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The **Skills Research Digest** monitors recently published skills and labour market research relevant to the work of the Department for the Economy and to the strategic and policy issues that we face in Northern Ireland.

In each case, we provide a short summary of the key points and web links to the full article or report*. A full list of sources can be found at the end of the publication.

Highlights this quarter include:

- The impact of COVID-19, including on part-time, older and low-paid workers, on apprenticeships, HE and R&D.
- Continuing to widen participation in HE during the current crisis – the challenges for under-represented groups and funding pressures.
- The changing nature of work, particularly post-COVID with the swift move to flexible and remote working.
- Skills gaps and shortages, particularly data, digital and cyber skills and those needed for the construction industry.
- Brexit – its impact on international student applications; and an interesting look at what divergence from EU employment regulations (below or beyond) could mean for UK workers.

**Links are correct at the time of publication, however it is likely that some will break over time. The list of sources has more general links, which should help the reader to track down the original report.*

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The research summarised here presents the views of various researchers and organisations and does not represent the views or policy of the Northern Ireland Executive or those of the authors.

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Preparing Young People for Work

16–19 EDUCATION

Pearson published [*The Future of Qualifications and Assessment for 14-19 year-olds: Interim Report*](#).

- It draws on: a survey of 5,000 young people, parents, teachers and employers in the UK; over 900 responses to an online consultation; a poll of 104 MPs; interviews with its expert panel and others.
 - The research focused on three broad areas: purpose and value of 14–19 education; the impact of wider economic, technological and societal trends; and issues around fairness and coherence.
- Findings are grouped under four guiding principles that reflect what people want of the education system:
 - **Empowering:** An education is a preparation for life and work and should inspire a lifelong love of learning achieved through the acquisition of a core of knowledge plus broader, deeper knowledge including problem solving, creativity, resilience, leadership and respect for others.
 - **Coherent:** Curriculum, qualifications, assessment and teaching should work together in harmony; the 14–19 phase should be coherent with higher education (HE) and apprenticeships.
 - **Adaptable:** 14–19 education should offer flexibility and choice of academic, applied and technical pathways in an inclusive system more akin to bridges and ladders than rigid tracks.
 - **Innovative:** 14–19 assessment and teaching should unleash the power of technology to improve adaptability, inclusion, empowerment and coherence.
- Phase 2 will explore what outcomes the post-14 curriculum should deliver for young people, and how assessment should best serve learning and support these outcomes.

The technical annex can be found [here](#). The final report is due at the end of 2021.

The Edge Foundation published [*Our Evidence Base*](#) by University College London (UCL) Institute of Education, outlining three principles at the heart of the Edge Future Learning approach to preparing students for life and work, based on international evidence.

- **Project-based learning** helps students develop knowledge, skills and motivation through relevant, interactive learning experiences where they work on driving a question towards a tangible product.
 - It creates opportunities to connect across traditional subject boundaries and build transferable skills such as teamwork and communication.
- **Real-world learning** provides students and teachers with opportunities to apply knowledge and skills through connections to the real world – from employer engagement in the classroom to teacher ‘externships’ (placements) in the workplace.
 - This breaks down the boundaries between school, college and life, demonstrating relevance in order to build motivation.
- **Community-connected learning** involves students collaborating to address societal challenges.
 - Drawing on a rich tradition of youth social action and citizenship, students develop youth voice and leadership skills, supporting their peers and building a deep sense of agency and purpose.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING & MATHS (STEM)

Engineering UK published [*Securing the future: STEM careers provision in schools and colleges in England*](#), drawing on a survey of 200 teachers and careers leaders plus relevant literature.

- For the Government to succeed in making the UK a global science superpower, it needs a new careers strategy in order to support good STEM careers provision as well as good STEM teaching.
- Schools and colleges in England’s ‘careers hub’ areas are faring better on some aspects of STEM careers provision, e.g. work experience, use of STEM ambassadors and other employer encounters.
- Many schools/colleges still have limited capacity for engagement with STEM employers; careers hubs should have a STEM leader to build that capacity and facilitate joint activities with employers.
- 46% of respondents cited financial barriers, such as not being able to pay for travel to STEM events or kit for STEM clubs; the Government should provide annual funding to support school careers activities.

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, lack of technology has been a barrier to careers provision, particularly in schools/colleges with high proportions of disadvantaged students.
 - The Government should develop a fully funded digital learning strategy and support schools/colleges to integrate work experience and other employer engagement activities.
- 'Opt-in' STEM activities tend to attract those with an existing interest; careers guidance should be embedded into the subject content of the STEM curriculum.
- Previous research shows that only 30% of secondary STEM teachers know a lot or quite a lot about what engineers do, and only 45% feel confident giving careers advice on engineering.
 - Teacher training and continuing professional development (CPD) should include information and training on STEM careers.

EMPLOYABILITY & CAREERS

COVID-related

The Centre for Learning & Life Chances in Knowledge Economies & Societies (LLAKES), UCL Institute of Education, published [*The darkest hour? New evidence of the learning experiences, wellbeing and expectations of youth during the third national lockdown in the UK.*](#)

- 44% reported that their learning of job skills had worsened as a result of the pandemic, rising to 58% of those who remained in education; 13% said it had improved, falling to 4% of those in education.
 - 53% perceived a worsening in their career prospects.
 - 60% felt more worried, anxious and depressed than before the pandemic; ~50% felt less useful and less optimistic about the future.
- 43% expected improvement in their financial situation in the immediate term, while 20% thought it would become worse.
 - 57% thought it quite/very likely that they would find a well-paid job, and 60% that they would be in a job that they enjoy.

The Resolution Foundation published [*Uneven steps: Changes in youth unemployment and study since the onset of Covid-19*](#), a briefing note on the scale and distribution of the labour market change experienced by young people in the UK.

- 16–24 year-olds accounted for a disproportionately large share of the fall in employment.
 - This is characterised by young people losing their jobs, and by recent education leavers struggling to find their first job.
 - Black and Asian young people have been more affected than their white peers.
- There are three challenges for policymakers:
 - Build avenues to help young people into the workplace
 - Provide them with support to stay in/return to education and training
 - Work with employers and employment support providers to tackle bias and discrimination in the hiring process and career progression more generally.

The Resolution Foundation published [*Double trouble: Exploring the labour market and mental health impact of Covid-19 on young people.*](#)

- The report explores structural changes over the past 20 years that have made young people particularly vulnerable to the COVID-19 crisis.
- The crisis has had a disproportionate impact on young people's jobs: in January 2021, 19% of 18–24 year-olds who were in work pre-crisis were unemployed (36% of those in insecure work), compared to 4% of 25–54s and 11% of 55–65s.
- It has also exacerbated an already 'bad' situation for their mental health: in April 2020, 51% of 18–24 year-olds had mental health problems, up from 30% pre-crisis and the highest for any age group.
- The Job Retention Scheme has had a protective effect on young workers' mental health, but a future rise in unemployment and insecure work would add additional pressure.

- Young people and their mental health should therefore be uppermost for policymakers as we move into the post-pandemic period.

Other research

England's Department for Education published [Post-16 education and labour market activities, pathways and outcomes \(LEO\)](#), providing analysis based on different socioeconomic, demographic and education factors.

- Post-16 pathways can comprise up to 15 different activities and are incredibly diverse: for the 3.6m people who took their GCSEs between 2002 and 2007, there are over 262k different pathways, of which 168k are observed for a single individual.
- Higher levels of education lead to better labour market outcomes for all sub-groups and all qualification levels.
- The proportions in employment and claiming out-of-work benefits and average earnings are often different for different sub-groups with similar education levels.
- The employment and earnings 'premium' for completing a degree or a Level 3+ qualification differs by socioeconomic, demographic and education characteristics.
 - However, this doesn't apply to a few select sub-groups, e.g. non-graduates with a statement of special educational needs (SEN) qualified to Level 3+ have similar proportions in employment as those not identified with SEN with Level 2 or below, but have lower earnings.

Prospects published two reports from its January–February 2021 Early Careers Survey of over 7k predominantly 16–24 year-olds, 74% of whom were female and 65% white.

- Respondents included: school pupils (aged 13+); college/sixth form students; university students, graduates, apprentices/trainees and people not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- [Jobs, apprenticeships and postgraduate study](#) considered the challenges of the past year, post-COVID career plans, the route to apprenticeships and pursuing postgraduate study.
 - Key challenges varied: for school pupils the top challenge was mental health; for college/sixth form and university students, keeping motivated; for apprentices, money.
 - 31% of respondents had changed their career plans due to the pandemic and 35% were still uncertain about what they would do; apprentices were the most certain about the future, despite 50% having changed their career plans.
 - University and college students are increasingly focused on training and development as a priority when looking for a job, ranking it above salary and equal to career progression.
 - Finding opportunities to apply to and having the required work experience are the two biggest barriers when looking for a job, regardless of current circumstances.
 - 25% of students interested in apprenticeships are struggling to find suitable local opportunities.
 - 45% of university students and 36% of college/sixth form students feel unprepared for work.
 - 25% of university students are considering postgraduate study but costs and funding are major concerns.
- [Work experience during a crisis](#) considered the availability, provision and value of work experience, and the extent to which it is paid or unpaid; this report is based only on the responses from university and college/sixth form students.
 - Only 17% had undertaken work experience in the last 12 months – 23% of those with two graduate parents, 17% of first generation students.
 - ~75% had found work experience useful in developing their skills; paid, longer-term and face-to-face experiences were most useful.
 - Despite the pandemic, work experience was predominantly face-to-face.
 - 59% of work experience was unpaid (52% for university students, 83% school/college students).
 - Lack of work experience was the main challenge for job-seeking university students.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD) published [Thinking about the future: Career readiness insights from national longitudinal surveys and from practice](#), exploring how teenage thinking about jobs and careers relates to adulthood labour market outcomes.

- **Career certainty** – being able to articulate a career ambition or occupational expectation for adult life – is linked to adult outcomes, even after accounting for variables.
 - Career *uncertainty* has become substantially more common, increasing from 15% of OECD 15 year-olds in 2000 to 25% by 2018, although ranging from 67% (Belgium) to less than 10%.
 - Uncertainty has grown particularly rapidly among those from the highest socioeconomic backgrounds and the highest quartile of academic performers.
 - In all countries there is more uncertainty among: disadvantaged students; boys; lower academic performers; foreign-born students; and those in schools offering no formal career guidance.
 - The highest levels are in low-performing boys and low performers from the highest socioeconomic backgrounds.
- **Career alignment** – educational plans that align with occupational ambitions – results in young people doing better in the adult labour market.
 - On average, 20% of young people in the OECD are misaligned, rising to 33% among the most disadvantaged quartile.
 - The most misaligned are: boys; lower socioeconomic status pupils; rural students; students of foreign birth; those with low academic performance; those lacking career guidance.
- **Career ambition** – the expectation of working in a managerial/professional job and/or of attending tertiary education – is associated with better employment outcomes.
 - On average, 75% of 15 year-olds in the OECD expect to complete an undergraduate degree and their role ambitions are high.
 - However, 14.6% of students with the ability to progress to tertiary education don't plan to, rising to almost double among the most disadvantaged.
 - 18% of high-performing girls don't expect to work in managerial/professional roles, compared with 29% of comparable boys.
 - 50% of children whose parents are managers become managers themselves; less than 25% of those of manual workers are likely to become managers.
- **Instrumental motivation** – based on an expectation of external rewards, including praise and good future prospects – is an important element of academic motivation and a predictor for performance, attainment and labour market success.
 - Students are more likely to assume that trying hard at school will get them a good job if they: have high economic, social and cultural status; are girls; are high achievers in maths; are native to the country.
- **Career concentration** is a new indicator that refers to the level of originality of teenage job expectations compared to their peers.
 - It is likely that young people with more original career aspirations may have given their future plans more thought and that lower levels of career concentration are a sign of greater ultimate critical reflection, career maturity and agency in decision-making.
 - Career concentration is highest among: girls; foreign-born students; urban residents; those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds; and higher achievers.
 - The lowest levels of career concentration (around 40%) are found in central European countries such as France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland, all of which have high teenage participation in vocational education & training (VET) programmes, which may explain the breadth of career interests.
 - Students attending schools that don't offer career guidance have some of the highest average levels of career concentration, at 55%.
- Options for helping young people think about their future include career counselling and employer engagement, e.g. talks, fairs, 1:1/small group discussion, simulated recruitment activities, workplace visits/job shadowing and practical work experience.

THE FURTHER EDUCATION & SKILLS SECTOR

Covid-related

[13 April] **The Association of Colleges (AoC) published [College Catch-up Funding and Remote Education: AoC survey and policy proposal](#), drawing on a survey of 80 colleges in England.**

- Overall, 77% reported that 16–18 year-old learners were performing below normal expectations for this point in the academic year, while 69% said the same of adults.
 - Students on practical courses such as construction, engineering, motor vehicle and hair & beauty had been hit hardest.
 - English, maths and English for Speakers of Other Languages had seen varied online engagement levels, especially for lower-level students and those with SEN.
- From January 2021, 85% of colleges had scheduled live online lessons for at least 60% of timetabled sessions.
 - 36% felt they still didn't have sufficient devices for students to study online; 32% said they had more than 300 students with inadequate home internet.
- 71% were providing additional tuition over and above what was available through England's tuition fund, with many teaching over the Easter holidays.

The report includes policy proposals around: funding; hours; targeted support; building confidence and wellbeing through extracurricular activities; joining up government programmes; and offering a fully funded extra year of study for those who need it.

The British Council published [How are vocational institutions innovating, evolving and changing as a result of Covid-19? A study of practice and perspectives in five countries](#), by the AoC.

- Findings – based on research in 15 institutions in the UK, Ghana, India, Malaysia and South Africa – are grouped under three headings:
 - **Digital transformation**, including: development of new and bespoke learner management systems and virtual learning environments (VLEs); move to flexible and blended teaching and assessment models; new quality assurance systems; improved staff and student digital skills; better communication within and outside the college and improved staff teamwork and staff-student engagement.
 - **New opportunities**, including: use of digital marketing; new and larger audiences and greater student reach through online tools; closer alignment with employers; new avenues of engagement with local community partners; student entrepreneurship.
 - **Pre-existing challenges**, including: rural access and connectivity; gender inclusion in upskilling; disadvantaged students; student welfare and mental health; cost implications; importance of in-person attendance where college is a 'home from home'.

Other research

The Social Market Foundation published [Not just other people's children: What the public thinks about vocational education](#), presenting the results of a poll of 2,005 UK adults undertaken with the Further Education Trust for Leadership (FETL).

- 48% would prefer their child to get a vocational qualification (VQ) after leaving school; 37% would prefer they attend university; 8% would prefer them to start work.
 - 43% of people in the ABC1 socioeconomic groups said they would prefer their child to get a VQ, while 45% said they would rather they went to university.
 - However, 18–24 year-olds are significantly more likely to favour university.
- Only 55% of people with a degree would opt for university if they could choose again; 33% said they wished they had taken a vocational course instead.
 - 61% with VQs would take the same route again, while 27% wished they had gone to university.
- 50% believe that politicians should give equal priority to further education (FE) and HE; 31% would prioritise FE and 9% HE.

- Some national newspapers are five times more likely to write about HE than FE, while MPs and peers speak about HE more than FE in Parliament.
- £9,399 is spent per HE student in England, up 9% in real terms over the last decade; FE student funding is typically £6,077, down 4% over the same period.

England's Department for Education published [Online and blended delivery in further education: A literature review into pedagogy, including digital forms of assessment, considering studies conducted in the UK, USA, Canada and Australia.](#)

- All the evidence indicates that fundamental pedagogical principles don't change in an online environment, but there are some difficulties in ensuring that they are robustly applied.
- A number of initiatives are seeking to develop currently underutilised applications of digital edtech; mobile pedagogy and immersive approaches (augmented reality and virtual reality [VR]) appear to be potentially the most fruitful.
- The characteristics of high-quality online pedagogy are not fundamentally different but, in some cases, teachers have had to adapt quickly, and there is evidence that even experienced teachers sometimes lack confidence in their ability to teach remotely.
- Factors such as age, gender, physical impairment and level of achievement impact on learners' success with online learning; however, there is little evidence on how the design, planning and provision of online and blended learning is being adjusted to take account of these differences.
- Few researchers distinguish between FE and HE, conflating them as 'tertiary'; however, the key pedagogical elements that distinguish high-quality online teaching and learning are likely to apply equally in a school, college or HE context.
- The move to online/blended learning is seen as a major driver for online assessment, accelerated by COVID-19.
- Technology could transform assessment in a number of fruitful ways, but how teachers use information from assessments and how learners act on feedback are more significant than the medium.
- There is evidence of some innovation in the use of technology for formative assessment, and both students and teachers welcome the additional strategies for providing informative feedback that technology can provide.
- The barriers to the adoption of high-stakes summative assessment online are chiefly: organisational culture, infrastructure and readiness, and issues of security and authentication; the opportunity for malpractice is seen as a major concern for many stakeholders.

Much of the research cited was carried out at university level or in secondary education, but the majority contained key elements that could be relevant in the context of FE.

Education Scotland published [Remote learning in Scotland's colleges: National overview](#), based on a review by HM Inspectors of Education from March to April 2021, involving 495 college staff and 180 learners.

- Remote learning delivery has developed well and at pace across the sector.
 - However, common issues that impacted quality include: digital poverty and unreliable connectivity; the wellbeing and mental health of staff and learners; and the digital skills of staff and learners.
- Recommendations for colleges include:
 - Ensure all staff have the skills to provide learning, teaching and support services remotely.
 - Develop approaches to support all learners to engage in remote learning, particularly younger learners on full-time FE programmes.
 - Develop arrangements to evaluate and improve the quality of remote learning for all.

The Campaign for Learning published [Racing to Net Zero: The role of post-16 education and skills](#), an overview of climate change and net zero for stakeholders, including a summary of key UK policy statements.

- The paper also presents the latest thinking on net zero by post-16 education, skills and labour market experts; each contributor concludes with three specific recommendations which were made before the publication of England's Skills & Post-16 Education Bill.

Although many of the contributors are focused on the sector in England, many of the recommendations have wider applicability.

HIGHER EDUCATION (HE): APPLICANTS & ADMISSIONS

Universities UK (UUK) published [Support for new students starting university in autumn 2021](#), case studies illustrating the steps being taken amid concerns about the impact of COVID-19.

