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The **Skills Research Digest** monitors recently published skills and labour market research relevant to the work of the Department for the Economy (DfE) 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:

- A more optimistic narrative around AI and GenAI, including growing business adoption and a focus on generating value and increasing productivity rather than on job loss.
- The importance of engaging SMEs across the skills and employer landscape, including in technology and green skills adoption, training & development, and diversity & inclusion.
- Increasing recognition of the need to convert young people's positive attitudes towards sustainability into positive attitudes towards careers in related sectors and occupations.
- Continuing focus on international students, particularly in light of their importance to HE finances.

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

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

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16–19 EDUCATION

The Edge Foundation (Edge) published [Edge Future Learning \[EFL\]: Lessons learned](#), based on research undertaken by the University College London (UCL) Faculty of Education & Society in 2022/23.

- As a result of working with some of the most effective schools, colleges and models around the world, Edge developed EFL around three key principles: project-based learning (PBL), real-world learning and community-connected learning.
 - It piloted these approaches with schools/colleges in northeast England in partnership with Ford Next Generation Learning (NGL) and the North East Local Enterprise Partnership.
- The research focuses on the experience of a university technical college and a further education (FE) college and is based on interviews and focus groups with stakeholders, staff and students.
- Central to the pilot's success was the intention and vision to transform teaching and learning to better meet the needs of young people, based on strong senior leadership engagement and clear alignment with the aspirations of EFL and Ford NGL.
 - It required sustained commitment, clear messaging to all staff and buy-in at every level.
- Co-constructing with students, staff, parents and employer partners a 'leaver profile' of knowledge, skills and behaviours needed for future careers had an 'immense' impact.
 - It ensured a consistency of approach, enabled focused conversations with employers and gave young people confidence in their industry-relevance.
 - It was embedded in the curriculum and was a central focus of teaching and learning.
- Enabling all learners to flourish was at the heart of teaching and learning, ensuring: opportunities that supported the interests and aspirations of all students; the foregrounding of multiple pathways post-18; and an environment of reflection that supported students to become self-directed learners.
- PBL was fundamental in transforming the educational experience, fostering the development of teamwork, creativity, problem-solving and communication and supporting careers-related decision-making.
 - It was carefully scaffolded to meet students' needs and abilities; and all projects were rooted in authentic, real-world problems that became more challenging over time.
 - Time was taken to introduce parents to PBL through showcase and student-led events.
 - Time was ringfenced for staff training in PBL, learning from other organisations and developing ideas with industry partners.
- Of central importance was the systematic and informed approach to employer engagement and the fostering of business partnerships premised on mutual benefit.
 - Each institution had people whose role was to focus on employer partnerships, with teachers gradually taking more responsibility once these were established.
- Staff in leadership roles valued the support of Ford NGL coaches who used skilful questioning and prompting to encourage reflection and thinking.

Edge is now supporting a range of different organisations through the Edge Deeper Learning UK network; the three principles have been recast as 'signature practices'.

Speakers for Schools published [Double Disadvantage: Does the decline in quality work experience impact state school students' access to Russell Group universities?](#)

- Findings of analysis in England include:
 - 50% of state school students leave secondary school without having had access to work experience.
 - Evidence of work experience and enrichment activities is used to assess university applications on at least 33% of occasions.
 - The proportion of offers from Russell Group universities dropped from 60% in 2021 to 55% in 2022, making competition fiercer.

- Applicants from affluent areas are nearly six times more likely to have a prestigious university offer, such as from a Russell Group institution, than those living in a disadvantaged area.
- 30% of young people attending state schools/colleges would have welcomed more help from their institution on how to get into university, compared with 13% attending independent schools.
- Recommendations include:
 - **School leaders should:** ensure all young people have fair access to multi-day, high-quality work experience; embed Gatsby Benchmark 7, which ensures encounters with FE and higher education (HE) providers.
 - **Government should** ensure schools/colleges are: adequately funded to support universal access to high-quality work experience and enrichment activities, targeted at more disadvantaged communities; and properly recognised for valuing and prioritising meaningful career education, work experience and volunteering as important ingredients in success beyond school.
 - **Russell Group universities should:** be consistent and transparent about the value of work experience and enrichment activities and signal any positive impact on admission clearly; and extend outreach to more challenging communities to challenge stereotypes and democratise access to valuable information and advice on how to successfully apply.

Edge published [Advancing British Standards? Exploring public attitudes \[in England\] towards a baccalaureate-style 16–18 education system.](#)

- The idea of a baccalaureate has been gaining momentum in recent years, including from the House of Commons Education Select Committee, Greater Manchester’s ‘MBacc’, the independent review of qualifications and assessment in Scotland, and the previous UK Government’s plans to introduce the Advanced British Standard in England.
- Findings from a poll of 2k adults include:
 - 52% think the current education system prepares young people poorly for the world of work; 37% think a school leaver today is more badly prepared than 20 years ago.
 - 88% think education should focus on teaching skills that will be useful for the workplace and 90% for everyday life; 82% that it should encourage exploration of technical/vocational options.
 - 81% think that technical/vocational qualifications should be as respected as ‘academic’ ones, while 32% believe this happens in practice; younger respondents are more likely to say they are already as respected.
 - 78% would support reforms to the education system in line with the Advanced British Standard proposals; 10% would oppose them; support is driven by the proposal for majors and minors – allowing for breadth – and the ability to mix and match ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’ subjects.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING & MATHS (STEM)

The Royal Society and EngineeringUK published [Science Education Tracker 2023: Wave 3](#), a survey of 7,256 11–18 year-olds in state-funded schools/colleges in England; it is the first to include questions about engineering.

- Findings related to post-16 students include:
 - Interest in biology has fallen from 74% to 71% and chemistry from 59% to 55%.
 - 39% agree that science careers are ‘suitable for someone like me’, up from 32% in 2019; the percentage believing that science careers require higher grades has fallen from 78% to 75%.
 - Interest in a STEM career is motivated by pay (42% girls/50% boys), societal benefits (35%/26%) and wanting to help others (37%/18%).

Enginuity published [Scotland’s Future STEM Workforce](#), the first part of a three-phase STEM Skills in Scotland research project on the impact of a decline in birth rate and school leaver numbers.

- The report analyses the availability of school leavers in the next five to ten years, and how many are opting for STEM-based activities.
- The proportion of post-16 learners choosing STEM options in FE/HE, apprenticeships or employment is gradually increasing, although the overall number pursuing STEM subjects is falling, despite a strong government STEM strategy and significant investment.
 - Some categories of STEM-based career are growing significantly, e.g. computer science (+64%) and veterinary science (+120%).

- Engineering grew by just 12%; physical and biological sciences fell by 13%/38% respectively.
- As demand has fallen, the number of FE/HE STEM-based programmes has also fallen (-24%).
- The number of school leavers choosing careers requiring foundations in physical sciences appears to be continuing to stagnate or decline, posing a significant challenge for the future.
- Revitalising interest and investment in STEM education is essential to help Scotland close its skills gaps and realise ambitions for sustained growth and long-term economic sustainability.

Phase two will examine the demand side.

EMPLOYABILITY & CAREERS

The Education Policy Institute (EPI) published [How do we support young people to get in and get on in the world of work?](#)

- The report summarises a roundtable discussion, conducted under Chatham House Rule, involving politicians, civil servants, school leaders and employers.
- It reflects on: what organisational know-how and work-ready attitudes and behaviours look like; how they may be further developed through the education system; and how to build closer relationships between schools, colleges and employers to facilitate workplace experiences and build pipelines of talent.
- Among the conclusions:
 - There is still uncertainty around skills terminology; a common language would be useful both for the education system and employers to support development and measurement of these skills.
 - While the UK Standard Skills Taxonomy will be a potential solution, some called for work to begin on translating our current conception of work-ready attitudes and behaviours into a set of metrics, allowing for the development of standards and qualifications to demonstrate competencies.
 - Employers are a valuable source of resources and opportunities, particularly if they are targeted at the most disadvantaged young people; however, employers need support too.
 - Third sector organisations are a helpful provider of common resources and best practice for employers to draw on; further consideration should be given to how best to support those keen to develop their training opportunities, including through further engagement with England's Careers & Enterprise Company's Employer Standards.
 - To see career readiness and skills development as purely an education issue is to ignore wider societal issues of rising mental health problems, lack of economic opportunity and increasingly sparse youth services.
 - Strong engagement is needed from employers as schools cannot solve their significant challenges alone.
 - Both the curriculum and the accountability system are key to improving career readiness in schools; it is critical to start in primary and link careers to all aspects of the curriculum.
 - Resources should be targeted towards young people who need them most; data collection and sharing and evaluation processes are important; the government must allow greater sharing of national datasets to facilitate this process and drive improvements.

Prospects Luminate published [Early Careers Survey 2024](#), exploring the plans and experiences of 6,102 Prospects website users in 2023, the majority aged 13–34.

- Respondents included: school pupils (4%); sixth form/college students (9%); apprentices/trainees (2%); university students (27%); employed/self-employed (41%); and those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) (15%).
- Key findings include:
 - 54% said money was their biggest challenge (+2ppt on 2022): nearly 50% of those who said their career plans had changed were influenced by financial worries; 50% listed balancing commitments; 48% taking care of their mental health (-2ppt, but -7ppt on 2021).
 - The greatest concerns for prospective students were the cost of living and tuition fees.
 - Engagement with careers advice sessions appears to be rebounding after a dip for all types of activity in 2022, although none is back to 2021 levels; industry and career professionals were top sources of guidance, however disadvantaged groups were less likely to access the resources available.

- 62% said they were fairly or very certain about their career plans (+2ppt, +7ppt on 2021).
- 20% of 2023 graduates were already planning to leave their current employer this year (-20ppt, -16ppt on 2021).
- 54% of ethnic minority graduates felt disadvantaged by their ethnicity in the job application process (+11ppt), compared with 8% of white graduates.
- 15% of female vs 10% of male graduates felt disadvantaged; 20% of respondents felt disadvantaged by their social class, rising to 26% of those whose parents didn't go to university.

Eurofound (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living & Working Conditions) published [Becoming adults: Young people in a post-pandemic world](#), on their plans for the future and the related wellbeing outcomes in the context of the labour market and housing and progress on the implementation of the European Union's (EU's) reinforced Youth Guarantee.

- The report builds on recent Eurofound survey data on the lives of young people since the pandemic, during which the age limit of the EU Youth Guarantee was extended from 25 to 29 years.
- Key findings include:
 - The youth employment rate in the EU is higher than at any time since 2007 and the percentage of those NEET is historically low.
 - Post pandemic, there are signs of improvements in job quality for young people, with fewer involuntary temporary contracts, greater perceived job security and better work-life balance.
 - However, young people are less satisfied with their jobs than older cohorts and would like more autonomy at work; almost 50% want to change jobs within a year, particularly those with jobs that can never be done from home and those with insecure contracts.
 - Most are looking for opportunities for training or further education; traineeships are common, however inequalities – e.g. gender disparities – affect traineeship quality.
 - A mismatch between aspirations and concrete plans for getting a job is associated with a higher risk of depression.
 - Pressures on active labour market policies are lower now the youth employment rate is higher, resulting in an overall sense of delay.
 - In many countries, young mothers are more likely to be NEET than young men, with family responsibilities the biggest reason for being NEET; however, policy measures aimed at young mothers or young women more generally are scarce.
- Policy pointers include:
 - Continued support for the reinforced Youth Guarantee is crucial, especially as youth-related policies have disproportionately emphasised formal education over labour market integration.
 - Increased emphasis may be needed on the gender dimension of the rate of those who are NEET.
 - Strategies should focus on disengaged and vulnerable young people, especially in the contexts of lower urbanisation and neighbourhood deprivation.
 - 'Decent' work must be a focus of youth employment policy – the labour market remains precarious and unfair to young people, given the cost of living and housing costs, and although jobs are available, many jobs are unattractive and badly paid.

The report provides good practice examples from countries including Belgium and Finland.

The Institute of Labor Economics (IZA) published [Are Parents an Obstacle to Gender-Atypical Occupational Choices?](#), focusing on stated parental preferences for their children's occupations, using a large-scale randomised survey with 5,940 adults in Switzerland.

- The surveyed adults were presented with a realistic choice, in which their hypothetical daughter or son had been offered two different training occupations drawn from a random sample of 105 jobs.
 - The aim was to study whether parents give gender-blind career advice to their children or whether they introduce obstacles into their child's path when pursuing atypical roles.
- Results show that adults are gender-neutral when advising a daughter but have a pronounced preference for male-dominated occupations when advising sons.
 - Preferences were almost identical for parents and non-parents and across age cohorts of adults.

PwC and Connectr published the [Youth Employment Index 2024: Helping young people make the most of the green transition](#), covering 38 OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development) economies, including the UK.

- The UK was 22nd out of the 38 economies (down four places from 2023), driven by high proportions of young people in part-time work, significant levels of young people NEET and rising inactivity due to worse mental health.
 - The Netherlands, Switzerland and Iceland were the top three in the index.
- The UK continues to underperform compared to its peers in the proportion of young people NEET.
 - UK GDP could be boosted by 1%/year if the NEET rate in all UK regions matched that of south-west England (7.8%).
- The global economy is going to be shaped by the green transition, but it will need sufficient young people with the required skills and experience.
 - 72% want to work for an employer aligned to sustainability, but barriers to green jobs include career pathway ambiguity, lack of green skills education and misinformation.
 - Government and business need to do more to enable young people to fill these roles.

The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) published [Research into careers in construction](#) commissioned by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) and undertaken with BMG Research between November 2021 and May 2023.

- Across two stages of research, 3,518 people were consulted through online surveys, including 14–18 year-olds, parents and career guidance professionals, plus interviews with 40 construction workers.
 - The aim was to better understand, track and support: attitudes to, attraction to and awareness of the construction industry; perceptions about entry and access to the sector; engagement with construction careers information, advice and guidance; and the influence of CITB activities.
- Key findings include:
 - For those outside the sector, construction was ranked as the joint third industry that young people would most like to work in, alongside education & teaching, engineering and science & pharmaceuticals.
 - 23% of young people said they *would* consider a career in construction, although 21% said they *would never* consider it.
 - The sector was ranked sixth by parents and highly by career guidance professionals; but it was the least popular among potential entrants working in other sectors.
 - Construction workers were attracted to the industry by the interesting and practical nature of the work and opportunities to be creative and see tangible results of their work.
 - New entrants generally had positive experiences of entering the sector due to the informal recruitment and induction processes, supportive colleagues and visible career pathways.
 - Those outside the sector sometimes hold firmly rooted and largely negative perceptions and stereotypical views of careers as being physically demanding, 'outdoorsy' and masculine.
 - Gendered perceptions of construction as a 'male' occupation persist and need to be tackled to improve recruitment of women into the industry.
 - Careers guidance relating to construction was seen to be of good quality: most career guidance professionals felt confident in supporting clients interested in a construction career; and new entrants said that each element of advice was fairly easy to access.
 - Respondents who knew more about construction tended to find it more attractive and vice versa.
 - Career guidance professionals said real contacts, connections and experiences with the sector were the weakest part of their offering, and yet 66% of new entrants, 42% of young people, 53% of parents and 58% of career guidance professionals had a friend or family member with construction experience – more could be done to support potential entrants of all ages to make links with people in construction.

The Institutional Landscape

Cedefop (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training) published [Learning outcomes going global: A multifaceted phenomenon](#), a policy brief produced in partnership with the European Training Foundation (ETF) and UNESCO.

- The concept of learning outcomes is becoming a common basis for almost all national and regional qualifications frameworks worldwide.
 - In vocational education & training (VET), the learning outcomes principle has become an explicit and visible building block – a way to increase transparency, broaden access, improve relevance and put the learner at the centre of the process.
- Strengths of learning outcomes include:
 - They can act as a common language, providing a comprehensive map of national qualifications and relationships between them.
 - They can facilitate learner mobility through recognition of credentials.
 - They are instrumental in defining and communicating skills – including those acquired through non-formal and informal learning – facilitating their use by individuals or employers and enabling further development by individuals and training institutions.
 - The approach clarifies the intention of the teaching and learning process and what is expected from the learner in terms of knowledge, skills and overall competences.
 - It also facilitates, through consistent alignment of teaching, learning and assessment, better design of education and training programmes.
 - Overall, it supports a more learner-centred process, potentially opening up to active, self-directed and problem-based learning.
- Challenges include:
 - The relationships between learning outcomes being written for different purposes
 - Accessibility and comparability
 - The link between learning outcomes and validation of non-formal and informal learning
 - The slow progress in redefining qualifications based on learning outcomes
 - A lack of clarity as to whether the content and profile of a credential or certificate can be presented in terms of learning outcomes.

THE FURTHER EDUCATION & SKILLS SECTOR

The Association of Colleges (AoC) published [Valuing Enrichment: Final report](#), a project funded by NCFE and undertaken with the University of Derby; it is based on data from 109 providers across England and Wales.

- Enrichment activities attract study programme funding and receive Ofsted judgments but are not based on any clear agreement on purpose and scope or any clearly identified resources; access is uneven.
- The report identifies nine different types of enrichment: for health & fitness; general education; technical & vocational; in creative fields; holistic, for low-attaining learners and those with special educational needs and disabilities; for societal participation; for mental health; student-led clubs and societies; and clubs/societies that extend perspectives.
- Five recommendations:
 - **Clear recognition of the value of enrichment through a national guarantee:** enrichment not only develops 'broader skills, attitudes and confidence', contributing to employment and progress, but also contributes to learners' continuation and successful course completion; a clear and expansive definition at national policy level would help raise awareness and support practical activity across colleges.
 - **Equality of access for all learners – enrichment that extends and complements all areas of study:** colleges with a clear vision share an approach to how such programmes relate to the taught, qualification-based curriculum; enrichment is most effective where it is consciously used both to complement and to supplement the taught curriculum across the institution.

- **Opportunities for student participation and agency:** colleges differ in the extent to which enrichment is driven by student choice and provides opportunities to assume greater personal responsibility; groups, clubs and societies can have important roles in personal development and networking but can also provide an important link between colleges and their wider communities.
- **National and local criteria for the success of enrichment:** diversity of college enrichment is a central finding of the study but there is a lack of clear expectations about what it should provide and what constitutes 'good'; criteria need to be broad to accommodate a range of priorities but provide support for those unclear about how to proceed.
- **Resourcing that extends beyond current employability, enrichment and pastoral allowances and pastoral support:** enrichment is important in meeting funding requirements, yet resources are constrained; colleges need adequate, designated resources and the flexibility to invest in ways appropriate to their students' needs.

The Education & Training Foundation published [Further Education and Skills \[FES\]: Changing systems of change](#), the report of a joint project with Saïd Business School, University of Oxford exploring how to build a sustainable and self-improving FES sector.

- FES is critical to both leading and responding to changes in technology, political priorities and demographics, which – combined with a challenging economic climate – are creating risks and opportunities across the UK.
- In order to create the positive feedback loop necessary for FES to become a sustainably self-improving system, four elements need to be in place:
 - **FES effectiveness improves:** providing and continuously improving high-quality training and education, fostering critical thinking and producing learners well prepared for the demands of the workplace; innovation built in; learners are adaptable problem solvers.
 - **FES perceived as successful:** a highly positive reputation locally and nationally, including high employment rates among graduating learners, encouraging more learners to see it as a viable development route and leading to an increased pool of skilled workers; improved collaboration between institutions, industries and government; FES seen as a transformative force for good.
 - **FES attracts people, funding new initiatives and right-touch regulation:** success makes it attractive to a diverse range of learners, faculty and staff, enhancing the learning environment and fostering creativity, critical thinking and innovation; funders are willing to support institutions and regulation is appropriate; institutions have improved financial stability, allowing for longer term strategic planning.
 - **FES is a desirable place to work and study:** the first choice for those looking to develop their own and others' skills; programmes are aligned with industry needs, enhancing employability and promoting better employment outcomes; the visibility of learner success motivates learners to perform better academically.

The second element needs more collective effort and will provide a focus for further discussions.

The AoC published its sixth [International Survey](#), describing the international activity of UK colleges in 2022/23, based on responses from 40 colleges, including three in Northern Ireland.

- 95% of responding colleges engage internationally; supporting student mobility was the main reason (89%), 75% cited diversifying college culture and 74% that it was part of the college's strategy.
 - 68% were seeking to raise the college's profile and 66% to generate commercial income.
 - Two had withdrawn from such work in the last five years: one due to financial reasons; the other due to the UK's current stance on immigration, combined with Brexit.
- The average college international income (excluding overseas campus operations) was £800k.
- China remained the top country for international engagement; 79% of colleges welcomed students from Ukraine – colleges remain places of sanctuary for many.
- The most popular level of course offered by colleges was Level 3 (68%); Level 4 (47%) and Level 5 (39%) were also a key part of the offer for international students, alongside English language proficiency courses (39%).
 - STEM, business and economic subjects remained popular choices for international students.
- 60% of students with a known destination progressed onto an HE programme either within FE or at another HE institution (HEI).

The House of Commons Library published [Financial support for further education students](#), outlining the support available across the UK to help with fees and living costs.

THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) and Advance HE published [Student Academic Experience Survey 2024](#), based on responses from 10,319 full-time undergraduates in the UK.*

- Overall, the results reveal an increasingly positive student experience, including a recovery in value-for-money perceptions to pre-pandemic levels and a marked decline in those whose perception is of 'poor'/'very poor' value.
 - The increase appears to be driven strongly by international students, both from the EU and the rest of the world; in terms of UK nations, only Northern Ireland (NI) has seen a marked annual increase, from 31% in 2023 to 41%, while Scotland has seen a slight fall.
- The cost of living was the most significant concern in terms of negative perceptions of value (44%).
 - Separately, 28% said the cost of living crisis was impacting their studies 'a lot' (+2ppt), and 50% said it was affecting them 'a little'.
- 68% – the highest figure to date – said they were satisfied with timetable contact hours (+2ppt on 2023 and +5ppt on 2022).
- 25% had considered leaving university (-3ppt), with 28% citing 'mental/emotional health' (-1ppt) and 11% 'financial difficulties' (+3ppt).
- Students now spend an average of 42 hours/week in paid work and study, up from 35 hours in 2021.
 - Some subgroups work and study on average 50+ hours/week: those aged 26+, 51.2 hrs; with caring responsibilities, 50.2 hrs; studying health subjects, 55.9 hrs; studying in NI, 50.7 hrs.
- 62% use artificial intelligence (AI) in their studies in a way allowed by their university; men, international students and those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to use AI than women, home students and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.
 - Students who have more contact hours, are studying more intensive courses, commute long distance or do more hours of paid employment are more likely to use AI tools daily, possibly in some cases to save time.

*England: 7,192; NI: 313; Scotland: 625; Wales: 417; EU: 1,006; rest of the world: 766.

HEPI published [analysis](#) suggesting that this year's key finding is that the student experience is bifurcating between those who are relatively well off and can steep themselves in extracurricular activities, consider paid internships and follow a sensible work-life balance and those having to work unhealthy hours just to keep their heads above water financially.

