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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 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:

- Concerns about the impact of the cost of living crisis on young people in education or training.
- Covid-19 continues to assert its influence, with research not only investigating its impact on attainment, the labour market, gender equality and health, but also highlighting how it has accelerated and helped to embed pre-pandemic trends.
- It is still early days, but microcredentials are causing policy debate around Europe, as countries consider how to quality assure, fund, recognise and otherwise support these tools for lifelong learning.

* 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 University of Stirling published [*Choice, Attainment and Positive Destinations: Exploring the impact of curriculum policy change on young people*](#).

- Funded by the Nuffield Foundation, the research focuses on curriculum narrowing in Scottish secondaries following the 2010 introduction of Curriculum for Excellence.
 - The aim was to deepen understanding of how curriculum making relates to educational attainment, early transitions and other outcomes, and is therefore of interest beyond Scotland.
- In secondary 4 (S4) (Year 10/11 equivalent), there has been a reduction in the number of National Qualification (NQ) entries, particularly in social subjects, expressive arts and modern languages, and a decrease in the number of subjects studied.
 - Students from comparatively disadvantaged areas are entering fewer NQs and taking a narrower range of subjects; they are also more likely to delay entry to level 5 qualifications and Highers.
- There is a significant 'culture of performativity' in many schools, encouraging the selection of content and/or the organisation of provision to maximise senior phase attainment.
 - There are 'counter-educational' practices, including abolishing low-performing subjects, teaching to the test and channelling students into courses to benefit attainment statistics.
 - Students are being channelled into senior phase courses before the end of the S3 curriculum.
 - Teacher shortages – especially in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) – and a lack of non-contact time, are limiting subjects offered and teacher capacity for curriculum making.
- Despite fewer young people entering level 5 qualifications in S4 since 2013, the proportion of passes has increased, as they have for Highers in S5, possibly due to more selective entry.
 - However, S5 entries to National 5s have decreased, suggesting that introducing more flexibility has not resulted in a larger uptake.
- Curriculum narrowing is also associated with negative consequences for young people in relation to attainment, transitions to subsequent study in school and destinations beyond school.
 - Contrary to the belief that studying fewer subjects will improve results, there is evidence that a narrower curriculum in S4 is linked – directly or indirectly – with fewer level 5 and Higher qualifications in S5 and Advanced Highers in S6.
 - There is also an association between a narrower curriculum in S4 and lower attainment in OECD PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) tests, including measures of global competence; and with less positive school leaving destinations, especially in relation to higher education (HE) entry.

The report concludes with 23 detailed recommendations, primarily for policymakers.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING & MATHS (STEM)

EngineeringUK published [*Engineering in higher education*](#), exploring the number, characteristics and outcomes of engineering and technology (E&T) students in UK HE, based on 2020/21 Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data.

- Between 2009/10 and 2020/21, there was a 14.0% increase in E&T students compared with a 5.2% increase in students overall.
 - E&T was the fifth most popular subject group when looking at all levels combined, and the most popular for postgraduate research students.
 - 6.1% of first degree undergraduate entrants in HE in the UK were studying E&T; 13.1% of postgraduate research entrants were studying E&T compared with 5.4% of postgraduate taught degrees.
- 18.5% of E&T first degree undergraduate entrants were women, compared to 56.5% overall; 25.8% of students on taught postgraduate courses and 27.8% on research courses were women.
 - 10.5% had a known disability, compared to 15.1% for all subjects combined.
 - E&T degrees had a higher proportion of minority ethnic entrants than other subjects, particularly Asians.

- 11.2% of first degree undergraduate entrants from areas with the lowest participation (quintile 1) were in E&T compared with 32.4% from the highest participation areas (quintile 5).
- Mechanical engineering was the most popular E&T first degree subject (22.5%); electronic and electrical engineering was most popular for both taught (19.4%) and research (19.6%) postgraduates.
 - 29.1% of chemical, process & energy undergraduate entrants were women, compared to 11.4% in production & manufacturing.
- 71.8% of E&T graduates from 2019/20 were in paid employment compared to 74.3% of those who graduated in 2017/18.
 - Of those in paid employment, 60% were working in the engineering industry 15 months after employment.
 - 8.2% of E&T graduates from 2019/20 were unemployed and looking for work compared to an average for all subjects of 7.3%; in 2017/18 it was 5.8%.

EngineeringUK also published [From A levels to engineering: Exploring the gender gap in higher education](#), using the same HESA data.

- 150k girls need to study maths and/or physics A level to reach the same number of women studying undergraduate-level E&T as men – an increase of 115k on the current numbers.
 - The number of girls studying maths and physics needs to increase by 26k to 33k.

CESifo Group Munich published [The Impact of the 'Coding Girls' Program on High School Students' Educational Choices](#), evaluating an educational enrichment programme implemented in ten Turin secondary schools in 2019/22.

- Launched in 2014, the programme provided computer programming instruction, role modelling and university orientation sessions and introductory talks on specific STEM topics and soft skills.
 - The aim was to inspire young female students to consider pursuing STEM studies.
- The programme had a significant impact on programming skills among both girls and boys.
- However, while it had a positive impact on boys' aspirations to pursue STEM studies at university, this wasn't true for girls.
 - This may be related to existing gender stereotypes developed at a very young age.
 - It may also be related to the fact that girls mature at a younger age and are able to form preferences about education choices sooner than boys, suggesting that such programmes would be more effective if introduced earlier than high school.

EMPLOYABILITY & CAREERS

England's Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) published [Ready for the Future: A review of careers education in England 2021/22](#), analysing progress and the remaining gaps.

- The report draws on data from 35k students, 84% of secondaries and colleges, over 120 employers and 1k business volunteers; some schools have three years of data on student destinations.
 - Although the findings are specific to schools and colleges gaining CEC support, it is possible to generalise that young people who face most barriers benefit more from careers education.
 - High-quality provision is helping to close the disadvantage gap, reducing levels of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- There is an emerging consensus around what young people need from a modern careers system:
 - Employers involved early in their education journey, to provide first-hand information
 - Information about all the different pathways available
 - An integrated approach full of powerful experiences
 - Personalised guidance from qualified careers advisers along the way.

The Edge Foundation published [The perspectives of learners: How are schools developing employability skills?](#), the second report in its 'Joint Dialogue' project.

- Young people's views and experiences were investigated via a survey of 67 students in Years 10–13, and focus groups in schools, sixth form colleges and two schools for those with special educational needs or disability (SEND).

- The most frequently noted skills that mainstream learners felt they were developing in school were communication, numeracy and problem solving.
 - They saw communication skills as the most transferable and necessary for careers and work.
- The most frequently noted skills learners felt they were *not* developing in school were digital skills and being informed, followed by drive, creativity and reflection.
- Students felt they developed the most employability skills through interacting with their peers, such as communication, teamwork and confidence.
 - Extracurricular activities were acknowledged by most as the means to develop teamworking, communications and resilience.
 - However, there is a disconnect between learners engaging with extracurricular activities in the pre- and post-16 phases of education.
- Students were generally confident using 'skills development' language and were able to identify employability skills they felt were important.
 - However, they felt it was difficult to articulate real examples of their skills development.
- Learners with SEND conveyed a well-rounded understanding of the meaning and importance of skills development.
 - In contrast to some of the conversations in mainstream schools, they provided more holistic examples to support their understanding of skills and their application to daily life.

The [first report](#) was published in 2018 and identified the skills employers were looking for.

[The Prince's Trust NatWest Youth Index 2023](#) was published, based on a YouGov survey of 2,025 16–25 year-olds in the UK in November–December 2022.

- Findings include:
 - 71% of 16–25 year-olds say having a job means they can plan for a successful future; 59% say it is/would be good for their mental health; 61% say it gives/would give them a sense of purpose.
 - 70% feel determined to achieve their goals.
 - 64% feel they can overcome the challenges they face but need practical support to build their confidence and skills.
 - When asked what would help them to achieve their career ambitions: 29% said help with building confidence; 30% securing better qualifications, training or work experience; 26% guidance on what jobs are available to them.
 - 59% would like a job that has a positive impact on society or their community; 20% would like a job in health and social care.
 - 53% think the cost of living crisis will have a worse impact on their life than the Covid-19 pandemic.

Youth Futures Foundation and the Social Innovation Partnership published ['Choosing your freedom': Findings from a participatory research study on young people and self-employment](#) – an area for which national data offer little information or insight.

- Around 0.5% of 16–24 year-olds are self-employed, mostly in 'skilled trades occupations'; twice as many young men as young women are self-employed.
- The research focused primarily on young people from Black and Asian backgrounds working in the arts, digital, creative and social impact sectors; findings include:
 - Good self-employment entails freedom to follow passions and design a working life to suit their preferences and needs; it is also about 'living their values'.
 - Few had engaged with any formal support; most had built their own networks, sourced their own mentors and sought advice from the internet or social media; practical information was lacking.
 - Support providers can offer deep insight and understanding but the support itself is under-evaluated, with little publicly available analysis on what works for whom; most support focuses on entrepreneurship.
 - Young people found mentoring and networks the most useful; however, some people had been 'scammed' by potential mentors.

- Young people were sceptical about 'targeted' support as it implies that those from certain backgrounds don't have the ability to work things out for themselves; support should be on a case-by-case basis and provided on merit rather than background.

Advance HE published [A Case Study Compendium: Contemporary practices and initiatives in employability on factors that enhance students' employability skills](#). [The full report is available to members only.]

- Themes include career preparation, knowledge and soft skills, inclusivity and equitable opportunities, and sustainability.

The European Commission's Working Group on Equality & Values in Education & Training published [Gender Equality in and Through Education](#), an 'issue paper' for policymakers based on Working Group presentations and discussions in 2022.

- The paper examines: gender gaps in education; gender segregation and non-traditional education and career pathways; bias in textbooks and learning materials; and tackling gender-based violence.
- Gender gaps and education:
 - Greater awareness-raising of gender gaps in education is needed for policymakers, practitioners, parents and the wider public.
 - More research is needed on the impact of dominant masculinity norms on the educational performance of boys and young men; these include attitudes, e.g. boys being expected to be 'naturally intelligent' while it is okay for girls to be 'hardworking'; the belief that it is not 'cool' for boys to study hard.
 - Review textbooks and learning materials, paying attention to issues including: the frequency and distribution of characters by gender; the roles that characters play/are entitled to; the activities that characters are engaged in and the tools they are using.
- Non-traditional career education and pathways:
 - The impact of both blatant and subtle biases and stereotypes on student attitudes and behaviours is not yet well understood.
 - Making career or subject choices too early can lead to greater gender segregation in both education and work spheres.
 - Long-term career counselling focused on career choices free of gender bias can help promote gender equality.
 - Provide gender-related anti-bias training for career guidance teachers and counsellors.
 - Specific policies and measures could attract more men into the education field (e.g. early childhood education and care/primary education) and more women into STEM.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD) published [Gender, Education & Skills: The persistence of gender gaps in education and skills](#).

- Key findings include:
 - In all OECD countries, men are more likely to be employed and earn higher wages than women.
 - Young men are more likely than young women to lack an upper secondary and a tertiary qualification; this gender gap increased between 2000 and 2020.
 - Girls perform better than boys in reading; boys outperform girls in maths, but by a much smaller margin; the gender gap in science is far narrower than in the other two subjects.
 - Among the highest achievers, girls perform better than boys in reading, but not in maths.
 - Women continue to dominate in fields of study related to caring, health & welfare and education, but are under-represented in STEM-related fields.
 - Since women in tertiary education choose fields of study with relatively less mathematical content, they are also much less likely than their male peers to practise advanced maths daily.
 - At university, men have greater proficiency in numeracy than women, probably due to career choice; girls' initial advantage in literacy seems to narrow or completely disappear at university.
 - Gender differences in numeracy are apparent across 16–65s, although the differences are smaller than those among university students; in contrast, male/female literacy is markedly similar in all countries.

- Narrowing gender gaps requires concerted efforts by parents, teachers and employers to become more aware of their own biases and to give girls and boys equal chances for success; approaches include:
 - Helping students overcome maths anxiety and lack of STEM confidence by evaluating actual abilities, giving positive feedback and helping in weaker areas without giving low marks
 - Training teachers to recognise and address any bias they may harbour
 - Using activities such as videogaming and web browsing to develop skills
 - Removing gender bias and stereotypes in curricula and raising awareness about the likely consequences on careers and earnings of decisions to pursue particular fields of study
 - Careful career guidance and counselling to help young men and women better match their acquired skills with their chosen career paths
 - Encouraging university students to improve numeracy skills by raising awareness of their importance in the labour market; maths camps can be organised targeting women
 - Ensuring sufficient opportunities and time for employee professional development, focusing particularly on improving numeracy.

The Institute of Labor Economics (IZA) published [A Lost Generation? Impact of Covid-19 on high school students' achievements](#), especially those who were about to enter the labour market or start university without the opportunity to recover.

- The performance of two cohorts of students in Italy was analysed – one that had not been exposed to the pandemic and one that left school in 2021 – using longitudinal data from standardised tests.
- Findings include:
 - The pandemic had a huge negative impact on students' performance in maths and reading (~0.4 standard deviation in both domains).
 - Low-achieving pupils suffered the most, increasing the gap between strong and poor performers.
 - The relative position of girls improved compared to boys after the pandemic, i.e. the gender gap in reading (in favour of girls) increased, and the gap in maths (in favour of boys) decreased.
 - Inequalities by parental education remained largely unchanged.
- Recommendations include:
 - Educational policies are needed to support this generation of students, particularly the most vulnerable, otherwise there is a high risk of increased university dropouts and the proportion of those who are NEET, plus a sharp decline in employment prospects, wages and national growth.
 - More research is needed to better understand the medium-term legacy of the pandemic and counteract the negative impact on the development of skills and the professional futures of these students.

IZA published [The Employment Effects of the Disability Education Gap in Europe](#), investigating the role of education in creating employment opportunities for people with disabilities across the EU, based on EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions for 2011–2019.

- Educational attainment is a major factor determining the probability of employment among those with disabilities.
 - The employment effects of tertiary education are much larger among people with disabilities than non-disabled people, i.e. having a disability is a greater disadvantage for less educated than for better educated people.
 - In more developed countries, the employment status of people with disabilities is generally less dependent on their educational attainment.
 - 20% of the disability employment gap in the 25–34 age group can be attributed to the gap in education between individuals with and without disabilities.
 - Non-formal education, especially digital skills training, may significantly improve the labour market outcomes of those with disabilities.

THE FURTHER EDUCATION (FE) & SKILLS SECTOR

England's Association of Colleges (AoC) published [*Global engagement in the UK college sector – academic year 2021/22*](#), its fifth annual report, based on responses from 82 colleges.

- 66% have international links and carry out some form of international engagement.
 - Those that have withdrawn from international work in the last five years cite college leadership decisions, resource constraints and the student visa sponsorship system as the key reasons.
- Income from college international work is difficult to calculate and is evolving; it can range from several thousand pounds into the millions; the survey suggests an average of £641k.
- The most common type of international activity is student mobility, with 68% engaged in legacy Erasmus+ or new Turing Scheme projects; over 50 have taken part in Turing since its inception in 2021.
 - The percentage active in international student recruitment (52%) is lower than 2020, which is not surprising given the pandemic, Brexit and the complexities of the student visa route.
- However, international recruitment represents almost 25% of total international income reported through the survey.
 - Overseas campus operations also represent 25% – ten colleges reported students taking their programmes overseas.
- 29% said that 75%+ of their international students progressed to HE courses at college or university; only 16% said that none did or that they didn't enrol international students.
- The top five countries for international work were: the greater China region, Germany, Italy, Spain and Japan.
 - EU countries remain strong partners for student mobility and China, Switzerland and Norway for international student recruitment.

England's Department for Education published [*Pre-census \(42-day\) retention strategies for 16–19 full-time learners*](#), based on case study examples of approaches used by ten colleges.

- In England, the overall national average in 2021/22 for withdrawals during the first 42 days of a course was 5.7%; in the case study colleges it ranged from 2.0% to 9.1%.
- **Strategic techniques** included: collaborative relationships with feeder schools and local authorities; college-ready programmes in feeder schools; investment in early, tailored support and individual guidance; designing the early curriculum around activities that settle, build confidence and create friendship groups.
- **Operational techniques** included: personalised induction; frequent monitoring of behaviour in the first 42 days; continuous reinforcement of expectations; staff investing time in getting to know learners; a curriculum designed to show early progress; early involvement of employers.

The Department also published [A guide to effective practice in curriculum planning](#) for post-16 FE.

The British Academy and Queen's University Belfast published [*Languages Provision in UK Further Education*](#), based on a literature review, national statistics, surveys of staff and students and interviews with key stakeholders.

- The UK focus over the last 20 years has been almost entirely on declining entries in secondary and HE and the voices of FE learners and teachers have rarely been heard.
- Low levels of participation in FE reflect years of underinvestment and an absence of clear progression pathways through appropriate vocational qualifications.
- A substantial number of FE colleges have no languages provision, particularly in areas that are 'cold spots' in HE.
- Recommendations include:
 - Develop a unifying voice for languages in FE, drawing on the expertise of staff in organisations including England's AoC, Colleges Scotland, Colegau Cymru and NI Colleges; this voice would strategically execute the following linked recommendations.