- Schemes cover academic skills development, preparation for and transition to university life and support for wellbeing.

The Institute of Labor Economics (IZA) published [International Student Applications in the United Kingdom after Brexit](#), based on UCAS data from 2013 to 2019, and a 'quasi-experimental', 'difference-in-difference' approach.

- International student applications from EU countries stagnated after 2016 and the Brexit referendum, whereas applications from non-EU countries rose by 14%.
- Findings include:
 - Brexit appears to have curtailed the growth rate of international student applications by 14%; it has also resulted in fewer international enrolments, although not as large a reduction as for applications.
 - The impact is greater for applications to STEM-related studies and to more selective universities, suggesting that students with more alternatives are choosing to study elsewhere.
 - Applications have dropped most among EU students from countries with weaker labour markets and economies, for whom the ability to stay in the UK after their studies might have been a critical pull factor.

The Sutton Trust published [University Admissions: The international picture – post qualification admissions systems around the world](#).

- The Government has stated its intention to move towards a 'post qualification' admissions system in England and is consulting on two options:
 - Post Qualification Applications (PQA): whereby candidates make their application to universities after they receive examination results in the summer
 - Post Qualification Offers (PQO): whereby candidates make their applications during term time before exams – as they do now – but offers are not made until after results are known.
- Unlike in England, all 31 OECD countries examined operate a system in which applications, offers or both occur after relevant exams are taken and results are known – 20 have PQO and 11 PQA.
- The timing of applications and the examinations used to inform offers vary substantially.
 - Several European countries operate application timetables similar to that proposed by the PQA model in the UK consultation.
 - Access to HE among those whose parents did not attain tertiary education is slightly higher on average across PQO than PQA systems, and retention is also slightly higher on average.
- The average level of earnings for graduates compared to those with upper secondary qualifications is higher on average under PQA.

UCAS published [Starting the Conversation](#), a report on HE applications and mental health.

- UCAS data is reflecting the change in recent years for people to be increasingly comfortable in talking about their mental health and wellbeing.
 - 3.7% of all UK applicants now declare a mental health condition – up from 0.7% in 2011; women are 2.2 times more likely to declare one than men.
 - Engineering, medicine and dentistry courses have the lowest declaration rates at only 1.4% of accepted applicants; many differences are largely influenced by subject-level gender ratios, but medicine and dentistry are notable exceptions.
 - Some LGBT+ students are around six times more likely to share a condition, and care-experienced students almost three times as likely.
 - Before they apply, 20% of students research the specific support provided for an existing condition, and over 25% look at the provision of general mental health and wellbeing services.

HE: THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Covid-related

[1 April] **The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published [Students' views on the impact of Coronavirus on their higher education experience in 2021](#), based on a poll of over 1k full-time undergraduates, conducted in mid-March.**

- 66% were living in their usual term-time accommodation.
 - 66% hadn't received any financial reimbursement from their university or accommodation provider.
- 56% weren't expecting to receive any more face-to-face teaching this academic year.
 - 54% were satisfied with online learning, up from 49% in March 2020 and 42% in June, but down from 59% in November.
- 65% said messaging from their institution on the impact of the pandemic on this academic year had been clear; 19% said it had been unclear.
- 63% said their mental health was a little or much worse (21%) as a result of the pandemic; 14% said it was a little or much better; 23% said it was unchanged.
 - 38% were satisfied with mental health services; 50% were satisfied with other support services.

[8 April] **The National Union of Students (NUS) published [Coronavirus Student Survey phase 4 March 2021: Accommodation](#), based on responses from over 5,800 students.**

- Over the previous four months, 23% had been unable to pay their rent in full, and 28% had been unable to pay their bills in full.
 - 70% were concerned about being able to pay their rent in the coming year, particularly those who were unsure if they were finishing their studies this year, international students, students of colour and students with a disability.
- Of the 38% who had a different address in term time, 32% returned to their term-time address following the Christmas break, while 15% didn't leave their term-time accommodation for Christmas.
 - 57% of those who chose to return did so because they had paid for their accommodation.
- Looking ahead to next year, 21% planned to live with friends in a flat or in halls of residence; for those who planned to be in rented accommodation in September, 35% had already signed a contract.

[25 May] **The UPP Foundation published [findings](#) from a poll by Cybil of over 2k students, commissioned for the launch of its Student Futures Commission.**

- 59% said face-to-face teaching was a top priority for September 2021, but 45% said they would like online teaching once or twice a week, with only 29% wanting it fully in person; 21% would prefer mostly online; 6% fully online.
 - Asked about which elements to keep online, 64% said recorded lectures, 27% live online lectures, 29% one-to-one supervision.
- Over 50% said they hadn't participated in any extracurricular activities – face-to-face or virtual – over the last year, with 80% saying this was less than they had expected.
- Nearly 80% reported a negative effect on their mental health from their experiences this year, with almost 25% saying it had had a very negative impact.
- 63% believed they were below where they would expect to be academically, but 48% thought they hadn't missed any aspect of teaching; 72% were neutral or satisfied with the way universities had managed student assessment.
- Only 50% were confident about the job market, but 65% thought their time at university would help them secure a job.
 - Students were placing greater importance on job security, training and career prospects, and less importance on location.

[15 June] **Universities Scotland published [findings](#) of a YouthSight survey in May 2021 of 552 Scottish university students and applicants.**

- **Students** said restrictions on in-person learning had had a negative impact on their progress with learning (80%) and motivation (77%), and had increased their feelings of loneliness (77%) and anxiety (73%).
 - 72% said they were better able to focus on their studies with mostly in-person teaching.
- 90% said they would miss out on important aspects of university if restrictions remain in place next term.
 - 76% said it was important that the majority of learning should be face to face.
 - 71% of those returning worry about their ability to progress/complete studies as effectively if online learning is the same as in 2020/21.
- 27% of **applicants** said they would defer if in-person teaching restrictions remained the same.

IZA published [The Global COVID-19 Student Survey \[GC19SS\]: First wave results](#), of 39,172 students at 28 universities in the US, Spain, Australia, Sweden, Austria, Italy and Mexico between April and October 2020.

- The survey goal was to capture, on a global scale, how students were coping with the disruptions.
 - Students' outcomes and future expectations of the labour market, their education and health were examined as a function of their country of residence, parental income, gender and – for the US – their race.
- Findings include:
 - 83% found the lack of contact with faculty or other students challenging.
 - 12% withdrew from at least one course and 41% were uncertain about returning in autumn 2020.
 - 56% of those who had had an internship plan for the summer of 2020 had it cancelled, as did 37% of those who had had a job offer.
 - 26% had a family member who experienced job loss.
 - At a time when testing was still not widespread, 7% had a positive test for COVID-19 either personally or in their family, 31% had a family member or acquaintance die from COVID-19, and 87% were worried about their health or that of their family members.
- Subsequent data collection will aim to determine to what degree the uncertainties and worries of those in the sample materialised.

Other research

HEPI and Advance HE published the [Student Academic Experience Survey 2021](#), covering findings from 10k full-time UK undergraduates.

- 27% felt they had received good/very good value, reversing the previously improving trend.
 - Where expectations were exceeded, students reported courses were well organised (48%) and teaching staff accessible (47%).
- 44% reported poor/very poor value, up from 29% in 2019; however, 58% would still have chosen the same course and institution.
 - Value perceptions had declined and were low across all four nations: Northern Ireland (27%); England (24%); Wales (29%); EU (30%); Scotland – where students don't pay fees – was at a record low at 50%.
 - Tuition fees were the primary factor (50%), followed by the volume of in-person teaching (47%), lack of access to in-person teaching (42%), teaching quality (26%) and volume of online contact hours (32%).
- 29% had considered leaving HE, of whom 33% cited mental/emotional health as the primary reason.
- Asked how to improve the academic experience, the top three areas identified were: improve assessment feedback; more in-person teaching/campus activities; better communication.

The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) published [Student mental health and wellbeing: Insights from higher education providers and sector experts](#), commissioned by England's Department for Education and carried out with Advance HE and the Careers Research & Advisory Centre; all data were collected prior to the pandemic.

- The research included online surveys with senior staff responsible for student health and wellbeing in HE providers between summer and winter 2019.

- Findings include:
 - 52% of HE institutions (HEIs) had a dedicated strategy for student mental health and/or wellbeing; 25% were planning one.
 - 93% consulted with their students on how to better support their mental health and wellbeing.
 - 96% collected data on their students' mental health needs, 41% on their wellbeing.
 - Wellbeing support (offered to all students) commonly involved group sessions/workshops, campaigns and awareness raising, peer-to-peer support and self-help through digital resources.
 - Early intervention support included: training to recognise deteriorating mental health; monitoring attendance/performance; working to educate and raise awareness of mental health issues; and encouraging an open culture where mental health issues can be discussed.
 - Targeted services commonly offered include: face-to-face counselling and therapies; and online counselling and therapy using purchased tools and apps.
 - 95% collected data to evaluate or review the services and/or support they provide for mental health, 70% for wellbeing.
- HEIs identified several areas where the evidence on student mental health and wellbeing could be improved in their own institutions and across the sector, including:
 - Evaluation evidence on effectiveness of services
 - Understanding the influence of HE (and transitions to HE) on students' mental health and wellbeing compared to that experienced by the general population
 - Understanding students' expectations for and experiences of support and any mismatch
 - Students most at risk and barriers to seeking help.

Universities UK International (UUKi) published [Widening Participation in UK Outward Student Mobility: A picture of participation](#), the first stage of a project supported by England's Department for Education and Erasmus+.

- Across the European Higher Education Area, governments and HEIs had a collective ambition of 20% of graduates having undertaken a study or training period abroad by 2020.
 - Many countries have begun to shift their focus away from the numbers participating towards exploring who participates and how students from under-represented groups can be supported.
- The project focused on five groups of students under-represented in mobility: low socioeconomic background; low participation neighbourhoods; black and minority ethnic (BME); with a disability; and care leavers.
- Participation rates in 2015/16 were: low socioeconomic background 1.5% (high: 2.5%); low participation areas 1.0% (high: 1.8%); BME 22.2%, but 17.6% of outwardly mobile students (NB rates varied between ethnicities); with a disability 1.5%, up from 1.1% in 2013/14, but still below the sector average (1.7%); care leavers 1.0%.
 - Students with overlapping disadvantages have even lower rates of participation, e.g. black low socioeconomic background students 1.2% vs white low socioeconomic background 1.6%.
- Other findings include:
 - Short-term mobility (1–4 weeks) is more attractive to the target groups, while there has been substantial growth in one-week mobility [*see also the UUKi item below*].
 - The top nine countries are consistent across all students: USA, Canada, Australia, France, Spain, Germany, Italy, Netherlands and China.
 - Provider-led mobility has increased by 54% since 2013/14, with programmes proving particularly popular across the target groups.
 - There was a higher level of growth in mobility for work placements across the target groups compared to their peers.
- The report makes ten recommendations based on analysis of activities at project institutions.

A toolkit is to be published to support the development of effective strategies at universities and colleges.

UUKi published [Internationalisation at Home – Developing global citizens without travel](#), showcasing 15 programmes from institutions in the UK, USA and Australia that provide students with international experiences in their home setting.

- Examples showcase different models, but a number of themes are identified:

- It is possible to distinguish between different primary **target groups**: all students and staff; home students; international students; the local community; students enrolled on specific courses.
- The **aims** can broadly be divided into: creating a global campus; integrating international students on campus; providing home students with global skills; connecting the campus with the local community; internationalising the curriculum.
- The **mode** varies from online and blended to activities being offered on campus, in the community or in the form of a residential programme.
- Depending on the programme, the benefits are: inclusivity; sustainability; integration and mutual understanding; enhanced learning opportunities; skills, including communication, teamwork, intercultural awareness, time management and language; collaboration with the local community, local organisations and partner institutions and other organisations abroad.

UUKi published [Short-term Mobility, Long-term Impact](#), exploring the benefits of providing students with international opportunities lasting less than four weeks.

- Participating students were motivated by: the experience of something new overseas (80%); improving intercultural awareness (62%); improving confidence (55%); enhancing academic skills (51%).
 - University-run opportunities were seen as more impactful, immersive and educational; most wanted to study something different from their degree and preferred a combination of classes.
 - The opportunity to travel was more important than the location.
- Short-duration programmes were less of a commitment, easier to schedule and more immersive.
 - Bursaries were important and a good incentive, but needed to be better communicated.
 - Preparation support was important, including meeting group leaders and other participants.
- Most reported a positive impact on their academic experience, with almost 50% getting inspiration for the topic of a dissertation, essay or degree presentation.
 - All felt that the skills and experience gained would positively impact their employment prospects.
- 93% said they had improved their adaptability and the same proportion their communication skills.
 - 93% had increased their understanding of different cultures and were keen to learn more; 88% were more self-confident and 85% were more confident to travel independently; 94% were interested in further travel.
- The main barriers were cost (41%), fear of the unknown (30%) and the short duration (26%).

The report also presents the institutional perspective through 16 case studies, including Queen's University Belfast.

HE: WIDENING PARTICIPATION

The Sutton Trust published [Measuring Disadvantage](#), using Millennium Cohort Study data to assess various measures that might be used by universities (and employers).

- Due to the lack of access to granular and verifiable information on a young person's socioeconomic background, universities use 'proxy' measures.
- The main measure used in England is POLAR, which was not designed to measure socioeconomic disadvantage; it is very poorly correlated with low family income and biased against key demographic groups, including black, Asian and ethnic minority (BAME) students.
- ACORN is the best area-level measure available, as it is very localised, is designed to be comparable across the UK and has a reasonably good relationship to low household income.
 - However, as a commercial indicator, it is not free to use and the methodology is not openly published.
- The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is another good option, with a moderate relationship with low household income [*SIMD – Scottish IMD – is used in Scotland*].
 - However it is biased against those who are BAME, live in a single parent household and who rent; it is also not comparable across the UK.
- Parental education is commonly used by universities but is relatively broad – covering around 66% of recent graduates – and can't be independently verified.

- The best available marker for childhood poverty is the number of years a child has been eligible for free school meals (FSM).
 - However, until verified data on FSM eligibility is available to universities, they will have to continue to use area-level markers.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) published [An evaluation of the impact of the Social Mobility Foundation \[SMF\] programmes on education outcomes](#) and [An evaluation of the impact of the Social Mobility Foundation programmes on employment outcomes](#).

- The SMF was established to contribute to UK social mobility by encouraging access to high-status universities and professional occupations for high-attaining pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.
 - It offers programmes involving mentoring, internships, support with university applications and access to skills development workshops.
 - On the Aspiring Professionals Programme, disadvantaged academic 16–17 year-olds predicted to achieve ABB at A level or equivalent are supported throughout their education, until graduate employment.
- Among the key findings:
 - SMF participants were substantially more likely to attend university after A levels and were more likely to attend Russell Group universities.
 - They were less likely than similar graduates to be in employment but more likely to be in postgraduate study.
 - For those in employment, there was no strong evidence that the SMF programmes changed the skill level or the industry of participants' first job after graduation.

England's Office for Students (OfS) published [Consistency needed: Care experienced students and higher education](#), highlighting significant equality gaps for students who have spent time in care.

- The past two decades have seen HEIs become more attuned to the needs of such students, and those who attend university generally consider it a positive – even transformative – experience.
 - HEIs provide: more targeted information and guidance; adjusted offers in recognition of disrupted education; more specialist support staff; in some, tailored pastoral care and/or financial support.
- However, numbers of care-experienced students remain low, particularly in high-tariff institutions; they are more likely not to continue to a second year, to take longer than three years to complete, and not to gain a 1st or 2:1.
 - During the pandemic, such students were often unable to return to family homes; many HEIs responded by distributing hardship funds and essential supplies, and running online events and networks.

The brief follows the lifecycle of a care-experienced student and showcases examples of institutional good practice. OfS wants to see the best examples of such support continue and developed further.

The OfS also published [Supporting care experienced students in English higher education: Towards a more consistent approach](#), commissioned by the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers.

- Recommendations include:
 - **Information, advice & guidance:** an accessible webpage; a named proactive contact from the moment of application; Uni Connect partnerships [see below] to provide advice and coordinate targeted outreach
 - **Admissions:** a rounded view taken, with contextualised offers where appropriate; a smooth transition, including induction and welcome events
 - **Finance:** access to additional support; advice on budgeting and managing finances; payments aligned to times of greatest need; additional funding for study visits and enrichment; paid employment as a student ambassador; support for graduation costs
 - **Pastoral:** a designated contact throughout the lifecycle; priority access to institutional support services; mentoring or peer support; enhanced careers guidance including after graduation
 - **Accommodation:** year-round accommodation or support finding suitable accommodation; practical assistance with moving; emergency accommodation if required.

The OfS published three reports evaluating Uni Connect, an English outreach programme designed to reduce the gap in HE participation between the most and least represented.

- [*Third independent review of impact evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect partnerships: A summary of the local impact evidence to date for the Office for Students*](#)
 - Multi-intervention approaches have a positive impact on short-, medium- and long-term outcomes for learners.
 - All interventions have a positive effect on learners' knowledge of HE and confidence to make informed decisions, while particular interventions appear to support specific outcomes.
 - Workshops and masterclasses develop study skills and confidence; mentoring and summer schools support self-efficacy and interpersonal skills; campus visits convey the benefits of HE and what student life is like.
 - Some target learners, including those who previously expressed an intention to apply to HE, change their mind after taking part in Uni Connect activities; this still represents a positive outcome if the decision not to progress is well-informed.
- [*Emerging insight report*](#), exploring how COVID-19 has affected Uni Connect outreach, activity effectiveness, learners' lives and their engagement with the programme.
- [*Formative Evaluation of Uni Connect Phase Two: Detailed findings report*](#) focusing on new outreach hubs and including recommendations for partnerships to drive impact.
 - Partnerships have successfully established outreach hub operating models that are driving more strategic stakeholder relationships with increased college involvement; their perceived impartiality has been a key enabler of strategic engagement with schools, colleges and stakeholders.
 - The majority of outreach hubs' new activity with learners has extended partnerships' existing outreach to new under-represented learners and/or schools.

The OfS published [*Improving opportunity and choice for mature students*](#), an 'insight brief'.

