

Redefining lifelong learning

Lessons from around the globe



Consumption

International

Employment

Finance and Wealth

Prevention

Health and care

Productivity

Costs

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Executive summary

Lifelong learning is about continuing to learn and improve our skills and knowledge throughout our lives, through any means. This has long been acknowledged as a solution to some of the challenges the UK will face as our population continues to age. We know that we need to sustain longer working lives. It's well accepted that all of us will need to keep learning and developing throughout our lives to achieve this. But our aspirations in terms of learning have not, so far, driven the change that would allow this to happen.

Being able to retrain and upskill as we work could play a crucial role in enabling everyone to work for longer. But we're a long way from achieving this for everyone in the UK. We still see rates of learning drop significantly in mid and later life. **In 2023, only 36% people aged 55 to 64, 24% of those aged 65 to 74, and 17% of those aged 75 and over said that they'd taken part in any kind of learning in the past three years in the UK.**¹ This is an improvement on previous years, but there's still a long way to go.

When people in mid and later life engage in continuous learning and training to help with work:

- **It improves their employment opportunities:** reskilling and upskilling improves productivity, adaptability, knowledge and general employability²
- **It strengthens economies in the face of rapidly changing labour markets:** a lifelong culture of learning is linked with economies that are stronger and more competitive and innovative³
- **It improves general wellbeing:** adults who engage in continuous learning live healthier, longer lives compared to those who don't⁴

The prize is considerable. It's estimated that if UK employment rates for those aged 50 to 64 matched the rates of those aged 35 to 49, the country's GDP would increase by more than 5%.⁵

How can we encourage lifelong learning?

We've looked at the approaches taken to lifelong learning around the world. The intent is to understand what's different in the countries that are seen as leaders in lifelong learning. We've drawn out some of the key features of policy and practice that seem to facilitate this. We've

also spoken to experts from the UK and across the ILC global network to identify examples of promising practices.

As there's no league table that identifies the world leaders in lifelong learning, we've consulted with experts in lifelong learning, both from the UK and globally. In this report we consider, in depth, the approaches in Singapore, Japan, South Korea, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden.

While each country's approach is different, and shaped by its wider cultural, political and economic context, there are some common threads. Key features of these approaches include:

- **A culture of lifelong learning starting in childhood**

Many of these countries have policies and practices that encourage children to embrace their curiosity, both inside and outside the classroom. Methods include meaningful play, freedom to work on their own cross-subject projects, and encouragement from teachers and parents to continue their explorations at home. There's also a wider cultural expectation of, and respect for, learning beyond school and university – with clear signals to reinforce the message across society that learning is a lifelong pursuit and educational policies cover the whole of peoples' lives.

- **A wider diversity of provision, often provided through cross-sector collaboration**

In many of these countries, national government leads a wider, cross-sectoral effort to provide lifelong learning opportunities. There's a wide range of learning options, with flexibility around when and where learning takes place, different kinds of courses, and a broader understanding of what counts as 'learning', with space for online learning, informal learning, self-study and more.

- **Support for people to find the type of learning that suits them**

Several countries offer free, publicly-funded skills assessments, which can help people analyse their current skill sets and determine which skills are worth building on. Supplying trusted databases, and support in navigating the learning landscape, gives people the confidence to access high-quality learning opportunities.

- **Increased investment in lifelong learning**

Many of these countries invest more public funding in education, both to encourage and enable a wide range of provision and to reduce the cost of learning for individuals. Public funding is also

balanced with investment from employers and individuals to increase access to learning.

- **Learning that is accessible**

Many of these countries combine community provision with online and remote learning to ensure that lifelong learning is accessible to all. Employers also play a significant role in supporting access to learning for their employees.

Making progress in the UK

Lifelong learning in the UK is held back by both supply and demand side challenges, including attitudinal and practical barriers to learning, and a lack of flexible, accessible, high-quality options.

However, there are examples of good practice from the UK, and beyond, which show promise in that they:

- Shift cultural attitudes to lifelong learning, including through:
 - o Addressing ageism
 - o Overcoming negative attitudes to learning
 - o Supporting inclusion
- Increase the range of learning opportunities
- Help people identify learning opportunities
- Widen state support for adult learning
- Build stronger links between work and learning

At present this practice is only emerging. There's relatively little detailed evidence that would enable us to identify which approaches have the greatest impact. This means that there's work to be done to bring together promising practice examples and find ways to scale them up to provide effective approaches.

This could help the UK determine an approach which more closely resembles those taken by global leaders.

Conclusions and recommendations

There is no single best practice in lifelong learning that we should adopt wholesale in the UK. However, we can take steps to learn from global leaders and start dismantling the barriers faced by adult learners, particularly those in mid and later life.

We need to draw together the best work currently being done by employers, education providers and community organisations and harness the potential of technology to ensure universal access to a wide range of high-quality flexible learning opportunities in the UK.

We recommend that we **bring together cross-sector leaders and experts to continue development of lifelong learning practice, to support innovation, and to robustly evaluate all current approaches to identify the best.**

The governments of the devolved nations could play an important role in convening these efforts. In addition, drawing on our learning around the globe, we recommend that the UK's governments should:

- **Join up education policy approaches for children and young people with those for adult learning**

At present, adult learning policy tends to be developed separately from that for children and young people, missing opportunities to shape education policy to create a culture of lifelong learning.

- **Provide support for individuals who wish to identify their skills gaps and find high quality learning opportunities**

Individual learners need online tools and access to guidance and support on learning in the community. This could be provided by expanding the remit of adult careers services and/or JobCentre Plus.

- **Improve access to funding for adult learning**

We need to reduce the cost barriers to learning, by widening eligibility for the UK's Lifelong Learning Entitlement and developing personalised learning accounts, building on the model established in Wales.

What is lifelong learning?

Lifelong learning is a broad and all-encompassing term, but not everyone who talks about it shares the same understanding of what types of learning it includes, who is responsible for it, and how it's measured.

In this paper, we take lifelong learning to mean any learning activity undertaken throughout life, whether formal or informal, for work or personal reasons, by necessity or for pleasure. It's important for an individual's competitiveness and employability, but that it also enhances social inclusion, active citizenship, and personal development. It can include: completing an undergraduate or postgraduate degree later in life; learning an instrument or language; or learning new recipes from TikTok.

Lifelong learning has long been embraced as a public policy priority in the UK, and is also supported globally as one of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.⁶

Why does it matter?

Learning throughout life has been proven to improve our self-esteem, our mental health and even our physical health. Learning alongside others encourages more social interaction, which prevents loneliness, especially for older people. Life satisfaction has also been shown to increase the more people learn, particularly when they're passionate about the subject studied.⁷ And of course, continual learning improves employability and skills. In an ever-growing and ever-changing economy, skill development helps people remain competitive in the job market.⁸

In the UK, nearly 1.5 million workers are now over the age of 65.⁹ And the rate of population ageing isn't slowing down – by 2050, the world's population of over-60s will double to 2.1 billion.¹⁰ With our population living longer than ever before, older people will need to stay in work for longer. Lifelong learning to upskill and reskill is a vital part of this. When governments and employees invest in lifelong learning, it strengthens economies and job markets, reduces pensioner poverty, and closes skills gaps. And closing skills gaps around the world could boost global GDP by \$11.5 trillion.¹¹

Challenges for lifelong learning

We've spoken with experts from the UK and around the world: to understand the current challenges involved in expanding lifelong learning, and to identify where we need to make changes. A common set of concerns emerged in our discussions. These included:

Supply-side challenges

There's not enough investment: A lack of investment from government and the private sector can hamper the success and accessibility of lifelong learning efforts. Countries with higher rates of continuous learning, like South Korea and Germany, invest in community centres, adult education centres, free courses, and existing programmes. In places like Canada and the Netherlands, public collaboration with the private sector helps to deliver learning opportunities.

There are too many options, and they're hard to navigate: There's no shortage of courses for people who want to learn. But potential learners can find it hard to work out which programmes to try. Understanding which courses are useful, and worth the time and money, can be difficult, especially if the course isn't formally accredited. It's also hard to understand course content. Government endorsement or course accreditation can help to allay these fears.

"It's very easy to find things, but is it trusted, is it worth your time, is it going to be useful for you?"

Brittne Kakulla, AARP (American Association of Retired People), USA

Current options aren't flexible enough: Learning programmes don't always cater to people with caring and work responsibilities. They also engage less with marginalised groups, including people on lower incomes, women, people from ethnic minorities, and disabled people.

There aren't enough physical places for learning: Countries with successful learning programmes offer adult education in easily accessible places like community centres and libraries. But in the UK, community facilities are increasingly under threat of closure due to pressures on local government finances.¹²

Demand-side challenges

Fear of learning

For some people, negative experiences of learning earlier in life can create barriers to adult learning. Adults who struggled in school as children, who were bullied or had poor learning environments, can be particularly resistant to learning.

“Quite often with adult learners, you’ve got a degree of resistance. You’ve had a bad time at school. You might come out with low qualifications. You don’t really like the idea at the age of 50 or 60 of going back into a classroom and having a teacher barking information at you. All of that sounds very unattractive.”

Chris Butcher, WEA (Workers' Educational Association)

Some experts even recognised their own hesitations with returning to formal learning.

“The thought of going into any kind of formal education was absolutely abhorrent to me because I’m very dyslexic and I had quite a bad experience of the education system.”

Caroline Waters, former Head of People and Policy, BT Group

Ageism

Ageism is a major barrier to people in mid and later life taking up retraining and upskilling opportunities, either inside or outside work. Research by the Centre for Ageing Better found ageism is the most widely accepted form of discrimination in the UK – and the least examined.¹³

“If she’s only going to do another couple of years anyway, what’s the point of investing thousands of pounds of training?”

Line manager in local government¹⁴

Ageist stereotypes can act as a barrier to people in mid and later life being offered training at work. Yet, as people work longer, training is inevitable and vital.¹⁵ Training improves employee satisfaction, motivation and morale, and leads to increased retention.¹⁶ OECD research found 25% of employers believe that people aged 55 and over are more reluctant to try new technologies than their younger

counterparts. This is despite the fact that mid-career and older workers were very open to adapting, changing jobs and improving their skillset. The same research found 89% of the employers surveyed who had hired mid-career and older workers said they performed as well as, or better than, younger hires.¹⁷

Stereotypes around digital literacy in older people are a particular concern. The assumption that they're less able to use new technology has led to a massive number of programmes focussed on computer literacy – but while this is important, supply far outweighs demand. There are some challenges with digital literacy,¹⁸ but generally, the issue isn't lack of skill but lack of confidence – while older people feel confident using technology at home, they're less confident using it specifically for work and learning.¹⁹

“Yes, Baby Boomers were not brought up with digital technology, but the older generation still experienced it. 98% of households have internet and Wi-Fi is everywhere here. The adaptation of internet and digital skills is very high in the Netherlands.”

