Skills Research Digest
Quarter 3 2022

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 skills, training and new qualifications needed to support the growth of 'green' industries and low-carbon energy transition.

- The cost of living crisis: its impact on education and career aspirations, applications and dropout rates; the relationship between skills, poverty and job security; the role of HEIs in tackling poverty and homelessness.

- The importance of investment in upskilling, reskilling, training and retraining for small businesses.

* 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.

Contents

Preparing Young People for Work

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING & MATHS (STEM)

EngineeringUK published *Secondary education and engineering*, examining trends in STEM entries and attainment across the UK as part of its *Educational Pathways* series.

- Performance in STEM qualifications at secondary education stage is an important pipeline into engineering careers.

- In 2020/21:
  - Physics A level moved from ninth to eighth in popularity, with entries up 7.4%; computing was up 11.3%, chemistry 6.9% and biology 7.6%.
  - Scottish Advanced Highers in design & manufacture and engineering science attracted more than double the number of students compared to 2019/20.
  - Since the pandemic started, the number of teachers of STEM subjects in state schools in England has decreased by nearly 5%.

EngineeringUK also published *Educational Pathways: Further education, apprenticeship and engineering*, exploring trends in engineering-related qualifications across the UK.

- Engineering-related apprenticeship starts:
  - Scotland has the highest percentage (45% in 2020/21) and they continue to rise year on year.
  - In England, 24% were in engineering in 2020/21, down from 29% in 2019/20, with the decline mainly in engineering and manufacturing technologies.
  - In Wales it was 19% (no change on the year).
  - Northern Ireland measures participation rather than starts or achievements; 69% of apprentices were on engineering-related frameworks in 2021, with electrotechnical the most popular.

- Women in engineering-related apprenticeships:
  - In England in 2020/21, women made up 14.5% of engineering-related apprenticeship starts, up from 8.1% in 2016/17; they were 25.9% of starters at Level 4/5 and 24.8% at degree level but only 7.8% at intermediate level and 13.1% at advanced level.
  - In Scotland in 2021/22 women were 11.3% of engineering apprentices, up from 8.8% in 2017/18.
  - In Wales, women were 7.4% of starters in 2020/21, up 3.4% on 2014/15.
  - In Northern Ireland, 6.5% of engineering apprentices were women, down from 6.8% in 2019 (no other data available).

- In England, the construction T level more than quadrupled its intake from 250 in 2020/21 to 1,150 in 2021/22, and engineering-related vocational qualifications made up 31% of all entries for 16–18 year-olds in 2020/21.

EMPLOYABILITY & CAREERS

City & Guilds published *findings* from a survey of 17–19 year-olds in the UK carried out in summer 2021 and labour market analysis from Lightcast.

- 40% planned to go to university (up 5ppt from 2021).

- There is a clear gender divide: 47% of girls vs 31% of boys planned to go to university.
  - 54% of girls vs 44% of boys based their decision on what they believe is the best route to a good job and salary.
  - 42% of girls vs 23% of boys said their decisions were influenced by their family.

- Labour market analysis suggests only 29% of UK jobs typically require a degree or equivalent.

- Improved careers advice and guidance is needed to make young people and their influencers better aware of their options.

Prospects Luminate published *Early Careers Survey 2022*, investigating the career plans and experiences over the previous 12 months of 5,255 users surveyed in January/February 2022.

- Respondents included school (5%), sixth form/college (11%) and university (31%) students, apprentices/trainees (2%), employed/self-employed people (35%) and those not in education, employment or training (13%).
  - 77% were aged 16–34; 66% were female; 65% where white.
- Key findings include:
  - Careers websites were the most frequent source of careers advice (57%), followed by family (40%), friends (39%) and social media (33%); 24% turned to teachers and 23% to industry professionals.
  - Fewer students participated in formal careers activities in 2022 than in 2021; the greatest drop was among university students, e.g. 48% attended an event such as a job fair, compared with 62% in 2021.
  - Despite the return to face-to-face working, there has been a growth in hybrid work placements, with 56% of respondents' most recent internship or work placement taking place either online or as a mix of online/in person.
  - Hybrid placements were found to be the most useful for developing skills, confirming career choices and improving career prospects; online only were the least useful.
  - The main reason for not doing work experience was a lack of opportunities (35%), followed by a lack of time (23%).
  - 59% of those planning to get a job, internship/placement or apprenticeship/training place said they felt prepared for their next step; those who hadn't done any work experience in the last 12 months were less prepared.
  - For 2021 graduates, the top three priorities when looking for a job were: training and development; career progression; and work/life balance.
  - 15% of sixth form/college students and 8% of school pupils said they planned to take an apprenticeship or degree apprenticeship as their next step, with 40% saying it wasn't an option for their chosen career path.
  - 30% of those in work said they planned to leave their current employer this year, rising to 40% among 2021 graduates; the main reason was to advance their career (39%), followed by a higher salary (18%).
  - 59% said they had changed career plans because they wanted to choose a different career or industry; the three most popular industries to switch to were: healthcare & psychology; creative, arts & design; and business, consulting & management.

Cedefop (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training) published *Minimising early leaving from vocational education and training in Europe: Career guidance and counselling as auxiliary levers*, mapping policies in the 27 EU member states (EU-27) and the UK, and identifying emerging trends, common partners and information and data gaps.

- Early leaving from education and training (ELET) is associated with risk factors such as unemployment, poverty, health problems and social exclusion; reducing it is an imperative that has been addressed as one of the target policies of various European strategic frameworks.
  - Lifelong career guidance and counselling is crucial to support motivated, smart career choices and to contribute to the prevention of ELET.
- Successful approaches to support early leavers and those at risk of abandoning their studies should be based on:
  - a comprehensive strategy, in which career guidance and counselling are integrated aspects of policies and practices aiming to counteract ELET
  - a strong multi-stakeholder collaboration so that different services and professionals may address individuals' diverse needs based on their qualifications and training
  - a mixed approach involving generic career guidance and counselling accompanied by individualised supporting measures
  - a case management approach that encourages collaboration with other services and professionals, including individuals' families and peers, to cope with complex needs.
- The main information and data gaps identified are:
  - Limited evidence on the available training and development opportunities for professionals in relation to career guidance and counselling services explicitly tackling ELET

- Underdeveloped evidence on the contribution of guidance and counselling to work-based learning and how learners' needs – especially of those more at risk – and aspirations in differentiated learning conditions and objectives are addressed
- Lack of evidence on systematic monitoring and impact evaluation of policies and practices supporting learners at risk and early leavers.

The Institutional Landscape

THE FURTHER EDUCATION & SKILLS SECTOR

The Edge Foundation published *Responding to Covid-19: Experiences of vocational learning and teaching from colleges in the British Isles***, exploring the challenges faced by four small-island colleges, with many of the lessons learnt applicable to the wider college sector.**

- Small islands linked to the UK have varied governance relationships with the UK, with different implications for their education systems, as well as for how Covid-19 restrictions were managed.
  - **Crown Dependencies** are self-governing on domestic matters and not represented in the UK Parliament; education policy is in some ways determined in response to the UK – e.g. the same qualifications frameworks and transition points – but UK policy changes don't have to be adopted.
  - **Scottish islands** are directly governed by the Scottish and UK Governments; island councils don't determine education policy, which is the same as on the Scottish mainland.
- The *[unnamed]* islands in the project each have a single further education (FE) college, providing most of the technical and vocational education.
  - The colleges also provide the only on-island access to higher education (HE), which made navigating the different FE/HE policies particularly difficult for those subject to UK governance.
- Most small islands around the UK and all those in the project closed schools and colleges in line with the UK mainland in March 2020 but worked to different closure timetables subsequently.
- The benefits of online learning included:
  - For students: developing independent learning; flexibility to fit with personal circumstances
  - For tutors: improving digital literacy; flexible working hours
  - For college leaders: increased use of technology; new learning about how to react and adapt to change.
- The challenges included:
  - For students: lack of social interaction; loss of work experience; varied levels of engagement; difficult home environments; issues with mental wellbeing
  - For tutors: more pastoral responsibilities; limited digital skills; increased workload; difficulty monitoring attendance and engagement
  - For college leaders: difficulty providing technology resources and access; limited external partnerships; low to no continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities and IT support.

Although the four participating colleges aren't named, the following are used to illustrate their varying contexts: the Isle of Man, Jersey, Guernsey, Orkney (mainland), Shetland (mainland), Lewis.

Jisc published *Learner digital experience insights survey 2021/22: UK further education (FE) survey findings* **based on a survey of 11,498 college/sixth form college students, conducted between November 2021 and April 2022.** *[A similar survey was published for HE – a summary of results for both is on page 11.]*

College Development Network (CDN) published *Pathways from Poverty: Colleges for communities***, the second report in its research on the role of colleges in tackling poverty.**

- Five key themes are presented as potential areas for the development of future practice:
  - Creating trusted and safe spaces to bridge the gap between the college and learners
  - Working in partnership with external agencies and the wider community
  - Driving and facilitating direct actions and interventions on aspects of socioeconomic disadvantage affecting learners and their broader communities

- □ Supporting transitions for learners by helping them to identify their existing skills, develop new skills and enhance their transferable skills
- □ Creating positive, practical and sustainable impacts.

The first report was published in March 2022 [see Skills Research Digest Q1 2022*, p. 5].*

CDN published its first *Workforce Survey Analysis Report*, based on responses from 1,810 staff in Scottish FE colleges in February/March 2022.

- In 2020/21 college staff spent an average of 23 hours on training and learning; 22% felt they did not get all the training they needed.
  - □ New staff tend to spend less time training and learning than staff employed for a year or more.
  - □ 70% prefer face-to-face learning.
- 86% feel they have the digital capabilities needed; 80% say they would benefit from further training.
- 93% believe they have the skills, knowledge and understanding to promote equality, diversity and inclusion in their area; 57% have had professional learning in this in the past year.
- There is interest in support, guidance and training on mental health and wellbeing, neurodiversity, gender identity and asylum seekers/refugees.
- 27% say they understand their role in relation to learning for sustainability; 50% feel confident about engaging with it; 14% have had professional learning in it in the past year.

Cedefop published *The future of vocational education and training [VET] in Europe: Volume 2 – Delivering IVET [Initial VET]: Institutional diversification and/or expansion?*. *[See* Skills Research Digest Q2 2022 *p. 5 for Volume 1.]*

- The report is part of a research project analysing how VET has changed in the EU member states, the UK (England), Iceland and Norway since the mid-1990s and how this influences future opportunities and challenges.
- It explores the extent to which:
  - □ the dividing line between VET and general upper secondary education and training is blurring and the kind of institutional solutions that are associated with this
  - □ combined schools and programmes are offering both VET and general education
  - □ 'hybrid' institutions and programmes are seeking to combine vocational and general subjects.
- In the last 25 years, digital and green transitions have created a demand for new skills, made some obsolete and led policymakers to look to VET to remedy skill imbalances common across Europe.
  - □ Shocks including the financial crisis and the pandemic have also had major implications for VET.
- Initiatives have sought to combine general and vocational paths, allowing students to choose from each as part of strategies to tailor teaching and learning to individual needs.
  - □ The increasing role played by general content, including general subjects (e.g. maths and languages) and transversal skills and competences (problem solving, team work, communication) is part of these efforts.
  - □ Increasing VET avoids specialisation too early, although there are concerns that increasing the general component in upper secondary might be off-putting to those who may have struggled with the same subjects in lower secondary.
- VET retains a strong, distinct identity through upper secondary education and, to a lesser extent, at higher levels; vocational and general pathways are still distinguishable, despite some blurring.
  - □ VET's distinct identity is directly linked to the important role played by occupationally oriented apprenticeship schemes and programmes with substantial work experience.
- If VET is to remedy emerging skill mismatches and better meet future skill needs, its curriculum must be up to date, and teaching and learning must ensure that intended learning outcomes are achieved.
  - □ It must also be able to attract a sufficient proportion of those entering upper secondary education.
- To make VET more attractive, many countries have looked to strengthen the links to higher levels of education, e.g. by providing access to general studies programmes or higher vocational studies.
  - □ This has resulted in some reconfiguration of upper secondary VET curricula to meet the entry requirements of HE institutions (HEIs), sometimes through additional modules or extra years of study.

- This could result in a two-tier system of VET at upper secondary, where some studies can lead to HE while others do so much less readily.

- The provision of workplace-based learning, especially through apprenticeships or work experience, can also make VET more attractive to learners and employers.
  - While most countries have prioritised strengthening these forms of learning, the ease and effect of reforms depends on previous experiences and existing traditions.
  - Several countries point to challenges in providing sufficient numbers of apprenticeship places.

- While national stakeholders (including social partners) have reasonable influence over curriculum content, vocational schools have a degree of autonomy with respect to how skills are developed.
  - Schools and training companies have space for individual and local adjustment and innovation, which allows vocational providers to tailor their provision to local labour market needs.