HEPI and TechnologyOne published [A Minimum Income Standard \[MIS\] for Students](#), based on work by Loughborough University's Centre for Research in Social Policy.

- Based on a minimum basket of goods/services constructed with UK-wide student focus groups, the MIS estimates what second- and third-year undergraduates in private rented accommodation need in order to participate fully in the world around them; among the findings:
 - Excluding rent, students need £244 a week; including rent, it's £366.
 - They need £18,632 per annum outside London and £21,774 in London to reach the MIS.
 - For those outside London, the maximum maintenance support falls short by: £8,405 for English students; £6,482 for Welsh; £7,232 for Scottish; and £10,496 for Northern Irish.
 - Outside London, England's support covers just 55% of the MIS; Welsh 65%; Scottish 61%; and Northern Irish 44%.
 - In London, the gap is £8,426 for English students, with the loan covering 61%; for Welsh, it's £6,604/70%; for Scottish, £10,374/52%; for Northern Irish £10,922/50%.
 - To reach MIS: English students must work 19 hours/week at minimum wage; Welsh 14 hours; Scottish 16 hours; Northern Irish 23 hours; many universities recommend working no more than 15 hours during term-time.
 - The parents of an English student receiving minimum maintenance support and not working would have to contribute £13,865 p.a. to ensure MIS; Welsh, £6,482; Scottish, £10,232; Northern Irish, £13,548.
 - Under the current system, parents in England, Scotland and NI are expected to contribute to living costs even if they don't have enough money for a minimum acceptable standard of living.

HEPI published a [blog post](#) summarising the themes emerging from a roundtable discussion of the report.

HEPI published [findings](#) from a survey of 2,043 UK students* exploring their experience of the cost of living crisis.

- 58% say their financial situation has got worse over the last year; 33% are at risk of dropping out as a result.
- 60% say money concerns affected which university they chose to go to.
- If students had an extra £500, 47% would put it into savings and 24% would spend it on groceries; if they had £500 less, 42% would cut back on social activities and 42% would do more paid work.
 - Female students were much more willing than male students to spend more if given more money, but also to cut down if they had less money.
- Wales has the most generous maintenance system; Scotland will overtake England in 2024 due to a new 'special support loan'; the maximum available in NI is the lowest of the four nations.
 - 36% of English students think the system of maintenance support in their country is fair, compared with 59% of Scottish students, 58% of Welsh students and 37% of NI students.
 - Net agreement (those agreeing it's fair minus those disagreeing) was: Wales 49%, Scotland 42%, NI 1%; England -4%.

England: 1,800; Wales: 55; Scotland: 140; NI: 35.

HEPI published ['Dropouts or stopouts or comebackers or potential completers?': Non-continuation of students in the UK, a policy note.](#)

- Findings include:
 - Pre pandemic, the UK had the lowest drop-out rate of developed countries, partly due to historic levels of academic selection at the point of entry, as well as the relatively short length of undergraduate degrees; the Republic of Ireland (RoI) was in second place.
 - Non-continuation fell during the worst of Covid and rose immediately afterwards, while the latest (experimental) data suggest it is now falling again but is not yet back to pre-Covid levels.
 - The likelihood of dropping out varies enormously depending on a student's characteristics, the course and institution studied and the original learning goal.
 - Those more likely to drop out include: mature students; males; Black students; students previously entitled to free school meals (FSM); and disabled students.
 - The factors affecting rates made the UK Government's demand that 'we should have the same high expectations for all students' unfeasible, especially as funding is constrained.
 - Politicians tend to focus on non-continuation as it is one way to gain traction over autonomous universities without directly demanding changes to admissions or curricula, hence rates being incorporated into a number of recent policy initiatives in England.
 - If the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) for England is to be a success, a new approach to non-continuation will be needed, as the LLE encourages people to access HE in small chunks throughout their adult lives.
- Recommendations include:
 - Provide better information to improve the match between expectations and experience.
 - Focus more on living costs and increased maintenance support.
 - Make clever use of big data to enable more personalised support for at-risk students.
 - Respond at institutional-level to both the existing evidence on non-continuation and to bespoke information gathered via structured exit interviews of students leaving before their course ends.
 - Make greater use of staging qualifications, so non-completers can gain some credits that can be used in the labour market or upon returning to study.

The Centre for Economic Performance published [Beyond the enrolment gap: Financial barriers and high-achieving, low-income students' persistence in higher education](#), based on data for France.

- The study estimated the impact of automatically granting generous additional aid to high-achieving, low-income students.
- Findings include: the aid had no effects on these students' persistence, graduation or enrolment, and did not induce switches to higher quality degrees; this suggests non-financial factors explain much of these students' observed attrition over time.

HEPI published [Trans and non-binary student experiences in higher education](#), new UK data to track the experience from application, through study and to life after graduation.

- 24% of trans applicants have experience of care vs 4% of non-trans applicants; on average, they also have lower A level and BTEC grades and are more likely to have a disability.
- 56% of trans applicants feel 'rejected by others' vs 26% of non-trans applicants.
 - However, on some questions such as life satisfaction, the wellbeing gap disappears or decreases while students are studying but reappears or increases once they leave HE.
- Trans/non-binary students are less likely to study business and law but are as or more likely to study STEM subjects; 20% of trans students study social studies vs 13% of not-trans students.
- 50% of trans and 49% of non-binary students have considered withdrawing from HE vs 28% of the whole student population, most commonly because of mental health issues.
 - In 2020/21 16% of trans/non-binary students dropped out vs 10% of not-trans/non-binary; 75% of those who completed gained a first/2:1 vs 80% of their peers.
- Trans/non-binary students earn on average £2k less 15 months after graduation than their peers; they are less likely to be employed in managerial and professional roles.
- Despite these challenges, many trans/non-binary students were having a positive HE experience.

HEPI is encouraging HE providers to adopt an intersectional approach to support, considering the varied identities and needs of trans/non-binary students.

The University & College Union (UCU) published [Non-visibly Disabled* PGR \[postgraduate researcher\] Experiences of Studies and Careers](#), based on a survey of 135 PGRs and six interviews.

- Survey findings include:
 - 53% don't feel able to balance their work and personal life.
 - 36% are happy with the support they receive.
 - 44% think supervisors have been allocated enough time to implement their adjustment needs.
 - 34% say their university has provided resources to meet their adjustment needs.
 - 44% feel they were given enough support to plan for their upgrade and 43% for their viva.
- PGRs face challenges accessing help as they are both students and employees, but systems are mainly designed for undergraduates; recommendations for universities include:
 - Recognise that reasonable adjustments at PhD level are likely to be more similar to staff than student adjustments.
 - Consider how to better provide support and advice for students who are starting businesses, especially in consulting or the tertiary sector.
 - Consider what support they can offer PGRs in finding fairly remunerated, part-time, flexible, accessible work, especially to support career progression within academia.
 - Communicate clearly which postdocs and research positions offer opportunities for flexible working and working from home.

**Suffering from e.g. mental health conditions, specific learning difficulties or chronic illnesses.*

HIGHER EDUCATION (HE): WIDENING PARTICIPATION

Universities UK (UUK) published [findings](#) from a survey of 6k UK graduates and 4k non-graduates aged 24–40, exploring the impact of university on people from all walks of life, and particularly on those who are first in their family (FitF) to go to university.

- Survey findings include:
 - 73% agreed their degree gave them the confidence to apply for jobs without feeling like an imposter, despite 65% saying that 'imposter syndrome' had made them think twice about going.
 - 78% credited university with making them more confident, 76% with giving them broader life experiences and 74% independent life skills, and 60% with expanding their social network.
 - 56% said going to university was a good decision, 30% that it was their best ever decision.
 - However, without their main source of financial support, 41% couldn't have afforded to go to university and 14% would have had to go to a university closer to home or live with family.

- [Analysis of Higher Education Statistics Agency \(HESA\) data](#) reveals that:
 - The total number of FitF students grew from 526,460 in 2012/13 to 651,965 in 2021/22 (+24%).
 - Students and graduates who are Black, Asian & minority ethnic British or of other minority backgrounds are disproportionately more likely than their white peers to be FitF.
 - FitF graduates in England are less likely to have attended an independent school (4% vs 14%) and to have a parent working in a higher managerial occupation (40% vs 85%), and more likely to have been eligible for FSM (10% vs 2%).
 - FitF students are more likely to choose university subjects that are perceived to have a higher earnings potential and/or a clear path from study to employment.
 - The proportion of FitF students at Oxbridge is 18%, far lower than 48% for the sector as a whole.

The research was part of UUK's [100 Faces campaign](#), stories of FitF student and graduate achievements.

HE: INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

UUK International published [International Graduate Outcomes 2024](#) in collaboration with QS, based on a survey of 10.5k respondents from 196 countries/territories, attending HEIs in GB*.

- Key findings include:
 - 59% chose to study in the UK due to the perceived high quality of its universities.
 - 73% feel that the Graduate route visa met their expectations, reporting higher job satisfaction compared to those on other visa types.
 - Despite high satisfaction with their educational experience, 53% felt more could be done in terms of career support and professional placements.
 - 71% feel a lasting connection with the UK, and 57% are more likely to engage in business with the UK due to their educational experiences.
 - Graduates on the Graduate visa contribute significantly to the UK economy, with many working in key sectors such as healthcare and education.
- Recommendations to institutions:
 - Improve career support service offerings to support international students in their early career journey both in the UK and in other countries.
 - Collaborate with employers to ensure skills are embedded in the curriculum and that they are developing the capabilities that the UK and their origin economies most need.
 - Work with the government to realise the benefits of the Graduate visa to ensure that it helps the UK to remain competitive in the global market for talent.
 - Leverage alumni communities to share their stories with future students and support them in their aspirations to become lifelong partners to the UK.
 - Champion the diversity of student and faculty communities to enhance the role institutions play as knowledge-sharing, multicultural microcosms.

*87% in England, 8% in Wales and 5% in Scotland.

INTO published [Global Agent Survey 2024](#), based on responses from 1,240 recruitment agents in 66 countries exploring trends in international students' applications.

- Eight key themes were identified:
 - 'Traditional destination flux': varying degrees of positive agent sentiment for Australia, Canada, the UK and the US
 - The rising importance of affordability in student decision-making
 - The emerging popularity of alternative destination countries, with European and Asian destinations capturing greater interest
 - Students applying to more universities and destinations, supported by globally focused counselling services; 10% of agents now send students to over 100 institutions
 - The majority of agencies counsel students towards multiple destinations – there are comparatively few single destination specialists
 - Agents rely on rankings as a proxy for quality with a preference for global rankings lists, e.g. QS

- Service and especially timely responses to enquiries and applications continue to dominate the most important factors for a productive relationship with institutional partners
- The extent to which agents are receiving training and accreditation as the global sector embraces more regulation.

The International Higher Education Commission published [Data Matters in Higher Education](#), identifying the main issues arising from significant deficiencies in the UK HE data landscape.

- Ongoing problems with data availability and timeliness hinder effective policymaking and strategic planning for the longer term, particularly relevant to international students; the problems include:
 - HESA provides comprehensive, high-quality data, but there is a systematic 1.5-year lag (currently two years) in making the data available; and the Graduate Outcomes survey data are not representative for international students.
 - The Home Office quarterly student visa statistics are only broadly indicative of student study intentions; significant other data sets are not shared or not shared in a timely fashion.
 - Devolution has opened up regional differences in recording of student data; a rebalance is needed in the relationship between HESA and the statutory organisations with which it works.
- Recommendations to drive alignment between universities, private sector and government include:
 - Addressing the lack of an effective data architecture for the official statistics collected on behalf of the government.
 - Accelerating the implementation of the Data Futures programme to provide in-year data collection and reporting.
 - A commitment to address the low response rate of international students to the Graduate Outcomes survey.
 - Systematising and embedding access to private sector data in the national overseas student data ecosystem to enhance the insights provided.
 - Mandating an existing sector body or establishing a new body to provide timely and easily accessible relevant data to enable institutions to make effective plans as required by regulators.
 - Requiring the Home Office to share with universities the detailed information they have on overseas students and their visa status.
 - The value of education exports needs to be a separate category in the Balance of Payments.

London Economics published [The Exchequer benefits and costs associated with the Graduate route visa](#), research commissioned by HEPI, Kaplan International Pathways and the National Union of Students (NUS).

- There were an estimated 66,410 Graduate route visa holders in the UK in 2022–23 (the first full year of the scheme): 56,460 international graduates educated in UK HE and 9,950 dependants.
 - For every ten main visa holders, there were under two dependants – a ratio that will decline significantly due to the rules tightening in January 2024; the number of dependents is already down 80%, significantly reducing the costs outlined below.
- Benefits and costs:
 - The benefit to the UK in tax revenues is estimated at £588m in 2022–23 (£10,410 per main visa holder); these figures exclude wider and longer term benefits, e.g. if graduates choose to remain in the UK beyond their current visa through the Skilled Worker route.
 - The costs to the Exchequer in terms of public service provision are estimated at £517m (£9,160 per main visa holder).
 - The estimated net benefit is therefore £70m (£1,240 per graduate), disproving claims of a financial deficit.

HEPI published data commissioned from London Economics showing [the value of international students to each UK parliamentary constituency](#).

- In the three top-performing constituencies – Leeds Central & Headingley, Sheffield Central and Newcastle upon Tyne Central & West – one year’s intake is worth £0.5b in economic benefits.
- The benefits for the top 20 constituencies combined – 17 in England, one in Scotland, one in Wales and one in NI – total £8.3b; £88m for the bottom 20.
- The total UK gross benefits of one year’s intake amount to £41.9b; after taking account of the impact on public services, the total net benefits are £37.4b.

Jisc and the Portulans Institute, Washington DC, published [Digital country profiles: International students' digital experiences in relation to their home country's civil digital infrastructure](#), covering Nigeria, India, Pakistan and China.

- When supporting international students to access UK HE:
 - Students shouldn't be treated as a homogenous group: the data illustrate the differences between countries in terms of their civil digital infrastructure and the ways in which digital is accessed and used in educational contexts.
 - Differences shouldn't be considered as deficits: more is gained when those working in UK HE reflect on the UK technology-enabled learning environment as only one of many ways in which digital technologies can be integrated into teaching and learning.
- Key recommendations include:
 - **Pre-arrival:** consider how digitally mediated teaching and learning has been accessed and used by students in their home country and clearly explain how it will be accessed and used pedagogically when they arrive in a UK HE setting.
 - **On arrival:** tell international students what digital platforms, technologies, resources and apps are available to them and how to access them on and off campus.
 - **During the course:** consider whether additional digital capabilities support could reduce digital shocks and be curious about what digital resources, prior experiences and communication methods students are familiar with, using these insights as a basis for supporting them to engage and move to using technology in new ways.

The UK Council for International Student Affairs published [Equity, Inclusion and Innovation: A sustainable international student policy](#), outlining recommendations for governments to shape immigration and other policy matters related to the international student experience in the UK.

- The recommendations aim to ensure that the UK's global image remains positive and welcoming for prospective and current students and supports the continued success of the whole education sector:
 - Promote the UK as a welcoming and inclusive country to study in, using positive language in cross-government policy and campaigns that acknowledges the strength and contributions of international students and their dependants to their communities.
 - Implement central data collection mechanisms to build a comprehensive evidence base on migration data for international students and their dependants.
 - Develop fair and equitable immigration policies for international students across UK education.
 - Transform digital tools for immigration to enhance the customer experience for international students and education sponsors.
 - Support careers and employability opportunities, recognising their intrinsic value to the UK's global education offer for international students and graduates.

The House of Commons Library published [International students in UK higher education](#), a research briefing covering student numbers, government policy and economic impact.

GRADUATES & GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

The Centre for Global Higher Education (CGHE) published [Understanding Graduate Skills Demand in Britain through the Work People Do: New evidence and policy implications](#).

- Demand for skills matched rising graduate supply 1997–2017, suggesting that it was the expansion rather than external factors that drove demand.
- The tasks workers perform are directly linked with qualifications needed for jobs and the wages paid.
 - Graduates have maintained their rank within the job skills hierarchy, demonstrating that demand has held its ground; employers pay a substantial and stable premium for graduate-level jobs, highlighting the continued economic value of HE.
 - Approximately 40% of the graduate wage premium can be attributed to the differences in tasks performed by graduates compared to non-graduates, emphasising the significant contributions of work content for pay.
- The mass expansion of HE has significantly enhanced regional requirements for graduate skills and consequently increased wages, affirming the critical role of educational growth in regional economies.
- Despite these positive trends, the growth in graduate skills requirements has shown signs of slowing since 2006, suggesting new challenges and shifts in the demand for high-skilled labour.

- Policy implications include:
 - The significant impact of HE expansion on the British economy and the stable, high value that employers place on 'graduate-level' tasks highlights a need for long-term, persistent economic growth strategies for high-skilled sectors.
 - Universities must continue to offer curricula and programmes that equip students from diverse backgrounds with the knowledge and complex skills needed to contribute to society and succeed in high-skilled jobs.
 - The potential decoupling of the growth in numbers and the utilisation of graduates suggests an even more pressing need for a strategy that considers both skills supply and demand.
 - Ongoing debate is needed on strengthening non-graduate routes into high-skilled jobs; the significant impact of HE expansion underlines the positive impact of a strong educational strategy.

UUK published [Graduate employment outcomes](#), analysing the employment and earnings of graduates in England, how they change over time and how they compare with those who chose employment over university.

- Earnings data from age 17 to 31 show most graduates rapidly catch up with and overtake non-graduates, despite having fewer years in the labour market, and this difference is sustained throughout their careers.
 - The salary difference increases throughout their careers, even after the costs of studying and higher taxes are factored in.
- Graduates earn more than non-graduates across all regions where universities are located.
- On average, earnings are higher regardless of socioeconomic background; those who received FSM will typically earn 33% more by age 31 than non-graduates who could have gone to university.

Prospects Luminate published [5 graduate development trends to watch in 2024](#), analysis of the Institute of Student Employers' (ISE's) [Student Development Survey 2024](#), which is based on the views of 139 employers. [The full report is available to ISE members only.]

- **Dissatisfaction with pay:** 51% reported graduates/apprentices leaving for better pay, up from 40% in 2023 and 2022, and 25% in 2021 and 2020; before the cost of living crisis, progression opportunities were more important.
- **Declining graduate retention:** 70% retained their graduates after three years, down from 83% in 2016; those of Black heritage and women were particularly hard to retain; 32% reported retaining former interns at a higher rate.
- **Return to face-to-face work:** 9% of graduates were going into the office every day, up from 5% in 2023; none was working remotely (down from 2%); 47% of employers thought in-person development had the highest impact.
- **Declining career readiness:** 49% strongly agreed/agreed that graduates were career ready when hired, down from 54% in 2023; 25% thought the same of school/college leaders (39%); self-awareness and resilience were the key areas of concern.
- **Human-centric approach:** 97% of employers offered new graduates a buddy/peer support scheme and 85% mentoring; 64% were offering more support for mental health issues, with 80% giving line managers training and support in this area.

IZA published [Gender Differences in Graduate Degree Choices](#), based on administrative data from the RoI.

- The study also used information on post-degree earnings to evaluate the extent to which degree choices influence gender gaps in graduate earnings.
- Findings include:
 - There are systematic and substantial differences by gender in choice of graduate field, even when taking account of the undergraduate programme attended and a large set of controls measuring academic interests and aptitudes.
 - Female graduates are around 20% less likely to pursue further study in STEM fields and more likely to enter teaching and health programmes.
 - These choices exacerbate early career gender gaps in earnings; there is an 8% gender gap in earnings at age 33 for those who pursued a graduate degree, with the choice of graduate programme explaining around 15% of that gap.

HE: TEACHING, RESEARCH & INSTITUTIONS

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) published [Evaluating Excellence: TEF \[Teaching Excellence Framework\] 2023 submission and panel statement analysis](#), providing analysis broken down by features of excellence.

- The analysis explores what can be learnt about outstanding and impactful practice in relation to the core features of the student experience: teaching, learning and assessment; course content and delivery; research, innovation and employer engagement; staff development and academic practice; learning environment and academic support; learning resources; and student engagement.

Only providers in England participated in TEF 2023, although providers in NI, Scotland and Wales can participate on a voluntary basis. The analysis is of use to all UK providers.

Advance HE published [Teaching Excellence Framework 2023: Patterns of excellence](#), mapping the submissions of a sample of 40 providers that achieved a Gold award in 2023. [The full report is available to members only.]

- Features common to Gold achievers include:
 - The prevalence of whole-institutional strategies
 - The proactive use of data to support strategic approaches to managing areas of poor performance
 - Adopting a strategic approach to evidence and evaluation through the systematised collection of data, performance monitoring and evidence of impact, particularly of educational gains
 - The commonality of approach to educational gains, but nuanced through alignment with the provider's particular mission or approach
 - A multifaceted and future-focused approach to success, going beyond developing students' success during their time in HE and as graduates, to prepare them to make a successful contribution to society
 - Taking a more targeted approach to continuing professional development (CPD) to ensure consistency of teaching excellence and the allocation of resources
 - Evidence of a greater level of student partnership in quality assurance and enhancement
 - Maximising the student experience for all students with targeted interventions
 - Personal tutoring as a key mechanism for the development of student-centred relationships and personalised support.

England's Office for Students (OfS) published [Stepping up: Approaches to strategic improvement described in submissions to the Teaching Excellence Framework \(TEF\) 2023](#).

- The report analyses how 31 providers that achieved a higher TEF rating in 2023 have been planning, implementing and evaluating improvements to their students' experiences and outcomes; findings include:
 - A range of operational frameworks have been used, including for teaching, curriculum design and student assessment; in the best examples, frameworks illustrate changes to practice and their impact is evaluated through internal and external data.
 - Some have explicitly changed the scope and content of their educational provision during the TEF period, explaining them in relation to improved impact on students.
 - They all refer to ways in which they have developed staff whose roles relate to student education, experience and outcomes; Advance HE fellowships play an important role in structuring their development.
 - The development of resources, estate and infrastructure has been significant, with digital resources and online infrastructure a high priority, resulting in changes to teaching and learning.
 - There are strong accounts of ways in which providers are embedding working with students as partners, moving beyond simply including representatives on committees; most also highlight the importance of strong relationships with alumni, who can act as advisers and mentors.
 - Partnerships are important, including academic, industry-related and civic, although more could be done to evaluate their impact on students.
 - Many have improved their promotion and reward frameworks to improve the status of teaching, innovation and education-focused leadership.
 - Annual awards for staff, some or all of which are voted for by students, provide valuable opportunities to celebrate success and promote innovation and good practice; providers also highlight institutional awards and rankings.

England's OfS published [Educational gains explored: Independent report on higher education providers' approaches to educational gains in the Teaching Excellence Framework \(TEF\) 2023, analysing the approaches taken by 51 providers rated Gold for 'student outcomes'](#).