- Improve communication and sharing of teaching and resourcing between secondary, FE and HE, including regional oversight of languages education.
- Review post-Level 2 qualifications in languages.
- Conceive a programme of funded research to better understand the teaching and learning of languages in FE settings, the needs of industry and the possibility of operationalising much more languages teaching and learning in FE.

HIGHER EDUCATION (HE): APPLICANTS & ADMISSIONS

UCAS published [The future of undergraduate admissions](#), outlining five key reforms that draw on its engagement with over 180 higher education institutions (HEIs), 700 teachers and nearly 15k students.

- There is consensus that a successful admissions journey should*:
 - encourage students to easily explore a wide range of options across the UK
 - provide sufficient time to engage with shortlisted choices, supporting effective transition to their next step in education
 - inspire students to reach their full potential and support their access to HE and future learning
 - be transparent about entry conditions, along with how offers and decisions are made
 - empower students to exercise choice simply and easily within a framework that protects their interests
 - enable HEIs to plan and manage undergraduate admissions effectively.
- Based on its research, the reforms comprise:
 - Most importantly for 2025 entry, changing the personal statement to a series of questions covering motivation and preparedness for the course and for study, other experience, extenuating circumstances, preferred approach to learning
 - Replacing the free text academic reference with structured questions
 - Reporting on the different grade profiles that have been accepted for entry to courses
 - Creating personalised recommendations for students making post-secondary choices
 - Launching an outreach connection service for schools and students.

**These findings were originally set out in [Reimagining UK Admissions](#) in April 2021.*

HESA published [Parental education data: Can we ever know why students might respond 'I don't know'?](#), a 'research insight' into the response of some applicants in their UCAS form when asked about the qualifications attained by their parents.

- 15% of student entries are missing data on parental education, possibly resulting from individuals refusing to supply the information, choosing to skip the question or not knowing the answer.
 - One possible reason for not knowing the answer is that students come from single-parent households and don't know the qualification levels of the other parent.
- By linking its data to Census 2011 records, HESA found that students living in areas with higher percentages of lone-parent families have a higher probability of responding 'don't know'.
 - The same applies to Black African and Black Caribbean students, who, according to census data, are more likely to live in lone-parent families.
- Future qualitative research could help to confirm if this is the reason students select 'don't know'; if it is, it may be worth investigating whether the wording of the question and/or guidance associated with it should be changed to make it clearer how such students should respond.

UCAS published [What is the Journey to a Million?](#), projecting that there could be up to 1m UK HE applicants in a single year in 2030.

- The projection is driven by:
 - an increasing 18-year-old population, with the Office for National Statistics forecasting that there could be nearly 900k 18 year-olds in 2030, up 180k from 2020
 - growing numbers of internationally mobile students: in 2000 there were 1.6m internationally mobile students, rising to 5.6m in 2020, and some forecast this could be as high as 9m in 2030
 - growth scenarios ranging from 19.5% to 41%, with the most likely at 30%.

- UCAS launched a [national, three-month debate](#), with 50 key thinkers tackling five 'big challenges' including: continuing to widen participation; supporting students in a more competitive environment; the imbalance of supply and demand; and the future student experience.
 - The first contributions consider: student progression and the choices they have in [Northern Ireland](#), [England](#) and [Wales](#); and [widening participation](#).

The House of Commons Library published [Higher education student numbers across the UK](#).

- The briefing presents a snapshot of the position in 2020/21 and examines trends in: the size of the student population; the number of entrants overall and for different types of students/courses; and entry rates for different groups and areas.

MillionPlus (the Association for Modern Universities) published [Who trains the nurses? Universities and the placements shortfall](#), a briefing calling for urgent reform of the system in England and Scotland.

- Modern universities collectively train around 66% of student nurses and are up to the challenge of ever-increasing demand; however, the requirement for training through a pre-qualification clinical placement presents a clear barrier for growth.
- The briefing highlights the innovative approaches modern universities have taken to expanding capacity, the mentoring and monitoring of students while on placement and improving working with partner NHS Trusts, care homes and other placement facilities.
 - It makes recommendations on enabling more efficient use of resources and on the recruitment of additional students.

The House of Commons Library published two overviews of government policy on medical, dental and healthcare students across the UK including in Northern Ireland.

- [The cap on medical and dental student numbers in the UK](#), highlighting calls to lift the cap on places and explaining some of the associated challenges.
- [Medical, dental, and healthcare students: UK numbers and student support arrangements](#), including the impact of changes to exam arrangements in 2020 due to the pandemic.

HE: THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Advance HE published [UK Engagement Survey 2022](#), reporting findings from 10,900 students in 16 institutions on their engagement with their studies, staff and peers.

- Findings include:
 - Overall, after a dip in engagement in 2020 and 2021, students' engagement with their studies has largely bounced back to pre-pandemic levels in 2022.
 - 38% said they saw staff often/very often, up from 33% in 2021 and equal to 2018.
 - 44% had been encouraged to collaborate with staff often/very often, more than any other year since the beginning of the survey.
 - 47% said they had worked with fellow students often/very often in 2022, up from 36% in 2021, but down from 56% in 2017 and 2018.
 - Students report that their courses did less to emphasise research and inquiry than they had pre-pandemic, although challenge, critical thinking, reflecting and connecting remained broadly unchanged.
 - 59% had paid work while studying, up from 43% in 2015.
 - 23% considered leaving during 2022 – lower than during the previous three years.

There is no indication of geographical coverage.

Advance HE also published [Student engagement through partnership: A literature review, exploring evidence from 2017–2022 on student–staff reciprocal initiatives and their impacts on student outcomes and experiences in HE](#). [The full report is available to members only.]

- The study explores: what constitutes a partnership; who benefits from partnership and how the benefits are measured; whether the benefit can extend beyond a select few; and whether partnership is a good thing.

London School of Economics & Political Science published [Working in partnership to improve international student integration and experience](#), its final report for England's Office for

Students (OfS) evaluating submissions from English institutions to a project set up as part of the UK International Education Strategy.

- International students' wellbeing is influenced by different factors and challenges, including:
 - Practical challenges, e.g. housing, finance and settling in a foreign country
 - Those related to a different HE system, e.g. academic skills, class interaction and language barriers
 - Those around the post-university experience, e.g. careers, employment insecurity and job search.
- Among the findings:
 - Universities are addressing the challenges through services that often target more than one issue, including academic services (e.g. academic writing and language skills), community-building initiatives (e.g. welcome packs, orientation and social events) and in-person/online support services including mental health and career counselling.
 - Most universities addressed the psychological and practical disruptions caused by the pandemic through strategies such as the switch to remote learning, virtual support to improve social and academic wellbeing (often in partnership with students' unions) and strengthening online counselling and mental health services.
 - The pandemic provided an opportunity to implement a more personalised approach towards international students, identifying their distinct needs.

HE: WIDENING PARTICIPATION

Transforming Access & Student Outcomes in Higher Education published [Rapid review to support development of the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register \(EORR\)](#) for England's OfS.

- The review presents recent evidence on equality gaps throughout the student lifecycle, from attainment at school through to labour market outcomes.
 - It enables a more detailed understanding of the 'raw gaps' and also explores the intersection of different characteristics, testing whether taking into account differences between groups can reduce some of the observed gaps.
- Outcomes throughout the student lifecycle are heavily patterned by demographic characteristics, with large differences by factors such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender and place, as well as for specific disadvantaged and under-represented groups.
 - From an early age, attainment itself is heavily patterned by these same factors.
- By identifying the role that prior attainment and demographic characteristics play in some of the patterns, this can help the HE sector understand the nature of these gaps and potential solutions.
 - The most appropriate approaches are likely to include both 'upstream' work to improve attainment, and 'downstream' approaches to improve outcomes, regardless of grade profile.

The House of Commons Library published [Equality of access and outcomes in higher education in England](#), a research briefing using data from England's Department for Education, the OfS and UCAS.

- The report explores: the differences in access and outcomes between groups; the barriers to equal access, participation and outcomes; government policy and actions; the role of the OfS; and responsibilities and actions of HE providers.
- Factors identified as barriers to greater equality in HE for students from different backgrounds include:
 - Prior attainment of students
 - Insufficient advice and support both before and during university
 - Financial concerns that deter young people from applying and can have a detrimental impact on experiences of HE
 - The prevalence of sexual and racial harassment on campus.
- Policy approaches to improve access, participation and outcomes for students include:
 - **Government** sets out its priorities for the OfS in an annual letter, informing levels of funding for programmes that aim to support student access and success.

- Since the pandemic, providers have been allowed to divert some funding to other areas, e.g. student hardship and mental health services.
- Funding has increased for HEI Access & Participation Plans from 2020/21 to 2024/25, with ~60% for financial support (mainly bursaries and scholarships) and the remainder for outreach activity to disadvantaged groups.
- **HEI** activities to increase representation include: creating partnerships with local schools and colleges; running mentoring and ambassador schemes; and facilitating summer schools.
- Many providers use contextual admissions data when making offers to applicants, in an attempt to widen participation among disadvantaged groups.
- Providers have also looked to improve the attainment and future success of disadvantaged students, e.g. making reasonable adjustments for disabled students and using careers services to reduce differential employment outcomes.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies published [Can higher education policy boost intergenerational mobility? Evidence from an empirical matching model](#), a research report for England's Department for Education.

- The scope for the HE system to substantially improve mobility statistics for entire cohorts is limited; however, focusing on students of higher ability highlights substantial effects in some cases.
- Contrary to perceived wisdom in HE policy, the effects don't come from policies that cut student loans or increase cash support.
 - Far more effective policies would target cash support on poorer students conditional on them studying higher earning subjects.
- However, the biggest improvements in mobility come from targeting the supply side by enforcing universities to give preferential admission to poorer students who graduate in the top 10% of their secondary school class.
 - This would substantially narrow earnings gaps between richer and poorer students with good prior attainment, without significant costs to the taxpayer.

GRADUATES & GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

Universities UK (UUK) published [How universities are turning the corner on grade inflation](#), an update on action taken in the past year to protect degree standards.

- Progress on grade inflation includes:
 - Universities have implemented all four commitments in the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment's 2019 statement of intent: ensure assessments continue to stretch and challenge students; review and explain how final degree classifications are calculated; support and strengthen the external examiners system; review and publish data and analysis on students' degree outcomes.
 - [118 universities in England and Wales](#) have published degree outcomes statements.
 - Data from 2021/22 show a UK-wide 3.9ppt decrease in upper awards compared to 2019/20, to 78% (firsts – 32%; 2:1s – 46%); they also decreased in Northern Ireland and Scotland, but by less.
- On governance, universities are: involving them earlier in the academic assurance process; recruiting a proportion based on their quality assurance expertise; providing in-depth training and induction.
 - However, there is a risk that responsibility for quality assurance often falls on governors with a background in HE; UUK, Advance HE and GuildHE are working to support more sustainable training to embed and empower all governors.

The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services published [International Graduate Routes: Narratives from the UK job market](#).

- The Graduate route visa, launched in July 2021, allows students to remain for a two-year period after graduation (three years for PhD candidates).
- Of 345 students surveyed:
 - 73% had studied at master's level, 23% at undergraduate degree level.
 - 85% had a Graduate route visa and 15% a Skilled Worker visa.

- At the time of the survey, 60% were employed full-time and 26% were unemployed; 72% of those employed via the Graduate route were in a graduate-level role.
- 58% said that their expectations of post-study work visas were being met; 24% did not think their expectations were being met.
- Facilitators for remaining in the UK can be categorised as:
 - A positive experience and perception of the Graduate route
 - The UK providing employment and lifestyle opportunities
 - Support provided by their university
 - Work experience and skill development
 - Initial experiences with employers, including transparency about their ability to provide sponsorship, their level of experience employing and working with international graduates, and how welcoming they were.
- Barriers are:
 - Lack of employer knowledge and resistance or prejudice
 - Lack of information on visas, employment rights, recruitment practices and cultural norms
 - Visa issues such as high costs, visa limitations and a lack of government support
 - Employment issues such as difficulties finding employment, precarious employment and differences related to subject studied and employer size
 - Issues related to living in the UK, including housing, mental and physical health issues and financial concerns, plus the perception of the UK as unwelcoming for international graduates.
- A number of recommendations are made for policymakers and employers, universities and careers and employability services, including:
 - Improving employers' and students' awareness and understanding of the Graduate and Skilled Worker routes
 - More joined up working between government departments to enable international students to make a greater contribution to UK culture and prosperity.

High Fliers Research published [The Graduate Market in 2023: Annual review of graduate vacancies & starting salaries at the UK's leading employers](#), based on a study of 100 leading UK graduate employers in January 2023.

- **In 2022** firms increased graduate recruitment by 14.5% – the highest ever annual rise.
 - 3,500 more graduates were recruited than was expected at the start of 2021–22.
 - Graduate recruitment increased in 11 of the 15 most sought-after sectors.
 - One 'Big Four' accounting & professional services firm hired over 2,300 new graduates, the most ever recruited by a single employer in the UK.
 - 52% of graduates recruited were male; 44% Black, Asian or minority ethnic; 13% LGBTQ+; 20% were from low-income families; 9% had a learning difficulty or disability.
 - 51% had studied at a Russell Group university.
- Applications for graduate vacancies increased by 8% year-on-year.
 - The number of graduate vacancies is now 16% higher than the pre-pandemic peak in 2019.
 - ~50% of firms received more graduate job applications this season than last.
- The majority of the employers returned to in-person events and university promotions for graduate recruitment marketing.
 - 254 graduates were recruited via a firm's work experience placements.
 - Employers increased the average number of universities actively targeted to 27.
 - Employers received 39 applications per graduate vacancy on average.
- **In 2023** the number of graduate jobs is expected to rise a further 6.3%.
 - Graduate starting salaries at UK top firms are set to rise to £33,500 (up 11.7% from 2020).
 - Accounting & professional services are expected to be the largest graduate recruiters, with 7,610 entry-level vacancies available.

HE: TEACHING & LEARNING

The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) and the Russell Group's Pro-Vice-Chancellors/Deans of Arts & Humanities Network published [*The Humanities in the UK Today: What's going on?*](#).

- The word 'crisis' is often used in relation to the humanities*, suggesting a huge drop in students and provision.
 - In fact, the distribution of UK humanities students across institutions and disciplines has shifted, creating a recruitment crisis in some areas and some institutions.
 - Humanities have remained relatively popular, despite strong government steers towards STEM.
- Key findings include:
 - In 2020, UK humanities research activity was 49% higher than the global average, outperforming all other research areas in the UK.
 - The number of UK students choosing humanities subjects suggests they continue to recognise the value of degrees that develop the talents and skills needed for a wide range of opportunities.
 - There is a strong correlation between the skills of arts, humanities & social sciences (AHSS) graduates and key skills valued by employers.
 - Only 14% of employers say specific degree subjects are a selection criterion; for most employers, it is the level of education that is important, not the particular discipline.
 - AHSS are now taught in a much more interdisciplinary way with the natural sciences and other STEM disciplines, allowing students to prepare for an increasingly complex and uncertain world.

**Humanities here include philosophy, history, theology, English, modern languages, digital humanities, film theory, and culture and media studies. Practice-based arts will be part of a separate HEPI report.*

The Centre for Economic Performance (CEP) published [*Do role models matter in large classes? New evidence on gender match effects in higher education*](#), based on data for all programmes and courses from a German university between 2006 and 2018.

- The study considered whether female students benefit from being taught by female professors, and whether such gender effects differ by class size.
- The effects on student performance are considerable in smaller classes, but don't exist in larger classes.
 - Direct and frequent interactions between students and professors are the important factor.
 - However, the idea that female students' performance increases simply because they are inspired by seeing another woman excel in a subject is too simplistic.
- The trend towards more online education with larger class sizes and less direct and frequent interactions between students and professors may weaken the impact of policies designed to increase female graduation rates in traditionally male-dominated fields by increasing gender diversity among professors.

IZA published [*Does the Closeness of Peers Matter? An investigation using online training platform data and survey data*](#), based on a large-scale online teacher training programme in China.

- The study categorised students into 'global peers' (from outside the county), 'local peers' (from the same county) and 'close peers' (from the same institution) to estimate their influences.
- The appearance of local and close peers generated positive influences on attendance at a lecture and on the length of time staying in a lecture; in contrast, global peers had a negative although economically insignificant impact on participation.
 - Peer effects increase with the closeness of peer groups; possible causes include peer pressure, reputation concerns and social interactions.
- Other findings include: females are influenced more by their peers than males; job security affects the responsiveness to the behaviour of close peers; and social interactions appear to be an important working mechanism for fostering peer effects in online education.
- To generate peer effects:
 - online education platforms could improve visualisation of the presence of peers in the online setting, e.g. highlighting close and local peers

- the design of the online education programme can encourage peer interactions, e.g. creating online social networks to strengthen positive peer effects.

Advance HE published [Embedding enterprise and entrepreneurship in higher education: An Advance HE case study collection](#). [The full report is available to members only.]