- The opportunity to study as a mature student is essential for equality of opportunity, providing essential skills for future prosperity, especially as the UK recovers from the pandemic.
- While numbers of mature students in HE have declined, particularly for certain types of study, there are positive signs of increasing demand.
- In England, the Government aims to nurture this growth through its Lifelong Learning Entitlement.
 - The OfS is working for change via: improved information, advice and guidance; regulation in the form of access and participation plans; funding initiatives to encourage more flexibility and choice.

The Republic of Ireland's (RoI's) Higher Education Authority published [*Study of Mature Student Participation in Higher Education*](#) by Indecon, based on a survey of over 1,900 past, current and potential mature students, plus stakeholder engagement and an international research review.

- The number of mature HE students in HE in the RoI has been falling following a peak in 2010/11.
- Findings include:
 - The decline coincided with a fall in unemployment, suggesting that the availability of employment opportunities may have an impact on participation.
 - More mature students attended institutes of technology than attended universities; the majority attend HE full-time.
 - Financial cost is seen as the single greatest barrier to participation.
 - Internationally, efforts to promote access for mature students focus on disadvantaged communities.
 - Participation in an FET (FE and training) course or through community education are important pathways to HE.
- The three main methods of increasing participation are: **in-reach** (creating new ways for students to access existing programmes), **outreach** and **flexibility** in the provision of education in locations, modes and at times that best suit students; guidance and peer support also work well.
- Recommendations include: focus access targets and support on disadvantaged communities; promote and fund part-time learning; make greater provision for flexible learning opportunities; and increase the provision of foundation/bridging courses.

The Scottish Government published [Re-committing to fair access: A plan for recovery](#), the fourth annual report by the Commissioner for Fair Access.

- The target is that by 2030, 20% of new entrants to HE will come from the 20% most deprived areas (SIMD20); interim targets are 16% by 2021 and 18% by 2026.
 - The 2021 interim target has been met, but the rate of progress has continued to slow: progress may have led to complacency.
 - COVID-19 has had a greater impact on the most deprived and constrained university outreach.
- Ten recommendations include:
 - Government should publicly reaffirm and intensify its commitment to fair access.
 - Make permanent the additional funded places made available in 2020/21 and 2021/22.
 - Consider raising the threshold of SIMD20 entrants in each university from 10% to 15%.
 - Consider including a target for entrants from the 40% most deprived communities.
 - Universities should make restoring in-person outreach activities a priority.
 - By 2026 all higher national (HN) students transferring to degree courses should be granted advanced standing, i.e. receive full recognition for their prior attainment.

The Sutton Trust published [Inequality in the Highest Degree? Postgraduates, prices and participation](#), identifying postgraduate education as the 'new frontier' in social mobility.

- Master's loans have now been introduced in all the UK nations, although England was the first.
 - In 2013/14, just 6% of first degree holders from working-class backgrounds in England progressed to a taught master's, compared to 8.6% for those from managerial and professional backgrounds; after loans were introduced, the figures were 12.9% and 14.2%.
 - Graduates from less privileged backgrounds are still less likely to progress, whether looking at parental occupation or education, neighbourhood or type of school attended.
 - The highest transition rates to taught higher degrees are among Black African (13.8%) and Chinese graduates (12.9%), with those from white (10.7%), Indian (10.7%) and Bangladeshi (10.2%) backgrounds having lower rates.
 - For higher research degrees, white graduates have the highest rate (1.7%); Black Caribbean graduates have the lowest rates to both taught (9.4%) and research (0.6%) higher degrees.
- Tuition fee levels for taught postgraduate courses have increased well beyond inflation in the past 14 years, in many cases doubling.
 - The price differences between the most prestigious UK institutions and the rest of the sector have also more than doubled, from around £1,400 to £3,532.

The Engineering Professors' Council published [Engineering Opportunity: Maximising the opportunities for social mobility from studying engineering](#).

- Engineering is a sector in which salary rewards are not based on prior levels of advantage; however, its advantages are not sufficiently accessible to the students who would benefit most.
 - Only 10% of engineering students come from the lowest participation areas compared with 12.5% across HE as a whole.
- The reasons for this 'drawbridge effect' include: high entry requirements; lack of familiarity due to engineering not being taught in schools; the focus on maths and physics for a subject that is as creative and practical as it is technical and theoretical.
- Recommendations include:
 - A more radical approach to contextual admissions, coupled with extra support prior to embarking on a degree – traditional Level 3 qualifications are an imperfect indicator of attainment and still less of aptitude.
 - More foundation courses, which are a proven access route to engineering in HE.
 - The development of nationally recognised, Level 3 preparatory courses for experienced adults from other fields to study engineering at higher levels.
 - Success metrics that better recognise the distance travelled by those who reach degree standard from a lower base of prior attainment, as well as geographic variability; employment outcome data should always be regionally benchmarked.

- Monitor access at a discipline level, so that universities aren't encouraged to cut engineering courses because they perform disappointingly in terms of fair access.

GRADUATES & GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

UUK and GuildHE published [Degree classification in 2019–20](#), examining the factors during the pandemic that may have contributed to a 6ppt increase in first-class and 2:1 degrees, to 82%.

- In unprecedented circumstances, universities ensured that the changing situation and digital poverty did not unfairly disadvantage students by introducing 'no detriment' and safety net policies and expanding online student support.
 - Many universities reported increased engagement of students with online teaching, learning and assessment and innovative approaches to course design and delivery.
 - Despite the disruption, there was a narrowing of attainment gaps by deprivation, gender, disability and ethnicity.
- An unintended consequence has been some students having additional time to focus on their studies, with reduced opportunities for paid work alongside their studies or for social activities and travel.
 - There were also improvements in areas such as independent study and greater interaction with staff, particularly among BAME students.
 - Many students will have benefited from the more flexible asynchronous approach to study, particularly those studying part time or for whom technology reduced accessibility barriers.
- In order to protect quality and standards, universities will be analysing their results to better understand the drivers of classification changes.
 - They are also considering what lessons can be learnt on the benefits of digital teaching and learning, new approaches to assessment and online student support services.

The Open University (OU) Careers & Employability Services published [You've Got Mail! Exploring student and practitioner experiences of the value of email and telephone careers guidance](#).

- The study was undertaken following the development of quality standards and practitioner training for 1:1 guidance at a distance.
- For students who received careers guidance via telephone and email, the former performed markedly better for a higher proportion.
 - However, of greater importance was an understanding of each technology's attributes in relation to a diverse range of student needs and contexts.
- For some groups of students, such as international students and those with work commitments who couldn't access careers support during office hours, email guidance – 'e-guidance' – was preferable.
 - E-guidance also provided 'thinking space' and a written resource for reference.
- Telephone guidance performed well in helping students develop a personal connection with a careers consultant; it was seen as convenient and efficient, as it was quicker at providing answers.
- Students receiving telephone guidance on average reported greater impact in terms of motivation and improved confidence; however, where a guidance model is followed, e-guidance impact results at three months were comparable.
 - E-guidance can be unhelpful if there is insufficient questioning and probing from the careers practitioner to explore the client's situation fully.
- Practitioners far preferred telephone guidance, explaining some of the reluctance – including lack of confidence and risk taking – towards e-guidance and giving rise to three important considerations:
 - The transference of existing guidance skills to digital platforms
 - The acknowledgement that e-guidance requires a distinct set of skills
 - Quality standards and training enabled the translation of standard guidance techniques into the medium of e-guidance.

The OfS published [A geography of employment and earnings: Experimental statistics classifying local variations in graduate opportunities](#).

- A new measure contextualises how graduate opportunities are spread across the UK, using Travel To Work Areas (TTWAs), divided into five quintiles, and drawing on two datasets:

- Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data to show above-threshold earnings or higher-level study [NB LEO data are not available for Northern Ireland]
- Census 2011 data (to be replaced by Graduate Outcomes survey data in future) to show highly skilled employment.
- For example, in England it shows that:
 - London, Reading, Slough and Heathrow have the highest concentrations of graduates earning over £23k, with 70% either well paid or in further study three years after graduation.
 - The areas with the lowest earnings are mainly in the Midlands, and north and south-west England (52%) with coastal towns facing particular challenges.
- In Northern Ireland, 36.7% of employees have highly skilled jobs, compared with 28.4% in Enniskillen.
- The measure can also be used for comparing outcomes across different groups, e.g.:
 - Black graduates are almost four times more likely than white to live in areas with the highest average graduate earnings and rates of professional employment, primarily driven by the number in London.
 - However, white graduates are significantly more likely to earn above £23k or be engaged in further study – 74% vs 60%.
 - This regional gap is largely obscured at a national level, where the figures are 60% vs 58%.

[Interactive maps](#) are available for exploring the data. The data tables are available [here](#).

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) published [Graduate outcomes: A statistical measure of the design and nature of work](#).

- It investigates the use of Graduate Outcomes survey data to measure one aspect of job quality, as defined by the Measuring Job Quality Working Group formed following the Taylor Review.
- The Graduate Outcomes survey asks employed graduates to rate their agreement with three statements:
 - My current work is meaningful
 - My current work fits with my future plans
 - I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current work.
- Taking an average of these three responses provides a useful composite variable that can act as a measure of the design and nature of work.
- The research fits into the context of the UN Sustainable Development Goal of decent work for all and efforts by UK administrations to measure and promote fair work.
 - It also aligns with common policy goals for HE: each UK nation aspires for graduates to enjoy fulfilling careers and to add value in the workplace through productive application of what they have learnt.

HESA is seeking further feedback on whether and how to use this new measure in its official statistics.

HE: TEACHING, RESEARCH & INSTITUTIONS

COVID-related

The European Commission published [The impact of COVID-19 on higher education: A review of the emerging evidence](#), by the Network of Experts on the Social Dimension of Education & Training.

- The report is based on 14 surveys carried out in 2020 by university networks, student organisations and researchers including in the EU, UK and globally, plus analysis of literature.
 - The focus is on three levels of impact: immediate, short-term and medium-term.
- **Teaching and learning:**
 - The sudden move to 'emergency remote teaching' by virtually all HEIs was a logistical challenge, and a challenge for teaching staff and students.

- Although overall assessment of the change was positive, numerous issues remain, including: how to ensure the quality of online learning; how to support staff and students to be better prepared; and how to avoid the risk of disengagement and student drop-out.

- **Social dimension of HE:**

- Under-represented, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups were disproportionately affected in terms of perceived learning losses, financial concerns and their mental health and wellbeing, with the consequential greater risk of drop-out.
- The effects on deteriorating educational equality in pre-tertiary education are also likely to have a direct effect on lowering the level of participation of disadvantaged groups in HE.

- **International student mobility:**

- The impact in the short and medium term has been immense, with physical mobility replaced by 'virtual mobility'.
- Challenges include providing international students with adequate academic and psychological support, and 'third country' students obtaining student visas and residence permits.
- The main questions in the medium term (to 2025) are: how will HEIs cope with falls in enrolments of international students and how will they support those who have decided to enrol in 'virtual mobility' or blended mobility programmes?

- Key recommendations for public bodies and institutions include:

- Support HEIs to upgrade and redesign their curricula for online delivery and ensure the necessary infrastructure for such delivery.
- Set up system-level schemes to further support access, retention and completion of under-represented, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in HE.
- Stimulate the goal of international collaboration in HE, including student mobility, redirecting funds originally intended for physical mobility to creative solutions such as 'internationalisation at home' strategies and high-quality virtual mobility.
- HEIs should provide additional academic, psychological and financial support to vulnerable groups of students to prevent their disengagement and drop-out.
- Set up support measures to ensure that international students receive appropriate academic and psychological support and have equal access to online learning tools.
- Ensure more flexibility to enable students to successfully achieve their learning outcomes.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) published a range of documents to support the changes to learning, teaching and assessment needed in light of COVID-19:

- [23 April] Updated [Ongoing implications of the pandemic for placements and practice-based courses, including field work](#).
- [8 June] [Learning from the experience of postgraduate research students and their supervisors during COVID-19](#), including supervision, student wellbeing and support, and assessment and the viva process.
- [10 June] [Emerging from Lockdown: Reflections for PSRBs](#) (professional, statutory and regulatory bodies), with advice for the future and overviews of previous guidance.

The National Centre for Universities & Business and the University Commercialisation & Innovation Policy Evidence Unit published [Innovation and resilience in a crisis: The impact of Covid-19 on business R&D](#), based on a survey of 500 UK business leaders in September 2020.

- 81% of businesses had to delay or stop research activity during the pandemic.
- 96% reported changes to collaborative projects with universities; 25% noted significantly reduced demand for university collaborations.
- 64% of those who had engaged with universities in the year before the pandemic had no plans to increase R&D activity with universities in the next year; 25% planned decreases.
- 28% said insufficient government funding for collaborations was a key reason for changes to projects and interactions with universities.

Other research

Jisc and EmERGE Education published [Technology-enabled teaching and learning at scale: A roadmap to 2030](#), based on interviews with over 50 university leaders, edtech founders and HE experts.

- Student demands for digital learning will continue to grow even after COVID-19; organisations are already competing with global technologies that are used by students at home.
- Institutions need to think long term to actively promote the value of blended learning for applicants, vs the 'value for money' agenda.
- There are three key areas for opportunities and emerging new innovators in blended teaching:
 - **Resources:** how might technology transform core teaching materials and improve access?
 - **Delivery:** how can technology and appropriate pedagogy be used to engage students most effectively with blended teaching and assessment?
 - **Support:** how can roadblocks to learning be removed to ensure a smooth, personalised learning pathway for students?
- Recommendations for universities include devising innovation frameworks to make decisions with pace and agility, and focusing on data management.

An overview of the edtech landscape and the key factors for scaling up tech-enabled teaching and learning are included.

Advance HE published [Building approaches to learning in online and blended-learning environments: Challenges and opportunities](#), a review by Bangor University of how to successfully blend online teaching and learning during the pandemic and beyond. [The full report is available for members only.]

- Staff and student union representatives worked on projects to: understand and maximise technology use; ensure high-quality module provision; create an online induction for new students; design agile policies to enable and support the learning environment; and identify training needs.
 - Resources were provided to ensure staff had the knowledge and confidence to provide high-quality, online provision with active learning communities.
 - Inclusion, equality and diversity, health and wellbeing and co-production were key themes.
- Ten 'top tips' for successful online teaching and learning include:
 - High-quality online teaching is built on good pedagogy, not good technology, and is different from the emergency response teaching that was required in March 2020.
 - Engage a backwards design approach whereby all assessment and interaction required from the student is driven by, and directly related to, the learning outcome – convey this clearly and explicitly in regard to each action/interaction.
 - Consider digital equity and inclusivity in regard to: disability, bilingualism, technology access, social inequity, temporal inequity and inequalities relating to race, gender or culture.
 - Provide flexibility/variation in access to information, within a clear structure.
 - Use asynchronous delivery for content and keep videos/podcasts short.
 - Use synchronous approaches for discussion forums, seminars and drop-ins.
 - Share the responsibility of feedback and use formative assessment with automatic feedback and self- and peer-evaluation to build towards authentic summative assessment.
 - Regular, purposeful deadlines will increase engagement and student success with the course.

Jisc and EmERGE Education published [Rethinking assessment](#), a follow up to two 2020 reports* on the future of assessment.

- The pandemic has offered a real opportunity for universities to reimagine assessment, to make it more relevant, adaptable and trustworthy.
 - Before a possible return to 'normal' in 2022, HE should undertake wholesale rethinking, involving every individual and department.
 - Changes need to be developed in partnership with employers, product providers and students.

*See Skills Research Digest Q1 2020 (p19) and Q2 2020 (p15).

QAA published [Which way for micro-credentials?](#), the second in its new *Quality Compass* series to help institutions respond to 'future challenges and opportunities'.

- It explores the role of micro-credentials in lifelong learning, their growth and their fit with credit frameworks, modular qualifications and digital badges.

The first *Quality Compass* in December 2020 was on [Navigating assessment in a digital environment](#).

Jisc published [AI in tertiary education: A summary of the current state of play](#).

- The types of AI applications available are outlined and case studies provided of their impact; legal and ethical issues and possible future applications are also discussed.
 - Types of AI already in use include: chatbots and digital assistants; adaptive learning systems; AI-assisted marking and feedback; and tools aimed at ensuring academic integrity.
 - Potential uses include: dialogue-based tutors; collaborative learning; and AI-assisted content creation.

Jisc's [Explore AI](#) website has a range of demos.

The British Council published [Local impact of transnational education \[TNE\]: A pilot study in selected European countries](#), on the impacts of UK TNE programmes in Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Spain, France, Malta, Portugal and Lithuania.

- The impact and benefits include:
 - TNE has an 'internationalising' role that helps to build prosperity for local areas and facilitates the attraction of international businesses.
 - TNE contributes to local labour market needs and local economies: providers actively look to identify future labour market and skills needs and develop programmes to meet them.
 - English-language taught programmes are a critical factor in attracting and retaining international businesses.
 - UK TNE programmes are perceived as contributing to the local development, circulation and transfer of knowledge, including staff development provided in critical areas such as teaching skills, curriculum design, evaluation and assessment, and programme management.
 - TNE enables students to study within their own communities; local families benefit from a lower cost of study than in the UK.
 - TNE students in Europe are seen as different from those who would go to the UK to study, i.e. TNE is seen as complementary and not in competition with recruitment to the UK.
 - Anecdotal evidence and case studies suggest that experiences for TNE students can be life changing.
- HEIs should consider systematic capture of information about the local impacts of their TNE activities.
 - It is important to measure, understand and effectively communicate the local impact of TNE, beyond financial returns such as income per student.

The British Academy published [Business and Management Provision in UK Higher Education](#), part of its Observatory work to promote the health and diversity of SHAPE* disciplines.

- Business & management is the biggest discipline in the UK, and is growing: it accounted for 16.3% of HE students in 2019/20, followed by subjects allied to medicine with 11.7%.
- Provision is diverse, with unique distinguishing features: it encompasses and is underpinned by a variety of subjects, from accounting, marketing, finance and information systems through to leadership & strategy, organisational & economic sociology and consumer behaviour.
 - Its breadth and depth is reflected in its range of institutional profiles, staff and student makeup, course and programme models, research foci, curricula and graduate employment outcomes.
 - It is also distinguished by features such as the provision of executive education and accreditation.
- A significant number and proportion of students and staff are international – in 2019/20, 39% of its students and 37.9% of its total staff numbers.
- Business & management research receives relatively less UK funding than other social sciences.
- Ethical business practice and equality, diversity and inclusion are increasingly on the agenda, consistently flagged as strategic priorities.