- Educational gains are core to providers' missions and stated values; they benefit both individual students and communities more broadly.
 - Articulations can include – but are not limited to – a set of core graduate skills and attributes, which remain dynamic in the context of rapid changes in society, technology and the workplace.
 - Educational gains are broader than learning gains, including benefits such as building new networks and personal, cultural and careers-related opportunities.
- The focus can be on gains that are comprehensive (shared by all), targeted (e.g. at a specific demographic group) and personalised (curated for individuals); these are not mutually exclusive.
- The knowledge, skills and attributes developed through core academic and professionally orientated study remain central and include both disciplinary and interdisciplinary gains.
- Curriculum design, pedagogic teaching approaches and resources are all of central importance in maximising outcomes.
 - Co-curricular and extracurricular activities, including connecting with alumni, employers and civic society, provide a menu of opportunities for students to extend their educational gains.
 - Providers are committed to offering support in a range of areas for different students and groups, including financial and mental health and wellbeing support.
- Measuring educational gains is complex; where a clearly defined set of gains is foregrounded, appropriate metrics can be selected as proxies; however, actual gains will be broader.
 - Measuring distance travelled is also complex, but in some contexts can be estimated through proxy measures.
- Students can have a proactive role in articulating, curating, tracking and measuring their own gains, both within and beyond the curriculum.
 - Provider stakeholders, including employers and their representatives, can also make a meaningful contribution to both articulating and measuring educational gains.
- While no single, sector-wide approach to defining and measuring educational gains is proposed by the guidelines or the providers themselves, the value of articulating the depth and range of gains achieved within their particular contexts resonates.
 - Articulating gains reflects benefits to students that are deeper and wider than gaining qualifications and graduate employment.
- There is now an opportunity for the sector to share good practices, including the articulation of educational gains as being both personal and collective

QAA published [When Quality Assurance Meets Innovation in Higher Education](#), findings from a Collaborative Enhancement Project led by the New Model Institute for Technology & Engineering (NMITE).

- The project involved researchers from Arden University, UCL, University of the Arts Bournemouth, the Engineering & Design Institute and Dyson Institute of Engineering & Technology, and included a literature review, a survey of 176 staff members from 65 UK HE providers and six focus groups.
 - The work was motivated by the project team's experience of working across a range of institutions of different sizes, ages and foci, and its observations of the way in which changes during the pandemic enabled more frictionless innovation and change.
- Key drivers of innovation include student satisfaction, inclusivity and the need to meet the needs of changing student populations.
 - Effective innovation is most likely when academics work alongside quality teams in a constructive and collaborative way.

QAA Scotland published [An Evaluation of 20 Years of the Enhancement Themes 2003–23](#), research commissioned by the Scottish Funding Council into the impact of activities on the experience of students in Scotland and how the work has influenced approaches globally.

- A detailed review of 'notable achievements' has key messages for policymakers, including: aligning activities to national strategic ambitions; focusing on impact not number of outputs; and prioritising the improvement of student outcomes and long-term impact.

QAA Scotland also published [Evaluation of the Impact of the Resilient Learning Communities Enhancement Theme](#), a set of HEI reports including an overview of key outputs and outcomes.

- The 'resilient learning communities' theme spanned the pandemic and had significant impact in helping HEIs to pivot learning, teaching and assessment strategies in 2020 and move to a blended approach in 2021/22.
 - Its overarching topics changed over its three years, leading to different emphasis on the following as it progressed: community and belonging; supporting staff and student success; equality, diversity and inclusion; and flexible, accessible learning.
- Although responding to the pandemic was not the theme's original intention, as it was designed pre Covid, it was significant in supporting HEIs to work together to shape their responses to it.
 - It also helped to develop a better understanding of community and sense of belonging for students.

Advance HE published [How do 'care' or 'pastoral support' activities contribute to core strategic outcomes in higher education?](#). [The full report is available to members only.]

- The aims were to: define the characteristics and activities of 'support'; understand the impact of providing support on 'support givers'; understand the importance of support work on organisational effectiveness; and explore possible implications on organisations and identify opportunities for organisational re-design.
- Literature review findings included:
 - There are tangible benefits for students and staff receiving support, but an absence of structural recognition and reward in organisations for support or care, with activities often carried out by women; this compounds the impact on colleagues' wellbeing and retention.
 - Impactful support is contextualised, authentic, relational and 'boundaried'; some aspects of support are codified in organisations and most frequently the role of the personal tutor is used for students.
 - Generally, there is a lack of recognition of support given and received in informal spaces, both to students and colleagues.
- Three recommendations: importantly, question assumptions and beliefs around this work; co-create a shared understanding of the importance of care; and build relational capability.

The OECD published [Building Competencies for Digital and Green Innovation in Higher Education](#), an 'Education Spotlight' by the European Commission/OECD Education & Innovation Practice Community.

- HE systems have a vital role to play in cultivating competencies including advanced technical skills, deep disciplinary knowledge and cross-cutting skills such as critical thinking and creativity.
- Individuals with higher education are more likely to engage in innovative activities, and the correlation between HE attainment and improved numeracy, literacy and problem-solving skills in technology-rich environments is clear.
 - Substantial differences in skill levels of HE graduates across countries show that there is much to learn about how HE builds competencies effectively.
- Key lessons and examples of policy and practice are presented, gathered from [analysis](#) published in March [see Skills Research Digest Q1 2024], case studies and two international peer learning events.
 - A workshop with Finland focused on two strategies: widening attainment by increasing the number of HE graduates to at least 50% of young adults by 2030; and democratising HE through Digivisio 2030 – a national digital service platform designed to enhance flexible HE learning opportunities by promoting institutional collaboration.

The British Academy published [Media, Screen, Journalism and Communication Studies: Provision in UK Higher Education](#), the latest report in its 'State of the Discipline' series.

- Between 2012 and 2018, undergraduate student numbers increased by 7%, followed by a 2% drop between 2019 and 2021.
 - Subject-based trends vary, with media studies undergraduate enrolments growing by 5% between 2019 and 2021, while cinematics & photography decreased by 5%; enrolments in journalism fell by 21% between 2012 and 2021.
 - The proportion of undergraduate students at Russell Group universities grew by 141% between 2012 and 2021.

- Overall postgraduate taught numbers increased by 72% between 2012 and 2021, while research numbers grew by 31%.
 - London and the South East are disproportionately attractive regions at postgraduate taught level, with 45% of students.
 - 54% of postgraduate taught students in 2021 were domiciled outside the UK and numbers of non-EU domiciled students have grown by 106% in absolute terms since 2012, although enrolments dropped in 2021/22.
- Graduates are highly literate in media and digital skills that are transferable to a broad range of industries, particularly the creative industries sector, which has grown at 1.5 times the rate of the wider UK economy over the past decade.
 - The top two destinations in 2021/22 for graduates from the field were information & communication (28%) and professional, scientific & technical activities (12%).
- The profile of academic staff in the field is shifting; female staff comprise higher proportions among younger age groups and an increasing proportion of female professors (49% of professors in 2021).
 - The proportion of staff identifying as white has fallen from 87% in 2012 to 83% in 2021.

UUKi published [Managing risk and developing responsible transnational education \(TNE\) partnerships](#), co-authored with the British Council.

- While the risk and security challenges that UK TNE providers encounter may be increasing in quantity and broadening in scope, there are practical steps universities can take to create partnerships built on trust and mutual understanding.
- All phases of a TNE partnership – from inception to winding down, teaching out, or termination – must be underpinned by an integrated approach to managing risk across six key areas: financial risk; reputational risk; academic freedom and freedom of speech; security considerations; relationship and personnel management; and cyber, intellectual property (IP) and data management.

HEPI published [How should undergraduate degrees be funded? A collection of essays](#) focusing on England and Scotland.

- Contributors include: the Russell Group; the NUS; the Engineering Professors' Council; Lord David Willetts and Lord Jo Johnson, both former ministers for universities & science in England; Reform Scotland; and the president and vice-chancellor of the University of the Arts, London.
- Two 'baseline scenarios' are also provided by London Economics, covering the cost of the current undergraduate degree funding system in England and in Scotland.
- Separate documents provide:
 - [Analysis of policy proposals](#) by London Economics.
 - [Analysis of polling from potential students](#) by UCAS, investigating the potential impact of the different models on application rates.

The National Centre for Universities & Business published [Arresting the decline: Unlocking the potential of university-SME interaction in the UK](#), based on insights from research and data.

- In recent years the level of university-SME interaction has at worst declined and at best stagnated.
 - University income from SME interactions would have been 29% higher if the pre-2020 trend had continued.
- Issues hindering interactions include: universities' reduced capacity to invest in longer/lower return activities; and the loss of European structural and investment funds.
 - Universities recognise the importance of growing SME interaction but are unsure of how to prioritise their efforts to maximise impact.
- Recommendations to policymakers, funders and institutions:
 - Set out a clear vision and plan for the role of SMEs in the UK economy and for what their interactions with partners can help to achieve.
 - Create a positive and long-term funding and policy framework to enable SMEs to gain the support and capacity to collaborate with key partners, including universities.
 - Harness the networks that universities have built, to be one of the key delivery partners to support SMEs.

AI & TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATION

Policy Connect published [Digitally enhanced blended learning: leveraging the benefits of technology in Higher Education](#), following an inquiry by the Higher Education Commission.

- The report considers how blended learning can 'widen participation, enhance student outcomes and modernise educational delivery'.
- It presents a holistic approach for successful implementation, offering 12 recommendations to refine and elevate current approaches, covering aspects including:
 - The importance of leadership and strategic oversight
 - The digital capabilities of staff and the provision of support
 - Equitable access to technology for learning and student experience
 - Employability for the modern workforce
 - Use and procurement of educational technology
 - Regulation and quality assurance of emerging practice.

Jisc published [Student perceptions of generative AI \[GenAI\] based on insights from 200 learners across UK FE and HE, an update on findings from an August 2023 report](#).

- Expectations of using GenAI have shifted over the last nine months as learners have increasingly realised the importance of acquiring GenAI skills for their future careers.
 - Most are using free versions of tools as well as AI features within social platforms; some are willing to pay for tools that aid accessibility and support neurodiversity, plus career-focused tools.
- The key changes since August 2023 are:
 - GenAI is being used increasingly as a collaborative tool to coach and support active learning and critical thinking, rather than just for providing answers.
 - Demand is growing for education to integrate GenAI across the curriculum to reflect the AI-enabled world we live and work in.
 - Learners are increasingly concerned about equity, bias and accessibility issues and want educators to address these in a safe, inclusive and responsive way.
 - Learners expect educators to be able to use GenAI competently, to integrate it comprehensively across education and to implement policy to ensure fair and effective use.

Jisc launched an [AI maturity toolkit for tertiary education](#), providing advice, guidance and resources for leaders to better understand where they are and where they want to get to.

- The five key stages of AI maturity are:
 - **Approaching and understanding:** interested in AI and understanding how it has impacted or is transforming other sectors
 - **Experimenting and exploring:** initial guidance produced; experimenting and piloting within existing processes and with existing, AI-enabled tools; a supportive data culture emerging; responsible AI processes established
 - **Operational:** institutional principles established; a systemic approach to skills/literacy; institution-wide use of everyday AI; task-specific AI used for some processes (e.g. chatbots)
 - **Embedded:** AI is embedded in strategy; AI considered for all new systems/processes; mature processes to manage the lifecycle of AI products, including procurement and monitoring
 - **Optimised/transformed:** supporting learning that optimises opportunities and outcomes for all; the right tasks automated, freeing staff time for creativity and human interaction.

The World Economic Forum published [Shaping the Future of Learning: The role of AI in Education 4.0](#), developed by a global coalition of education experts, practitioners, policymakers and business leaders.

- If managed well, technology offers a unique opportunity to help education systems enable 'Education 4.0' – a comprehensive framework of key transformations that will provide young learners with the abilities, skills, attitudes and values fit for the future.
 - However, the complex process of facilitating learning requires more than mere dissemination of information and AI should serve to enhance, not replace, the role of the teacher.

- The paper provides insight into AI's potential to address challenges in education systems through:
 - **Personalised learning content and experiences**, catering to diverse student needs and enabling tailored educational journeys for each learner
 - **Refined assessment and decision-making processes**, promising more accurate evaluations and insights into student progress
 - **Optimisation of teacher roles** through augmentation and automation of tasks, alleviating admin burdens and empowering educators to focus more on personalised instruction and mentorship
 - **Integration of AI into educational curricula**, presenting an opportunity for teaching both with and about AI, equipping students with essential skills, discernment and knowledge for the future.
- Illustrative case studies highlight some of the learnings thus far in a 'frontier field'; they include:
 - AI-powered digital textbooks – South Korea
 - AI tutor project – UAE in collaboration with partners including Microsoft
 - Skill building with virtual mentors – West Africa
 - Computational thinking & AI – Uruguay
 - School cyber security challenges (careers resources) – Australia
 - AI for youth entrepreneurship curriculum – Europe.

Jisc published [Extended reality \[XR\] in learning and teaching: Report 2023/24](#), exploring the level of interest, investment and adoption of XR across the UK's tertiary sector, based on 157 responses from 110 institutions mostly in England, 55% in FE and 39% in HE.

- 78% had invested in XR; 55% said they were getting 'moderate to extensive' use out of it.
 - This compares with a 2019 study when 54% said that augmented reality (AR)/virtual reality (VR) was being used by one or two departments.
- In FE, XR is mainly being used for teaching in health, public services, social care and STEM; HE also uses it across arts, humanities and social sciences.
 - 34% in FE and 41% in HE believe that XR helps 'prepare for life and work'.
- Barriers to use include cost, time and a lack of specialist skills among practitioners; accessibility is also a concern, as is sustainability, with the high turnover of devices as the technology develops.
- There is a need for better understanding and more evidence on its use and impact.
 - FE organisations in particular want more involved advice, guidance and training; HEIs want more resources and sector insights, potentially due to more established infrastructure and funding.

The report includes a number of 'stories from the XR community' and makes recommendations around evidencing impact and fostering collaboration.

The University of Glasgow published [Policy and practice recommendations for augmented \[AR\] & mixed reality \[MR\]](#), summarising a two-year, Royal Society of Edinburgh funded project.

- The project explored the nature of AR and MR technology, the theories underpinning them, and the ethical and legal questions prompted by such new technology.
- Recommendations include: policymakers should integrate education about AR/MR and their benefits and risks into 'critical thinking curricula in schools' and 'more urgently, into a campaign of digital literacy for adults'.

Jisc published [Digital sustainability in tertiary education: trends, challenges and sector insights](#), based on a survey of 98 members, 66% in HE.

- 45% of HE respondents say their institutions have net zero targets for 2035 or earlier; in contrast, 56% of FE respondents have sustainability objectives, yet haven't set net zero targets.
 - The top actions being taken to ensure digital sustainability in both HE and FE are policies for key stages of the IT product lifecycle.
- The eight biggest digital sustainability needs are: a platform for online collaboration; advice on overcoming financial barriers; knowing where to start; upskilling staff and students; advice with measuring indirect digital emissions; dashboard utilisation and data analytics; increased leadership awareness; and measuring digital emissions.

A five-stage roadmap for digital sustainability support is provided, plus best practice and strategies.

CGHE published [EdTech in Higher Education: Empirical Findings from the Project 'Universities and Unicorns: Building Digital Assets in the Higher Education Industry'](#), funded by the Economic & Social Research Council.

- The research studied universities, EdTech start-up companies and investors in EdTech to gain insights into the digitalisation of HE and its political economy.
 - The aim was to trace the flow of ideas, strategies and actions between these actors and to understand how and why the EdTech industry is developing as it is.
- Key findings include:
 - EdTech in HE is less advanced than presented by the industry and policy discourse: all players are struggling to make user data valuable and useful; digitalisation and datafication mean more work and higher costs for universities; and legacy software and 'big tech' seem to dominate the sector rather than the EdTech industry.
 - EdTech aims and practices require more transparency, participants want more democratic data governance and EdTech needs to support rather than challenge universities.
 - Universities, EdTech companies and investors in EdTech also share some aims, although there are substantial differences between their goals.

The Workplace

RECRUITMENT

The Open University (OU) reported [findings](#) from its survey of employers, focusing on the recruitment and retention of 16–24 year-olds.

- 46% are struggling to recruit young people and 53% are struggling to retain them; 72% have seen a shift in young people's values and priorities in the workplace in the last three years.
- 58% said there is a mismatch between skill levels and employer expectations, with 54% reporting a decline in transversal skills (e.g. communication, teamwork, time management) and 55% technical skills.
 - Many attribute the mismatch to the pandemic: 51% to the lack of work experience; 44% to the lack of social and work/study interaction; 31% to the lack of opportunity to work with and learn from colleagues.
- The top five benefits requested by young people in the past three years are: flexible working (47%); increased salary (46%); hybrid working opportunities (42%); wellbeing support (24%); and mentoring or shadowing opportunities (24%).
 - The top learning & development (L&D) opportunities requested are: accredited short courses (31%); mentoring or coaching (30%); informal online courses (29%); vocational qualifications (25%); and apprenticeships (24%).
- 54% of organisations don't have any specific initiatives, skills programmes or workplace adjustments for different groups, including those under 25.

Hays plc published [findings](#) from a February–March 2024 survey on interview experience, with 11,900 responses from employers and employees across the UK in a range of sectors, types and sizes of organisation.

- Many employers are falling short in providing a positive experience during the interview process and are consequently losing out on talent:
 - The main reasons for a negative experience are: poor communication and a lack of clarity in the steps involved (40%); unprepared interviewers (37%); lack of structure to the interview process (36%); and the process being too long and cumbersome (33%).
 - 27% of employers said it takes from one to four weeks to get in touch with applicants who have made it through to the interview stage.
 - 51% of professionals have had a negative experience during the interview process for a new job, from 28% of those 18–24 to 56% of those 50+.
 - 47% have been deterred from a prospective employer due to a poor experience during interview.

APPRENTICESHIPS & TRAINEESHIPS

The Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD) and Youth Futures Foundation published [Balancing act: Youth apprenticeships and the case for a flexible skills levy](#).

- The apprenticeship levy was introduced in 2017 to counteract the long-term decline in employer investment in training and to help address technical skill shortages, increase the quantity and quality of apprenticeships and boost opportunities for 16–24 year-olds.
 - It has so far failed to achieve these aims; in particular, numbers have fallen most among young people and there has been a sharp fall in more deprived parts of the country.
- A more flexible skills levy would remove the incentive for employers to rebadge training as apprenticeships and support other forms of accredited training that can better meet their skills development needs; key features should be:
 - 50% of funds ringfenced for apprenticeships, primarily for young people.
 - A complementary industrial strategy, focused on improving job quality and skills investment.
 - Changes to complementary areas of employer policy, such as business support and labour market enforcement.
 - Strengthened sector-based institutions to identify key skills issues and shortages and help inform levy priorities.
 - A national body such as Labour’s proposed Skills England to bolster the ability of key sector bodies to drive collective employer action on workplace practices, improving skills development, job quality and technology adoption.
 - An apprenticeship guarantee for under-24s, which has strong employer support.
 - Financial subsidies rebalanced to boost the availability of apprenticeships for young people and ensure they offer a viable and quality career pathway.
 - Small businesses offered enhanced incentives, apprenticeship standards reviewed and traineeships reintroduced to facilitate access to apprenticeships.

The Learning & Work Institute (L&W) published [Flex and match: A new Skills Levy for growth and opportunity](#), making the case for an approach to increase employer investment in training, improve training opportunities for young people and better meet the needs of employers and the economy.

- Employers should be allowed to use their apprenticeship levy funds for other training, matched to a maximum of the amount they spend on apprenticeships for young people and capped at up to 50% of the levy.
 - Permitted training should include functional literacy, numeracy and digital skills and other training up to Level 5 from an approved list supporting national priorities, e.g. net zero and productivity.
 - Up to £200m p.a. available for the same training in SMEs that agree a plan with an adviser.
- The government and social partners should also consider expanding the levy to smaller firms with a higher rate for larger firms, and how to further improve quality and completion rates.
 - The government should also introduce a Skills Tax Credit and ensure skills better align with growth and economic plans to further increase employer investment in training and meet economic priorities such as net zero.

The House of Commons Library published [Degree Apprenticeships](#), a research briefing covering degree apprenticeships in England and Wales, Graduate Apprenticeships in Scotland and higher level apprenticeships in NI.

- It explains what they are, how they are regulated and funded and how many people start one.

Cedefop published [Apprenticeships and the digital transition: Modernising apprenticeships to meet digital skill needs](#).

- The report comprises research papers presenting practices and insights from Switzerland, France, Germany, Canada, the USA and China, plus European studies on the use of XR and VR and the EC DigiGo project.
- The papers explore how: skill needs are changing due to the digital transition; this impacts apprenticeship systems; apprenticeships can support and promote transition; they can benefit from effective technology adoption and use in the school-based and workplace components.

Engenuity published [Unlocking the value of apprenticeships for engineering and manufacturing SMEs](#) with *The Engineer*, investigating the issues for SMEs in England with apprentices completing their programme.

- All SMEs are facing a number of similar issues to a greater or lesser extent, including apprentices leaving schemes due to: a job change or a better job offer (41%); training not being as good as hoped (27%); and a perception that apprenticeship schemes are being badly run (22%).
 - Maths & English requirements and the end-point assessment process also cause issues for some.
- SMEs would like: more information about the funding that is available and how to get it (57%); better access to clear and concise information on apprenticeships (34%); more support from their associated college or training provider (32%); and more help finding training providers (27%).
- However, 61% achieved above-average completion rates of over 65%.
 - Many of these: have mentoring in place (42%); have reviewed and updated their apprenticeship processes (39%); work in collaboration with their training providers or colleges (36%); actively recruit older apprentices (31%); and run their own assessment days (22%).

Cedefop published [Greening apprenticeships: From grassroot initiatives to comprehensive approaches](#), drawing on evidence from its community of apprenticeship experts.

- The briefing looks at the different approaches European countries follow to adapt their apprenticeship provision to needs arising from the green transition.
- Apprenticeships are particularly well placed to develop the skills for the green transition, as they are at the intersection of the education system and the labour market.
- High-quality skills intelligence, multi-stakeholder governance structures and collaboration at all levels can help apprenticeships maximise their impact in meeting the skill needs.
 - When multi-stakeholder governance is matched with flexibility in apprenticeship design processes, the capacity of apprenticeship systems to adapt to the green transition is reinforced.
- Examples of this direction can be found in: agile processes for updating programmes (also at the initiative of social partners); the provision of electives in apprenticeship curricula; or the existence of zones for adaptation of curricula to local labour market needs.
 - However, while apprenticeship stakeholders look for agility to meet pressing skill needs, they should not overlook the quality of apprenticeship programmes and their objective to qualify future workers so they will remain employable in the longer run.

TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

KPMG published [Workplace learning research: five ways to improve learning](#), drawing on a survey of 2k UK desk-based working adults from various sectors.