SOLAS (Further Education & Training Authority), Republic of Ireland (RoI), published _FET [Further Education and Training] Learner Outcomes: Healthcare learners_, on the value of FET to learners who would like to become frontline healthcare workers.

- The FET sector provides courses at Level 5 (L5) and L6 for students to work as: nursing auxiliaries and assistants; care workers and home carers; laboratory technicians; healthcare practice managers; and pharmacy assistants.

- Learners who engaged in health-related FET courses have improved employment and progression prospects following completion.
  - There is a significant decrease in the reliance on welfare support among this cohort after graduation when compared to pre-enrolment economic status.
  - The total share of healthcare learners in substantial employment in 2018 following course completion was 60%, increasing to 69% in 2019 and staying relatively steady at 67% in 2020.
  - Learners in the healthcare cohort can expect to earn a higher salary on completion of their course.
  - FET courses provide valuable opportunities and clear pathways into HE for the healthcare cohort; 1,015 healthcare learners progressed to HE in 2018/19, an initial progression rate of 10%; the majority of the FET health cohort who progressed to HE moved into courses in health and welfare.

HIGHER EDUCATION (HE): APPLICANTS & STUDENTS

The Student Room (TSR) published _How prospective 2023 and 2024 entry undergraduates feel about the rising costs of living_, findings from a survey in September 2022 with 642 respondents.

- 92% of respondents were concerned about rising costs of living, feeling anxious, scared or stressed.
  - 43% were worried whether they could afford university.
  - 37% would look for universities offering bursaries or scholarships, however 41% didn't expect to be eligible.
  - 48% were worried about the financial impact on their parents if they went to university.
  - 25% were worried as their parents were not able/willing to help them with the cost of living at university.

- 47% were now more likely to change their university plans, either by choosing a university closer to home or living at home and commuting; 56% were now seeking cheaper accommodation options.

- Parents/carers were also influencing a change in university choice: 40% said their parents were encouraging them to live at home, closer to home or in cheaper locations, and 12% said their parents were encouraging them to defer or not to go to university at all.

- Respondents wanted universities to include course essentials such as equipment within the tuition fees (72%) and to clearly communicate any additional costs for software or trips (70%).
  - 38% would welcome information to alleviate parents' concerns.

Save the Student published _National Student Money Survey 2022_, results of its tenth survey.

- 74% of students said they wished they'd had better financial education.

- 82% of students surveyed worry about making ends meet, up from 76% last year; 10% had used a food bank in 2020/21.

- Average monthly spending has risen 14% to £924, although rent has changed little over the past two years (£418); the two areas that have increased the most are transport and household bills.
- The average for Scotland is £932, for Wales £852 and for Northern Ireland £836; in England, it ranges from £822 in the West Midlands to £962 in the South West and £1,089 in London.

- 53% think university is good value for money, up from 49% last year.

- The average student's maintenance loan falls short by £439 a month, up from £340 last year.
  - The maximum funding for living costs in 2022/23 is going up by: 4.5% for Scottish students; 3.5% Welsh; 2.3% English; 0% Northern Irish.
  - The three most common sources of money are: part-time job (62%), parents (59%), savings (57%) and maintenance loan (53%); 31% have their own business or 'side hustle'.

- 82% had thought about dropping out of university at some point, 60% due to mental health issues, 52% due to money worries (up from 41%) and 37% due to loan interest rates.

The Migration Observatory, University of Oxford, published its annual _Briefing: Student migration to the UK_, covering numbers, characteristics, economic impact, what they do after their studies and how many settle in the UK.

- Student migration to the UK rebounded after the pandemic, hitting an all-time high in 2021.
  - In 2020/21, 600k international students were enrolled in UK HE, 22% of all HE students.
  - Ulster University was in the top 15, with 42% of new students who were international; LSE had the largest share, at 72%.

- Tuition fee income from non-EU students has grown substantially since 2000/01, making up 17% of UK universities' total income.

- 80% of international students starting in UK HE came from non-EU countries, 30% came from China.
  - EU student applications fell by ~50% from 2020 to 2022.

- From 2008 to 2019, the UK lost global market share in international students to Australia, Canada and China, although the absolute number of international students coming to the UK increased.
  - Work visa grants to non-EU former students fell by 84% from 2011 to 2020, before the decision to reintroduce post-study work rights in 2021.

- Most non-EU students leave the UK after their studies; those who remain in the UK longer term usually take ten years to settle.

The House of Commons Library published _International students in UK higher education: FAQs_, including statistics, government policies, funding and their costs and benefits.

HE: WIDENING PARTICIPATION

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) published _Keeping track: Can linking higher education records tell us anything about the quality of parental education data?_, an assessment of the quality of the parental education information HESA collects.

- First-in-family data (relating to students who go to university but whose parents did not) has been the subject of discussion within the sector in the UK over the past year.

- The insights of this report will be of particular relevance to those involved in widening participation activity (e.g. outreach work), as the parental education variable is used by some providers and organisations to support their decision-making.

- Key findings include:
  - Students registered on full-time degree courses who transfer providers across academic years will generally be required to complete a UCAS application form on two separate occasions; this provides an opportunity to cross-check their answer to the parental education question.
  - The agreement rate is 91% for the two UCAS forms among those who indicate whether they had at least one parent/step-parent/guardian with an HE qualification.
  - Although the high agreement rate is reassuring, it does not preclude the possibility that respondents have supplied an incorrect response; this could help to reduce the extent of 'missing' data and improve the utility of this variable across the sector.

TASO (the Centre for Transforming Access & Student Outcomes in HE) published _Summer schools in the time of COVID-19: Interim findings on the impact on widening participation_, drawing on a randomised controlled trial with eight universities.

- Over 90% of students who responded to pre- and post-summer school surveys said they were likely/extremely likely to apply to HE or had already applied; the response rate was just 43%/46% and those who responded were likely to be highly motivated.

- Summer schools may have a small positive effect on self-reported applications as well as on three mechanisms that are thought to encourage applications: self-efficacy relating to HE; compatibility of HE with social identity; and perception of practical barriers to HE.

- The summer schools seemed to have a significant effect on individuals' self-reported confidence in their ability to apply to and succeed at university.

England's Office for Students (OfS) updated its maps showing young participation in HE by local area across the UK.

- The maps can be used to explore the historical POLAR4 measure, which covers the whole of the UK, and there is also a map showing the UK-wide 'Adult HE 2011' measure.

It also updated its postcode search function.

UCAS published _Next Steps: What is the experience of disabled students in education?_ with Pearson, drawing on application data and a survey of 5k applicants.

- 19% of UK working-age adults identify as disabled, but disabled people are almost 50% as likely to have an undergraduate degree than non-disabled people.
  - In 2021, 83,220 disabled students applied to HE – a record high – with 80% gaining a place.

- Key findings include:
  - 14% of UK applicants recorded an impairment/condition in 2021, up 105% (+42,650) from 2012.
  - Before the pandemic, disabled students were 23% more likely to defer entry than non-disabled students, rising to 28% in 2021 – this disparity varies by impairment type.
  - 56% research an institution's support for disabled students before applying, particularly its reputation for equality, diversity and inclusion.
  - The intersectionality of impairment type and personal circumstance influences where students apply: those with physical impairments or challenges with mobility are more likely to be mature and from less-advantaged backgrounds; despite having higher-than-average A level attainment, they tend to be placed at lower-tariff providers closer to home.
  - ~50% feel supported by their school or college: educational support is felt to be strongest (53%) and access to inclusive extracurricular activities is weakest (17%).
  - Applicants' expectations for support in HE exceed their satisfaction with support at school or college: 61% expect academic support will be good and 65% expect the same of pastoral support.
  - Only 17% felt satisfied with access to inclusive extracurricular activities at school/college, whereas 44% expected social opportunities at university or college to be good or excellent.
  - Applicants with hidden disabilities are less likely to be satisfied with their experiences in education, more likely to feel uncomfortable sharing an impairment and less likely to have high expectations for HE.
  - 47% of young applicants recording a learning difference are from the most advantaged backgrounds (POLAR4 quintile 5) compared to 8% from the least advantaged backgrounds (quintile 1), and they are nearly three times more likely to come from an independent school.
  - Although women are more likely to apply to HE overall, the gender gap narrows for disabled applicants and reverses for those with a social, behavioural or communication impairment and with visual impairments.
  - 15% of disabled applicants record an LGBT+ identity, compared to 8% of applicants not recording a disability, rising to 22% for those recording social, behavioural or communication impairments.
  - 65% said they feel comfortable with sharing a disability but 10% were uncomfortable.

Educationally maintained inequality? The role of risk factors and resilience at 9, 13 and 17 in disabled young people's post-school pathways at 20 **based on research by the Economic & Social Research Institute (ESRI) was published in *Irish Educational Studies*.**

- The RoI has the highest level of participation in HE in Europe, however it also has one of the widest participation gaps between disabled and non-disabled young people.
  - Multiple challenges face disabled young people, reflecting the direct and indirect impact of socioeconomic disadvantage at family, school and community levels.
- A large-scale longitudinal dataset was used to assess how disabled young people compare with their non-disabled peers in accessing a range of post-school educational pathways.
  - All else being equal, there is greater progression to FE and training, and lower participation in L8 degrees in universities.
  - Entry to HE is lower among those with socioemotional difficulties, even after controlling for key characteristics.
  - Attendance among young people with an intellectual disability or specific learning difficulty is mediated by academic performance.
- Findings highlight the importance of school attendance, engagement and achievement during primary and early secondary, as well as parental expectations, with important implications for inclusive education.
- Stronger linkages across the tertiary landscape and stronger HE transition support are needed, particularly for young adults with socioemotional/psychological difficulties.

The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published *Gypsies, Roma and Travellers [GRT]: The ethnic minorities most excluded from UK education*.

- Gypsy or Irish Travellers comprised the highest proportion of any ethnic group (60%) with no academic or professional qualifications, compared to 23% average of all those in England and Wales.
  - In 2020/21, 9.1% of Gypsy/Roma pupils and 21.1% of Irish Traveller pupils achieved a grade 5+ in GCSE English and Maths, compared to a national average of 51.9% in England.
- Young people from Gypsy/Roma (6.9%) and Irish Traveller (10.7%) communities are the least likely ethnic groupings to enter HE by age 19 (compared to ~40% of all young people).
- Campaigns to improve access are made more difficult by prejudice and racism.
  - 44.6% of people in the UK hold negative views against Gypsy and Irish Travellers – 18.7ppt higher than against Muslims.
- Recommendations include: better data collection; recognising Gypsy/Roma and Traveller histories; and more tailored funding.

The Institute of Labor Economics (IZA) published *Dreaming of a Brighter Future? The impact of economic vulnerability on university aspirations***, a study using a unique Canadian dataset for 2002–2008.**

- The research examined whether there is an inequality of opportunity to achieve HE partially explained by the aspirations of 12–15 year-olds in economically vulnerable households.
  - In particular, it explored whether limited economic resources are associated with perceptions of what children may become – why focus on aspirations as opposed to e.g. academic achievement?
- Findings include:
  - Poverty is associated with reduced university aspirations from the perspective of the young person and their mother.
  - Poverty contributes to about 10–15% of the observed inequality of opportunity gap – mother's education is the largest factor at 30%.
  - Economic insecurity is not associated with educational aspirations and persists regardless of how insecurity is measured.
  - Controls for academic effort, e.g. standardised test scores, daily reading and getting good grades, do not impact these findings.
- Results suggest that alleviating child poverty and easing post-secondary financial barriers among the poor may help offset reduced university aspirations at a critical time in a young person's life.

GRADUATES & GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

Universities UK (UUK) published *Closing ethnicity degree awarding gaps: Three years on*, investigating the progress universities have made on ethnicity degree awarding gaps and what more they need to do.

- In May 2019, UUK published a report calling on UK HE to accelerate progress in removing ethnicity degree awarding gaps.
  - UUK created a framework for universities to remove the gaps and over 100 institutions signed a pledge to follow this approach.
- Universities have made substantial progress in gathering and analysing key data.
  - The gap between white students and those from Black and other minority ethnic backgrounds awarded a First or 2:1 has reduced by 4.4ppt, from 13.2% in 2017/18 to 8.8% in 2020/21.
- The continued existence of any unexplained gap is an indisputable inequality; breaking down the data by individual ethnic groups also reveals larger disparities, especially for Black students.
  - The gap for those from Black and other minority ethnic backgrounds awarded a First is especially concerning at 9.5%, rising to 19.3% for Black students in 2020/21.
- University leaders now need to:
  - prioritise genuine co-production with students, jointly developing and implementing a strategic, whole-university approach to removing the gaps
  - embed institutional approaches, ensuring there is accountability for all staff within every academic faculty and every professional services department
  - develop evaluation expertise, building an understanding of what success looks like and how it can be maintained.
- Five core recommendations have been updated:
  - University leaders should go further to embed commitments, working in partnership with students, including setting clear expectations on roles and responsibilities for all students and staff and measures of success and ongoing accountability for a whole-university approach.
  - Universities should go further in co-producing initiatives and approaches with their students; staff should be supported to develop the appropriate skills and knowledge to facilitate conversations about racial inequality with all students and learn from their lived experiences.
  - Universities should go further to ensure there is accountability for all staff to actively create inclusive cultures, including doing more to improve students' access to diverse role models, e.g. in encouraging those from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds into postgraduate study.
  - Universities should give staff access to the data they need to remove the gaps; implementing a data dashboard has been key to building awareness and understanding; universities should be more transparent about awarding gaps and share accessible information with students.
  - Appropriately resourced evaluation expertise is needed to build institutional understanding of what works; it should be planned into institutional and local approaches to removing awarding gaps at inception; universities should use existing resources, such as those provided by TASO.

