



Skills for Learning Professionals

A SECTOR SKILLS AGREEMENT FOR THE LIFELONG LEARNING SECTOR

STAGE 1 – SKILLS NEEDS ASSESSMENT (SNA)

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skills
FOR BUSINESS

FOREWORD

Lifelong learning is a reality for everybody. No longer do we inhabit a world where one set of skills will equip us for life. The pace of change, whether technological, geographical, organisational or social, means that we all have to adapt and learn new skills.

But who will help us to learn? Learning professionals, whether lecturers, librarians, tutors or youth workers, need the right skills to help learners whoever and wherever they may be. Therefore it is vital that learning professionals themselves are able to develop appropriate skills. And this is the starting point for Lifelong Learning UK's Sector Skills Agreement (SSA), of which this research and its companion volume form the first two stages.

Let me provide some context. Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) is the independent, employer-led, Sector Skills Council (SSC) for community learning and development, further education, higher education, libraries, archives and information services and work based learning.

Our vision is that the UK lifelong learning workforce should be the best globally. The realisation of that vision depends on ensuring that employers in the lifelong learning sector can recruit, retain and develop highly skilled and effective staff.

Lifelong Learning UK is one of twenty-five Sector Skills Councils which make up the UK's Skills for Business network, and we occupy a unique position within it. It is lifelong learning employers who must meet the workforce development needs of all the UK's other employment sectors. It is also a major employment sector in its own right, with a workforce - as this research confirms - of well over a million people, and its own workforce development needs.

The Leitch Review of Skills¹, published in December 2006, threw those needs into sharp relief with its recommendation that the UK triples the attainment of skills by adults. The UK's ambition, detailed in Leitch, is to commit to a radical improvement in its skills ranking amongst OECD nations by 2020.

LLUK will play an important role in realising the UK's skills ambitions. The day following the publication of the Leitch Review, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills Alan Johnson said: "Our lifelong learning workforce must be firing on all cylinders and this is where LLUK plays a vital role. We won't create world class skills in Britain without world class trainers. This shines a spotlight on LLUK." We look forward to working with current and new governments across the UK in 2007 to consider how the lifelong learning workforce can become world class.

Lifelong Learning UK brings together the UK's lifelong learning sector in a way that no other body does. LLUK is a bridge between demand for learning and skills and the supply of education and training. Lifelong Learning UK's SSA-gives, for the first time, an overview of the skills held by the learning professionals who deliver or support learning in a range of locations including colleges, training providers, libraries, universities and in the community. It identifies the types of skills gaps that exist and gives the information needed to plan for future workforce development.

This is one of the most far-reaching pieces of research undertaken for and about the workforce in the lifelong learning sector. There is an assumption that the sector has been documented to death. In fact, this is the first time sector-wide research of this kind has been attempted, and in many areas we are sailing into uncharted territory. Our stakeholders and a range of employers

¹ Leitch Review of Skills, *Prosperity for all in the Global Economy: World Class Skills*, December 2006

have been eager to work with us and we obtained feedback from a much greater number of respondents than our most optimistic forecasts had anticipated.

Even so, there is more investigation to be done, and one key outcome of this research is that it tells us where to concentrate our further research efforts in order to test some long-held assumptions.

The research indicates that there is much potential for cross-cutting work such as developing learner support or service skills between different groups of learning professionals. There is an increase in interest amongst our groups of employers about how others in the sector address skills issues, and what they can learn from each other. It is evident that the sector will have to work together in new ways and new partnerships – and will also need to address some negative trends, such as the ongoing barriers to career progression and advancement experienced by women and people from ethnic minorities.

This volume, a skills needs assessment, represents Stage 1 of the SSA for the lifelong learning sector. It looks at drivers of change such as demographics, technology, participation trends and expenditure in order to assess current skills needs and future priorities. We see a sector which has achieved considerable success, but faces major challenges driven by the pace of change. Employers anticipate increased demand for skills at NVQ level 4 and above, as well as at NVQ level 3, and see increasing the skills levels of the existing workforce as more important than increasing the workforce within particular sector occupations.