- Limited options, poor quality and lack of accessibility in workplace learning are encouraging many to take control of their own training and seek more interactive ways to learn.
 - 56% of 18–24 year-olds, 33% of 25–34s and 15% of 55–64s have used GenAI to learn new workplace skills; 61% of all workers said they wanted specific training on using the technology.
- Only 44% strongly agreed they had the right skills to perform their roles effectively, with the most in-demand areas for learning being: digital skills (44%); industry-specific knowledge (43%); and so-called ‘soft’ skills such as communication and leadership (41%).
 - 66% of 18–34 year-olds wanted to improve their communication and leadership skills.
- 55% overall wanted to learn more skills to improve performance in their current roles; 48% to support future career progression; 22% to apply for other jobs.
 - In the legal sector, the proportion learning for their current role was 79%; in business & consulting it was 70%; this compared to 44% in engineering & manufacturing and 40% in energy.
- 31% overall were learning to increase their chances of promotion, rising to 54% in hospitality & events and 43% in healthcare; this compared with 24% in public services & admin and 15% in legal.
- Those aged 65+ prefer traditional face-to-face learning – all other age groups prefer online learning.
 - 33% of 18–24s prefer to learn by doing their own research online (19% overall); 25% prefer using social media or social learning platforms (10% overall).
 - Overall, 50% prefer to learn via on-the-job experience and practice, dropping to 36% for 18–24s.

IES published [Outcomes from employer-sponsored career development: Review of the literature](#), exploring the links between career support and wider outcomes in order to understand how one leads to the other.

- The research is part of a wider piece of work commissioned by NHS England to help employers design future career development programmes, or tweak existing ones, to maximise their full potential.
- The following research questions were considered:
 - What outcomes are associated with organisational career management?
 - What are the underlying mechanisms by which these outcomes occur?
- Employer-sponsored career development activities support the development of a positive psychological relationship between employer and employee; the outcomes associated with organisation career interventions are:
 - Perceived career success or satisfaction
 - Organisational commitment – particularly the ‘emotional’ commitment to an organisation
 - Perceived organisational support
 - Turnover and intention to leave; turnover may not be a direct outcome of career support, but as a result of improvement in psychological states
 - Job performance, and to a lesser extent job satisfaction; this also appears to be indirect.

The Productivity Institute, a UK-wide research consortium, published [Maximising productivity through managing new technology: A report prepared for the Midlands Productivity Forum in consultation with West Midlands Combined Authority \(WMCA\)](#); the forum is led by the University of Warwick.

- The research focused on the availability of education and training that could support local managers to better lever the potential productivity gains of digital technology.
- Realising productivity gains from new technology investments requires suitable management skills.
 - Larger firms have the internal capacity and resources to undertake ongoing strategic reviews of management training and a dedicated business function focused on identifying the potential of technology to achieve business aims.
 - Smaller and less resourced firms rely on business support programmes to accomplish these strategic tasks; business support has been instrumental in driving their technology investments.
 - Some SMEs lack the socio-technological management skills to do this smoothly and effectively, but the management training or business support available is via programmes such as Made Smarter, accessed via Growth Hubs and often aimed only at manufacturing businesses.
- SMEs rely on other sources of support to identify and implement new technology, including competitors, customers, suppliers, trade shows and technology suppliers.
 - Technology suppliers are particularly important in providing informal support for skills in managing technology; they are trusted and, unlike publicly funded programmes, able to provide relevant support when businesses need it.
 - SMEs also rely on HEIs and the ‘catapults’ to keep abreast of technological developments.
 - The distinction between management skills development as training on the one hand and business support on the other is not helpful when it comes to meeting business needs.
- Recommendations include:
 - More and better provision of new technology implementation management skills, including for service sector SMEs.
 - Provision that is demand responsive and tailored to need, taking account of firms’ varying starting points in their management of technology investments; ideally, a pipeline that incorporates entry level and progression opportunities along with informal support as part of a progression pathway.
 - Exploit England’s Combined Authorities’ dual responsibility for adult skills investments and Growth Hubs as well as their links to HE and FE and employers; they are in a unique position to stimulate and finance the development of a coherent pipeline.
 - Encourage firms to adopt a business, not technology, approach: productivity gains haven’t been achieved partly as the focus is mainly on the tech rather than how it functions in the business.
 - Encourage business support programmes to disseminate findings on the benefits of training to manage technologies.

- Consider developing a regional ecosystem approach to management skills for implementing new technology – gaps and weaknesses in uptake currently exist in part because greater coherence is needed, in particular between education and training and business support.

Coursera published [2024 Global Skills Report: Trusted skill insights for a rapidly changing world](#), its sixth annual report, drawing on insights from over 148m learners and 7k institutional customers plus 325 university and industry partners. [An email address is required to access the report.]

- GenAI course enrolments increased 1,060% globally over the past year; the types of courses being chosen suggest different global regions are at different stages of AI adoption, but there's a universal recognition of the need to develop proficiency.
- The steep increase demonstrates learner interest and the efforts of business, governments and HEIs to prepare AI-ready economies.
 - 72% of US CEOs say GenAI is a top investment priority, with increasing investment in employee training; targeted initiatives in some countries/regions are setting the stage for AI training and adoption.
- Over 90% of jobs now require at least some level of digital proficiency, but there's still a big gap between employer expectations and worker capabilities.
 - 70% of European businesses view the lack of digital skills as a major obstacle, with 40% of adults lacking even basic skills; learners in many regions are prioritising human over digital skills.
- Enrolment growth in crucial cybersecurity skills is lower than high-growth areas like cloud computing and data science, with the gap between needed and available professionals rising 12.6% on the year.
 - In Europe, cybersecurity enrolments fell by 5% on the year, despite the impact of cyberattacks; other regions have seen an increase, possibly due to greater government focus.
- Learners are increasingly turning to industry micro-credentials – including Coursera Professional Certificates, which grew 61% on the year – to gain digital skills for jobs; with 60% of workers requiring retraining by 2027, accessible learning pathways are needed more than ever.
- 46% of Coursera learners in 2023 were women, up from 43% in 2022.
 - A higher proportion of 16–44 year-old women in the EU have basic digital skills than men, despite only 18% of women being ICT specialists.
 - Mexico and Colombia have achieved gender parity in online learning, supported by government programmes.
- In Europe and parts of Asia Pacific, learners tend to focus on skills related to emerging technologies, such as FinTech, machine learning algorithms and artificial neural networks, as well as human skills.
 - In other regions, the emphasis is on foundational business and digital skills, such as risk management, supply chain systems, business communication, auditing and general accounting.
- Skill rankings at country, regional and global level, place the UK 45th, putting it in the 'competitive' territory (1–28 are classified as 'cutting-edge').
- The UK is 19th out of a list of 20 for Coursera learners as a percentage of the labour force (1.06%); the RoI is 10th (1.41%).
 - Three small advanced economies (SAEs) feature in the list: Luxembourg 7th (1.51%); Switzerland 12th (1.13%); Estonia 14th (1.11%).

Cedefop published a briefing note on [Monitoring and evaluating lifelong guidance systems across Europe](#).

- Traditional learning and career pathways are being replaced by more dynamic, 'patchier' routes and shorter job tenures.
 - Fast-changing and more complex learning and working contexts draw more attention to continuous learning and individual mobility, making lifelong guidance pivotal.
- Career guidance is a fundamentally social activity and its impact is not straightforward: its effects on people's choices may be incremental or felt over time, reflecting the fact that individual career pathways are not linear but shaped by many factors, including the socioeconomic context.
- Continuous monitoring and evaluation must cover all fields where guidance is provided and include information on:
 - Guidance inputs: investments, costs, quality standards and staff training

- Processes: guidance activities and methods
- Outputs: client satisfaction, participation
- Outcomes: individual/organisational/societal.
- To understand the chain leading to potential guidance impact, external factors must also be considered; it is essential to capture positive and negative information on intermediary guidance outcomes.

The briefing provides an overview and examples of approaches to: calculating the costs of guidance; collecting reliable and comparable data; overcoming obstacles to systematic monitoring; and common indicators that are used.

SKILLS GAPS & SHORTAGES

The OU and British Chambers of Commerce published [Business Barometer 2024: An analysis of the UK skills landscape](#), based on a survey of 1,350 employers across the UK in April–May.

- 62% of organisations (44% in NI; 47% in Wales; 56% in Scotland) are currently facing skills shortages, down from 73% in 2023.
 - The top five role shortages in NI are: IT, admin, customer service, healthcare and engineering.
- 68% (55% in NI; 60% in Wales; 77% in Scotland) say shortages have increased the workload on existing staff.
- 39% intend to use mentoring or coaching to train staff over the next 12 months.
 - Certificated short courses are the most popular type of training in NI (35%) and Wales (37%); in Scotland, non-certificated short courses or mentoring/coaching are the most popular (38%).
- 64% (67% in NI; 56% in Wales; 67% in Scotland) are not confident about applying AI; 64% (49% in NI; 45% in Wales; 49% in Scotland) are not confident about applying green technologies.
- 19% say they have implemented a written skills plan for 2024, 71% haven't and 10% are unsure.
 - 16% in NI have implemented a skills plan, 63% haven't; 6% in Wales have, 79% haven't; 16% in Scotland have, 63% haven't.
- 63% (63% in NI; 69% in Wales; 52% in Scotland) don't have specific recruitment, retention or training initiatives for targeted groups; larger firms are far more likely to have these in place.
- 86% of those using apprenticeships are expecting to increase or are committing to the same number over the next 12 months.
- Recommendations for businesses include: prepare a written talent development plan; identify areas of business impacted by AI and green technology and build capability; explore hidden talent in the specific sector or local community; and incorporate L&D into employee benefits.

The National Foundation for Educational Research published [Rethinking skills gaps and solutions – Working Paper 4 of The Skills Imperative 2035: Essential skills for tomorrow's workforce](#).

- The report builds on previous research by quantifying the availability of essential employment skills (EES) in England.
 - EES, which will be in even greater demand by 2035, are: communication; collaboration; problem-solving; organising, planning & prioritising work; creative thinking; and information literacy.
- 13% of workers overall in 2023 had 'substantial' EES deficiencies – i.e. the requirements of their jobs surpassed their skills.
 - 19% (2.8m) in managerial jobs (e.g. HR managers and directors), professional jobs (e.g. accountants) and associate professional occupations (e.g. engineering) had substantial deficiencies.
 - This compares with just 6% in mid- to low-skill occupations (e.g. skilled trades, sales, customer services and admin) due to job requirements decreasing at a faster rate than skills supply when moving down the occupational hierarchy.
 - The number with 'substantial' deficiencies may grow from 3.7m in 2023 to 7m in 2035.
- Self-reported data indicate that 14% overall have substantial EES underutilisation, i.e. the skills they have are higher than those required for their jobs; this rises to 22% in mid- to low-skill occupations.

- However, employers perceive that overall skills gaps are most prevalent in low-skill occupations, with transferable skills constituting a large component of the gaps.
- People with higher levels of EES earn more and are more likely to be in management positions; while skills supply may affect salary and status, it could be vice versa or the relationship may be reciprocal.
 - They also have higher job and life satisfaction, which may be due to the satisfaction of having their skills used, or to those who are more satisfied being better at developing skills.

Edge published the spring 2024 edition of its [Skills shortages in the UK economy](#) bulletin, exploring how different approaches to assessing sectoral and regional shortages can inform effective interventions.

- It features items on a range of topics, including:
 - How England's Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education (IfATE) is preparing the skills system to meet labour market change
 - How L&W is mapping local essential skills needs in England
 - How automation means different jobs, not fewer jobs
 - Degree apprenticeships in England
 - How GenAI is sculpting the workplace of the future.

Cedefop published [Untangling labour shortages in Europe: Unmet skill demand or bad jobs?](#), based on data from wave 2 of its European Skills & Jobs Survey.

- Detailed information on foundation, digital, manual and interpersonal job-skill requirements in European labour markets at job level was used to construct comprehensive indices of the required skills profile of European jobs.
 - These measures are used to investigate to what extent occupational labour shortages are underpinned by high(er) skill demands as opposed to other drivers, e.g. labour market immobility, worker skills gaps or unattractive working conditions.
- Findings include:
 - Workers in shortage occupations are more likely to carry out relatively lower skilled, manual tasks; some jobs also entail the execution of highly routine work.
 - ICT professionals stand out in the high-skilled occupational category, in that shortage jobs require more autonomy and learning aptitude, which are more likely to be acquired on the job, partly fostered via initial VET (IVET).
 - While greater upskilling investment may be needed to tackle shortages in some occupations, for others (e.g. health care), improvement in working conditions is more likely to be effective.
 - Widening the talent pool may also serve to stem some of the shortages seen in some gender-dominated occupational groups.
 - There is marked variability in the skills required within both broad and narrow occupational groups and across specific occupations within a given broad category; this is likely to reflect the relatively idiosyncratic HR practices that firms deploy for attracting and using skills in their workplaces.
 - To design effective skills policies, it is critical to acknowledge that a one-size-fits-all approach – e.g. focusing only on investing in upskilling or reskilling – is likely to fall short of effectively mitigating different types of labour and skill shortages.

WorldSkills UK published [Skills for Success in the UK Screen Industries](#), exploring the challenges facing film and TV, animation and visual effects and video games.

- These sectors experienced four times the rate of growth in employment compared with the UK economy as a whole between 2011 and 2022, adding 100k jobs.
 - However, 87% of employers in the sector say skills shortages are a problem.
 - Their needs are wide-ranging and often overlap with those of other parts of the economy, including digital technology, construction, engineering and other tertiary sectors.
- 72% of young people would be enthusiastic about a career in film and TV, but most don't recognise the range of jobs on offer, particularly those that require technical skills, e.g. carpentry and joinery.
 - More young people are aware of careers in areas where the sectors have a higher profile, e.g. London and NI.

- Diversity is also a challenge, with 22% of young people from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds believing that these sectors 'don't hire people like me'.
- Employers increasingly recognise the importance of technical pathways to fill vital skills gaps and increase diversity, presenting a huge opportunity for VET providers.
 - Innovative providers are already partnering with employers on curriculum design, professional development and industry placements.
 - However, they are also struggling to retain up-to-date knowledge, while the preponderance of SMEs makes apprenticeships and placements difficult.
- WorldSkills UK has committed to actions including:
 - Launching a new skills competition programme in makeup and special effects for film & TV and showcasing the skills required by the sector at its national competition finals
 - Developing inspiring careers programmes and events for young people
 - Working with Screen Alliance North to help Local Skills Clusters strengthen their pipeline of skills and talent via CPD for educators, and skills competition programmes for young people
 - Promoting and helping to mainstream good practice developed by innovative FE colleges.
- Wider stakeholders should:
 - Strengthen careers information, advice and guidance for the screen industries
 - Encourage deeper partnerships and more strategic coordination across regional skills providers, employers and sector bodies
 - Improve interdisciplinary working and collaboration within technical education providers
 - Increase the transfer of knowledge and skills between industry and the FE workforce, making successful examples of industry masterclasses and dual professionalism the norm
 - Continue to flex the application of policies that support technical skills development.

The Financial Services Skills Commission (FSSC) published [Bridging the skills gap in a rapidly evolving sector: Skills for the future of Financial Services 2024](#), supported by EY, on the increasing demand for data, AI and tech skills as firms undertake digital transformation programmes and adopt AI.

- The report is based on: a survey of 25 FSSC member firms representing over 270k employees; EY Skills Foundry and Eightfold AI data for 50 firms and skills from 3k profiles; and Office for National Statistics (ONS) data.
- Key findings include:
 - Pressure on recruitment eased in 2023, with lower vacancy ratios; however roles that were hard to fill in 2022 (data, software, cyber and risk) remained hard to fill in 2023, with the addition of product management.
 - FSSC members are still experiencing stubborn skills gaps, with behavioural skills seeing the highest growth in demand, especially for empathy and coaching; however, efforts to build skills are showing a significant impact, e.g. with data analytics.
 - Machine learning and AI have the biggest supply-demand gap; the sector appears to be more exposed to AI than others, with highly skilled roles such as analysts and account managers significantly affected.
 - More women than men were hired in 2023, despite women making up a smaller proportion of the applicant pool; programmes to attract women into male-dominated roles are starting to redress the balance, but applications from women are still mainly in customer service and admin roles.
 - A declining number of apprentices and a lower share of graduates are entering financial services.
 - More firms are forecasting their skills needs and using increasingly sophisticated data points but forecasting horizons have reduced.
 - Total learning hours remain on an upward trend and non-mandatory learning increased slightly.
 - Reskilling is gaining momentum: 71% of members are actively reskilling, up from 50% in 2022; and the number of people being reskilled has almost doubled; however, more action is needed to promote reskilling and retain those at risk of leaving.
- Recommendations include:
 - For firms, make skills a strategic business priority, including increasing the use of data on skills at the leadership level

- Develop ways to deepen skills forecasting and assess proficiency levels, to: understand the range of skills needed to support the adoption of AI and net zero; increase non-mandatory learning and measure its impact; and improve sector proficiency, within a supportive learning culture
- Expand L&D approaches targeted at specific skills gaps
- Collaborate to find industry solutions for appropriate skills challenges via representative bodies.

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN), RoI, published [Skills for International Financial Services \[IFS\]: An Assessment of the Future Skills Requirements in High Potential Sub-Sectors of Ireland's International Financial Services Sector to 2027](#), based on research by Indecon International Economic Consultants.

- It is forecast that the sector will need to recruit between 6k and 9k people between 2024 and 2027, with an estimated potential skills gap of between 800 and 4k.
- The study identified and focused on seven high-growth potential sub-sectors: fintech and payments; asset management; investment funds and securities services; insurance and reinsurance; international banking; wholesale capital markets; aircraft leasing and finance.
- Findings include:
 - All fields of study relevant to the IFS sector have seen an increase in the number of graduates compared with five years ago.
 - However, the current level of supply of candidates at various qualification levels will be insufficient to meet the skills needs of the industry.
 - Doctoral-level degrees have the most significant skills shortage, with 34% of respondents anticipating a significant shortage of these qualifications by 2027.
 - Future shortages will be more pronounced from National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Level 7+, with Level 8 expected to have the biggest absolute increase.
 - The apprenticeship route remains relatively undervalued as a career pathway in the sector and further work will be needed to promote this route and to develop further specialist programmes.
 - Most IFS-related HE courses tend to be male dominated, with computer/IT-related courses overwhelmingly male (over 80%); building awareness of career opportunities and boosting the appeal of the sector among female second- and third-level students will be important to improve diversity and inclusion and widen the supply of skills.
 - Several industry bodies currently provide training or are planning to; increasing attention is being given to the potential for micro-credentials to address workforce skills gaps.
 - The attraction of suitably qualified migrants is proving difficult; 45% of firms said difficulty in attracting skilled talent from abroad was a 'very significant'/'significant' contributor to skills gaps.
 - The integration of sustainable finance practices and environmental, social and governance (ESG) standards across all areas has led to a key new horizontal skill requirement; however, only 30% of the most popular relevant third-level courses have an ESG or sustainable finance component.
 - Other gaps in skills and competencies most highlighted were: IT, digital and data analytics skills, including in crypto and blockchain, cybersecurity and AI; risk & compliance, regulatory and associated legal skills; soft 'human experience' skills; anti-money laundering knowledge/skills.

Recommendations are included.

The EGFSN, RoI, published [Skills for Biopharma: Researching and Forecasting the Current and Future Skills Needs of the Biopharma Sector in Ireland to 2027](#).

- The biopharma sector in the RoI currently employs 50k people and an additional 21k jobs are forecast to be created by 2027, creating an annual shortfall of 3k graduates entering the sector.
- Findings include:
 - Specific skills demand has arisen due to aspects including: changes in manufacturing technologies; the growth of personalised medicine and consequent increase in more specialised therapies; increased process automation and robotics, creating a major need for AI, digital and data skills; and the need to remain compliant with evolving regulatory requirements.
 - The most significant driver of growth, investment, employment and skills demand in the sector globally has been, and will continue to be, the growth of biologic therapies.
 - Greater use of subcontracting in manufacturing and the growth of service companies, plus growing environmental sustainability, have also increased demand for further types of skills.

- Important future skills include: those needed for the digital transformation of the sector; leadership; and transversal skills.
- The sector needs to promote careers more effectively and develop new pathways into careers.
- Collaboration between industry and the education and training sector will be key to ensuring a good match between the demand for skilled workers and supply.
- The education and training sector must have the capacity to respond to skills needs articulated by industry, and investment may be needed.
- Strengthening STEM education in schools is essential to underpin progress and future success.

SOLAS (Further Education & Training Authority) published [Hospitality Skills in Ireland: Supply and demand in the aftermath of Covid-19](#), with Fáilte Ireland.

- The report provides an overview of recent employment trends in accommodation & food and hospitality, and research on careers in tourism.
- It highlights the key employment indicators for hospitality skills and the extent to which pandemic-related restrictions impacted and changed the employment landscape.
 - There are more part-time workers than ever before, the age profile of the workforce has shifted lower and there has been an increase of newcomers to the sector: 33% of workers were new in 2021, underlining the extent of the skills gap across the sector and across roles.
 - There has been growing demand for education and training provision, with an increase in training for front-of-house skills, and a 134% increase in training in bar and barista skills, food and culinary preparation, and customer service since the industry reopened.

SKILLS POLICY

L&W published [The great skills divide: how learning inequalities risk holding the UK back](#), the first report from the Ambition Skills project.

- Overall, the UK is trading water compared to other countries when it comes to literacy, numeracy and qualifications up to Level 3; the opportunity cost to the economy is £20b a year.
 - By 2035, almost 50% of UK 16–64 year-olds are set to have an HE qualification, but 33% will still only have a GCSE or equivalent at most.
 - The UK is on track to be: 12th out of 39 OECD countries for low qualifications by 2035 (13th in 2022); 29th for medium skills (unchanged); and 10th for high skills (6th).
 - Skills funding in England has been cut by £1b since 2010; employers are investing 26% less per employee than in 2005; graduates are three times more likely to receive training at work than non-graduates.
 - Adults have gained 7m fewer qualifications in the last decade than if attainment had stayed at 2010/11 levels, with the largest number of missing learners in English and maths (2.1m) and at Level 2 (2.3m).
 - 27% fewer adults in the most deprived areas are learning; in the least deprived areas, it has barely changed.
- Growth is concentrated more in higher and professional occupations, which is likely to mean increased demand for higher level skills.
- There is an increased need for transferable and essential employment skills like communication, collaboration, problem-solving, organising, planning and prioritising work, creative thinking and information literacy.

Skills2Capabilities, a Horizon Europe study led by Warwick Institute for Employment Research (Warwick IER), published its first [Policy Brief](#); the project is investigating how to ensure better matching between the supply and provision of skills and capabilities with employer demand.