- Five case studies examine initiatives including: building cross-discipline teams to enhance enterprise ideas; extracurricular work-based learning via an enterprise and innovation lab; and identifying employability and enterprise opportunities in a programme of study.

HE: RESEARCH & INSTITUTIONS

UUK published [Research and Innovation facts and figures: 2022](#), exploring outputs, impacts, collaboration and culture, and funding in UK universities.

- 41% of UK research is world-leading (4*) and 43% internationally excellent (3*).
- UK publications received 10.5% of the world's citations – a figure that has remained relatively consistent over the last two decades.
- In 2020, the UK produced 6.3% of global publications; its share has remained relatively steady even as that of the US and the OECD has decreased and China has increased.
- The UK is fourth in the Global Innovation Index and is deemed an 'efficient economy', meaning its innovation outputs (e.g. patents, interactions between universities and business) outweigh its inputs.
- 90% of universities embed entrepreneurship within degree programmes and 98% provide extracurricular support for enterprise and entrepreneurship.

An interactive map of the UK shows research quality by provider location.

HEPI published [How to talk to policymakers about research](#), based on interviews with former ministers, special advisers and officials.

- Policymakers tend to see the value of research in just two ways: applied and used as evidence in policymaking.
- Long timescales and a lack of control over outcomes can frustrate policymakers, who tend to want immediate results and clear links between funding and economic growth.
- Proof that R&D funding has leveraged local business investment creates a powerful argument for policymakers to provide further funding.
- There is an appetite among policymakers for non-utilitarian arguments on the value of research alongside (rather than instead of) economic evidence.
- There is scope for researchers to present a vision of the value that research adds to the UK, but this should recognise the financial and other pressures on any government.

HEPI published [The role of universities in driving overseas investment into UK research and development](#) with Midlands Innovation, the National Centre for Universities & Business and UUK International, drawing on analysis, research and a pilot in the English Midlands.

- Universities have a unique role to play in levelling up, not only providing the basis of the research ecosystem that attracts investment but also offering a pipeline of skilled graduates for industry collaboration and spin-outs.
- Universities already play an important role in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) to the UK, but there is a clear opportunity for this to be expanded and improved; recommendations include:
 - Government should target the world's top 200 R&D investors, taking advantage of its new Whitehall departments to launch a refreshed, more ambitious approach to securing FDI into science & technology.
 - Government should incorporate FDI in R&D into its plans to forge bilateral international research and innovation bridges with partner nations.
 - Universities, government and local partners should work together to showcase the investment potential of the innovation clusters that surround campuses across the UK.
 - Universities should 'hunt in packs' to attract more significant investment into regional economies.
 - A more systematic approach should be taken to introduce universities to firms that may potentially invest, or have recently invested, in a local area.

HEPI and the UPP Foundation published [Public Attitudes to Higher Education Survey 2022](#), based on their second annual survey of 2k adults in England in August.

- 75% agree that a university degree is an impressive achievement; 77% that universities are important to research and innovation; 57% that they are important to the UK economy.
 - 22% believe a degree is a waste of time, rising to 32% of 18–24s; 53% that studying topics that don't clearly lead to a profession is a waste of time; 58% that a degree doesn't prepare for the real world.
 - Overall, 52% believe that the advantages of a degree outweigh the disadvantages.
- Among 'University Pessimists' 54% definitely wouldn't want to go to university (up 20ppt from 2021), 34% would probably or definitely not want their children to go (up 14ppt).
- 50% agree that university research should receive funding from the taxpayer (down 2ppt).
- 57% say that freedom of speech at English universities is under at least some threat, and 22% that it is under great threat.
- 71% think that the cost of living will deter people from going to university, and 57% that the government should provide additional support to students, but only 10% say they are a top priority.
 - 64% think maintenance grants should be reintroduced in England; 44% agree that the amount of maintenance loan students can borrow should increase; 69% think loans should always cover student rents.
 - 20% of parents would not expect to make any financial contributions to support their children if they decided to attend university, rising to 33% among social class DE.
 - 63% agree that students should expect to work part time to cover living costs, rising to 72% among those aged 65+ and falling to 40% among 18–24s.

THE TERTIARY SECTOR

The Royal Society of Edinburgh published [Tertiary Education Futures](#), the final report from a project with its Young Academy of Scotland to stimulate creative thinking about how post-school education might evolve and what this means for learners and society.

- Conclusions include:
 - Learners will come from increasingly divergent backgrounds, including returners displaced from the job market by decarbonisation or automation, and will require bespoke support.
 - Future learners will expect a more tailored, fluid experience that would fit into their schedules and allow them to demonstrate their adaptability to potential employers.
 - Institutions might move towards a more collaborative system that relies on decentralised, reciprocal provision, which would lead to a more agile and interdisciplinary delivery infrastructure.
 - Fostering a culture of collaboration will require system-wide changes, e.g. funding reforms.
 - Taking a value-based approach to competition between institutions could help reduce barriers to building a more integrated system.
 - To futureproof their education, learners may look to alternatives if tertiary providers fail to modernise.
 - The margins of traditional subject-based study will become progressively blurred as interdisciplinarity and problem-based learning take greater hold in curricula, assessment methodologies and qualifications; there is a need to consider how interdisciplinary learning undertaken in secondary schools can be recognised and further facilitated.
 - Adaptable and behaviour-centred meta skills – e.g. innovative thinking and emotional intelligence – will become increasingly vital.
 - A process of regular reskilling – including through microcredentials – will become increasingly commonplace and the sector will need to adapt its offerings accordingly.
 - Over the next decade and beyond, colleges will likely step into a more significant role as one of the primary vehicles for delivering a just transition.
 - Learners may expect more agency in mapping their educational journey, weaving together different types of provision and stacking qualifications to suit their needs and interests.
 - Community learning and partnerships have an essential role in providing accessible, local lifelong learning opportunities.

- It is imperative to continue to look at the evolving role of the sector around the world.
- Traditional hierarchical curriculum development may gradually be replaced by a shared process of co-production.
- Further technological transformation is inevitable, and the tertiary sector must ensure it is on the front foot in order to capitalise on its opportunities without disenfranchising staff.

The Social Mobility Commission published [Labour market value of further education \(FE\) and higher education \(HE\) qualifications: A summary report](#), including an 'exploratory analysis' of the 'value-add' of a university compared to how it performs on selected access measures.

- At age 29, women who attend HE tend to earn 50% more than those with five good GCSEs (A*–C) who don't attend; for men, the figure is 25%.
 - Attending HE is associated with 24% higher earnings for women and 19% higher earnings for men relative to people with similar characteristics ('value-add').
- FE is less straightforward: there are various pathways and qualifications at different levels; a proportion of people with an FE qualification pursue HE studies; the sector has experienced a great deal of reform, particularly in the past decade.
 - In general, returns increase with higher levels and are higher for apprenticeships than equivalent classroom-based qualifications.
- Within FE, the value-add also tends to be positive as people move up each level.
 - The highest returns are for Level 5 for women and Level 4 for men; however, there may be relatively few qualifications available at these levels and only a relatively small number of people pursue them.
 - Intermediate and advanced apprenticeships may have a positive effect on earnings compared to vocational qualifications at the same levels.
- In HE, more academically selective universities tend to have a higher value-add, while less selective universities tend to have a lower value-add.
 - However, more selective universities tend to be disproportionately less accessible to those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.
 - Degree class also makes a difference: women who achieve a first-class degree earn 3.5% more and men 7% more than people of similar characteristics who achieve a 2:1.
 - STEM subjects, law and economics tend to have both higher average earnings and a higher value-add than other subjects.
- In FE, subjects such as engineering for men and business administration and law for women tend to have a higher value-add.
 - There is also some evidence of a modest difference in earnings according to institution attended.

[The Lived Experiences of Transition from College to University in Scotland: A qualitative research synthesis](#) by University of Dundee researchers was published in the *International Journal of Educational and Life Transitions*.

- Four common factors of effective transitions were identified to inform practice in both sectors:
 - **Sectoral**, e.g. a lack of alignment between the purpose of college and university systems – the former on skill development and lifelong learning, the latter on HE; and a disconnect between how things are done – course structure, conventions, rules and demands, and approach to teaching
 - **Academic**, e.g. differences in what is expected of the student as an independent learner and in the relationship with staff; development of relevant academic skills; and differences in assessment
 - **Identity and social**, e.g. emotional aspects; and time management and balancing studying with working and family life
 - **Logistical**, e.g. adapting to new travel, study and IT methods.
- Findings have implications for all those considering relationships in and between FE and HE; key questions for the development of a coherent tertiary sector include:
 - Where does the responsibility lie for making effective transitions from college to university?
 - To what extent is alignment between colleges and universities feasible or desirable?
 - Does the current conception of the college to university transition genuinely widen participation?

The Royal Anniversary Trust published [Accelerating the UK Tertiary Education Sector Towards Net Zero: A sector-led proposal for action and connected thinking](#).

- The report was produced by 21 UK HE and FE winners of The Queen's Anniversary Prizes, brought together by the Platinum Jubilee Challenge.
- Six core principles include:
 - Mandatory standardised reporting across all nations, with peer validation, by 2024
 - Proactive knowledge and resource sharing between HE and FE institutions, harnessing the full impact of the sector's skills, experience and solutions
 - Actively work with local authorities and regional governing bodies, and collaborate with the private sector in the UK and beyond to innovate, access finance and realise wider benefits.

The proposal includes 14 recommendations for government around the built environment, travel & transport, sustainable supply chain, finance & investment, internal skills & resources and offsetting.

WORKFORCE ISSUES

College Development Network published [Professional Learning in Scotland's Colleges](#), a snapshot taken in 2022/23, exploring structures, what's working well and the key challenges.

- **Positive practice** includes: supporting the wellbeing of staff and students; each college having a mandatory, rounded induction; lecturers spending time in a local, subject-specific business; supporting staff to advance their own qualifications; creating thinking opportunities and spaces; creating specialised roles or teams that deal solely with professional learning.
- **Challenges** include: lack of time; lack of finance and vulnerable budgets; funding of the Teaching Qualification in Further Education (TQFE) creating a backlog; lecturing qualifications pre-TQFE being overly operational and assessment driven; gaining accurate data on trends and needs; imbalance of professional learning within departments; the image or perception of continuing professional development (CPD).

The Lifelong Education Commission, in partnership with the Chartered Institute for Further Education, published [Developing Industry-Expert Teaching for Higher Skills](#).

- There is a broad political consensus that we need to radically improve the quantity and quality of technical and vocational education to address UK skills shortages.
 - However, in common with many other sectors, the FE and skills sector is facing a growing crisis in recruiting and retaining appropriately qualified staff.
 - It is widely acknowledged that the best people to provide the training and education needed are 'dual professionals' who can combine up-to-date industry experience and expertise with the ability to teach to a high standard.
- Based on an exploration of progress so far and key barriers, the report makes a number of recommendations, including:
 - Government should actively support the sector in attracting and retaining dual professional teaching staff as a key element of an integrated, long-term strategy for workforce development.
 - Funding for colleges offering courses in skills shortage sectors should be increased to rates comparable to those in the private sector.
 - Government should consider providing incentives such as tax breaks for companies and individuals, to encourage the release of members of staff for higher skills teaching.
 - The collection and reporting of FE workforce data need to enable analysis of the proportion and range of industry-expert teachers, to support better planning for recruitment and retention.
 - Initial FE teacher training should be modified to better reflect the role of dual professionals and support their transition into teaching.
 - Future workforce development policies and strategies for Level 4/5 provision should apply across the entire tertiary sector.

The Lifelong Education Commission was launched in February 2021; it is now the [Lifelong Education Institute](#), focusing on policy thinking and influence in skills and education, and hosted by ResPublica.

STUDENTS, APPRENTICES & THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS

England's OfS published [Evaluation report of the cost of living research in 2023](#), drawing on a poll of 4,021 HE students between 23 January and 15 February.

- 42% of students are given money by their parents, guardians or other family members to support them with housing costs, most commonly once a month.
- Over the last six months the cost of living has most negatively impacted students' mental wellbeing (56%) and social life (54%).
 - They have cut back most on social costs (56%), buying new clothes (51%) and food shopping (43%).
 - 58% say the impact of cutting back on activities has had a negative impact on their mental and/or physical health.
 - 17% have considered dropping out because of the impact of the cost of living.
- 38% are aware of their institution's hardship funding, bursaries, etc. and 36% of the financial advice and guidance available.
 - However, 19% say they are not aware of any support and 27% are aware of support but have not accessed the forms of support listed.
 - 44% agree that their university/college has done enough to support students with cost of living issues over the last six months, while 27% disagree.
- [Notes on roundtable discussions](#) summarises findings from four sessions in December 2022 and January 2023, convened to bring together student and sector representatives, understand the impact on different student groups and hear about mitigation measures being put in place.

There is no indication of geographical coverage, but the YouthSight panel is UK wide.

An OfS Insight Brief – [Studying during rises in the cost of living](#) – covers this and other recent relevant research and examines some actions being taken by institutions to mitigate the effects on their students.

The Russell Group published [Student Cost of Living Report](#), based on a survey of 8,800 HE students by 14 students' unions in January/February 2023.

- Among the findings:
 - 25% regularly went without food and other necessities because they couldn't afford them, rising to 30% among the most disadvantaged students.
 - The average income was £825 per month and 50% weren't confident they had enough money to cover basic living costs.
 - 17% of those in paid employment were working more than 30 hours a week alongside their studies; others were skipping on-campus lectures due to travel costs.
 - 54% said their academic performance had suffered because of the crisis and 18% were considering dropping out for financial reasons.

There is no indication of geographical coverage.

The Sutton Trust published two reports on the impact of the cost of living crisis on university students:

- [Cost of Living 2023 – University students](#), findings from a survey of 1,050 undergraduates, including:
 - 63% were spending less on food and essentials; 33% of those from working-class families had skipped meals; 18% had avoided buying course supplies such as textbooks.
 - 43% were using less power in their homes; 16% were travelling to campus less to save on transport costs while 14% were going more often to use 'free' energy.
 - 47% had stopped or reduced going out with friends; 6% had moved back in with their families to save money (10% working class vs 4% middle class).
 - 45% were turning to parents for additional financial support (38% working class vs 48% middle class).
 - 27% had got a job or taken on more hours; 11% had received university support.
 - 24% said they were less likely to finish their degree as a result of the crisis.
- [Cost of Living 2023 – University students \(paid work\)](#), results of a poll of 2,019 students, including:

- In the current academic year, 66% of undergraduates are undertaking paid work in a typical week; 20% report working 16–30 hours per week, 6% over 30 hours per week.
- 49% have missed classes in order to do paid work, with 6% reporting they do this often, and 23% have missed a deadline or asked for an extension.
- 67% of those from the most deprived areas have worked during term, compared to 59% in the least deprived areas; they also work longer hours.

There is no indication of geographical coverage.

National Union of Students (NUS) Scotland published [Fighting for Students: The cost of survival](#), based on a survey of 5,306 college and university students and apprentices.

- 37% of students and apprentices considered dropping out of their course for financial reasons (up 1ppt from February 2022), particularly those from widening access groups.
 - The main reason was not having enough money in their loan or bursary (34%); the cost of living was cited by 19%.
- 21% have missed a class due to travel costs and a further 7% have missed a placement.
- 52% skipped a meal, 11% used a foodbank (up 3ppt) and 45% have gone without heating; 35% were unable to pay their rent in full.
- 11% were unable to find somewhere to live by the time their course began in September 2022.
 - 10% had experienced homelessness; 2% were currently homeless.
- 66% claim that since the start of their studies, their mental health has been impacted by their money worries, 19% indicate it has been impacted a great deal.
 - All widening access groups are more likely to be impacted, along with those in HE, rented homes and identifying as non-binary.
- 60% work alongside their studies, most commonly around 10–20 hours a week; younger students, those in FE, rented homes, disabled, care experienced and from low-income families are more likely *not* to work.

The Workplace

RECRUITMENT

The Health Foundation published [Bridging the gap: Making young people a vital part of every workforce](#), with the Institute for Employment Studies.

- Research included a survey of 1,011 businesses and interviews with 40 employers, and findings from a survey of 1,275 young people across the UK on their views and perceptions of the quality of work and their experiences in work.
- Findings include:
 - Although large numbers of young people are currently looking for work, employers are not always hiring them: in the past year 68% didn't hire 16–17 year-olds, 40% didn't hire 18–21s, 21% didn't hire 21–25s.
 - 50% of employers recognised the need to recruit younger workers to build the talent pipeline, 30% to widen their candidate pool; however 26% hire younger workers as it is more affordable.
 - Only 25% of employers have hired young people who experience disadvantage.
 - There is a discrepancy between employers' and young people's perceptions of good work: 43% of employers said it was an enjoyable workplace environment, 42% a job that feels interesting and fulfilling, 41% a job that offers opportunities to progress; young people said it was pay above industry standards and security and stability; they agreed on 'interesting and fulfilling'.
 - Employers feel a lack of skills (42%), experience (36%) and confidence (34%) hinder young people's access to good work, but also recognise there is unequal access to work; young people highlight lack of access to connections, networks and mental health support as barriers.
 - Employers look for the 'right fit' when recruiting young people and place emphasis on their digital skills, but struggle with young people's expectations of work given their lack of experience.

