

Impact report 2024-25



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Foreword

We live in a time of multiple crises and a stagnating economy. This makes it difficult for many people to make ends meet and has left many public services stretched. Expanding access to learning, skills and employment must be a core part of the answer to these challenges. Over the last year we have worked hard to make the case and show the difference that learning, skills and employment can make to these challenges.

We're pleased the new Government adopted our calls for an 80% employment rate ambition and Youth Guarantee so all young people are offered help to find a job, training place or apprenticeship. We showed how that could boost the economy and save the taxpayer. The challenge now is delivery, and we are helping to understand how the underlying challenges vary across the country and build the evidence base on what works. We also secured funding from DWP and Youth Futures Foundation for our flagship JobsPlus trials, testing new ways to help social housing tenants into work based on successful approaches in the US.

We continued our work on lifelong learning. Our long-running Adult Participation in Learning Survey showed a record one in two adults took part in some form of learning in the last three years, driven by self-directed and informal learning. This is encouraging, but there are stark and persistent inequalities. Moreover, reduced investment by both Government and employers means there are fewer formal opportunities for people to take that learning on. We showed that your likelihood of taking part in learning falls by four percentage points for every year older you are: something our aging population makes even more important to tackle.

Our work also highlighted that the UK risks falling further behind other countries particularly at lower and intermediate qualification level. Through our Ambition Skills programme, supported by City & Guilds and NOCN, we showed this is particularly driven by wider regional inequalities than many European countries. The programme will now look at how we can change that and the

economic and social prize for doing so. We are always looking to strike a balance between raising challenges and showcasing solutions. Adult Learners' Week and the Inspire! awards in Wales and the Festival of Learning in England, are always highlights for us, shining a light on amazing adult learners and celebrating their achievements.

As ever, we know that none of this is possible without our excellent and dedicated trustees and team. We thank them for their work over the year.

Whatever the year ahead holds, we will continue to make the case for learning, skills and employment, build the evidence base, shape policy, and test new ways of working.

**Jeremy Moore, Chair of the Board,
and Stephen Evans, Chief Executive**



“We're pleased the new Government adopted our calls for an 80% employment rate ambition and Youth Guarantee.”



Our mission

Learning and Work Institute is an independent policy and research organisation focused on lifelong learning and better work.

Our vision is for a fair and prosperous society where learning and work enable everyone to realise their potential.

We research what works, influence policy and develop new ideas to improve practice.

Social and economic inclusion are at the heart of all we do as we work towards a fair and prosperous society.



Our priorities

Our strategic plan for 2024-29 focuses on four priorities:



Lifelong learning

Learning is good for careers, health and wellbeing, civic engagement and much else. But while people are increasingly engaging in learning independently, more formal opportunities for adults to learn have been in decline. Some groups – like older people, those out of work, people with lower qualification levels – are far less likely to participate in learning than others.



Essential skills

One in five adults has low literacy or numeracy, and core capabilities such as these and health, financial literacy and citizenship are unequally distributed between demographic groups. This holds back people's life chances and is worse than in many comparator countries.



Employment

The UK's employment rate is relatively high by international standards, but is far from world leading in particular because some groups, like disabled people, and areas of the country have much lower employment rates than the average. Helping more people into work would bring economic benefits, improve the public finances, and boost living standards and life chances.



Better work

Most people are satisfied with their work and a flexible range of employment opportunities gives people more chance to find work that suits them. But some people would prefer more secure work but are unable to find it: finding flexibility can be a one-way street in favour of employers. Furthermore, despite rises in the minimum wage many people in work find themselves struggling to make ends meet, while many people find themselves stuck in low paid work, unable to progress, often linked to socioeconomic background.



Our vision would mean that by 2040:

- **More adults are participating in learning**, achieving this by substantially reducing inequalities between groups and areas.
- **Everyone has the essential skills and capabilities** like literacy, numeracy and digital that they need **for life and work**.
- The UK has the highest employment rate in the G7, with **80% of working-age adults in work**, achieving this by narrowing employment gaps between groups and areas.
- **More people are in work that meets their needs**, supporting wellbeing, development and good living standards.

Why we're here

Click each infographic for more information



63%



63% fewer adults are improving their literacy and numeracy each year than in 2013/14.

On current trends it would take at least 20 years for all adults who need it to get help.