- The project's aim is to better understand how skills systems need to develop if they are to help people make labour market transitions – i.e. between jobs, employers or sectors – and thereby reduce the level of skill mismatch that might otherwise arise.
- Progress is summarised on aspects including:
 - Improving the effectiveness of skills and lifelong learning policies in enhancing the responsiveness, proactiveness and resilience of VET and adult learning systems
 - Identifying emerging patterns of skill demand and associated skill mismatches

- Determining and analysing institutional responses to emerging patterns of skill demand and mismatches.
- Two initial policy-related findings:
 - **Space matters** – regional differences at the subnational level and across countries underscore the importance of spatial context; institutional arrangements, economic conditions and transitions and policy environments have a bearing on how skills are supplied and used in the labour market.
 - **Innovative methodologies bring new insights** – the project introduces new technologies into the skills research field, providing an opportunity to understand the challenges in a new framework.

Research teams involved are from the UK, Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway.

The ETF published [Is money the solution? International Financial Institutions investing in the future of skills](#), encouraging stakeholders to collectively shape a global investment and priority landscape in skills development.

- The report combines insights from major international financial institutions (including the World Bank, European Investment Bank, Asian Development Bank and African Development Bank), EU policies, ETF policy advice and perspectives from the European University Institute.
- It highlights various initiatives undertaken by financial institutions to support skills development, including education and training of young people, adults, employees and those in fragile contexts.
- For the sustainability of societies and economies, it is imperative to position skills development as a fundamental component of investment strategies aimed at transformation, inclusion and socioeconomic development.
 - The challenge lies in devising an integrated investment approach that brings together financial, economic and human development goals.
- Conclusions include:
 - Education and training are evolving, therefore investing in them represents a critical and strategic choice, requiring a thoughtful approach to prioritisation, based on evidence and knowledge.
 - There is no place for 'solo' performances – alliances are needed, and knowledge partnerships within and across skills ecosystems can play a central role in growth and development.
 - Each financial institution acknowledges the multiplying value of investing in education and training; priorities highlighted by their investment strategies include: addressing the 'learning crisis', supporting sustainability through the development of green and digital skills among young people and adults; and ensuring fairness and inclusion in labour market systems.
 - Maintaining policy dialogue with partner countries, especially during times of fragility, brings results (e.g. Ukraine's experience).
 - For all stakeholders involved in human capital development, the status quo is no longer an option – every year should be considered the 'Year of Skills'.

SKILLS FORECASTING

England's Department for Education published [Future skills projections and analysis](#), providing a detailed assessment of the benefits and limitations of current methods used in the UK and internationally for analysing future skills needs.

- Overall, it finds important limitations that are common across many forecasts, in particular:
 - The lack of a skills taxonomy to enable forecasts of skills rather than employment.
 - A lack of understanding of how skills change within occupations, which is crucial to understanding the impact of key trends such as automation and AI.
 - The granularity required to meet a range of user needs.
- In addition:
 - The skills forecast landscape in the UK is diverse and fragmented, with multiple forecasts produced by different organisations, at different intervals, levels of complexity and granularity and for different purposes.
 - The landscape is hard to navigate, with no single repository for forecasts.

- Forecasts are not easy to digest, resulting in users not knowing which approach to choose, how to interpret results or how to assess quality.
- There is a lack of guidance on best practice in conducting/commissioning forecasts and how existing forecasts can be used for different purposes.
- Working Futures fills the role of a respected, foundational, national forecast, although gaps have been identified that could improve it.

The work will be used to prepare the Department for Education's Unit for Future Skills to produce or commission economy-wide skills projections.

The UK Government published [Supply of skills for jobs in science and technology](#), bringing together statistics from a number of sources to assess supply and demand up to 2030, following publication of the [UK Science & Technology Framework](#) in March 2023.

- It covers [STEM occupations](#) (as defined by the Royal Society) and occupations of most relevance to each of the five UK critical technologies: AI; engineering biology; quantum technologies; future telecoms; and semiconductors.
- In 2023, there were 9.4m people in the UK in STEM employment across all industries, around 33% of the total UK workforce; this included 2.6m in the roles most relevant to the critical technologies; only 25% of them were female.
- 50% of STEM workers were in STEM industries, with the remainder in 'not STEM' (including medicine/health).
 - 3.6m workers in STEM industries were 'not STEM' workers who support the growth of science and technology.
- 52% of early career STEM workers completed their highest level of education in a STEM subject; the figure rises to 61% for those in occupations most relevant to the critical technologies.
- Four plausible scenarios have been used to project the growth of the UK economy and the STEM sector:
 - **Baseline growth:** STEM employment will grow by 4% by 2030, based on past trends.
 - **Technological growth:** STEM employment will grow by 6%, due to faster technological change and adoption of automation technologies and new jobs associated with these, the green transition and the provision of better-quality education, health & care services.
 - **Population growth:** STEM employment will grow at the same rate as the population.
 - **High growth:** STEM employment will increase by 10%.

A [jobs and skills dashboard](#) has been developed by the Unit for Future Skills to allow analysis of the data alongside further data on skills shortages.

CHAISE, a Sector Skills Alliance financed by the Erasmus+ programme, published [Annual Blockchain Skills Forecasts](#), forecasting estimates for blockchain skills demand and supply in Europe between 2021 and 2026 to help policymakers in targeting digital skills programmes.

- The forecast for blockchain skills demand is based on online job adverts, EU Labour Force Survey data and Cedefop occupational forecasts; forecast for supply is based on Eurostat and EU member state graduate data.
- Conclusions include:
 - Blockchain skills demand is declining year-on-year, and supply is forecast to be sufficiently high to satisfy demand at the graduate level across Europe; however, skills supply shortages could persist for positions requiring more experience.
 - Blockchain technology continues to be applied across a variety of sectors, resulting in occupationally diverse skills demand, new education and training offers and varied use.
 - Regulatory uncertainty, skills shortages and a lack of use cases and public trust in blockchain were highlighted as potential challenges for growth in blockchain adoption.

GREEN SKILLS & JOBS

Nesta published [Understanding barriers to participation in the green labour market](#), research undertaken with the Behavioural Insights Team.

- The report is based on a UK-wide survey of 2,385 men and women spanning a range of educational and professional backgrounds.
 - Participants were asked about their awareness of, and interest in, 'green jobs' in general, before being assigned to one of six specific green jobs, based on their educational and professional background.
 - They then answered a series of questions in relation to the green job, assessing their awareness of its requirements, overall impressions of the job and perceptions of key job attributes, including salary, competitiveness and availability.
- Understanding of 'green jobs' was low, with women's understanding lower than men's.
 - To improve awareness and understanding, it may be more effective to refer to specific, tangible jobs or industries rather than using the broad term 'green jobs'.
- Among those with STEM backgrounds, men showed stronger interest in STEM green jobs than women; among those with non-STEM backgrounds, women were more interested in non-STEM green jobs than men.
 - Women perceive themselves as less qualified and suitable for green jobs than men; this probably reflects underlying gender differences in self-perception rather than being unique to green jobs.
- There is a gap between participants' slight-to-moderate interest in green jobs and their lack of clear intention to apply for specific green jobs.
 - Emphasising job and career benefits such as pay, job security and flexibility, alongside the jobs' social impact, may help bridge this gap.
- Encouraging individuals to consider new career paths is challenging.
 - One strategy for facilitating a green career transition could involve helping individuals identify green jobs that closely align with their current skill sets and professional experiences.
 - Encouraging early interest in green jobs and incorporating green skills into education could also boost future green workforce participation.

Nesta also published the [Green Jobs Explorer](#), a prototype tool based on 4m job adverts, to enable the exploration and comparison of the environmental aspects of occupations.

- Three proxy measures are used to determine how green an occupation is: the emissions of the industry; the green skills applied in the role; and the amount of time spent on green tasks.
- On average, 1.5% of green skills make up job adverts; environmental consultants require a maximum of 22% green skills.
- Green jobs are not equally spread across the UK: the highest proportion of green skills in job adverts UK-wide is in the Scottish Highlands & Islands (1.74%); the lowest is London (0.64%); NI is 0.94%.

The Centre for Progressive Policy published [Are we ready? Navigating the green transition in an age of uncertainty](#), part of a series on the potential of industrial transitions to provide greater economic security and resilience and help develop the UK's regional economies.

- The ability to capitalise on the new opportunities that the green transition will present hinges on the ability to tackle the 'green skills gap' – an estimated shortage of 200k workers to fill the 2m green jobs the government is aiming to create by 2030.
 - Skills shortages differ significantly across regions and failure to address these will result in some areas missing out on opportunities to create new high-paying jobs in emerging green industries, develop renewable infrastructure and raise energy efficiency.
- To maximise the economic opportunities, the UK will need to train a significant number of workers in two types of job:
 - **Green increased demand:** the impact of green economy activities and technologies increases employment demand for some existing occupations but doesn't entail any significant changes to the occupation itself.
 - **New and emerging:** the impact of green economy activities and technologies creates the need for unique work and worker requirements, resulting in new occupations, which might be entirely new or based on an existing occupation.

- Key findings:
 - Workers who could most easily be retrained into green jobs are spread unequally across the country: London and many parts of the Midlands show less potential, whereas Wales and the East show much stronger potential; sub-regionally, areas with strong potential sit outside mayoral-metropolitan areas.
 - Areas with the highest potential for developing 'increased demand' workers are former industrial heartlands and poorer rural areas; areas with the highest potential for developing 'new and emerging' workers tend to be less deprived.
 - Workers who could most easily be retrained into new and emerging jobs tend to live in less deprived areas, although there are a few exceptions where a green jobs-led inclusive growth plan is most feasible.
 - Pay differences between non-green jobs and different types of green job will impact on workers' incentives to switch jobs, creating a greater market incentive in poorer areas to encourage the switch but potentially acting as a hurdle to filling green vacancies in wealthier areas.

The UK Energy Research Centre published [Where Next for SMEs and Net Zero?](#), drawing on a comprehensive review of policies and business support initiatives across the four nations, as well as interviews with governance stakeholders and SMEs*.

- UK SMEs face multiple challenges, including: labour and skills shortages in certain sectors; and limited knowledge and resources on net zero.
 - There is increased demand for external support and a willingness to pay for expertise; however there is a need to raise ambition and accelerate activity.
- Rather than retreat, government bodies must adapt and exercise multiple modes of intervention.
 - Local, place-based support remains crucial for engaging SMEs on net zero, but there is a need to extend the reach of programmes and integrate sustainability across local economic development policy.
- SMEs can contribute to climate action in a variety of ways, acting in multiple roles: consumers, enablers, adopters, citizens and influencers.
 - Their role has yet to be systematically addressed in the context of just transitions; they have different capabilities, levels of exposure and characteristics.

**The research was undertaken as part of an 18-month project on the Governance of SMEs for Net Zero (GoZero), focusing on five sectors (restaurants, hairdressers, construction trades, steel and horticulture) and five city-regions, including Belfast.*

The ETF published [Green Skills, Red Alert! Learning to power the green transition](#), four articles on the interplay between the green transition and skills, and the crucial role of VET in preparing workers for a sustainable, equitable and inclusive future.

- **[Green horizons: Skills for climate action:](#)**
 - The success of policies hinges on the integration of education and skills development with labour market needs, creating a workforce resilient to the evolving dynamics of a decarbonised economy.
 - The three main challenges faced by most EU region countries that affect the speed at which they integrate green skills and sustainability into learning outcomes are: access to quality education; relevance of learning outcomes and alignment with labour market needs; and critically inadequate investment in education and training systems.
 - Merging technical skills with a societal shift towards sustainable living is essential.
- **[The future of work in the green transition: Evidence from ETF research in countries neighbouring the EU](#),** on the challenges and opportunities of the green transition to the job market.
 - Education systems need to meet but also to foresee the skills needed for a greener economy.
 - Many new jobs will be created and many existing roles will evolve at the task level, resulting in most jobs becoming greener, reflecting the current skills shortages reported in various sectors.
 - The skills required pertain to installation, use and maintenance, in demand across sectors such as agriculture, automotive, construction and energy sectors.
 - Country-specific skills needs also emerge, reflecting the unique characteristics of each sector in a given country, primarily influenced by a country's geology and government strategic decisions; exposure to extreme natural events can also influence specific skills needs, e.g. in construction.

- Educational institutions can play a pivotal role in preparing future generations, by: embedding sustainability into curricula; evolving skill sets to meet new market demands; and adopting innovative pedagogical strategies.
- Adapting education and training systems poses challenges, including: the need for substantial investment; development of new teaching materials and methods; and the training of educators in sustainability issues.
- However, there are also significant opportunities for innovation in education, the creation of new jobs and the promotion of a more sustainable and equitable global economy.
- **[Greening the future: Using vocational excellence for a just transition](#)** – drawing on ETF’s Greening Responses to Excellence through Thematic Actions (GRETA) project, it discusses innovation and strategic partnerships that have proven effective in various regions, and highlights the potential of grassroots initiatives when scaled via policy support and supported by educational frameworks.
- Policy recommendations aiming to bridge the skills gap, promote green skills development and contribute to sustainable development and economic prosperity include:
 - Integrate green skills strategies with global commitments
 - Cultivate collaborative partnerships in skills development
 - Empower VET educators with the knowledge and skills to lead in matters of sustainability
 - Embed sustainability into VET curricula to equip learners with the skills for a green society
 - Promote lifelong learning for sustainable development, support accessible VET programmes and acknowledge prior learning
 - Ensure financial sustainability – allocate specific funding for green training programmes and encourage private sector investment through incentives
 - Strengthen international collaboration for the exchange of best practice and expertise.
- **[Driving change: Exploring the Green Skills Award](#)**, examples of international good practice in environmental education and sustainable skills development from the ETF’s Awards launched in 2021.

St George’s House published [Delivering integrated climate education, skills and professional standards](#), the report of a consultation event.

- Senior figures from professional, statutory & regulatory bodies (PSRBs), employer representatives, youth voices and tertiary education sector bodies explored the case for a reformed curriculum centred on responding to the climate emergency.
- The consultation agreed three key areas for action:
 - **Organisational change:** immediate engagement with the Professional Bodies Climate Action Charter; using the review cycle of benchmark standards as a critical opportunity to embed sustainability; integrating sustainability into training provision; integrating sustainability into internal PSRB policy and procedures; thought leadership through membership, especially around climate justice.
 - **Enabling student leadership and empowerment:** more student voices in the room; co-production of new systems and processes with students; students and graduates empowered to change their institutions from the inside.
 - **Advocating for system change:** a new PSRB to challenge economic orthodoxy; integration into global quality metrics; reimagine the system as if it was designed to progress sustainability.

Participating organisations included a number of universities plus: BCS – the Chartered Institute for IT; Association of Chartered Certified Accountants; Chartered Management Institute; Royal Institute of British Architects; Royal Town Planning Institute; the Engineering Council; England’s IfATE; Advance HE; General Medical Council; and England’s Department for Education.

SOLAS published [The Future of Green Skills: An Irish Perspective](#) based on qualitative and quantitative research by Deloitte Ireland, highlighting how climate and sustainability is driving the focus on green skills and providing recommendations to close the current skills gap.

- Key findings include:
 - **Increased demand for green skills:** new green occupations and skills are emerging, and some occupations will need to be adapted to keep up with sustainability trends; demand is surpassing supply, and concerns are growing around an imminent shortage of green talent; there is also a need for more general skills to support the transition.

- **Leadership buy-in is imperative:** leadership needs to invest in this area, be proactive and identify gaps, and there is a need for ownership in developing the skills and occupations.
- **Regulation is forcing organisations to take action:** many organisations are making changes to prepare for new and emerging regulations, highlighting the need for a data literate and digitally competent workforce.
- **Investment in L&D is insufficient:** organisations need to invest in training to keep abreast of the evolving job and skills landscape; L&D teams are facing challenges in understanding where to start when developing a curriculum, and in securing the budget.

The Skillnet Ireland Climate Ready Academy published [Sustainability Capabilities for Business Leaders: Guiding leaders to pioneer the transition to sustainable business outcomes](#), research by Maynooth University with Business in the Community Ireland, on Irish business leaders' beliefs and capabilities on sustainability.

- Leadership sustainability capabilities are defined as: the ability of a business leader to plan, direct and enact activities that consistently and successfully deliver positive environmental, social, and governance value for all its stakeholders.
- A consortium of stakeholders from industry, third sector and academia co-created a 'Sustainability Capabilities for Leaders' (SCALE) diagnostic, piloted in five large, leading Irish organisations.
 - SCALE comprises 20 questions that investigate leader beliefs and 54 capability statements, grouped into six overall sustainability capabilities: valuing sustainability; adaptive action; critical systems thinking; futures literacy; supporting fairness; and leader development.
 - Completing the diagnostic guides business leaders to more deeply comprehend these essential sustainability capabilities – and the leadership activities within them – that require development.
- Findings include:
 - Business leaders have shown a commitment to ESG initiatives; they have invested more in the 'social' dimension of sustainability, but report lower levels of capability in the 'governance' and 'environment' dimensions.
 - They are currently at the 'explorer' level of sustainability capability – working to develop their capabilities; they are keen to gain insights and knowledge from strategic business sustainability experts to better understand emerging sustainable business systems and practice.
 - There is a lack of clarity regarding the skills needed to drive sustainable change and effectively implement sustainable practices.
 - A constructive, collaborative response is needed from government and industry to ensure that all necessary sustainability transition upskilling and support mechanisms are available and effectively communicated.

The Design Council published [Design Economy: The Green Design Skills Gap – Insights into the scale and skills of environmental design in the UK](#), based on responses from 1,068 designers working across a range of disciplines.

- Design is a key tool in the green transition: 66% of those surveyed have designed for environmental impact in the last 12 months.
 - The top three issues addressed were: carbon emissions/net zero transition (27%); environmental awareness and sustainable behaviour change (26%); and climate change adaptation (24%).
- 71% think demand will grow, but only 43% feel they have the capability to meet the higher demand.
 - Only 46% are proficient or expert in design for environmental impact; only 50% think education provided them with the right skills to a large or moderate extent (47% of 16–24 year-olds).
- Designers are more confident in generalist approaches, such as social design, sustainable materials design and design for sustainable behaviour change; they are less confident in technical approaches such as biomimicry, biophilic design, circular design and eco-design.
- Investment is needed in green skills for current and future designers, from school to design leaders.

The Design Council has [announced](#) a mission to upskill 1m UK designers for the green transition by 2030.

The IPPR (Institute for Public Policy Research) Fair Transition Unit published [Manufacturing Matters: The cornerstone of a competitive green economy](#).

- UK manufacturing has declined far more than other advanced economies in the G7, losing over 33% of its manufacturing strengths since the 1990s, whereas similarly service-focused countries like the US and France have maintained their manufacturing strengths at 1990s levels.
 - Rebuilding the UK's manufacturing strengths can bring benefits including a more dynamic and competitive economy and greater economic opportunities with less regional inequality.
- The decline of manufacturing has led to fewer, worse-paid job opportunities for those with meaningful skills but without university degrees and for people who live in towns with a strong manufacturing presence.
- The net zero transition presents a perfect opportunity to revitalise UK manufacturing as it has comparative advantage in one in three green products, with green strengths scattered around the country.
- Based on the size of opportunity, existing industrial capabilities and strategic supply chain considerations, the UK's immediate green manufacturing priorities should be wind manufacturing, heat pumps and green transport.

The IPPR Fair Transition Unit published [Skills Matter: Shaping a just transition for workers in the energy sector](#), detailed analysis of the transferability of skills and future career options for 115k workers from a range of gas sectors.

- The significant reduction in gas demand required to meet legally binding net zero targets can help improve energy security by reducing gas imports, lower energy bills and create new jobs.
 - However, this shift will also bring about profound changes to the energy system and daily lives, as well as challenges for workers.
- The transition is currently too slow and the policy support in place to ensure a fair transition for workers in gas sectors is insufficient.
 - Existing commitments are either inadequate or omit key sectors; and the lack of involvement of trade unions risks eroding the quality of jobs available to affected workers.
 - The current system of training provision, skills support and careers advice is not well equipped to support this kind of workforce transition.
- Three key findings:
 - For just over 40% of people who changed jobs in 2021, their new jobs shared on average just over 50% of the work tasks with their previous job.
 - Only ~5% of workers in gas sectors could move to a green occupation job – i.e. in low-carbon industries – that shares on average 40%+ work tasks with their current role; if gas sector workers were only moving into green occupations, many would likely need significant retraining support.
 - 93% of the occupations in gas sectors on average share over 50% of their work tasks with green or blue (climate compatible) occupations and therefore far more workers could retrain quickly, although green or blue occupations may not always be located in the place where workers live.
- Three key recommendations cover: a green industrial strategy; a fair transition approach that involves workers and their unions; and a reformed skills system.

The Construction Leadership Council published [Roadmap of Skills for Net Zero: Competencies for Domestic Retrofit](#), a framework of the core knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to deliver retrofit of homes at scale.

- The UK has 28m homes, most of which will need to be retrofitted to meet the legally binding 2050 net zero target.
 - One of the many challenges is the capacity and capability of the workforce, which can only be increased if there is a consistent understanding of what is needed and the appropriate mechanisms such as qualifications, training and certification.
- Overall:
 - **Government needs to:** commit to a long-term national strategy; introduce incentives or schemes to encourage retrofit; introduce incentives and schemes to encourage workforce training; ensure holistic approaches, e.g. by linking skills funding with retrofit programme funding.
 - **Industry needs to:** develop sector-specific competence frameworks; introduce minimum competence levels; work with key organisations to ensure occupational standards include the

necessary knowledge, skills and behaviours; emphasise the urgency of the task in local planning, e.g. through England's Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs).

- **Providers need to:** introduce appropriate core modules to meet minimum requirements; evaluate existing courses and curricula to ensure they cover the necessary knowledge and skills; work with industry to align courses/qualifications with industry needs; work with other providers to develop training materials and the necessary infrastructure; work with accreditation bodies to validate qualifications and courses.

The Construction Leadership Council published its [Industry Skills Plan Update](#) for the UK in 2023.

The RECHARGE UK electric vehicle trade group published [Harnessing the skills opportunities of a recharged electric vehicle sector](#).

- Motor manufacturers, distribution network operators, charge-point manufacturers, operators and installers, local authorities, software solution providers and other private and public sector organisations are all involved in this relatively new and fast developing sector.
- The report investigates:
 - **Current opportunities:** who is filling them and what skills are in demand?
 - **Future forecast:** what jobs are on the horizon, and how many skilled workers will be needed?
 - **Industry efforts:** what is the sector doing to bridge the skills gap and help fill the opportunities on offer?
 - **Government support:** what existing support programmes are available and what more is needed?
- Four recommendations to help the UK seize local and national skills opportunities:
 - Sector outreach programmes to inspire the next generation of 'net zero heroes'
 - Government-funded local centres of excellence for net zero skills
 - Sector/government-supported upskilling programmes for the existing workforce
 - Government-funded reskilling programmes for those in the workforce without relevant skills.

AUTOMATION & AI

PwC published [2024 AI Jobs Barometer: How will AI affect jobs, skills, wages, and productivity?](#), analysing 500m job adverts in 15 countries, including the UK, exploring how jobs are changing in 'AI-exposed' sectors and occupations.