Overall, SSAs will encourage investment in skills. They will influence future funding and have the potential to unlock new sources of funding. Our SSA is the main channel for employers and stakeholders, within their national policy contexts, to collaborate over skills planning for the future. Our SSA will also have a unique element – an Impact Review. This looks at all the other SSAs produced by the Skills for Business network to assess the impacts and demands they will have on skills in the lifelong learning sector, both currently and for future workforce planning.

As we move forward into the next stages of our Sector Skills Agreement I would encourage lifelong learning employers to continue to get involved. We want to ensure as many of you as possible take every opportunity to contribute your views. 2007 holds many far-reaching changes for those involved in skills provision, one thing is certain – skills will continue to have a higher profile in the UK than they ever have before.

David Hunter
Chief Executive
Lifelong Learning UK

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This executive summary, along with the full report and associated annexes, represent the main outputs of an extensive programme of both primary and secondary research undertaken between May and November 2006. The research forms the first and foundation stage of the Sector Skills Agreement (SSA) process for the lifelong learning sector – the skills needs assessment. It was undertaken by independent consultants SQW, in collaboration with Lifelong Learning UK, the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for the lifelong learning sector.

Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) is the SSC representing five key constituencies, which together make up the lifelong learning sector:

- community learning and development (CLD)
- further education (FE)
- higher education (HE)
- libraries, archives and information services (LAIS)
- work based learning (WBL).

The lifelong learning sector occupies a unique position within the ‘Skills for Business’ network. Its employers provide services which meet the workforce development needs of other employment sectors, and it is an employment sector in its own right, with its own workforce development needs.

The Sector Skills Agreement process was developed by the ‘Skills for Business’ network in order to ensure that businesses are equipped to meet the realities of the modern working environment and that the workforce is able to offer the right skills in the right places at the right time. The SSA comprises five key stages, with the fifth resulting in a final agreement of how the SSC and employers will work together with key partners to secure the necessary supply of appropriate training for the future.

In addition, because of LUK’s key role in supporting employers delivering lifelong learning and because of the extent to which the skills needed by the lifelong learning workforce will be shaped by the workforce development needs identified within other employment sectors, Lifelong Learning UK will undertake an additional stage. This will comprise an **‘Impact Review’** of the SSAs produced by other SSCs, the purpose of which is to consider the effects and demands that the SSAs will place on the lifelong learning sector, both now and in the future.

Methodology

The research undertaken for Stage 1 of the Sector Skills Agreement necessarily adopted a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods, drawing on a range of existing secondary data sources and primary data collection. This included:

- a comprehensive review of relevant existing literature
- the identification and analysis of existing standard and sector-specific secondary data sources
- the design, collection and analysis of a range of new primary data:
 - 22 key stakeholder consultation interviews
 - a large survey of sector providers/employers with 689 analysed responses
 - seven future scenarios workshops.

The profile of the lifelong learning sector

Various existing secondary data sources have contributed to the development of an estimate of the total workforce within the lifelong learning sector, which is in the region of **1–1.2 million people**.

Estimates also suggest that HE, FE and CLD are the largest constituencies in terms of their workforce, with LAIS being the smallest.

Examination of the characteristics of the existing workforce, based on a range of existing secondary data sources, reveals that:

- The majority of the lifelong learning workforce is **female** (particularly in Northern Ireland), but that female employment is limited in the more senior or professional employment categories.
- The majority of the workforce is **aged between 35–54 years**, with a slightly younger profile apparent within the WBL constituency and also amongst women in the HE and FE constituencies.
- The workforce is predominantly employed within **professional** roles, which is higher than for other sectors or the economy as a whole.
- **Full-time, permanent employment** is the norm – particularly within the HE and WBL constituencies and for staff at less senior or professional levels.

These findings suggest particular challenges for the lifelong learning sector. For example, the greater prevalence of female employment amongst younger, non-professional and part-time staff suggests enduring gender barriers to skills development and career progression, which need to be addressed. Similarly, older workers, who make up much of the sector and have not benefited from recent reforms to the compulsory education system, are likely to have different skills needs and qualifications than their younger colleagues, and this also has implications for future ‘succession planning’ and renewing the workforce (particularly the professional workforce) within the sector.

Drivers of the demand for skills

For a sector, which exists to support and deliver lifelong learning, **government policy** in a range of areas plays a considerable role in influencing the development of the sector and the future demand for skills within its workforce.

