

**UK General Election 2024:**

*What can we expect for lifelong learning?*

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**LEI Thinks**

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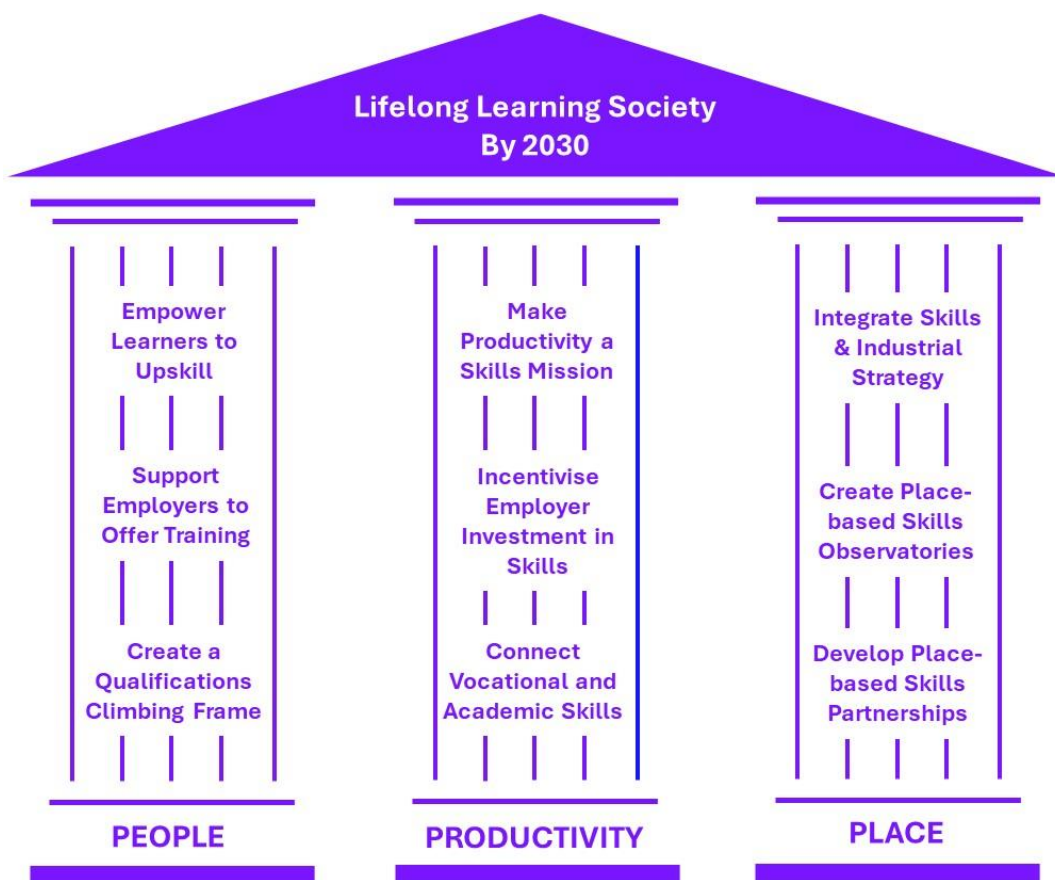
## CONTENTS

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<a href="#">OUR MANIFESTO FOR LIFELONG EDUCATION 2024</a>	1
<a href="#">1 INTRODUCTION</a>	5
<a href="#">2 MANIFESTOS AT A GLANCE: WHAT IS BEING SAID?</a>	6
<a href="#">2.1 Conservatives</a>	6
<a href="#">2.2 Labour</a>	9
<a href="#">2.3 Liberal Democrats</a>	12
<a href="#">3 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS</a>	16
<a href="#">4 ABOUT THE LIFELONG EDUCATION INSTITUTE</a>	18
<a href="#">5 APPENDIX – KEY QUOTES</a>	19

## OUR MANIFESTO FOR LIFELONG EDUCATION 2024

This general election is a watershed moment for the UK’s skills agenda. The Lifelong Education Institute believes that solving the UK’s skills challenges means addressing them in a holistic way. The path to prosperity requires an education system that puts **people** first, allowing everyone to become a learner at any stage of life. Raising **productivity** depends on a well-trained workforce that has opportunities to reskill and upskill throughout the course of their careers. And growth will only return to every left-behind **place** across the UK by tapping into the talent and potential of all of its residents. By building on these three pillars, we can realise a Lifelong Learning Society.



We set out here the LEI’s recommendations for sound, pragmatic, visionary policies that will transform the UK’s education and **skills landscape and** put the country on the path back to growth.

