



Press Release – [EMBARGOED UNTIL 8AM 03/03/2020]

New report – England’s Skills Puzzle: Piecing together further education, training and employment

Former Skills Minister calls upon Government to give skills and lifelong learning renewed attention through devolution and a new Productivity Board.

March 3rd 2020 - A new report launched today by the cross-party Skills Commission, makes seven recommendations for creating a more coherent and responsive skills system to support small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and lifelong learning in England. It follows a 12-month inquiry led by former Skills Minister, Sir John Hayes CBE MP, and leading figures from across further education (FE), skills and industry.

The inquiry found that employers are struggling to engage in an overly centralised skills system. Unlike other developed countries, England lacks channels to engage employers on a collective basis and has few local levers to adjust provision to meet local needs. Furthermore, a restricted and volatile funding system that promotes competition over collaboration is limiting the ability of colleges and training providers to respond effectively to local employers at a time when retraining and upskilling is becoming more important than ever.

To address this the Commission recommends:

- A framework for skills and lifelong learning with medium and long-term targets to be monitored by the Government’s new Skills and Productivity board, which should be placed on a statutory footing and report to Parliament bi-annually like the Climate Change Commission
- Further devolution of adult skills budgets, supported by stronger labour market and sectoral intelligence
- Funding reform to incentives colleges and training providers to collaborate around meeting local learning and skills needs
- A national campaign to support the recruitment and retention of teaching staff in FE
- Pilots of personal learning accounts to support opportunities for retraining and upskilling as the population lives and works for longer.



Commenting on the Commission's findings:

Sir John Hayes CBE MP, Inquiry Co-chair

“It is vital that we reprioritise further education and skills in this parliament and link it to macroeconomic policy. I want to see the new Skills and Productivity Board established as a statutory body with cross-party backing, as a means to keep this government and future administrations on track to meet our ambitions to level-up all areas of the country and ensure we have a skills system that works for SMEs”

Dr Fiona Aldridge, Director of Policy and Research, Learning and Work Institute

“We need a clear strategy for skills and lifelong learning, and a funding system that encourages providers to work together to meet local needs. There are many great policy initiatives across FE and skills, but too often these are developed in isolation and implemented with little regard for how they will impact the wider skills ecosystem.”

Barry Sheerman MP, Inquiry Co-chair

“The Government quite rightly has high ambitions for the further education sector. This needs to be matched by resources, including multi-year budgets for providers. A concerted national campaign to recruit and retain talent and expertise in the sector is also required. World-class teaching and learning cannot be achieved without supporting the workforce”

Simon Kelleher, Head of Education and Skills, Policy Connect

“With 80% of 2030's workforce already in the labour market and the OECD estimating that 15% of jobs are at high-risk of automation, we need to act to ensure people have adequate opportunities to retrain and upskill. Allowing for greater local influence over skills provision through the English devolution whitepaper is one way to do this. The Government should also pilot personal learning accounts as a way to support people to invest and retrain across their working lives”

Notes

Evidence for this inquiry was collected from across the country including roundtables with employers, providers and other stakeholders in Lincolnshire, the Tees Valley, Bristol and London. This was complemented with submissions from a public call for evidence, desk-based research and interviews.

The Skills Commission is an independent body made-up of parliamentarians from across the major political parties and leading figures and experts from further education, skills, academia and business.

The research was coordinated by Policy Connect and the Learning and Work Institute, and the inquiry was funded by the Further Education Trust for Leadership.



Policy Connect

Policy Connect is a cross-party think tank improving people's lives by influencing public policy. We collaborate with government and Parliament, through APPGs, Commissions and Forums and across the public, private and third sectors to develop and improve public policy. We work in health; education & skills; industry, technology & innovation and sustainability policy.



The Skills Commission

Policy Connect's Education and Skills team run the Skills Commission. The Commission brings together Parliamentarians, leading figures from across the FE and Skills sector, academics and employers to undertake high-level research into Further Education and Skills policy, making recommendations to government, the sector and industries.

Inquiry Partner:



Learning and Work Institute

Learning and Work Institute is an independent policy, research and development organisation dedicated to lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion. We research what works, influence policy, develop new ways of thinking, and help implement new approaches. We want everyone to have an opportunity to realise their ambitions and potential in learning, work and throughout life.

Inquiry Sponsor:



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- Innovating constantly to meet the needs of learners, communities and employers;
- Preparing for the long term as well as delivering in the short term; and
- Sharing fresh ideas generously and informing practice with knowledge.