Marie-Louise Kok, Leyden Academy on Vitality and Ageing

Internalised ageism is also a significant issue. 12% of adults in the UK feel they're too old to learn.²⁰ This is relatively unchanging regardless of race, gender, employment status and socioeconomic background. And these attitudes can harm our learning – research has shown fear or shame about learning can shut down neural pathways crucial to learning.²¹

Cost barriers

The cost of learning can also act as a barrier to taking part – with those on lower incomes significantly less likely to take part in learning than those on higher incomes.

Many adult learners worry about taking time away from their current job to retrain or reskill for another. They may have concerns about investing time and money into courses that won't help them change careers, or just about taking the plunge at all.

Lifelong learning in the UK

The UK track record so far

"There's a tendency in current policy that people will sort of rocket-propel up to level three and level four^a really quickly and just get on with it, get on your bike, whereas somebody with low qualifications and low confidence will take a longer time. On more than one occasion, the Department for Education Ministers have said [that people repeating courses is] a bad thing... what they're failing to recognise is that the courses are incremental. They're actually having different results each time somebody participates."

Chris Butcher, WEA

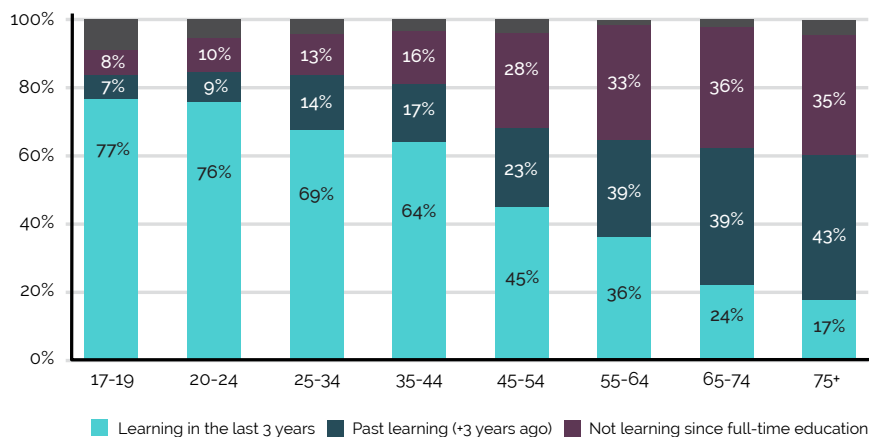
The UK's lifelong learning challenge is clear.

Younger people's participation in education is high: school is compulsory from the ages of five to 18.²² Students have the option to leave school at 16, but they must stay in full-time education in a college, start an apprenticeship, or work part-time and study part-time.²³ In 2023, 68.2% of GCSE students received a grade C (or equivalent) or higher,²⁴ as did 75.4% of A-level students.²⁵ In addition, there are currently 2.99 million students in further education and 2.97 million in higher education.²⁶ However, the majority of these learners are under the age of 21. In 2018, mature students (aged 21 and over) accounted for only 30% of the total number of students in higher education, and those over the age of 25 accounted for just 1.3%.²⁷

We engage significantly less with learning as we get older. In 2023, research by the Learning and Work Institute (LWI) found that 49% of UK residents over the age of 17 reported having engaged in learning in the past three years. But only 36% of those aged 55 to 64 had done so. Of those aged 65 to 74 this falls to 24%, and for those aged 75 and over, it's down to 17%.

^aLevel 3 qualifications are typically achieved at the end of senior school, and are A-levels or A-level equivalents. Level 4 qualifications are more advanced learnings, equivalent to high level apprenticeships or the first year of a bachelor's degree.

Figure 1: Participation in learning by age



Source: Learning and Work Institute, 2023. [Adult participation in learning survey 2023](#).

There is some good news though: the LWI found that the UK's levels of lifelong learning have improved in recent years – 2023's participation rate represents an increase of eight percentage points compared to participation in 2022. In fact, it's the highest recorded participation rate since the survey began in 1996. Compared to 2022, there's been a notable increase in participation for those aged 35 to 44 (+16 percentage points) and 55 to 64 (+10 points). The precise reasons for this uptick aren't clear yet, but since the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020, learning has been on the rise in the UK after decades of decline.

There are major disparities in participation

However, the UK still has a long way to go, particularly if we want to reach adults who haven't previously engaged in learning. While 48% of UK residents over the age of 17 said they were likely to take up learning in the next three years, those who hadn't engaged recently were far less likely to aspire to learning than those who had done so recently.²⁸

There's also widespread evidence that some groups are more likely to be left out of education than others altogether. This educational disadvantage is often lifelong, starting in childhood.²⁹

There are geographic disparities in participation. While 51% of adults in England reported being current or recent learners in the 2023 LWI survey, rates in the other nations of the UK hadn't improved. The increase in learning participation is greatly driven by the Greater

London region. London continues to have the highest participation rate in England. The gap between London and the lowest performing English region (the North East) is consistent with 2022, at 22 percentage points.

Socioeconomic status is a key predictor of participation in learning. According to the LWI survey, there's a 22 percentage point difference between those in the highest socioeconomic group (60%) and those in the lowest (38%).

There are also disparities by gender – in 2023 men were significantly more likely to be learning (at 51%) than women (47%) – although this represents a reversal of the trend seen in previous years.

In terms of ethnicity, adults from ethnic minorities are more likely to participate in learning than White adults, but there's little data on how those ethnic minorities break down. Previous research has shown that adults with west Asian backgrounds are far less likely to undertake continuous education than adults from other minority ethnic backgrounds.³⁰ We also know that people from ethnic minorities are less likely to participate in formal tertiary education and less likely to get a first or 2:1 result in undergraduate degrees.³¹

Disabled people can also face barriers to accessing learning. One in ten adult learners in the UK cites disability as a challenge experienced while learning, and one in ten adults who haven't learned recently cite disability as a reason.³²

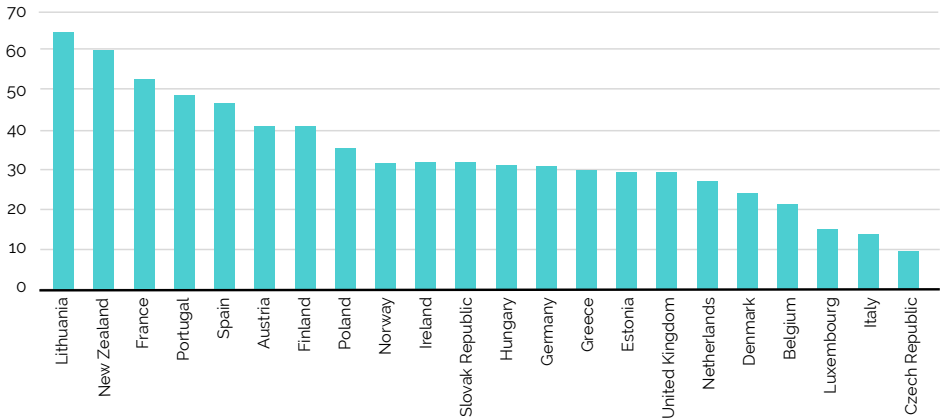
Neither Government nor employers are investing in skills

One of the reasons behind these disparities in learning is the UK's pattern of investment in lifelong learning.

Data from the LWI survey shows that the UK Government's investment in skills is set to be £1 billion less in 2025 than in 2010, while employer investment in training has fallen by 28% since 2005. When these statistics are combined, we see that the average spending per employee in the UK is currently half the EU average.³³

In a third of all UK businesses, 50 to 100% of training is solely focused on induction and health and safety.³⁴ Investment in skills training varies across industry, but generally employers have stated that providing training is an expensive task.³⁵

Figure 2: % of employers who cite high costs as a limiting factor



Source: OECD, 2019. [Getting Skills Right: Future-Ready Adult Learning Systems.](#)

Outside of the workplace, there's limited support available. Services like Jobcentre Plus only help those who are unemployed and claiming benefits.³⁶ And there's significant stigma attached to accessing support from these services – research from Phoenix Insights found that people seeking to retrain or return to work had little confidence they'd find the right support at the Jobcentre Plus.³⁷

In the absence of state or employer funding, individuals are forced to use their own resources to access learning. Individuals invest £7.3 billion a year and £55 billion-worth of time in their own learning: more than the Government and employers put together. But this spending isn't evenly distributed. Younger people are three times more likely to participate in learning than older people – and they invest three times as much per year (£3,900 v £1,300). Meanwhile Londoners spend an average of £1,400 per person – more than double than those in the rest of the South East (£565) and Scotland (£624).³⁸

There are major skills gaps

Poor access to lifelong learning opportunities leaves the UK lacking the skills it needs for a thriving workforce.

While the UK performs reasonably strongly in terms of school education, nearly a fifth of all UK adults haven't completed upper secondary education.^{39,40}

There are skills gaps across the UK economy, and in some areas the mismatch between supply and demand for particular skills is significant. The UK also has a high level of skill underutilisation and a shortage of high-level skills compared to countries with similar economies.⁴¹ In 2023, 30% of recent graduates were employed in non-graduate jobs, while 33% were employed in fields unrelated to their qualifications.⁴²

In some communities there are few skilled jobs available. The *2017 Future of Skills and Lifelong Learning Report*⁴³ highlighted a "low skill equilibrium". This means that in certain regions and sectors, a low-skilled workforce is matched by the availability of low-skilled jobs, meaning there's no motivation to retrain.

The UK policy context

Encouraging lifelong learning has long been recognised as a policy priority by a number of UK Governments.

England

England, for example, has not wanted for policy on lifelong learning, with a succession of public policy documents being published over recent decades.