- Since 2016, the number of jobs that require AI specialist skills has grown 3.5 times faster than the overall number of jobs.
 - Knowledge work sectors in particular are seeing growing demand: financial services has a 2.8 times higher share of such jobs than other sectors; professional services is three times higher; information & communication is five times higher.
- Jobs that require AI specialist skills carry up to a 25% wage premium in some markets; in the UK, the average wage premium is 14%, rising to 58% among database designers and administrators.
- Skills sought by employers are changing at a 25% higher rate in the most AI-exposed occupations – to stay relevant, workers in these jobs will need to build or demonstrate new skills.
 - Some of the skills rising fastest in demand are those that can't easily be performed by AI, such as sport instructors, child safeguarding and ecological restoration.
- Sectors with the highest AI penetration are seeing almost 4.8 times greater labour productivity growth, with the potential to generate economic growth, higher wages and enhanced living standards.
 - PwC's [Annual Global CEO Survey](#) published in January 2024, reported that 84% of those whose companies had begun to adopt AI believed it would increase efficiency and 70% said that it would significantly change the way their company created and captured value over the next three years.
- The data suggest that AI doesn't herald an era of job losses but rather more gradual jobs growth, helping to enable companies to find the workers they need.
- Policymakers can:
 - Encourage the use of AI to grow productivity and prosperity
 - Ensure growing prosperity from AI adoption is widely shared

- Support the use of AI to augment rather than replace workers
- Support workers with training/retraining, worker protections and safety nets
- Shape the education system to help prepare workers for an AI age.

Lessons can be learnt from Singapore, Denmark and the US, which show the strongest growth in jobs that demand AI skills and top the International Monetary Fund's [AI Preparedness Index \(AIPI\)](#).

BCG (Boston Consulting Group) published [AI at Work 2024: Friend and Foe](#), findings from a survey of 13k employees at all levels in 15 countries/regions, including 1,200 in the UK, exploring their attitudes to AI.

- Rapid adoption in businesses – 64% of senior leaders surveyed are starting to use GenAI to reshape their organisations – is creating a 'split-screen' effect:
 - On one side, increasing confidence over the past year as employees use the tools more frequently.
 - On the other, regular GenAI users are more likely to worry about job loss – 49% believe their job may disappear in the next ten years, compared with only 24% of those who don't use GenAI.
- Only 30% of managers and 28% of frontline employees have had training in how AI will change their job, compared with 50% of senior leaders.
 - The top three challenges leaders identify are: lack of AI/GenAI literacy in non-tech roles; uncertainty about when to use GenAI; lack of AI/GenAI technology talent.
 - The top three challenges of frontline workers related to training: insufficient time to learn how to use it; ineffective training; uncertainty about when to use it.
- Reflecting the overall youth and optimism of their populations, Global South respondents were more likely than those in the Global North to experiment with the tool, engage in professional development and focus on the quality of their work; they were much more likely to have received GenAI training.
- Five key recommendations: establish a transformation-first mindset; manage all transformations; build training muscle at scale; emphasise how GenAI can increase value creation and employee joy; and anticipate the evolution of roles, skills, operating models, data and governance.

McKinsey published [The state of AI in early 2024: Gen AI adoption spikes and starts to generate value](#), based on 1,363 responses to a global online survey in February/March 2024.

- Adoption has increased to 72%, +17ppt on 2023, with the biggest increase in professional services.
 - AI is being used in two or more business functions in 50% of organisations, most often in marketing & sales and product & service development, where it can generate the most value; 8% are using it in five or more functions.
- 13% of respondents are regularly using it for work (+5ppt); 26% are regularly using it both for and outside of work (+12ppt).
 - The most senior executives have seen a larger jump in use in and outside work than their mid-level management peers; those working in energy & materials and professional services report the largest increase in use.
- In most industries, organisations are likely to invest over 5% of their digital budget in Gen AI and analytical AI.
 - 67% of respondents expect their organisations to invest more in AI over the next three years.
- Risks associated with its use range from data management – privacy, bias or IP infringement – to model management, focusing on inaccurate output or lack of explainability; a third big risk category is security and incorrect use.
 - Respondents are now less likely to say their organisations consider workforce and labour displacement to be risks and they are not increasing efforts to mitigate them.
- Three archetypes for how organisations are deploying new tools: 'takers' use off-the-shelf, publicly available solutions; 'shapers' customise these tools with proprietary data and systems; and 'makers' develop their own foundation models from scratch.
 - Around 50% of reported uses are 'takers'; respondents in energy & materials, technology and media & telecoms are more likely to report 'shapers' and 'makers'.
- Gen AI high performers are much more likely than others to use solutions in: risk, legal and compliance; strategy and corporate finance; and supply chain and inventory management.

The OECD published [Artificial intelligence and the changing demand for skills in the labour market](#), providing first estimates for the effect of AI on jobs that don't require specialised AI skills, based on online job vacancies across ten countries over the past decade.

- Occupations highly exposed to AI comprise 33% of all vacancies.
- The skills most demanded in such occupations are management, business processes and social skills, including general project management, finance, admin, clerical tasks and customer support.
 - On average across the sample: 72% of such vacancies demand at least one management skill; 67% at least one business processes skill; over 50% at least one social, emotional or digital skill.
- The share of vacancies in high-exposure occupations demanding at least one skill from each grouping has increased by 5ppt.
 - Demand for cognitive, emotional or digital skills has increased by 8ppt, social skills by 6ppt and business process and management skills by 5ppt.
 - However, there is also evidence that demand for these skills might be falling in AI-exposed organisations.
- There is some evidence that AI adoption might increase demand for some blue-collar skills, possibly due to spillover arising from demand for skills related to production and technology, as well as physical skills.

IZA published [Artificial Intelligence and the Skill Premium](#), examining how the emergence of AI will affect the ratio between the wages of skilled and unskilled workers.

- AI predominantly substitutes for tasks performed by high-skill workers in contrast to automation in the form of industrial robots, which affects low-skill workers performing routine mechanical tasks.
 - For example, AI-based models and devices are increasingly used to diagnose diseases, develop drugs, write reports, code or generate inspiring ideas.
 - Because these tasks are often performed by high-skill workers, AI may put downward pressure on their wages and thereby also on the skill premium.
- A 'nested constant elasticity of substitution production function' was used to distinguish between three types of capital: traditional physical (machines, assembly lines); industrial robots; and AI.
- The findings show analytically and numerically that AI has the potential to reduce the skill premium and thereby mitigate or even reverse increases in inequality observed in recent decades.

The European Commission published a [Eurobarometer on Cyberskills](#), based on an EU-wide telephone survey in April–May 2024, plus factsheets for each EU member state.

- Critical insights include:
 - **Awareness and training deficiencies:** 71% of companies recognise cybersecurity as a high priority, however 74% are not providing any training or awareness programmes for their employees, and 68% believe training and awareness raising are not needed.
 - **Hiring difficulties:** companies are experiencing substantial challenges recruiting staff with the right cybersecurity skills: 45% have difficulties finding qualified candidates; 44% said there is a lack of applicants; 22% a lack of awareness; and 16% budget constraints.
 - **Qualification and certification gaps:** 76% of employees in cybersecurity roles lack formal qualifications or certified training; 34% transitioned from non-cyber roles, and 57% took on cybersecurity responsibilities in addition to their existing duties.
 - **Diversity and inclusion:** 70% of respondents acknowledge the importance of diversity and inclusion in cybersecurity, and yet 53% reported having no women in cybersecurity roles; however, 66% said that women are encouraged to pursue cybersecurity positions.

The ETF published [The age of AI: Platform work in EU neighbouring countries](#), a policy briefing based on research between 2020 and 2024 exploring the nature of platform work and the role of AI, key characteristics of platform work and profiles of platform workers across regions.

- The profiles of platform workers:
 - Remote workers are typically highly qualified, with upper secondary or tertiary education levels and prior work experience; in contrast, on-location work generally requires lower skills, though there is evidence of overqualification among these workers.
 - All platform workers must possess at least basic digital skills, but higher levels of proficiency correlate with better pay.

- Strong competition in international marketplaces for the highest-paid platform jobs means workers need advanced digital skills and a good command of the English language.
- Successful platform workers also need a range of occupational skills, personal dispositions and competences developed through formal education and training.
- Platform work contributes to improving existing and developing new skills:
 - Using online platforms for job searches can help to develop soft skills, such as analytical and problem-solving abilities, self-presentation and communication; career management and entrepreneurial skills are also essential.
 - Some types of platform work, especially remote, are associated with the ongoing development of on-the-job skills through self-learning processes; however, skills and career development within platforms are often limited, which can lead to deskilling.
- Policy implications for skills, education and training include:
 - Continuing training and adult education are essential in addressing skills mismatches & shortages.
 - Initial education also plays a key role; education systems should focus on the skills needed, emphasising digital skills and STEM competences, particularly among girls.
 - Key competencies and transversal skills require special attention; platform workers' needs should be included in learning provision strategies, connected to lifelong learning tools like micro-credentials and individual learning accounts.
 - Career management services and counselling are vital.
 - A more detailed identification of skills needs will enhance skills development and matching, and applying AI tools to monitor demand and supply on digital labour platforms has strong potential.

The UK's Parliamentary Office of Science & Technology published [How is artificial intelligence affecting society?](#), a 'rapid response' summary covering the effects on decision-making, workplace rights, transparency, surveillance, civil liberties and IP.

ADULT & LIFELONG LEARNING

L&W published [New Futures pilots: Evaluation report](#) – the New Futures programme, funded by the Covid-19 Support Fund, ran four place-based pilots in Belfast, Edinburgh, Wales and Tees Valley, supporting workers looking to reskill and change career due to the pandemic.

- The pilots involved: tailored, targeted outreach; careers advice/coaching; practical solutions such as flexible training models and help with childcare or travel costs; working with local partners, including employers, support services and voluntary and community organisations.
- 639 participants registered in total: 36 in Belfast; 250 in Edinburgh; 278 in Tees Valley and 75 in Wales; most experienced a steady fall in numbers during the course of the pilots.
 - 27% were from minority ethnic backgrounds and 58% were out of work when they registered.
- 280 (44%) progressed into a new job, with little difference by prior employment status.
 - A range of employment-related outcomes included gaining a promotion, starting an apprenticeship or vocational training and gaining new technical and employability skills.
 - They also built resilience to continue looking for employment and experienced wider outcomes such as increased confidence, self-belief, self-worth, motivation to continue learning and, in Belfast, the development of a participant network.
- Personalised support was an important aspect, with trusting relationships and holistic, wraparound support key; this was resource intensive but adequately funded.
- Careers advice and employability support were integral and received overwhelmingly positive feedback; careers coaches were highly valued when they had a strong understanding of the local labour market and connections with employers.
- The intensive training offered was considered a successful part of the pilots and a key driver of employment outcomes; the findings showed the importance of comprehensive and flexible training.
 - The Wales and Belfast pilots focused on the tech sector, cited as a key motivator by participants.
 - Involving employers in designing training was thought to boost the chance of positive outcomes.
- Overall, the focus on supporting career change set New Futures apart from other interventions and was essential to its success, as was the flexibility to design provision to meet local needs.

L&W published [New Futures: Four Nations Policy Recommendations](#), drawing together insights from the above pilots and offering the recommendations below.

- Each nation to develop a high-level vision to ensure that all adults, regardless of age or background, have support to change career.
 - Greater alignment and coordination at a devolved level to enable simpler navigation and joined-up support between individuals, employers and providers.
- Evaluations of provision for people in and out of work to improve understanding of what works in policy and practice, why and for whom, with national lessons shared across the UK.
- Each nation to establish support for those already in employment to switch careers, building on existing and successful programmes, alongside lessons from New Futures.
 - Funding devolved to Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) where these exist in England and aligned with business support in growth sectors, with clear asks of employers on co-investment.
- Improve financial incentives for employers by replacing the Corporation Tax deduction for training with a Skills Tax Credit, modelled on the successful R&D tax credit.
 - Review the effectiveness of other tax incentives, such as lower employer National Insurance contributions for employing young apprentices.
- Support living costs for people in and out of work, including simplifying existing complicated entitlements for free courses and extending access to maintenance loans; including:
 - Introduce a new system of learning accounts in England, Scotland and NI and extend Wales' Personal Learning Accounts, allowing individuals, employers and government to co-invest in learning.
 - Based around an online portal, learning accounts to include: a universal government contribution of £5k; targeted top-ups and incentives for employers and individuals to contribute; a skills passport; local labour market information; and access to online and in-person careers advice.
 - Extend the Train & Progress benefit rules for people seeking work in England, Wales and Scotland to allow full-time training of up to one year; in NI, amend Universal Credit to enable full-time training for up to 12 months where it will have long-term career benefits.
 - Strengthen the right to request time off to train in England, Wales and Scotland, including access to a maintenance loan; introduce the right in NI.

L&W also published four [nation-specific reports](#), including [New Futures Four Nations: Northern Ireland briefing paper](#) on career change policy in NI.

- There is considerable interest, enthusiasm and goodwill for greater support for career change in NI among government departments, local councils, employers and training providers; however, there is insufficient focus on career change and its increasing importance to individuals and the economy.
- Recommendations include:
 - Better signposting towards guidance and support for career change; the new careers portal being developed needs to engage all ages and ensure that Careers Service NI is not seen as only for young people.
 - An action plan to ensure that career change is more clearly recognised, prioritised and supported.
 - Information about future jobs and likely future skills needs should be more accessible and current to potential employees, employers and training providers.
 - Employers should be encouraged to be more flexible in recruitment methods, particularly looking beyond formal qualifications when experience could be as relevant; employers and training providers should also be flexible in how training and jobs are structured.

The European Commission published [Working Group on Adult Learning: Findings report PLA \[peer learning activity\] on National Skills Strategies](#), guidelines to support member states to discuss more deeply how national skills strategies can improve adult and lifelong learning.

- The report includes an overview of national skills strategies, and country examples for Belgium (Flanders), Cyprus, Finland, Poland, Romania and Slovenia.
- When working on a national skills strategy, or working comprehensively on skills-related issues, preconditions including the following can increase the chances of success:
 - Secure political will and high-level buy-in; however, political will can jeopardise implementation if a strategy is considered to be too closely linked to a political party and the government changes.

- Secure a whole-of-government approach, with ministries responsible for education and skills development cooperating with those involved in issues such as housing, social policies, transport and taxation.
- Engage a wide group of stakeholders in design and implementation, including education and training providers, social partners, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society, academia and industry.
- Secure a good evidence base for the strategy.
- To make the strategy work for adults and effectively engage them in learning, implementation considerations include:
 - Tailor the approach to target groups; when focusing on one barrier (e.g. finance), others need to be taken into account (e.g. lack of relevant learning offer, transport challenges, caring obligations).
 - Apply a networking, cooperation approach and maximise use of existing resources, and emphasise the role of employers to offer opportunities and facilities to support learning.
 - Focus on inclusivity and enjoyability: make the provision accessible for all (e.g. flexible provision, validation of prior learning) and ensure the learning is relevant and enjoyable for the learners.
 - Invest in the quality of teachers, trainers, adult educators, validation staff and counselling staff.
 - All policies and measures should be sufficiently funded, staffed and given the time needed.

The European Commission also published [Working Group on Adult Learning: Findings report PLA on Financing of Adult Learning](#), directly related to the implementation of individual learning accounts, with examples from four countries: Denmark, Finland, France and the Netherlands.

- The country examples showcase different approaches to increasing funding for adult learning, including employer-led funding arrangements and initiatives that provide direct financial support to empower adults to learn, e.g.:
 - Approaches related to collective bargaining in the Netherlands and Denmark
 - Employer levies in France and Denmark
 - Individual entitlements offered by the government in Finland and France.
- The examples differ in scope and size but together illustrate effective approaches to increase the financing available for adult learning, aiming to inspire policy action in different national contexts.

The European Commission also published a PLA report on [Skills for life](#), focusing on vulnerable learners.

The Lifelong Education Institute published [Lifelong Learning Pathways for Music and the Arts](#), recognising the profound impact of the arts on personal development, cultural enrichment and societal wellbeing.

- The think piece:
 - Examines current opportunities in music and the arts in the UK, ranging from structured educational programmes to informal, community-based initiatives
 - Showcases innovative approaches to education and outreach from across the UK, emphasising inclusivity, accessibility and diversity
 - Serves as a call to action for policymakers, educators and cultural stakeholders to prioritise lifelong learning in the sectors, fostering a more vibrant, equitable and culturally enriched society
 - Makes ten recommendations covering all phases and ages.

QUALITY OF WORK & GOOD JOBS

CIPD published [Good Work Index 2024](#), analysis of its seventh annual survey exploring job quality and its impact on over 5k workers from different sectors and occupations UK-wide.

- It includes data on seven dimensions of work: pay & benefits; contracts; work-life balance; job design and the nature of work; relationships at work; employee voice; and health & wellbeing.
 - 25% (23% in NI) reported at least one form of conflict in the workplace in the last year, -5ppt on 2019, possibly due to increased homeworking; there is above-average incidence for those with protected characteristics, who have seen no improvement over the last five years.

- Other indicators show little change: most are satisfied with their job and pay and feel their work provides value for their organisation, but fewer feel inspired by their own work or the wider organisational purpose.
- As in 2023, increasing numbers view work as transactional, bringing with it the risk of a slide into mediocre work with demotivated, uncommitted and unproductive staff.
- More positively, staff feel able to acquire useful skills in their roles and access good career opportunities; however, many still feel overqualified.
- There are big gaps in training participation, especially for employees working in smaller organisations; 28% of those who work in an SME have not had any training in the last year compared to 15% in organisations employing 250+.
- While the majority of respondents feel they have a strong degree of autonomy in their work, this has seen no significant change over the last five years, despite the rise in homeworking.
- With most indicators of job quality showing only small changes over the years, it follows that increased homeworking has had little impact on them, too.
- Homeworking remains popular among those who are able to do it and there is unmet demand from those who don't, but it is not a panacea; job design, opportunities to develop and strong workplace relationships are more likely to support better working lives than geographical location.
- **A separate [Good Work Index 2024: Northern Ireland](#)**, based on a survey of 499 workers, states that NI collects more data on job quality than anywhere else in the UK; findings include:
 - 39% of employees said their job offered good prospects for career advancement, with those on the highest incomes most likely to agree.
 - 67% felt their qualifications matched their job well, but 29% felt overqualified; 58% said their skills matched their current duties well.
 - 58% felt their job offered good opportunities to develop their skills.
 - 36% of those educated to degree level or higher felt they were overqualified for their job.
 - 28% said their workloads were too high, rising to 41% for disabled employees.
 - There is a very strong link between the quality of line manager relationships and job satisfaction: over 80% of those who agreed with positive statements about relationships with managers were satisfied with their jobs; for those who disagreed, job satisfaction was below 35% in every aspect.

Other regional reports cover [North of England](#), [Scotland](#) and [Wales](#).

[Work and life: the relative importance of job quality for general well-being, and implications for social surveys](#) by UCL Institute of Education was published in *Socio-Economic Review*.

- The report explores the experiences of employed people in Europe, the US, Australia and South Korea, using global survey series.
- The impact of job quality on wellbeing is of similar magnitude to that of health and is more significant than education, gender, marital status, parental status, age or household income.
 - In Europe, job quality accounts for 14–19% variation in wellbeing, with findings consistent across all countries and datasets.

The Labour Relations Agency (LRA), NI, published [Building a business case for good jobs: The links between Good Work and innovation, productivity and employee health/wellbeing](#), a ReWAGE evidence report, and a [ReWAGE Policy Brief](#) detailing findings from LRA-commissioned research by Warwick IER.

- The research, including literature reviews and case studies of companies in NI, examined the relationships between job quality and innovation, productivity and employee health/wellbeing.
 - Its aim was to explore the business case for more good jobs in NI and, through these good jobs, improvement to NI's economic performance.
 - The literature review drew on the generic terms 'good work', 'fair work', 'job quality' and 'decent work', plus the seven dimensions of Good Work developed by the Carnegie Measuring Job Quality Working Group (i.e. terms of employment; pay & benefits; health, safety & psychosocial wellbeing; job design & the nature of work; social support & cohesion; voice & representation; and work-life balance).
- Despite limitations with available data, findings indicate that investment in good jobs at firm level will have performance benefits.

- Recommendations include:
 - Consider implementing a good employment charter.
 - Use the research findings to educate and inform all firms of the business benefits of good jobs.
 - Provide support to help all firms transition to providing more good jobs.
 - Consider targeting support for small firms.
 - Consider including a measure of good jobs as part of NI's metrics.

LRA also published case studies of [Businesses in Northern Ireland benefiting from Good Work](#). ReWAGE is an independent expert advisory group co-chaired by the Universities of Warwick and Leeds, that analyses work and employment research to advise government on the UK's productivity and prosperity challenges.

The Fair Work Convention, Scotland, published [Fair work policy levers in Scotland](#), a research report focused primarily on UK-based studies, by the University of Strathclyde Scottish Centre for Employment Research (SCER).

- The commitment to fair work in Scotland is 'long standing and significantly more embedded in policy' than elsewhere in the UK.
 - 'Fair work' is described as 'paid work that offers effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment and respect'; it includes access to training, skills and learning.
- The evidence assessment's aims were to: identify and review existing knowledge on policy levers and how these are (or may be) applied in advancing fair work; and evaluate any evidence on the effectiveness of levers in generating their intended outcome(s).
- 12 policy levers were identified plus key information on their evidence base, potential ownership, dependencies and constraints, and their potential locus and reach.
 - The 12 levers include: targeted awareness campaign; embedding fair work in employability support; support for 'real living hours'; fair work champions in public bodies and industry leadership groups; accredited training in fair work; fair work communities of practice.
 - The proposed levers aim to engage, support and encourage employers, and to support peer-to-peer learning across the employer community.
 - The levers are both broadly and narrowly targeted but will require the investment of resources to bring about change; this is particularly challenging in the current economic and fiscal context.

The Fair Work Convention also published [Levers for fair work in hospitality in Scotland](#) by the University of Strathclyde SCER, based on research including in-depth interviews with 15 key stakeholders in 11 hospitality organisations during autumn 2023.

- The aim was to gather stakeholder views on fair work challenges and opportunities in the hospitality industry, and to consider the policy levers available to the Scottish Government and how these may be received by the sector.
- For many, hospitality is not an attractive industry in which to work; the sector has a range of fair work challenges:
 - Parts of the industry are characterised by high levels of non-standard employment contracts, underemployment, low pay, unsocial hours, significant staff turnover, work intensity and stress.
 - The workforce is disproportionately made up of women, young people, racialised and migrant workers.
 - Jobs are diverse and span a wide range of skills, though most workers are in elementary roles.
 - Variable shift patterns and high operational pressures create challenges in providing training.
- However, skills shortages could stimulate a business model shift geared toward the retention of workers, and fair work practices could help to improve the reputation of the industry as an employer.
 - The sector can also provide: opportunities for progression and social mobility; flexible working hours; subsidised accommodation; exposure to different work contexts; relatively autonomous working; and opportunities for ongoing learning.
- There was strong stakeholder support for fair work education and training, for leaders and managers as well as staff.
 - However, training would only be effective if it was industry-led and delivered in ways that made it accessible across small businesses and the different industry sub-sectors.