- Its ability to keep abreast of societal trends and integrate them into academic provision and research is a key reason for its popularity as a subject of study.
- Business & management faces opportunities and challenges:
 - Growing international and private sector provision complicate an already competitive UK landscape; Brexit and COVID-19 are creating barriers for key student markets.
 - It suffers from organisational and structural inequalities, notably for female staff from Black and other minority ethnic backgrounds.
 - The position of business schools within their wider institutions is an intrinsic risk, caused by the historical culture of separatism from other departments, the use of business & management as a source of easily generated income and an overreliance on Chinese and Indian markets.

**SHAPE: Social Sciences, Humanities & the Arts for People & the Economy*

The British Academy published [Knowledge Exchange in the SHAPE subjects](#), arguing that such knowledge exchange is key to government, HE and societal priorities.

- SHAPE knowledge exchange is thriving:
 - It is deeply embedded and pervasive across all subjects and the full spectrum of knowledge exchange activities.
 - It takes many forms, from co-producing best practice and skills development in policing services, to underpinning new start-up companies and shaping public debate.
 - There is a growing community of knowledge exchange professionals and institutions across Europe, finding new ways to build relationships between researchers and businesses, public organisations and communities.
- SHAPE knowledge exchange benefits society:
 - It has informed the global response to and recovery from COVID-19 through the UK Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), the Civic University Network and programmes such as the British Academy's SHAPE the Future and COVID-19 & Society.
- The benefits of SHAPE knowledge exchange are diverse:
 - Students and staff in SHAPE work to support police to reduce domestic abuse and better support victims; to give leaders the evidence to make decisions about public spending; to enrich and regenerate local communities; and to give people enjoyable and profound experiences.
- The Knowledge Exchange Framework needs to better capture the value of SHAPE knowledge exchange by incorporating: policy engagement and influence; engaging schools and colleges; equality, diversity and inclusion.

UUK published [Universities and the UK's economic recovery: An analysis of future impact](#), by the National Centre for Entrepreneurship in Education.

Over the next five years:

- UK universities will provide over £11.6b of support and services to SMEs, businesses and not-for-profits, including specialist advice, access to facilities and equipment and bespoke research projects.
- 79% of employers with over 25 employees anticipate a need for upskilling in the next 12 months; UK universities will offer:
 - Northern Ireland: 410 years' worth of CPD courses (90 years' worth in the next year)
 - Scotland: 3,490 years' worth (600 years)
 - Wales: 4,800 years' worth (880 years)
 - England: 54,936 years' worth (10,580 years).
- Universities will attract £21.7b of national and international public funds to spend on collaborative research with businesses and non-academic organisations.
- More than 191k nurses, 84k medical specialists and 188k teachers will graduate from UK universities.
- Funding for local regeneration projects with significant economic and social impact will have a value of £2.5b.
- Northern Irish universities are forecast to form nearly 150 new companies and charities – including spin-offs, social enterprises and graduate and staff start-ups, Scottish over 1,000, Welsh over 1,500, English over 19k.

- 14,628 new jobs could be created, based on the 3.5% rise in employment at universities in 2015–20.
 - An estimated 1.27% of all people in employment in the UK work for a university.

UUK launched #GettingResults – a campaign to put universities at the heart of the economic and social recovery. Universities Scotland published a separate report, [Getting results for Scotland](#).

HEPI published [Regional policy and R&D: Evidence, experiments and expectations](#), on the role of research funding in tackling the UK’s regional inequalities.

- Geographic concentration of R&D is not an idiosyncrasy of the UK: the level of concentration in the UK is somewhat less than in other major research nations.
- The picture of regional concentration of UK R&D funding varies according to the metric used as well as the granularity of the data; comparisons between regions mask significant variations within them.
- Research in universities is funded below the full cost – increasing research funding in a region leads to greater research deficits.
- Six policy principles are outlined for regional R&D:
 - Set out measurable objectives: a clear vision and regional metrics could advance the regional R&D agenda.
 - Regional metrics should focus on the impact of research, rather than the level of investment.
 - Foster inter-regional collaborations to strengthen the impact of research.
 - Create strong civic partners at regional and local levels to lead regional R&D initiatives within a national framework.
 - Integrate regional, national and global interests.
 - Ensure financial sustainability for university research, thereby enabling stronger regional R&D.

WORKFORCE ISSUES

The Russell Group published [Realising Our Potential: Backing talent and strengthening UK research culture and environment](#).

- There are challenges around: the lack of long-term contractual job security; opportunities for progression, constructive feedback and professional development; evaluation, recognition and reward systems that don’t always consider activities such as teamwork, people management and support for equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Increasing pressures to juggle multiple responsibilities and expectations alongside core research work can lead to long working hours, reduced time for high-quality management and negative impacts on staff wellbeing.
- Further efforts are needed to ensure a diverse and inclusive workforce, including training for those making decisions about grant proposals and researchers’ careers, and more diverse funding panels.
- Rigid hierarchies and concerns around reporting of bullying can be particular issues for researchers.

A set of [case studies](#) and a [toolkit](#) for universities to improve research culture and environment were also published.

Advance HE published [Best practice responses to Covid-19 and gender equality within research institutes](#), based on a survey of 30 institutes. [The full report is available for members only.]

- The main themes explored were staff health and wellbeing, professional development, remote working and supporting those with caring responsibilities.
- Recommendations are made on issues including harnessing any positives emerging from the pandemic, and mitigating against long-term inequalities.

The University & College Union published [Challenging LGBT+ exclusion in UK higher education](#), findings from a pilot survey in six universities of the working conditions of 122 LGBT+ staff.

- 47% had experienced mental health issues.
- 30% had experienced homophobic language; of those identifying as women, non-binary or other, 26%, 25% and 33% respectively had witnessed derogatory language towards others.
- 29% said promotion criteria negatively impact LGBT+ people; 77% had thought about leaving HE.

RECRUITMENT

The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants and the International Federation of Accountants published [Groundbreakers: Gen \[Generation\] Z and the Future of Accountancy](#), based on a survey of 9k 18–25 year-olds, with findings relevant beyond accountancy.

- Respondents' concerns about job opportunities and security, wellbeing and mental health rank significantly higher than issues impacting society such as climate change and inclusivity and equality.
 - They value organisations that provide opportunities to acquire skills and a good work-life balance; although job insecurity is their main concern, they're not intent on accepting any job to 'play safe'.
 - The environmental, social and ethical record of an organisation or other issues – e.g. the inclusive and diverse nature of its workforce – are less important, possibly a reflection of the pandemic.
- Those in employment want progression fast: 60% expect to move role within two years, almost 66% expect their next role to be a promotion and 50% are considering an external move.
- Almost 66% say they expect to have multiple careers in different disciplines in the future, suggesting this is a generation more open to a portfolio career.
- Most expect technology to impact entry level roles in accountancy while also seeing the benefits to the profession of focusing on higher-value work.
 - They've also been hard hit economically over the last year and, with technology being adopted at scale, are concerned about its impact on their own job opportunities.
- Less than 50% agree that business leaders have integrity and do what they say, and less than 40% agree businesses contribute to fighting climate change.

The report makes ten recommendations to enable employers to harness Gen Z's potential.

STEM Returners published [The STEM Returners Index 2021](#), new research to understand the barriers to returning to work following a career break and to track the progress STEM industries are making in solving the issues.

- Findings are based on a May 2021 survey of 750 STEM professionals attempting to return to work or having recently returned.
- The pool of STEM professionals attempting to return is significantly more diverse than the average STEM organisation: 51% female and 38% BME, compared with 8% female and 6% BME in industry.
 - 46% had a degree, master's or PhD, 76% of which were in a STEM subject; 38% had more than 10 years' experience in the industry prior to their career break.
- Despite the UK's STEM skills shortage, 6% were finding trying to return to work difficult/very difficult.
 - 73% had applied for more than six jobs in the last 12 months, with over 20% applying for 70+ through standard recruitment channels.
 - 51% had never/rarely received feedback; females were 76% more likely than males never to receive feedback; 60% of over-45s never/rarely received feedback vs 44% of younger applicants.
 - 40% of both male and female returners felt there was an assumption that their skills had deteriorated; in reality, returners pick up new skills during a career break, generally keep themselves up to date and quickly refresh their skills when they return.
 - 67% of BME respondents said it was difficult/very difficult to return compared to 57% of white British respondents.
- 94% of returners were glad they had returned to employment, but 29% had found the transition difficult/very difficult, while 16% had found it easy/very easy.
 - Women were six times more likely to cite lack of flexibility in working hours to allow for childcare responsibilities as a barrier.

STEM Returners was founded in 2017 to redress the gender imbalance within STEM; it is supported by the Institute of Marine Engineering, Science & Technology and the Women's Engineering Society.

APPRENTICESHIPS & TRAINEESHIPS

UCAS published [Where Next? Improving the journey to becoming an apprentice](#), findings from their general research and a survey of 1,165 Year 12/13 students*.

- Over 50% of all UCAS applicants are interested in apprenticeships; the most popular subjects are engineering (65.6%), computer sciences (65.2%) and architecture, building and planning (65.2%).
 - 46.3% from the most disadvantaged areas are interested vs 40.9% from the most advantaged.
- 31% of respondents said it was very easy to access information about HE, compared to just 6% about apprenticeships.
- Only 8% associated apprenticeships with leading to a good job and only 4% associated the word 'prestigious' with apprenticeships, compared with 76% for a traditional university degree.
- In a self-reported sample, only around 33% of school students and 50% of college students reported receiving their legal entitlement to information from apprenticeship providers or FE colleges.

Over the next 12 months, UCAS aims to ensure its information on all pathways is even more accessible.

**UCAS doesn't specify the location of these students, but the context suggests they were in England.*

The Centre for Vocational Education Research published [The impact of the apprenticeship levy on apprenticeships and other training outcomes](#).

- Between 2015/16 and 2018/19 there was a marked decline in apprenticeship starts at the Intermediate level and (to a lesser extent) at Advanced level, plus a rapid increase in Higher (Level 4+) starts.
- However, levy-paying enterprises generally experienced a positive trend in starts compared with non-levy enterprises of similar size and sector:
 - Those previously undertaking no apprenticeship training saw a greater increase.
 - Those starting with low/medium/high levels of apprenticeship training experienced a less significant decline in training intensity at lower apprenticeship levels and a greater increase at higher apprenticeship levels than non-levy enterprises.
- The apprenticeship levy appears to have had a net positive effect on starts over the period, especially at higher levels, with no associated decrease in the provision of other forms of training.

Cedefop (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training) published [Cross-border long-term apprentice mobility \[CBLTMA\]: Making it work – suggestions for national policymakers](#).

- CBLTMA lasting more than six months can be an excellent opportunity for companies and apprentices and should be considered as a medium- to long-term VET policy priority.
 - However, it is not easy to achieve, especially with the pandemic's impact on people's mobility.
- Apprentice mobility is a long-term investment; short-term incremental changes are needed at national level to open CBLTMA to more apprentices, consolidating what works, expanding gradually, promoting the benefits and providing support.
- CBLTMA is one of a variety of measures to improve the quality and image of apprenticeships and can work as part of a long-term strategy; however, this needs to be undertaken at sectoral level with social partner involvement and be understood as a long-term process.
- Challenges include:
 - Employers are afraid of losing apprentices during/after mobility.
 - Employers (particularly SMEs) see little benefit from CBLTMA, with variations across sectors.
 - Small and micro-companies face major obstacles compared to medium and large ones.
 - There is little appetite among apprentices.
 - Apprenticeships are too diverse across countries.

The document provides tips for policies addressing each of these challenges.

SKILLS GAPS & SHORTAGES

City & Guilds published [Skills Index 2021](#), the first of a new annual report for the UK, produced with Emsi and the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC).

- Of 1,090 businesses surveyed in April:
 - 54% said they can recruit the skilled staff they need.
 - 56% face barriers to meeting skills and talent needs: 28% cited a skills mismatch between skills needed and those gained through education.
 - The top broad skills needed are industry/job specific (53%), sales or business development (48%), and leadership and management (40%).
 - The main plans for tackling skills gaps were: recruiting from within the UK (44%); training and development (42%); and recruiting apprentices or trainees (36%).
- Of 2,003 working-age adults surveyed in May:
 - 61% didn't feel they had the skills to access new opportunities in the next five years.
 - Only 9% were confident they had advanced digital skills (22% of employers say they need these); only 12% were confident they had sales & business development skills (48%) and 19% the project management skills needed (33%).
 - 30% hadn't received any formal workplace training in the last five years; 64% have not received any training in the past year.
- [Emsi's Open Skills Library](#) shows that the strongest demand for skills in April 2021 was in health & social care (up 22% from 2020) and tech skills (up 21%).
 - The top emerging skills for remote working were in telecommuting, Zoom and Microsoft 365.
- Recommendations include:
 - Five-decade careers mean that a new more radical approach to lifelong learning is needed: more bite-sized learning opportunities; a change in mindset towards self-funding training; a move to digital learning and assessment.
 - Employers, individuals and government need to contribute to the funding of lifelong learning.
 - Better use of data and a 'common language of skills' to enable future skills planning: employers need to look externally for accurate predictions about future skills needs; and better careers advice and guidance for all ages and stages.
 - Making the skills system more accessible to smaller businesses.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport published [Quantifying the UK Data Skill Gap](#), drawing on interviews with over 1k business, 5k workers and 1k students across the UK.

- 48% of businesses – mainly large – were recruiting for data roles, 12% of them for data analysts; it is likely that COVID-19 has lowered the recruitment for these roles as part of a general pause.
 - UK businesses are recruiting for an estimated 215k roles requiring hard data skills and a further 19k that require only basic IT skills.
 - Over the last two years, 46% of businesses have struggled to recruit for roles requiring data skills: 55% of large businesses, 54% of medium and 30% of small.
 - 58% of businesses think their organisation has sufficient data skills to meet current and future needs, while 14% think they don't.
- The estimated potential supply of data scientists from UK universities is unlikely to be more than 10k per year; upskilling the current workforce is therefore vital.
- 64% of employers are confident in identifying skills gaps and 57% are confident in finding resources to train; 56% preferred to develop the skills internally rather than outsource or recruit new workers.
- 60% of workers who hadn't received any data skills training said that such skills didn't add any significant value, compared to 19% of those who had received such training.
 - When data skills training was relevant to their day-to-day job, workers said it improved their productivity or innovation and reduced stress levels.
- 70% of workers were interested in data skills training and 46% said their need for data skills had increased over the past five years; however, 50% hadn't received any training in the last two years.
- 45% of students rated their current industry/sector expertise as excellent/good, while 68% expected it to be excellent/good at the end of their studies.

The OU and Be the Business published [Skills for success: Supporting business leaders with digital adoption](#), based on a survey of over 1,500 UK SME leaders. [An email address is required to access the full report.]

- 77% say they do not have the skills required to implement new technology.
 - Only 50% say they have a plan to address gaps in digital skills in the next 12 months.
- The value of technology isn't clear: only 39% believe it has a positive impact on increasing efficiency, 31% on revenue and 27% on profit margin.
- Recommendations include creating a culture of continuous learning, and recognising the power of a varied skillset in an organisation.

TechUK published [Fast Forward for Digital Jobs](#), the report of its taskforce examining the state of adult education and digital skills training.

- There is a significant discrepancy between the upsurge in demand for digitally skilled workers in areas such as coding and the opportunity to retrain in these fields for those made redundant due to COVID-19.
 - Immediate action is needed to close the growing digital skills gap with thousands of digital job vacancies remaining unfilled, even in the current job market.
 - Recent projections suggest a further 3m UK jobs requiring digital skills will be created by 2025.
- The taskforce focused on 'productive' technical skills at Level 4+ (equivalent to HNC or year one of a three-year degree):
 - **Digital skills for the modern workplace:** an intermediate level of understanding and skills that uses digital and tech effectively on a daily basis; particularly important to prepare the workforce for the augmentation of tasks within roles as tech becomes more embedded and sophisticated
 - **Higher-level technical digital skills:** specific skills that include data analysis or coding as well as digital transformations and emerging technologies such as AI and machine learning.
- Seven recommendations are made under three headings:
 - **Supporting learners:** showcase the life-changing opportunities of digital skills and jobs; champion bite-sized flexible learning; help learners meet the cost of retraining through financial assistance similar to the Lifelong Loan Entitlement and Lifetime Skills Guarantee
 - **Supporting employers:** help SMEs invest in digital reskilling through a digital skills tax credit; enable more SMEs to benefit from the apprenticeship levy; ensure providers focus on job readiness by creating partnerships with employers
 - **Delivering change at scale:** develop an online Digital Skills Toolkit 2.0 to help people navigate to digital skills and careers.

The taskforce comprised representatives from Google, Microsoft, Amazon Web Services, BT, Salesforce, Cisco, FDM Group and UKFast.

Cedefop published [Trends, Transitions and Transformation](#), exploring how the pandemic is changing skill needs and reshaping jobs, drawing on analysis of online job adverts.

- The pandemic has boosted demand for digital skills at all levels: they are quickly becoming a transversal requirement in virtually all occupations and sectors, helping workers and businesses cope with ongoing change.
 - Restrictions have shown that digital skills help companies adapt and modernise their business models.
 - During lockdowns, they have enabled business continuity in many sectors; this includes public services, as in the rapid shift to online teaching in schools and remote provision of public services.
- Digital skills equip people with technical and transversal competences, enabling them to find and keep jobs and participate actively in society, while driving the move to a greener, digital economy.
- Strengthening digital skills is a high priority across the EU, but much work remains to be done in continuing VET, especially since the lack of digital skills is particularly dramatic among adults.
- Skills intelligence needs to become more than a compass for VET and skills policymakers.
 - Smart, people-centred skills intelligence helps citizens select the upskilling or reskilling tracks that work for them, to address digital and other skill needs while shaping their careers.

The Financial Services Skills Commission and the Professional & Business Services Council published [Skills for future success: How financial, professional, and business services \[FPBS\] can address skills challenges to deliver recovery and growth in UK regions and nations](#), based on job postings and research with over 80 UK FPBS employers.