Table 1: A timeline of lifelong learning policies in England

| Year | Policy | Summary |
|-----------------------|--|---|
| 2025 (planned) | Lifelong Learning Entitlement ⁴⁴ | Will introduce a £37,000 loan for post-18 education. |
| 2023 | Lifelong Learning Bill | Established the legal framework for Lifelong Learning Entitlement. |
| 2022 | Levelling Up White Paper ⁴⁵ | Identified skills gaps and priorities for education and training. |
| 2021 | Skills for Jobs White Paper ⁴⁶ | Outlines how skills development will be further supported and encouraged increased relationships between employers and education providers. |
| 2021 | Plan for Jobs ⁴⁷ | Announced investment in adult skills training through bootcamps, traineeships etc. |
| 2021 | Lifetime Skills Guarantee ⁴⁸ | Committed to offering adults access to A-level-equivalent qualifications free of charge, focusing on in-demand skills. |
| 2017 | Industrial Strategy ⁴⁹ | Highlighted the importance of skills and lifelong learning, particularly in STEM, digital skills and regional skills development. |
| 2017 | Apprenticeship Levy ⁵⁰ | Introduced a mandatory levy on large employers to fund apprenticeship training. |
| 2012 | Work Programme ⁵¹ | Created new welfare-to-work programme encouraging skills training and job searching for unemployed people. |
| 2007 | Skills Pledge ⁵² | Pledge from employers to invest in training and development. |
| 2007 | Further Education and Training Act ⁵³ | Outlined new framework for skills and lifelong learning; established local skills councils. |
| 2002 | Learning and Skills Council ⁵⁴ | Established national body to manage funding and support for post-16 education/training in England. |
| 2001 | Skills for Life Strategy ⁵⁵ | Outlined goals to improve basic numeracy and literacy skills for adults. |

"Government investment at times passively follows or even reinforces inequalities in training."⁵⁶

Learning and Work Institute, Learning at work: Employer investment in skills, 2021

The most recent Government lifelong learning policy for England was the 2021 *Skills for Jobs White Paper*, which introduced the new Lifelong Loan Entitlement (now called the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE)), which will become available from September 2025.⁵⁷ The LLE will create a single funding system to pay for college or university courses. It's intended to help people train, retrain and upskill flexibly over their working lives to develop new skills and gain new qualifications, whether through full-time degrees, individual modules, or other courses (like higher technical qualifications). However, this entitlement is only available to those who wish to pursue formal learning and is restricted to those without existing higher-level qualifications and aged less than 60.

Other significant initiatives include the apprenticeship levy, introduced in 2017, which created a tax on large employers (those with a salary bill of over £3 million) to support apprenticeships. It was designed to support the cost of apprenticeships to encourage more upskilling and reskilling. However, funds from the levy may only be used on training programmes that last longer than a year, employers must use external training providers instead of their own resources, and training is often so narrow that few transferable skills are developed.⁵⁸ After the levy's implementation, the number of apprenticeships in the UK actually dropped.⁵⁹ It has been criticised by businesses, charities and even other branches of Government for being too restrictive.⁶⁰

There are similar limitations on the effectiveness of schemes to incentivise training provision by businesses, by offering tax relief on training costs. Because these schemes are only available to businesses that are in profit, they can't be used for skills development and training as a tool for growth, development, or recovery.⁶¹

While central government has continued to issue policy papers on lifelong learning, adult education budgets have increasingly been devolved to mayoral combined authorities. This has allowed some flexibility in how learning budgets have been used. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority used its devolved adult education budget to support rapid retraining

of workers to fill gaps in frontline roles. However, mayoral authorities have raised concerns about the limitations of these budgets. These limitations are heightened by the loss of European Structural Funds, which had been used effectively for skills development programmes in several areas (e.g. Greater Manchester). Mayoral authorities have also expressed frustration about a lack of data sharing between central government and the combined authorities.⁶²

While central Government funding for lifelong learning has been in decline, trades unions have continued to provide an important source of learning for workers in England. Most unions have Union Learning Reps (ULRs), representatives who help their members upskill and reskill. Research from the Trade Unions Congress (TUC) shows that 37% of union members access learning opportunities, compared to 22% of non-union members. For example, the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union worked to provide free courses to Morrison's employees.⁶³ Learning organisations like the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) have historic relationships with trade unions to educate members,⁶⁴ and universities like the University of London have partnered with learning unions to support lifelong learning, too.⁶⁵

Wales

The devolved nations have also been developing lifelong learning policy. In 2020, the Welsh Government set out its intention to establish a right to lifelong learning. This built on previous initiatives, including Personal Learning Accounts, which pay for adult learners to access flexible courses designed to meet established skills gaps (see page 52).

The Welsh Government has also established the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research. This is part of its vision for Post Compulsory Education and Training – bringing together learning provision. The Commission is a single body with responsibility for the funding and regulation of further education (including colleges and school sixth forms); higher education (including research and innovation); adult education and adult community learning; and apprenticeships and training. The Commission will be operational from April 2024 and is intended to bring a more coherent strategic approach to lifelong learning across Wales.

Scotland

The Scottish Government has also set out a comprehensive lifelong learning strategy. *The Adult learning strategy 2022 to 2027* was published in 2022 and aims to:

- Improve life chances for adult learners across Scotland
- Create conditions for connected adult learning opportunities, particularly for those furthest from inclusion and experiencing disadvantage, by linking Scotland's communities, local authorities, third-sector organisations, colleges and universities
- Ensure accessible opportunities for adults to learn throughout their lives

Northern Ireland

In March 2022 the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland published its Skills Strategy, which promised "Skills for a 10X economy". The strategy recognises that rates of lifelong learning in Northern Ireland trail the rest of the UK. It places significant emphasis on upskilling the working age population, but also recognises the need for a shift towards lifelong learning, with more opportunities for reskilling throughout working life. At its launch, the Economy Minister Paul Frew emphasised, "...it's important to offer the widest possible range of learning pathways for people to choose from, and not just as young people, but throughout their life."

Global approaches to lifelong learning

Overview

The UK's low levels of learning among people in mid and later life aren't universal. The average 'disengagement rate' (the percentage of adults who aren't learning and are unwilling to engage in available learning) across the OECD is 50%. Across England and Northern Ireland that rate is 42% - so we are by no means the worst. However, there are countries which do even better – and even those with similar overall rates offer lessons to be learned.

In this chapter we explore some of what we can learn from global leaders in lifelong learning. While most countries gather some data around adult participation in learning, it's not enough to create a global lifelong learning league table. Instead, we're featuring countries highlighted by our global and UK experts. This includes clusters of good practice, with leaders in Northern Europe and in East Asia.

Table 2: Overview of profiled countries

| Country | Key features of approach | Key roles | % of adults ¹ recently engaged ² in learning Higher = better (UK = 45) | Adult ¹ disengagement rate Lower = better (UK = 42) | OECD financial ranking ³ 1 = best (UK = 18) |
|--------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Canada | Accessible learning opportunities A wider range of opportunities | Provincial government leads on lifelong learning under a broad national framework Community organisations play a significant role in provision | 47 | 39 | 6 |
| Germany | Support to identify learning needs and opportunities Accessible learning opportunities | State governments play a significant role in arranging lifelong learning provision. Employers are also significant providers | 47 | 45 | 11 |
| Japan | Culture of lifelong learning Accessible learning opportunities | Strong state oversight, but lower investment with individuals and companies funding most learning | 37 | 57 | 1 |
| Korea | Culture of lifelong learning Accessible learning opportunities | Lifelong learning councils in each city coordinate provision in their area, through accessible local centres | 37 | 44 | 2 |
| Netherlands | A wider range of learning opportunities Accessible learning opportunities | State oversight, and public investment, but provision delivered across sectors | 54 | 40 | 10 |
| Singapore | Culture of lifelong learning Support to identify learning needs and opportunities Public investment in lifelong learning | Strong central government leadership through a single national agency, working in partnership with employers and others, who are incentivised to play a role | 48 | (not available) | (not ranked) |
| Sweden | Culture of lifelong learning Public investment in lifelong learning | Significant state investment supports learning provision in collaboration across the state, employers and learning providers | 56 | 35 | 16 |

1. Defined as aged from 25 to 64 2. Within the last 12 months 3. OECD assessment of national financial arrangements, where the highest ranking is 1

Sources: Participation data: OECD, 2019. [Survey of Adult Skills \(PIAAC\) \(database 2012, 2015, 2019\)](#). Funding ranking: OECD, 2019. [Getting Skills Right: Future-Ready Adult Learning Systems](#).

Disengagement rates: OECD, 2021. [Skills Outlook: Learning for Life](#). Per country.

While every country approaches lifelong learning differently, we can see five key approaches emerge:

1) A culture of lifelong learning

In these countries, steps are taken to instil a love of learning from childhood, then to reinforce expectations of lifelong learning, including through the explicit provision of learning opportunities for all ages.

Holistic and whole-child development approaches to primary and secondary education help to instil learning confidence and skills.

Early-life education sets out societal expectations for lifelong learning, and steps are taken to recognise and celebrate learners in mid and later life.

As a result the demand-side attitudinal barriers seen in the UK – ageism and fear of learning – are significantly lower.

Countries such as Japan, South Korea and Sweden, and other Scandinavian countries exemplify these approaches.

Country profile: Japan

Formal education

In Japan, primary and lower secondary schools are publicly funded and free. Fees for upper secondary schools may be adjusted based on annual household income, making them affordable for most.⁶⁶ After completing school, over 80% of students tend to continue to some form of higher learning.⁶⁷

The concept of, and participation in, lifelong learning is drilled into Japanese children from an early age. Since 1947, children of all ages have studied the subject *jiyu kenkyu* (independent research) at school. And time for *tokubetsu katsudo* (special activities) has been built into curricula since 1968 – this encourages a focus less on intellect and more on character and social development.⁶⁸

Lifelong learning

In 1996, Japan's *Priorities and Prospects for a Lifelong Learning Society* policy paper emphasised the need for *ikiru chikara* (a zest for living) when it comes to learning for children. It also encouraged an even more holistic approach to learning, which included time for integrated studies.⁶⁹

Integrated teaching across school grades is also a vital part of the Japanese education system. Group activities allow students to guide and be guided by students of different ages, instilling motivation to move up the grades and understand what might be expected of them in future years. The attitude towards learning in Japan is one of reverence.⁷⁰

Japan's lifelong learning policy is extremely comprehensive. The 1990 Lifelong Learning Promotion Law is the cornerstone of Japan's adult education policies, setting up councils for lifelong learning within communities. Policy focuses on encouraging older encouraging to learn. Adult learning in Japan takes place in many areas, including Kominkans, public universities, private learning institutions and at work.⁷¹

A unique aspect of Japan's lifelong learning activities is *bunka borantia* (culture of volunteering), which goes hand in hand with learning. Volunteering is accompanied by specific training programmes. For example, the Tokyo Voluntary Action Centre offers seminars on the best ways to volunteer, volunteer management, and social issues that volunteers and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) may face.⁷² In community settings, it's also common to share knowledge acquired from volunteering, essentially engaging in non-formal learning.⁷³

An annual week-long national lifelong learning festival not only promotes the idea of continuous education, but also helps people find the options that are best for them.⁷⁴

Who leads lifelong learning efforts?