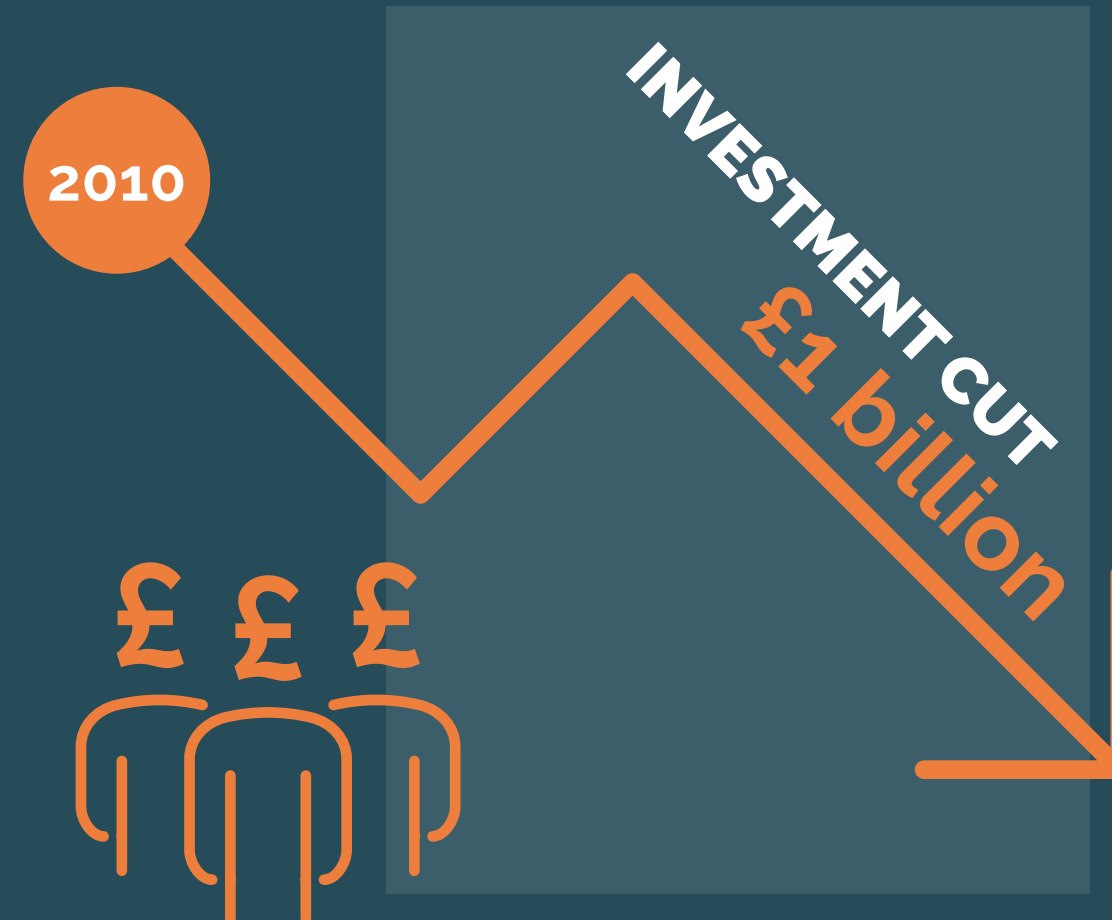


One in two adults say they've taken part in learning, with interest increasing through the pandemic with the rise of online learning.

But there are stark divides by age and class, and cuts mean people can lack routes for formal learning.

The Government has cut investment in England by **£1 billion (20%)** since 2010.

Employers are spending 26% less in training per employee in real terms compared to 2005, and are three times as likely to train graduates as non-graduates.



By 2035, we're on track for one in three people to still only have a level 2 qualification at most.

That would place us 29th out of 39 OECD countries, barely changed from our league table position today.



You're three times as likely to be qualified below level 2 if you live in the **West Midlands** than if you live in **West London**. Regional skills divides are larger in the UK than in Europe.

London and the South East match world-leading countries like Canada, Japan and South Korea; other parts of the UK are on track to be overtaken by Latvia, Estonia and New Zealand.



Doubling rates of adult attainment, back to 2010 levels, could boost the economy by at least £23 billion per year, requiring an extra investment from people, employers and the Government of £1.9 billion per year.



Three in five young people (58%) who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) have never had a paid job and almost half (48%) are still not in education, employment or training a year after they first become NEET.



