**Skills 2030: Call for Evidence**

# Introduction

The skills system in England encompasses a diverse range of vocational education and training in both the public and private sectors. It covers a wide range of educational pathways post-16, including further education (FE), higher education (HE), workplace training (such as apprenticeships), continued professional development, and adult learning.

Policy Connect and the Skills Commission are gathering written evidence for the inquiry *‘Skills 2030: A World-class Skills System’*. Co-chaired by Barry Sheerman MP and Sir John Hayes MP, the inquiry will investigate the key policy initiatives the next government should have as top priorities to deliver a world-class skills system by the end of the next Parliament in 2030.

This Call for Evidence seeks to gather evidence and insights from stakeholders across the skills system. We will use your insights, including any practical case studies, to inform policy recommendations in a future report.

The Commission will develop recommendations with a holistic, cross-sector focus to help the next government, departments across Whitehall, and local government deliver a world-class system. It will lay out an ambitious programme for the skills system that remains sensitive to the current political and economic landscape and the existing skills system.

Instructions

Policy Connect is gathering evidence through ongoing roundtable sessions, interviews with expert stakeholders, and this written Call for Evidence. Please find the questions below.

**We appreciate that you may prefer to respond only to the questions in your area of expertise. The questions are grouped into six themes:**

1. **A holistic look at the skills system in England**
2. **Devolution and skills policy**
3. **Lifelong learning**
4. **A strategic government approach to skills**
5. **Qualifications and standards**
6. **A skills system that works for all learners**

Please feel free to send any additional evidence or information that might support our inquiry but has not been covered in our research questions (please do this by attaching a separate document to your email in either Microsoft Word or PDF format). We are particularly keen on **papers, data, or reports that you or your organisation have completed**. We would appreciate any data submissions, statistics or case studies showing **what works and what does not.**

The deadline for submission of evidence is Friday 3 November 2023 at 11:59 pm. Evidence should be submitted to: Peter.Wilson@policyconnect.org.uk

For more information about Policy Connect or the inquiry, please [visit our website](https://www.policyconnect.org.uk/sc) or contact Peter.Wilson@policyconnect.org.uk

Research Questions

# A holistic look at the skills system in England

1. Which elements of the current skills system are working well and why? Which features of the current skills system are *not* working well and why?
2. Which changes could the government make to significantly improve the skills system that do not require new spending commitments?
3. How can we increase the level of investment that businesses across the UK make in training?
4. Which **one to three** policy initiatives should the next government have as its top priorities to help deliver a world-class skills system by the end of the next Parliament? (*Examples of a policy initiative include “devolve more funding to local areas” or “tweak the lifelong loan entitlement”*).

# Devolution and skills policy

1. Has the devolution of the adult education budget to combined authorities been a success? Please explain your answer.
2. What further devolution in the skills system would be beneficial and what aspects of the system should remain with national government, and why?
3. What steps can be taken to improve collaboration in the skills system at the local level between local authorities, employers, and education providers?

# Lifelong learning

1. Individuals must be able to adapt to changes in the economy and their personal lives by taking opportunities to skill, upskill and reskill across their life course. What policy changes could improve the uptake and success of education and training amongst learners over 30?
2. How can we make it easier for learners in work to engage and get high-quality outcomes from part-time learning?

# A strategic government approach to skills

1. Delivering a world-class system will require departments across Whitehall to collaborate. How can we improve cross-Whitehall collaboration when it comes to skills policy?
2. How can we improve strategic workforce planning to better address long-term workforce needs?

# Qualifications and standards

1. How can we ensure that qualifications (and the training learners embark on to achieve them) are able to constantly adapt and keep up to date with current skills needs?

# A skills system that works for all learners

1. What forms of education and training post-16 are the most successful at promoting social mobility and reducing socio-economic inequality?
2. How can we better support individuals who face barriers to progression – such as socio-economic disadvantage, regional inequalities, and mental health issues – to fulfil their potential and have a successful educational journey?
3. How can we incentivise employers to increase the training they offer to individuals at lower qualification levels (e.g., apprenticeships at level 2)?

Additional Evidence

Please feel free to send any additional evidence or information that might support our inquiry but has not been covered in our research questions. Please attach a separate document to your email in Microsoft Word or PDF format.

Submission Permissions

Kindly let us know whether we have your permission for the following:

1. Do you give permission for the report to quote your submission?
2. May we attribute the submission to the organisation you belong to?
3. May we attribute the submission to you personally, listing your job role?

# About Policy Connect

Policy Connect is a cross-party think tank. We specialise in supporting parliamentary groups, forums, and commissions, delivering impactful policy research and event programmes, and bringing together parliamentarians and government in collaboration with academia, business, and civil society to help shape public policy in Westminster and Whitehall, so as to improve people’s lives.

Our Work focusses on five key policy areas which are: Education & Skills; Industry, Technology & Innovation; Sustainability; Health; and Assistive & Accessible Technology.

We are a social enterprise and are funded by a combination of regular annual membership subscriptions and time-limited sponsorships. We are proud to be a Disability Confident and London Living Wage employer, and a member of Social Enterprise UK.

# Appendix: Background to Skills 2030

Since the Department for Education’s *Skills for Jobs* white paper was published in January 2021, the government has made progress in implementing a series of reforms to the skills system. These advances include the introduction of Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs), the continuing role out of T-Levels and the steps being taken to create a Lifelong Loan Entitlement (due to be in place in 2025). These reforms will form the basis of the skills system that future governments can build on.

Yet, the skills system continues to face a range of challenges. Funding for further education colleges will be 5% lower in real terms in 2024 than in 2010. T level and apprenticeship completion rates remain too low. Spending on entry-level apprenticeships by employers is down £200 million since 2017. Overall, employer investment in training in the UK has fallen since 2015 and is about half what employers spend in our European neighbours.

More widely, the country faces challenging social and economic circumstances that the skills system needs to be mobilised to address. The UK faces a variety of skills shortages. Low rates of economic growth and flatlining productivity are longstanding challenges. Disparities in access to educational opportunities perpetuate economic inequalities and social immobility, leaving many individuals unable to fulfil their potential. We also face a multifaceted list of future challenges: technological change that will redefine job profiles, an ageing workforce, and the need for the UK to undergo a green transition to net zero.

There is no shortage of ideas to reform the skills system. Since the publication of the White Paper, there has been an explosion of skills reports that make policy recommendations of all shapes and sizes for the skills system. Yet, what is lacking is a holistic vision for the future of the skills system that can gain cross-party consensus. With a general election in 2024, now is the time to set the skills agenda for the next government. It is in this context that the Skills Commission has launched the Skill 2030 inquiry.