Lifelong learning is mainly led by the government, under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. The Ministry oversees national and prefectural-level Lifelong Learning Councils, which support provision of learning within communities. Each council has some level of independence and may provide lifelong learning as it sees fit for its region, depending on a number of factors, including skills demand and community interests.⁷⁵

Partnership in learning provision is an important part of national policy. The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry is included in learning facilitation, as are private businesses and NGOs.⁷⁶ Employers generally fund and encourage learning participation too.

How accessible is lifelong learning?

Lifelong learning in Japan often takes place within *Kominkans* (community learning centres), which offer local people easy access. In 2008, there were more Kominkans than lower secondary schools in Japan. Classes may also take place in community buildings like museums and libraries. These provide all ages with structured learning programmes on a variety of topics. Classes are generally free.⁷⁷

Online learning has been increasingly available since the COVID-19 pandemic, with government, employers and educational institutions encouraging participation. There are government programmes to improve digital literacy and ensure everyone can access distance learning programmes.⁷⁸

There are also targeted programmes designed to narrow inequalities in education and the workforce, including support for women to upskill and improve their careers.⁷⁹

2) A wide range of learning opportunities, with cross-sector collaboration

In countries where lifelong learning is embraced, opportunities for learning are varied, with options for more flexible and informal learning alongside traditional formal courses. Self-study, volunteering and other forms of learning are also encouraged.

This diversity of learning opportunities is usually provided through cross-sector collaboration. National governments provide a framework under which local authorities, employers, providers and community organisations can work together. Online learning is increasingly part of the offer in these countries.

Countries such as the Netherlands and Canada exemplify these approaches.

Country profile: the Netherlands

Formal education

In the Netherlands education is publicly funded.⁸⁰ Children must go to school between the ages five and 16. Those aged between 16 and 18 must obtain a qualification before leaving school.⁸¹ Many students choose to pursue higher or further education: the Netherlands consistently ranks as one of the highest among OECD and partner countries for levels of tertiary attainment.⁸² 38% of those aged 25 to 64

have a university degree. Universities are heavily state funded, putting the cost of further education among the lowest in Europe.⁸³ On top of this, comprehensive loans not only help students pay university fees, but also cover costs of living and healthcare.⁸⁴

Lifelong learning

The Dutch Government has a comprehensive lifelong learning policy and national programme, which includes a number of schemes. The goal is to increase the number of highly-educated people and reduce unemployment.

The Dutch adult learning programme has a significant focus on filling gaps left after secondary education – to bring everyone up to the same level. Schemes focus on Dutch language learning and digital skills, with priority given to adults who struggle with reading and writing; immigrants who struggle with Dutch; older people; and those who are long-term unemployed.⁸⁵ There's also public investment in corporate training, lower-level skills building and family development.

The national government and many municipal governments offer *Scholingsvouchers* (training vouchers). Depending on the provider, these have different values and requirements. The government implemented a national *Scholingsvoucher* programme for unemployed adults aged over 50. They were offered vouchers worth up to €1,000 for training that would actively improve their employment prospects, mainly supplied by private training partners. The government invested €16.5 million in the programme, which ended in 2017 having been used by 18,753 people. Other *Scholingsvoucher* programmes remain active.⁸⁶

Sectorplannen is an ongoing series of initiatives to improve labour markets, in partnership with various universities. It's focused on investing in various type of scientific research, and includes reskilling across these fields. Learning-focused initiatives include career guidance, retaining and training older workers, mid-career switching, and new labour market entrants. By 2019, 155,532 people had taken part in these retraining and upskilling measures.⁸⁷

The Netherlands also benefits from a range of programmes for learners in mid and later life. These include the Silver Starters programme, which is provided by the Leyden Academy of Vitality and Aging in the Netherlands and aims to empower older people to become entrepreneurs. The 12-week course gives participants the foundational skills for converting their idea into a business. It consists of online

learning and coaching on topics including customer needs, revenue models, marketing, prototyping and pitching. The curriculum can adapt to people's prior life and work experience. In 2021, 97% of learners reported that their self-confidence had improved as a result of the programme, and 93% that they had gained higher knowledge and skill.

Who leads lifelong learning efforts?

Lifelong learning is a largely collaborative system. Adult education and upskilling policies are outlined by government, but delivered through a partnership of employers, social partners, educational institutions, and Vocational Education and Training (VET) schools. Training and development funds come from different industry sectors. All work together on policy development and implementation.⁸⁸

The Education Inspectorate – a branch of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science – accredits and monitors formal adult learning provision, whilst municipalities are responsible for monitoring informal learning.⁸⁹

How accessible is lifelong learning?

Formal in-personal education is generally far cheaper in the Netherlands than other countries in Europe. Secondary VET schools offer flexible education paths and recognise prior learning, to make it easier for adults to access the right type of learning for them.

Online learning is common: 99% of households have internet access, and digital literacy is generally high. The Open University offers low-cost tuition online, which is charged per course.⁹⁰ Students on lower incomes can receive discounts of up to 80% of tuition fees.⁹¹

Country profile: Canada

Formal education

School attendance is compulsory from ages six to 18 in Canada, and free to citizens and permanent residents. There's no central department of education; curricula are determined by provincial governments and vary across the ten provinces.⁹² Canada's population is generally highly educated – 31% of people aged 25 to 64 have a bachelor's degree, and 61% have some form of tertiary attainment. Further and higher education isn't free, but students can qualify for a loan or grant to cover their costs, although this depends on factors that include family income, tuition fees, living expenses, and other barriers to access.⁹³

Lifelong learning

Across Canada, more than 60% of adults engage in some form of learning.⁹⁴ Lifelong learning and adult education strategies are determined at a provincial level and vary slightly. In Ontario, for example, the education department is working to provide more non-university or micro-credential options for adults, after research revealed that middle-aged adults are less interested in returning to full-time, degree-style studying.⁹⁵ Meanwhile in Quebec, a key policy aspect centres on recognition of prior learning.⁹⁶ New Brunswick holds regular online skills and job fairs.⁹⁷

Canada also has many lifelong learning associations that individuals can join free of charge, or for a small fee. Many have existed for decades, becoming a trusted fixtures in their local communities. The [Edmonton Lifelong Learners Association \(ELLA\)](#) is a learning hub for lifelong learners aged 50+. It offers expert-led courses, many of which are suggested by members. Its mission is to provide affordable informal educational courses, seminars and workshops in the liberal arts, fine arts, sciences and humanities, as well as physical activities. ELLA encourages its membership to “learn for the love of learning”, with the aim of fostering friendship as well as expanding minds. Volunteers, members and leadership work together on the planning, design and administration of learning sessions. ELLA has grown from 65 members in 2002 to approximately 1,000 members in 2023.

In addition to provincial efforts, the national government runs a skills development programme called Future Skills under the Ministry of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion. This provides working adults with opportunities for upskilling, equalizes opportunities for Indigenous people, and guides people on which learning opportunities are best for them.⁹⁸

The national government is also developing a tool to enable Canadians to access labour market and skills demand information, to inform decision making around skills development.⁹⁹

Who leads lifelong learning efforts?

Apart from Future Skills, formal education and upskilling is often employer-led, particularly for programmes like MBAs. Lifelong learning efforts are generally carried out by provincial education departments, which work hand in hand with employers.

Community-led lifelong learning programmes are also common in Canada and can be found in most major cities. These are NGO groups that charge a small membership fee, and host a variety of social events in addition to providing learning opportunities.

How accessible is lifelong learning?

Canada allows individuals to withdraw up to \$10,000 CAD from their pension pots to support upskilling or reskilling. These funds must be repaid within 10 years, but there's no interest to pay – making the scheme more attractive than a traditional loan.¹⁰⁰

Many provinces also champion distance learning, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. Ontario increasingly offers open access programmes that result in accredited certificates, often free of charge.¹⁰¹

3) Support to identify learning needs and opportunities

Many leaders in lifelong learning provide individuals with effective support to identify skills gaps and navigate learning opportunities. This will become even more important as more learning opportunities open up.

Germany and France have national programmes designed to help people to assess their skills and identify opportunities for training. In Singapore, the comprehensive SkillsFuture programme includes help to identify learning needs.

Recognising and accrediting a broader range of learning is important. In Switzerland, Germany and Austria, citizens are offered 'training passes', which include information on a wide variety of different forms of learning: not just formal university degrees but also workshops, internal employer training, and skills built through volunteering.¹⁰²

Country profile: Germany

Formal education

In Germany, students must go to school from the ages of six to 18. Curricula are set by each federal state's Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs.¹⁰³ Germany has two types of further education: vocational schools and formal universities. Both are completely free. Currently, 32% of the working age population have a university degree or diploma, but more people choose to study at vocational schools.

While education is valued in Germany, there is less cultural emphasis on university education and greater respect for vocational learning. Vocational training has a practical aspect; it often combines learning with on-the-job training. Work experience and strong industry links mean employment is almost guaranteed after vocational training. Students can also earn a salary while training, providing greater financial stability.¹⁰⁴

Lifelong learning

The German strategy for lifelong learning focuses on quality assurance of courses, including validation and accreditation of non-university learning, improving adult access to education through community learning centres, and motivating adults to self-learn.¹⁰⁵

ProfilPASS is one way Germany facilitates, encourages and monitors lifelong learning. Individuals can assess and document their skills to help them find work or training opportunities. The tool guides individuals through a self-assessment of their skills and qualifications, identifying any skills gaps to identify their best learning options. It also encourages them to write their own descriptions of their competencies. If they wish, individuals can also ask others for testimonies to further prove these skills. A wide range of learning is included: not just short courses, degrees, workshops and internal training, but also volunteering as a form of skill-building. More specific *ProfilPASS*es include those for older workers, women, and refugees or migrants.¹⁰⁶

To ensure courses are verified, the German government sponsors an online database called *Kursfinder*. This covers nearly 900 centres and organisations around the country, which offer free or low-cost adult learning options, many of which are accredited or even funded by the government. *Kursfinder* provides career advice and placement opportunities following further education.