Strengthening economic prosperity, productivity and social justice is a key theme within government policy across the UK, to which the development of skills within the population as a whole is expected to contribute. Public Service Agreements (PSAs) and target indicators (high-level indicators in Scotland) have been established, which set out clear targets for improving the education/training attainment of young people and improving adult skills levels.

Moreover, the way in which the lifelong learning sector responds and develops, in order to meet the demands placed upon it, is also largely governed by policy development. Although specific policies have been implemented in different ways within the four UK home countries, common themes included:

- setting standards for service delivery and professional practice
- developing capacity within the lifelong learning workforce

- developing responsive and flexible services offering greater choice and personalisation to meet the needs of employers and individuals
- strengthening partnership working, collaboration and service integration, which involves employers and individuals in determining service provision
- reducing bureaucracy and inefficiency within the system and service delivery infrastructure.

Closely related to policy development, **expenditure on lifelong learning** is also acknowledged as both reflecting and also being a significant driver of change. Analysis suggests that, whilst total funding levels are likely to remain healthy and stable in the near future, this will not necessarily affect individual constituencies equally and increasing investment by employers and individual learners will be required. The sector will need staff skilled in securing and sustaining funding from an increasingly diverse range of sources, as well as staff skilled in offering provision that responds to the needs and demands of 'paying customers'.

Demographic change clearly has implications for **trends in participation** in lifelong learning and participants' specific demands and needs. The UK population is predicted to increase from nearly 60 million today to around 69.5 million by the year 2054, and this population is expected to be an increasingly ageing population. Hence, demand for lifelong learning amongst older learners may increase – this is already apparent within the HE constituency, for example. Older participants in lifelong learning may have very different needs, preferences and behaviours, compared with the more traditional, younger users, with whom lifelong learning staff may be more familiar. This may require an updating of staff skills and approaches to service delivery.

The increasingly **global economy** will place an increased premium on skills within the workforce as a whole. New industries, occupations and working practices will require new skills and knowledge, with associated demand for 'replacement skills'. The implications of this for the lifelong learning sector will also become clearer as a result of the LLUK 'Impact Review' of the skills needs identified by the Sector Skills Agreements undertaken by other Sector Skills Councils.

Migration is another important facet of globalisation. Inward migration potentially increases demand for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) provision, as well as requiring lifelong learning staff to work with an increasingly diverse population. The migration of skilled workers (both inwards and outwards) also increases the need for internationally comparable standards for skills and qualifications. The development of the proposed 'European Qualifications Framework' would also enable and potentially result in increased competition for students between lifelong learning providers in the UK and those overseas.

Finally, **technological change** has considerable implications for the development of skills across the workforce as a whole, thus influencing demand for lifelong learning provision. Developments in technology also shape the delivery of that provision and hence the skills needs of the lifelong learning workforce. Skills will require continual updating in order to keep pace with rapid technological innovation.

The competitive position of the sector

There are known difficulties in measuring the impact of the lifelong learning sector and its competitive position, performance, success and productivity. Unlike sectors that produce tangible 'products' (and that consequently have an impact on Gross Value Added – GVA), the lifelong learning sector lacks a single standardised scale, which can be used to measure its success and productivity.

A few formal measures and 'hard' performance indicators do exist, although these are generally constituency-specific and, where similarities across constituencies do exist, data is often not collected in directly comparable formats. Moreover, informal, 'softer' measures, identified through this research, emphasise the competence and knowledge of employees as a proxy for success, but, being qualitative in nature, are necessarily hard to quantify and, therefore, do not lend themselves to generating statistical trends.

Various sources indicate that increasing participation in lifelong learning could result in **benefits to the UK economy**. For example, within the HE constituency, research suggests that the constituency had an income of £16.87 billion in the year 2003/04 and gross export earnings of £3.6 billion. Similarly, projections made by Lord Leitch claim considerable benefits to the economy of increasing the skills of the UK workforce as a whole.

Trends in participation also provide an indicator of the success of the sector, as in an increasingly commercially oriented environment potential participants 'vote with their feet'. Continued increases in the number of participants in lifelong learning suggest that the perceived benefits or value of participation still outweigh the personal investment increasingly required. **Participant satisfaction** surveys also support this finding.