For some, luck matters more: The impact of the great recession on the early careers of graduates from different socio-economic backgrounds **by the Institute for Social & Economic Research, was published in *Oxford Economic Papers*.**

- The study uses variation in unemployment caused by the 2008 recession to analyse socioeconomic gaps in graduate outcomes, with data from the UK Destination of Leavers from HE survey.
- Entering the labour market during an economic downturn increases socioeconomic status (SES) differentials in outcomes.
  - The sharp increase in unemployment experienced in the UK from 2008 to 2011 translated into wider SES gaps across a range of labour market outcomes measured six months after graduation, including employment, salary and access to professional and graduate jobs.
  - This continues after taking into account the effects of compositional changes in the population of graduates, observed and unobserved university characteristics and economic conditions at the time of enrolment.
- There is limited evidence that this is due to differences in human capital or geographic mobility; instead, differential access to professional networks might be important.

- E.g. during a recession, low SES graduates are more likely than high to return to their previous employer, particularly where this employer offered a non-placement job.

- Students from more disadvantaged backgrounds should be offered additional support not only during the transition from school to HE but also when moving from university to the labour market.
  - This could take the form of direct support through subsidised work placements, assisted job search, retraining programmes or by providing hiring subsidies to employers.

- Understanding is needed as to why disadvantaged students seem to have differential access to professional networks at graduation and what role information plays in the value of job placements.
  - Universities could help to reduce socioeconomic inequalities by encouraging more students – particularly those from a low SES background – to take on placement and internship opportunities and by offering better career advice at graduation and throughout their studies.
  - Adequate financial support could be provided to disadvantaged students to take on opportunities, as most placements are unpaid and thus only accessible to high SES individuals.

The Centre for Education & Youth (CfEY) and the Education Policy Institute (EPI) published *What works to reduce [graduate] equality gaps in employment and employability?***, on behalf of TASO.**

- One year after graduation there is an £11,300 earnings gap between the lower and upper quartile; ten years after graduation this has more than doubled to £24,100.
  - Three years after graduation there are significant differences in earnings according to subject studied and university attended, with a £20k gap between the ten HE providers with the highest earning graduates and the ten with the lowest.

- After three years there is a gap of £4,800 between the highest minority ethnic earners (those of Indian background) and the lowest (Pakistani background); many of the gaps continue to widen in the ten years after graduation.

- Male graduates earn 8% more than their female peers one year after graduation, rising to 32% ten years after graduation.

- The disadvantaged groups most likely to be targeted for career interventions are those from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, care leavers, disabled students or those from a low SES background.
  - Work experience, employability skills and information, advice & guidance are the most likely interventions; however, less than 50% of eligible students participate, in line with uptake for career programmes generally.

- Four kinds of innovative, technology-based solutions offer early proof of concept:
  - Work simulations creating virtual environments
  - Commercially available video games that can improve employability skills
  - E-portfolios that might help mature graduates 'show' rather than 'tell' their achievements and experiences
  - Automated CV analysers for students in specific subjects to allow large-scale quality feedback.

- Recommendations for HEIs include:
  - Adopt a strategic approach to careers and employability provision
  - Explore the impact of sandwich courses and work experience on labour market outcomes for disadvantaged and under-represented students
  - Develop and evaluate alumni/peer mentoring opportunities for these students
  - Trial and evaluate technology-based approaches to careers and employability improvement
  - Share evidence across the HE sector on what works to reduce employability gaps.

The dataset does not include information on part-time work or unemployment, potentially disproportionately skewing the earnings gap for some demographics.

The Home Office published *Graduate route: Early insights evaluation***; the Graduate route was introduced as part of the new Future Borders & Immigration System (FBIS).**

- Interviews were conducted with 50 individuals who had used the route successfully to apply to stay in the UK for two or three years.

- Findings include:
  - The most common way that graduates found out about the route was through their HEI (~50%).
  - The three most important factors when considering staying in the UK are: the content of the Graduate route and what it allows you to do; the appeal of the career/course they are pursuing; and familiarity with the English language.
  - The Graduate route's most influential feature is the flexibility it affords holders.
  - Respondents are overwhelmingly using the route to work – all are in work, self-employed or looking for employment; most are working in professional or associate professional jobs and earning £20–30k a year.
  - 28 are living in England, 13 in Scotland, six in Wales and three in Northern Ireland.
  - The majority plan to extend their stay beyond the duration of their current visa; for many, this could mean switching to the Skilled Worker route.
  - ~50% thought the application fee and health surcharge were fair, ~50% unfair.

IZA published *The Over-Education Wage Penalty among PhD Holders: A European perspective*, using data from the European Skills & Jobs survey to measure the prevalence of over-educated PhD holders in EU member states and the UK.

- Over the past 15 years, all European countries have seen a substantial increase in the number of doctorates awarded:
  - In the EU, the number of newly enrolled doctoral students aged 24–35 increased from ~71k in 2013 to almost 90k in 2018.
  - The total number of doctoral students was estimated at around 660k in the EU in 2018.
- The increase has raised concerns about the employability of new doctoral graduates and about the availability of appropriate job opportunities that allow them to fully exploit their skills.
  - For the economy this is worrying because it leads to the underutilisation of the productive capacities of PhDs.
  - For the individual, the doctorate is expected to generate significant returns, e.g. better career opportunities, increased work satisfaction and higher pay; however, for those who end up in jobs for which they are over-educated, the disappointment is likely to be considerable.
  - The incentive to undertake a PhD is likely to be dampened; individuals may reconsider their investment, fearing that the time and effort in obtaining a PhD is not sufficiently rewarded.
- Findings include:
  - While the share of over-educated PhD holders is around 75%, only 42% actually appear to be over-skilled.
  - 36% of PhD holders are both over-educated and over-skilled, and 18% are over-educated and dissatisfied with their jobs.
  - Over-educated PhD holders face a wage penalty ranging from 25% to 13.5% with respect to their well-matched counterparts.
  - The over-education wage penalty is significantly higher for those who are both over-educated and over-skilled, and especially for those who are both over-educated and dissatisfied with their jobs.
  - The over-education wage penalty increases greatly along the wage distribution.
- Despite research demonstrating the costs associated with over-education and over-skilling, policies to address the problem are rarely visible, at national or European level.

HE: TEACHING & LEARNING

Jisc published *Learner digital experience insights survey 2021/22: UK further education (FE) survey findings* based on responses from 11,498 college students, and *Student digital experience insights survey 2021/22: UK higher education (HE) survey findings*, based on responses from 33,726 university students; both were conducted November 2021–April 2022.

- Returning solely to pre-pandemic practices is not an option; student experiences need to be heard for a stronger more hybrid future.
- 73% in FE had experienced taught classes mainly on site, 3% were taught mainly online.
- 65% in FE and 74% in HE rated the quality of online learning best imaginable/excellent/good.

- 38% in FE and 43% in HE said online learning materials were engaging and motivating; 49% in FE and 54% in HE said the materials were at the right level and pace.

- Students want investment in: upgrading platforms and systems (FE 36%, HE 42%); specialist software for their course (FE 24%, HE 29%); and more computers/devices (FE 29%, HE 15%).

- 29% in FE and 45% in HE prefer a mix of on-site and online learning; 66% in FE and 42% in HE prefer mainly on-site learning.

- 53% in FE and 50% in HE said they received guidance about the digital skills needed.

The FE report is based on responses from 25 colleges across the UK including two in Northern Ireland, the HE report on responses from 41 HEIs across the UK, also including two in Northern Ireland.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) published *Unpacking your Hidden Curriculum: A guide for educators*, on 'some of the unwritten rules and norms' in HE that students are assumed to understand but are not explicitly taught.

IZA published *Keep Me In, Coach: The short- and long-term effects of targeted academic coaching*, evaluating a group coaching programme for first-year students on academic probation at a US university.

- To boost graduation rates, policymakers often advocate for academic support such as coaching or mentoring; however, evidence for the success of these interventions is mixed.

- The programme evaluated involved the following for student participants:
  - Group coaching focused on improving self-confidence, reflecting on weaknesses and finding solutions to address their challenges and creating an action plan.
  - Follow-up individual meetings with a coach or use of an academic support service.

- Targeted, group coaching can be an effective way to improve marginal students' academic and early career outcomes:
  - Programme participants experienced substantial improvements in their academic performance and retention – students' first-year grade point average increased by 14.6% and the probability of first-year dropout decreased by 8.5ppt.
  - Effects were concentrated among lower-income students who also experienced an increase in the probability of graduating.
  - Effects were also concentrated among male students and those enrolled in STEM courses.
  - For the most affected groups, the programme increased earnings 7–9 years after initial enrolment at the university.

- The positive effects of the programme appear to have been driven largely by improvements in students' morale and social-emotional state.
  - Post-programme, participants reported feeling relatively more supported by faculty and less likely to feel that they were the only ones struggling.

- Notifying students of their poor academic performance serves an important purpose, however institutions should consider adding a positively toned behavioural intervention alongside the standard academic probation message.

Advance HE published *Employability in the curriculum report: A digital report assessing employability within the curricula of Welsh HE providers*, based on student and staff surveys conducted in November 2021 on behalf of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales.

- Findings include:
  - There was a broad recognition of employability elements and awareness of such within the programmes responding to the surveys.
  - Programmes that offered work-related activities scored considerably higher in terms of all elements of employability than those that didn't.
  - Every group of students also identified work experience as the number one area they would prefer to see an emphasis on to enable their future careers.
  - Students supported by the GO Wales work experience programme were significantly more likely to find their course emphasised employability.
  - Students who declared a disability were less likely to find their course emphasised employability (51%) than those who didn't declare a disability (57%).

- There is a need to create space within timetables for inter/multi-disciplinary teaching to aid student learning, encourage and foster a range of aspects of employability, and support flexible and hybrid approaches.
  - The pandemic has hastened the introduction of some elements that were already progressing, such as online placements, online interview skills and authentic and engaging assessment methods.
  - Now is a timely opportunity to reimagine these areas permanently, developing a hybrid and interdisciplinary curriculum across an integrated ecosystem.

The Open University (OU) published *Innovating Pedagogy 2022: Exploring new forms of teaching, learning and assessment, to guide educators and policy makers***, the tenth annual report, with the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, listing ten innovations already in currency but that haven't yet had a profound influence on education.**

- **Hybrid models**, combining face-to-face sessions with online materials and activities in a cohesive experience.
  - New types are being explored in which students can alternate between attending classroom sessions and participating synchronously and/or asynchronously online.
- **Dual learning**, based on close synchronisation between classroom and professional practice in industry in order to bring professional reality to the classroom and theoretical understanding to the workplace.
- **Pedagogies of microcredentials**: in their most basic form, small amounts of formally acknowledged learning, mainly focused on employment and mostly offered online.
  - The range of pedagogical options includes: e-portfolios for skills articulation; competency-based learning; case-based learning; conversational learning.
- **Pedagogy of autonomy**: the development of educational systems that encourage the growth of autonomy; associated with two ideas: learning is a profession and learners are professionals.
- **Watch parties**: learners engage collectively online with a specific video or broadcast; they may be from all over the world but can engage from their own homes, cafes or a variety of other venues.
  - There can be more social engagement in watch parties than in face-to-face teaching.
- **Influencer-led education**: 'edu-influencers' provide freely available video and other content to followers beyond formal and accredited education programmes and mostly work outside educational institutions.
  - They are increasingly shaping learners' decisions about what to learn, from whom and where, and their online presence tends to blur the boundaries between entertainment and learning.
- **Pedagogies of the home**: seek to investigate the types of informal teaching and learning practices that occur in a home environment plus culturally specific ways of learning, e.g. via the community.
- **Pedagogy of discomfort**: a process of self-examination that requires students to critically engage with their ideological traditions and ways of thinking about issues such as racism, oppression and social injustice, questioning and disrupting preconceived ideas and creating new understandings.
- **Wellbeing education**: should be a whole-institution approach where all aspects are conducive to wellbeing and promote good mental health.
- **Walk-and-talk**: walking can stimulate curiosity about one's surroundings, improve one's mood, clear the mind and spark new ideas.