Adults without formal, accredited qualifications who have relevant work experience can often sit exams at vocational colleges without completing a full course. Individuals need not invest significant time covering coursework, skills or knowledge already acquired on the job.¹⁰⁷

Who leads lifelong learning efforts?

Lifelong learning is mainly led and funded by federal state governments. It's also common for employers to invest in formal learning.

How accessible is lifelong learning?

Lifelong learning opportunities are commonly offered in community centres or specific adult learning centres in Germany, where classes are generally free or very low cost. There are 900 centres across the country and 3,000 smaller branch offices that offer a more limited number of courses tailored to local needs. These centres and offices hold over 700,000 courses and events every year.¹⁰⁸

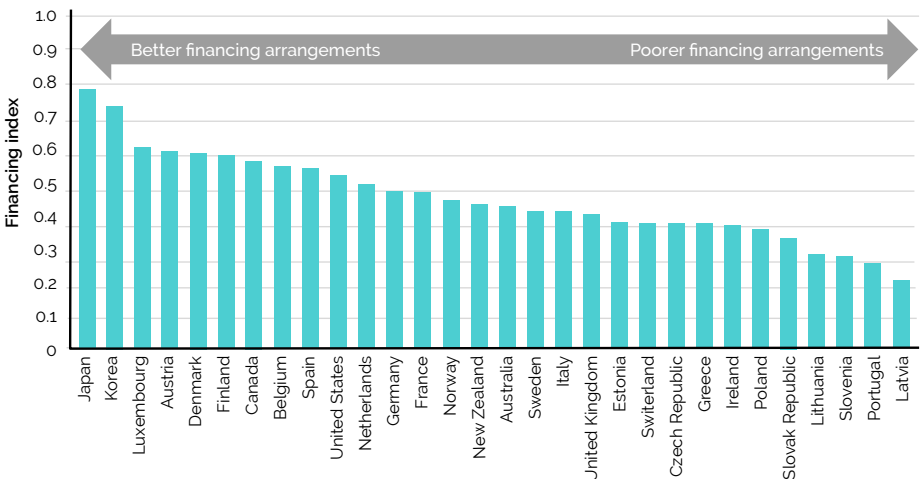
There are also specific programmes designed for migrants and refugees, which bridge inequalities in access to education and reduce inequalities in general. Programmes for both children and adults assist with language learning and cultural integration into their new homes.

4) Public investment in lifelong learning

Inevitably, money makes a difference. Countries that lower the cost for individuals, or help them finance the costs, are leading the way in ensuring further education is more easily accessible.

The OECD's Priorities for Adult Learning (PAL) dashboard compares the financing of adult learning across OECD countries. It draws together an aggregate assessment of financing which includes individual, employer and government contributions. The UK is significantly behind many comparable countries: in 2019, the UK's score on the PAL dashboard was just above 0.4 – the 12th worst in the OECD.¹⁰⁹

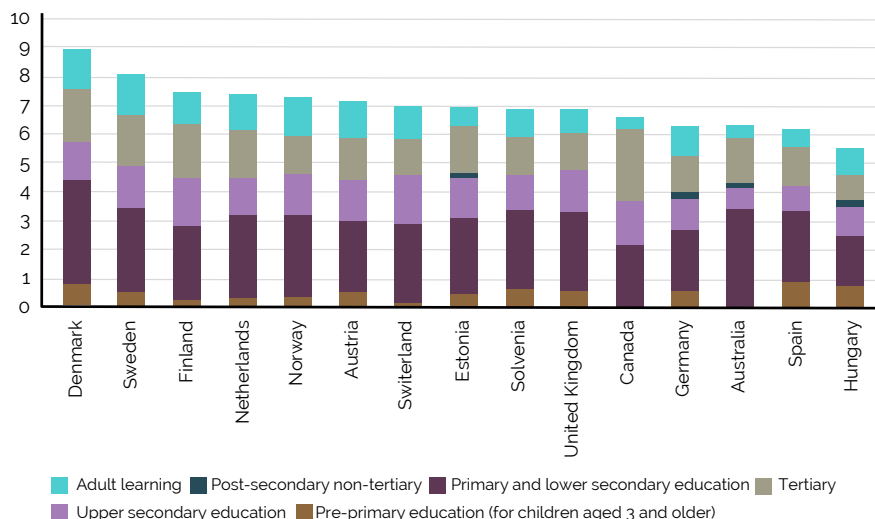
Figure 3: PAL scores for 30 OECD countries



Source: OECD, 2019. [Getting Skills Right: Future-Ready Adult Learning Systems](#).

Identifying the balance of funding for different countries is challenging. There is only partial data at an international level; it's also generally quite old, which means it doesn't necessarily reflect recent changes in policy in countries such as Singapore. We can see from more recent data that funding education across the lifecycle varies considerably, with adult learning less prioritised in many countries. But it's clear that some countries offer greater state support for lifelong learning.

Figure 4: Expenditure by type of education (% of GDP), by country



Source: OECD, 2019. [Getting Skills Right: Future-Ready Adult Learning Systems](#).

Country profile: Sweden

Formal education

Sweden places great emphasis on instilling a love of learning from childhood. The curriculum is set at a national level, and education is compulsory from the age of five to 15. It's also completely free, even at tertiary level education.¹¹⁰

48.5% of the population are educated to tertiary level; 19% of the population has a bachelor's degree. Vocational training is also common in Sweden: in 2020/21, 92,500 students were enrolled in vocational training courses.¹¹¹

From an early age, students are encouraged to enjoy learning, through activities such as meaningful play.

Lifelong learning

The Swedish Strategy for Lifelong Learning states that education must prepare children for working life and instil a positive attitude to continued learning in all aspects of life.

The country's education policy covers all ages, from nursery school to old age. Its strategy has separate goals for each age cohort to engage in learning. Adult education policy encompasses a coordinated approach between employers, learning institutions and the government. It emphasises ensuring that education is accessible, and that adults are supported and offered guidance. The policy encompasses a wide range of learning from formal university education to popular adult education. Current policy aims to accredit and strengthen these options so that they are considered an equal alternative to a university degree.¹¹²

Who leads lifelong learning efforts?

Lifelong learning is mainly led and funded by the national government, under the central National Agency for Education. This department oversees all education policy and efforts, from preschool to adulthood, ensuring a seamless approach to learning from childhood onwards.¹¹³ Employers also encourage continuous education. Social partners play a big role in education provision, with the government, trade unions and employer organisations working together to provide training courses, career guidance, and accreditation of prior learning.¹¹⁴

How accessible is lifelong learning?

Lifelong learning in Sweden can be carried out online or through local authorities. There are municipally managed learning centres around the country, making education relatively accessible regardless of geographic location. It's usually free or very cheap.¹¹⁵

Aside from encouraging adults to engage in formal and informal learning, the Swedish government works hard to remove barriers to allow all adults to learn. Learners get active support to help them connect with the right resources, like study skills workshops and career counsellors. Someone wanting to upgrade their skills may receive personalised guidance on relevant courses, while those who want to re-enter the workforce are matched with relevant training opportunities. Additional support for adults wanting to learn includes childcare subsidies.¹¹⁶

5) Accessible learning opportunities

Leaders in lifelong learning also take steps to ensure that learning opportunities are accessible. Many of the countries we studied provide adult learning opportunities in community venues, close to people's homes. However, online provision is also increasingly part of the lifelong learning offering. This allows more people to access learning at a time that suits them best and doesn't interfere with work or caring responsibilities.

Country profile: Singapore

Formal education

Singapore's education system is broadly state-funded, and curricula are controlled by the national Ministry of Education. Parents or guardians have to pay a small annual fee of approximately S\$255^b (£150).¹¹⁷ Children are expected to be in school from ages seven to 17. If students wish to attend university, they must first complete a pre-university year of study. University isn't free, but students can take loans from the Ministry of Education, which work in a similar manner to the UK's student loan system.¹¹⁸ In 2022, 87.1% of school learners continued onto pre-university education.¹¹⁹

Lifelong learning

Singapore's lifelong learning efforts are carried out through the government's one-stop-shop: SkillsFuture. Under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, SkillsFuture facilitates lifelong learning with courses, career advice, learning stipends, and more.

As a technocratic democracy – where decision-makers are selected based on expertise – Singapore has long valued the concept of lifelong learning and consistent upskilling. This idea is introduced at school and reinforced throughout people's lives. As seen in Japan, the learning culture is one of reverence rather than love.

The SkillsFuture credit programme started in 2015; it gave S\$500 to every resident (regardless of employment or education status) over the age of 25, to be spent on SkillsFuture-approved programmes. In 2020, everyone aged over 25 was awarded another one-off top up of S\$500, while everyone between the ages of 40 and 60 was awarded a further S\$500.¹²⁰

^bSingapore dollar

More specific SkillsFuture programmes, like the Mid-Career Support Package, target middle-aged workers. There are also multiple incentives and programmes, including Career Conversion Programmes, where people undergo skills assessments and are then retrained for a career in a new industry based on their current interests and skill levels. Potential new industries include accountancy, allied healthcare, information technology, and public transport.¹²¹

SkillsFuture includes an Emerging Skills Series, which directly addresses skills gaps and shortages in specific industries such as care, automation and the digital economy. There are a variety of courses to cater to different skills and experience levels. These courses are sometimes free, often heavily discounted, and can be paid for with SkillsFuture credits.¹²²

Who leads lifelong learning efforts?

Lifelong learning efforts are generally led and funded by the government, mainly via SkillsFuture. But there's also a high level of collaboration with businesses. For example, if small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) sponsor their employees to undergo training, there are further discounts on cost. Under the Mid-Career Support Package, there are also employer incentives to hire transitioners – SkillsFuture pays 40% of the new employee's salary for the first six months.¹²³

How accessible is lifelong learning?

