# CIPD urges UK to make lifelong learning core to skills policy or risk falling behind



The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) has warned that the UK risks being overtaken in a fast-changing global labour market unless lifelong learning becomes central to national skills policy and employer strategy.

In its report *Lifelong learning in the reskilling era: From luxury to necessity*, the CIPD says technological change, demographic shifts and the net-zero transition are “reshaping the jobs landscape”. Without decisive reform, millions could be left behind as roles vanish or evolve beyond current skillsets.

The institute highlights steep declines in training access with age — just 51% of 45–54-year-olds and 47% of over-55s feel they are still developing in their roles — and persistent socio-economic divides in participation. According to the Learning and Work Institute, 60% of adults in the highest socio-economic group engaged in recent learning compared with only 39% in the lowest.

Generative AI, big data, cybersecurity and green technologies are expected to see the fastest skills growth, the CIPD says, but will require targeted reskilling in both technical and human-centred capabilities. The UK Government’s Green Jobs Taskforce estimates one in five jobs will change by 2050, demanding coordinated action between employers, training providers and regional markets.

Despite rising demand, employer investment in training fell 27% between 2011 and 2022, while public spending on adult learning has dropped about a third in real terms since 2003–04. The CIPD calls for clearer incentives, modular training, paid learning leave and better use of the Apprenticeship Levy to reverse this decline.

It points to international models such as Austria, Estonia, the Netherlands and Singapore, where vouchers, learning accounts and short courses have boosted participation when paired with employer engagement and labour-market alignment.

Employers, the CIPD argues, should make lifelong learning part of business strategy, offering flexible, paid training linked to progression, especially for older and lower-paid staff.

The institute says the UK can still lead in AI and green innovation if it acts now, but warns that failing to invest risks deepening inequality and eroding regional resilience. “With the right policy mix and employer commitment, lifelong learning can shift from a luxury to a national strength,” the report concludes.

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## Bibliography

1. <https://hrreview.co.uk/hr-news/uk-workforce-not-ready-for-future-without-major-reform/383165> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://hrreview.co.uk/hr-news/uk-workforce-not-ready-for-future-without-major-reform/383165> - An article reporting on a CIPD report warns the UK workforce risks falling behind unless lifelong learning becomes central to policy and employer strategy. It highlights technological change, demographic shifts and the green transition reshaping jobs, and that older workers face barriers to mobility and retraining. Participation in learning is uneven, with higher socio-economic groups more likely to learn. The piece cites concerns about falling employer and public investment in adult learning, the impact of generative AI on higher-skilled occupations, and that around 6.3 million jobs will change because of net zero. It calls for coordinated reform and employer action.
3. <https://ifs.org.uk/education-spending/adult-education-and-skills> - Institute for Fiscal Studies research documents long-term falls in public and employer spending on adult education and skills. It reports public funding for adult skills decreased from about six point three billion pounds in 2003–04 to roughly four point three billion pounds in 2023–24, a real-terms drop of around a third, with classroom-based learning experiencing the steepest cuts. The analysis notes a shift toward work-based learning and the modest role of advanced learner loans. It highlights falling participation in classroom qualifications, pressures on funding rates, and stresses that future reforms must prioritise effectiveness, targeting and stability over restoring prior spending.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/green-jobs-taskforce-report/green-jobs-taskforce-report> - The UK Government’s Green Jobs Taskforce report examines how the transition to net zero will reshape employment and skills demand across regions and sectors. It estimates that around one in five jobs — about 6.3 million workers — will experience changes by 2050, with some roles growing and others declining, requiring reskilling and redeployment. The report highlights the need for targeted investment in green skills, support for affected regions and coordination between employers, training providers and government. It outlines sectoral opportunities such as offshore wind growth and stresses aligning training frameworks with evolving job tasks to maximise labour market resilience.
5. <https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025/digest/> - The World Economic Forum’s Future of Jobs Report 2025 assesses global labour market trends and forecasts skill and job shifts driven by technology, demographics and the green transition. It identifies AI, big data, networks and cybersecurity among the fastest-growing skill areas, alongside human-centric abilities like analytical thinking, resilience and collaboration. The report projects significant churn with both creation and displacement of roles, urging upskilling and public-private action. It recommends investing in lifelong learning, modular training and labour-market policies to manage transitions, stressing the need for inclusive approaches so workers and firms can adapt and maximise equitable opportunities from technological change.
6. <https://learningandwork.org.uk/news-and-policy/persistent-inequalities-in-lifelong-learning-what-can-we-learn-from-the-adult-participation-in-learning-survey-2024/> - Learning and Work Institute’s Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2024 reports historic highs in adult learning but reveals persistent inequalities. The survey finds 52% of adults engaged in learning in the past three years, yet participation falls with age and varies sharply by social grade and region. Three fifths (60%) of people in the AB socio-economic group reported recent learning compared with 39% in the DE group, and likelihood of participation decreases by about 4% with each additional year of age. The Institute warns policy must widen access, target disadvantaged groups and embed lifelong learning across public programmes effectively.
7. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/increasing-adult-learning-participation_4bf61e5b-en> - The OECD study Increasing Adult Learning Participation examines reforms in six countries — Austria, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands and Singapore — that raised adult learning participation through measures such as training vouchers, paid educational leave, individual learning accounts and short modular courses. It reviews design and implementation lessons, noting that measures must be well targeted, monitored and combined with employer engagement. The report highlights the importance of financial incentives, leave entitlements and modular provision to broaden access, while warning that higher participation alone does not guarantee improved labour-market outcomes without attention to quality, targeting and alignment with employer needs.