The OECD published *Does Higher Education Teach Students to Think Critically?***, the results of a project to measure graduates' analytical reasoning and evaluation and problem solving skills.**

- The project used the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA+) International instrument developed by six countries (England, Chile, Finland, Italy, Mexico and the US) that wanted to continue the work of OECD's Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes project (abandoned in 2013 due to lack of support, despite a successful feasibility study).
  - It is based on the CLA+ instrument developed by the US Council for Aid to Education, which has a long history of assessing generic skills in post-secondary education.
- Overall, only 45% of tested university students were proficient in critical thinking, while 20% demonstrated 'emerging' skills.

- Learning gain was found to be small on average, with those studying fields closely aligned to real-word occupations – e.g. business and health – scoring the worst.
- In England, 2,090 self-selected students were tested over three years as part of a pilot to assess learning gain, with institutions finding that CLA+ worked as a diagnostic tool and formative assessment as well as to test performance output.

England's OfS published *National Data Skills learning and pilots: Final report*; the pilots were run in partnership with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS).

- Seven universities in England shared £333k to test different methods of teaching foundational data skills to undergraduates whose subject doesn't contain significant data science elements.
- The report considers the effectiveness of provision and good practice and includes a wider review of evidence on how providers in the UK and beyond teach data skills to such students; findings include:
  - There is a lack of clarity about the scope and language of 'data' and 'competencies', and the extent to which these should be considered 'foundational' in HEIs.
  - Some of the pilot projects reported misalignment between what industry says it needs and what students are taught, e.g. to undertake a project or dissertation.
  - More work is needed with the students to contextualise this type of learning and demonstrate its relevance across a wide range of careers.
  - There was also some evidence of 'statistics anxiety', and teaching such students can be pedagogically challenging where there are wide variations in levels of data skills.
  - A range of approaches were used in the pilot, ranging from embedded content or mandatory modules within subject curricula through to encouraging self-study using third-party resources.
  - Embedded modules featuring real-world subject-related examples appeared to be most popular; the earlier the skills were taught in a course, the better; this has implications for upskilling subject teaching staff.

England's OfS published *Maintaining the credibility of degrees*, an 'insight brief' on grade inflation in English HE.

- The proportion of first-class degrees awarded in England has more than doubled, from 15.7% in 2010/11 to 37.9% in 2020/21.
  - This effect was established pre-pandemic and has led to concerns that degrees have lost their value over time.
- Since 2019, when the OfS called for universities in England to tackle grade inflation, actions taken by HE representative bodies have included:
  - Publishing a statement of intent, calling on HEIs to: ensure assessments stretch and challenge students; review and explain how degree classifications are calculated; strengthen the system of external examiner oversight; publish data and analysis of degree outcomes
  - Identifying that universities are now: publishing degree outcome statements; reviewing the classification algorithms; sharing classification descriptors; strengthening external examination
  - Committing to returning by 2023 to pre-pandemic levels of Firsts and 2:1s, including by working with governing bodies to support understanding and scrutiny.
- OfS is working to establish the causes of the steady growth in higher degree classifications pre-pandemic and will continue to identify courses and universities that might not be meeting its regulatory requirements relating to assessment and awarding practice.

HEPI published *Why it is time for university governors to do more on academic quality*, focusing mainly on England.

- Possible ways of providing assurance on academic governance questions include:
  - Degree Outcomes Statement – an annual consideration of student attainment, including: what has happened; what has changed (e.g. in grade distribution); and why it has changed
  - Annual quality report to the governing body or board away-day, including: key performance indicators including from the National Student Survey and postgraduate surveys; summary of key points from external examiners and departmental action plans; and specific consideration of areas of higher risk, e.g. transnational education
  - Regular review of the OfS's ongoing conditions and key risks, including key metrics being presented to the Audit & Risk Committee with red/amber/green ratings.

England's OfS published *Student Engagement in Knowledge Exchange [KE] Competition: Formative Evaluation report 3 – Summary*; **the programme is supporting 20 projects to share practice and inform ongoing policy and investment.**

- Projects have made good progress, but challenges are evident in three areas:
  - **Partnership engagement and relationships**: e.g. maintaining effective communications between different locations; ceasing involvement due to changes in timelines
  - **Maintaining student engagement**: mainly due to fluctuation of motivation throughout the academic year and lack of availability due to study workload and changes in the timeline
  - **Staff workloads**, including: small teams that can't share/reallocate workloads; changes in timelines – individuals didn't expect to still be working on the project beyond summer 2022.
- Outputs have far exceeded targets, e.g. around 16.7k students have been engaged so far against a target of 13k, and 2.3k partners against a target of 1.5k.
  - In addition: briefings, reports and blogs have been published; podcasts produced; a KE WhatsApp group created for students at different universities; academic and external stakeholder boards and student advisory boards established; funding bids submitted; and a mapping exercise completed.
- A greater number of projects have achieved at least some of their anticipated outcomes including:
  - Increased and enhanced student involvement in KE activities, particularly by under-represented groups
  - Strengthened student networks and relationships between the HEIs and partner organisations
  - Improved student skills (research, entrepreneurial, project management, communication and employability)
  - Improved ability of businesses to see the value of KE activities.
- Some projects now anticipate that they will achieve outcomes they didn't previously identify, e.g. establishing new partnerships, enhancing the evidence base and developing frameworks.

HE: INSTITUTIONS & RESEARCH

HEPI published *Research Evaluation: Past, present and future*, **a collection of essays considering what has worked well in evaluation of UK research, what could have worked better and what the future direction should be.**

- The Research Excellence Framework (REF) has a unique place in the UK's system and has evolved, and arguably been improved, in part in response to criticisms of its processes and in part to take account of changing academic, social and political realities.
- The most significant and controversial change has been the inclusion of 'impact' as a major element, in response to a political need to show that public investment in research produces benefits.
  - It is now well established – a rare example of political interference in academic matters resulting in an improvement.
- The assessment process has been adapted to improve the evaluation of interdisciplinary research, addressing early criticisms that academics were being inhibited from undertaking it.
  - Academics taking a career break and early career researchers are also now assessed fairly.
- The REF has been one of the reasons for the international research pre-eminence of UK universities, but its downsides have become so serious as to question whether it can continue in its present form.
- The REF's role in determining the allocation of unconstrained research funds provides a driver of behaviour that has led academics and leaders to focus on research over teaching and other activity.
  - The measures taken to increase the value placed on teaching have been small and unsuccessful compared to the imperative the REF provides to focus on research.
- The REF is the victim of its own success, as increasing numbers of universities have progressively improved the quality of their research and obtained higher grades, while traditional research powerhouses have been unable to demonstrate similar improvements.
  - It has required ever-increasing contortions to use REF results in a way that protects the funding of the strongest research universities, causing angst among those who have improved their quality but whose funding has not increased to match.

These essays have been gathered to contribute to a rethink of the REF – and more generally of research policy and funding – that is under way with the Future Research Assessment Programme review.

GuildHE published *Building the Jigsaw: Heatmaps and Case Studies illustrating local, national and international impacts of specialist and smaller universities and colleges*, **based on studies carried out in 2019/20 before the pandemic.**

- A wide range of initiatives and collaborations are being undertaken by smaller and specialist institutions that actively address regional, national and international economic, social and cultural challenges throughout the UK.

- Five case studies were conducted involving 11 institutions; each study includes a qualitative case study and at least one heatmap visualising the topics covered.

  - Heatmapping is an experimental, emerging approach to thinking about and capturing the impact of KE activities – 'heatmaps' are used as a visual way of showing the unique contribution each institution has on 'place'.

  - Themes covered include cybersecurity, dementia studies, agriculture and city regions.

- The top three takeaways for policymakers and institutions:

  - Innovation does not always mean 'brand new', particularly when considered at local levels.

  - Capturing impact – positive and negative – is important.

  - Funding for success requires a funding mix.

The National Centre for Universities & Business (NCUB) published *Through crisis to recovery: The ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on universities and their ability to drive innovation*.

- The report explores the following:

  - The scale and nature of the effects on the innovation-focused activities of universities and their ability to initiate and deliver them

  - How universities adapted and responded to the challenges of the pandemic to continue to support innovation

  - The trends and drivers shaping the strategic priorities of universities for innovation and the factors affecting the strategic agility of universities to respond to the pandemic

  - The effectiveness of policy interventions made during the pandemic, and the views of universities on what further policy interventions could be made to enable them to more fully contribute to an innovation-led recovery.

HEPI published *Horizon Europe and Plan B research funding: Turning adversity into opportunity*, **a policy note on the UK's association with Horizon Europe, the EU Framework Programme for Research & Innovation.**

- Full association with Horizon Europe remains preferable but a checklist for making the alternative (Plan B) work includes:

  - Incentivise the participation of less well-resourced UK universities in European research and innovation, e.g. through staff exchange schemes.

  - Allow greater freedom for individual researchers to devise their own research topics, rather than funding pre-defined projects.

  - Co-fund schemes between the UK Government and the private sector for applied research projects.

  - Minimise bureaucracy with short and simple applications.

  - Encourage reciprocal collaborations with EU partners by requiring multi-country stakeholders in research projects.

The King's College London Policy Institute published *The state of free speech in UK universities: What students and the public think*, **based on surveys of 2,500 students and several surveys of the general public, with comparisons to a similar survey in 2019.**

- Among the complex and sometimes contradictory findings:

  - 65% of students say free speech and robust debate are well protected at their institution, while 15% disagree; 73% report that debates and discussions are civil, respecting the rights and dignity of others, while 10% disagree; these figures are largely unchanged from 2019.

  - 80% feel free to express their views at their university (-8ppt on 2019); 70% of the general public feel free to express their views in UK society.

  - 75% of students say they are free from discrimination, harm or hatred (-3ppt).

- 34% of students say free speech is very/fairly threatened in their university (+11ppt) and 32% feel academic freedom is threatened (+12ppt); but 53% feel free speech is under threat in UK society as a whole.

- 25% say they very/fairly often hear of incidents at their university where free speech has been inhibited (+13ppt), but 64% say they haven't heard about such incidents very often or at all.

- 49% feel that universities are becoming less tolerant of a wide range of viewpoints, rising to 65% among Conservative-voting students, but falling to 37% among those who would vote Labour.

- 51% think the climate at their university prevents some people from saying things they believe because others might find them offensive; 30% disagree.

- In comparison, 80% of the UK public think that the climate in UK society inhibits some people from speaking their minds, while 17% disagree.

- 43% of both students and the general public report having felt unable to express their views because they don't want to disagree with others.

- 46% of students but only 35% of the public believe that debating an issue like sexism or racism makes it acceptable; 41% of students but only 25% of the public feel that academics should be sacked for teaching material that offends some students.

- Although few have heard of England's Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill, 60% of students and 61% of the public support it when it's explained to them.

All of the surveys used are UK-wide, but the report provides no breakdowns of samples or findings.

HEPI published *Could universities do more to end homelessness?*, highlighting the consistently high prevalence of homelessness in university towns and cities.

- Research evidence into the effectiveness of interventions to relieve and prevent homelessness is particularly weak in the UK.

- It is important that universities teach their students about homelessness, especially in courses whose graduates are likely to engage with it in a professional capacity such as medicine, education, social work and many others.

- There is a strong case to suggest that universities have a civic duty to relieve and prevent homelessness in communities where they are key players and tend to increase local housing costs.

- Ten recommendations include:
  - Ensure admissions processes are open to potential applicants affected by homelessness and support students to ensure their success.
  - Review curriculum content across subjects to ensure that homelessness is considered and discussed in an evidence-led way.
  - Involve people with personal experience of homelessness in the development, review and delivery of the curriculum.
  - Develop evidence-based volunteering opportunities at scale for students and staff.

WORKFORCE ISSUES

Advance HE published *Leadership in global higher education: Findings from a scoping study*, based on discussions with 145 international HE leaders and staff and a literature review.

- The aim was to inform the development of an HE leadership survey; three key themes emerged:

- The **context in which people are working and leading**:
  - The pandemic, policy, society, funding, students and staff.

- The **meaning of that context for values and purpose** in HE leadership:
  - Public good, inclusivity, social justice, social mobility and freedom of speech
  - Government intervention, economic rationalisation and managerialism
  - Empowerment, wellbeing, resilience, role modelling and enabling
  - Consultation, engagement and values-based leadership.

- The **skills, competencies and behaviours** that would enable or enhance effective HE leadership:
  - Adaptable, analytical, authentic, collaborative, compassionate, creative, credible, decisive, digitally engaged, inclusive and self-reflective.

HEPI published *Thirty years on: Leadership convergence between newer and older universities*, **a follow-up to its policy note on vice-chancellors' (VCs') lengths of tenure at long-standing UK universities** [*see* Skills Research Digest Q2 2022 *p. 15*].

- The significant disparity between pre- and post-1992 tenures has narrowed considerably during the past three decades, with the gap now negligible.