Levels of success experienced by lifelong learning participants provide another indicator of the success of the sector, as well as potentially influencing levels of future participation. For the FE constituency, where data was available, success rates have increased between 1997/98 and 2003/04, exceeding targets by 2%.

International comparison of the lifelong learning sector is similarly complex, with each country collecting the relevant data in different ways. However, some indicators have been identified as producing robust comparison between 30 OECD and 37 EU (and associated) countries and these can be used to measure the UK lifelong learning sector against its worldwide counterparts.

It has already been stated that **female employees** make up a high proportion of the UK lifelong learning workforce. However, the predominance of men within academic roles, which has already been noted, was less marked within the UK than in Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and Switzerland. Moreover, of these countries, the UK saw the biggest increase in numbers of female academics between 1998–2004.

Similarly, whilst the issue of an **ageing workforce** remains, the UK has a lower proportion of staff aged more than 50 years employed in delivering tertiary education, compared to many other countries, including Norway and Italy.

Average **academic salaries** in tertiary education in the UK were second only to those in the United States (after taking into account the cost of living) and considerably higher than those in Sweden.

Expenditure on tertiary education in the UK, representing 1.1% of GDP, is the same as that in France and Japan, but considerably lower than that in the USA (2.7%). However, more is spent within the UK on primary-, secondary- and post-secondary non-tertiary education (3.9% GDP), ranking it 13th amongst OECD countries.

In terms of **learner outcomes**, the proportion of 25–64 year olds which had attained upper-secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education (57%) was higher than the OECD average of just 44% in 2002, and had remained stable since 1998.

And finally, the UK has a fairly high **rate of return**, a measure of the benefits of education over time, relative to the costs of the investment in education, and analogous to the percentage returns from investing in a savings account. Of the nine countries where data existed, only Finland and Hungary had better rates of return.

The current skills profile, skills needs and priorities in the lifelong learning sector

It is acknowledged that it is hard to find a suitable proxy measure for ‘skills’ within the available secondary data sources. The most common and widely used indicator is qualifications, although this is limited in that it does not take into account skills held or developed by employees, which are not formally recognised in any way. Nonetheless, qualifications data does allow comparisons to be made across different occupations and employment sectors and there was little option but to take this approach for this research.

In addition, there are challenges in terms of identifying and comparing skills and qualifications at different levels as a range of different qualification frameworks are currently in operation across the different lifelong learning constituencies and UK home countries. However, the majority of the sources on which this report draws (including the Labour Force Survey and the influential Leitch review of skills in England) are based on the five level National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) framework. For this reason, **the five-level NVQ framework has been adopted throughout this report**, despite the fact that this has recently been updated to an eight-level National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the existing Scottish Qualifications Framework (SCQF) has 12 levels. Examples of qualification types and levels and their equivalence to this five-level NVQ framework are shown in table B2 in Annex B.

It has already been stated that the lifelong learning sector is made up of a high number of senior and professional occupations. It is not surprising, therefore, that **a high proportion of the workforce hold qualifications equivalent to NVQ level 4 or above** (64%, compared with 24% in the economy as a whole). Northern Ireland had the highest incidence of NVQ level 4 or above qualifications within the lifelong learning workforce, while England had the lowest.

Moreover, between the years 2001–2005, **the numbers of the lifelong learning workforce holding an NVQ level 4 or above qualification has increased** across all home countries of the UK, but particularly, more recently, within Northern Ireland.

However, against this backdrop of already high and increasing skills levels within the workforce, especially among professional and support/associate professionals, the demand for such high-level skills continues to outweigh supply. Employers across the UK lifelong learning sector face **difficulties in recruiting staff as a result of skills shortages**, with applicants for vacant posts not having the required skills, work experience or qualifications. There is also evidence of **an even greater challenge in terms of the numbers of existing**

staff with skills gaps, individuals lacking the skills required for the successful performance of their role.