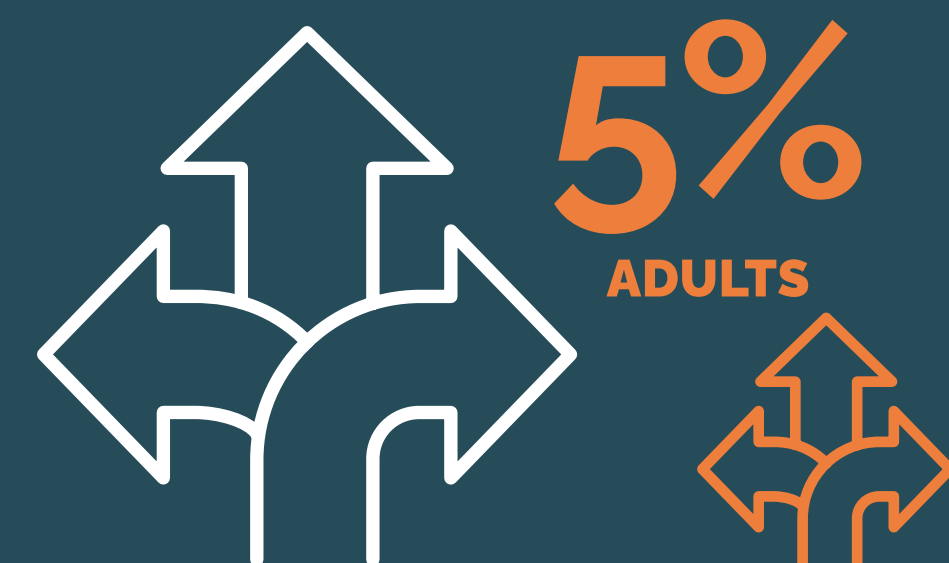
Young people's education and employment opportunities still depend on where they live.

NEET rates are nearly twice as high in Wales (15%) and the North East (16%) as they are in London (9%) and the South East (10%). 16 out of the 20 best areas for youth opportunities are in London.



One in five people economically inactive due to long-term sickness say they want a job, but only 1% are in work six months later.

Successful reform to the benefits system could help 500,000 more people into work over ten years. This would boost the economy by £8 billion a year and save the taxpayer £4 billion a year.



Around 5% of adults (two million people) change sector or occupation each year.

On average, their salaries drop by £3,731 per year, on top of any costs of retraining. 50-year careers mean more people will need to retrain. We need to help them with the financial costs.



Shaping policy

We encourage evidence-based policy development and use our insights to improve service design and delivery. Highlights of our achievements during 2024-25 include:

- The new Government adopting our proposals for an 80% employment rate ambition, a more flexible Skills Levy, a Youth Guarantee, and greater devolution.
- Influencing the Government's plans to improve employment support, including an additional £1 billion of investment, and introducing new support conversations to explore people's aspirations and help them access support that's right for them.
- Establishing and leading a partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions, Youth Futures Foundation, Communities that Work, Institute for Employment Studies, MDRC and nine housing associations to test a JobsPlus community-based approach to employment support.
- Influencing and informing the development of devolved Adult Education Budget policy in Greater London, the West Midlands and other mayoral combined authorities, through a range of research and evaluation projects. In addition, we supported Liverpool City Region to think about how skills could support their early years workforce strategy.
- Securing a commitment from Medr for a Learner Voice Forum that reflects adult learners in Wales.



- Developing quality and practice in adult education in Wales through the Adult Learning Partnership Effectiveness Tool that has been adopted by Medr.
- Continuing to influence thinking on how to reverse the decline in employer investment in skills, informed by our research funded by Nuffield Foundation and the Gatsby Charitable Foundation.
- Building support for our campaign to change the 21 hour rule, which prevents young adult carers studying more than 21 hours per week from claiming Carer's Allowance, including engagement with the Minister of State for Social Security and Disability.
- Supporting care leavers to engage their local councillors. A number have been successful in influencing local councils to recognise care status as a protected characteristic.
- Being called to give evidence by a number of Committees, including the House of Lords Industry and Regulators Committee on skills policy, the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee on adult numeracy and maths education, and the House of Lords Home-Based Working Committee on the impact of working from home for different groups.
- Helping to shape the agenda and priorities of a number of All-Party Parliamentary Groups, including the APPGs for young carers and young adult carers, and youth employment.