- This convergence fits into the broader erosion of differences over time, with the 1992 dividing line becoming increasingly artificial.
    - Former polytechnics have become more like traditional institutions, and there has been a cross-pollination of culture and leadership structures.
    - The movement of VCs and other senior administrators between traditional and post-1992 institutions is now more common.

- The long-term decrease in tenure may reflect the greater importance of a VC's position today, with the greater day-to-day demands and media attention that come with the job.
    - A faster turnover of university leaders would potentially make space for a more diverse generation of VCs to take up their roles, but it would also increase turbulence and disruption.

The University & College Union (UCU) published *The impact of social class on experiences of working in post-16 education*, **based on a survey of 4k members working in adult, further, higher and prison education across the UK.**

- 49% described their background as working class, compared with 60% reported in the 2021 British Social Attitudes survey.
    - The figure for the FE sector is 68%, compared to 40% in HE.

- 54.2% of working-class and 42% of non-working-class members agree that working-class staff face barriers in relation to recruitment at their institution.
    - 52.6% overall and 61.1% of working-class members agree that a working-class background presents a barrier to career progression.
    - 50.5% overall agree that a working-class background presents a barrier to feeling included.

- 58% of working-class members agree that working-class staff face barriers in relation to networking opportunities at their institution compared with 44.2% of non-working-class members.

- 32.8% overall agree that they have been disadvantaged or discriminated against in their career due to their accent, rising to 40.8% of working-class members.

The Workplace

RECRUITMENT

The Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD) published its *2022 Resourcing and talent planning report*, **based on responses from 1k UK-based human resources (HR) professionals.**

- 81% attempted to fill vacancies and 77% experienced difficulties, up from 49% in 2021.
    - Recruiting for senior and skilled roles was most challenging (58%), although 26% had difficulties attracting low-skilled candidates.

- 60% reported increased problems with retention and 37% undertook initiatives to improve it, up from 29% in 2021.
    - ~40% anticipate an increase to their recruitment and talent management budgets in the next year.

- Better pay and/or benefits is now the most common response to retention difficulties (54%, up from 32%), although the private sector is far more likely to increase pay than the public sector.
    - Pay and benefits, perception of the organisation as an employer, organisational values, career development opportunities, perception of job security and flexible working are all important.

- 38% are increasing efforts to develop more talent in-house, with upskilling existing employees the most common response to recruitment difficulties (60%).

- ▪ 46% currently offer apprenticeships, around 33% have graduate and/or post-A level entry routes and just over 25% have intern schemes.
- ▫ 28% have career returner programmes and 22% mid-career-change programmes.
- ▪ 69% advertise at least some jobs as open to flexible working and 30% of recruiters believe this has been one of their most effective methods for attracting candidates, up from 24%.
- ▪ 66% offer some hybrid/remote working and 47% advertise at least some jobs as 'open to location'.
  - ▫ 68% of those who offer it say it has helped them attract and retain more talent; 45% that it has increased productivity; 35% that it has increased engagement.
  - ▫ 25% expect it to increase over the next 12 months; 66% expect it to remain the same.
- ▪ 61% have a formal diversity policy and the majority are taking some steps to attract diverse candidates.
  - ▫ However, just 35% are actively trying to recruit talent of all ages, while only 24% advertise in different sources and 23% actively try to attract talent from all backgrounds.
  - ▫ 32% are very/extremely active in trying to recruit more diverse candidates to the board, while 30% aren't at all active.
- ▪ 80% report an increased use of technology in the recruitment process due to Covid-19, although only 20% use online induction, tests/assessments and/or applicant tracking systems; 16% use artificial intelligence (AI) or machine learning.
- ▪ 38% report that their CEO has had talent management as a key priority over the last 12 months, up from 30%, but lower than in previous years.
  - ▫ 30% don't look beyond six months, while 17% are planning over two years into the future.
  - ▫ 63% collect some data to inform their resourcing decisions but few take a comprehensive approach; only 12% collect data to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of retention initiatives.

A set of case studies is also available at the same link.

APPRENTICESHIPS & TRAINEESHIPS

Cedefop published *Built to Last: Apprenticeship vision, purpose, and resilience in times of crisis*, a set of short papers from its community of apprenticeship experts.

- ▪ Looking to draw lessons from the past to better prepare apprenticeships for future shocks and for the accelerated pace of change, resilience is a quality of interest for researchers and policymakers.
  - ▫ The proliferation of apprenticeships indicates a need to better understand and clarify their vision and purpose within national contexts and for international comparison.
- ▪ The papers aim to show how company participation in apprenticeship changes in times of crisis and to inform responses that help apprenticeships adapt and overcome fluctuations.
  - ▫ They give examples of how national stakeholders can share a common vision and purpose, allowing apprenticeships to adapt to emerging needs without compromising their essential features as a distinct type of training.
  - ▫ They show how apprenticeships that are built on a common vision – and shared efforts and responsibilities – are also built to last, to withstand times of crisis.
- ▪ Part I papers consider: work-based learning in Bulgaria; new modern apprenticeships in Cyprus; the apprenticeship contract in France; dual pathway in the Netherlands; programmes in Portugal and Romania; apprenticeship resilience in England.
  - ▫ Part II looks at vision and purpose in Denmark, Germany, Lithuania and Poland.

SKILLS GAPS & SHORTAGES

CIPD published *Employer Views on Skills Policy in the UK*, primarily based on a survey of 2k decision-makers conducted mid-February to mid-March 2022.

- ▪ Recruitment difficulties are highest in the public sector and more prevalent among professional occupations, where 43% of employers say that applicants do not have the required level of skills.
  - ▫ The most difficult skills to find are technical skills and softer skills such as problem solving, planning and organisational skills and customer handling.

- In response, they are focusing on improving pay and conditions, but also upskilling existing staff and offering apprenticeships.
- Employers who take a more strategic approach to skills are more likely to address current and future skills needs, ensure that work is well designed and that managers are equipped with the skills they need to develop their people.
- 36% of employers disagree that their people managers receive adequate training on how they develop their people.
- Over 50% of employers who recruited directly from school felt that young people were poorly prepared for work.
  - Too few employers engage with the FE sector and their awareness of technical education reforms *[in England]* remains low.
- There is broad support to reform the apprenticeship levy into a more flexible training levy, to allow employers to invest in other forms of accredited training.

PwC published *The Energy Transition & Jobs: Can people transition to new green jobs?*, a detailed analysis of the growth of green jobs across the UK and the skills required to fill them.

- Investment in the green economy and the high transferability of skills suggest that, contrary to perceptions, net employment losses can be avoided as progress is made towards net zero.
  - However, increases in renewable, nuclear or low-carbon energy generation will be constrained by a significant shortage of skilled labour that can't be addressed from the existing UK energy workforce alone.
  - By 2050, 400k roles will need to be filled to build the net zero energy workforce: 260k will be additional roles and 140k will replace those who have left.
  - The majority of jobs forecast to be created in the net zero energy workforce will be primarily based in Scotland, particularly the north east.
- 1.6% of all advertised jobs in the UK in 2021 were 'green', with jobs in all UK regions, particularly in Scotland (2.3%) and the North West and South West (1.8%); in Northern Ireland it was 1.5%.
  - The green skills most in demand were largely 'sector agnostic', reflecting the high demand across the economy; however, 'renewable energy', 'infrastructure' and 'nuclear' all rank in the top ten.
  - Factors creating a skills shortfall include a lack of investment in reskilling, and that 20% of the existing workforce are due to retire by 2032.
- Both government and industry action are required to address a current lack of coherent labour force planning, a lack of engagement with educational institutions and negative perceptions of the sector among young people.

The European Commission published *Feasibility study for a (self-) assessment tool on skills management practices in SMEs*, exploring the skills needs of SMEs from a range of sectors and maturity stages, based on literature, interviews with stakeholders and SMEs, and case studies.

- SMEs tend to perform less well on a range of business indicators compared to bigger companies, which is correlated to lower investments in skills management-related indicators.
  - Lack of qualified employees within an enterprise is an important barrier to innovative activities; although a higher share of SMEs (compared to large enterprises) claim that this factor hinders innovation, a smaller share of SMEs provide training.
  - Many government policies and other positive external determinants can boost SMEs' interest in investing in skills, but are often overshadowed by e.g. supply constraints, lack of funds, lack of time and lack of human resources.
- Business needs of SMEs:
  - Skills management needs are closely related to their business needs and are shaped by improving productivity, growth and profits, and technological development and increased pace of business digitalisation and greening.
  - A large portion of business needs could be solved with more effective and/or efficient skills management.
  - An increasing share of SMEs want to ensure their employees have relevant digital competencies and are looking for opportunities to develop green skills.

- Development options are identified for a self-assessment tool for skills management for SMEs; four types of skills management practices are focused on:
  - **Analysis and planning** (**skills assessment**), e.g. workforce analysis, employee evaluation and identification of skills gaps
  - **Skills development**, e.g. training (internal or external), mentorship, task force assignment
  - **Skills utilisation**, e.g. job rotation, larger involvement of employees in decision-making
  - **Complex skills management practices**.
- The self-assessment tool should:
  - be provided free of charge, easily accessible and require minimum time commitment from SMEs
  - present concrete benefits, i.e. contribute to improvement of business outcomes (e.g. increased productivity) or people-related outcomes (e.g. ability to attract and retain talent)
  - focus on smaller, more tangible aims (e.g. improve productivity, growth, etc.).

The International Labour Organization (ILO) published _Using Online Vacancy and Job Applicants' Data to Study Skills Dynamics_, assessing whether such data is a suitable source outside of Europe and the US.

- A tailor-made taxonomy systematically aggregates three broad categories of skills – cognitive, socioemotional and manual – and 14 commonly observed and recognisable skills sub-categories, based on unique skills identified through keywords and expressions.
  - Machine learning techniques are then used to implement the taxonomy in online vacancy and applicants' data, thereby capturing both the supply and the demand side.
- Using Uruguayan job board data, skills are successfully assigned to 64% of applicants' employment spells and 94% of vacancies.
- The advantage of the approach is its reliance on data currently available in many countries across the world, thereby allowing for country-specific analysis that does not need to assume that occupational skills bundles are the same across countries.

The researchers believe they are the first to explore this approach in the context of emerging economies.

TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

IZA published _Training, Worker Mobility, and Employer Coordination_, examining the impact of employer associations on business decisions on training and the movement of workers between firms, drawing on matched employer–employee data from Portugal.

- Firm-provided training is important for investment in employees; it can greatly increase worker productivity and business performance.
- However, worker mobility – particularly employee 'poaching' – can influence companies' decisions on their investment in training.
- Employer coordination on reducing mobility via e.g. the operation of no-poach agreements and employers' associations (EAs), can lead to increased training and productivity.
  - EAs implement no-poach agreements to reduce their labour costs (from wages and turnover) and to increase their returns from training.
  - Workers in an EA firm are less likely to be poached by another firm affiliated with the same EA.
  - Training provision by EA-affiliated firms is considerably higher than those not in the EA.
  - Such forms of employer coordination may have important benefits in terms of worker productivity if they lead to higher levels of training.

The CBI published findings from the latest _CBI/PwC Financial Services Survey_ of 78 financial services firms, conducted in early June 2022.

- Upskilling and retraining staff is the most frequent priority for respondents (73%), ahead of advances in technology and business transformation (69%) and achieving operational resilience (68%).
  - 74% are looking to upskill their existing workforce in response to disruption.
- While 47% of firms report no barriers to training staff, 50% report lack of time as a key barrier to meeting training needs.

- The most common objective from reskilling is improved workforce agility (59%).
- The most common workforce priority for the year ahead is retaining talent (65%).

The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) published *Scaling up Skills: Developing education and training to help small businesses and the economy*, **based on survey responses from 675 small business owners in England.**

- 78% of small businesses that have tried to recruit in the past 12 months have experienced difficulties including a lack of candidates with relevant qualifications, skills and experience (82%), and a low number of applicants generally (60%).
  - 48% say that technical skills are important to achieving future growth.
- 16% are looking to hire an apprentice.
  - 21% say that reintroducing a financial incentive over the next 12 months would lead to them hire additional apprentices in that period.
- Only 4% engage with schools and 15% with FE colleges.
- 83% have provided training for their staff and/or themselves over the past 12 months; the average number of days is seven; 74% say it directly related to the job role.
  - 26% say leadership and management skills are the most important to future growth; 26% have undertaken leadership and management training in the last 12 months.
  - 31% have a training plan for the year ahead and 17% have a budget.
- The top incentives to carry out more training include:
  - More government assistance with costs (64%)
  - More tax relief incentives (48%)
  - Improved information, advice and guidance on the training support available (37%)
  - More flexible training opportunities (37%)
  - Improved course quality (25%).
- Barriers to implementing training include: relevant training is not available locally (23%); no relevant training is available (13%); the quality of courses and/or providers is not satisfactory (13%).
- 40% of sole traders haven't been on any courses over the past 12 months; 80% are without a training plan, a training budget or a relationship with a training provider.
- Recommendations cover: legal targets for qualification levels for young people and adults; incentives for hiring young apprentices; free training for older adults; tax relief for self-employed people who take training; a nationwide young enterprise competition for school and university/college leavers.