- Factors disrupting the FPBS sector include:
 - The ongoing trend of global operations and technological evolution, plus automation and digitisation
 - Increased disruption from new market entrants, putting pressure on established players to ensure their workforce has the right skills and disposition to adapt quickly
 - The 'war for talent', with firms competing for scarce skillsets within their industry and with others
 - Evolving workforce demographics, with people staying in the workforce for longer and changing roles and companies more often throughout their careers
 - The continued rise of the gig economy, giving employers more flexible talent arrangements while increasing the imperative for people to evolve their skills continually to remain relevant
 - Workplace culture and diversity being increasingly recognised as key to widening talent pools and improving the supply of skills
 - The acceleration of digital adoption in the pandemic, which has 'super-charged' many of the trends above, including driving the embrace of hybrid working and global operations, with downstream impacts on the talent supply and heightening the importance of technical skills.
- There is evidence of emerging regional* specialisation, e.g. an increase in cybersecurity roles in Northern Ireland and tax technology in Scotland.
- The location of FPBS firms can have a big impact on skills challenges, for example:
 - 50% of FPBS employers in Northern Ireland reported vacancies for professional-level roles due to skills shortages, compared to 23% in northeast England.
 - Firms in areas with large FPBS clusters are finding it more challenging to fill positions.
 - Regional challenges include: 'brain drain' due to a perceived lack of career opportunities; a more limited talent pool; lack of recognition of specialisms; lack of awareness of regional challenges; and fewer entry level roles.
 - Regions where business activity is concentrated in relatively smaller or fewer hubs face the greatest challenges in recruiting.
 - Northern Ireland (Belfast) and Wales (Cardiff) have only one major FPBS hub, which limits the ability for firms to draw on additional labour pools; firms here had the longest job advert posting duration (37 days) of any region.
- Skills gap challenges are fewer for firms with multiple offices and London-based headquarters; but for SMEs they can mean the risk of business loss.
- COVID-19 has impacted the type of vacancies, for example in Northern Ireland in 2020 there were fewer consulting operations specialists and customer service posts, and more/new cloud engineer architects and consulting director posts than in 2019.
- An eight-point plan for the sector:
 - Build a lifelong learning culture.
 - Increase supply of tech skills and digital literacy.
 - Underpin efforts to build a skilled workforce by a commitment to diversity and inclusion.
 - Enhance strategic workforce planning capabilities to identify future skills needs.
 - Support mid-career retraining through an employer-led skills brokerage service and clearer pathways into the sector.
 - Attract and retain highly skilled talent across the regions by strengthening the pipeline and locating senior roles in regions.
 - Boost the availability of skills across the regions through strategic collaborations between employers, education providers and regional government.
 - Develop regional centres of specialisation, building on existing clusters.

**For 'regions', read 'regions/nations'.*

The CITB (Construction Industry Training Board) Construction Skills Network published [The skills construction needs 2021–2025](#), providing national and regional insights for the UK, including a [separate report](#) for Northern Ireland.

- The industry will reach 2019 levels of output in 2022 – by 2025 it will need to recruit an additional 217k new workers just to meet demand.
 - Most English regions will experience an increase in workers by 2025, with East Midlands (1.7%) and West Midlands (1.4%) leading demand.
 - Scotland (1.4%), Wales (0.7%) and Northern Ireland (0.7%) are also predicted to fare well.
 - The only region forecast to see a slight decline in workforce is the North East (-0.1%).
- **For Northern Ireland:**
 - An extra 5k workers will be needed between the end of 2020 and 2025 (1.5% per year).
 - 6.7% annual average growth is forecast for private housing work and will be a key sector.
 - The strongest recruitment requirement levels are in: non-construction professional, technical, IT and other office-based staff; wood trades and interior fit out; and electrical trades.

The Chartered Institution for Further Education and St Modwen Homes published [Building the UK of the Future](#), exploring the reasons for workforce challenges in the construction industry and progress being made.

- The report makes 18 recommendations around: training; the role of business in developing the workforce; attracting talent; and retaining talent.

The Scottish Government published the [Scottish Employer Skills Survey \[ESS*\] 2020](#), based on phone interviews with 3,497 businesses between October and December.

- 11% of employers had vacancies (-9ppt on 2017); 21% were due to skills shortages (-3ppt).
- 12% of employers had a skills gap among employees (down 4ppt); the manufacturing sector had the highest density of skills gaps.
- 33% reported employee skills under-use (with qualifications/skills beyond those required) (down 2ppt); financial services had the highest proportion of the workforce underutilised (16%).
- 59% provided training in the last year; 35% provided off-the-job training (51%).
 - 26% said COVID-19 had had an impact on their training plans; 51% had provided training in response to COVID-19 in the past six months.
 - 55% of staff had received some training in the previous year (down 7ppt).
- 74% had an upskilling requirement (up 5ppt); the main reason was changing workplace practices due to COVID-19 (52%); 96% had changed working practices in some way.

**Scotland had opted out of [ESS 2019](#) covering the rest of the UK (published in October 2020, see Skills Research Digest Q4 2020, pp. 27–28), having been included since the first ESS in 2011.*

TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

The BCC published [Report of the Workplace Training & Development Commission](#), on what businesses want from UK adult skills training provision.

- Businesses consistently highlight three key principles for the skills system:
 - **Skilled people:** supporting the development of adults in the workplace to ensure they are effective in the job role and can contribute to the success of the business
 - **Flexibility:** access to high-quality, accredited and cost-effective training and development, available flexibly online, in the classroom and in the workplace
 - **Influence:** on the content, delivery and quality to ensure it meets business needs and growth aspirations.
- Recommendations are grouped in five areas:
 - **Building high-performance learning cultures:** many employers – particularly SMEs – are not yet harnessing the opportunities offered by investing in skills progression and engagement in their local business community
 - **Digital skills and innovation:** digital skills are becoming increasingly important in the workplace, but innovation is being stymied by shortages of basic and higher-level digital skills

- **Using the skills system:** employers perceive the system as unresponsive, unstable, complex and bureaucratic
- **Place-based solutions:** businesses, providers, councils and local economic stakeholders all have a role in identifying and planning for current and future local skills needs and in stimulating demand, but more trust, confidence and coordination are needed
- **Enabling employees:** to become full participants in their learning journeys, including ways to manage and record bespoke training, modular learning and achievements.

IZA published [Employers' Willingness to Invest in the Training of Temporary Workers: A discrete choice experiment](#), based on testing a theoretical framework for employers' training provision that incorporates the costs and associated benefits.

- Temporary workers participate less in training than those on permanent contracts; human resources (HR) practices are considered to be an important explanation for this difference.
- Employers are less willing to invest in temporary workers due to the shorter time horizon associated with their investment.
 - This depends on the characteristics of the training related to the expected costs and benefits.
 - It particularly holds when temporary workers do not have the prospect of a permanent contract with their current employer.
- Employers' likelihood of investing in temporary workers depends on: whether employees make a financial contribution to the training costs; whether a repayment agreement applies if workers leave the organisation prematurely; the transferability of the skills being developed.
- Similar effects are observed when looking at employers' willingness to invest in permanent workers, however, which suggests that it will be difficult to decrease the training gap between temporary and permanent workers.

Kineo, part of the City & Guilds Group, published [The role of learning in employee experience: Creating happier employees through better learning experiences](#).

- Any experience that helps employees perform better and feel better, have sharper focus in their jobs, and feel a sense of belonging, accomplishment and fulfilment is part of the new term 'employee experience' (EX).
- Shifts in the market, including the gig economy, young employee expectations and the skills gap, are driving changes in how to engage with employees.
- The report describes the main components required to develop and implement employee development plans and pathways.

The Centre for Economic Performance (CEP), London School of Economics & Political Science, published [Education and management practices](#), based on a literature review.

- The education of both managers and the workforce more generally appears to be an important driver of better management practices.
- The report examines how such relationships might be conceptualised, highlights a positive correlation between management practices and measures of local skills supply and discusses the policy implications.

AUTOMATION & AI: IMPACT ON WORK

The Enterprise Research Centre published [The effects of digital adoption due to Covid-19 on Northern Ireland SMEs performance: New empirical results](#), including findings related to skills.

- 441% of small and 46% of medium firms said that lack of digital skills was one of the main obstacles to digital technology adoption.
 - This is in line with recent OECD research that concludes that skills should be at the core of the policy response to the pandemic.
- The data also indicate that cyber risk (48%) and engagement of employees with new technology (39%) are concerns for medium-sized firms, although less so for small firms (29%/27%).
- 'Internal readiness' in the shape of digital skills and a technology adoption strategy has a positive effect on performance.

- However, during the pandemic, adoption has been motivated more by external factors: the challenges from public health and social distancing regulations; the adoption of technology by competitors; and firms' perceptions of how digital technology would support their operations.
- It is likely that the pandemic has accelerated the pace of digital technology adoption and, while this could be advantageous, it is crucial to strengthen internal capabilities in order to ensure that the maximum benefit can be taken in terms of business performance.

The World Economic Forum, with Deloitte, published [Technology Futures: Projecting the possible, navigating what's next](#), aiming to provide the tools to more accurately imagine the future of information, locality, economics and education.

- It combines insights from the history of computing, the practical lens of futurism and the imaginative signposts offered by four fictional stories of life in 2030-something.
- Chapter by chapter it:
 - identifies the themes that have characterised the development of modern information technology
 - introduces a novel methodology for projecting these historical insights forward, towards foresight
 - marries this research with speculative fiction that offer a vision of the future through the lens of information/locality/the economy/education
 - considers the 'so what?' and the 'now what?'
 - offers actions on the insights and foresight critical to tomorrow's leaders.

SKILLS POLICY

The 5% Club – an employer group committed to supporting at least 5% of their employees earning and learning – published [A manifesto for skills across a lifetime of 'Earning & Learning'](#); five policy interventions are proposed:

- A **unified national approach (UNA) for skills**, including: a cross-Whitehall skills taskforce; a centralised employment & skills hub for employers; work with the devolved administrations to simplify and harmonise policy where possible.
- A **more targeted application of the apprenticeship levy**, including: create a simpler, more employer-friendly system; ease time limitations for spending and introduce greater flexibility in how it can be used.
- Drive **'levelling up' through a lifetime of learning**, including: fully integrate England's new National Skills Fund into the UNA and accelerate its roll-out; harness the synergy between professional development and personal learning; support the creation of career pathways that anticipate multiple learning interventions across a career – upskilling, reskilling and new skilling.
- Pursue **equality of access to the right workplace for all**, including: facilitate a national regime of virtual and accessible work experience and training; revitalise the Level 2 apprenticeship; work with employers to create a national assessment framework of employability skills.
- Create **genuine parity of esteem across all education and career pathways**, including: expedite the plans for England's Lifelong Loan Entitlement; improve the quality, relevance and impartiality of careers advice in schools; consider a review and radical reform of FE provision.

The Centre for Progressive Policy (CPP) published [Skill up to level up: Reducing place-based skills inequality to tackle rising unemployment](#) in England, using a new model of employment.

- A 1ppt fall in the share of local residents without a formal qualification is associated with a 0.26ppt increase in the employment rate; in the most deprived areas, the increase rises to 0.33ppt.
 - If the share without any formal qualifications was reduced in every area to the rate seen in the top 10% of local authorities, employment in England would increase by an estimated 573k.
- The employment cost appears to be concentrated in the most deprived 20% of local authorities, where tackling basic skills inequality could boost employment by up to 302k.
 - In two of the most deprived areas of England, more than 20% of the local working-age population lack any formal qualifications; this compares to 3% in the least deprived areas.
- The employment cost is greatest in towns/cities with a large working-age population and low skills.

The Edge Foundation published [Perspectives on National Occupational Standards \[NOS\]: What do users think?](#).

- The research was undertaken for the NOS Governance Group, comprising representatives of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.
- NOS specify the standard of performance an individual must achieve when carrying out a function in the workplace, plus the knowledge and understanding they need to meet that standard consistently.
 - To be fit for purpose, NOS must address requirements concerned with: technical skills and knowledge; managing the work process and environment; working relationships.
 - NOS cover not only what someone must do, but the outcomes they must achieve.
- The rapid pace of change, complexity of emerging technologies and the broader impacts of the fourth industrial revolution, coupled with the fall-out from COVID-19, mean that there will be challenges for governments in taking forward the NOS system.
 - There will be a need to think strategically, adopt 'agile' governance, continuously adapt to new, fast-changing environments and collaborate closely with business and civil society to be in a position to reflect common objectives and values and shape a future that works for all.
- In looking at the desirability and viability of different futures for NOS, consideration is needed on:
 - the balance between potential advantages and disadvantages, and for whom
 - the level of support likely from the respective governments and stakeholders
 - the scope for change given other policy priorities
 - the practical/financial implications for each nation, their partners and NOS users
 - the availability of the necessary funding and resources to deliver what is required.

Robert Gordon University published a [UK Offshore Energy Workforce Transferability Review](#).

- The UK's energy sector is being fundamentally re-shaped due to COVID-19, the energy transition, technology and innovation and changing industry dynamics; there is significant scope to turn the UK into an 'offshore powerhouse'.
- Over 90% of the UK's oil & gas workforce have medium to high skills transferability.
 - 'Workforce transferability' refers to people who change roles within the sector, with either fully or partially transferable skills (subject to induction and training requirements).
 - For workforce transferability to be applicable, the skills need to be required, the jobs need to be available and there needs to be sufficient financial incentive to move between energy sectors.
- In 2030 it is projected that:
 - ~200k people are likely to be needed for offshore wind, hydrogen, carbon capture & storage and ongoing oil & gas projects (up from ~160k in 2021).
 - ~80% of jobs in the sector will be in/as: operations; technicians; engineering; projects; finance; HR; commercial/business development/marketing; procurement/supply management; health, safety & sustainability.
 - ~50% of jobs will be filled by those transferring from existing UK sector jobs, new graduates and recruits from outwith the sector.
 - ~65% of jobs in the sector will be in offshore renewables (up from 20% in 2021).

Skillnet Ireland published [Cybersecurity Skills Development Strategy](#), a review to identify the future cybersecurity skill requirements for the RoI based on research from September to December 2020 including a literature review, expert interviews and an online survey.

- The report details the qualitative and quantitative needs of the target audience and critiques existing cybersecurity programmes and training providers.
- The key factors influencing the demand for cyber skills include:
 - The skills required to manage and deliver safe cyber environments are continuously evolving due to the changing nature, scale and attack surface of cyber intrusions.
 - There is a low take-up of the implementation of standards and global best practices for cybersecurity, meaning that the sector remains at a relatively low level of capability maturity.
 - The level of investment in training for cyber skills is relatively low in comparison to other ICT disciplines.

- There is a perception that people outside the cyber functions have a relatively weak understanding of the value of cyber investment, creating a challenge in quantifying the value of cybersecurity.
- The perception that there is a skills gap and a shortage of resources is shaping job design, training needs analysis and recruitment practice decisions.
- The value chain ecosystem for the cybersecurity sector is complex with a diverse set of enterprise, government and vendor stakeholders – addressing solutions for cyber skilling requires an integrated and joined-up approach from all stakeholders.
- Enterprises need support with upskilling and cross-skilling cyber resources, including:
 - Skilled resources, and job-ready resources in particular
 - Support with the design and provision of cyber skill training programmes
 - Improvements in the ease of using internships and apprenticeships
 - Assistance with identifying and deploying best practices for training in cybersecurity.
- Other findings include:
 - The sector is well-served by online training providers globally.
 - In the RoI, there is a strong demand for advanced training in cybersecurity; most cybersecurity teams are small albeit often part of a global operation, and many face competition from lower labour cost countries; most cyber jobs are mid-tier.
 - If entry level roles continue to be staffed in overseas locations, the sector will always have a challenge to grow the scale and scope of the overall talent pool; automation does not remove the need to have a career path that includes entry-level positions.

The CBI (Confederation of British Industry) published [Skills and training for the green economy](#), its submission to the UK Government's Green Jobs Taskforce.

- Three challenges apply to all sectors of the green economy:
 - A lack of public awareness – without a stronger brand, individuals are less likely to consider career opportunities in home efficiency, automotive and clean power sectors.
 - Transitioning into changing industries and new jobs – industry will have a major role in preparing their workforces for change, including upskilling; however, some people will leave rather than retrain, and new workers with better matched skills will join.
 - Stability and direction of government policy.
- Six recommendations on careers advice and training support, and on developing new quality industry standards, include:
 - Government should introduce support for training and careers guidance through 'jobs and skills hubs' targeted at the sectors and regions where jobs are at risk.
 - Government should develop further content on the Skills Toolkit that supports the development of skills pathways into green industries.
 - Employers should work with the Careers & Enterprise Company to promote 'green' career paths, linking with schools and colleges to offer support for all young people in growing green sectors.
 - Government should bring forward its 2025 delivery goal for the Lifetime Skills Guarantee to provide the training needed in priority green sectors and help meet decarbonisation targets.
 - The National Skills Fund must provide the skills and training for individuals in and out of employment and support transitions into new green jobs.

The recommendations are mainly for England, but are of wider interest.

Cedefop published [Digital, greener and more resilient: Insights from Cedefop's European skills forecast](#).

- It reports on highlights emerging from several skills forecast scenarios, with the aim of inspiring creative, holistic thinking about how headline VET and skills policy priorities will best be implemented in the years ahead.
- In some respects, the realities emerging post-COVID appear to accelerate and reinforce megatrends rather than being game-changing: the growing importance of the service sector; increasing automation/digitisation; and growing labour market polarisation towards high-skilled jobs.
 - Such trends are accompanied by a growing demand for high-level skills that need to be acquired by an ageing population.

- Skills policies should be designed around the double ambition of: helping higher skilled workers to develop the capacity to stay current in, and shape the future of, work; and assisting those in automatable jobs to make transitions towards work with better and in many cases greener prospects.
 - Insights into the type of jobs likely to disappear is just as important as understanding skills needs in jobs, and the new jobs themselves emerging thanks to AI or other technological advancements.
- The systematic approach offered by skills forecasts remains relevant in an increasingly dynamic and disruptive world.
 - However, it is crucial to combine them with other types of labour market intelligence such as surveys, real-time labour market information and the increasingly favoured skills foresight.