Developing solutions

Here is a snapshot of our wide-ranging **research and development work**. We are proud to partner with national and local government, businesses and charities, maintaining our reputation for high-quality research and analysis.

Lifelong learning

In its 28th year, our **Adult Participation in Learning Survey** showed that, after a decade of decline during the 2010s, participation in learning has risen for the third year in a row. Just over one half of adults (52%) say they have taken part in learning in the last three years – the highest rate since the survey began in 1996. The increase in participation since the pandemic has been driven by a rise in self-directed learning, including online, for personal reasons or leisure. This is positive, but local and national government, employers and others need to make sure adults also have routes to more formal learning and accreditation where they want to and where that would be of benefit to them. The survey continues to highlight stark inequalities in who participates in learning, meaning there is much more to do to ensure fair access to opportunities.

Through our **multi-year strategic partnership** with Ufi VocTech Trust we continue to support the adoption and deployment of technology to help every adult in the UK get the skills they need to participate and benefit from our transitioning economy. This includes collaborations with four places across the UK to test and learn what works to increase adult participation in learning.

We tested ways of helping people to reskill and change career through four pilots in Edinburgh, Belfast, Tees Valley and Wales as part of our **New Futures** programme. Our **evaluation** and policy work resulted in **recommendations** for supporting career changers across the UK.

Our **Driving Change in Higher Education** project is currently supporting 15 universities across England to introduce new policies and support to improve young adult carers' experiences and outcomes. In partnership with Carers Trust, our **campaign** to exempt young adult carers from the 21 hour rule in the benefit system has gained good support and is raising awareness of the challenges that young adult carers face in accessing further education.

Through our work with Welsh Government, we developed a **Tool for Effective Practice** for adult community learning partnerships. This included collaborations with Estyn and partnership leads across Wales, leading to a resource which supports the strategic development of their delivery and to aid planning with Medr.

We supported a partnership of adult learning providers to join a Taith-funded project which linked to Aontas in Ireland to explore opportunities to develop learner voice and engagement. Developing learner voice will be a key area of work with Medr in 2025.

Our focus on Family Learning continued, working with providers and the Welsh Government to produce a framework which raises awareness of the impact of delivery.

Advocating for adult learning

Learning and Work Institute's campaigns have highlighted the benefits of adult learning for more than 30 years, inspiring similar initiatives around the world.

In England, Festival of Learning was supported by NOCN, City Lit, the Education and Training Foundation, and Skills and Education Group. Award winner announcements took place in July, and the 12 winners and 4 finalists were selected from over 250 nominations. Award winner stories received sector and local press coverage.

Lifelong Learning Week took place from 4 to 8 November 2024. During the week, we published the 28th edition of our annual Adult Participation in Learning Survey, hosted webinars about older adults and essential skills and learning with technology, and hosted an event on supporting young adult carers' education opportunities, attended by L&W's Patron, Her Royal Highness Princess Anne.

We partnered with the West Midlands Combined Authority to deliver their **West Midlands Adult Learning Awards** for a second time, with the ceremony taking place

in June 2024. We also worked with the team at City Hall to deliver the **Mayor of London's Adult Learning Awards** for the third time, with a celebration in November for adult learners and their supporters.

In Wales, we co-ordinated a network of partners to deliver outreach events and promotional activity for **Adult Learners' Week**. The collaboration involved over 100 partners, with over 600 events listed on the campaign platform and at least 6,000 people taking part in taster courses and information and advice sessions. 16,000 users visited the platform during September which has been built to provide links to providers as well as wider advice and support. Theme days were introduced to steer some event activity and alongside this we co-ordinated national policy and advocacy events. This included a webinar to explore insights from L&W's Adult Participation in Learning Survey and a film featuring two learners in conversation with Simon Pirotte, Chief Executive of Medr.

Campaign partners include Colleges Wales, Universities Wales, the Open University in Wales, Amgueddfa Cymru | Museum Wales,

UNISION Cymru, The Digital College, Adult Community Learning providers, Wales TUC, and many others. We worked with Welsh Government to organise a multi-media marketing campaign which signedposted hundreds of people to advice, guidance and events hosted on the Working Wales and Adult Learners' Week websites. We delivered the Inspire! Adult Learning Awards in September, with the stories of **award winners** promoted alongside Adult Learners' Week. Over 80 press features were secured including ITV Wales evening news coverage. The award ceremony involved over 200 guests including the Secretary for Education, Lynne Neagle. In March we held the **Inspire! Tutor** awards recognising the achievements of the workforce across the tertiary sector, showcasing community outreach, supported employment, ESOL and learning Welsh. We were hosted in the Senedd by MS John Griffiths and were joined by Vikki Howells, Minister for Further and Higher Education. Our partnership for the Inspire! Awards included Adult Learning Wales, Agored Cymru, AIM Qualifications, the National Centre for Learning Welsh, Universities Wales and the Open University in Wales.