The OU and TrainingZone published *L&D's [learning & development's] role in enabling social mobility*, **a 'white paper' with insights, strategies and tools to help employers use L&D to access overlooked talent.** *[An email address is required to access the full report.]*

- Employers need to better understand social mobility and factor it into their L&D strategy.
- The report covers: the socially diverse talent pool – from refugees to former sports professionals; five types of social mobility; how different types of organisations enable social mobility; intrapreneurial learning, skills bootcamps and personalised learning; and creating an action plan for L&D leaders.

AUTOMATION & AI: IMPACT ON WORK

Cedefop published *Challenging digital myths: First findings from Cedefop's second European skills and jobs survey [ESJS2]* **– a policy brief.**

- The pandemic accelerated the digitalisation of work and accentuated EU digital skill demands.
  - ESJS2 shows that it affected the employment of 33% of workers from the EU-27 plus Norway and Iceland (EU+), with younger and lower-educated workers most negatively affected.
- The pandemic had an unprecedented impact on the social fabric of workplaces, with ~29% of EU+ workers working remotely and 39% spending less time working in offices, factories and other places.
  - 46% more often used digital communication tools/platforms for work meetings or conferences, 39% to perform some of their work tasks and 36% to participate in job-related learning.

- 41% of those with tertiary-level education worked more remotely during the first year of the pandemic compared with 18% of lower-educated workers.
  - Working from home or elsewhere was also more prevalent for those employed in the ICT (63%), financial (54%) and professional services (46%) sectors; this compares with accommodation & food services (12%), essential utilities (19%) and health & social work services (17%).
- 87% of EU jobs now require at least some basic digital skills (e.g. emailing, browsing, word processing) and almost 50% of workers use specialised software.
  - 20% undertake relatively advanced database management and 10% need very high digital proficiency, e.g. to maintain ICT systems; ~7% use programming or coding at work.
- 35% of EU+ employees had to learn to use new digital technology for their main job around 2020–21, ranging from 50% or more in Finland, Norway and Sweden to 30% or less in Italy and Cyprus.
  - 32% had to learn to use new programs or software and 10% new computerised machines.
- 52% of EU+ adult workers need to develop their digital skills further to do their main job better than at present – 13% significantly and 39% to a moderate extent.
  - ~20% would benefit from training in navigating the web; 30–40% could improve their fundamental word processing and spreadsheet use; 70–90% could be trained to acquire more advanced database management and programming skills.
  - However, only 26% of EU+ workers undertook digital skills training in 2020–21.
- Rather than speculating about jobs that may or will vanish, digital and skills policies should consider what type of work design is required, following technology-enabled changes, to ensure human-machine complementarities.
  - Technocentric policies that do not fully consider the wider social and organisational context, and how digitalisation affects it, are likely to be either one-sided or fail in securing equitable outcomes for European citizens, organisations and economies.
  - Job design must be at the heart of policies to steer technological development towards a desired future of work.
- A human-centred work design approach prioritises skills utilisation and places workers at the centre of organisational policies.
  - Technological adoption should be accompanied by work design approaches that foster job autonomy instead of narrow (algorithmic) management and control systems based on ratings, recommendations and rewards.
  - Technological change should stimulate skill variety and use, so that it motivates workers to learn and perform.
  - Employee empowerment, scope for feedback in management practices and positively reinforcing social relations in workplaces also drive the effectiveness of digital technology adoption.

SKILLS POLICY

The Northern Ireland Department for the Economy, Welsh Government and Scottish Government published _National Occupational Standards [NOS] Strategy 2022 and beyond_; NOS are funded and managed by the three devolved governments.

- The political and social context for UK NOS is changing:
  - England's apprenticeship reforms and review of technical education has changed the UK-wide approach to standards; the reduction in the number of sector bodies has made UK-wide engagement with industry more challenging.
  - An ageing population is leading to multi-generational workplaces and the way we learn will need to change as the demand for lifelong learning increases – NOS can respond and lead the way.
  - In times of disruption, transferable skills are even more important – NOS can play a key role in articulating and highlighting those skills.
  - The Fourth Industrial Revolution is changing the labour market at a rapid pace, with new skills and occupations emerging.
- A 2021 Edge Foundation report found that NOS are still valued, particularly for the role they play as the 'cement' that binds the UK skills system to the world of work.
- New principles for NOS:

- Responsive: employer-centric and UK-wide, enabling the transfer of skills and mobility of labour
- Recognised: for their role in underpinning the UK skills system; inclusive: allowing for multiple access and different uses
- Relevant, current: reflecting new skills demands; aligned to other standards and qualifications architecture
- Robust: evidence of impact and usage; systems and processes that are accessible, agile and trusted.

- Priorities include:
  - Remain demand-led and be based on real-time insights, with better use of labour market information and strong stakeholder engagement.
  - A set of pan-sector and multisector NOS will be supported by a catalogue of common work-relevant behaviours.
  - The presentation will be refreshed; they will continue to include sufficient detail to allow for bite-sized learning, supporting flexible upskilling/reskilling and lifelong learning.
  - Systems and processes will be more agile but will still ensure high quality and responsiveness.
  - Purpose will be better communicated, building on the NOS brand to raise awareness of their value.
  - Impact and outcome evaluation data will be developed to exemplify their economic and social value.
  - Clearer linkages will be pursued with relevant policy across the UK, Europe and internationally, as well as other professional standards and qualification frameworks.

- A NOS Strategic Development Plan will be commissioned to put the principles and priorities into action; progress will be reported regularly.
  - There will be ongoing, regular monitoring and a formal review of progress in 2027.

IZA published _The Relation between Skills and Job Security: Identifying the contractual return to skills_, a study based on Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) data from 29 countries including the UK.

- The traditional steady job with a permanent contract is on the decline, and there is evidence for some countries that the stepping stone of temporary work towards permanent jobs has eroded.

- The study uses PIAAC data to estimate how skills relate to the odds of obtaining a permanent contract vs alternative contractual arrangements for employees.

- Findings include:
  - Skills substantially relate to having a permanent contract across the full sample.
  - Both numeracy and literacy skills contribute to the odds of obtaining a permanent contract, with numeracy contributing more than literacy.
  - There are substantial differences between countries: either only numeracy skills contribute to permanent contract status, only literacy skills, or neither, but never both.
  - The 'contractual return to skills' differs substantially from the traditional wage return to skills across countries, with differences appearing to relate to demand factors and labour market institutions.

England's Department for Education Skills & Productivity Board* published _Skills needs in selected occupations over the next 5–10 years_, focusing on four priority areas: managers, science & technology, skilled trades and health.

- Skills related to knowledge and effective use of relevant technologies will continue to be required.
  - Digital literacy is already an essential (if basic) requirement, with varying degrees of digital skills required in different sectors and different occupations.
  - However, across roles, skills around understanding and use of data will increase in importance in future as responsibilities for data handling and data security are shared across organisations.

- Some specific technical skills are (and will be) needed in health and skilled trades such as those related to the ability to adapt clinical skills to developments in health and care, knowledge of the technical or scientific basis of work and understanding of relevant standards and legislation.

- Expected changes in the selected occupations and emerging skills point to:

- skills needs in using specific new hardware and software
- data science skills
- the need to apply or adapt skills to future-related goals such as combatting climate change.

- People and communication skills are and will continue to be needed, including to complement the use of digital and technical skills and communicate about them to colleagues and the public.
  - Teamwork skills are and will be key in addressing complex needs in coordinated way.
  - Skills around planning and communicating long-term strategy and goals, exploiting opportunities and managing risks were seen as especially important for managers and health professionals.

- Skills related to awareness of equality, diversity and inclusion are important; however, the need to move from awareness to action was also thought to require certain skills in driving change in organisational culture.
  - This and the teaching of teamwork skills are key potential areas for policy intervention.

- More creative and focused training is required on the skills needed to work together, whether it is offered through educational institutions or CPD.

- Alternative and non-traditional routes (e.g. cross-skilling and horizontal movement) are likely to help with recruitment in the areas and occupations of interest.
  - CPD will play an important role in workforce adaptation, upskilling and reskilling.

The board was dissolved when the new Unit for Future Skills was launched, but its publications are still available – for the moment at least – on the old webpage.

City & Guilds published two new reports as part of its series following its *Great Jobs* research with Emsi Burning Glass [see Skills Research Digest Q1 2022, *p. 17*]**.**

- ***Understanding Essential Jobs in Social Care: Exploring an undervalued industry in need of skills*, a detailed look at the sector including skills shortages.**
  - There are currently 1.7m jobs in social care in the UK with a further 226,441 vacancies expected by 2026 (13% growth rate).
  - Challenges include: poor retention, which increases hesitancy for employers to upskill or train staff who seem likely to leave; a reduced talent pool following Brexit; an ageing workforce; an undervalued workforce; a female-dominated (83%) workforce.
  - Unlike other sectors, there is also little scope for automation to fill skills gaps.

- ***Levelling Up the UK: Shining a spotlight on the essential roles that are vital to levelling up skills in the UK*, exploring the challenges and solutions to achieve the agenda's goals, with a focus on England.**
  - The UK has over 1.3m open job vacancies in various industries, and 3m additional vacancies are expected in essential sectors over the next 5 years, including 340k roles that currently don't exist.
  - Skills development and levelling up activities are not keeping pace with demands.
  - Challenges include: skills stagnation of entire regions; disparity in skills acquisition and qualification levels; massive change and growth means more adults need to reskill; lack of funding for skills required; and the knock-on effect of long-term underfunding of adult education, apprenticeships and work-based learning.
  - A solid skills development strategy is needed with long-term objectives.
  - Actions for employers to consider include: broaden the recruitment pool when hiring; re-invest in existing workers; provide greater access to workplace training; and investigate and make better use of current government initiatives.

Cedefop published a policy brief on *Cities in transition: How vocational education and training can help cities become smarter and greener*.

- The European Green Deal is the EU's growth strategy and its policy response to the challenges related to climate change and environmental degradation.

- Cities are 'smart' because they implement innovative ICT solutions, and they make use of them and of their data to achieve specific goals to improve the sustainability and wellbeing of their residents.
  - Empowering and enabling cities to become greener and smarter should be a core priority for VET.

- Key points from the 'smart and green city' (SGC) concept include:

- VET can play a major role in meeting SGC skill needs, due to its close connection to the world of work and its ability to provide science and technology-based knowledge and skills crucial for building, retrofitting, green construction, IT management and other green economy areas.

- Robust and trusted skills intelligence, based on a variety of anticipation methods and tools, is essential to inform policymakers and VET providers about short- to medium-term skill needs; this is crucial for SGC-relevant skills that are changing rapidly due to technological progress.

- IVET is crucial for SGC skills formation, upskilling, reskilling and matching; for young learners, high-quality IVET programmes linked to SGC goals, with strong work-based elements, modules on sustainability and the development of tutors'/mentors' skills, are essential drivers.

- Continuing VET (CVET) plays a key role in ensuring that the continuing development and proliferation of SGCs is not impeded by skill shortages and gaps: work-based learning and on-the-job training are well suited to developing skills for SGC jobs; microcredentials can stimulate uptake, providing certification and recognition of learning that increase acceptance from employers, strengthen learners' employability and facilitate professional mobility.

- To support CVET provision, effective feedback loops are needed between employers and trainers, encouraging employers to train staff and ensure that workers can balance training and work.

- Local administrations, trade unions and employers have a role to play in making the transition just; they are well placed to take account of local circumstances and the position of vulnerable groups, and to promote gender equality in VET and SGC-relevant employment.

City & Guilds published [findings](#) from a Censuswide survey of 500 UK electricians on electrical vehicle (EV) charging work.

- 73% are likely to seek work in installing or repairing EV charge points in the next year, however only 28% have had EV charge point training; 34% learnt on-the-job.

  - 99% understood there to be major risks associated with EV charging work.

  - 70% plan to enrol in an EV charger installation qualification; 58% believe the industry needs an updated specific qualification.

The target number of public EV charge points by 2030 is 300k across the UK.

Nesta published [*How to scale a highly skilled heat pump industry*](#), on the need to grow the UK's supply of skilled heat pump engineers and productive companies to employ them.

- There are an estimated 3k trained heat pump engineers in the UK; this will need to increase to at least 27k in the next six years (4–6k per year); they will need to be highly skilled.

- Existing heat pump companies will need to take on and train new employees and may need to grow their companies as a result; this requires a company-led approach to thinking about skills challenges.

  - The heating industry is one of the least diverse parts of the UK economy and it needs to cast the widest possible net to attract those who are currently under-represented.

- There is currently no single, clear route for someone new to the industry to train and training offers are fragmented and sometimes inconsistent.

- Heating engineers also need hands-on experience and guidance from experienced engineers.