Business in the Community (BITC) published [findings](#) on the costs and benefits of flexible working, including analysis of job adverts from FTSE 100 companies.

- Offering flexible working can cost employers up to 6% of annual payroll bills; however, the benefits could be worth up to 20%.
 - The potential business gain from flexible working arrangements flows from: increased productivity; higher employer attractiveness; employees opting for flexible working over increases in pay; reduced absenteeism; and lower real estate costs.
- Flexible working has become increasingly important to employees, but it has also become essential for employers to offer it if they want to attract and retain talent.
 - With nearly 50% of working-age adults in the UK providing some kind of care, flexible working is consistently cited as the most important way employers can better enable unpaid carers to combine paid work and care.
- Analysis of job adverts from FTSE 100 companies finds that financial services companies are the most likely to detail flexible working options, e.g. they are almost three times more likely to promote flexible working opportunities than companies in the real estate sector.

There is no methodological information on the analysis, however BITC will provide full details on request.

IZA published [Overeducation, Overskilling and Job Satisfaction in Europe: The Moderating Role of Employment Contracts](#), based on data from the first of Cedefop's two European Skills & Jobs Surveys, undertaken in 2014, covering 23,123 workers across 28 countries.

- Findings include:
 - Over-education and over-skilling reduce the probability of workers being satisfied with their jobs.
 - The drop in job satisfaction is almost double for genuinely over-educated workers, i.e. those who are both over-educated *and* over-skilled.
 - The adverse effects on job satisfaction are more pronounced among mismatched workers (whether over-educated, over-skilled or both) on fixed-term rather than indefinite contracts.
 - Therefore, firms targeting workers' job satisfaction should avoid employing over-educated and/or over-skilled workers, but particularly both, especially when the latter are on fixed-term contracts.

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION (EDI)

The Royal Academy of Engineering published [The EDI Engine: Evidencing the business benefits of equality, diversity and inclusion \(EDI\) in engineering](#), based on a literature review and interviews across a range of engineering businesses.

- For engineering businesses, EDI is a win-win; by prioritising EDI, companies can boost their business and engineering performance, driving benefits in four areas:
 - **People:** better positioned to attract top engineering talent and boost staff retention and satisfaction, alongside overall workforce performance and productivity.
 - **Products and services:** stimulate problem-solving, creativity and the development of more innovative and inclusive products and services; by developing solutions tailored to a wide range of end users and needs, they can unlock new market opportunities.
 - **Partners:** enhance customer engagement and enable investment; many customers require businesses to meet EDI criteria and a growing number of investors factor EDI into their decisions.
 - **Processes:** enhance operational excellence and bring cost efficiencies by increasing psychological safety so employees feel empowered to raise issues, particularly linked to health and safety, also reducing potential fees from legal disputes.
- Key recommendations:
 - Understand the company's starting point: collect data to evaluate EDI practices, policies and culture; analyse results to identify strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement.
 - Collaborate with experts and partners: leverage external resources and expertise to guide efforts; work with external partners and the community to promote the engineering profession and advance EDI.
 - Adopt a leadership-driven, strategic approach: make sure senior leadership champions EDI efforts to drive change; align EDI efforts with the company's broader strategic goals and planning processes to increase leadership accountability and commitment; develop a vision and set measurable goals for advancing EDI.

- Tailor initiatives to organisational needs: set ambitious yet realistic goals tailored to needs, resources and capabilities; prioritise high-impact initiatives and design a flexible approach that enables adjustment based on ongoing progress and learnings.
- Cultivate a culture that embeds EDI: foster an environment where it is integrated into everyday practices; encourage open communication, celebrate differences, increase internal awareness and proactively address bias and discrimination.

The ETF published [Gender dimension of labour market transitions: Implications for activation and skills development policies of the EU neighbouring countries](#), the report of a study focused on policymaking in active labour market policies, career guidance and skills development.

- The aim was to map how activation and skills development policies are gaining importance as key components of: post-Covid recovery; green and digital transitions; and strategies to address emerging socioeconomic risks and uncertainties, and significant security threats worldwide.
 - It provides an overview of the key trends in labour market participation among women, education outcomes and gender-responsive policies and programmes.
 - It highlights exemplary policies, national initiatives and donor programmes to enhance gender equality in labour market transitions and to address root causes of inequalities.
- For women to equally benefit from job opportunities linked to the post-Covid recovery and digital and green transitions, there is a need for: upskilling and reskilling; vocational guidance; and support for labour market transition into relevant professions.
- **Issues and challenges** include: more barriers in accessing the labour market for women, despite often having higher levels of education; low and unstable employment rates; the poor quality of jobs; pay gender gaps and segregation; cultural prevailing obstacles; and limited evidence.
- **Enabling factors** include: targeted programmes; career guidance frameworks that adopt a gender-sensitive approach; and incentives to promote the employment of women in male-dominated occupations.
- Examples are provided of gender-sensitive, gender-transformative and gender-responsive approaches, including:
 - Career guidance strategies and initiatives that don't only target girls and young women but also their social environment and parents, teachers and school curricula.
 - Initiatives that address barriers for women to access training and in targeting support at women with caring responsibilities, and implement packages of measures, including counselling, mentoring and internships in addition to training.
 - Support for the development of digital skills of girls and women is key for their employability.
- There is little evaluation evidence on the success of training measures to promote women's skills development in line with labour market demand, or of gender-transformative training programmes.

International Comparisons

The House of Commons Library published [Higher education around the world: Comparing international approaches and performance with the UK](#), a briefing including a comparison of policy, systems, student numbers, funding, access and participation, and research.

The European Commission published [Investing in education 2024](#), an overview comparing public expenditure in education in 2022 to the 2010s and with other domains at EU and national levels.

- Investment in education faces stronger competition from other public functions post pandemic and as a result gets a lower share of total public expenditure than in the 2010s.
- Tertiary education accounted for 17% of public expenditure at EU level; school education received over 70%.
 - There are large differences between member states; in tertiary education the main determining factors in differences are tuition fees and support for students.
- Member states are using EU funds to: support comprehensive curricular reforms; develop students' digital competences; reinforce education in STEM; enhance educational infrastructure and strengthen teachers' professional development.

- Skill formation is among the key drivers of sustainable economic growth and resilience, because it enhances the stock and quality of human capital.
- Competences/skills is the area most frequently covered by counterfactual policy evaluations, followed by: institutional aspects of the education system; long-term effects of education; education drop-out/completion/participation; disadvantaged students; and the teaching profession.
 - By contrast, educational infrastructure is almost unexplored.

Eurydice published [The European Higher Education Area \[EHEA\] in 2024: Bologna Process Implementation Report](#), six inter-related chapters providing a comparative snapshot of the EHEA, and assessing how far policy commitments have been implemented.

The Bologna Declaration was signed in 1999 by HE ministers in 29 countries to ensure more comparable, compatible and coherent HE systems in Europe, with key commitments including on degree structures, recognition and quality assurance.

Cedefop published the 2024 release of the [European Skills Index](#), which uses the latest available data to measure 31 national skills systems using a composite indicator approach.

- The index comprises three pillars:
 - **Skills development** (six indicators): basic education (three); training & other education (three)
 - **Skills activation** (four indicators): transition to work (two); labour market participation (two)
 - **Skills matching** (five indicators): skills utilisation (two); skills mismatch (three).
- The UK ranks 25th overall (42.2): skills development (21st, 47.9); skills activation (15th, 63.0); skills matching (29th, 30.1).
 - It has fallen from 23rd in 2017, although its score has increased from 37.3.
- The highest scoring country is Czechia (70.4): skills development (11th, 60.5); skills activation (23rd, 53.9); skills matching (1st, 92.4).
- The lowest scoring country is Spain (24.2): skills development (23rd, 43.1); skills activation (28th, 36.5); skills matching (31st, 12.5).

Cedefop published [European inventory of validation of informal and non-formal learning 2023: Overview report](#), covering the validation systems of the 27 EU member states and European Free Trade Association countries.

- The report describes trends, focusing on the systematisation of validation approaches and its development in education and training, labour market and third sector contexts.
 - It also addresses the extent of institutional coordination and the trends on validation processes and methods.
- Thematic reports cover:
 - [Validation in the green economy](#)
 - [Systems and arrangements to increase awareness of opportunities – Outreach](#)
 - [Evolution of validation as an integrated part of national skills policies and strategies](#).
- Country reports are published for: [Austria](#), [Belgium \(Flanders\)](#), [Belgium \(French speaking\)](#), [Czechia](#), [Denmark](#), [Estonia](#), [Finland](#), [Iceland](#), [Ireland](#), [Luxembourg](#), [Norway](#), [Sweden](#) and [Switzerland](#).
 - Case studies are published for: [Austria](#), [the RoI](#), [Sweden](#) and [Switzerland](#).

Eurydice published [Validation of non-formal and informal learning in higher education in Europe](#), exploring the situation in 37 HE systems, based on qualitative data from 2023/24.

- Covering the HE systems in all EU member states plus Bosnia & Herzegovina, Switzerland, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia and Türkiye, the report looks at:
 - Whether non-formal and informal learning can enable alternative access to HE
 - The extent to which it can contribute to the fulfilment of HE study requirements by substituting formal degree courses
 - The type of learning that can be validated
 - The quality assurance mechanisms underpinning validation practice.

- Finding include:
 - Students without the traditional entry qualifications have the option to access HE on the basis of validating their non-formal or informal learning experiences in less than 50% of the systems.
 - Students have the legal possibility of accessing HE through this route primarily in western and northern European countries.
 - There are legal limitations even in systems where the validation is possible, e.g. not all types of HEIs may be involved, or only learners above a certain age may be eligible.
 - Many of the systems that allow non-traditional learners to access HE also offer other ways to do so: via entrance exams or admission tests, trial or preparatory HE programmes, or alternative qualifications.
 - Another validation route is to exempt learners from some HE study requirements if they can demonstrate that they already possess the knowledge and skills required; it is offered by 30 systems and is more common than validation for accessing HE studies but regulations often set restrictions on the amount of this type of learning that can be validated.
 - Some non-formal and informal learning is easier to validate than others, e.g. outcomes from work-related activities and/or education and training courses other than those initiated by family or leisure activities.
 - Around 66% of the systems with validation arrangements explicitly address this theme in national steering documents relating to HE quality assurance procedures; the aim is generally to ensure that the validation practice is underpinned by clearly defined rules.

The ETF published [Network of national qualifications databases: Building trust in skills and qualifications of non-EU countries](#).

- Insights are provided into: the role of qualifications databases; why it is crucial to make them interoperable; and the use of existing European tools to support data and information exchange between countries.
- A network would aim to support EU neighbouring countries and those in Central Asia in developing national databases that allow for comparability of qualifications across countries, and to share information and data on skills and qualifications between non-EU countries and EU member states.

The Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) published [Study on poverty and income inequality in the context of the digital transformation: Final report – Part A: Ensuring a socially fair digital transformation](#), a study undertaken for the European Commission.

- It provides 27 detailed reports assessing the current and future prospects of each EU member state in terms of how prepared it is to manage the digital transformation in a socially fair manner.
 - Key areas of focus include: the labour market; individuals' digital skills; and cross-cutting dimensions such as the digitalisation of businesses and digital infrastructure.

[Part B](#), published by the European Commission, presents 30 case studies describing some of the main actual or potential uses of digital technologies (including AI) by a country's public sector, including for designing and implementing active labour market policies and monitoring poverty and income inequality.

Government

The UK and devolved governments published [UK shipbuilding skills taskforce report: government response](#), welcoming the taskforce's report [A Step Change in UK Shipbuilding Skills](#) and its [Toolkit for Employers](#) published in 2023.

- A new UK-wide Shipbuilding Skills Delivery Group was being set up to take forward the recommendations, aiming to support a collaborative sector that is better understood by the public, offers a range of opportunities to train and progress and ensures there is a pipeline of talent.

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Department for the Economy (DfE) published [sectoral action plans](#) for seven of the nation's most innovative, productive and export-orientated economic sectors.

- Plans cover: [agri-tech](#); [life & health sciences](#); [advanced manufacturing, materials & engineering](#); [fintech/financial services](#); [software & cyber](#); [screen industries](#); and [low carbon/net zero](#).
- Each action plan sets out a range of activities to support sectoral growth and provide high-quality, high-productivity jobs.
 - The actions are generally grouped under the themes of: collaboration; people & skills; innovation; and trade & investment.
 - The screen industries plan groups activities under the themes of: economic; skills & education; innovation; and culture.

ENGLAND

The Department for Education published [Technical Education Learner Survey 2023: Progression of the first T level cohort](#), based on the third survey of those who started their programme in 2020; it was completed by 477 participants (36% of the cohort).

- Overall, 44% were undertaking a degree; 40% were in paid work; 13% were on an apprenticeship.
 - Destinations varied by route, e.g.: only 1% of education & childcare students were on an apprenticeship, with 52% in work; 37% of construction students were in work and 32% on an apprenticeship; 50% of the digital students were taking a degree.
 - 72% of the apprentices were training at Higher (Level 4/5) or Degree (Level 6+) level, higher than the rate for all Level 3 learners.
 - 30% of those in paid work or an apprenticeship were working for the organisation that provided their industry placement.
- Among the 14% of respondents who had left their programme early, 72% were in the workplace and 23% were studying.
- 75% of completers had remained in the general field of their T Level, including the majority of those who were currently studying; 59% had remained within their occupational specialism.
- 83% of learners didn't change their career plans significantly during their programme.
 - 80% of completers agreed that their T Level had allowed them to progress to what they wanted to do and prepared them for their current study, the workplace and their future career.
 - The industry placement was seen as the most important element in this, followed by technical knowledge and practical skills.
- 78% of those who completed and 35% of those who didn't were very/quite likely to recommend their programme to others.

Work Advance published [Strengthening Governance Arrangements in the English Post-16 Skills System](#), commissioned by the AoC, offering a blueprint for a new national skills body, drawing on consultations with skills experts and the OECD's regular skills assessments.

- A framework of governance functions comprises three strategic, cross-cutting functions:
 - Promote coordination, cooperation and collaboration across the whole of government.
 - Enhance the evidence base to better anticipate current and future employment, skills and training needs.
 - Develop future-focused skills strategies – aligned nationally, sub-nationally and sectorally – that set long-term strategic priorities and provide an overarching framework for action to deal with megatrends.
- Three areas of operational policy levers aim to:
 - **Incentivise individuals:** provide all-age information and guidance; customise skills provision and programmes through extended work-integrated learning options; develop a financial and non-financial support package to enhance learning; evaluate impact and promote outcomes and benefits.

- **Enable providers:** Provide information, guidance and resources; enable more responsive, customised provision via flexible frameworks and standards; enhance financial incentives to innovate; regulate, monitor, evaluate and assure quality.
- **Incentivise employers:** provide information, guidance and business support; build capacity for a learning culture and the take-up of customised training and new work-based, integrated learning; target financial incentives; evaluate engagement and impact.
- Recommendations set out how and where governance arrangements need to be strengthened to better support the post-16 skills system.
 - At their heart is a new skills body to act as a strategic, evidence-based adviser to the government and the wider system and drive change, bring independent oversight and take on distinct responsibilities.

UCU published [*A Culture of Fear and Anxiety: UCU members' perceptions of Ofsted inspection in further education*](#), based on a survey of over 1k FE members in England.

- Only 20.4% agreed that the inspection process raised standards in the sector and 9.9% that it was the best way to support improvement in FE colleges.
 - 56.8% agreed that Ofsted inspections should be abolished; 91.4% would like to see an alternative model of improvement/challenge in the sector; 77.8% would like to see a peer model.
- Recommendations include:
 - **Government** to fund the sector to replace inspection with a co-designed, collaborative, sector-led, peer improvement model that is valued and trusted by staff, students, parents/carers and the wider population.
 - Government to commission an independent review of Ofsted's inspection practice and methodology, including looking at perceptions of inspection and patterns of sector improvement in Wales and NI to learn the lessons of 'light-touch' inspection.
 - **Ofsted** to operate as a supportive organisation with a clear responsibility for supporting safer and healthier workplace practices that seek to prevent work-related stress and overwork.
 - Ahead of abolition of inspection, Ofsted to consult the sector on revised judgment terminology – 'inadequate' is not acceptable – considering a simplified satisfactory/requires improvement delineation.
 - Ofsted to conduct a freedom of information exercise to quantify the extent of sector investment in 'mocksted' and inspection-related consultancy services and require institutions to publish the amount of funding that has been spent in preparation for inspection, including on consultancy.

Edge published [*General/Liberal Studies \[GLS\] in English Further Education: The rise and fall of a radical programme to balance general and technical education c1957–1980*](#), part of its 'Learning from the Past' series.

- Current efforts to facilitate a breadth of study and foster generic skills compare poorly to the radical, student-centred GLS programmes that emerged in the 1950s to meet the growing demand for technological knowledge and skills.
- GLS had a strong educational mission to cultivate critical thinking and communication skills and a meaningful awareness of citizens' rights and responsibilities, and to expose students to culture.
 - With its discourse-based pedagogy, social mindedness and high degree of tutor autonomy, GLS epitomised principles that remain relevant and important.
- However, in the 1970s and 1980s, anxieties about national economic troubles and rising youth unemployment amplified concerns for greater accountability over the FE curriculum, leading to the dismemberment of any identifiable programme of GLS.
- The fate of the GLS experiment provides useful guidance for future initiatives in FE policy and pedagogy and the paper reflects on two issues: the teaching of general skills and their proximity to the workplace; and the relationship between autonomy of lecturers and accountability measures.

The OfS published [*Financial sustainability of higher education providers in England*](#).

- There was a decline in financial performance in 2022–23 and a significantly higher number of providers expect to fall into deficit in the coming years.
 - Net liquidity has fallen, but there is evidence of the sector adjusting to protect its cash flow in the face of financial challenges.

- Providers predict an improved outlook from 2026–27, however much of the projected additional income comes from anticipated growth in domestic and international students.
- Five key risks affect the sector:
 - Continuing decline in the real-terms value of income from UK undergraduates combined with inflationary and economic pressures on operating costs.
 - A recent apparent reduction in applications from UK and international students after years of strong growth, especially from international students.
 - A financial model that has become reliant on fee income from international students, with a particular vulnerability where recruitment is predominantly from a single country.
 - The affordability of necessary estates maintenance and development and the significant cost of investment needed to reduce carbon emissions as part of commitments to achieve net zero.
 - Cost of living difficulties for students and staff, which challenge both student recruitment and the support needed by students during their time in HE.

The OfS also published [Navigating financial challenges in higher education](#), an 'insight' paper on the financial challenges facing providers and the actions some are taking to navigate them.

HEPI published [Four futures: Shaping the future of higher education in England](#), written by Professor Sir Chris Husbands and sponsored by the King's College London Policy Institute, looking beyond individual and short-term funding challenges.

- Four scenarios are posited and analysed in terms of what they could mean for students, HE and government.
 - **Scenario 1 – The evolution of the present.** Government didn't seriously address the difficulties hemming in the sector: neither undergraduate tuition nor maintenance funding were ameliorated, the structural flaws in research funding persisted and universities' freedom to increase international recruitment remained subject to national immigration policies; with government consumed by other priorities, universities were on their own, plotting a strategic development course through constrained funding.
 - **Scenario 2 – Delivering the 2010 vision.** Government committed to funding universities properly to do the job it had asked them to do; while this took several years to play through in spending plans, it restored enough confidence to enable more secure long-term planning; policy pivoted away from hidden cross-subsidy and back towards the idea that HE costs and benefits should be shared between the direct beneficiaries (graduates) and indirect beneficiaries (society).
 - **Scenario 3 – A place-based tertiary system.** Around the world, increasing attention is being given to tertiary structures for the management of post-18 education (e.g. Scotland, Wales, Australia); the common theme is a sense that policy that focuses only on universities and the substantial minority of young people who progress to conventional HE produces cliff edges between different routes through advanced learning, focuses too extensively on a single model, generates skill shortages and creates inefficiencies in both supply and demand.
 - **Scenario 4 – A differentiated system.** Government funding remained constrained and was insufficient for the scale of investment in students or in research and innovation that the sector wanted and government would have liked; but government still wanted a post-financialised knowledge economy and recognised that in order to get closer to what it wanted on the basis of what it could afford, it needed to actively restructure the sector.

The AoC published [100% opportunity: the case for a tertiary education system](#).

- The existing system in England is:
 - Ineffective, as evidenced by high numbers of students who are NEET, low skills levels and stagnating productivity
 - Inefficient, with disproportionate funding allocated to the post-16 education of a small number of people, compared to the education and upskilling of the remainder of the population
 - Unfair, perpetuating inequalities based on socioeconomic background and geographical location.
- The proposed reforms would meet the needs of 100% of young people and adults and offer: clearer pathways; optimised funding; enhanced employer engagement; and streamlined oversight.
 - **A national social partnership body**, working across government to support strategies including the green transition plan, NHS long-term workforce plan, industrial strategy, digital transition and inward investment plans, and setting priorities for the whole country.

- **An effective system of devolution**, establishing LSIPs that are aligned to national priorities and set out how the locality can support national as well as local economic growth.
- **A young person's guarantee and demand-led adult funding**, with a minimum offer for every 16 year-old and funding to give everybody access to the learning and skills they need.
- **Mission clarity of schools, colleges and universities**, encouraging them to collaborate and sign up to the new system, ensuring there is a complete 'offer' for every 16 year-old and bringing together the adult education budget, apprenticeships, Higher Technical Qualifications and degree education.
- **Curriculum and qualifications that reflect national and local needs**, through a national review centred around more hours for 16–18 year-olds, a broader curriculum, stronger enrichment and more inclusion and urgently reconsidering English and maths GCSEs and the resit policy.
- **A reformed apprenticeship levy**, top-sliced to fund national and local priorities.

The AoC also published [14 in-depth policy papers](#), providing an overview of current policies, the challenges they pose and specific recommendations to better meet the needs of all.

The AoC published [Local skills improvement plans: a review of their impact and opportunities for the future](#), based on the experience of college leaders and employer representative bodies.

- There is clear evidence of some early successes:
 - College leaders have welcomed the focus on connecting with local employers – a central priority – and a number report having met with employers that haven't previously engaged with the skills system.
 - In many areas, colleges have been welcomed as genuine partners, and LSIPs have enabled a collective review of the long-term skills needs within a place.
 - Strategic Development Fund projects have been particularly important in successfully supporting and galvanising college collaboration and providing a flexible resource to strengthen this joint working, with an emphasis on strong strategic engagement with employers.
- Four key areas of development:
 - Build genuinely place-based partnerships, ensure LSIPs act as a partnership between all key stakeholders and cohere with other local or regional planning processes, rather than adding further layers of complexity.
 - Ensure effective, strategic, two-way employer relationships that reflect the broad range of employers within a place and that focus on long-term priorities rather than current vacancies and on how employers will have to change too.
 - Recognise the impact of both the level of funding entering the system and the funding approach, as either enabling or undermining ability to implement the plan.
 - Ensure there is a clear and coherent approach to accountability, so that everyone knows their roles and responsibilities in developing and implementing LSIPs.