Financial support and targeted interventions make learning and reskilling in Singapore widely successful and accessible. The SkillsFuture programme is administered online to further improve accessibility.

Country profile: Republic of Korea (South Korea)

Formal education

School in Korea is compulsory from ages six to 18 and publicly funded.¹²⁴ The curriculum is nationally controlled by the Ministry of Education and revised every five to ten years. Attendance and pass rates are both very high, with only 2% of those aged from 25 to 34 lacking a secondary qualification. This is far lower than the OECD average of 14%.¹²⁵ Further education and university is not free but is relatively affordable compared to the UK. There's also a comprehensive government student loan programme.¹²⁶ More than half of the population hold a bachelor's degree or equivalent.

Lifelong learning

Hard work and education are integral to Korean cultural values, with emphasis on learning throughout life. Lifelong learning is a key part of government policy, considered both a tool of growth and a form of welfare policy to support people who earn less. Every five years, the Ministry of Education assesses current lifelong learning trends and adjusts its policies and plans as necessary. The most recent one focuses on building skills for technological innovation.¹²⁷

Who leads lifelong learning efforts?

Lifelong learning is generally led by the national government, in partnership with local municipalities. Each city in Korea also has its own lifelong education council, which works hand-in-hand with national government to ensure adequate provision of adult education.¹²⁸ The country now recognises 180 cities as 'Lifelong Learning Cities', locations where learning is embraced.¹²⁹

How accessible is lifelong learning?

South Korea has free, easily accessible learning centres throughout the country, due to a high level of national and local government investment. These offer both formal and informal learning. For example, in Suwon City, every resident has a learning centre that's a ten-minute walk from their home. These aren't necessarily new builds; cities have repurposed libraries, community centres and youth centres to serve multiple purposes that include learning. At present, 39.2% of the population of Suwon City engages in adult learning.¹³⁰

Online learning is also widely offered. The government sponsors a Massive Open Online Course platform offered in the Korean language, known as a K-MOOC. It offers hundreds of courses provided by 70 universities. The platform is used by tens of thousands of people, across all ages.¹³¹

The country also makes learning accessible through its policy on autodidacticism, the process of learning without a teacher. South Korea has had an officially recognised self-study degree system since 1990. Candidates with a high school level qualification who engage in self-learning are offered the opportunity to take standardised tests and exams. If they pass, they are awarded a bachelor's degree under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. There are a number of degree subjects that can be achieved through this method, including public administration, engineering and law.¹³²

Learning in practice

While efforts to promote lifelong learning are best led at a national level, we can see examples of individual businesses and community organisations driving initiatives. These exemplify the same principles that underlie the approaches taken by leading countries.

These green shoots, whether led by businesses, entrepreneurs, education providers or community groups, must be nurtured to address the supply and demand-side challenges identified in Chapter 2, and improve access to lifelong learning here.

To do this we need to draw together the most promising practice among employers, learning providers, community organisations and others. We must also harness the power of technology. In this way we can develop a concerted strategic approach for improving access to, and participation in, lifelong learning. We also need to support innovation and invest in evaluation so we can quickly find what's working, fill gaps, and roll out effective approaches.

In this chapter we explore approaches being taken in the UK and by individual businesses around the world to:

- Shift cultural attitudes to lifelong learning
- Increase the range of learning opportunities
- Support people to identify opportunities for learning
- Widen state support for adult learning
- Build stronger links between work and learning

Changing cultures of lifelong learning

Initiatives that reduce the fear of learning for individuals and combat ageist stereotyping will be vital if we are to shift to a culture in which lifelong learning becomes the norm.

Challenging ageism

If we want to help more people in mid and later life access learning at work, we need to combat ageism in the workplace.

Age-friendly employment and training in action

The Isle of Wight Council consciously strives to be an age-friendly employer. It has actively ensured that nearly half of its employees (46%) are aged 50 and over, and recognises the value older workers can offer in the workforce.¹³³

The council has put age-friendly recruitment practices in place, avoiding discriminatory language such as a requirement for "X years of experience". Job sharing and part-time roles are offered as standard, and workers with caring responsibilities are catered for. A carers group lets everyone with those responsibilities share experiences and network.

And it actively encourages apprenticeships for people of all ages. Almost one in five of its apprentices are aged 50 and over – around the same figure as for those aged 16 to 24. There's also age-friendly training, with sessions on dementia for front-line workers and a free course on hearing loss, as well as regular 'lunch and learn' opportunities.

The council also considers career paths for all the roles it has to fill, from social workers to carers to teachers, with employees being able to start in an admin role, for instance, but progress to becoming a care worker. Older workers' experience is considered a plus – the council recognises their life skills and considers them to have coaching potential for younger colleagues.

Intergenerational learning has been shown to help to reduce ageism, encourage more teaching and learning outside formal programmes, develop social skills across all ages, and reduce the stress and isolation experienced by carers.¹³⁴ Age-diverse teams have been shown to be more flexible and creative, and to have better problem-solving skills along with greater productivity.¹³⁵

Skill-sharing on real projects

Google has multiple mentoring programmes that encourage knowledge sharing across generations. This starts with standard 'buddy' programmes, where a new employee is paired with an older, more experienced employee who serves as a mentor during their onboarding period.¹³⁶ But going further, Google's annual Summer of Code programme takes inexperienced individuals on a 12-week programming project, under the supervision of more experienced mentors. The opportunity to learn new skills from others, while implementing those skills, encourages the sharing of knowledge.¹³⁷

Flexible approaches to mentoring

The University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass Amherst) has a successful 'mutual mentoring' programme, which recognises that everyone has something to learn and something to teach, regardless of age, socioeconomic status, or professional position.

This programme encourages every employee to create their own mutual mentoring networks,¹³⁸ but also offers mentoring incubators for specific skills, like leadership, or groups, like non-tenure track faculty.¹³⁹ The groups needn't be work-specific; there are also mutual mentoring groups for carers.

The programme has resulted in quicker career progression, increased research output, more effective teaching, and improved socialisation and community for staff.¹⁴⁰

Setting expectations around lifelong learning

Empowering individuals to build an understanding of their strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement can help remove the fear associated with learning and, instead, foster a sense of accountability and action,

Creating space for learning at work

At Adobe, employees are expected to create individual development plans, in which they reflect on personal goals, interests and aspirations. They share these with their managers, who will help them determine how these aspirations might be achieved.¹⁴¹

Not only does this help individuals stay motivated to upskill and reskill, but for companies, having this detailed understanding of their employees' career goals helps them to help employees find the right training and career opportunities. This personalised approach to goal setting as well as training and upskilling has resulted in high employee satisfaction: 93% of employees say Adobe is a great place to work,¹⁴² and 70% wouldn't leave even if they were offered a job with a higher salary.¹⁴³

Input from all for continuous improvement

Toyota follows the concept of *kaizen* (continuous improvement) as a core principle throughout its work. Kaizen means to change for the better, every day, in all areas of the company, involving all employees.

This extends to training programmes. Employees of every level are invited to give feedback on areas for improvement and suggest new, practical solutions.¹⁴⁴

Measures to support inclusion

If we wish to address gaps in participation among marginalised communities it's vital that we tackle financial barriers, educational disparities, cultural differences and access issues.

Specialist programmes can help support inclusion among communities that may face specific barriers to participation or have particular learning needs, such as migrants and asylum seekers.

Levelling up

Finland has specific programmes aimed at migrants and refugees, which bridge inequalities in access to education and reduce inequalities in general. Programmes for both children and adults assist with language learning and cultural integration in their new home countries.

Of all OECD countries, Finland has the lowest difference in learning and employment outcomes between migrant and non-migrant people.¹⁴⁵ Part of this success comes from sheer comprehensiveness. The integration programme covers social and cultural information, language learning and interpretation services, adult skills training and job search assistance. It also measures and provides services that encourage immigrants to independently acquire the skills and knowledge needed in society.¹⁴⁶

Addressing gaps in representation among the education workforce can also support inclusion.

Representation makes a difference

The Startup School for Seniors – which operates in London but offers online courses – encourages diversity among both its educators and learners.

Many of this school's learners identify as disabled – and so does at least one instructor. In addition, 55% to 63% of its learners identify as non-White, making the school broadly representative of the community it serves.

“It’s about being what you can see.”

Mark Elliot, Startup School for Seniors, UK

The school's commitment to inclusivity fosters a sense of belonging and community. Learners see themselves reflected in their instructors but can also connect with peers from various backgrounds, leading to stronger learning outcomes. Studies have shown that diverse classrooms can lead to improved problem-solving, critical thinking, and creativity¹⁴⁷, all of which are essential for entrepreneurs.

After the eight-week programme, 81% of students feel they have sufficient skills to start and continue a business.

Bottom-up approaches, where learners collaborate in the planning and design of programmes, often see better performance and engagement.¹⁴⁸

Increasing participation through co-design

When the BT Group realised its disabled employees weren't engaging with training to the same extent as other employees, the company created listening groups to understand why. These groups allowed employees to give feedback about training that was exclusionary, however inadvertently.

Establishing an approach where issues could be flagged from the bottom up allowed employees of all abilities to describe what worked best for them. The company was then able to restructure existing programmes to ensure they were inclusive for all employees. It initially created development programmes for specific groups that were less likely to engage in training (including women, disabled workers and those from ethnic minorities). Through these programmes, 65 to 78% of all employees in the groups targeted received a promotion within a year. Once the talent pool was more diverse, BT phased out this approach.

“We made sure that each programme was diverse in itself. We didn't have specific programmes for specific people.”

Caroline Waters, BT Group

Three years after the targeted training programmes had been phased out, the percentage of employees from marginalized groups who received promotions that year rose to 85%.

Another way to engage with learners from under-represented groups is to meet them in their own communities and foster engagement on their terms. In the USA, the AARP uses churches to reach Black people with AARP programmes focussing on health education and advocacy, to overcome mistrust in the healthcare system.

“For our African American initiatives, we work with churches, because that's a big part of the community and there's a lot of trust there.”

Brittne Kakulla, AARP, USA

Attention is needed to ensure not only that opportunities for education are open, but that the content of learning is culturally appropriate. Developing programmes from the bottom up and collaborating with the community is vital.