  - If the industry tries to rely on new entrants and apprentices alone, there will not be enough experienced engineers to provide hands-on training and oversight.

- Current incentives are not strong enough for workers to train or companies to hire them; engineers are unsure how the market and government commitment will develop and there is no wage premium for installing heat pumps compared to gas boilers.

  - Increasing company sizes and enabling workers to specialise in different skills, plus using new technologies and labour-saving aids could help to raise productivity.

- Recommendations include:

  - The UK Government should appoint a body to oversee the low-carbon heating industry and workforce.

  - Providers and governments should work together to establish direct routes to training via low-carbon heating apprenticeships and college courses and to integrate heat pump modules into existing courses and apprenticeships.

  - Providers and governments should roll out industry-wide 'train the trainer' programmes for existing plumbing and heating trainers.

- □ Providers should work with firms to develop options for specialised design and installation training.
- □ Governments should trial different types of cash incentive to attract people to train and to encourage companies to take on and train new workers; they should also offer time-limited grants for CPD to certified heat pump engineers to spend on additional training and productivity-enhancing measures.

The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) published *Train Local, Work Local, Stay Local: Retrofit, growth, and levelling up***, exploring the skills and training needs in home insulation and heating upgrades for the housing repair, maintenance and improvement (RMI) sector.**

- ■ The Government could make retrofitting homes with insulation and upgrading boilers to heat pumps the cornerstone of its levelling up strategy by creating jobs that can be trained for and filled locally.
  - □ A retrofitting programme of £7b per year in England could sustain over 400k direct jobs and 500k indirect jobs by 2030 and over 1.2m/1.5m by 2050.
- ■ Existing RMI jobs do not match well with where retrofitting will be needed most: areas with the highest demand for installers tend to be current or former industrial and coastal communities.
- ■ There are also structural challenges with training and recruitment in the RMI sector and broader construction industry, including in retraining the existing workforce, attracting new workers and adhering to training standards and practices.
- ■ Five key recommendations for government:
  - □ Improve training and jobs standards so that upskilling means giving everyone a holistic understanding of heat loss.
  - □ Increase practical and local on-site training to ensure new installers have the practical experience that many employers demand.
  - □ Improve quality assurance of training by banning the 'pay to pass' model and clamping down on certification schemes that don't have robust quality assurance in place.
  - □ Provide support for local courses by allocating funding for low-carbon heating and energy efficiency training costs for both existing workers and new labour market entrants.
  - □ Reintroduce *[England's]* skills academies to distribute funding and coordinate the rollout of high-quality training.

CESifo published *The Next Wave of Energy Innovation: Which Technologies? Which Skills?***.**

- ■ A changing energy landscape requires new human capital but addressing the impact of the energy transition on workers' reskilling and retraining receives insufficient policy support.
  - □ Low-carbon energy policy aims to make inefficient, dirtier technologies obsolete, but doing so risks making some workers' skills obsolete.
- ■ Changing workforce needs matter for several reasons, including:
  - □ Low-carbon energy employment opportunities will require workers with the necessary skills; certain skills (e.g. abstract and cognitive) are complementary to new technologies, while others (routine and manual) are substituted by them.
  - □ Cognitive skills are also a key input of a country's innovative capabilities, and their availability is important to solve the remaining innovation challenges *[also described in the paper]*.
- ■ Understanding how to prepare workers for low-carbon energy transition is hard due to a lack of data and widely accepted definitions of green jobs, many of which are new or don't yet exist.
  - □ Using a task-based approach can help improve the measurement and the conceptual understanding of green occupations.
  - □ Low-carbon energy jobs make more intensive use of STEM skills than other comparable jobs.
  - □ New tasks related to low-carbon energy (e.g. using computing and maths skills for smart grid management or climbing wind towers) replace tasks related to coal mining jobs.
  - □ Some engineering and technical skills (e.g. mechanics and construction) do not necessarily correlate with higher levels of formal education, suggesting that green occupations require more on-the-job training than similar occupations.
- ■ The willingness of workers to allocate skills to tasks depends on the distribution of wage offers across occupations – workers don't want to be retrained to move to a sector that pays them less.
  - □ Green jobs require workers with STEM skills, but also pay less than many other STEM-intensive occupations, e.g. fossil fuel workers earn higher wages.

ADULT & LIFELONG LEARNING

England's Department for Education published *Evaluation of the Level 3 Free Courses for Jobs [FCFJ] offer* and its impact on adult learners and providers.

- FCFJ is part of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee, announced in September 2020 to help 'build back better'.
  - From April 2021 it provided fully funded qualifications for adults who don't hold a L3 qualification.
  - In April 2022, eligibility was expanded on a trial basis to include low-waged or unemployed adults qualified to L3 or higher (this change was too late for the evaluation).

- Key findings include:
  - Most providers said that demand for courses included in the offer and for jobs linked to the courses was slightly higher than for those outside the offer; a minority said that courses in scope didn't meet local labour market needs.
  - 72% said they had introduced new sector subject areas (SSAs), most commonly health & social care.
  - 64% said that FCFJ had enabled them to offer more remote live classes and study groups and 63% to employ more teaching staff, particularly those that didn't previously offer adult L3; 96% will carry on with FCFJ in the future.
  - In April–November 2021, starts of funded learners on eligible courses were up 54% on 2018/19, to 11k; starts were up in all regions and in most SSAs, most notably in health & social care, ICT and building & construction.
  - Starts have increased for learners with a range of characteristics, particularly for those with a learning difficulty, disability or health problem (+125%), men (+64%), 50–64 year-olds (+94%) and those in the second least deprived quartile (+81%).
  - 74% of learners said they would have been less likely to have begun their course had it not been free, as they wouldn't have been able to fund it themselves.
  - 40% said that, with cost not an issue, there were no barriers to study; 27% had caring responsibilities and 21% cited other financial considerations, such as transport and equipment; providers pointed to lack of home internet being a key barrier (15%).
  - 69% of learners were taking the course to improve job prospects; 55% due to an interest in the subject.
  - The mean dropout rate was 12%; 41% of providers said dropout was similar to other courses.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF WORK

IZA published *Working from Home Around the World*, a study of the shift to work from home (WFH) of full-time workers in 27 countries in mid-2021 and early 2022 due to the pandemic.

- Longer, stricter government lockdowns during the pandemic led to higher WFH levels and higher planned WFH levels after the pandemic ended.
  - WFH averages 1.5 days per week, ranging widely across countries; post-pandemic, employers plan an average of 0.7 WFH days per week, but workers would like 1.7 days.
  - Most employees were positive about their WFH productivity during the pandemic.
  - Employees value the option to WFH 2–3 days per week at 5% of pay, on average, with higher valuations for women, people with children, those with longer commutes and highly educated workers.

- The internet, emergence of the cloud and advances in two-way video pre-pandemic created the conditions for a big shift to WFH.

- Other developments spurred by the pandemic that helped drive a lasting shift to WFH include:
  - Investments in the home and inside organisations that facilitate WFH
  - Learning-by-doing in the WFH mode
  - Advances in products and technologies that support WFH
  - Much greater social acceptance of WFH
  - Lingering infection concerns that lead some people to prefer remote work.

- Implications are examined for workers, organisations, cities and the pace of innovation, including:

- Some people dislike remote work and miss the daily interactions with co-workers; those who feel that way will gravitate to organisations that stick with pre-pandemic working arrangements.
- Younger workers in particular will lose out on valuable mentoring, networking and on-the-job learning opportunities.

The Work Foundation published *The changing workplace: Enabling disability-inclusive hybrid working*, a study of disabled workers' experiences of remote and hybrid work, including a survey of 406 disabled people, interviews and roundtables with employers.

- Disabled people said working from home gave them more autonomy and control over when and how they work, which allowed them to better manage their health and wellbeing.
  - 70% said if their employer stopped them working remotely, it would negatively impact their health.
  - 85% felt more productive working from home.
- Some disabled workers were facing challenges due to a poorly managed transition to remote or hybrid work; this could limit progress in reducing the disability employment gap.
  - 19% of respondents who requested additional support or new adjustments while working remotely had their request refused, with no alternative arrangements put in place.
  - 89% said they had access to specialist equipment or software at home, however they often reported that they had purchased equipment themselves with their own money.
- Respondents, particularly those with multiple impairments or conditions, highlighted concerns that they might lose access to opportunities at work if they need to be based at home.
  - 70.3% of respondents with multiple impairments, compared with 52.8% of those with a single impairment, agreed that opportunities to develop and grow might go to those in the office.
- Outdated cultures meant that some disabled workers felt left out or isolated while working at home, particularly when colleagues used different working patterns.
- Recommendations for government to support an inclusive transition to hybrid work include:
  - The Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) should make flexible working the default position for all employees, with flexible options included in all job adverts.
  - BEIS should require large employers to publish information on their approach to flexible and hybrid working.
  - The Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) should reform Access to Work, providing better funding and resourcing, so that it breaks down barriers to accessing occupational health expertise.
  - The DWP should refresh the Disability Confident Scheme to reflect changing working lives.
- Recommendations for employers to support their disabled employees include:
  - Invest in training and support line managers to promote an inclusive culture and ensure that they have the tools and confidence to respond to reasonable adjustment and flexible working requests.
  - Consult with staff to develop an inclusive approach to remote work via staff surveys, engaging with staff disability networks, and holding regular information and feedback sessions.
  - Explore the support of wider forms of flexibility, e.g. compressed/staggered hours and job sharing.
  - Introduce workplace adjustment passports for all staff, to help support everyone to thrive at work and destigmatise the adjustment request process.

The ILO published *Realizing the opportunities of the platform economy through freedom of association and collective bargaining*, on the emergence of coordinated group actions, new organisations and collective bargaining for those working for digital platform businesses.

- Digital labour platforms are part of the growing diversity of work arrangements with substantial opportunities for businesses and workers; however, while diverse work arrangements may help to increase access to the labour market, this growing diversity can heighten inequality.
- Surveys of 6,739 app-based and traditional taxi drivers and delivery workers in ten countries show that they are motivated to engage with each other and join different types of group to exchange experience on issues of common interest or to collectively improve working conditions.
  - Most were not aware of a trade union organisation that they could join, but rather organised informally, e.g. through Facebook or WhatsApp.

- Case studies in Australia, Chile, India, Nigeria, Ukraine and Spain describe efforts by employers' and workers' organisations to reach out to workers on digital labour platforms and how these workers self-organise with a view to influencing their terms and conditions of work.
  - They also show the potential contributions that social dialogue and collective bargaining can make to resolving labour conflicts in the platform economy.
- Analysis of 11 collective bargaining agreements covering digital labour platforms in Austria, Chile, Denmark, Italy, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Spain and Sweden shows that they all regulate working time and include provisions on hourly wages and incentive-based payment structures.
- Access to freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining can further help to ensure that the opportunities of the platform economy are fully realised for both workers and businesses.

The Centre for Economic Performance published *Firm-level technological change and skill demand*, a discussion paper on the impact of technological change on inequality, based on a large survey of firms' innovation activities in Hungary and Norway.

- Innovation activities and technological change are associated with an increase in skill demand.
  - The extent to which firm-level technological change is skill biased is identified and quantified by estimating the change in both the skill ratio and skill demand following innovation.
  - Skill-biased technological change increases both the firm-level skill ratio and the skill premium.
- Innovation is a key force behind the recent trends of inequality, which is surprising given the considerable fall in the college/university wage premium observed in many countries in recent years.
  - The increase in skill demand is substantially larger in Hungary (which is further from the 'technological frontier') than Norway, indicating that technology adoption can be an important source of rising inequality in countries far from the technological frontier.

EMPLOYMENT: RIGHTS, RESPONSIBILITIES & WAGES

The Work Foundation published *Room to Grow: Removing barriers to training for people on universal credit [UC]*, exploring how the welfare system impacts access to training, based on qualitative interviews with 16 people on UC in England who are also interested in training.

- UC requirements impair training possibilities:
  - Some respondents were required to conduct job search activity for 35 hours a week, which affected their ability to undertake training and attend parts of courses they had already started.
  - For people with caring responsibilities or part-time jobs, it was especially difficult to fit training courses around these commitments.
  - Those with mental and physical health conditions also found it difficult to take part in training while completing their work search activity.
- Transactional relationships with work coaches limit support to build new skills: people on UC often need to research training opportunities and eligibility themselves, as work coaches were often unaware of available key skills initiatives.
- Parents on UC struggle to take up training opportunities without access to affordable, flexible childcare, especially when they have conditionality and part-time work to balance.
- The DWP should:
  - Allow anyone receiving benefits to study part- or full-time for at least one year, with the potential to extend; conditionality requirements should be adjusted to account for time spent studying
  - Provide clear information about the ways people can study while receiving UC, and about the funding available to help cover course fees and other costs associated with training
  - Create opportunities for those on UC to discuss interests in accessing training with their work coach at any point; work coaches should agree and document training goals
  - Establish a specialised group of career developers to engage with local stakeholders and share their knowledge with work coaches through CPD and high-quality advice, to ensure work coaches have up-to-date knowledge of local skills ecosystems, labour market demands and training opportunities, including government skills initiatives.