- Common challenges in the recruitment of young people include: unsuitable applications; a perceived lack of interview skills and etiquette; smaller pools of skilled candidates; poor preparation for successful job searching.
- The main approaches taken by employers to address recruitment challenges include: improving initial training and onboarding; providing more work experience schemes; and improving planned progression strategies – however 33% of small employers were not taking any action.
- Employers have a positive experience of managing young people but find meeting their support needs challenging; the most effective management practices include regular meetings and communication, and opportunities for young people to take responsibility and receive recognition.
- Employers view young people as prone to ‘job hopping’ but recognise the role good work plays in retention.
- Employers engage with universities and colleges more often than with schools and employment services but feel that careers services do a poor job of preparing young people for work.
- Employers want more support to manage young people’s health in the workplace and call for improvements to careers guidance and education.
- Employers’ age appears to influence attitudes and behaviours around youth employment: those aged under 45 are more likely (63%) than those over 45 (41%) to hire young people and have more experience hiring young people facing disadvantage (63% vs 50%).
- Employers in small organisations encounter more significant challenges around youth employment compared to those in larger organisations.
- Numerous recommendations include:
 - Support a shift in mindset and practice among employers by e.g.: incentivising employers; building better pathways from education to work; strengthening the role of intermediary bodies.
 - Address the discrepancies in culture, perceptions and expectations that risk widening the gap between young people and employers, by e.g.: improving standards of pay for young people; strengthening their voice and involving them in decision-making; supporting youth-friendly business cultures.
 - Provide support for employers to help young people thrive in the workplace, by e.g.: learning from the good practice of others; improving mental health literacy; supporting inclusive practices; investing in health and wellbeing support.
 - Support small businesses to hire from younger age groups by e.g.: establishing local ‘employer hubs’; reforming and increasing financial support for small organisations; helping them to access existing support.

The Chartered Management Institute (CMI) published [Age in the Workplace](#), a discussion paper that includes findings from a poll of 1k managers undertaken in October 2022.

- 74% said they were open ‘to a large extent’ to hiring younger workers, especially 18–34 year-olds, but this dropped to 60% for 34–49 year-olds and 42% for 50–64 year-olds.
- Only 30% are open to hiring those aged 65+, while 18% said their organisation wasn’t open to the idea at all.

The Space Skills Alliance published [How and why people join the UK space sector](#), the first report of its kind, based on results of the 2020 Space Census.

- Choosing a space career requires motivation, capability and opportunity; the present skills shortage in the sector suggests it must be made more attractive to a wider range of people.
- **Motivation:** 86% are motivated by a love of space and/or a desire to do interesting work; 63% of those who like space join by age 25 compared with 38% of those who want to do interesting work.
 - Interest in space comes from: educational settings, e.g. science festivals (42%), schools (24%) and museums (23%); media, e.g. books (36%), TV (30%) and the internet (17%).
 - School outreach only impacts 5%, despite being the focus of a lot of space skills strategies.
- **Capability:** The sector is very highly qualified; 22% have a bachelor’s, 38% a master’s and 30% a PhD as their highest qualification.
 - Only 7% hold an apprenticeship or vocational qualification as their highest qualification.
 - Physics and geophysics (34%) and engineering (31%) are the most common subjects of study.
 - 21% of under 35s have studied aerospace engineering vs 8% of over 35s.

- 48% of under 35s vs 18% of over 35s have undertaken work experience, especially graduate schemes and internships.
- **Opportunity:** 47% join as new graduates and 77% by age 35.
- Although there is a range of resources about space sector careers, these are primarily aimed at young people with virtually no resources available for career changers.

APPRENTICESHIPS & TRAINEESHIPS

City & Guilds and the 5% Club published [Levying Up: Delivering sustainable skills, including research with 1k HR decision-makers at apprenticeship levy-paying UK businesses](#).

- The apprenticeship levy is not being optimised to its full potential:
 - £3.5b of apprenticeship levy funding has been left to expire since its introduction in 2017.
 - Employers have spent an average 55.5% of their levy funding in the last five years; only 4% have used their full levy funding.
- Only 15% of employers are always able to recruit the skilled people they need.
- 94% of employers face barriers to accessing levy funds that could help them to fill skills shortages.
 - The main barriers are: attracting and hiring apprentices is too difficult (22%); the time that an apprenticeship takes to complete (19%); too much bureaucracy or admin (18%); lack of time to invest (17%).
 - Other barriers include: standards are unfit and there is a lack of support for SMEs; employers lack awareness and understanding of the levy; apprenticeships don't meet the skills requirements of many sectors.
- 96% would like to see a change to the levy.
 - 43% would prefer a model in which 50% is ring fenced for apprenticeships and 50% is flexible, meaning businesses can identify the best way to meet their skills needs.
- Recommendations include:
 - Create a broader skills levy that ringfences significant funding for apprenticeships.
 - Use unspent levy to address labour market shortages via programmes designed to reduce skills shortages in the sectors that are most affected.
 - Increase representation for SMEs including in reviewing apprenticeship standards, and by simplifying the system.
 - Introduce standardised, levy-funded modular learning, enabling leaders to select more compact qualifications and training to meet skills needs, and making it easier for employees to upskill throughout their careers.
 - Invest in information, advice and guidance.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) published [Scottish Apprenticeships Performance Report: Skills for Scotland](#), based on a range of statistics and survey findings, demonstrating apprenticeships' return on investment.

- The exchequer gets up to £4–5 in return for every £1 of public investment in apprenticeships.
- Employers receive up to £63k net benefit over the lifetime of an apprentice completer at Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 6/7.
- A completer at SCQF level 6/7 has a net benefit on lifetime earnings of £65k–£84k compared to a non-completer.

CESifo published [The Value of Early-Career Skills](#), drawing on Germany's detailed apprenticeship plans to assess how different skills are rewarded economically.

- 13k narrowly defined skills are grouped into six broader categories: cognitive, social, digital, manual, management and administrative.
- Workers who start their career with higher cognitive, social or digital skills earn significantly higher wages over long-run horizons but returns differ.
 - For example, 16–20 years after completion, one additional month of learning cognitive skills during apprenticeship is associated with 1.3% higher wages; for social skills it's 1.5% and for digital skills it's 2.1%.

- These estimates correspond to 16–27% of the returns to a full year of schooling.
- In terms of the drivers of such returns, there is evidence for skill complementarities: those who simultaneously acquired cognitive and social skills during apprenticeship are particularly valuable and are able to sustain their pay advantage throughout their careers.
 - There is also evidence for skill-technology complementarities: workers with higher cognitive skills earn higher wages in regions in which production technology is more likely to require these skills.
 - There has been growth in returns to cognitive, social and digital skills over the past 30 years, with digital rising substantially, suggesting technology as a major driving force.
- The results suggest that the widely praised German apprenticeship system can serve as a role model, and several countries (e.g. the US) are debating creating such a system.

SKILLS GAPS & SHORTAGES

England's Department for Education published [Labour market and skills projections: 2020 to 2035](#), providing the most likely trajectory of change in types of jobs and in the skills workers will need.

- The projections are at national (UK/GB/four nations), regional and local levels.
 - They consider the future labour market by: industry, occupation, qualification level, gender and employment status.
 - They form part of the Nuffield-funded [Skills Imperative 2035 research programme](#), led by the National Foundation for Educational Research.

The Manpower Group published [The Talent Shortage](#), findings from a survey of 39k employers across 41 countries, including the UK.

- 77% of employers globally report difficulty finding the skills they need in 2023 – a 17-year high; the figure for the UK is 80% (2,020 employers).
- The top five technical skills they need are: IT & data (27%); engineering (22%); sales & marketing (20%); operations & logistics (19%); and customer facing & front office (17%).
 - The top five 'soft' skills are: reliability & self-discipline (29%); creativity & originality (26%); critical thinking & analysis (26%); reasoning & problem solving (26%); and resilience & adaptability (26%).
- The industries experiencing the worst shortages are: communication services (79%); energy & utilities (79%); health care & life sciences (78%); and IT (78%).
- 71% of organisations are addressing this by upskilling/reskilling their workforce, 51% by filling new, permanent roles, 43% by investing in more technology.
 - 57% are offering more flexibility about when and where people work, while 33% are increasing wages and 33% are looking at new talent pools, such as mature workers.

Amazon Web Services (AWS) and Gallup published [AWS Global Digital Skills Study: The economic benefits of a tech-savvy workforce](#).

- The report is based on a survey of 30k workers and 9,300 hiring managers in 19 countries, including the UK, along with analysis of Lightcast [*formerly Emsi Burning Glass*] data on job vacancies.
- UK findings include:
 - 72% of businesses have vacancies for workers with digital skills; 11% of workers possess them.
 - 68% of businesses find it challenging to hire the digital workers they need of whom 45% say this is due to a shortage of qualified applicants.
 - Investing in advanced digital skills alone raises annual GDP by an estimated £67.8b.
 - Workers with advanced digital skills – e.g. cloud architecture and software development – earn 30% more than those with no digital skills – around £11,568 p.a..
 - 67% of digital workers are very/extremely interested in digital skills training, but 93% face at least one barrier, e.g. time (51%), lack of financial resources (34%), and knowledge of the skills they need (32%).

AWS has committed to training 29m people in 200 countries in cloud computing by 2025.

The Institution of Engineering & Technology (IET) published [IET skills for a digital future: 2023 survey](#), a YouGov survey of 1,235 UK employers in September–October 2022.

- 54% had difficulties recruiting due to a lack of skills in the labour market (+5ppt on 2021); 47% had skills gaps in their workforce (+2ppt).
 - 49% of those with a digital skills gap said it harms productivity, 35% that it restricts growth, 35% that it harms innovation.
- 51% had a digital skills strategy, of which 92% needed additional skills to implement it.
- 88% said technicians were important; 48% of those with technician skills gaps provided additional training.
- 31% said artificial intelligence (AI)/machine learning would be important for sector growth, but 50% of these didn't have the skills needed.
- 74% said their engineering/technical staff could apply existing skills to new situations.
- 87% arranged/funded training: 70% on-the-job; 51% in house; 51% online; 51% accredited.
 - 44% provided digital skills training: 58% of large employers vs 27% of SMEs.
- Nine recommendations include: provide sustained support for skills in emerging tech; provide targeted support for SMEs; employers to increase the value proposition for technicians.

Cedefop published [Ready, Steady, Go!](#), summarising its 2022–23 activities to help kickstart the European Year of Skills.

- European labour markets are recovering from the pandemic and are more digitalised because of it.
 - The telework boom spilled over into recruitment practices; skills shortages led employers to expand online job advertising to reach more potential candidates; and job turnover increased because many employees used the labour market upturn to look for a better job elsewhere.
- A new skills forecast to be released in 2023 suggests that employment will rapidly become more skills-intensive.
 - The number of high-skilled jobs will likely rise faster than forecast earlier, surpassing medium-skilled employment in about a decade from now; employment in elementary jobs remains stable.
 - With skills upgrading dominating labour market trends in the decade ahead, the focus will need to be on expanding vocational education & training's (VET's) potential and role in helping people access more demanding jobs.
 - As employment is projected to be more closely aligned to supply at all skill levels than previously forecast, it appears that, at the EU aggregate level, matching is set to improve, although this will require EU Green Deal ambitions to be met.

TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

The CBI published [Education & Skills Survey 2022](#), based on 273 responses from UK businesses of all sizes and sectors.

- 38% intended to increase investment in training and development over the next year, down from 53% in 2021; 47% were planning to maintain investment, up from 43%.
- 80% said they were unaware of England's plans to introduce the Lifelong Loan Entitlement and 82% were unaware/only slightly aware of Local Skills Improvement Plans.
 - 65% were unaware/only slightly aware of T Levels.
- Of those that didn't offer apprenticeships, 42% cited the lack of compatibility between current standards and skill needs, 27% the complexity of administration and 24% greater relevance of other forms of training.
 - 75% supported extending apprenticeship levy funding to cover other forms of regulated or accredited training.
 - 75% were planning to maintain or expand their apprenticeship offer over the next 12 months, up from 72% in 2021; 34% are planning to expand it, down from 43%.
 - 48% said being able to find a provider that can offer a relevant course would make the apprenticeship system more effective, up from 29% last year.

Skills Builder Partnership published [Essential Skills Tracker 2023](#) with the Edge Foundation, KPMG and the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD), the second annual survey, based on responses from 2,259 UK 18–65 year-olds.

- Various established measures were used, including the Skills Builder Universal Framework of eight essential skills* and questions from the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey; key findings include:
 - The cost of not providing skills-building opportunities for workers equates to £22.2b p.a. (£7.5b–£40.6b); the cost of the very lowest levels of essential skills is £15.2b (£4.9b–£27.1b).
 - Moving from the lower quartile essential skill score to the upper quartile is associated with a wage premium of 9.4%–12.0% (an average of £3,600–£4,600 p.a.).
 - 92% believe that essential skills are important for career success, on a par with literacy skills and more than sector-specific knowledge (84%), digital skills (84%), numeracy skills (82%) or technical skills (65%).
 - 56% would consider getting a new job for improved skills-building opportunities; the higher someone’s levels of essential skills, the higher the agreement with this statement.
 - Essential skills scores are just as powerful as and sometimes better than income as a predictor of job satisfaction; building essential skills has a significantly higher return on investment than raising wages.
 - Essential skills appear to start declining in people’s 40s, but those who have opportunities to build them in work see them continuing to grow rather than decline with age.
- Full-time UK workers fit broadly into five categories:
 - **Skills Trap Proper** (17%): start disadvantaged and unable to break out of a cycle of low education and basic and essential skills
 - **Social Mobility in Action** (13%): fewer advantages but good education and basic and essential skills, so enjoying strong income, job satisfaction and life satisfaction
 - **Underachievers** (20%): advantaged, well educated and good basic skills; but without good essential skills, they earn much less than others and enjoy lower life satisfaction
 - **Essential Skills Doing the Heavy Lifting** (22%): had a good start but doesn’t translate into strong basic skills; with high essential skill scores still manage to earn well and enjoy life
 - **Middle Class Achievers** (28%): advantaged, well educated, have strong skills and earn well.

**Listening, speaking, problem solving, creativity, staying positive, aiming high, leadership, teamwork.*

Skillnet Ireland published [Insurance industry ESG \[environmental, social and governance\] knowledge and skills analysis 2023](#), commissioned by Sustainable Finance Skillnet with research by KPMG, including a survey of over 400 insurance specialists.

- Findings include:
 - 94% of the insurance industry has no formal ESG training; 51% would be interested in taking an ESG training course, rising to 74% of risk professionals.
 - Compared to other sectors, insurance firms are not looking as much to the external market to fill ESG-related skills and capability gaps.
 - Upskilling requirements was the lowest ranked factor of a range of issues for the industry.
 - 33% of risk professionals consider themselves to have the necessary ESG skills and capabilities to carry out their role effectively, compared to 80% of investment advisers.
 - Basic ESG knowledge is considered to be the most relevant skill/knowledge area across the majority of roles in insurance companies.
 - The top challenges in advancing the ESG skills agenda are: the perception of a lack of industry focus on ESG-related issues; and limited course availability.
- Recommendations include: develop an introductory ESG course; deliver in-depth courses on a role-specific vs topic-specific basis to ensure knowledge, skills and learning are applicable and practical; keep course content under constant review as ESG is an evolving risk and regulatory environment.

Eurofound and Cedefop published [Fostering skills use for sustained business performance: Evidence from the European Company Survey](#), based on a 2019 survey of company policies and practices including over 21k interviews.

- Businesses need to make sure employees’ new skills are used optimally to ensure policy efforts aimed at increasing the skills base of the labour force have maximum impact.

- Without policies that specifically target their practical application, the benefits generated by increased skills will not materialise.
- There is growing recognition of the role of management in creating the right conditions for employees to use their skills and thus improve the efficiency, innovation and adaptability of firms.
- People-centred managerial approaches that harness workplace wellbeing are key to making the best use of human capital as well as to more successful business outcomes; this is true across different countries, sectors and organisations of different sizes.
 - Promoting workplace wellbeing not only benefits employees but is also important in translating employee skills into positive business performance.
 - Universities and management & business schools can contribute by fully integrating into their teaching a people-centred management culture and practices that create opportunities for employees to develop and use their skills.

IZA published [Advanced Digital Technologies \[ADT\] and Investment in Employee Training: Complements or substitutes?](#), based on employer survey data 2018 to 2020 from the 27 EU member states, the UK and the US.

- Use of ADT (e.g. 3D printing, advanced robotics, augmented reality, drones, big data analytics and AI) is increasing, encouraged by declining costs and accelerated by the pandemic.
 - The impact of ADT on workers depends on employer incentives to retain and retrain staff and on institutional factors such as the national infrastructure for training and job search, direct government funding, tax incentives and social benefit systems.
- Findings include:
 - Employers adopting ADT reduced their investment in training per employee, especially in countries where employment protection legislation is less severe or where public training expenditure as a share of GDP is lower.
 - This is likely to reflect both a decline in the spend on training and a reduction in the percentage of individuals undertaking job-related training.
 - However, in countries that spend more on training policies – including subsidies to employers – employers’ training investment per employee does not fall with digital use or intensity.