Skills shortages made up a higher proportion of vacancies within lifelong learning establishments, compared with the all-sector average within Wales and Northern Ireland, but a lower proportion in England. In addition, skills shortages were responsible for more 'hard to fill' vacancies within lifelong learning than the all-sector average in each of the home countries in the UK. However, the considerably lower all-sector average and lifelong learning figure in Northern Ireland suggest that other issues were involved in the recruitment challenges faced there. Skills shortages were faced, particularly at **NVQ level 4**, for **managers and professional occupations** and comprised predominantly occupationally-specific **professional/technical/ practical skills**, followed by **transferable skills**.

Skills gaps involved considerably higher numbers of cases than skills shortages. However, the proportion of employees within the lifelong learning sector deemed to have skills gaps was lower than the all-sector average in the UK home countries, where comparative data was available. Across the home countries of the UK, skills gaps in lifelong learning establishments were reported in the highest proportion in Scotland and the lowest proportion in Northern Ireland. The low incidence of skills gaps in Northern Ireland may be associated with its higher proportion of the workforce already qualified to NVQ level 4 or above. Similar to the picture for skills shortages, skills gaps were most commonly reported at **NVQ level 4**, for **managers and professional occupations**.

In addition to the priorities resulting directly from these skills shortages and skills gaps, stakeholders interviewed identified **leadership and management**, and **transferable and wider employability skills** as particular priorities across all lifelong learning constituencies within the UK. Some particular skills priorities within individual UK home countries and individual constituencies were also identified (such as the need to build capacity for delivering lifelong learning through the medium of Welsh in Wales).

Future skills needs in the lifelong learning sector

Future trends forecasts, based on the Labour Force Survey, suggest that:

- The lifelong learning workforce, already comprising a high number of professionals, is expected to become even more increasingly dominated by **professional occupations** – reaching 56% by the year 2014, an increase of 3%.
- Overall, **almost 300,000 new recruits will be required** in the lifelong learning workforce by the year 2014 to satisfy both predicted expansion and replacement demand. The lifelong learning sector (reflecting its age profile and high incidence of professional occupations) has a high replacement demand – raising considerable issues in relation to skills development, career progression and succession planning.
- An increasing proportion of the lifelong learning workforce is expected to work on a **part-time** basis – 38% in the year 2014, an increase of 2%.

It is perhaps not then surprising to learn that employers anticipated increased demand for skills at NVQ level 4 and above, and also at NVQ level 3, and that increasing the skills levels of the existing workforce was more important to them than increasing the workforce within particular sector occupations. Higher-level professional skills are, therefore, a priority for lifelong learning sector employers, but transferable and wider employability skills are also recognised to be important for a wide range of lifelong learning occupations in the future.

Lifelong learning employers across the UK identified the following overall priority future skills needs:

- increasing demand for professionals and support/associate professionals, especially in FE, HE and WBL.
- increasing demand for particular professional/technical/practical skills for professionals within individual constituencies, such as teaching and supporting learning in FE and HE; records management and librarianship in LAIS; and occupational competence for WBL trainers and assessors.
- increasing demand for transferable and wider employability skills, such as ICT and customer service skills, and especially leadership and management skills, across most constituencies.
- increasing integration between lifelong learning constituencies resulting in growing demand for overlapping job roles and multi-skilled staff, and partnership skills.

The future scenarios workshops also provided participants with an opportunity to speculate on and envisage what the future lifelong learning sector might look like. In line with some of the drivers of the demand for skills already identified from the review of relevant literature, participants identified three broad themes, which they believed would have a significant impact on the sector and its workforce in the future:

- globalisation
- integration
- responsiveness

They also identified specific priorities for the future related to individual constituencies within the four individual home countries of the UK.

Future priorities

The final chapter within the report draws together all the findings from all of the previous chapters to suggest the future priorities for:

- the lifelong learning sector as a whole
- specific constituencies within the lifelong learning sector
- Lifelong Learning UK as an organisation.

In relation to the **lifelong learning sector as a whole**, priority issues for the future relate to:

- the policy context
 - improving education and training participation and attainment among young people aged 14–19
 - improving literacy and numeracy and increasing qualifications levels in the working-age population
 - increasing social inclusion and improving individuals' employability
 - lifelong learning system reform and quality improvement
- the changing social, economic and technological context
- the changing global and international context
- major trends across the lifelong learning workforce
 - an ageing workforce
 - a predominantly female workforce, except in the more senior and professional roles
 - a highly qualified workforce in predominantly professional roles

- an increasing need for high level skills, rather than an increase in numbers within particular occupational groups
- a high 'replacement demand' within the workforce, with implications for future workforce succession planning.