Essential skills

We stepped up our advocacy on essential skills for adults and young people. The latest OECD Survey of Adult Skills, released December 2024, highlights real and welcome improvements in young people's essential skills, but shows very little change on adult skills, with 8.5m adults having low literacy or numeracy, or both. We played a leading role in shaping the sector response, hosting a **webinar** (131 registrations) with the OECD's Director for Education and Skills, Andreas Schleicher, just two days after the data release. We continue to argue for English and maths to be core components in 16-19 programmes and apprenticeships in England, highlighting that England has less focus on these subjects than other countries. We made the case in the media, through events such as our **English, Maths and ESOL conference**, and by engaging politicians, including by giving evidence to the London Assembly and the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee. Working with Age UK, we published **new research** highlighting the essential skills needs of older people, launched with a **webinar** (114 registrations) during Lifelong Learning Week.

We continued to support Mayoral Strategic Authorities with local commissioning and delivery of essential skills provision and other aspects of the Adult Education Budget through research and evaluation. We delivered an evaluation of Greater Manchester's Adult Education Budget for the period since

devolution, and shared learning from our evaluation of the Multiply adult numeracy programme with stakeholders in the West Midlands. Our **review** of English Language Acquisition (ESOL) policy in the West Midlands set out clear and actionable policy measures to support better outcomes from the West Midlands Combined Authority's investment in English language skills. Our report, launched by Mayor Richard Parker at a regional stakeholder event, was well-received by WMCA and the sector, and we are continuing discussions with WMCA on ways in which we can support implementation. We also supported the Greater London Authority with **research** into the impact of the rising cost of living on access to adult education in London.

We continue to play an active role in the European Association for the Education of Adults and the European Basic Skills Network, sharing insights from our work with adult learning providers, practitioners and policymakers across Europe. We helped EAEA and EBSN develop a joint response to the OECD's survey of adult skills at the European level. We moderated a European webinar on the same theme, which attracted over 200 registrations Europe-wide. We contributed to an EAEA panel on impact in adult learning at the EAEA's annual conference in Helsinki, and shared findings from our work on green skills at EBSN's conference in Valladolid.

Employment

L&W has been at the heart of key policy debates on employment and reducing economic inactivity. A highlight for the year has been kicking off a trial of JobsPlus in 10 pilot sites. JobsPlus is a community-led employment scheme that aims to help people into work through on-site employment services, community support, and financial incentives. The pilot is funded by the Department for Work and Pensions and Youth Futures Foundation. L&W is leading the programme working in collaboration with Communities that Work and Institute for Employment Studies, with additional support from MDRC, the US-based research organisation who supported the original JobsPlus trials in the US, and nine housing associations.

Ahead of the election in July 2024, we published **Aiming high: An 80% employment rate and how to deliver it**, which called for a UK employment rate of 80% to be achieved through extending employment support, working with employers on recruitment and job design and investing in social infrastructure like health, skills and childcare. The aim of an 80% employment rate was adopted by the incoming Labour Government. We have continued to inform employment and benefit policy, responding to the Government's Get

Britain Working white paper with a policy paper **Get Britain Working: The path to an 80% employment rate**, which provided more detail on the Government's plan, why it matters, and how success can be achieved.

We provided a **submission** to the Work and Pensions Committee for their inquiry into Jobcentre Plus reform. In advance of the Government's Green Paper on incapacity and disability benefits, we published **The benefit trap**, a paper examining why the number of incapacity benefit claimants has risen and setting out recommendations for a better system.

We partnered with the Institute for Employment Studies and Royal Society for Public Health to inform the Commission for Healthier Working Lives (supported by the Health Foundation) producing reports **on local variations in employment outcomes, how to better support workers' health**, and how to support unpaid carers to access work.

We published our multi-year evaluation of **DWP's Restart Scheme**, in partnership with Ipsos, where we identified key learnings that informed the delivery of the Scheme, the development of future programmes and the wider evidence base on employment support.