Skillnet Ireland published [Teaching and learning modalities for continued professional development: Attitudes and experience of the long-term care workforce](#), a study commissioned by Leading Healthcare Providers Skillnet and carried out by the European Centre of Excellence for Research in CPD at the Royal College of Surgeons.

- The consequences of successful knowledge translation can be significant, e.g. more job satisfaction, higher retention rates and higher quality services for those requiring long-term care services.
 - The aim was to inform workplace development leaders, programme designers and educators about the views of healthcare professionals in the long-term care sector on CPD formats.
- Findings include:
 - Four themes are important: flexibility; networking; resources and support; and balancing online and face-to-face learning through blended learning.
 - The preference was for face-to-face CPD (32%), followed by blended learning (30%), synchronous (live) online (23%) and asynchronous (pre-recorded) online learning (14%).
 - Live online CPD was said to be convenient, flexible and to offer the opportunity to interact with peers; however its quality depends on teachers’ skills.
 - 89% said they would need support in the workplace to implement new knowledge and skills.
- Recommendations include:
 - Develop the digital pedagogical competences and skills of healthcare educators, e.g. to make teaching more engaging and to implement digital upskilling strategies for online and blended learning.
 - Encourage blended CPD activities to combine flexibility and convenience with effective learning.
 - Design CPD activities based on the learning needs of the long-term care workforce and involve the learner throughout the course design process.
 - Follow up and collaborate with the employer to ensure the integration of new knowledge and skills in the workplace.

- Employers and managers could provide more protected time for learning, technical support, and facilitators and mentors in the workplace to support uptake of new knowledge in clinical practice.

CESifo published [Firm Training](#), a literature review and discussion on the determinants of who receives training, its effects on outcomes and various policy debates on issues such as training taxes, subsidies, non-complete agreements and the minimum wage.

- Among the findings:
 - Seemingly minor differences in how surveys are drafted, routed or answered can lead to quite different estimates of the incidence, duration and determinants of training.
 - When it comes to contributing to the overall stock of human capital, the importance of training clearly exceeds that of formal schooling: in little over a decade, an average worker receives investments equivalent to four years of college education.
 - The nature and intensity of training vary greatly in terms of duration and content, making it difficult to measure participation or estimate the impact.
 - Obtaining plausible estimates of the causal effect of training remains a challenge, mainly because surveys often don't collect data on all the characteristics that affect productivity and participation.
 - Many unsolved or poorly solved puzzles remain, e.g. how have changes in job search technology changed the relationships between wages, training and experience?
 - The literature offers little in the way of evidence-based policy prescriptions, other than the case for modest tax subsidies; there is no evidence of any income gradient in take up, however selection on 'ability' is clearly an important driver.

AUTOMATION & AI: IMPACT ON WORK

CEP published [Productive robots and industrial employment: The role of national innovation systems](#), using World Economic Forum data for 13 OECD countries.

- The report explores the impact on the allocation of hours of work of introducing robots in an economy with automatable and non-automatable tasks.
 - There are two types of job: one is engaged in tasks that can also be done by robots; the other involves tasks that are complementary to the output of robots.
- The institutions shaped by the innovation environment of a country – the extent of R&D, the quality of human capital, the quality of scientific research and collaboration between companies, universities and governments – play a critical role in shaping the incentives to take on robots.
- Countries with poor innovation capabilities, mainly in south and east Europe, substitute robots for workers much more than countries with a more favourable environment, e.g. the US, Germany and Nordic countries, who might even add labour when they recruit more robots.
 - It is therefore not possible to use estimates from one country to make inferences about robot-labour substitutions in another, even if the countries are broadly similar.

CEP published [Robot adoption, worker-firm sorting and wage inequality: Evidence from administrative panel data](#), based on a literature review, plus data from across Italian provinces.

- As automation and digitalisation intensify, there are increasing demands for workers with specialised knowledge of automated systems, algorithms, software and machines.
- Findings include:
 - Robot adoption increases wage inequality by fostering both horizontal and vertical task specialisation across firms.
 - In local economies where robot usage has been more pronounced, workers performing similar tasks have disproportionately clustered in the same firms.
 - Such clustering is characterised by the concentration of higher earners performing more complex tasks in firms paying higher wages; these firms are more productive and poach more aggressively.

SKILLS POLICY

England's Department for Education published [Skills and UK productivity: Estimating the contribution of educational attainment to productivity growth](#).

- Two main methodologies are used – growth accounting and an econometric approach; both try to assess the impact of changes in the labour input on growth, broken down into contributions from total hours worked and labour composition.
- Overall, the acquisition of education and skills enhances productivity and is not simply a device used by individuals to signal their ability to potential employers.

Nesta published [Green jobs: Rapid evidence review](#) with the Behavioural Insights Team, summarising what is known about the drivers and barriers to getting more people into green jobs and offering initial ideas for policy and employer interventions.

- To achieve its target of net zero carbon emissions by 2050, the UK will need to undertake a green transition that is likely to transform the economic landscape.
 - Some jobs in traditional, carbon-intensive industries, such as oil and gas, will decline; other jobs will be transformed as green practices become more prevalent; a wave of new green jobs will appear.
 - Green jobs are also seen as a crucial way to plug the UK's productivity gap, which has been increasing at a faster rate than in other G7 nations since the global financial crisis of 2008.
- The UK Government's Ten Point Plan, launched in 2020, aims to create and support up to 250k green jobs by 2030; more recently, the Government pledged to create 2m green jobs by 2030.
 - The Green Jobs Taskforce comprises ministers, industry, trade unions and the skills sector and is tasked with growing green jobs and addressing related challenges.
 - However, there is a need to agree what is meant by 'green jobs', where the gaps are and what policymakers and employers can do to fill them.
- Key conclusions:
 - Top-down, sectoral approaches to defining green jobs are easy to apply but risk under- or over-estimating the number of jobs that benefit the environment; bottom-up, granular approaches allow for more nuance, but can be subjective and difficult to operationalise.
 - Four main categories of barrier to more people being in green jobs: the number available; awareness of green roles; people's ability to fill the roles; and the attractiveness of such jobs.
 - Overall, the skill shortage is a crucial barrier; however, there are sector-specific nuances, with more research needed.
- Two promising types of intervention:
 - Work with employers to test the effectiveness of various framings designed to encourage the uptake of green skill training or education opportunities among current and future workers.
 - Develop an index of green employers, filling a gap and: boosting workers' awareness of what a green job is; making a job potentially more attractive if it is accredited as green; incentivising employers 'to green' more jobs and improve environmental practices to raise their rankings.

Business in the Community (BITC) published [Building green skills for a just transition to a net zero, resilient future](#), one of three 'route maps'* developed to support organisations in the move towards BITC's [Seven Steps for Climate Action](#).

- Green skills are described as: the 'knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes required by people and organisations to thrive as part of a fair and inclusive transition' to net zero.
- Both 'technical' and 'essential' skills are needed to unleash the flexibility, creativity and problem solving to enable individuals and organisations to navigate the future.
- A framework is proposed to tackle the skills challenge, focused on three key groups: the current workforce; the future workforce; and workers most at risk in the transition, e.g. those with low skills, on low pay and/or who are part of a group more likely to be disadvantaged in the labour market.
- Understanding and developing an organisation's skills needs across three categories involves:
 - The **mindset, attitudes and understanding** that will enable people to translate the risks and opportunities of the climate crisis and the societal shift to net zero into action in their role, e.g. foundational climate skills, an understanding of the climate crisis and its drivers
 - The **essential and transferable skills** needed to move into different roles as careers and employers adapt, e.g. critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, communication, self-management, leadership, teamwork and digital skills

- The **technical skills** businesses will need to adapt to changing legislation and reporting requirements and to support the transition from high carbon activity, e.g. insulation, solar and heat pump fitting; circular product design/repairs; and nature conservation.
- Action is needed across three focus areas to ensure an organisation and its people have the skills to thrive in the transition: equipping leaders to empower everyone; enabling everyone to contribute; and ensuring upskilling for all.

**The other route maps are on 'involving diverse stakeholders' and 'embracing circular economy practices'.*

The Scottish Government published [Commission for the Land-Based Learning Review: Report to Scottish Ministers](#), advice from a short-term Commission set up in autumn 2021.

- The group undertook a review of learning in land-based and aquaculture sectors from early years onwards; the aims were to:
 - consider how to attract more people into these sectors by improving learning pathways
 - help deliver a just transition to net zero by ensuring the learning system equips people with the skills and knowledge required and that the workforce is sufficient.
- Recommendations include:
 - Reframe/rename land-based sectors (including e.g. forestry, farming, horticulture) as 'nature-based' to present a better 'face' to prospective new entrants, as well as to better capture the importance of the industries.
 - Establish clear progressive experiences for nature-based learning and climate literacy across all levels of the school curriculum.
 - Identify ways to support an increase in sector-school/college partnership learning pathways.
 - Provide ongoing professional learning support for school staff and volunteers, to improve knowledge and understanding of the sector.
 - Ensure funding to support nature-based education and training programmes.
 - Ensure accreditation bodies have the capacity to review and develop awards to meet the skills and knowledge requirements of the sector.
 - Support the retention of critical HE provision in e.g. forestry and aquaculture.
 - Commission research to identify key transferable skills needs across different job roles.
 - Learn from e.g. Women in Agriculture Taskforce/Scottish Aquaculture to inform actions to attract more women and other under-represented groups into the sector.

SDS published [Digital Economy Skills Action Plan \[SAP\] 2023–2028: Key issues and priority actions](#) to drive 'an urgent step-change' to increase the supply of digital economy skills.

- Digital skills are now essential for all key industries, not just for the technology sector.
 - Four digital skills segments are: Adoption (to use and operate tech systems); Transition (e.g. for e-commerce); Integrated (professional digital skills into non-tech roles); and Professional (for traditionally tech-sector-only roles, e.g. software development).
 - Soft skills such as meta skills also play an important role in driving behavioural change.
- There are five priority areas for action:
 - Create opportunities for all young people to develop critical digital economy skills.
 - Improve the evidence base of skills needs.
 - Improve SMEs' digital leadership skills.
 - Ensure a fairer, more inclusive and diverse digital economy.
 - Rapidly increase the acquisition of critical skills via workforce development, upskilling and reskilling.
- Short- and long-term measures include:
 - Creating a toolkit to help employers assess digital skills at work and source the right training.
 - Increasing the number of FE students who can access technology-led work placements and the number of tech experts who visit schools.
 - Introducing digital skills into non-tech education and apprenticeships, e.g. agriculture, hospitality, construction and early learning & childcare.

- Including entrepreneurship and enterprise skills in tech-related apprenticeships to encourage more start-ups.
- Implementing a fast-track digital skills training model to help employers find people with the right skills more quickly.

HEPI with Kaplan published [‘Not heard of this’: Employers’ perceptions of the UK’s Graduate route visa](#), based on a survey of 656 members of the Institute of Directors.

- 20% said they had previously sponsored a visa for an employee; 35% hadn’t but would consider it; 28% hadn’t and had no intention of doing so.
 - The level of bureaucracy involved was the most common theme by far, cited by 21% of those who hadn’t sponsored a visa; 13% mentioned cost and 10% time delays.
- The Graduate route – which removes the bureaucracy and enables former international students to stay in the UK to work – has been knowingly used by only 3%.
 - 27% were unaware of it; a further 20% hadn’t used it and had no plans to do so.
- Recommendations include:
 - Convey the benefits of the Graduate route visa more clearly so that it works better for employers, graduates and the Exchequer.
 - Put in place a meaningful long-term agreement across Whitehall and the political spectrum to maintain or improve the current post-study work rules for former international students.

Eurofound published [Measures to tackle labour shortages: Lessons for future policy](#), exploring national measures implemented to tackle labour shortages in health, care and ICT, plus those arising from green and digital transitions.

- Tackling labour shortages is not just about developing skills – measures must also include making certain sectors and occupations more attractive, activating underutilised labour and better matching supply and demand.
- Shortages are particularly prevalent in sectors with challenging working conditions, e.g. health and long-term care.
 - Low levels of investment, the impact of the pandemic and a gender-segregated labour market are contributing, and the ageing population and workforce is set to exacerbate these shortages.
- Measures often focus on pay and working conditions, however focusing on pay alone is often insufficient without other quality of life factors that make work more attractive, e.g. education infrastructure, greater autonomy over working hours, access to training and career progression and more meaningful work.
- Measures to make use of existing labour are especially important in ICT and the green and digital transition, where skills mismatch is the biggest driver of shortages.
 - With rapidly evolving technological developments and the growing need to identify future skills needs, joint efforts between governments, social partners and training providers will be critical to identify existing skills needs and forecast future ones.
- Measures targeting underutilised groups in the labour market need to provide holistic support that addresses factors preventing participation, e.g. health issues and lack of access to affordable care, as well as training and work experience.
 - This requires the close collaboration of social partners and other relevant bodies in the context of broader measures, e.g. work–life balance policies and tax and benefit incentives.

The European Commission published [Skills shortages and structural changes in the labour market during COVID-19 and in the context of the digital and green transitions: Thematic review 2023](#), mapping data, drivers and policy responses to shortages across the EU.

- In the early pandemic (2020):
 - Shortages **decreased** for positions with high and intermediate skills requirements (both general and specific) in manufacturing, transport, finance, health and public administration, and for intermediate skills in wholesale and public administration.
 - Shortages **increased** for high-skilled workers in construction, and for those with intermediate specific skills in manufacturing, construction, transport and finance.
- Drivers of skills shortages:

- Digitalisation was key; the green transition was a driver of smaller magnitude – its effects are expected to increase in the future.
- Most shortages and their drivers were already present pre-Covid but became more prominent during the pandemic in most sectors.
- The pandemic did not create new drivers but accelerated existing shortages induced by structural factors, e.g. ageing population, education mismatches, digitalisation and (partially) the green transition.
- **Policy responses to skills shortages during the pandemic** were a continuation of those developed over the last decade, aiming at better matching of education and skills development to the needs of the labour market; measures adopted included:
 - Promoting access to and participation in education and training at all levels
 - Increasing the attractiveness of subject areas in high demand, especially among female students
 - Providing more, better trained teachers in VET and adult learning
 - Increasing the funding and capacity of educational institutions for specialists in high demand
 - Improving the quality and effectiveness of provision through e.g. curricula revised in line with labour market needs, work-based learning, and innovative methods based on digital technologies.
- **Policy responses to skills shortages due to the digital and green transitions** include:
 - Investing in new technologies
 - Identifying current and future needs for skills
 - Ensuring there are sufficient numbers of qualified teachers and trainers
 - Digital and green skills training for the broader population: students, employees, jobseekers, public administration and the economically inactive.
- Evidence on the coverage and effectiveness of policy responses is scarce and should be strengthened; available evidence includes a Republic of Ireland (RoI) Human Capital Initiative.
 - The main response by employers has been to train staff via their own and publicly funded schemes; other responses include: collaboration with educational institutions, employment agencies and other employers; and enhancing the attractiveness of jobs.
- Digitalisation has generated demand for digital skills at all levels; such skills have become a basic and transversal competence.
 - Digital skills programmes have been developed for the population as a whole and at all stages.
 - Measures and programmes have also been set up to close the digital divide for specific groups, including upskilling those who are employed and unemployed.
 - Social partners are involved in various areas of digital skills development.
 - The promotion of STEM/digital skills in schools and improving IT in education are key measures in some member states.

The European Commission and the OECD published [Policy brief on improving the effectiveness of inclusive and social entrepreneurship training schemes.](#)

- Entrepreneurship training can help increase the number and chances of success of start-ups and improve employability.
- Skills gaps remain a significant barrier to sustainable, inclusive and social entrepreneurship activities.
 - Between 2016 and 2020 only 39% of women and 50% of men in the EU said they had the skills and knowledge needed to start a business.
 - Governments commonly use inclusive and social entrepreneurship training programmes to address these gaps, including via courses, workshops, bootcamps, coaching and mentoring.
- Online training programmes have become increasingly common, particularly since the pandemic.
 - Digital learning platforms improved the reach of many schemes but also created challenges for training providers as this format requires a high level of motivation to self-manage learning.
 - The shift from passive to experiential learning is another important trend.
- Governments can strengthen training schemes for inclusive and social entrepreneurship by:

- Tailoring content for different target groups, using evaluations and stakeholder consultations to focus on the specific skills gaps; e.g. older people often have lower levels of digital skills, which may hinder their ability to register a business online
- Improving access by minimising barriers such as location, hours, accessibility and lack of childcare
- Engaging stakeholders and local actors in the design and implementation of schemes to ensure they are relevant and appropriate for the targeted groups
- Using ongoing monitoring to track key performance indicators, such as activity, participant satisfaction, output and outcome indicators.

ADULT & LIFELONG LEARNING

England's Department for Education published [*Cost barriers to learning at Level 3*](#), based on research by the Learning & Work Institute (L&W), including an online survey of 1,389 current or recent Level 3 learners and 20 in-depth interviews.

