10-year adult literacy strategy*](#).

- Over 300k adults in the RoI do not have any formal education equivalent to the Leaving Certificate and almost 900k have no formal education beyond school level.
 - This includes a more 'hidden' group within the workforce, and particularly across older age groups.
- A range of commitments and actions are made under four pillars: understand; access; expand; and empower.

EUROPE

The European Commission published [*The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training \[ECVET\]*](#), a review of its development and implementation between 2009 and 2020.

- The key objective of ECVET was to facilitate the transfer, recognition and accumulation of assessed learning outcomes of individuals who are aiming to achieve a qualification.
- It helped to transfer and recognise learning that has taken place abroad; it also allowed people to transfer and accumulate learning outcomes achieved in different contexts, to build up recognised qualifications, update or upgrade them.
- ECVET has ended as an initiative; the report considers how its achievements will be taken forward in the 2020 Council Recommendation on VET and will lead to future EU initiatives.

The European Commission published [*Practical guide: Creating pathways of support for vulnerable young people to enter training and the labour market*](#).

- It aims to provide European Social Fund managing authorities and stakeholders with ideas and examples to develop or improve approaches to encourage vulnerable young people not in employment, education or training to enter training and the labour market.

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