Cedefop published three practical guides to understanding technological change and skill needs.

- The guides aim to inform analysts and policymakers about available skills anticipation methods used to navigate the uncertainty of changing technologies and skill demands; they focus on:
 - Guide 1: [Skills surveys and skills forecasting](#)
 - Guide 2: [Big data and artificial intelligence methods](#)
 - Guide 3: [Technology and skill foresight](#).

ADULT & LIFELONG LEARNING

National Numeracy published [Counting on the recovery: The role for numeracy skills in 'levelling up' the UK](#).

- OECD data suggest that 57% of the working-age population in England and 60% in Northern Ireland have low numeracy skills, with other sources suggesting broadly similar levels in Wales and Scotland.
 - This is below the OECD average, and well behind leading countries such as Japan (36%).
 - An estimated 16m workers in the UK have low numeracy skills and are currently earning around 6.5% less than they could if they had a basic level of numeracy – nearly £1,600 less per year.
 - 59% of those who have lost their jobs so far in the pandemic are likely to have low numeracy skills, the equivalent of 560,000 people.
- The right investments in numeracy skills could both support those who have lost jobs back into employment and provide the foundations for a stronger path for future growth, as well as playing a valuable part in the levelling up agenda.
 - The North East, West Midlands and Yorkshire & the Humber have an estimated average of 64% of working-age adults with low numeracy skills compared to a UK national average of 58%; the average wage in those regions is 12% below UK average – £3,400 per worker.
- All parts of society have a role to play in improving adult numeracy skills.
 - Government – working with learning providers, local businesses and charities – should consider how number confidence and basic skills development can be integrated into the support for unemployed people, with a particular focus on low-wage areas.
 - Businesses can help to build the skills necessary for a resilient and adaptable workforce, both for their own staff and the communities they operate in.
 - Individuals should consider accessing opportunities to develop their number confidence and numeracy skills to thrive within an ever-changing global economy.

The OECD published [Skills Outlook 2021: Learning for Life](#), providing insights into how countries can best support lifelong learning for all and individuals' ability to learn how to learn, with particular reference to the impact of the pandemic.

- In the short term, the pandemic could lead to increases in early school leavers.
 - In the medium and long term, lower engagement could result in the current generation of students failing to develop positive learning attitudes, at a time of profound structural changes that will require individuals to upgrade their skills throughout their life.
- Reductions in rates of those who are NEET result in less disparity in achievement and intergenerational transmission of educational advantages.
 - High-quality orientation programmes (including internships and job shadowing) informing school-aged children about FE and the labour market can reduce NEET rates.

- Creating stronger connections between schools and the labour market could be especially important post pandemic, not only to reduce the number of school leavers who will become NEET, but also to ensure that youngsters understand changing workplace requirements.
- The pandemic caused major disruptions in the provision of HE programmes and VET, potentially creating difficulties during the transition from compulsory schooling into young adulthood and compounding the risk of low investment in adult learning.
 - Pandemic-related measures have had a large direct and indirect effect on participation in adult learning among those willing to participate.
- Evidence from online job vacancy data reveals that communication, teamwork and organisational skills are among the transversal skills most frequently demanded by employers.
 - Cognitive skills, such as analytical, problem solving, digital, leadership and presentation skills are also highly transversal across jobs and work contexts.
- While the pandemic heightened the importance of building skills related to resilience to change, evidence shows that the labour market returns associated with transversal skills can vary depending on how they bundle with other skills and across job roles.
 - Employers should be supported in providing effective lifelong learning to their employees so that they can develop the right mix of transversal and technical skills that they need to thrive.
 - The most frequently demanded transversal skills are communication, teamwork and organisational skills; analytical, problem solving, digital, leadership and presentation skills are also highly transversal.
- The effect of the pandemic on jobs is likely going to interact with existing structural changes such as digitalisation and population ageing, reshaping the demand for digital skills and occupations in the healthcare sector.
 - Similarly, planned investments in green technologies and renewable energy are likely to increase the demand for specialists, potentially creating skill gaps that lifelong learning systems will be called to fill.

Key recommendations

- **Place learners at the centre of learning:** diversified learning opportunities can enhance the quality of education and training and can also empower individuals to make relevant choices, sustaining their motivation for lifelong learning.
 - Policy design must be inclusive, affordable, accessible and adaptable.
- **Skills for a lifetime:** lifelong learning rests on strong foundation skills, the willingness to learn and a habit of learning, all vital to navigating changing labour market needs and life circumstances.
 - Policies should harness the power of technology, but do so considering the effects technology can have on existing skills inequalities and the creation of new ones.
- **Strong coordination** is needed to support learning providers in developing high-quality, inclusive learning.
 - Policies should build strong coordination, knowledge management and information sharing in order to bring innovative initiatives to scale.
 - Policies should also be aimed at improving recognition, validation and accreditation procedures to enhance the visibility and transferability of the skills taught in these programmes.
 - Partnerships across different actors should be promoted to create synergies and maximise learning opportunities.

Learning & Work Institute (L&W) and Nesta published [Using Labour Market Data to Support Adults to Plan for their Future Career: Experience from the CareerTech Challenge](#).

- The CareerTech Challenge, launched in 2019, supported 31 innovators to develop new solutions to help people find rewarding future careers.
 - 20 were focused on connecting people digitally with data-driven information, advice and guidance to help them identify: their own skills and those needed for a rapidly changing labour market; local jobs; pathways that would enable them to prepare for and secure new, future-proof roles.
- The research explored the process of building these solutions; among the findings:
 - The most common challenge was the accessibility of labour market data, including: poor communication from public data holders on content; financial barriers; issues with usability and

format; inconsistencies in terminology; absent and incomplete data; limited local-level, jobseeker and 'live' data.

- Creative approaches to overcoming barriers included using local-level data sourced directly from local employers, organisations and training providers.
 - Users engaged well with solutions that provided tailored advice and guidance, e.g. that collected personal information about current circumstances and existing skills, qualifications and experience.
 - Developers who secured buy-in from careers advisors, providers and local stakeholders developed better solutions; those who worked in partnership with key local organisations found it easier to pilot their tools.
- The report includes seven considerations to inform future decisions on how to design, develop and implement effective labour market, data-driven solutions.

Nesta has launched a number of initiatives that aim to fill gaps in the UK's supply of labour market information, including creating an [Open Jobs Observatory](#) providing insights on skill demands drawn from online job adverts; it is currently developing a methodology for tagging green jobs.

McKinsey & Co published [Defining the skills citizens will need in the future world of work](#), based on a survey of 18k people in 15 countries between July and October 2019.

- Governments are keen to help their citizens to develop, but it is hard to devise curricula and the best learning strategies without being more precise about the skills needed.
- In a labour market that is more automated, digital and dynamic, all citizens – no matter their occupation or sector – will benefit from having a set of foundational skills that help them:
 - add value beyond what can be done by automated systems and intelligent machines
 - operate in a digital environment
 - continually adapt to new ways of working and new occupations.
- Under four broad categories – cognitive, digital, interpersonal and self-leadership – 13 separate skill groups were identified, and then 56 'distinct elements of talent' (DELTAs) that fall within them, e.g.:
 - Category: cognitive; skill group: critical thinking; DELTAs: structured problem solving, logical reasoning, understanding biases, seeking relevant information.
 - Two further pieces of research sought to gauge: the current level of proficiency in the 56 DELTAs compared to the level required to future-proof the ability to work; and whether proficiency in these DELTAs was already associated with certain work-related outcomes.
- The top three DELTAs in which proficiency predicts better outcomes in three key areas are:
 - **Employment**: synthesising messages; coping with uncertainty; adaptability
 - **High income**: self-confidence; work-plan development; organisational awareness
 - **Job satisfaction**: self-confidence; coping with uncertainty; self-motivation and wellness.
- Governments should:
 - Review and **update national education curricula** to focus more strongly on the DELTAs, as well as leading further research to define progression and proficiency levels and design developmental strategies and assessment models for each DELTA
 - **Reform adult training** including: using AI algorithms to guide users on skills assessment and shortlist relevant training programmes; introduce skill-based certification; encourage a greater focus on DELTAs
 - Ensure universal, high-quality, affordable **access to lifelong education**.

OLDER WORKERS

COVID-related

The Centre for Ageing Better and the IES published [Working well? How the pandemic changed work for people with health conditions](#) and [The impact of COVID-19 on older workers with long-term health conditions \[LTCs\]](#), based on research during the first year of the pandemic.

- The pandemic has not only widened the disability and the age employment gaps, but also the gap between those in good and bad employment.

- Employers who were already supportive of workers' health stepped up during the crisis, but those who were not supportive continued to fail to the detriment of already vulnerable employees.
- Changes for older workers during the pandemic include: working remotely was often a positive change, but not for everyone; jobseekers with LTCs were worried about the rise of ageism and ableism in a competitive job market; many had an opportunity to reflect on their future.
- Numerous recommendations include:
 - For government: ensure that England's Plan for Jobs works for older and disabled workers, by setting service standards for both; increase the pace of reforms to improve access to occupational health.
 - For employers: actively try to learn from the natural experiment of mass remote working; invest in line-management training now, e.g. on how to talk about health at work; confront ageism and age-bias in recruitment processes.

The Resolution Foundation published [A U-shaped crisis: The impact of the Covid-19 crisis on older workers](#)*.

- The last 50 years have seen two distinct periods of change in employment among older adults:
 - 1970s to mid-1990s: employment fell, mainly among older men, due to the changing sectoral composition of the economy and government policies that explicitly discouraged their employment.
 - 1990s onwards: strong increases, mainly among older women, boosted since 2010 by increases in the female state pension age.
- In 2019, employment of those aged 50–64 was at 73%, higher than at any point since 1975; employment rates have since fallen by 2ppt among both men and women in their 50s.
 - The impact on women has been worse than any of the major crises dating back to the 1980s, while for men it has been similar so far to the crises of the 1980s and 1990s.
 - Among those employed in February 2020, 35% of 60–65s surveyed were either no longer working by January 2021, were furloughed or were earning at least 10% less than in February 2020; among 18–25s it was 41%; 40–44s 20%.
 - There is also a U-shape when it comes to furloughing, and to some extent when comparing changes in employment and unemployment across age groups.
- Older workers who lose their jobs tend to: take longer to return to work; earn substantially less than previously when they do return; change their retirement decisions, although not necessarily because they are forced to.
- Policymakers should:
 - Prioritise ensuring that older workers are supported to return to work and are offered the same quality of service as younger unemployed people
 - Pilot and evaluate a tax credit supplement for older returners, as under the New Deal 50+ programme in the 2000s
 - Continue to support employment growth for older workers; give them the right to request flexible working from day one; offer a right to return to those who take time off due to caring responsibilities or ill health.

**Mostly people aged 50+, but some data refer to 55+ or those aged 50–state pension age.*

Other research

The Centre for Ageing Better and the Behavioural Insights Team published [Ads for all ages: How age-biased are job adverts in the UK, and what can we do about it?](#), part of the Good Recruitment for Older Workers (GROW) project.

- Most words/phrases in adverts did not significantly affect candidates' likelihood to apply, but some (e.g. 'innovative', 'adaptable') affected their perceptions of how successful their application would be.
- Younger-age stereotypical words (e.g. 'dynamic') are more commonly used in real job adverts than older-age stereotypical words (e.g. 'knowledgeable').
 - None of the words/phrases that positively attracted older jobseekers deterred younger jobseekers.
- The inclusion of benefits such as generous pension contributions and flexible working opportunities, was associated with a higher stated likelihood of older jobseekers applying.

- 45–54s were more attracted to flexible working opportunities than the wider group of all over 45s.
- Research shows that offering flexible working arrangements increases applications by up to 30%.

The IFS published [Changing patterns of work at older ages](#), funded by the Centre for Ageing Better.

- With around 10m (61%) of 50–69 year-olds in paid work, this age group comprised 31% of the UK workforce in 2019, up from 21% in 1992.
- At the end of April 2021, 14% of workers aged 65+ were furloughed, compared with 10% of 40–49s.
 - 50–60s are likely to face significant challenges finding new jobs after the end of furlough.
 - They usually lack recent job search experience and are less likely to change occupation, which may be necessary as the economy adjusts to new working and spending patterns after the pandemic.
- Those with lower levels of education, the long-term unemployed and women are particularly less likely to re-enter work at older ages after becoming unemployed.
- 16% of 50–69s in employment would like to work fewer hours, up from around 14% prior to the Great Recession – an increase of around 230k.
 - For some, part-time work acts as a way of making a gradual transition towards retirement but it is more common among people with higher levels of education and living in less deprived areas.
- Only 9% of older employees become self-employed in the run-up to retirement; self-employment is more likely among men and those with a history of self-employment earlier in life.
- 50% of full-time workers move straight into non-working retirement, without any intermediate steps, particularly members of defined benefit pension schemes, which are common in the public sector.
- Around 7% of older workers in 2019 wanted to work more hours per week, higher than the 5% seen in 2007 before the financial crisis.
 - They tend to have less secure work arrangements, lower earnings and shorter job tenures, be in their 50s rather than their 60s, be men and be working part time.
- Around 39% of workers aged 50–69 report a long-standing health problem, making them less likely to stay in paid work and significantly more likely to retire via a period out of the labour market.
 - Some may have preferred and been able to stay in work with more flexibility or better support.
- In future, those approaching retirement are increasingly likely to be in more stressful and more cognitively demanding jobs; making sure appropriate flexible work options are available should be a particular priority.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF WORK

COVID-related

The BCC published [findings](#) from an April 2021 survey of over 900 UK firms exploring their approaches to flexible working during the pandemic.

- Remote working was the most common form (66%), followed by flexitime or staggered hours (38%), part-time hours (36%) and working from different locations (32%).
 - 54% of those offering business-to-consumer (B2C) services, such as hospitality and retail, could offer remote working, compared with 80% of those offering business-to-business (B2B) services, such as finance and law.
 - 21% of manufacturers and B2C service firms were not able to offer any of the flexible working options proposed, in comparison to only 7% of B2B service businesses.
- Barriers to remote working include: mental health and wellbeing (55%); the need for face-to-face contact with staff or customers (41%); the need to operate equipment (33%); fairness to staff whose roles cannot be performed remotely (30%); monitoring productivity (28%); internet connectivity (26%); and IT issues (24%).
- 72% of firms will have at least one member of staff working remotely over the next 12 months, and expect an average of 53% of their workforce to be working at least some of their hours remotely.
- Only 15% offered all jobs flexibly as standard, only 8% job sharing and 7% self-rostering of shifts.

Timewise Foundation published [The impact of Covid-19 on part-time employees: How they've been affected and why they must be included in the jobs recovery](#), the first in its Fair Flexible Futures series, based on Labour Force Survey research from the IES.

- The two-tier labour market between flexible 'haves' and 'have-nots' existed before COVID-19.
 - The flexible 'haves' were able to work flexibly and part time, often in professional roles, with autonomy over working time and location.
 - The 'have-nots' were often in poor-quality, poorly paid part-time work, with little autonomy.
 - As a result of the pandemic, this gulf is widening.
- There is an opportunity – and a necessity – to harness the momentum of the flexible work revolution to influence change: it must be systemic, involving policymakers and employers and all forms of flexible work.
- Recommendations include:
 - Government to include the right to request flexible work in the Employment Bill; and all levels of government to offer incentives for flexible job creation and progression opportunities.
 - Employers to embed fair flexible work across their organisations.

Other research

The BCC, supported by Barclays LifeSkills, published [The Next Normal: Futureproofing the Workforce for a Post-Pandemic World](#), drawing on online discussions with BCC members.

- The following workforce challenges have been created by COVID-19:
 - **Adjustment to a new working environment:** some customer relationships became more demanding, and managing employees remotely was not straightforward, with widespread concern about employee fatigue; but new processes were introduced in response.
 - **Increased incidence of employee wellbeing and mental health issues,** including isolation and loneliness among remote workers; managers were reported as being emotionally drained from dealing with wellbeing and mental health concerns; some businesses provided staff training in mental health awareness.
 - **How to communicate effectively** about job security or queries that would normally have been resolved easily in an office environment; many businesses used social networking and messaging platforms to support communication both with and within their workforce.
- Businesses expect to manage their workforces differently in the future:
 - **The workplace will evolve:** there are many benefits to having employees in one place, including training, the creation of ideas and cultivating a positive workplace culture; however, remote working offers opportunities to recruit from further afield and to allow more flexible working.
 - **Training priorities may shift:** digital capability is becoming increasingly important to business competitiveness and success; employee wellbeing and mental health is not well understood, making it likely to feature more prominently in future training plans; more learning content will move online.
 - **A focus on the workforce's next generation:** early engagement with young people is crucial to the development of employability skills; work experience is important, but many businesses don't have the resource to offer it; generalising about the role of young people in the workforce can be problematic – they may be more adept at using some digital technology, but not always specialised digital software; winning the war for talent requires a deep understanding of what potential employees want from their employer.

A blueprint is set out of the skills and capabilities that will be needed to thrive post pandemic.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD) published [Flexible working: Lessons from the pandemic – From the 'nature' of the work to the design of work](#) based on interviews with 32 senior managers between October and January and a UK survey of 2,133 decision-makers.

- 63% of employers planned to introduce or expand the use of hybrid working, depending on the needs of the job, the individual and the team, and the team working practices.
- 38% of respondents said productivity was unchanged as a result of lockdown homeworking, while 33% said it had improved.

- 34% said they had created new ways to collaborate with IT tools, while 23% said it had resulted in IT upskilling.
- 46% said employee wellbeing improved through avoiding the commute, and 39% through greater flexibility of hours.
 - Inclusion for those with a disability or illness or working in distributed teams could improve, due to the normalisation of using technology.
- Seven strategies that teams and their managers can use to make a success of hybrid working:
 - Develop the skills and culture needed for open conversations about wellbeing.
 - Encourage boundary setting and routines to improve wellbeing and prevent overwork.
 - Ensure effective coordination of tasks and task-related communication.
 - Pay special attention to creativity, brainstorming and problem solving tasks.
 - Build in time, including face-to-face time, for team cohesion and organisational belonging.
 - Facilitate networking and inter-team relationships.
 - Organise a wider support network to compensate for the loss of informal learning.