Policy Connect published [Skills 2030: Building a World-Class Skills System](#), the report of an inquiry by its Skills Commission, making recommendations for England in five key areas.

- **Reshaping skills policy decision-making:**
 - Develop a national skills strategy embedded within a wider industrial strategy and create a Skills & Workforce Council to oversee its implementation.
 - Provide MCAs and other regional authorities with 'no-strings-attached' funding settlements for adult skills and enhanced powers to shape skills provision in their area.
- **Investing in FE and skills:**
 - Provide FE colleges with multi-year funding settlements covering at least two years.
 - Publish an FE workforce strategy that: increases the sector's attractiveness; introduces a workload reduction taskforce; rolls out the Workforce Industry Exchange Programme announced in 2021; increases support for staff training and CPD, focused on student mental health and digital skills.
- **Removing barriers for young learners:**
 - Address the financial and educational barriers facing 16–19 year-old apprentices, including by: providing free travel and VAT-free equipment; mitigating impacts on benefits; providing access to maintenance loans; and developing an alternative to maths and English exit requirements.
 - Extend Pupil Premium Plus to looked-after children and 16–19 care leavers in FE.

■ Maximising employer investment in skills:

- Ensure all apprenticeship levy funding is allocated by redirecting underspends to apprenticeships in SMEs and a new lifelong learning initiative [see below].
- Reform the apprenticeship levy by: allowing employers to spend their levy funds over five years and spend up to 50% on an approved list of training courses; and ringfencing 50% of an employer's funds to be spent on Level 2/3 apprenticeships.

■ Making lifelong learning a reality:

- Launch a new lifelong learning initiative, to include: a right to five days a year to train; an expanded list of free Level 2/3 qualifications available under the Lifetime Skills Guarantee; and a refreshed lifelong approach to career guidance.
- Develop the digital infrastructure to underpin lifelong learning, including a post-18 Universal Skills Account and a Universal Skills Passport.
- Establish a minister-led working group on cross-provider HE credit recognition to: develop guidance on best practice in recognising prior learning; and promote credit transfer schemes to existing provider alliances and partnerships.

SCOTLAND

Prospects Luminate published [Scotland – What do graduates do? A region-by-region analysis of Scotland's graduate labour market](#), using data from the HESA Graduate Outcomes survey and the ONS.

- Scotland has a higher proportion of people than the UK average educated to NVQ4+ (degree or equivalent) – the majority of the workforce has this level of qualification.
 - However, as it has around the same proportion of professional-level jobs as the UK as a whole, there are slightly more people educated to degree or equivalent than there are professional roles.
- 4.2% of graduates from Scottish HEIs were unemployed – the lowest since Graduate Outcomes data were inaugurated – compared to 5.0% from UK-wide.
- High-tech manufacturing is vital to the economy but the required highly skilled workers are in short supply.
- SMEs are a little less important to graduate employment than in some parts of the UK; 22% start their career at an SME.
- 82% of graduates working in Scotland are from Scotland and studied in Scotland.
 - 7% are from outside Scotland and studied elsewhere; 6% are from Scotland but studied elsewhere; less than 5% are from elsewhere but studied in Scotland and stayed for work.

The UK-wide report was summarised in Skills Research Digest Q3 2023, p. 13.

Historic Environment Scotland and Skills Development Scotland (SDS) published a refreshed [Skills Investment Plan \[SIP\] for Scotland's historic environment sector](#), with a summary of progress since the first version in 2019.

- The sector supports an estimated 20k direct jobs, 68k full-time equivalent jobs and 78k volunteers in culture and heritage, with construction, tourism and creative industries the main sub-sectors.
- Findings from a survey of 56 organisations in 2023 include:
 - 68% of employers expect to have skills shortages in the next five years (+20% on 2019).
 - 41% have found recruiting staff extremely challenging (+30ppt).
 - 65% highlighted the huge impact of specialist skills shortages on organisation growth.
 - Three priorities are: growing provision and building capacity; attracting future talent and improving access; and fostering innovation.
 - Skills needs include: digital; project management; traditional; and technical.
 - 11 focus areas include: strong sector leadership for skills; identifying, stabilising, maintaining and growing specialist technical skills; accreditation and standards; attracting future talent and developing inclusive progressive pathways; the accessibility of CPD, e.g. for SMEs and volunteers; improving digital literacy; and skills to address the climate crisis.

The latest in a [series of SIPs](#) from SDS. A detailed action plan is included; supporting documents include a research report and skills profiles. A [national strategy for the historic environment](#) was published in 2023.

WALES

Colleges Wales published [*Demonstrating the Social Value of Further Education Colleges in Wales*](#), based on an understanding of 'social value' as encompassing the broader positive impacts that FE institutions have on individuals, communities and wider society.

- The report uses as its framework the goals of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act, i.e. a Wales that is: prosperous; resilient; healthier; more equal; of cohesive communities; of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language; globally responsible.
- Revealing the FE sector's multifaceted contributions to Wales' societal wellbeing, it makes three recommendations to further embed and embrace social value, focusing on legislative alignment, leadership advocacy, internal collaboration and formalised reporting.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND (RoI)

Skillnet Ireland published [*Ireland's Talent Landscape 2024: Future Skills Challenges of Irish Business*](#), based on an Ipsos Behaviour & Attitudes survey of 500 business leaders across all sectors, sizes and regions.

- 56% of businesses experienced a shift in their core skills in the past two to three years, and 61% anticipate further changes over the next two to three years.
 - 65% said their workforce would need upskilling in digitalisation and 59% in climate action and sustainability, in order to navigate complex modern challenges and remain competitive.
- 41% had difficulties finding employees with the necessary skillsets: financial risk management (48%), technical and engineering (30%) and marketing (55%) were identified as vital capabilities for future competitiveness but were challenging to source.
 - The main skills needs for growth by size of business were: SMEs – cyber security, financial management, and marketing and sales; large businesses – robotic process automation, cloud computing, AI, marketing and sustainable supply chain management.
- 41% said upskilling was intrinsically linked to business growth; 74% of employees had engaged in upskilling or training, however 27% of businesses hadn't provided staff upskilling in the past year.
 - 43% of businesses said time was a significant barrier to upskilling, 29% said it was the cost of training and 29% said it was a challenge to find relevant courses.

Cultural & Creative Industries Skillnet published [*Irish Immersive Technology Strategy for Growth – Promoting Ireland's Digital Transformation*](#), with Eirmersive, representing the RoI's 'immersive sector' – XR, encompassing AR, VR, MR and spatial computing.

- The RoI's immersive technology sector was worth over €43m in 2022; barriers to growth include a talent and skills challenge, which undermines the stability of businesses.
- Key findings from research conducted between June and September 2023 include:
 - 41.6% of respondents face hurdles in recruiting individuals with the necessary technical skills; another 33.7% report that finding expertise in the field poses a barrier to their operations.
 - Main shortages are: technical proficiency; content creation; design skills; and commercial acumen.
 - Diversity is a critical element; existing challenges include biases in investment, support and hiring practices, with a noted lack of emphasis on authentic diversity within the workforce.
 - There is a gap in knowledge and expertise, underscoring the importance of continuous learning and adaptation.
- Recommendations include:
 - Establish a national immersive skills advisory group by the end of 2024, with working groups that prioritise the gaps and barriers identified in the report.
 - Implement training programmes in EDI strategy development and set diversity criteria and guidelines to influence funding decisions and hiring practices.
 - Implement mentorship programmes and early education in STEM to build future talent.
 - Launch awareness campaigns about career opportunities in the sectors for students and parents.
 - Introduce specialised courses and modules in XR design and development.
 - Expand upskilling and training offerings in immersive technologies to current professionals.
 - Develop national occupational standards in collaboration with industry leaders.

EUROPEAN UNION (EU)

Cedefop published [Terminology of European education and training policy: A selection of 430 terms](#), a revised and expanded multilingual glossary.

- It covers the latest EU policy priorities, particularly on skills intelligence and employment.

It defines key terms and provides translations in German, French, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese.

CEPS published [Shaping tomorrow's workforce: EU policy priorities for skills](#).

- Although the European Year of Skills ended in May 2024, skills will remain a key topic in the years to come, paving the way for a 'Decade of Skills'; four recommendations:
 - **Anticipate future skills demands:** utilise skills intelligence to identify upskilling and reskilling needs, address shortages and develop proactive education and training programmes; promote occupational mobility to boost productivity and create pathways for vulnerable workers.
 - **Promote and embrace lifelong learning:** encourage continuous learning and adaptation to new technologies and industry changes; ensure access to lifelong learning opportunities, as job retention and growth depend on this capability.
 - **Enhance labour market integration:** align skills training with industry demands to integrate newcomers and foster entrepreneurship and innovation; modernise education and training systems and incentivise industry-specific training in key sectors.
 - **Address redistribution impacts:** understand and mitigate the redistribution impacts of AI; ensure equal access to quality education, training and employment opportunities to prevent inequality; enhance redistributive policies to address ex-post income disparities.

Circle Economy Foundation and Deloitte published [Circular Jobs Can Boost A Just Transition in Europe](#), a briefing outlining key policy measures ahead of the 2024 EU elections.

- The concept of a circular economy is being spotlighted as a promising solution to two pressing priorities: investing in workers and advancing green ambitions.
 - However, while significant strides have been made in setting targets and developing roadmaps towards a circular economy in Europe, there is a lack of initiatives focused on ensuring individuals are equipped with the necessary expertise and competencies to drive this transition forward.
- Drawing on findings of the [Circularity Gap Report 2024](#), the briefing recommends:
 - Planning effective industrial policies that prioritise those sectors of the economy most at risk in the transition, and mapping the new skills and associated training that will be required in the future.
 - Securing major funding for social protection and skills policies to ensure all workers can be supported in the transition, as well as upskilling and retraining programmes; both micro-certifications and longer term training programmes will be necessary; public-private partnerships can help ensure timely upskilling and a more shared responsibility for skills.
 - Rolling out innovative and targeted policy tools to assist workers, such as job guarantees; this can include tools to channel new circular jobs in areas where they are needed most.

The briefing features short case studies on: Sweden's specialised regional employment office, focused on the renewable energy industry in the north; and the RoI's 2021 Green Skills Action Programme.

The EU CAP Network published [Action-oriented recommendations for upskilling and reskilling the EU agricultural workforce](#), by the Network's Thematic Group on Nurturing Skills for a Thriving & Sustainable Agricultural Sector and funded by the EU.

- The report presents eight recommendations to improve skills in the EU agri-food sector, targeting various levels of policymaking and outlining concrete measures and key players.
 - Promote an EU-wide standardised certification programme for sustainable agricultural practices: allocate funds for programme development, training and certification to enhance the adoption of sustainable farming; improve environmental outcomes; align the workforce with evolving trends.
 - Initiate a cross-border skills sharing programme based on peer learning; ensure funding for events with simplified implementation.
 - Initiate a comprehensive skills diversification programme led by the EU and national institutions in collaboration with universities and other education and training bodies.
 - Establish a comprehensive, centralised skills and knowledge management platform led at the EU or national level, offering a unified framework that encompasses all EU stakeholders.

- Establish an EU-wide skills tracker funded through a Horizon project, collaborating with Eurostat and training providers to provide comprehensive yearly data on training programmes.
- Make access to funding and information easier and faster for projects with clear quality and goals.
- Establish an inclusive voucher system for farmers, including new entrants and young farmers, through collaboration between farmers, governments and the EU; this aims to eliminate financial barriers, enabling lifelong learning and enhancing agricultural skills.
- Implement an EU-wide training package on agro-ecology using demonstration farms across various countries; prioritise the training and promotion of agro-ecology practices contributing to a sustainable and resilient agricultural sector.

SMALL ADVANCED ECONOMIES (SAEs)

Includes relevant items by/about the following SAEs chosen by the DfE Northern Ireland for comparative purposes: Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Israel, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland (in addition to Scotland, Wales and the RoI, covered above).

Cedefop published 2023 Policy Briefs on VET for a number of SAEs, summarising national policy development since 2015.

- They are based on information collected from Cedefop's European network of expertise on VET (ReferNet).
- Reports are available for: [Austria](#), [Belgium \(Flanders\)](#), [Belgium \(French speaking\)](#), [Denmark](#), [Estonia](#), [Finland](#), [Iceland](#), [Luxembourg](#) and [Norway](#).

Also of relevance is the online [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#), which provides a rich source of information on VET and lifelong learning in the EU member states, Iceland and Norway.

Austria

Cedefop published [VET roadmap for a climate-friendly building sector](#), a news report.

- The building sector is responsible for almost 33% of Austria's energy consumption and for 17% of its greenhouse gas emissions, not including 'grey emissions' from the production of materials.
- As part of the ReBUSk project, funded by the EU LIFE programme, a roadmap was developed to ensure sufficient well-qualified skilled workers by 2030 to green the sector.
 - It highlights five strategic fields of action for IVET and continuing VET (CVET), with measures to overcome barriers and skills deficits in the various building professions.
- Analysis of the curricula, training regulations and course descriptions of IVET and CVET programmes related to 70 key occupational profiles showed some relevant skills were already partly incorporated.
 - However, skills that contribute to enhancing resource efficiency, recyclability and decarbonisation of existing buildings are still hardly taught.
- Stakeholder engagement is high: from the start of the project, the consortium involved representatives from ministries, educational institutions, companies, sectors and interest groups.
 - In conferences, workshops and bilateral discussions, their expertise, experience and interests were pooled and integrated into the roadmap.
 - As a result, there have been over 65 declarations of support for the roadmap, strengthening its sustainability and potentially contributing significantly to its implementation.

Cedefop published [Exceptional apprenticeship diploma – springboard for careers](#), a news report.

- Standard Austrian apprenticeship training concludes with an 'apprenticeship-leave' exam.
- However, an 'exceptional apprenticeship-leave exam' is available for those who haven't completed a formal programme but have acquired practical experience and skills through work experience, self-study or other non-traditional means.
 - It is conducted by the Austrian Economic Chamber and open to a range of trades and occupations.
 - In 2022, it accounted for ~17% of all successfully completed apprenticeships and is therefore one of the most important instruments for validating skills acquired non-formally, informally or abroad.
- In a survey of those who had taken the exceptional exam in 2020–2022, 73% already had a qualification above the compulsory school leaving certificate.

- Most were motivated by career advancement (50%), career change (33%) and (re-)entry after unemployment or parental leave (26%); 9% sought the recognition of skills acquired abroad.
- Before taking the exam, 28% were unemployed or undergoing public training programmes; this fell to 4% after the exam.
- Similarly, the proportion of skilled workers rose from 36% to 65% and of executives from 5% to 12%; the proportion of unskilled workers fell from 18% to 2%.
- Overall, 97% were satisfied with their decision to take the exam and 94% with their post-exam career to date.

Denmark

The Ministry of Children & Education [announced](#) a new plan to secure more skilled workers for the green transition.

- The number of skilled workers has been falling over a number of years, with 70k fewer forecast for 2030 than in 2022.
- Through 'Prepared for the Future IV', the government plans to strengthen green transition-related aspects of education programmes and make VET a more attractive education choice.
 - Ringfenced funding of DKK 300m (~£34m) will be allocated to vocational schools over a four-year period so that they can invest in up-to-date and green equipment and upskill teachers; most will be aimed at food & agriculture and technology, construction & transport.
 - As part of an agreement on green tax reform for industry, DKK 100m (£11.3m) will be used in 2025 and 2026 for green continuing education and upskilling.
 - Three 'climate vocational schools' will be designated, acting as driving forces across all vocational schools and training providers, helping to develop, test and update relevant programmes, including for the teaching workforce.
 - The government will be setting aside DKK 23.5m (£2.7m) annually so that vocational students can benefit from more study trips, including to other countries.

Cedefop published [New political agreement for VET students in the healthcare sector](#), a news report.

- In response to a pressing need for more healthcare workers, the Danish government has entered into an agreement with a broad coalition of parties to take a proactive approach to tackling increasing skills shortages.
- Key elements:
 - Increased support for language learning, acknowledging the diverse linguistic backgrounds of prospective students.
 - A substantial annual investment from 2025 to incentivise vocational schools to tailor their programmes to local needs.
 - Exploration of wage compensation for learners aged 25+ who are enrolled on social and healthcare assistance study programmes.
 - Long-term planning to address workforce shortages through targeted recruitment efforts and sustained investment in vocational training.

Estonia

Cedefop published [Better ICT and engineering skills in VET by 2029](#), a news report.

- A strategic initiative to increase the popularity of these fields and meet the demands of the labour market is being implemented through two programmes: [IT academy](#) and [Engineering academy](#), supported by EU funds and overseen by the Ministry of Education & Research.
- Relevant education content, organisational structure, methodology and infrastructure will be updated.
 - **In IT**, this involves developing new curricula at European Qualifications Framework (EQF) levels 4 and 5 (equivalent to A levels and HNC/HND) and supporting teacher/trainer professional development; learner mentoring and tutoring programmes will also be developed.
 - **In engineering**, new curricula and modules at EQF 4 and 5 along with broad, interdisciplinary programmes in upper secondary, focusing on industry 4.0 requirements and integrating the various engineering disciplines with product and industrial design.
- The initiative will also aim to increase female participation.

Finland

Cedefop published [More flexibility and skills for the green and digital transitions](#), a news report.

- Based on the report of a working group, the Finnish National Agency for Education initiated measures to increase flexibility in further and specialist vocational qualifications, strengthen the competences required by digitalisation and the green transition and promote the use of micro-credentials.
 - The aim is to speed up the process of developing VET qualifications, reduce the number of units per qualification and streamline the articulation of vocational competence requirements and their evaluation criteria.
- Qualifications consist of units, which are assigned competence points, describing their scope rather than study time.
- To make learning more flexible and able to be personalised:
 - The scope of further and specialist qualifications will be defined and it will be possible to include units from HE programmes, other VET qualifications or customised vocational units based on local competence needs.
 - Common optional units will be developed that can be used across all professional fields, e.g. covering managerial competences.
 - New optional units will be included that can be completed as micro-credentials, covering competences for the green and digital transitions, based on industries' needs.
 - Green and digital competences will also be included in all vocational qualifications as sector-specific professional requirements or units.

Cedefop published [VET learner mobility periods rising but still below pre-COVID levels](#), a news report.

- In 2023, 71% of Finnish VET providers offered international mobility to their learners as part of internationalisation, mostly through the Erasmus+ programme.
 - The current EU international mobility target for VET students is 8%, but a European Council recommendation in May 2024 proposed an increase to at least 12% by 2030.
- 8.8% of VET learners went abroad for study-related periods, +38% on 2022, but still down on 2019; Finland received 2,437 international students, +29% on 2022.
- In 2023, 61% of Finnish VET students who studied abroad did so at workplaces in their professional fields: 1% under an apprenticeship contract and 7% under a 'KA2' programme (cooperation among organisations and institutions).
 - 39% of those who came to Finland came to learn at a workplace.

New Zealand

The Ministry of Education published [Let's Get Accessible: Disabled students' experiences navigating the tertiary education system](#) with the National Disabled Students Association, Tertiary Education Commission and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority.

- The report is based on a survey of 235 disabled students in tertiary education, plus focus groups; key findings include:
 - Levels of support for disabled learners are inconsistent across their learning providers.
 - Accessing support is difficult for many disabled students.
 - Barriers to inclusion in the wider student experience are common.
 - The power dynamics within tertiary providers make advocacy difficult for disabled students.

Norway

The Ministry of Trade, Industry & Fisheries published [Roadmap 2.0: The green industrial initiative](#), updating the roadmap published in 2022 and promising to take the Norwegian economy through 'the biggest transition it has seen in modern times'.

- In terms of labour and skills:
 - The Norwegian labour market is skill-intensive, with a high ICT intensity and relatively few routine jobs in industry and the service industries.

- Norwegian industry has a work culture that is flat and trust-based, with short lines of communication between the management, engineer and skilled worker.
- Companies have employees with high theoretical and practical expertise in all parts of production, who tend to operate with a high degree of autonomy.
- Norwegian industrial environments have expertise and extensive operational know-how in areas such as oil and gas, renewable energy, metallurgy and the maritime and marine sectors.
- Many strong industrial environments have been developed through employees' ability to develop and use new solutions and good interaction between industry and research and education environments.
- There is a generally high level of education in the population, a social safety net for everyone and a regional profile that ensures the decentralised provision of education, welfare and infrastructure.
- The authorities provide predictable framework conditions that promote development, restructuring and market access; there are short lines of communication between the authorities and the business sector, between businesses in different sectors, and between businesses and academia.
- The Norwegian Committee on Skill Needs submitted a report in June 2023 on future skills needs for the green transition; while its recommendations are being considered by the Government, it will:
 - Invest in education with a focus on flexible and decentralised provision, based on local skills needs
 - Maintain dialogue with sector parties concerning special skills needs and how policy instruments can better meet these
 - Work on skills policy with the Skills Policy Council
 - Continue arrangements such as the industry programme and the Industrial Training School
 - Assign VET a key role, giving vocational colleges a greater role in educating skilled professionals and developing the workforce throughout the country
 - In 2025, introduce a new funding system for universities and university colleges that gives them more freedom to prioritise future skills needs in the short and long term.

The OECD published [Shaping Norway's Digital Future](#), analysing performance, policies and priorities to inform the development of a new national digital strategy.

- The report assesses Norway's digital performance based on the OECD Going Digital Toolkit dashboard of indicators and analyses its digital policies through the lens of the OECD Going Digital Integrated Policy Framework.
- Several priorities will shape the content and structure of the forthcoming strategy: ensuring high-quality information and communications infrastructure; developing the data economy; fostering data protection and information security; increasing the digitalisation of SMEs; promoting an inclusive digital society in an ageing population; supporting the green transition; and digitalising the public sector.
- Norway's digital policy landscape comprises relatively more initiatives related to innovation than the other dimensions of the OECD Framework, followed by society, access and use.
- In terms of indicators, it:
 - Outperforms all OECD countries in indicators related to the effective use of digital technologies
 - Outperforms the OECD and Nordic averages in societal indicators of digital transformation
 - Is above the OECD average but below the Nordic average on indicators of trust and access
 - Has opportunities to catch up in indicators related to market openness, jobs and innovation where there is the most potential to improve performance.
- Key policy recommendations are structured around six areas:
 - Encourage technology adoption and skills development to ensure a more digital-intensive economy and resilient workforce
 - Prioritise innovation to create a more digital Norway
 - Maximise the potential of data, while maintaining Norway's strong culture of trust
 - Harness the potential of digital technologies for society
 - Prepare for next generation networks and a future of unlimited connectivity everywhere
 - Design holistic digital policies within effective governance and monitoring mechanisms.

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