- Key findings of general relevance include:
 - 54% struggled to cover their living costs to some extent while learning, particularly those: with caring responsibilities; with a long-term health condition or disability; who were unemployed and looking for work; from Black backgrounds.
 - Of those employed prior to taking part in learning, 42% had to reduce their working hours or stop working; those who fully or mostly used online learning were less likely to have done either.
 - The costs most commonly covered by financial support were materials and equipment followed by travel.
 - Interviewees – particularly those unemployed or on low income – were positive about England's Free Courses for Jobs offer, particularly due to its fully funded nature; most took up the offer to help them progress in their career, both in terms of pay and responsibilities.
 - The four key barriers to pursuing learning identified by interviewees were: awareness and understanding of learning options; cost; time; and confidence.
 - Financial support was seen as more important for those on low incomes; for others, the exceptions were living expenses if they had to reduce their hours and childcare costs.
- Considerations for policy and practice:
 - It is important that financial support for adult learners is proactively communicated, for example in course marketing material.
 - Financial support to help cover childcare costs is a priority for (potential) adult learners.
 - Financial support towards living costs is a high priority for (potential) adult learners if they need to reduce their time working to accommodate learning.
 - Learning online helps to make learning flexible and can reduce cost barriers.
 - Learning provision needs to flex to adults' different circumstances.

L&W published [*Effective practice in English and maths for adult learners in London*](#), commissioned by the Greater London Authority to better understand barriers to engagement, participation, achievement and progression.

- Effective practice in **recruitment and engagement**:
 - Online and social media marketing, although approaches need to be consistent and reach more potential learners; word of mouth, which is highly prevalent; community outreach activity, although not all providers offer community-based programmes
 - Regular contact from provider to learner at enrolment stage; a comprehensive initial assessment of learning and wider support needs to align the learner with the right course
 - Employer support could help increase recruitment, but there are few examples in practice.
- Effective practice in **retention, persistence and motivation**:
 - Having experienced and qualified teaching staff, as the role of the tutor is pivotal; however, recruitment and retention of high-quality staff is a sector-wide challenge
 - Practitioners who can differentiate approaches and activities and provide high-quality feedback; access to high-quality CPD and other networking and development opportunities is crucial
 - Flexibility in provision, including having a range of class times, modes and support where personal circumstances affect participation

- A range of content, activities and resources, including group discussions and relevant topics.
- Effective practice in **attainment, achievement and progression**:
 - Individualised support that takes account of different starting points and challenges
 - Ensuring a good fit between learner needs and aspirations and the qualifications and non-accredited learning available
 - Recognising and, if possible, capturing the range of wider outcomes achieved through English and maths provision
 - Providing information, advice and guidance to support further progression.
- Effective practice in **supporting adults throughout the learner journey**:
 - Non-accredited provision, such as bridging courses between levels or taster sessions, allowing for differentiated provision that meets a wider range of learner needs
 - Community-based outreach and provision encourages adults from different backgrounds and across all ages to learn new skills and helps overcome attitudinal barriers to learning
 - English and maths provision contextualised to a community setting or a workplace – working in partnership with community organisations and employers is a key facilitator
 - Embedding digital skills in English and maths, or English and maths in a vocational course
 - Online provision can be helpful for learners studying at higher levels; however, some element of face-to-face provision and support is highly beneficial
 - Having childcare responsibilities can be a key barrier; partnership working can enable providers to use venues with existing childcare provision
 - Peer support can help learners at all levels.

The OECD published [*Is Education Losing the Race with Technology? AI's progress in maths and reading, drawing on evaluations from computer scientists of whether computers can solve PIAAC literacy and numeracy tests.*](#)

- There is high expert consensus that AI can answer around 80% of the literacy questions.
 - It can solve most of the easy questions, which typically involve locating information in short texts and identifying basic vocabulary.
 - It can also solve many of the harder questions, which require navigating across larger chunks of text to formulate responses.
- AI can solve around 66% of the numeracy test, but there is disagreement behind this result.
 - Some experts imagined narrow AI solutions for separate numeracy questions; others considered general systems that can reason mathematically and process all kinds of numeracy questions similar to those in PIAAC – they gave lower ratings.
- AI's literacy capabilities have improved considerably since a similar assessment in 2016; however, extracting formal maths models from tasks that require general knowledge and are expressed in language and in images has received less research attention.
- Given more recent advancements and current investment and research, experts believe that AI will solve the entire literacy and numeracy PIAAC tests by 2026, potentially outperforming large shares of the population.
 - AI's potential performance in literacy is close to that of adults with Level 3 proficiency; across the OECD countries in PIAAC, only 10% perform better than Level 3.
 - The AI numeracy performance is close to that of adults at Level 2 on the easier and intermediate questions, and similar to Level 3 on the harder questions; on average, 57% of OECD adults are at or below Level 2 and 88% are at or below Level 3.
- Across countries in PIAAC, on average, 59% of workers use literacy skills daily at a proficiency comparable to or below that of computers; 27%–44% perform numeracy tasks daily at work, having numeracy proficiency below or at the level of AI.
 - Even the best-ranking countries to date cannot supply more than 25% of their workforce with the literacy and numeracy skills needed to outperform AI.
- In this context, the focus of education may need to shift more towards teaching students to use AI systems to perform literacy and numeracy tasks more effectively.

The British Council published [findings](#) from a OnePoll survey exploring the language learning ability, interests and habits of 3k UK adults, including 83 from Northern Ireland.

- 26% regretted not having learnt to speak another language fluently, rising to 37% among 18–24s.
 - 25% would choose Spanish, 21% French, 14% Italian, 13% German and 10% Japanese.
- 24% believed it was now more important than ever for people in the UK to learn another language.
 - 35% would prioritise French, 34% Spanish and 19% German.
 - 25% of 18–24s thought Chinese the most important, compared with 13% of 35–44s.
- 39% would use mobile apps to learn a new language, 35% would attend evening classes.

The OECD published [Micro-credentials for Lifelong Learning and Employability: Uses and possibilities](#), the first of two papers for the Micro-credential Implementation Project funded by the European Commission.

- The report examines what is known about both the potential and limitations of microcredentials with respect to: labour market participation and outcomes; widening pathways from upper secondary to HE; improving completion of HE; and promoting social inclusion.
 - It includes examples of a range of practices across the world.
- The findings suggest that policymakers need to make interventions to steer and support learners and providers, with discussions needing to focus on five key points:
 - The need for **clarity about the purpose and target population** of microcredential initiatives; e.g. objectives may include increasing employability or widening access to HE and improving completion; they may be aimed at learners who want to top up specialist skills and knowledge or those wanting to change to a different field of expertise.
 - Ensuring **funding support** for learners and providers is sustainable and that microcredentials remain accessible to all.
 - Achieving the full potential of microcredentials will require changes to **quality assurance and academic recognition** policies.
 - **Information provision** needs to go beyond the development of an online information portal to reach a wider population; there are promising examples of engaging outreach organisations and local stakeholders and of offering complementary study and career guidance.
 - Public policies can encourage **collaborations** between education and training institutions and industries in microcredential development and provision; examples include the UK Institute of Coding – a multi-sector initiative.

A second paper this year will outline practical approaches and steps, looking specifically at how funding, quality assurance and information and guidance can be adapted to create a supportive ecosystem.

Cedefop published [Microcredentials for labour market education and training: Microcredentials and evolving qualifications systems](#), covering EU member states, the UK, Iceland and Norway.

- Developments in microcredentials and their incorporation into national qualification systems vary substantially between countries.
 - In most countries, discussions are at an initial stage, with a focus on better defining and standardising their role within national qualifications systems.
 - Where discussions are more advanced, these are stimulated by current or completed reforms that aim to allow wider opportunities in terms of learning pathways.
 - In a few countries – e.g. Estonia and Spain – microcredentials or alternative credentials are referenced explicitly in legal documents.
- Microcredentials are seen to be fit for purposes such as addressing the needs of the labour market, lifelong learning, upskilling and reskilling, recognising prior learning and widening access to learning.
- Stakeholders tend to position them on a continuum of qualifications/credentials, serving a supplementary and complementary function to other forms of qualifications.
 - They offer some advantages over traditional qualifications, mainly flexibility and suitability for building sector-specific/occupation-specific skills in order to respond to changing industry needs.
 - The definition boundaries between microcredentials and sectoral or professional skills certificates are fairly blurred; quality assured and industry-recognised certificates may be considered a subcategory of microcredentials that enjoy higher visibility, recognition and trust.

- EU member states are already attempting to balance the challenges and opportunities presented by microcredentials, implementing standardisation and regulation to ensure comparability while retaining flexibility; the main dimensions being considered currently include:
 - Defining microcredentials: even though a broad EU definition exists, countries are making more detailed decisions on what elements microcredentials need to possess
 - Deciding where microcredentials could be most useful within national qualification systems (e.g. formal, non-formal and/or informal learning; VET, HE and/or adult education)
 - Indicating the necessary conditions for the inclusion of microcredentials into national qualification systems
 - Reviewing the laws and regulations relating to education and training
 - Establishing a link between microcredentials and existing offers.
- Since most countries have only recently begun to engage with microcredentials, it will be some time before a full picture emerges of the optimum relationship with qualifications systems.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF WORK

Autonomy published [*The results are in: The UK's four-day week pilot.*](#)

- The pilot involved 61 companies and around 2,900 workers from diverse sectors and sizes; it took place June–December 2022.
 - Participants had two months of preparation: workshops, coaching, mentoring and peer support.
 - Each company designed a tailored policy, e.g. 'Friday off', 'staggered', 'decentralised', 'annualised' and 'conditional' models.
- Based on administrative data, survey data and interviews at the beginning, middle and end of the trial, findings include:
 - 39% of employees were less stressed and 71% had reduced levels of burnout at the end of the trial; levels of anxiety, fatigue and sleep issues decreased, while mental and physical health both improved.
 - 54% found it easier to balance work with household jobs, and employees were also more satisfied with their household finances, relationships and how their time was being managed.
 - 60% found an increased ability to combine paid work with caring responsibilities and 62% reported it easier to combine work with social life.
 - Companies' revenue stayed broadly the same over the trial period, rising by 1.4% on average.
 - When compared to a similar period from previous years, organisations reported revenue increases of 35% on average, which indicates healthy growth.
 - The number of staff leaving dropped by 57% over the trial period.
 - 15% of employees said that no amount of money would induce them to accept a five-day schedule over the four-day week to which they were now accustomed.
 - 56 of the companies (92%) are continuing with the four-day week, with 18 confirming the policy is a permanent change.

CESifo published [*Can Workers Still Climb the Social Ladder as Middling Jobs Become Scarce? Evidence from two British cohorts*](#), focusing on occupations and occupational categories and disentangling intra-generational mobility from that due to the individual's initial job.

- Key findings:
 - Intra-generational occupational changes are a major source of mobility, with large shares of those in low-paying jobs eventually moving to middling jobs and those in middling jobs moving to high-paying jobs.
 - As the share of middling jobs has fallen, intra-generational occupational changes and the move from low-paying, middling to high-paying middling jobs have weakened as sources of mobility.
 - For the younger cohort, the role of parental income in determining occupations has increased, both for first-period jobs and for the transition towards better-paid occupations.
 - The impact of parental income has increased the most in regions experiencing the greatest increase in job polarisation; i.e. the disappearance of middling jobs has played a role in declining mobility.

- There is a potential transmission of polarisation across generations, where the increased importance of parental background may accumulate across generations, creating a multiplier effect that over time accentuates the occupational distance across groups from different backgrounds.

EMPLOYMENT: WORKPLACE HEALTH

The UK Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) published [Employee research summary](#), summarising research into sickness absence, occupational health and workplace adjustments in GB.

- 75% felt their overall health was good but 30% said they had a physical or mental health condition they expected to last 12 months+ (a long-term health condition).
 - 35% reported a sickness absence in the past 12 months.
- More than 10% overall had not received any sick pay during absence from work, either because they were not off work for long enough or because they were told they weren't entitled to it.
- 64% of employees who had a long-term sickness absence had or were going to have a meeting with their employer to discuss their return to work; some considered this to be beneficial, while others perceived this to be a 'tick-box' exercise.
- Phased returns to work were valued when offered and 70% felt they facilitated a quicker return, although some were concerned about the potential loss of income as a result of working fewer hours.
- Of those with a long-term health condition with a workplace adjustment in place, 65% said the process of getting adjustments was easy; employees who had experience with workplace adjustments found all to be beneficial.
- 51% had access to occupational health services, rising to 71% in the public sector and 69% in large organisations; 74% of those self-employed didn't currently have access to such services.

There are individual reports on: [Understanding the experiences of employees who have had a sickness absence](#); [Sickness absence, reasonable adjustments and occupational health](#); and [Sickness absence and return to work](#).

The DWP published [Incentivising SME uptake of health and wellbeing support schemes](#), drawing on a discrete choice experiment within a survey of 500 SMEs in GB, supplemented by 30 interviews.

- 70% currently provide at least one type of proactive health promotion scheme for all employees, but smaller SMEs generally provide lower levels of support.
 - Provision is often employee led and comes about as a result of staff requests.
- SMEs have an appetite to do more but a lack of resources – money and/or time – are the top barriers to implementation, along with a lack of knowledge about what support to invest in.
- Both financial support and advice and support have a role to play in improving SME uptake of health and wellbeing schemes.
 - With regards to financial support, a greater impact could be achieved by funding a larger group of SMEs at 50% reimbursement than half as many SMEs at 100%.
 - Access to supplementary advice, in the form of a needs assessment and signposting to appropriate health and wellbeing schemes, was observed to have a significant impact.
- The risk of 'deadweight loss' from SMEs using financial support to simply subsidise actions that they are currently taking appears low.
 - Employers had a desire to do more and intended to use any funding provided to either extend their current provision or move into new areas.

The TUC (Trades Union Congress) and Long Covid Support published [Workers' Experiences of Long Covid](#), based on a self-selecting survey of 3k people with the condition, undertaken in September/October 2022.

- As of August 2021, 970k people in the UK were experiencing self-reported long Covid; the most recent data, from January 2023, put this at 2m.
- 49% said they had reason to believe they had contracted Covid-19 at work.
 - 14% said they had lost their job because of reasons connected to long Covid.

- 66% said they had experienced one or more types of unfair treatment at work, including bullying/harassment (16%) and being threatened with disciplinary action (8%).
 - 25% said their employer had questioned whether they had the condition and/or the impact of their symptoms.
- 12% didn't inform their employer of their symptoms, 33% of whom said this was because they didn't think their employer would do anything and 31% because they thought their employer would view their symptoms negatively.
- 48% were not given all or any of the changes they needed to return to work and 50% weren't given the changes they needed to manage their job.

The British Red Cross published [Loneliness at work: Report for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Tackling Loneliness and Connected Communities](#), drawing on a literature review and a unique survey of workers' experiences of loneliness and relationships at work.

- Loneliness is linked to poor mental and physical health, increasing the risk of early mortality by 26%; the impact of severe loneliness has been costed at almost £10k per person per annum.
 - It also: reduces employee engagement, impacting productivity; makes workers more likely to leave; and affects health and wellbeing.
 - The Co-op and New Economics Foundation found that it costs UK employers £2.5b p.a..
- 10–11% of workers often feel lonely at work, compared to 13% who often or always experience 'general loneliness'; 43–45% sometimes experience aspects of loneliness at work.
 - Disabled workers and those with long-term health conditions are more likely to report general loneliness (24% vs 9%).
 - Those from minority ethnic communities aren't more likely to report loneliness but are more likely to feel they have no one to talk to at work (13% vs 9%) and to feel that their colleagues are like strangers (37% vs 27%).
 - 32% of senior managers are often or always lonely, twice the average for UK workers.
- Those working mainly from home don't experience higher levels of loneliness but are less likely to feel close to colleagues and are more likely to want opportunities to socialise during working hours.
 - Team members are more likely to report loneliness than those who work mainly alone.
 - Workers were more likely to be positive than negative about Covid-related changes on their relationships.
- Recommendations include:
 - **For employers:** better understand the impact of loneliness and take meaningful action, including adding questions to their employee surveys; pay particular attention to the needs of leaders and managers; commit to addressing workplace discrimination and involve workers from minoritised communities and disabled workers in identifying priorities for action; offer employees choice around working location and ensure remote workers have opportunities for informal contact.
 - **For government:** convene small businesses and trade bodies to consider how best to collect and share data on loneliness and best practice; work with employers' organisations and professional bodies to commission awareness training for employers; work with minoritised communities to identify and promote practical actions; make clear that there is no simple link between home working and loneliness at work.

EMPLOYMENT: EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

The Work Foundation published [Shifting Sands: Employer responsibility during the cost of living crisis](#), examining employer approaches to financial wellbeing at work, based on a December 2022 survey of 1k senior GB decision-makers and 18 employee interviews.

- 66% of business leaders agree employers have a substantial role to play, but only 40% had introduced new support since the start of 2022; 34% hadn't and weren't planning to; 17% were undecided.
 - Of those who had introduced support: 45% gave above standard incremental pay increases; 44% a one-off bonus/support payment.
- Limited communication around support create a barrier to effective engagement for some and the fear of stigma prevents workers from seeking financial wellbeing support at work.

- Direct financial support is important, but employers also have a role to play in offering or signposting advice and guidance on financial issues.
- Consultation and deep engagement is important and should be approached on the basis that distinct groups of workers will require different forms of support.