As co-chairs of the Youth Employment Group, we have regularly convened our members to argue for better support for young people. To support the implementation of the Youth Guarantee and the eight Youth Guarantee Trailblazers announced by the Government in the November 2024 white paper, we have kicked off a **project** to demonstrate the need for a Youth Guarantee and understand how it could be successfully implemented.





Better work

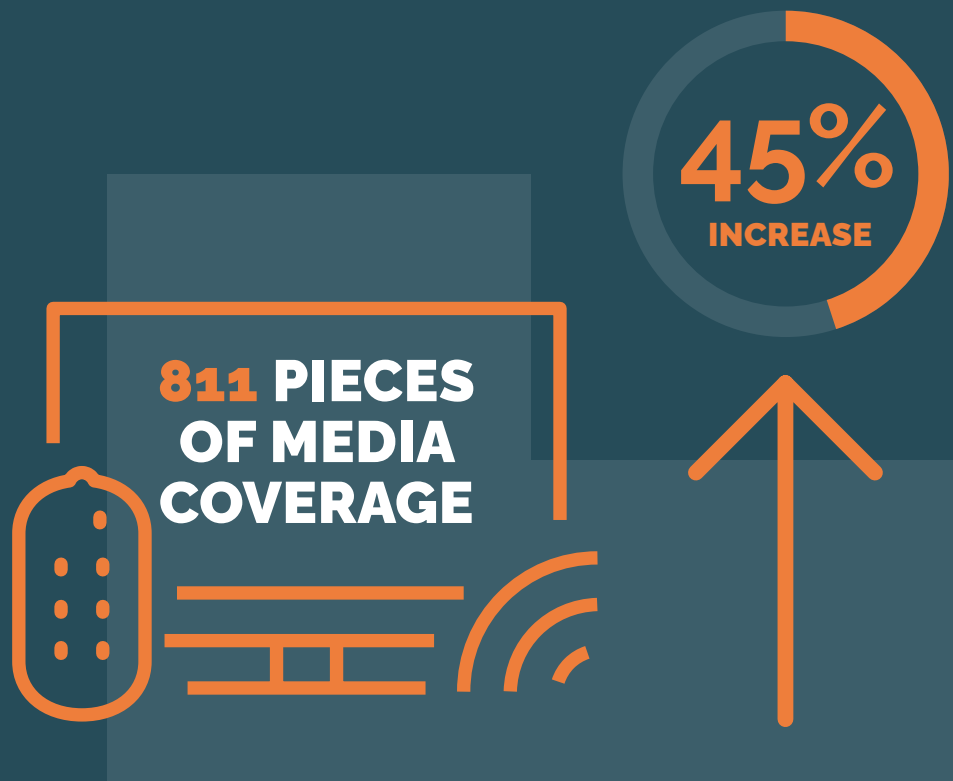
At a time of increasing attention to the relationship between work and health we have created and disseminated high quality evidence on how to create healthy and inclusive workplaces. Through **our work with Health Equals** we made the case for a more inclusive employment support system, set out how local government can support residents to have healthier working lives, identified how to ensure home working is healthy, and gave evidence to the House of Lords Home-Based Working Committee.

We continue to test and explore what works to support progression at work. This includes advising Liverpool City Region on how to improve retention and progression as well as increase the diversity of their childcare workforce. Through a new project funded by the Robertson Trust, we are testing how successful international models of in-work progression can be adapted for delivery in Edinburgh.