CIPD published [Flexible Working, Teleworking and Diversity: An evidence review](#), exploring the extent to which flexible working arrangements (FWAs) support inclusion and diversity.

- The idea that FWAs help individuals manage work and family responsibilities is based on two social theories:
 - **Resource theory** suggests that work–family conflict occurs when the demands of work drain the resources needed to meet the demands of home life, or vice versa: FWAs enable employees to better balance their resources for both domains; this is thought to support diversity because FWAs are particularly beneficial for those with greater family responsibility, such as parents.
 - **Social exchange theory** suggests that people feel a desire to help and give back to those who have done the same to them: employees who receive the benefit of FWAs may be more likely to reciprocate in the form of greater commitment and engagement to their organisation.
- FWAs and teleworking have small positive effects on diversity and perceived inclusion.
 - Creating an environment in which employees have the autonomy and freedom to work in a more varied manner to suit their needs is a worthwhile inclusion and diversity intervention.

A scientific summary is also available at the same link.

The RSA (Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures & Commerce) published [Good work innovations in Europe: Reimagining the social contract](#), findings from a literature review, secondary data analysis and horizon-scanning, as part of its Future Work Programme.

- Automation risk varies considerably across Europe and several growth industries over the last decade are resilient to automation, including hi-tech and 'hi-touch' sectors such as leisure and social care.
 - However, industries such as hospitality and logistics have seen strong growth despite being at high risk; the fastest shrinking industries have been mining and oil & gas extraction, due to a transition to renewable energy.
 - Younger workers are consistently identified as most at risk of automation, while women are missing out on some of the best paid hi-tech roles.
- COVID-19 could lead to: job losses in industries such as tourism and the creative arts; e-commerce replacing high street jobs; remote working reducing the need for cleaners and security; economic rebalancing away from major cities.
- In recent decades, the social contract between workers and businesses has frayed, as non-standard work has become more prevalent in many parts of Europe.
 - Self-employed workers have been some of the hardest hit during the pandemic and government support measures were in many cases introduced later and were subject to greater conditionality.
- 200 innovations are mapped around three broad themes and clustered into broad 'intervention sets' that use similar approaches to address similar problems:
 - **Skills, training & lifelong learning:** online learning; peer learning networks; technology bootcamps; augmented learning; digital credentials and skills profiles; digital career coaching
 - **Economic security:** income smoothing and cash flow management; financial capability and wellbeing; insurance as an employment protection; umbrella cooperatives; fairer gig platforms

- **Worker voice and power:** new organising models and expanded membership offerings; new kinds of collective agreements; worker data and digital organising platforms; platform cooperatives; cooperative federations.

CEPS (Centre for European Policy Studies) published [Digital labour platforms \[DLPs\] in the EU: Mapping and business models](#), aiming to improve the data on platform work.

- The number of DLPs active in the 27 EU member states (EU27) increased from 463 in 2016 to 516 in March 2021.
 - Net growth has slowed significantly due to fewer launches and an increase in DLPs becoming unviable or merging/being acquired.
- However, the DLP economy has increased five-fold in the same period, to around €14b; most offer taxi and food delivery services, both of which have been strongly impacted by COVID-19.
- The earnings of those working through platforms have increased 2.5 times in the period, to €6.3b, 50% of which is earned by those active on the top five DLPs (predominantly taxis and food delivery); individuals' total earnings are estimated to have decreased due to COVID-19.
 - Around 92% can be classified as self-employed, with the remainder on full-time, part-time, temporary agency and zero-hours contracts.
- 23% of active DLPs (49% of earnings) are platforms originating outside the EU27, although those intermediating on-location services mostly have an EU office.
 - 6% of active DLPs are not-for-profits such as cooperatives.
- Around 90% are on-location services (taxi and delivery, home services, etc.); online services account for the remaining work (less than 10% in terms of earnings).
 - Low and medium skills account for almost 90% of the intermediated work.
- 75% of DLPs depend on commissions as their primary revenue source, mostly cut from the payment to the service deliverer; some require the worker or the client to pay a subscription fee.
- The WES (work, employment and social dimensions) model is used to assess working conditions:
 - **Work:** around 75% of workers have low autonomy; direction (from the platform or the client) is common; many platforms seek to control workers' behaviour; ratings from client are a significant element; allocation and evaluation of work is often executed through an algorithm
 - **Employment:** as an intermediary, DLPs shift most of the costs, risks and liabilities to others; less than 5% of earnings are based on a work contract; only 3% of earnings are locked into an agreed working time and exclusivity of service is rare; workers rarely receive social protection; termination decisions are often made by an algorithm with dispute resolution mechanisms rare
 - **Social:** workers are often isolated, making collective bargaining a challenge; most DLPs have no stipulation as to collective representation rights; around 66% of workers have access to some measures to prevent discrimination and promote equity.

CESifo published [Covid-19, Working from Home and the Potential Reverse Brain Drain](#).

- The pandemic has forced entrepreneurs and workers around the world to rapidly adopt new communication and organisational technologies and tools that allow them to work from home.
 - At the same time, the stigma of working from home has considerably diminished, which may lead to system and lasting changes in the culture of working.
- For some occupations, working from home may become the new normal and physical presence at the workplace may be reduced to a bare minimum; others will adopt a hybrid model.
 - With the need to commute reduced, some workers may decide to move to a different country, particularly skilled white-collar migrants who have moved country for professional reasons but would prefer to return to their country of origin.
 - Considering only migrants from Europe or the European periphery, this 'reverse drain' is estimated at up to 3m white-collar workers, mostly from the EU15* countries and most of them working in the UK, France, Switzerland and Germany.
- This could have a number of important implications, including returning migrants: raising their and their loved ones' wellbeing; continuing to earn their income in their destination country, with a large part of their consumption in the home country; exerting a positive influence, known as 'social/cultural remittances'; participating in professional networks in their home country.

- The home countries of these migrants could implement policies incentivising the return of their bright teleworkers, in order to enjoy the above benefits.

**Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, RoI, Spain, Sweden, UK.*

CEPS published [Towards a resilient and sustainable post-pandemic recovery](#), setting out the main findings from its Task Force for a New Industrial Strategy for Europe.

- With Industry 4.0 anchored to pre-existing business models and organisational forms, the 'North Star' of Europe's post-pandemic recovery should be 'Industry 5.0', currently under development.
 - It recognises companies as working communities and that worker wellbeing has multiple dimensions.
 - Impacts are achieved on three main fronts: building a human-centric industry focused on wellbeing; fostering sustainability from an economic, social and environmental perspective; enhancing resilience.
 - An Industry 5.0 approach avoids unsustainable forms of capitalism that award uncontested 'shareholder primacy'; a new enterprise model should be explicitly based on fairness, resilience and sustainability.

EMPLOYMENT: RIGHTS, RESPONSIBILITIES & WAGES

COVID-related

The Resolution Foundation published [Low Pay Britain 2021](#), looking at the impact of COVID-19 and the implications for low-paid workers as the economy starts to recover.

- The 2016 National Living Wage drove a rapid rise in the minimum wage, resulting in the proportion of low-paid workers – earning less than 66% of median hourly pay – falling from 21% to 15% in 2019.
 - It fell again to 14% in 2020, although this might be due to job losses being concentrated among lower paid workers, thereby pushing up average pay levels.
 - However, the proportion of workers in low weekly pay is 28% and has only fallen by 2ppt since 2015, showing that the number of hours worked is as important as the hourly rate of pay.
- Low-paid workers have been the worst affected by COVID-related restrictions on the sectors they work in, so should benefit most from re-opening.
- Overall **furloughing** rates fell from 16% at the end of February to 15% at the end of March and 12% at the end of April; hospitality rates fell from 58% at the end of March to 48% at the end of April.
 - The limited data shows that 34% of previously furloughed workers were still furloughed in March, rising to 38% among those in the bottom pay quintile compared to 17% in the highest paid.
 - 12% of previously furloughed workers had started a new job, including 7% who had changed sector; the figures for the lowest paid are 18%/14%.
- There are risks ahead for low-paid workers, particularly rising unemployment later in the year and a deterioration in the quality of work and compliance with labour market rights.

CIPD published its 21st [Health & Wellbeing at Work](#) report, based on responses from 668 UK HR professionals gathered from November to December 2020.

- 27% of organisations are 'much more reactive than proactive' on health and wellbeing, down from 41%, but the proportion with a formal wellbeing strategy is still only 50% (albeit up by 6ppt).
- Most organisations are taking additional measures to support employee health and wellbeing in response to COVID-19, most commonly through an increased focus on mental health, tailoring support to individuals' needs, and providing additional support for people working from home.
- 77% believe their organisation actively promotes good mental wellbeing (+19ppt), although just 50% believe it is effective in tackling workplace stress or in identifying and managing the mental health risks arising from COVID-19.
 - 84% have observed 'presenteeism' over the past 12 months, both in the workplace (75%) and while working at home (77%); 70% have observed some form of 'leaveism', such as working outside contracted hours or using holiday entitlement to work.

- Around 60% say their organisation has a supportive framework to recruit, manage or retain people with a disability and/or long-term health condition; just 40% collect some form of data or information on workforce disability.
- Mental ill health remains the most common cause of both long-term and short-term absence followed by musculoskeletal injuries and stress.

The TUC (Trades Union Congress) published [Workers' experiences of long Covid](#), findings from a poll of 3,500 people who had had COVID-19.

- 3,300 self-reported as having long COVID, 79% of them key workers.
 - 29% had been experiencing symptoms for 12 months or more – the period of time usually used to define a 'long-term' impact under the disability provisions of the Equality Act.
- 52% had experienced some form of discrimination or disadvantage at work, with 19% having their employer question the impact of their symptoms and 13% facing questions about whether they actually had long COVID.
 - 18% said that the amount of sick leave they had been forced to take had triggered absence management or HR processes, and 9% had used up all their sick leave and had been told they would face negative consequences if they took more.
 - 5% had been forced out of their jobs.

Nottingham University Business School and Warwick Institute for Employment Research published [Carrying the work burden of the COVID-19 pandemic: Working-class women in the UK – Final report](#), from a 12-month Economic & Social Research Council funded project.

- The pandemic has highlighted the essential but under-valued work performed by working-class women, exposed and intensified the deep gender and class inequalities that impact their working lives, and resulted in further job and financial insecurity, heavier care responsibilities and challenges in managing unpaid and paid work.
 - Their paid work was less protected from the negative effects than women in the highest level jobs.
 - Key working was highest among working-class women; they were much more likely to have gone from positive to no hours of work; and they were much less likely to be able to work from home.
 - They had the lowest wages of all workers; those living with another adult earner had the lowest household earnings; fewer were able to save; and over 33% reported financial hardship.
 - They were the least likely to reduce their hours or change their work schedules because of time spent on childcare or home-schooling.
 - While women overall reported higher levels of psychological distress than men at all time points in the study, working-class women reported the highest levels of all groups in November 2020.
- Recommendations for government include: provide a stronger social security safety net; extend employment rights and invest in strong and effective enforcement; provide support for the sectors hardest hit; invest in the early years and social care sectors to avoid widespread closures.

See Skills Research Digest Q2 2020 p. 46 for a summary of the first briefing note in this project, on employment and mental health.

IZA published [The gender gap in income and the COVID-19 pandemic](#), modelling the gender income gap in the RoI before the pandemic and during the three waves of the virus.

- 'Nowcasting' techniques and microsimulation were used to show how the pandemic and the associated tax-benefit support can be expected to change the gender income gap.
 - The gender income gap is cushioned by the pre-pandemic tax and transfer system, and by pandemic-related income supports.
- The findings highlight the impact of a number of long-term trends in the RoI labour market that impact underlying gender differences in income.
 - The gender gap is driven more by hours worked and labour force participation than by wage differences.
 - High childcare costs are particularly relevant: although labour force participation rates and hours of work for men and women have somewhat converged since the 1980s, a larger gap remains after childbearing.
- Improved policies are needed to enable work-life balance to support child rearing, reduce the growing gap in educational outcomes between men and women, and challenge gender stereotypes.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) published [World Employment & Social Outlook: Trends 2021](#), providing a comprehensive assessment of how COVID-19 has affected work.

- It analyses global patterns, regional differences and outcomes across economic sectors and groups of workers, and presents projections for the expected labour market recovery.
- Preventing long-lasting damage to global economic and social outcomes requires a comprehensive and concerted human-centred policy agenda, including:
 - Promoting broad-based economic growth and the creation of productive employment through investment in sectors that can be a source of decent jobs and that support a just transition, gender equality and vibrant labour markets.
 - Supporting household incomes and labour market transitions, particularly for those most affected by the crisis, through active labour market policies, public employment services and publicly provided, high-quality care services.
 - Strengthening the institutional foundations of inclusive, sustainable and resilient economic growth and development by enhancing social protection systems, promoting formalisation and ensuring that all workers, irrespective of their contractual arrangements, have the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining, enjoy safe and healthy working conditions and receive adequate minimum wages.
 - Engaging in social dialogue to develop and ensure effective implementation of human-centred recovery strategies.

Other research

The Work Foundation published [Standing at a crossroad: Brexit and the future of workers' rights](#), on what divergence from EU employment regulations could mean for different workers, based on a literature review and interviews with academia, trade unions and EU agencies.

- Rather than being a linear trajectory in one direction or the other, the future of UK workers' rights and protections will consist of a complex set of decisions to be made over time, with the UK diverging up or down on various issues while the EU likely continues with progressive policy initiatives.
- Key areas for potential deviation **below EU minimum standards** include: working time and agency worker regulations, caps on compensation claims for discrimination, and exemptions for SMEs.
 - The worker groups who would be most affected by these deviations were suffering insecurity, low pay and poor working conditions long before Brexit and the pandemic.
- However, the UK has a history of going **beyond minimum EU standards** in a variety of areas, e.g. annual leave, paternity leave and pay, and flexible working.
- Opportunities for UK policymakers include:
 - Take forward developments in the EU's progressive new policy areas, e.g. the right to disconnect (allows employees not to have to perform work outside their normal working hours), ensuring transparent and predictable working conditions, and improving conditions in the gig economy.
 - Introduce policies on workers' rights and protections beyond EU minimum standards, e.g. improving sick pay, enforcement of rights, flexible working and other family friendly policies.
 - Prioritise strengthening rights and protections as part of a strong economic recovery for all.

CIPD published its fourth annual [Good Work Index](#), based on a January 2021 survey of 5k workers across different sectors and occupations.

- Job quality is measured by: pay and benefits; employment contracts; work-life balance; job design and the nature of work; relationships at work; employee voice; health and wellbeing.
- Pre-pandemic inequalities in job quality still exist and are likely to be exacerbated unless action is taken on issues such as: opportunities to develop skills; availability of fairly paid, stable work; access to flexible work.
- For organisations wanting to take action to improve job quality, this includes:
 - Considering job design and the nature of work across the workforce, and ensuring good-quality jobs are a reality throughout the organisation
 - Engaging with employees on change and identifying where improvements can be made
 - Prioritising wellbeing, recognising individual challenges, partly influenced by job quality
 - Recognising the work-life balance challenges for remote workers and for those who may not have the same access to flexible working

- Taking a human-centred approach when reintegrating furloughed employees into work, recognising the sense of insecurity about labour market prospects that many may feel.

The [website](#) provides an interactive graphic that enables exploration of how job quality varies between occupations, and includes appendices on the methodology and tables and a separate survey report.

ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation & Arbitration Service) published [Estimating the costs of workplace conflict](#).

- Detailed analysis results in an estimated total annual cost of conflict to employers (including management and resolution) at £28.5b – just over £1k for every employee in the UK each year, and just under £3k annually for each individual involved in conflict.
 - It points to a clear link between the wellbeing of employees and organisational effectiveness.
- Investment in effective and early resolution designed to build positive employment relationships may have a significant return.
 - The costs are lower where employees engage with managers, HR or their union, while the cost of formal procedures are more than three times those associated with informal resolution.
- Organisations need to place much greater emphasis on repairing employment relationships in the event of conflict and acting early to address issues of capability and poor performance.
 - The analysis also provides support for approaches to disciplinary issues that focus on learning and avoid blame; however, managers need to be provided with the core people skills to have quality interactions with their staff.
- Overall, the results provide strong arguments for decreasing the emphasis on legal compliance and effectiveness of the tribunal system, towards the resolution of conflict within organisations.

IZA published [Skill Demand and Wages: Evidence from linked vacancy data](#), a study of job descriptions in over 1.5m vacancies posted by the Austrian public employment service.

- Employers in Austria are legally required to state the minimum remuneration for advertised positions, therefore it is possible to relate the skill content of jobs to wage postings.
- The study examines to what extent skill demand is associated with wages and vacancy duration.
 - It identifies the 14 most common skill requirements mentioned in job adverts and estimates their associations with wage postings, starting wages and vacancy duration.
 - Skill associations with starting wages are estimated for a subset of vacancies which can be matched to administrative data on the employment spells of eventual hires.
- An association was found between the number of skill requirements and wages, accounting for education, work experience and firm and occupation fixed effects.
 - Posted wages steadily increase with the number of skill requirements – jobs with many skill requirements pay substantially higher wages.
 - Managerial and analytical skills show relatively high returns, while most soft skills have small wage effects.
 - Employers also need more time to fill vacancies with many skill requirements.

The Living Wage Foundation published [findings](#) from two surveys, each of over 2k UK adults, investigating notice periods for work schedules.

- Among the 59% of workers whose job involves variable hours or shift work, 62% reported having less than a week's notice of their work schedules; 12% had less than 24 hours' notice.
 - A second survey of full-time workers earning less than the living wage found that 55% had less than a week's notice, with 15% having less than 24 hours' notice.
- The [Living Hours programme](#) requires employers to both pay a real Living Wage and commit to provide at least four weeks' notice for every shift, with guaranteed payment if shifts are cancelled within this notice period.
 - Living Hours employers also provide a guaranteed minimum of 16 working hours every week (unless the worker requests otherwise), and a contract that accurately reflects hours worked.

ACAS published [Dismissal and re-engagement \(fire-and-rehire\): A fact-finding exercise](#), commissioned by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy.

- During the pandemic in 2020, there was increasing attention on the use of 'fire-and-rehire' practices.