The House of Commons Library published [National Minimum Wage \[NMW\] Statistics](#), a briefing on trends in the UK NMW, NMW jobs and how the UK compares internationally.

- In 2021, the UK had the eighth highest adult minimum wage out of 25 OECD countries after taking into account differences in the cost of living.

Cranfield University School of Management published [Part-time working after the pandemic: The impact of the flexible furlough scheme](#), research funded by the Economic & Social Research Council, including an employer survey with CBI Economics.

- The scheme was effectively an experiment in part-time working for many employers, particularly those who had not used it previously, or only for a limited range of jobs; findings include:
 - 39.7% of respondents said that using the scheme helped them to design and manage part-time working more effectively.
 - 42.6% said that using it helped them to better match human resources with variations in business demand.
 - 42.1% said it made line managers more open to part-time working, e.g. there was an increased willingness to consider requests from individuals, plus some proactive creation of opportunities.
 - 30.4% agreed that increased working from home, and 28.7% that changes to their business model had led to greater openness from line managers to part-time working.
 - 51.2% felt the pandemic had led to more employees wanting to work fewer hours to achieve a better work-life balance, while 38.5% believed that working from home meant fewer people wanted to work part time because they saved time by not commuting.
 - Labour shortages meant that some employers would be more likely to grant a request for part-time working, both from an existing employee if they would be difficult to replace, and from an applicant if there were few alternative candidates.
- Three main recommendations for policy:
 - Guidance for employers on managing part-time working, including on how to design work to facilitate part-time working in a range of different jobs, should be made available via government bodies, e.g. ACAS, and professional associations, industry groups and campaigning organisations.
 - A formal, funded pilot of part-time working should be set up to promote different working arrangements and enable the development of appropriate employment policy.
 - More research, e.g. on: worker demand for part-time working; how part-time working could attract more older workers and enable those with ill health to work.

CIPD published [Effective Workforce Reporting: Improving people data for business leaders](#), based on a survey of 1,560 UK senior and HR decision-makers and professionals.

- Respondents' three most important areas of non-financial metrics were customer satisfaction (35%), employee retention (31%) and governance & compliance (28%); issues such as inclusion and diversity, environment and sustainability, and corporate culture lag behind.
 - Around 50% of large organisations don't collect data on recruitment and retention, workforce diversity, employee health and wellbeing or training and development.
- Only 15% saw developing and training their existing workforce as a top people priority, despite 53% considering skills recruitment as their biggest issue and retention as a bigger opportunity area than recruitment.
- Only 12% said that people matters were discussed at every board meeting, although 23% said they were often discussed.
- Even in organisations where key workforce data were collected, they were often not reviewed.
 - For example: 42% collected exit interview data but only 18% said they were reviewed by the senior team; on wellbeing, it was 47%/26%; on employee diversity, 57%/26%.
- 30% of leaders said that the data presented didn't give the full picture and 22% weren't clear about how the data connected to organisational priorities.

EMPLOYMENT: EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

The Institute for Social & Economic Research published [Gender differences in job mobility and pay progression in the UK](#), based on ten years of Household Longitudinal Study data, from 2009–10 to 2018–19.

- The gap in human capital generated by women staying at home or working part time and the loss of firm-specific skills when mothers can't return to their pre-birth job can't fully account for the observed gap in hourly pay that emerges after the birth of a first child.
- While men and women experience similar overall levels of between-employer mobility, there are important qualitative differences driven by motherhood.
 - Compared to men and to women without children, mothers are 33% less likely to change employers for work/career reasons and almost twice as likely to change employers for family-related reasons.
 - Mothers are also less likely to change jobs with the same employer.
- In contrast, fatherhood has no impact on mobility patterns and these mobility differences have important wage implications.
 - Changing jobs with the same employer and changing employers for work/career reasons leads to significantly higher wages, while changing employers for family reasons is associated with wage losses.
 - A woman having a child at age 25 can, by age 40, expect to earn 14% less per hour than a man with similar characteristics; about 25% of this gap is explained by differences in mobility patterns.
- It is likely that both supply and demand factors play a role in limiting job moves made for career reasons, with childcare constraints limiting women's desire to move jobs while employer discrimination may limit the job choices available to them.
 - The findings are consistent with a monopsonistic labour market [*in which employers possess unilateral wage-setting power*] competition model where employers exploit mothers' preferences for non-wage job attributes by paying them lower wages.

IZA published [Gender Wage Gap among Young Adults: A comparison across British cohorts](#), on the evolution of the gender wage gap between 1972 and 2015.

- The report is based on data from four British cohorts born in 1946, 1958, 1970 and 1989/90, comparing the gender wage gap among graduates and non-graduates.
 - It has substantially decreased over time for all workers in the UK, as for most developed countries.
 - In Europe, it is larger at the top of the earnings distribution than at the bottom, but in some cases, it has widened among low earners, where women are concentrated.
- Findings include:
 - The gaps decline over the period among non-graduates, who benefited considerably from the equal opportunity measures of the 1970s and then from NMW legislation.
 - The gap among graduates increased between 1972 and 2015.
 - Occupational gender segregation plays an important role in the later cohorts; women – particularly those who are high-skilled – concentrate in occupations that are likely to have lower pay than more mixed occupations or those mainly employing men.
 - Women may choose jobs that are more flexible and with lower wages, even before forming a family, with the expectation of needing less rigid working patterns.

The European Commission published [Gender equality and work–life balance policies during and after the COVID-19 crisis: Thematic review 2022](#).

- Unpaid care duties are key to gender gaps in the labour market:
 - Across EU member states, only ~33% of families share care responsibilities equally between women and men.
 - The unequal division of unpaid care work reduces women's access to and permanence in the labour market and concentrates women in sectors and jobs allowing greater working time flexibility at the price of lower wages and career opportunities.
 - Work–life balance policies are therefore vital.

- The pandemic may have long-lasting effects on the labour market conditions of women.
 - It is likely to have aggravated gender inequalities via the unequal division of exceptional unpaid care work due to the closure of schools and care services, reinforcing traditional gender roles and jeopardising progress achieved prior to the pandemic.
 - This affects women's wellbeing and their longer term labour market prospects, in terms of wage penalties, lower social protection and pension contributions.
 - The emergency measures implemented during the pandemic were often temporary and did not adopt a gender perspective, nor address the specific problems of disadvantaged groups (e.g. single mothers, migrant women).
- Long-term recovery strategies boosting female employment and addressing work-life balance are needed to address the structural weaknesses of policies and care systems.
- Legal entitlement to full-time childcare and compulsory attendance, and to the quality of services provided, are important to support greater use and provision of formal childcare services.
 - They also help shift cultural perceptions and norms towards increased acceptability of mothers returning to the labour market.
- Pre-Covid, women already provided informal long-term care more often and for longer hours than men; during the pandemic, women have been more affected by additional long-term care responsibilities in member states with less-developed residential care.
- During the pandemic, in some member states more women than men took advantage of flexible working arrangements, such as reduced working hours to accommodate care responsibilities.
 - More women than men adopted teleworking in Belgium, Greece, Spain, Hungary, Italy and Slovakia during the pandemic; the reverse was true in Germany and Luxembourg.
- Companies and social partners also have an important role in moving towards greater gender equality at work and ensuring that any gendered effects of telework are alleviated.

The Economic & Social Research Institute (ESRI) published [Wages and working conditions of non-Irish nationals in Ireland](#), funded by the Government of Ireland Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth.

- Non-Irish nationals are less likely to work in professional/managerial occupations (33% vs 44% of Irish nationals) and much less likely to be members of trade unions or staff associations (13% vs 34%).
 - From 2011 to 2018, non-Irish nationals earned 22% less per hour on average than Irish nationals.
- Earnings differ considerably depending on country of origin:
 - East Europeans earn 40% less per hour than Irish nationals; after accounting for factors such as education level and job characteristics, they still earn 20.5% less.
 - The gap is much smaller for those from West Europe, North America, Australia and Oceania; this is partly due to HE qualifications.
 - African nationals have very low employment rates, and when in work they earn 14% less on average than Irish nationals, after accounting for background and job characteristics.
- Non-Irish women earn 11% less than non-Irish men, who in turn earn 18% less than Irish men.
- The migrant wage gap has narrowed from 25.5% in 2011–2013 to 18.7% in 2016–2018, partly due to an increase in the skill level of non-Irish workers and that they are working in higher quality jobs.
- Policy-related changes that could help reduce the migrant wage gap include greater trade union membership and effective English language training.
 - Specific measures to combat labour market discrimination may be required, e.g. the current development of an anti-racism strategy in Ireland.
 - Job quality, including wages, should be a priority for migrant integration policy.

City & Guilds published [Increasing neurodiversity in the workplace: City & Guilds Neurodiversity Index Report](#), based on a survey of 161 employers and 817 employees.

- 41% of employers have adapted their recruitment processes to accommodate neurodiversity.
- 23% of HR professionals and 29% of senior leaders have had specific training relating to neurodiversity in the last 12 months.

- 49% of organisations have neurodiversity champions or mentors, serving as advocates and allies, and raising awareness of neurodiversity in the workplace.
- 58% of neurodiverse employees have disclosed their condition at work with a good/OK response; 32% felt unable to disclose their condition; 10% received a poor response after disclosure.
- 40% of neurodivergent employees say they are impacted most days in the workplace by their condition.

There is no indication of geographical coverage.

The World Economic Forum published [Global Parity Alliance: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion \[DEI\] Lighthouses 2023](#), providing eight case studies selected for having met impact benchmarks for DEI.

- In 2020, companies worldwide spent an estimated \$7.5b on DEI-related efforts, a figure projected to rise to \$15.4b by 2026.
 - At the current rate it will take another 151 years to close the global economic gender gap at all levels, while data are still too sparse to systematically estimate global gaps for racial equity and LGBTQIA+ and disability inclusion.
- Analysis of the case studies suggests five common success factors that yield the most impact for under-represented groups:
 - A nuanced understanding of the root causes
 - A meaningful definition of success
 - Accountable and invested business leaders
 - A solution designed for its specific context
 - Rigorous tracking and course correction.

The case studies are: EY (neurodivergent inclusion); Limak (gender equity); PwC (socioeconomic mobility); Randstad (gender equity & socioeconomic mobility); Schneider Electric (gender equity); Shiseido (gender equity); Tata Steel (gender equity); and Walmart (socioeconomic equity and career mobility). The Global Parity Alliance is a cross-industry group committed to advancing DEI around the world.

The European Commission published [Making access to social protection for workers and the self-employed more transparent through information and simplification](#), analysis of policies in 35 countries including the UK between January 2017 and April 2022.

- The report explores the national policies, practices and reforms aimed at:
 - providing and improving information about the conditions and rules of access to social protection
 - simplifying access to social protection schemes and administrative requirements.
- Significant progress is being made in the provision of digitalised, high-quality and easily accessible general and personalised information, partly accelerated by the pandemic.
 - Countries have also simplified the rules, digitalised application procedures and streamlined administrative structures to ensure a better flow of information.
- Further improvement is needed in areas including:
 - Making access to information easier for those who are more vulnerable, those with disabilities, and in some cases for non-standard workers and the self-employed
 - Simplifying complex rules governing application procedures and promoting the automatic granting of benefits
 - Regularly evaluating the transparency of policies and practices, including the consequences of digitalisation on access to information and the importance of bridging the digital divide.

International Comparisons

The OECD published [The design of upper secondary education across OECD countries: Managing choice, coherence and specialisation](#).

- The report captures the diversity of countries' upper secondary systems by:

- developing a common language that sets the foundation for internationally comparative analysis
- categorising how countries organise their programmes in upper secondary education to manage choice, coherence and specialisation
- identifying benefits and strategies to mitigate the risks associated with different approaches to upper secondary programmes for students, education systems and society.

Cedefop published [*The future of vocational education and training in Europe – 50 dimensions of vocational education and training: Cedefop’s analytical framework for comparing VET.*](#)

- The report explores future trends in the 27 EU member states plus the UK, Iceland and Norway, analysing how VET has changed since the mid-1990s and how this influences future opportunities and challenges.
- It covers five interlinked themes:
 - The changing content and profile of VET; epistemological challenges and opportunities
 - Delivering initial VET (IVET); institutional diversification and/or expansion
 - Facilitating vocational learning; the influence of assessments
 - Supporting lifelong learning; the changing relationship between IVET and continuing VET
 - European VET; synthesis and trends.

Government

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Department for the Economy (DfE) published [*Northern Ireland Skills Strategy: Skills for a 10x Economy – 1st annual monitoring report.*](#)

- Northern Ireland continues to have a high proportion of the working-age population with no qualifications (11.8% vs UK average 6.8%); in the 50–64 age group it is 18.3% (UK 9.3%).
 - The proportion in employment with graduate and postgraduate qualifications has grown significantly to 37%, while the number with low/no qualifications continues to decline.
- The Northern Ireland Skills Barometer anticipates a decline in the number of jobs available for individuals with low/no qualifications and an increasing demand for graduates.
 - There will also be more opportunities available for those with mid-level qualifications than the number joining the labour market at that level.
 - This issue needs to be better understood, including how mid-level skills can support the delivery of the 10x ambition, particularly in the context of innovation and inclusivity.
- In terms of creating a culture of lifelong learning, an initial goal was set to match the UK average participation rate of 25% of working-age adults by 2030.
 - In 2021, the figure remained at 17%, little changed since 2016; this must be considered as a key priority going forward.
 - Women are more likely to participate than men; 50–64 year-olds are much less likely to engage in education and training.
- An evidence base on digital skills has been developed, with the first year of evidence gathering focused on digital skills for economic and social inclusion.
 - An estimated 18% have no digital skills; 57% basic skills; 25% above-basic skills.
 - There are significant disparities in digital capability when factors such as age, labour market status and social deprivation are considered.
- Progress against strategic goals:
 - Increasing the proportion of individuals leaving Northern Ireland HE with first degrees and postgraduate qualifications in narrow STEM subjects: no change at 24% (target 27%).
 - Increasing the proportion of the working-age population with qualifications at Level 2+: up 2ppt to 78.5% (target 85–90%).
 - Increasing the proportion of the working-age population with qualifications at Level 3+: up 3.9ppt to 59.9% (target 70–75%).

- In addition:
 - Research to better understand what 'quality work' looks like in Northern Ireland further draws out some of the gender-based disparities present in the labour market.
 - The Skills Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Group was established as a sub-committee of the Northern Ireland Skills Council to consider how skills policy can support a positive impact on addressing labour market inequalities and the report highlights work to date.

A two-, five- and eight-year implementation plan outlines when the Strategy's various recommendations should be implemented.

DfE published [Young People Inequalities in the Northern Ireland Skills System](#), a presentation outlining research in the area.

- 16–24 year-olds make up 11% of the whole Northern Ireland population, with the number expected to peak at around 27k in 2032 before going into long-term decline.
- UK-wide research suggests that 51% of this age group feel that the pandemic has lowered their aspirations for the future, while 64% feel it isn't easy to get a good job and 43% feel ill-equipped to get the job they want.
- While most young people are in education or employment, the employment rate is only 50% for 16–24 year-olds and 33% for those who are disabled.
 - For those in work, wages are lower; for those available to work, unemployment is higher.
 - Entrepreneurship rates are also particularly low at 10% of 18–24 year-olds compared with a UK average of 13%, rising to over 16% in Wales.
- 48% of school leavers in Northern Ireland go to HE, but rates are much higher among grammar school students (75.9% v 25.7%) and those not eligible for free school meals (54.8% v 27.8%).
 - They are higher for Catholics (+5.8ppt) and those from ethnic minority backgrounds (+4.6ppt).
- 19% fewer young people enrolled in FE in 2021/22 than in 2017/18, with the largest decline among those aged 19 and under (-23%); only 13.3% of those enrolled were from the least deprived quintile.
- 16–19 apprenticeships have increased by 73% since 2013/14, with 96% growth among males but only 12% among females; the 20–24 age group has seen a 20% fall (36% females, 3% males).
- 2020/21 saw a 10% year-on-year increase in under-24s enrolling in Northern Ireland HEIs and a 12% increase in 21–24 year-olds.

[Education Across the Island of Ireland: Examining educational outcomes, earnings and intergenerational mobility](#), based on research by the ESRI, was published in *Irish Studies in International Affairs*.

- In-depth analysis was carried out of intergenerational educational mobility and the education-earnings relationship within and between jurisdictions.
 - Data were taken from the Irish and UK Labour Force Surveys and the OECD's 2014 PIAAC survey.
- Findings include:
 - There are substantial wage premiums across all qualification levels in the RoI relative to Northern Ireland; these are not merely driven by higher returns to professional occupations or higher-value-added foreign direct investment employment.
 - The mean wage gap was 27% in 2014 in favour of the RoI; around 25% of this can be explained by lower levels of educational attainment in Northern Ireland.
 - Educational attainment has improved more rapidly in the RoI than in Northern Ireland in the past 15 years, and levels of educational attainment are substantially higher in the RoI.
 - Early school leaving, based on the OECD definition, is more than twice as prevalent in Northern Ireland than in the RoI (14.1% vs 5.6%).
 - Coming from a more disadvantaged background is a significant predictor of educational failure in both jurisdictions, but its impact is more pronounced in Northern Ireland.
 - The marginal effect of the impact of low parental education on the probability of a child having a poor educational outcome is about twice as large in Northern Ireland as in the RoI; 38% of young people in the RoI exceeded their parents' level of education compared to 29% in Northern Ireland.
- Conclusions include: academic selection in Northern Ireland is likely to contribute to limiting the extent to which the educational system facilitates intergenerational educational mobility.