"It's really important to understand the history. The way that the First Nations people [in Australia] have been treated has been so biased and so racist that giving them an education sitting in that [governmental] context is not adding value to their lives. As such, it's quite benevolent in some ways, and it's trying to upskill without understanding their background."

Meg Polacsek. ILC Australia

Increasing the range of learning opportunities

Providing a far wider range of ways for people to learn throughout their lives will clearly be vital if we are to widen participation in learning and ensure workers have the right skills to support the UK economy.

There are huge opportunities to weave a rich tapestry of learning opportunities across sectors in the UK. These should draw on the best of business, technology, traditional learning providers, and community organisations, and empower individuals to learn independently.

Formal education isn't the only way to build skills and knowledge. Making learning more flexible can bring down barriers to access and can be particularly helpful in engaging people who didn't benefit from formal learning earlier in life.

"Education doesn't [only] happen in colleges and universities alone, it also happens in workplaces, in communities and in a multitude of other settings across the country."149

James Withers, independent advisor to the Scottish government

There are promising examples of new ways to deliver learning and skills development to adults – from using technology to deliver learning by stealth, to developing new "schools" that are rooted in communities and built around relationships.

Many employers have been quick to recognise the benefits of more flexible learning – offering not just formal training courses but also opportunities for employees to learn from each other.

Sharing ideas and answers, informally

BT Group has incorporated more flexible ways to learn in and among its more formal training programmes. One is the concept of 'learning communities'. Employees have access to high-tech virtual 'global development' rooms, which they can use to write up their ideas or problems.

Over the course of the day, BT employees from around the world can use their own global development rooms to read these ideas or questions and respond, offer advice or specify further challenges, encouraging an exchange of ideas around the world.

Community-led learning

Harnessing the collective knowledge, resources and local understanding of community organisations can help build programmes that can connect with those who are less engaged with more formal or traditional education provision. A community-led approach to upskilling can also address context specific skills shortages.

Overturning expectations

Explore in Newcastle is a member-led organisation. It was created to preserve the award-winning Explore programme originally created by the North East Centre for Lifelong Learning, part of the University of Sunderland.

"Built around the learning people say they need rather than what successive governments think they need", the Explore programme is now run by a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO). This aims to support a community where members can contribute their own knowledge and experience, to foster an environment where social interaction is a valuable part of learning, and to promote the culture, history and natural and urban environment of the North East.

Members actively tackle stereotypes as part of their vision to make lifelong learning accessible and flexible, democratic and participative, as well as innovative and challenging. They select instructors to address certain expectations. In fields that are stereotypically considered masculine, like engineering, they have female instructors, and in fields that are stereotypically considered to be feminine, like art, they have male instructors.

Online learning

The COVID-19 pandemic saw an increase in online and flexible learning; this period helped demonstrate the value of that route, particularly in facilitating access for those with more responsibilities and less time in the day. Carers, full-time workers and those who struggle with getting out and about can all benefit from more distance and flexible learning. In addition to new online offerings from formal education providers there are also many less formal opportunities. For instance, sites like [udemy.com](https://www.udemy.com) offer courses ranging from professional coding to acoustic guitar, with prices ranging from tens to hundreds of pounds.

TikTok has become one of the largest learning platforms in the world: available in 75 languages, it's one of the most downloaded apps in 40+ countries. Creators record short-form videos with lessons on cooking hacks, dance moves, crafts, maths and more. #LearnOnTikTok currently has more than seven billion views. It's easy for anyone to create videos, share information, and find an audience. And because it's a social network, it's easy for users to find new interests based on what who they follow or what they're already watching. Teaching on TikTok embodies the idea of learning for the love of it, rather than for formal qualifications. It's fun and engaging (sometimes too engaging) and learners are there by choice, not for a certificate or a course credit. While the video length limitation (three minutes) means it's not suited for formal learning or training, it does make it perfect for 'bite-size' lessons that could suit those who've had bad experiences with formal, structured learning formats.

Free for all – with benefits for the provider

The IBM SkillsBuild platform offers free, online, accredited courses in a variety of IT-related areas for learners from secondary school age and upwards. It also offers courses covering 'soft skills' like communication and leadership, ensuring these align with demand in current job markets.¹⁵⁰

Since 2021, 7 million people have taken courses through the platform, and its new strategy aims to reach 30 million by 2030.¹⁵¹

Although SkillsBuild could charge for its services, offering them for free benefits both IBM and the wider economy. Keeping training inclusive and accessible puts IBM at the forefront of technology education for adults. It also helps the company better understand the needs of the technology workforce and create their own pipeline of talent they can use to build their business.

Learning by doing

Many employers now support on the job learning, and learning through volunteering. On the job training can allow workers of any age to adapt and apply the skills acquired quickly – providing immediate value not just to the individual but the employer.

Previously undervalued, soft skills now play a more important role in the 21st century workplace and are highly valued by employers. Volunteering allows many people to build more soft skills, as well as cultivating skills unrelated to their particular profession that can make them more adaptable.

Learning on the job, around the world

Multinational audit firm PwC has a Global Mobility programme that sends employees on short- and long-term secondments around the world. The programme gives employees the opportunity to work and live in entirely new fields and environments, meaning they learn on the job but also become more culturally aware.

“During my time in New York, I was exposed to a different industry, different business practices and different business models, so I had the opportunity to broaden my understanding of financial services. I wouldn’t have had this experience at home, nor would I have been able to work with clients of that size.”

PwC Global Mobility participant

Some employers already embrace staff volunteering as a means of supporting skills development, as well as contributing to the wider community.

“Older adults want social connection to help them stay sharp. So that’s feeling like they’re challenging themselves. And then, you know, the other piece in the lifelong learning is feeling like there’s a value that they add to [communities].”

Brittne Kakulla, AARP, USA

Employer support for volunteering

Patagonia, an outdoor clothing brand, encourages its employees to volunteer. Patagonia's environmental internship programme allows employees to work full-time at an environmental organisation for up to two months while still earning their normal salary and benefits.

Those who do participate return with a new set of skills. Since one of Patagonia's core missions is protecting the environment, this can also help renew staff dedication to the company's values.¹⁵²

Employers are also playing their part in broadening the reach of adult learning.

Bringing learning to an international network

As a standalone initiative, IBM's SkillsBuild is already a great start for adults to acquire in-demand skills that align with what's needed in current job markets, minimising the risk of investing time and money in retraining.

But SkillsBuild's reach is enhanced by its collaborative aspects. The initiative has partnerships in 29 countries, across six continents. These include partnerships with government ministries, corporations (including SMEs), higher education institutions, non-formal learning programmes, learning charities, and job-seeker programmes.¹⁵³ It provides skills assessments and training to every partner at no charge, improving the career opportunities for learners around the world.

Learning through fun

Learning isn't a chore, so adult learning programmes shouldn't make it feel like one. There's already clear evidence that people who take part in learning are motivated by factors other than skills development. People often sign up to socialise: adult learning is associated with higher levels of interpersonal and social connection. It's even been shown to promote civic engagement and activity. According to a 2014 survey by the WEA, 93% of people on their adult education courses make new friends. 88% agreed that they met people they wouldn't normally mix with and almost all (98%) enjoyed getting the chance to meet these people.¹⁵⁴ Recognising the importance of social interaction can help learning providers develop courses that are attractive.

The idea of 'edutainment' is becoming increasingly popular in both formal and informal educational settings. There's clear evidence that this approach sees better results.^{155 156} It engages more participants, encourages their creativity and imagination, encourages problem solving, and facilitates the development of interpersonal skills.¹⁵⁷

"You want to have some type of entertainment component to the education. For the 50+, one of the things that we see consistently which is unique to the population is their interest in doing stuff to stay mentally sharp."

Brittne Kakulla, AARP, USA

Gamification is also increasingly common as a tool for supporting learning. Duolingo is a famous example of a gamified approach with levels, challenges, lives and rankings. It's currently the world's most popular language learning app.¹⁵⁸

"Meaningful play is a specific learning strategy that works well with older learners."

Marie-Louise Kok, Leyden Academy on Vitality and Ageing, Netherlands

In America, 45% of adults over the age of 50 engage in gaming activities.¹⁵⁹ Introducing this type of activities into the learning space can help people transition back into learning in a way that's enjoyable and easy.

Companies are also employing gamification in their employee training.

Gamification for motivation

Oranio, a gamified learning platform in Brazil, serves companies like PepsiCo, Carrefour, and Google Education. The platform is used to enhance training, onboarding and commercial development.¹⁶⁰

Cisco, a multinational communications and technology company, uses gamification in its social media training programmes. These feature exploration opportunities, teamwork, progression loops and badges, with more than 13,000 courses completed in the first year of its conception.¹⁶¹

Audit firm Deloitte employs gamification to monitor training. As executives weren't completing their assigned leadership training programmes, Deloitte introduced badges, teams and leaderboards to encourage completion. The average time taken by employees to complete training was halved.¹⁶²

Gamification is one form of 'stealth learning': creating more opportunities for people to upskill and reskill without even noticing, by building elements of learning and training into day-to-day activities. Doing this, rather than asking people to engage with formal learning opportunities, can be particularly effective for those with previous negative experiences of learning. As technology evolves, there will be significant potential to further develop these forms of learning, but at present there's limited evaluation of their use, particularly in developing skills for work.

Helping people identify opportunities to learn

There are also green shoots emerging around offering people support to navigate learning opportunities.

Becoming part of the community

[What's NeXT?!](#), an organisation headquartered in Toronto, Canada, pairs middle-aged and older people with work, learning and volunteering opportunities around the world. The organisation integrates itself into local communities to encourage people who are looking to transition to a new phase of life to sign up.

It connects individual participants with communities of people at different life stages, allowing them to create connections that work for them – whether as student or mentor.

What's NeXT?! does little to no advertising, but has managed to attract over a thousand members through community integration and word of mouth. The building of trust between providers and recipients is key to encouraging adults to use learning programmes, both at What's NeXT?! and more generally too.

“Counselling, supervision, and personal contact are really important.”

Bettina Thöne-Geyer, German Institute for Adult Education, Germany

“Good coaching programmes are really helpful for providing some guidance and direction.”

Jodi Starkman, Innovation Resource Centre for Human Resources, USA

Employer training programmes often adapt to the training needs and existing knowledge of the individual learner – this approach is increasingly assisted by technology for courses that are delivered online.