IZA published *Does Performance Pay Influence Hours of Work?*, a study based on longitudinal UK data, examining whether performance pay causes employees to work longer hours in pursuit of higher pay

- On average, performance pay is associated with both longer worker hours and a higher probability of working very long hours, the margin at which negative effects of hours worked may be concentrated.

- While limiting the extent of performance pay could reduce the health-harming long hours of blue-collar labourers, it is unlikely to change the health-harming long hours of managers, as managers would work long hours independent of payment method.

CIPD published *Zero-hours contracts: Evolution and current status*, drawing on questions added to its spring 2021 Labour Market Outlook survey.

- Overall, only 18% made some use of zero-hours contracts – 77% didn't use them; hospitality and entertainment industries (49%) and the voluntary and health sectors (24%) were most likely to.
  - 44% of those who used them only did so for less than 10% of their workforce; 23% used them for over 50% of the workforce.

- 64% of employers who used them did so to manage fluctuations in demand, while 46% used them to provide flexibility for individuals; ~17% said it was to keep costs down.

- 3.3% of all employees said their main job involved a zero-hours contract, with young people and older people most likely to have them.

- Four recommendations:
  - Introduce a right for variable-hours workers to request a more stable contract or working arrangement after they have been employed for six months.
  - Create a statutory code of practice on the responsible management of zero-hours workers that would include the requirement to pay compensation if workers' shifts are cancelled at short notice.
  - Improve labour market enforcement, including through the creation of a Single Enforcement Body and a stronger focus on supporting employer compliance.
  - Abolish 'worker status' to help clarify and enhance employment rights for zero-hours workers.

CIPD published *Employer focus on working parents: Parental leave and pay and childcare policies*.

- 33% of organisations have a maternity pay policy that covers the statutory minimum, while 18% offer 4–13 weeks of maternity pay at or near the full rate of pay.

- 49% of organisations have a paternity or partner leave policy, but it only provides the statutory minimum leave entitlement; ~33% provide the statutory minimum paternity/partner pay.

- Estimates suggest that just 2% of eligible couples made use of shared parental leave last year.
  - A more effective way of starting to equalise parental leave and pay would be to ring-fence paid paternity/partner leave.
  - 46% of organisations say they would support extending statutory paternity leave and pay.

- 34% report that the 2017 introduction of 30 hours of free childcare per week for 3–4 year-olds in England made a positive impact on the number of women returning to work.
  - 56% believe the participation rate of women with young children would improve further if the same level of free childcare support was extended to 0–2 year-olds.

IZA published *A Field Study of Age Discrimination in the Workplace: The importance of gender and race. Pay the gap*, using data from four simultaneous field experiments in England.

- The study explores the extent to which chronological age intersects with other characteristics, such as gender and race, during the initial stage of the hiring process, and has an impact on recruitment.
  - It concentrates on low-skilled vacancies in hospitality and sales in the private sector.
  - It compares the labour market outcomes of younger white British men with those of older white British men and women, and with those of older Black British men and women.

- Findings include:
  - In all cases, older individuals were found to experience adverse employment outcomes.
  - Older white British men and women, and older Black British men and women, experience job access constraints and are sorted into lower paid jobs than younger white British men.

- The level of age discrimination is found to be higher for Black British men and women.
- Women and racial minorities were more negatively affected by age discrimination than men and racial majorities.
- Black British women experience the highest level of age discrimination.
- Age discrimination might be the result of prejudices for older individuals that have not been reduced by the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation.

- Recommendations include:
  - Eliminating age discrimination in selection requires firms to adopt inclusive HR policies at the earliest stages of the recruitment process.
  - Cooperation between firms and employees might be essential for an inclusive workplace, allowing arguments for reducing ageism, sexism and racism to be presented and solutions developed.
  - These policies should be accompanied by effective laws that can raise the cost of discrimination and discourage employers from practising discrimination.

The Scottish Government published _Exploration of the pay and career progression experiences of women aged over 50 in Scotland_ in the finance & insurance and information & communication sectors – qualitative research by the National Institute of Economic & Social Research on behalf of the Fair Work Convention.

- Women frequently expressed a reluctance to pursue opportunities for progression – internal and external – and, to a lesser extent, opportunities for training.
  - The reluctance was typically explained as a wish to avoid the potential stress and pressure they connected with progression.
  - Most also felt that their capacity and desire to pursue opportunities for more pay and more responsibility had reduced as they had got older.

- They identified factors relating to their age and gender as key barriers both to their progression and their general sense of wellbeing in the workplace:
  - Work-related concerns included: age bias in recruitment and promotion processes; the age profile of management structures and technology; gender-related bias.
  - Personal concerns included their health, the menopause and caring responsibilities, and how these experiences contributed to their reluctance to pursue opportunities for progression.

- All employers interviewed recognised that gender could be a barrier to progression; however, few recognised that age, and the intersection between age and gender, may also be a significant barrier.
  - Most large employers regularly monitor recruitment, pay and progression by gender but not age.

- Some employers expressed concerns about what they saw as additional age-related issues in the workplace, e.g. training older workers in new technology and the need to consider issues around retirement and succession.
  - In these cases, they often expressed uncertainty around how to talk appropriately and sensitively in the workplace about age.

- Recommendations include that employers: should increase their monitoring of pay, progression and training by age; would benefit from increased support and guidance in addressing age discrimination.

International Comparisons

The OECD published _Education at a Glance 2022_, internationally harmonised indicators on education systems in OECD and partner countries, covering all levels of education; the 2022 edition focuses on tertiary education.

- An executive summary presents selected results, while a separate _Spotlight on Tertiary Education_ offers trends, facts and challenges for that sector; among the latter:
  - Between 2000 and 2021, the share of 25–34 year-olds with tertiary education has increased by 21ppt to 48%; the average share for women is 53% and for men 41%.
  - In 2020, 6.4m tertiary students worldwide had crossed a border to study – more than twice the number in 2007; internationally mobile students account for 5% of undergraduates on average, but 14% of master's students and 24% of doctoral students.

- In 2021, the employment rate of tertiary-educated 25–64 year-olds was 10ppt higher on average across OECD countries than that of those with upper secondary or post-secondary, non-tertiary qualifications.

- The average earnings premium for those with a bachelor's or equivalent degree is 44%, rising to 88% for those with a master's or doctoral degree.

- Spending per student is higher at tertiary level than at all other levels in almost all OECD countries, averaging US$17,600 per student at tertiary, $11,400 at secondary and $10k at primary.

- Almost 33% of total expenditure on tertiary institutions came from the private sector in 2019.

- Challenges include: completion rates; strengthening equity and inclusion; disparities in gender equity in STEM and among senior academic staff; attracting doctoral students, who play an important role in modern knowledge-based economies.

The European Commission published *Supporting refugee learners from Ukraine in higher education in Europe*, qualitative Eurydice data on national policies and measures in 37 European education systems *[does not include the UK]*.

- The report examines what HE authorities have done to date to assist HEIs in integrating and supporting Ukrainian refugee learners.

- Findings include:
  - Many countries reacted rapidly to provide policy support to HEIs, in most cases with measures based on pre-existing policy.
  - There is significant variety in policy responses to integrate these citizens into HEIs.
  - The most common support measures are: host language training or support; psychological counselling; academic guidance; introductory courses; and financial support (mainly non-repayable grants or scholarships) and reserved study places.
  - Full tuition fee exemption is only offered by seven countries.
  - Over 50% of education systems have no external quality assurance evaluation mechanism in place for their large-scale measures.
  - Recognition of previous educational attainment can be a serious challenge and has not happened in 17 of the systems; further work is required in others to recognise refugee qualifications that cannot be adequately documented.
  - The European Qualifications Passport for Refugees, developed to facilitate recognition of qualifications where documentary evidence is lacking, is only being systematically used in three countries.
  - Only seven HE systems monitor the integration of refugees in their institutions; the monitoring undertaken is basic, mostly tracking enrolment data.

Government

NORTHERN IRELAND

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

ENGLAND

The UK's National Audit Office published *Developing workforce skills for a strong economy*, examining whether the Government's approach in England is effective.

- Since 2012, the UK has experienced slightly lower workforce productivity growth than comparable nations and the OECD has highlighted the need to encourage lifelong learning and promote better skills utilisation.

- Wider economic and societal changes are creating skills shortages and making the skills challenge more acute: the exit from the EU; the need to achieve net zero by 2050; the ageing workforce – 33% were aged 50+ in 2021, up from 20% in the early 1990s.

- The amount employers in England spent on training per employee dropped in real terms from £1,710 in 2011 to £1,530 in 2019 (-11%); 39% of employers had provided no training in the previous 12 months.

- The number of adult learners fell 48% from 2010/11 to 1.6m in 2020/21 and, in the last five years, participation in the most disadvantaged areas of England fell 39% compared with 29% overall; among learners aged 50+, numbers fell by over 50%.

- Although the workforce is more highly qualified than in the early 2000s, England's Department for Education has concluded that there need to be increases in: the number of learners; the number achieving higher qualifications; the proportion doing more economically valuable subjects; and the rigour and quality of learning.

- New Learning & Skills Improvement Plans led by designated Employer Representative Bodies are designed to help providers reshape what they offer to tackle skills mismatches and respond to needs.

- The Levelling Up white paper 'skills mission' will only go some way towards reversing the fall of around 280k in learner numbers in the 20% most disadvantaged areas since 2015/16.

- Different parts of government are working together more effectively to coordinate activity on skills, but cross-government arrangements are complex, with multiple other ministerial and official groups.
  - The Department for Education is managing its own skills activities more strongly as a coherent portfolio, but its metrics do not indicate what level of performance would constitute success as a whole and its approach does not extend to interventions that are led by other departments.

- Overall, while the Government has strengthened its approach in recent years, the skills challenge has grown significantly, with key indicators going in the wrong direction.

- Employers and training providers say they find it hard to navigate the growing and sometimes disjointed set of skills programmes.

- The Government is staking its success on a more employer-led system, but it is unclear whether the conditions are in place for this to be implemented successfully, in particular whether employers are ready to engage to the extent that will be needed to achieve a step-change in performance.

- There is a risk that, despite the Government's greater activity and good intent, its approach may be no more successful than previous interventions in supporting workforce skills development.

SCOTLAND

Audit Scotland published *Scotland's Colleges 2022*, on the country's 27 FE colleges and their students.

- Covid-19 funding contributed to a healthier than expected financial position for the sector in 2020–21; however this is expected to deteriorate.
  - Colleges face a challenge in balancing enabling high-quality learning at the volume expected and to contribute to other Scottish Government priorities while remaining financially sustainable.

- The pandemic has had a detrimental impact on learning and student outcomes: the proportion completing and achieving their intended qualification has fallen, particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable students.
  - High rates of student withdrawals may affect the life chances of individual students, impact on wider society and risk not maximising public investment in the college sector.

- The sector needs clear strategic direction for the short and longer term; the Scottish Funding Council's 2021 recommendations for change need to be implemented at the earliest opportunity.

The Reform Scotland think tank published *Scrap The Cap: Towards 'no win, no fee' higher education*, on the current funding structure for universities.

- The tuition fees of Scottish students are paid for by the Scottish Government; current funding structure for universities therefore leads to an 'artificial' annual cap on the number of places that can be offered to eligible Scottish students.
  - There is no cap on the number of fee-paying students from the rest of the UK or from overseas.

- Proposals include:
  - Graduates should pay government for a proportion of their university fees when they earn enough money to do so.

- The Scottish Government should consider introducing schemes that cut or scrap payments for those who remain in Scotland working in certain sectors for set periods of time.

MillionPlus published *Facts and stats: MillionPlus modern universities in Scotland 2022*, providing key facts about its six member institutions in the country; 'modern' institutions are those that acquired the university title after 1992.

- They host or deliver:
  - 56% of full-time students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds
  - 59% of graduate apprenticeships
  - 68% of full-time mature students
  - 70% of students articulating into university: 41% of first-degree students from the most deprived areas of Scotland have 'articulated' through the HNC/HND college-to-university pathway
  - 42% of all care-experienced students
  - 58% of undergraduate transnational education
  - 100% of nursing & midwifery, 91% of nutrition, 73% of software engineering, 68% of design studies and 40% of computer science students
  - 33% of all graduate start-ups and 39% of all social enterprises in HE.

WALES

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

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND (RoI)

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) published *National Access Plan: A strategic action plan for equity of access, participation and success in higher education 2022–2028*, the fourth five-year plan.

- The plan continues to target and support students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, those with disabilities and those from the Irish Traveller community.

- Specific cohorts named for the first time include: students who have experience of the care system, homelessness and the criminal justice system; survivors of domestic violence; carers; 'second-chance' mature students; and migrants and refugees.

EUROPE

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

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