- Ongoing parliamentary scrutiny of such practices saw cross-party support emerge for a Private Members' Bill seeking to reform the law on unfair dismissal to curb their use.
- Relevant available evidence was largely qualitative on themes such as whether the practice is new, its prevalence, the contexts in which it is used and whether policy interventions are needed.
- Key findings include:
 - The practice has been observed for many years across a range of industries and sectors, in all sizes of organisation and in both unionised and non-unionised workplaces.
 - It has been used in a range of circumstances, including: redundancy; harmonising terms and conditions; introducing temporary or permanent flexibility; interrupting continuity of service; business responses to changing consumer behaviour, sectors or operational needs.
 - There is a shared sense that it has become increasingly prevalent both in recent years and during the pandemic, and has been increasingly used as a tactic at an early stage of negotiation.
 - It has not been universally adopted by employers, who have also displayed good collaborative working during the pandemic; however, some have used it as a tactic to undermine or bypass genuine workplace dialogue.
 - It might be expected to increase when COVID-related business support initiatives are wound down, particularly if recovery is slow.
 - There was no single perspective on when it might be viewed as unreasonable, with some feeling it could legitimately be used in situations driven by genuine business need and preceded by negotiations in good faith.
 - There were differing views about perceived strengths and gaps in existing protections for workers and mixed views on the need for specific measures.
 - Non-legislative options included: improved guidance for employers on legal obligations and good practice; using data on the practice to inform public procurement and access to government funding; publishing 'name and shame' data.

L&W published [Building Strong Foundations: Supporting low-skilled employees and new starters to succeed in the workforce](#), exploring the role of managers during the pandemic.

- The research investigates the experience of those whose highest qualification is at Level 2 (GCSE) or below, while acknowledging that many have a range of well-developed and valuable skills not recognised through qualifications.
- While the Government is investing in helping people change jobs or get back into work, much less attention is being paid to the support that they will need in the workplace to make a success of their new roles, and to the vital role that managers play in this.
- Key findings include:
 - 41% of low-skilled workers who had changed roles had joined a new employer.
 - Low-skilled workers are more likely than most new starters to have challenges connecting with their manager and colleagues; young people face specific challenges around developing skills, managing work-life balance and health and wellbeing.
 - 60% of managers involved in onboarding low-skilled workers during the pandemic said they had found it harder to support new recruits to adjust to new ways of working and to work more flexibly; 50% of such managers had mainly been working from home.
 - 92% of employees said receiving manager feedback was important whereas only 71% of managers prioritised this.
 - While 78% of managers were supporting health and wellbeing, under 25% of low-skilled workers said that this was a challenge when starting a new role.

The Institute for Public Policy Research published [No Longer 'Managing'](#), tracing the rise in working poverty in the UK since the year 2000.

- The UK's welfare system is built on the notion that work is the main route out of poverty; in England, the Government has promised to 'level up' opportunity through skills, jobs and economic growth; however:
 - Rates of working poverty hit a new high of 17% before the pandemic.
 - The chances of families with one full-time and one part-time earner being pulled into poverty have doubled over 20 years, from 5% to 10%.

- For households with two people in full-time work, the chances of being pulled into poverty have doubled from 1.4% to 3.9%.
- Working poverty rates among families with 3+ children have reached a record high at 42% – up more than 66% over the past decade.
- Couple households with one full-time earner now have a poverty rate of 31% which is almost as high as working households where nobody works full-time.
- These increases are being driven by a number of factors, including falling returns from work.
 - Reducing working poverty requires a range of labour market reforms to tackle insecure work and raise job quality including: greater collective bargaining and unionisation; higher labour standards; bearing down on insecure work; and increasing the availability of flexible and part-time work.
 - Given the concentration of working poverty in low-paid sectors such as retail, care and hospitality, it must link to industrial strategy and skills policy, increasing wages in those sectors as well as opportunities for progression out of low-paid work through better access to training and skills.

IZA published [The Changing Distribution of the Male Ethnic Wage Gap in Great Britain](#), based on data for five ethnic groups – White, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Black African and Black Caribbean – from the Labour Force Survey between 1993 and 2019.

- The existence of a gap in the average wages of White and ethnic minority men in the UK is well established.
 - While there are differences in the extent of the gap between different individual groups, it appears that all ethnic groups earn less than the White majority group.
- The study focuses on gaps across the distribution of wages rather than just the mean – this has implications for understanding ethnic pay gaps and the policies intended to address them.
- Findings include:
 - Increasing education is associated with reducing the wage gap for all except Black Caribbeans.
 - The marginal impact of education increases in magnitude the higher up the pay distribution one moves, most notably for Black Africans; assuming a causal impact of education on pay, the increasing attainment of ethnic minority groups points to an important way to reduce pay gaps.
 - The introduction of the minimum wage is associated with a significant reduction in the wage gap between ethnic minorities and White workers at the lower end of the pay scale, apart from Bangladeshis – this may suggest potential issues related to non-compliance with the policy.

IZA published [A Firm-Side Perspective on Parental Leave](#), on the link between the ‘internal replaceability’ of new mothers and their maternity leave duration, and the costs for employers.

- The analysis is based on Germany whose policy reforms since 1996 substantially expanded the availability of day care and strongly encouraged early maternal employment.
- Key insights include:
 - Women who are difficult to replace internally within an organisation take shorter maternity leave and their employers hire replacements more often.
 - Firms hire more substitutes to cover maternity leave when no/few internal substitutes are available (0.3 replacement hirings per mother) compared to those with more internal substitutes.
 - Introducing more generous parental leave benefits erases the link between mothers’ internal replaceability and their leave duration.
 - Motherhood and generous parental leave policies burden firms that have few internal substitutes available.
 - Firms respond by hiring fewer women of childbearing age into occupations where they are difficult to replace internally.

Eurofound (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living & Working Conditions) published [Disability and labour market integration: Policy trends and support in EU member states](#), with the UK included for some aspects and a case study on the RoI.

- The report focuses on three stages: entering employment, staying in the job and returning to work after an absence.
 - It explores the mechanisms and effectiveness of over 150 policy measures designed before the pandemic, and of early measures in its wake.

- Lessons learnt and policy pointers for the integration of people with disabilities into the open labour market are provided.

International Comparisons

Cedefop published [Spotlight on VET – 2020 compilation: Vocational education & training systems in Europe](#).

- The report provides an overview of VET systems with their distinctive qualities, such as: the main accession and progression routes for learners; the types and levels of qualifications they lead to; the types of programmes; delivery modes; work-based learning ratio; and duration.
 - It also briefly reflects on current challenges and recent VET policy initiatives.

The Economic & Social Research Institute (ESRI), RoI, published [A comparative assessment of minimum wage employment in Europe](#), comparing the RoI to other European countries with a minimum wage, including the UK, based on data from 2017 and 2018.

- The report looks at the incidence of minimum wage employment, the relative magnitude of the minimum wage rate, the profile of the typical minimum wage employee, and levels of job satisfaction and poverty risk.
- Currently, 21 of the EU27, plus the UK, have a statutory minimum wage.
 - Those with a relatively high incidence of minimum wage employment include Portugal (15.6%), Germany (15.1%), Poland (14.8%), Hungary (14.2%), Spain (14.0%) and the UK (13.6%). The incidence is low in Belgium (1.7%), Netherlands (2.6%) and Greece (4.5%).
 - Being young, having low levels of education and being a non-national are associated with a higher likelihood of minimum wage employment across Europe.
 - In some countries, women are heavily over-represented, e.g. in Belgium, Germany, France, Latvia, Netherlands, Portugal and UK where ~60–70% of minimum wage employees are women.
 - Minimum wage workers in nine countries are less satisfied in their job than higher-paid workers, from less than 5ppt in Estonia and Portugal, to 10ppt in the RoI, Belgium, Hungary and Latvia.

Government

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Department for the Economy (DfE) published [A 10x Economy: Northern Ireland's Decade of Innovation](#), a new economic vision to ensure Northern Ireland is positioned among the 'elite small open economies' in the world.

- The aim is to create a 'ten times better' economy through:
 - **Technologies & clusters:** focusing on priority clusters where Northern Ireland has existing strengths and can capitalise on windows of opportunity – digital, ICT & creative; fintech/financial services; life & health sciences; agri-tech; advanced manufacturing and engineering
 - **Talent:** inspiring and preparing a future generation that can respond flexibly to future skills requirements – addressing skills imbalances; creating a culture of lifelong learning; enhancing digital skills
 - **Diffusion:** ensuring that innovation provides opportunities across all sectors and disperses economic and societal benefits to all
 - **Funding:** taking a new approach, including Challenge Funds, better participation in funding programmes and applying conditionalities to offers of government support
 - **Place:** building on success in attracting visitors, energising the ecosystem for innovation and developing the innovation infrastructure through the City Growth Deals programme.

DfE subsequently published a consultation: [Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland: Skills for a 10x Economy](#).

ENGLAND

The National Foundation for Educational Research published [*Putting Apprenticeships to Work for Young People: An analysis of the impact of policy reforms and the pandemic on apprenticeship starts.*](#)

- Reforms include: introduction of the apprenticeship levy; the requirement to last at least 12 months and include 20% off-the-job training; the requirement for all apprentices to achieve a Level 2 maths and English qualification; a gradual introduction of new standards, underpinned by an end-point assessment.
- Key findings include:
 - Starts across learners of all ages fell by 20% between 2015/16 and 2018/19, driven by a rapid decline in intermediate and advanced apprenticeships offered by SMEs.
 - Starts by the most disadvantaged apprentices fell by 30%; by the least disadvantaged by 3%.
 - The reforms have particularly impacted young learners, mainly because older apprentices are more likely to be doing higher-level apprenticeships, which have substantially grown in number.
 - The pandemic had a substantial impact, with starts falling 47% in March–July 2020 compared to 2019; deprived and younger learners were again impacted the most.
 - Starts for young apprentices and intermediate level apprenticeships remain far below pre-pandemic levels.
- Among the recommendations:
 - Redesign the funding system to support the needs of SMEs.
 - Separate and protect the budget for 16–18 year-old apprentices.
 - Launch a national campaign to raise the profile of traineeships.
 - Reassess how minimum English and maths requirements are incorporated.
 - Require all vacancies to be advertised on the national Find An Apprenticeship website and provide application support to those from disadvantaged areas.

The CPP published [*Is the algorithm working for us? Algorithms, qualifications and fairness, reflections on the 2020 qualifications 'debacle' by former Ofqual Chair Roger Taylor.*](#)

- By blaming the algorithm for the mistakes in 2020 we risk missing the most important lessons: the problem was not the algorithm, but what we were trying to do with it: human decision-making failed.
- Algorithms now have an undeserved reputation as a mechanism of injustice, but, when used to interpret results, they are a powerful mechanism for fairer decision-making and social mobility.
 - Employers and universities are using data-driven systems to understand qualifications in context; in Australia, an algorithm was used, with public support, to adjust exam results for lost learning.
- General qualifications are becoming less relevant to recruitment, a trend that reflects the rising power of digital technology but that risks undermining the value of qualifications and fair selection.
 - In planning to rebuild, we have an opportunity to consider how qualifications can adapt to retain power in a data-driven age as a way for young people to progress from education into adult life.
- Better decisions might be made if those in government viewed official data and information systems as public utilities rather than as there to help it achieve its objectives.

London South Bank and Aston Universities published [*Truly Modern Technical Education: Unleashing the potential of Universities of Technology to really level up.*](#)

- A University of Technology focuses on the creation, enhancement and application of technical knowledge in order to affect the growth of enterprises and enhance productivity in the economy.
 - Its teaching is focused on a smaller number of 'technical' subjects.
 - Its research is intended to be quickly applicable to real life, in particular to enhance the productivity of enterprises and of the economy in general.
 - It undertakes its teaching and research in intimate engagement with industry and the professions.
 - While globally competitive, it has a strong place-based focus.
- While progress is being made in England on the 'missing middle' of technical qualifications at Levels 4 and 5, there continues to be a failure to join up with another 'missing middle' – applied research.

- Modern technical universities work with thousands of businesses, e.g. on apprenticeships, employer-sponsored students, placement students and knowledge transfer partnerships, but better alignment is still needed between businesses, central and local government and universities.
- The paper makes eight recommendations under three themes:
 - **Skills:** fundamental funding reform to drive the significant expansion of higher technical education
 - **Research:** a comprehensive restructure of R&D and a coherent national plan
 - **Place:** joined-up thinking across government in the context of towns, cities and regions.

SCOTLAND

The Scottish Government published [Making Scotland's future: A recovery plan for manufacturing](#) following consultation on a draft published in December 2020.

- Actions in four priority areas, including 'skills & workforce' and 'collaboration & networks', include:
 - Encourage employers to use incentives to retain, adopt and recruit apprentices.
 - Establish fast-track employment models in emerging skills shortages and jobs growth areas.
 - Initiate actions to mitigate the impact of graduate unemployment, e.g. via meaningful work experience, education, training and jobs.
 - Develop learning experiences in commercial awareness, foster enterprising behaviours and encourage progressive leadership practice.

The Scottish Council for Development & Industry published [Making a Good Living: A 2030 blueprint for Scotland](#), including a detailed focus on learning throughout life.

- 12 recommendations on issues including the move to net zero, technological change and low productivity include:
 - Transform workplaces by closing the leadership skills gap with other countries.
 - Scale-up demand for and participation in work-based learning, with an immediate focus on digital, data and green skills.
 - Transform content, delivery and investment in education and skills to meet the future needs of learners and the economy.

Audit Scotland published [Scotland's Colleges 2020](#), on the pandemic's impact on finances.

- The 26 colleges have responded well overall, with governance and financial management continuing effectively.
- However, in 2019/20 the pandemic hit existing financial challenges further, with the sector reporting an overall deficit of £54m – 7% of total income.
- A significant number will need increased funding and/or cost cutting to deliver balanced budgets in the future; many are reconsidering what buildings and equipment they require.

The UK Parliament's Scottish Affairs Committee published [Universities and Scotland](#) on the challenges facing HE and the impact of reserved decisions on Scottish universities.

- Conclusions and recommendations include:
 - Expand the Turing Scheme to provide funding for UK placements for international students and opportunities for academic staff.
 - Introduce a new/expanded scholarship scheme to attract EU students to Scotland and the UK.
 - Increase the representation of Scottish universities on the UK Research & Innovation board.
 - The Scottish Government and universities should work with the UK Government and universities to find examples of best practice in diversifying income streams away from potentially volatile international student fees.
 - The Scottish Government should review student mental health services, following evidence of structural underfunding that pre-dates the pandemic.

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) published [Coherence and Sustainability: A review of tertiary education and research](#), the final report of a three-phase review commissioned by the Scottish Government in June 2020 in light of COVID-19.

- Among numerous recommendations, seven are highlighted for system change:

- Develop a clear strategic, longer-term vision for tertiary education and research, incorporating multi-year funding assumptions and commitments, and a new National Impact Framework.
- Protect excellent discovery research and develop mission-oriented research and knowledge exchange, to create knowledge of social, economic and cultural value.
- Build capacity and a more systematic approach to the way coherent tertiary education and skills provision and investment is planned, so that it responds better to current and future needs.
- Find better ways to support learning throughout life and to give credit for it by reviewing targets, the assumptions that underpin existing funding models and student support, and qualification frameworks.
- Ensure the interests of current and future students are protected and promoted in the development of standards, outcomes, blended and digital learning opportunities, equality and inclusion actions, participation frameworks, investment and approaches to accountability.
- Recognise more fully the importance of international education connections and global research standing as an intrinsic part of the success and sustainability of the HE sector.
- Galvanise current and future leaders across tertiary education, skills provision and research to work together to effect system change.

SFC also published an updated paper on [The financial sustainability of colleges and universities in Scotland](#). The Scottish Government is to provide a full response by the end of September 2021.

WALES

[No relevant material sourced for this quarter's release.]

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND (RoI)

The Department of Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science published [Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021 to 2025](#).

- The aim is to expand the types of programmes available and increase the number of apprenticeships to 10k per year by 2025, with the following five objectives:
 - A high-quality and innovative approach: ensuring the highest quality of work-based learning, supporting and demonstrating innovation to empower apprentices and employers to meet current and emerging skills needs
 - Employer-driven responses: apprenticeships will be recognised and valued by employers across all sectors as a key mechanism for building a highly skilled workforce, contributing to productivity and sustainable growth
 - Apprenticeship for all: the profile of the apprenticeship population will more closely reflect the profile of the general population
 - A valued option: apprenticeships will be available and recognised as a work-based learning opportunity, providing sought-after qualifications across the tertiary education and training sector
 - A single cohesive system: a single apprenticeship system underpinned by a clear governance framework with strong stakeholder input.

SOLAS (Further Education & Training Authority) published two skills bulletins:

- [Summer Skills Bulletin 2021: Working from home in 2020](#), examining who worked from home by sector, gender, occupation, level of education, age, region, nationality and employment type.
- [Spring Skills Bulletin 2021: Skills Mismatch in Ireland's Labour Market](#), summarising over-qualification in the main occupational groups, and exploring why clerical support workers appear to be significantly over-qualified.

ESRI published [Monitoring decent work in Ireland](#) with the Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission, based on a review of international approaches and labour market surveys, and consultation with 33 organisations.

- The report examines how young people, those with disabilities, Travellers and East European migrants have less access to 'decent work', as defined by the ILO.
 - Dimensions explored are: access to work; adequate earnings; employee voice (representation and job control); security and stability of work; equality of opportunity and treatment in employment; and health and safety.

- Key findings include:
 - In 2019, 33% of workers aged 18–24 had a temporary contract, vs 6% of 25–64 year-olds.
 - 34% of the general workforce were in a professional/managerial job, vs 14% of Eastern European workers.
 - The employment rate for people with disabilities was 41%, vs the national average of 73%.
 - 22% of employees had low hourly pay, vs 60% of young workers, 38% of Eastern European migrants and 32% of lone parents.
 - 20% of ethnic minority workers, 14% of workers with a disability and 11% of non-Irish workers reported discrimination in the workplace, vs 7% average.
 - Trade union membership is largely unaddressed in employment or equality strategies in the RoI.
- Recommendations include:
 - A focus on decent work should be a priority for Ireland’s implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
 - The national equality strategies should consider issues relating to the quality of decent work as a whole, rather than focusing solely on getting people into work.

EUROPE

[No relevant material sourced for this quarter’s release.]

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