Using AI to optimise learning

Personalisation and curation in learning programmes can be a large undertaking – but it can be supported by artificial intelligence (AI). Training organisations like Obrizum use AI to adapt existing learning content for individual employees.

Multinational companies including PwC, Merck, and Barclays employ Obrizum¹⁶³ to make programmes more engaging for individual employees, to identify their weaker skill areas, and to tailor training to personally suit their needs.¹⁶⁴

Widening state support

Free or subsidised learning helps overcome cost barriers for many adult learners. It's a vital component for addressing socioeconomic inequalities in lifelong learning.

New initiatives are emerging in different parts of the UK, with the potential to channel additional flexible resource towards learners in mid and later life.

Personal Learning Accounts

The Welsh Government offers a Personal Learning Account, which allows those who meet its criteria to train free of charge, with courses and professional qualifications to develop skills and help them to progress or change their career.

The Personal Learning Account helps people who are already in work to retrain, specifically targeting sectors with skills shortages or those that are growing locally. Courses are designed to provide skills and qualifications already sought by local employers. These include:

- Net Zero and green technologies
- Digital skills (for various abilities)
- Logistics (in particular HGV/LGV driving)
- Advanced materials and manufacturing (including technical engineers)
- Hospitality (including chefs, catering assistants, waiting and front of house staff)
- Health and social care re-engagement

Designed to be flexible and allow for work, life and family commitments, the goal is to quickly upskill workers with skills that will allow them to apply for well-paid, attractive jobs in their local area. Training is also designed to address employer concerns that other further education courses don't produce 'job ready' candidates.

Linking work and learning

Strengthening the links between learning and new or improved employment prospects can help people feel more confident about investing their time and money in learning.

Helping older career-switchers

Brave Starts is a UK-based programme that helps people over the age of 45 learn and find meaningful employment.¹⁶⁵ The programme includes guest speakers from the industries targeted by their learners, who talk about what they do. Through this, learners are able to better understand what they should do to enter their chosen career, and how to network with industry stakeholders. Brave Starts also manages specific networking programmes. The aim is to discover each participant's goals and help create a network to help achieve them.

“We’ll network people doing those jobs. We tend to organise two phone calls or zoom calls, and then we ask them to do one of their own, because it’s an employability skill they grow. In the next workshop they can tell us what they learned about that sector. They’ve got real, concrete data points to evaluate, whether or not it feels right for them.”

Lucy Standing, Brave Starts

This guidance and networking assistance, alongside an emphasis on independence in their job searches and career research, helps encourage confidence among learners and improve their employability.

Offering support and guidance with networking and job searching can also help people feel confident in engaging with learning programmes.

Creating support networks for confidence

“On top of [the basic course], there’s things like one-to-one support and group workshops and weekly group sessions. We also provide a general moving forward group which meets monthly to provide peer support.”

Suzanne Noble, Startup School for Seniors

Startup School for Seniors is a UK-based programme that empowers older entrepreneurs. The school places a great level of focus on support. It offers valuable one-on-one mentoring and compliments that with opportunities to engage in peer-to-peer support as well. Group workshops and peer groups, which often meet after the course has been completed, help establish a community of alumni who support each other.

Providing opportunities to upskill and learn in-house can help employers ensure their workforce has the skills they need, while creating incentives for employees to stay within their organisations.¹⁶⁶

Lifelong learning for career development

BT Group's approach to HR facilitates the upskilling and reskilling of current employees to create a culture of learning. One of the most important aspects of its learning and development programmes was that they focus on the individual, and each employee's own definition of success. The philosophy was that well-rounded, happy, healthy individuals are better employees.

Regular one-on-ones between employees and managers meant that each employee's aspirations and goals were considered. Managers then matched promotions and upskilling opportunities to employees who had expressed interest in those specific fields or topics. Managers understood not only their employees' career goals but also their personal goals and values. This allowed them to offer training opportunities that were the best fit for each individual.

In addition, BT's in-house skills academy regularly engaged employees in learning and upskilling to help them become the best versions of themselves, inside and outside of the workplace. This facilitated many internal promotions. In fact, there was a point in time where 60% of their board members had worked their way up from being apprentices.

“The magic isn't having the best people. The magic is having people who can connect together, create ideas together, develop things and produce things together, and work well together.”

Caroline Waters, Director People & Policy, BT Group, 2008-2013

When employers partner with higher education institutions this can offer another way to bridge the gaps between supply and demand, while reducing the financial risks for learners that can be attached to learning as an adult. In the US, different businesses offer their employees a range of educational opportunities.

Partnerships for employee education

Amazon USA partners with 140 higher education institutions across America to offer fully-paid tuition to any employee who wishes to further their education. This could mean a traditional university degree, but it can also include other qualifications, like the General Educational Development (GED) test or the English as a Second Language certificate.¹⁶⁷

So far, Amazon has paid for the education of over 150,000 employees.

Chipotle, a fast-food chain, and Target, a department store chain, offer debt-free tuition assistance programmes in partnership with specific universities. These programmes are often linked to the companies' interests: for instance, Chipotle's programme assists those wanting to study subjects like agriculture, culinary arts, supply chain management or hospitality.¹⁶⁸

Employees are given the opportunity to upskill and reskill, while their employers benefit from their new skills and knowledge.

Private and union partnerships

BP Southern Africa has a partnership with the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. This allows BP to pay the tuition fees for any employees and their dependents who wish to study business or leadership programmes.¹⁶⁹

Successful partnerships can also be found within trade unions in South Africa. Trade unions have an integral role in South African society; they're fiercely protected by law and society alike. The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) is a historic organisation that represents an enormous industry. It runs programmes, like the Mineworkers Investment Trust and the JB Marks Education Trust, which encourage upskilling of miners.

"[Lifelong learning] needs to be a collaborative effort among all key stakeholders."

Mehbs Remtulla, What'sNeXT?!

Shifting employer attitudes

Employers who recognise and reward wider forms of learning will be essential to create a societal shift towards a wider range of learning opportunities throughout people's lives.

Skills-based hiring (evaluating candidates based on their skills, rather than on their education or past work experience) is on the rise: an American survey recently found that 73% of employers have now moved to skills-based hiring, and that 92% believe it's more effective than looking at past experience.¹⁷⁰

Using partners that support a skills-based approach

Third-party job application vendor BeApplied, used by companies like Penguin Random House and UNICEF, relies on a skill-based approach. This programme allows employers to receive 'blind' job applications without CVs or lists of past job experience. Instead, employers create a list of questions for applicants. The answers are then ranked blindly, applicants are chosen blindly, and applicants are invited to interview blindly.¹⁷¹

Some employers are deliberately shifting to this approach.

Focusing on skills to sidestep prejudice

Steelcase, a furniture manufacturer, moved over to skills-based hiring after realising that their workforce lacked diversity in terms of race and gender.

The company changed interviewing methods to prioritise skills over CVs, and revamped job descriptions to remove biased language. Wherever possible, requirements for previous work experience were removed. As a result, both diversity and employee retention increased.¹⁷² Now 45% of Steelcase employees come from racial or ethnic minorities.¹⁷³

Conclusions and recommendations

In the UK, we need to accelerate our efforts to support lifelong learning if we are to capitalise on the opportunities of an ageing society.

There's no quick fix or silver bullet which can move the UK from where we are now to where we need to be. But we can start to emulate the best from international practice.

Our international learning suggests four key areas for action. We should act to:

- **Shift the culture around learning:** in the UK this will require action to unpick ageist attitudes, tackle resistance to learning built on prior negative experiences, and to widen participation
- **Increase the diversity of learning options:** in the UK this will require cross-sector collaboration and innovation to develop new learning options that can attract learners throughout their lives
- **Help individuals identify their skills gaps and the learning opportunities that work for them:** in the UK this would mean ensuring more people have access to free and trusted sources of support and guidance
- **Increase investment in learning:** in the UK this would mean giving more people access to funding for adult education courses, including more flexible funding options

As we've seen from the examples in Chapter 4, there are already initiatives to build on. We believe there's a need for **collaborative action to bring together cross-sector leaders and experts** across sectors to build on existing good practice that can **change cultural attitudes, provide meaningful opportunities, and continue to develop lifelong learning practice** in the UK. This includes **supporting innovation** and robustly evaluating the approaches already being taken to **identify the most promising ways forward**.

We believe that the governments of the devolved nations can play an important role in convening these efforts. In addition, drawing on our learning around the globe, we recommend that the UK's governments should:

- 1) Act to develop a culture of learning that starts from childhood:
Governments should bring together those working on education policy for children and young people with those working on

adult learning to develop education policies that span the life course. If we continue to develop adult learning policy separately from policy for children and young people we will miss opportunities to adopt a culture that supports lifelong learning.

- 2) Take steps to increase the diversity of learning options: Governments should support **cross-sector efforts to encourage innovation**, as well as the **evaluation and replication of learning approaches that are attractive to learners** of all ages
- 3) Give people more help to find the type of learning that suits their needs:
We need new services that can offer **free and trusted advice and support** to individuals to **identify their skills gaps** and to **access quality learning opportunities**. This should include online tools and access to learning guidance in the community, throughout all life stages. It could be provided by expanding the remit of adult career services and/or JobCentre Plus.
- 4) Improve access to adult learning:
Governments should continue to **reduce cost barriers** to lifelong learning, **by ensuring more people have access to funding** for adult learning. First steps should include widening eligibility for the Lifelong Learning Entitlement in England, and developing personalised learning accounts, building on the model established in Wales.

There is no silver bullet that would improve the culture and uptake of lifelong learning in the UK. But, in the hope that we can set our country on the right path, we've highlighted some of the work and models used by global leaders in lifelong learning.

Although no single country has a perfect approach, we hope to cherry-pick the best aspects of all, to accelerate the UK's efforts to improve lifelong learning. The ultimate goal is to ensure that everyone lives a longer, healthier and more fulfilling life.

Methodology

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About ILC

ILC is the UK's leading authority on the impact of longevity on society. We combine evidence, solutions and networks to make change happen.

We help governments, policy makers, businesses and employers develop and implement solutions to ensure we all live happier, healthier and more fulfilling lives. We want a society where tomorrow is better than today and where future generations are better off.

ILC wants to help forge a new vision for the 100-year life, where everyone has the opportunity to learn throughout life, and where new technology helps us contribute more to society.



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