Key priorities for the future identified in relation to **individual constituencies** within the lifelong learning sector include:

- In **CLD**:
 - skills related to management and leadership
 - information, communications and technology (ICT) skills
 - demand for youth workers and parent training practitioners
 - other constituency specific skills, including partnership working, outreach skills and the ability to promote social inclusion and empower communities.
- In **FE**:
 - specific shortage subjects – construction; engineering; ICT; science; management; health and social care
 - Skills for Life (and its equivalents – Essential Skills; Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL; and Adult Basic Skills)
 - skills related to management and leadership
 - future demand for support professionals and technical support staff
 - other constituency specific skills, including gaining current industry experience; updating vocational courses; developing a wider range of teaching and learning support skills.
- In **HE**:
 - technicians qualified to NVQ level 4 or above
 - skills related to management and leadership
 - future demand for skilled teachers for specific subject areas – business management; IT; economics; electronics; law and medicine
 - skills related to the widening participation agenda, i.e. skills to cater to a wider student body with diverse learning styles and demands.
- In **LAIS**:
 - ICT skills – digitisation; metadata management; database building; basic and advanced ICT user skills; web management and web content development
 - specific technical skills – cataloguing; indexing; stock selection; conservation; preservation; information retrieval and management; knowledge management; content management systems (CMS)
 - customer engagement – interpersonal and communication skills; language skills (Welsh language in Wales); skills to support adults with needs in terms of Skills for Life (and its equivalents – Essential Skills; Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL; and Adult Basic Skills)
 - skills related to management and leadership.
- In **WBL**:
 - skills related to management and leadership
 - assessment skills
 - Skills for Life (and its equivalents – Essential Skills; Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL; and Adult Basic Skills)
 - updating of industrial practices.

In conclusion, it can be said that skills priorities across the UK and specific constituencies are showing a strong sense of modernisation. Traditional patterns (of student/teacher; librarian/user relationships) are gradually merging into a 'contemporary paradigm', where lifelong learning institutions are expected to function as businesses and the workforce will need to be armed with **agility, competence and business acumen**, in order to be able to liaise with service users as customers in the modern world.

Finally, the production of this report of the first stage of the Sector Skills Agreement for the lifelong learning workforce has identified some **future priorities to be addressed by Lifelong Learning UK** as an organisation.

A programme of LLUK research projects has already been proposed, commencing in 2007, to collect new primary data, which will go some way towards addressing the remaining gaps in the evidence. These research projects will focus on the:

- archives and records management workforce across the UK
- CLD workforce across the UK (including strand level data for community based adult learning (CBAL), community development, community education, development education, family learning, working with parents and youth work.)
- qualifications of FE staff in Northern Ireland
- WBL workforce across the UK.

It is acknowledged that this report has not been able to address some issues relating to the individual constituencies and, more particularly, to individual strands or component parts of lifelong learning constituencies at a fine level of detail. This was recognised particularly by stakeholder reviewers of the report within the CLD and LAIS constituencies. Other issues, which were identified but similarly not possible to address in detail within the scope or remit of this research, include:

- measures and indicators of success and productivity within the sector
- lifelong learning service user satisfaction
- the effects of the introduction of HE fees
- the effects of the introduction of e-learning
- issues relating to private and voluntary-sector provision of lifelong learning services
- issues relating to the volunteer workforce and SMEs within lifelong learning service delivery.

There are, therefore, further decisions to be taken within LLUK about the extent to which additional and more detailed research work focused on individual constituencies, parts of constituencies and specific issues can and will be prioritised for action in the future.

Skills for Business is an employer-led network consisting of 25 Sector Skills Councils and the Sector Skills Development Agency. Through its unrivalled labour market intelligence and insights from employers in all sectors of the UK economy, the network identifies change needed in policy and practice relating to education and skills development. With the influence granted by licences from the governments of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and with private and public funding, this independent network engages with the education and training supply-side, such as universities, colleges, funders and qualifications bodies, to increase productivity at all levels in the workforce.

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