ENGLAND

The House of Commons Library published [The value of student maintenance support](#), a research briefing on changes in support in England and its impact on public expenditure.

- Key trends in the real value of the maximum maintenance support package over time include:
 - The introduction of loans in 1990/91, which initially increased the value of the overall support package and gradually replaced grants over time.
 - The reintroduction of grants in 2004/05 and their extension in 2006/07 both resulted in jumps in the maximum value of support.
 - 2012 reforms increased the size of the support package for new students; freezes or below-inflation increases in grant and/or loan rates meant real values fell in the following few years.
 - Loans replaced grants for new students from 2016/17; increases in the maximum loan amounts in the same year took the value to what was then its highest level in real terms.
 - Maximum loan amounts increased gradually between 2016/17 and 2021/22.
 - Inflation was/is expected to be much higher in 2022/23 and 2023/24 than the cash increase in maximum support levels; the real-terms cut is likely to be around 7% in 2022/23 and 4% in 2023/24 – larger than any real cuts in student support since the early 1960s.
- Only students from the poorest households qualify for the maximum level of maintenance support, so they face the greatest impact of any changes in the overall amount available.
 - The real cuts in 2022/23 and 2023/24 make it more likely that students will not be able to cover their living costs without additional financial help.
- In higher income households, parents of dependent students need to make larger contributions to bring support levels up to the maximum.
 - Parental contributions are not made explicit in student finance material therefore some students may not receive the support they need.

The OfS published [Evaluation of new Data Science and Artificial Intelligence conversion Masters courses: Second interim report](#), undertaken by CRAC.

- The courses were launched in September 2020 with the aim of enhancing diversity in the sector.
- 6,317 students have enrolled to date, against a target of 2,500 for the total programme; the proportion who are UK domiciled fell from 53% in year one to 33% in year two – 32% overall.
 - 38% of all students have been female throughout.
 - The proportion of those who are disabled has fallen from 13% in year one to 5% to date in year three, compared to 18% of UK students.
 - 21% of UK students to date have been from Black backgrounds.
- In year one, almost all 220 available scholarships were used, but awards in year two fell below target to 292; the percentage awarded to UK students fell from 83% to 67% and overall stands at 61%.
- A survey of 280 course completers found that most had quickly secured jobs specialising in or using data and/or AI, almost all of them in the UK, irrespective of graduate domicile.
 - Most of those who haven't secured a new job a few months after completion are looking for similar types of employment.

30 English universities have been awarded funding to invest in up to 817 [additional scholarships](#) for the programme in 2023/24; the criteria have been widened to include students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

England's Department for Education published [Evaluation of Skills Bootcamps: Wave2 Implementation Report](#), part of a process evaluation.

- Most Wave 2 Bootcamps were in digital skills and HGV driving, but some were in green, engineering, construction and technical skills.
- 16,120 people started a Bootcamp (DfE target was 16k); 67% were male, but the proportion of women in digital and HGV driving was higher than among the workforce.
 - Those who applied and started were more likely to live in areas of high disadvantage.
- 94% of participants wanted to get a new job or change career.

- 81% were motivated by the offer of a guaranteed interview; 73% thought they could earn more money; self-employed participants were particularly motivated to learn new skills; the flexibility of the training was particularly attractive, as was the fact that it was free.
- 2,648 employers engaged with Bootcamps, 65% of them SMEs.
 - 26% offered an interview; 15% gave employees time to attend; 10% offered employment.
 - Many said they got involved to enhance organisational performance; they valued being involved with curriculum design and provision.
- Employers felt Bootcamps helped to increase workforce diversity, offering a 'new talent pipeline'.
 - Those that trained existing employees saw improved staff retention and satisfaction, as well as financial benefits (e.g. higher fees for digital services).
 - Some felt participants needed time to embed and practise new skills and that Bootcamps should sit within a larger programme of employee development.
- Successful Bootcamps had: opportunities to practise and embed learning through applied projects and vocational experience; strong employer-provider relationships.
- 21% of participants felt there wasn't enough time to learn the necessary skills and knowledge, with some feeling the provider had tried to condense longer programmes into the Bootcamp.
- Interspersing employability sessions throughout the Bootcamp was more effective than running them as a block.
 - Some participants found the sessions too simple and of no benefit, whereas those who experience personalised sessions could see the value.
- Providers thought the key performance indicator of 100% attended a guaranteed interview was unrealistic – many learners were just sent lists of job adverts; for those who had an interview, the quality varied.

SCOTLAND

The Scottish Government published three papers on its Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) youth employment strategy launched in December 2014:

DYW Evaluation: Evidence synthesis, a review of activity from 2014 to 2019, and identifying good practice and lessons arising from the pandemic years.

- The target of reducing youth unemployment by 40% by 2021 was achieved in 2017; other main successes include the development and growth of apprenticeships and increases in the attainment of vocational qualifications at SCQF level 5+.
- DYW has given young people access to a broader range of work-based learning, positively impacted parents' and young people's views of work-based learning and addressed education and workplace inequalities.
- Continuing challenges include:
 - Increasing employer engagement, and achieving positive destinations for under-represented groups
 - Schools embracing DYW due to issues including: staff capacity, skills and funding; coordination and information management; geography and school type; pupil needs and lack of incentives to participate; and barriers to partnerships with employers and colleges
- More work is needed to meet DYW equality and inclusion targets, e.g. males are still much more likely to pursue careers in construction, engineering and computing, and females in creative industries, medicine/health, teaching, hospitality and caring.

The Impact of Scotland's Developing Young Workforce Strategy on Employer Engagement, research in 2022 by Rocket Science, with employers and practitioners.

- The role and funding of DYW is still vital, with school coordination helping employers to create and sustain their engagement.
- There is a need to maintain and strengthen the focus on the most disadvantaged in the labour market.
- Support for employers is complex; most don't know who best to approach and are confused by the range of offers.

- Effective collaboration is needed between DYW bodies, employers, teachers and parents.
- Employers would like a smaller number of high-quality or immersive engagements with young people interested in their work or sector, including those at a younger age.
- Virtual engagement as part of a wider, hybrid offer should be considered, however employers prefer in-person engagement.
- 14 recommendations include: Scottish Government establishing a long-term funding stream for DYW, and greater collaboration between DYW Regional Groups.

[The Impact of Scotland’s Developing Young Workforce Strategy on Education](#), research in 2022 by The Lines Between, including a survey and interviews with school staff and stakeholders.

- 20 key learning points to inform policy include:
 - Explore the value of providing more direction in the DYW activities that schools should offer.
 - Find effective ways to capture, collate and share good practice among schools.
 - Schools may benefit from support to help staff embrace work-based learning and implement vocational or work-based pathways.
 - Ensure school staff are aware that DYW and work-based learning is for all pupils, as some view it as more relevant to pupils less suited to traditional academic subjects.
 - Pupils and parents have a greater understanding of, and interest in taking part in, work-based learning opportunities; but some still view them as lower value than traditional subjects.

The Scottish Parliament Education, Children & Young People Committee published [College regionalisation inquiry final report](#); the inquiry began in March 2022, ten years after the creation of 13 college regions.

- In 2011 there were 41 colleges, there are now 26; most sit within 13 regions established in 2013.
- Positive impacts of the reforms include: the creation of colleges of scale; coherence of the curriculum across a region; increases in articulation which has widened access to HE; and enhancement of the student voice, e.g. in decision-making.
- However, colleges are being held back by the funding model and the lack of flexibility to respond to economic and societal needs and priorities.
 - Colleges need more funds to be able to deliver what is asked of them, and more flexibility to manage their own finances and deliverables.
 - If extra funding and flexibility are unavailable, the Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council need to provide a clear vision and steer on priorities.

The Scottish Government published [Pathways: A new approach for women in entrepreneurship](#), an independent review of the gender gap in entrepreneurship in Scotland.

- Only 20% of Scotland’s entrepreneurs are women, and start-ups founded by women receive only 2% of investment capital.
- One of five major causes of under-participation in entrepreneurialism is that general education and normalisation of entrepreneurship as a valid career path is largely not present in the education system.
 - This affects all demographics, but its impact is greater for women in the presence of the other proximate causes.
- 31 recommendations include the following relevant to learning and skills:
 - Integrate entrepreneurial education into schools and FE colleges.
 - Include mandatory diversity and equality education in all secondary schools and university and college courses.
 - Bring start-up incubation, education and support to where primary carers are, e.g. provide it in a range of pop-up locations to help more women and other primary care givers to access services.

The Scottish Government published [Evaluation: Flexible Workforce Development Fund \(FWDF\)](#) by EKOS.

- The FWDF was established in 2017 to provide employers with flexible upskilling or retraining opportunities for staff, address skills gaps and boost productivity.

- The fund is largely working well; it was universally considered to be much needed and valued and has benefited the intended audiences.
 - However, independent training providers have had limited involvement and benefit.
- Almost all 203 employers surveyed have skills gaps due to changing customer expectations, digital innovation and Covid-19 recovery.
 - 69% of apprentice levy-paying employers in Scotland have not accessed the fund, mainly due to limited awareness or the funding cap not being considered appropriate.

12 recommendations are made.

WALES

The Welsh Government published [Stronger, Fairer, Greener Wales: Net Zero Skills Action Plan](#).

- The plan prioritises seven key areas of action:
 - Gain an understanding of the current skills position for each emission sector
 - Build a shared understanding of net zero skills across Wales
 - Grow a skilled workforce to meet net zero commitments
 - Strengthen the skills system
 - Promote opportunities for early years and young people to realise their potential
 - Cross-government and partnership approach to meet the skills commitment
 - Just transition.
- Actions are summarised in [Actions we will deliver moving forward](#) and include:
 - A public consultation on sector-specific skills requirements and how to achieve them through partnership working; the outcome will support the development of a skills 'roadmap'
 - A 'Journey to Competence' for each occupation and for new and transitioning jobs in each sector, outlining the qualifications needed
 - Pilot a 'Net Zero Personal Learning Account' for upskilling/reskilling in colleges in high-demand sectors (construction, energy, engineering and manufacturing), including promoting women to take up net zero skills
 - Explore options to strengthen the skills system and make it more flexible, responsive and stronger, with greater alignment between HE, FE, apprenticeships and employability programmes.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND (RoI)

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) published [Graduate Outcomes and Socio-Economic Status](#), based on analysis of its Graduate Outcomes Survey class of 2020 data linked with a deprivation index score (DIS).

- Almost 20% of graduates from the class of 2020 were from affluent backgrounds while fewer than 10% were from disadvantaged backgrounds.
 - 25% of social sciences, journalism & information graduates were affluent; 14% of services graduates were disadvantaged, the highest proportion.
- The overall average DIS was 2.3; across degree levels, those graduating with an undergraduate degree were from less affluent areas (1.8) than those with a postgraduate degree (3.7).
 - On average female graduates were slightly less affluent than males (2.1 vs 2.5), both those graduating with an undergraduate and a postgraduate degree.
- There was little variation between DIS groups in terms of employment levels; however:
 - 17% of affluent graduates were pursuing further studies, compared to 15% across all DIS groups and 13% for disadvantaged graduates.
 - 6% of affluent graduates were unemployed compared to 9% of disadvantaged graduates.
 - A relatively large proportion of affluent graduates work in financial, insurance and real estate activities (17%) and ICT (9%) compared to the overall average.
 - 60% of affluent graduates were working in professional occupations compared to 51% of disadvantaged graduates.

- A larger share of disadvantaged graduates work in sales and customer service (10%) and caring, leisure and other service occupations (7%) than the overall average.

The HEA also published [Graduate Outcomes and Disability](#) based on similar analysis to the above report.

- The proportion of graduates with a disability, nine months after graduation:
 - 69% were in full- or part-time employment or due to start a job, compared with 74% with no disability.
 - 20% were pursuing further full- or part-time study compared with 19% with no disability.
 - 7% were unemployed, compared with 5% with no disability.
- 47% of graduates with a disability were employed in professional occupations compared with 56% of those with no disability.
 - 55% said that their course was very relevant/relevant to their job vs 60% of those with no disability.
- Graduates with disabilities were more represented in each of the lower salary bands; in each band thereafter graduates with no disabilities had a higher share of their total group.

The OECD published [A review of technological university academic career paths, contracts and organisation in Ireland](#), commissioned by the HEA and the RoI's Department for Further and Higher Education, Research & Innovation.

- Irish authorities are reshaping the nation's HE landscape, creating a network of technological universities that merge, build on and extend the mission of the country's institutes of technology.
 - Technological universities are tasked with providing research-informed teaching and learning across all levels of HE, linking their programmes to the needs of their region's citizens, businesses and professions.
- The technological university system cannot fully achieve these expectations with an employment model first developed more than 50 years ago.
 - The current academic career structure, the organisation of academic work and management and leadership structures of technological universities are impediments to: an expanded research profile and research-informed teaching; deeper engagement with knowledge needs of regions and communities; and a wider offer of flexible learning to meet reskilling and upskilling needs.
- The research draws on a set of benchmark HEIs from other OECD countries to identify options for new career and employment contracts and organisation structures.

EUROPE

Cedefop published [Working together towards attractive, inclusive, innovative, agile and flexible VET](#), a briefing note on how European countries along with Iceland and Norway will be implementing the VET Recommendation and the Osnabrück priorities.

- National implementation plans (NIPs) set out countries' activities until 2025, including proposals until 2028 and a further outlook to 2030.
- To put their NIPs into practice, countries will build on recent or current reforms, national strategy papers on VET, skills, youth and research, and reform programmes in the framework of the European semester.
 - Most countries rely on existing governance structures, e.g. national committees, advisory councils or working groups, to implement, monitor and report on progress towards objectives.
 - More than 66% of them will involve social partners in the process and almost all will draw on EU funding to finance their reforms, including the Recovery & Resilience Facility, the European Social Fund Plus and Erasmus+.
- The VET Recommendation sets the following quantitative targets for participating countries to achieve collectively by 2025, with progress monitored by Cedefop's [European VET policy dashboard](#):
 - At least 82% of VET graduates are in employment
 - 60% of VET students benefit from work-based training for at least part of their studies
 - 8% of learners benefit from a learning mobility opportunity abroad.
- Depending on their systems and starting points, countries have chosen different priorities:

- Agile & resilient VET, adaptive to labour market needs (138) – e.g. Denmark, Austria and Belgium
- Attractive VET, based on modern and digitalised provision (106) – e.g. Iceland and Norway
- Innovative & excellent VET (102) – e.g. Greece and Bulgaria
- Inclusive VET, promoting equal opportunities (100) – e.g. Lithuania and the Netherlands
- Flexible VET, providing progression and lifelong learning opportunities (89) – e.g. Luxembourg and Belgium
- VET underpinned by quality assurance (75) – e.g. Slovenia and Estonia.

The European Commission published [Study supporting the evaluation of the Quality Framework for Traineeships \[QFT\]: Final report](#), assessing the impact of the QFT across the current 27 member states, eight years since it was introduced.

- The study focuses on 'open market traineeships' and those that fall under Active Labour Market Policies; it excludes work experience placements that are part of formal education or VET, and mandatory traineeships regulated under national law (e.g. medicine and architecture).
- Lessons learnt include those on: the scope of traineeships covered by the QFT; boosting implementation at regional and national levels; enforcement, monitoring and evaluation; and funding to support the implementation of quality traineeships and the QFT.

The European Commission published [Final report of the study on the state and effectiveness of national funding systems of higher education to support the European Universities Initiative \[EUI\]](#), analysis of the performance-based funding (PBF) systems in the 27 EU member states.

- The EUI was launched in 2019, aimed at finding new ways of 'long-term structural, sustainable and systemic cooperation' between HEIs on education, research and innovation.
- The report considers how and to what extent national funding schemes such as PBF can be used to support transnational university alliances such as those in the EUI.
- Positive impacts of PBF systems included:
 - Increased quality of teaching, learning and overall research outputs
 - Greater focus on student guidance and mentoring
 - A more transparent way of distributing core funding to HEIs
 - Support for dialogue between HEIs and national funding authorities.
- Recommendations are made on how best to use PBF systems to achieve national policy objectives.

The European Commission published [The road towards a possible joint European Degree: Identifying opportunities and investigating the impact and feasibility of different approaches](#).

- A joint European degree would bring together several HEIs and several languages; students could benefit from embedded mobility opportunities and learning through interdisciplinary challenge-based approaches.
- It could be gradually implemented:
 - as a 'label', awarded to joint study programmes that result in a joint degree and that meet a list of criteria
 - as a qualification based on common European criteria, awarded via an accredited joint study programme.
- Benefits could include: easing the combination of studies in several European countries; high-quality opportunities for students and HEIs; promoting student skills and learning outcomes to employers.

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