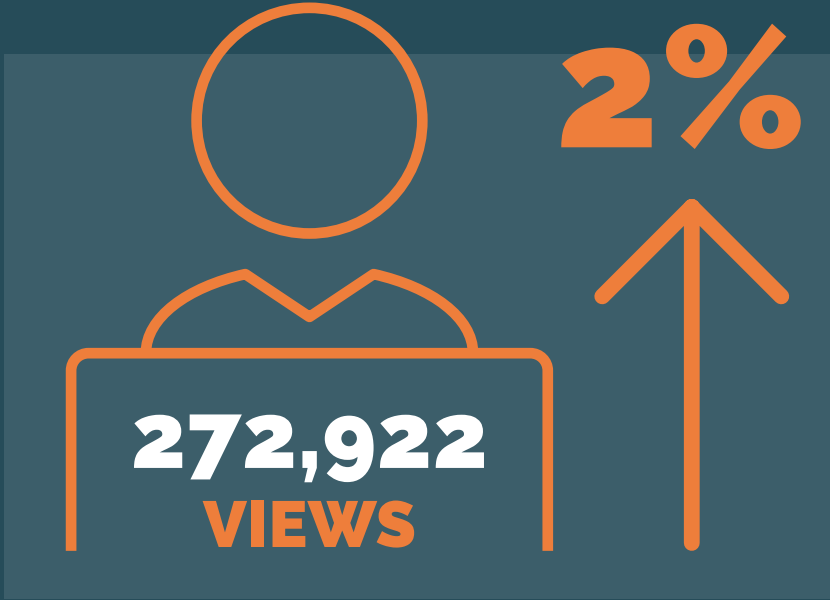
We have had substantial success in building and disseminating the evidence on how to increase employer investment in training and widen access to high quality technical education. We published **research** on the need to rethink pathways into tech careers by placing greater focus on social mobility. Our **multi-year project** funded by the Nuffield Foundation L&W explores employer investment in skills, and how employees are responding to the need to upskill and retrain in a transitioning economy. This is complemented by research funded by the Gatsby Charitable Foundation, which seeks to better understand how employers and employees make decisions about higher technical education and training.

Our reach in numbers

We received 811 pieces of media coverage in 2024-25 for our campaigns and unique research and analysis. This is a 45% increase on the previous year.



We achieved significant national media coverage in print, online and broadcast for our policy research, including in The Times, the Guardian, the Financial Times, The Telegraph, The Economist, The New York Times, Big Issue, LBC, Times Radio, BBC News and a wide range of local press. Our work has also been featured in sector press including FE Week, FE News, Education Journal, Wonkhe, People Management, Personnel Today, Business Matters, HR Magazine, Business News Wales and Energy Manager Magazine.



Our L&W, L&W Wales and Festival of Learning websites received 272,922 views in the year (2% higher than the previous year).

We had spikes around report publications, particularly for our Ambition Skills programme of work, and online events including for Lifelong Learning Week, and during Adult Learners' Week in Wales.

Our followers on LinkedIn rose more than 1,150 this year to 7,022.

We received 168,058 impressions and 2,683 unique visitors.



Our YouTube channels had 18,718 views with 83,622 minutes of footage viewed.



This year we made the decision to refocus our strategy away from X (formerly Twitter).

We have opened a new Bluesky account and have gained 961 followers.

Bringing people together

We maintain a range of networks, advocate through coalitions, and convene people and organisations to focus on burning issues, and to increase our influence and impact. We secure senior political figures and industry leaders to speak at our online and in-person events throughout the year.

In July, we hosted our Employment and Skills Convention in Birmingham. The event was sponsored by Maximus, Clarion Futures, Youth Futures Foundation, Edge Foundation and City & Guilds and 276 people registered to join. We delivered our annual English, Maths and ESOL Conference online, attracting 286 people. We also held webinars as part of Lifelong Learning Week, focusing on essential skills in older people and learning with technology, as well as other webinars through the year exploring the latest PIAAC data and findings from our research for Health Equals. In addition, we held policy roundtables on disability employment and youth employment.

In Wales, we held a webinar during Adult Learners' Week to launch L&W's Adult Participation in Learning Survey data. Our Employment and Skills Wales Convention took place in the Autumn and was attended by over 100 people. The event was sponsored by City & Guilds and supported by National Infrastructure Commission Wales and Serco. We also held our ESOL Networking Day to present providers and practitioners with research updates, networking sessions, and practical workshops aimed to support and advance the ESOL sector in Wales.





Our funders



Age UK
Blagrave Trust
Central London Forward
Centre For Ageing Better
Centre for Progressive Policy
City & Guilds
Clarion Futures
Department for Education
Department For Work And Pensions
ESRC
Generation
Greater London Authority
Greater Manchester Combined Authority
Local Government Association
Maximus UK
Medr
Ministry Of Defence
Morley College

National Lottery Community Fund
National Open College Network
Nuffield Foundation
Open University
Phoenix Group
Serco Limited
South East Strategic Partnership For Migration
The Edge Foundation
The Gatsby Charitable Foundation
The Health Foundation
The Robertson Trust
Ufi VocTech Trust
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Published by National Learning and Work Institute
Unit 1.23, St Martins House, 7 Peacock Lane, Leicester LE1 5PZ
Company registration no. 2603322 | Charity registration no. 1002775

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