## Pillar 1: People

Lifelong learning, training, and upskilling is a right to be enjoyed by all.

1. **Empower learners to grasp their upskilling opportunities**
  - Simplify the regulatory and funding landscape for post-16 education
  - Create a digital individual learner account (ILA) that enables learners to manage their Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE).
  - Create a tripartite co-investment system for lifelong learning that combines contributions from learners, businesses, and government, administered via an ILA/digital skills account.
2. **Work with employers train up their employees**
  - Require businesses to offer support for continuing professional development (CPD) as part of their workers' career development.
  - Set a minimum training level for every worker to take at least 1 week of upskilling per year, and 30 days per year on average.
  - Allow workers to request '4+1' or '3½+1½' weekly work and upskilling 'splits' as part of all future job contracts.
3. **Help learners find their way up the qualification climbing-frame**
  - Commit to implementing the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) by 2026, and lower the minimum level for course eligibility to 10 credits.
  - Implement accessible modular options for all courses at levels 4–8, and allow learners the choice of any module for at least 25% of their courses in qualifications lasting over a year.
  - Introduce sectoral/subject-specific Lifelong Learning Pathways (LLPs), initially for all post-16 learning at levels 1–8.

## Pillar 2: Productivity

Productivity is the route to progress.

1. **Make boosting productivity the central mission of 21st-century Britain**
  - Turn the apprenticeship levy into a lifelong learning levy, split 50/50 between apprenticeships and other work-based courses.
  - Create an Institute for British Productivity to oversee Regional Skills Improvement Plans (RSIPs), with business, trade union, education provider, learner, and community representatives.
  - Consolidate all skills funds into a Productivity Investment Fund (PIF) for large public projects.
2. **Incentivise employers to invest in their staff**
  - Introduce a skills tax credit for businesses in strategic growth sectors, to incentivise staff training.
  - Require businesses to set aside a percentage of their profits (in line with the EU average) for a business-wide Human Capital Investment Fund (HCIF).
  - Allow employer contributions to the lifelong learning levy to fund individual learner accounts (ILAs).
3. **Bridge the divide between academic and vocational skills**
  - Add productivity as an explicit evaluation criterion for future research, teaching, and knowledge exchange evaluation.
  - Reform course development to ensure all qualifications deliver a mixture of academic and vocational learning.
  - Introduce a mandatory subject-relevant industry placement as a core requirement of qualifications at level 4+.

### Pillar 3: Place

Prosperity starts at home.

1. **Develop skills strategy in line with industrial policy to play to the UK's regional strengths**
  - Consolidate Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) into Regional Skills Improvement Plans (RSIPs), overseen by Regional Skills Councils (RSCs).
  - Publish a revised UK industrial strategy that prioritises regional comparative advantage, strategic/legacy, and future growth sectors.
  - Devolve 50% of the PIF budget to RSCs, to let regional stakeholders target spending at key skills gaps.
2. **Work together to find new solutions to specific skills challenges**
  - Create regional Skills Observatories to identify skills gaps and skills matching opportunities within their RSIP areas.
  - Let businesses agree Knowledge Exchange partnerships with their local tertiary education providers, including plans for reciprocal staff secondment.
  - Create Skills and Innovation Hubs in high-density business clusters, targeting skills gaps found by the Observatories.
3. **Bring skills to local learners when and where they need them**
  - Create Regional Education Partnerships (REPs) to act as a unified voice for education providers.
  - Introduce Skills Academies for key sectors in each region, to act as hubs for curriculum co-design, industry-expert teaching, and pedagogical training.
  - Require every tertiary education provider to draw 5% of their intake from local 'community learners', and 20% from their region.

### A lifelong learning society by 2030

Transforming the UK's skills needs dedicated leadership.

- Government to introduce a Minister for Lifelong Learning based across DfE, DBT, and DSIT.
- Businesses to introduce a senior management role responsible for CPD, in-work upskilling, and workforce development.
- Every university to create a Department/School of Lifelong Learning, in collaboration with local post-16 education providers.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

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Our LEI Thinks '**Education and Skills: Across the Political Landscape**' assessed on a range of scales the interventions on skills and education policy by the six major political parties in the UK during the 2023 autumn party conferences: the Liberal Democrats, Conservatives, Green, Plaid Cymru, Labour, and the Scottish National Party (SNP). As these parties now currently jockey for advantage ahead of the General Election on 4 July, key questions arise regarding their positions on education, training, and skills development. In this context, it is vital for individuals and organisations that are active in education and skills development space to understand the implications of the main parties' views for the future of the sector.

This thinkpiece '**UK General Election 2024: What can we expect for lifelong learning?**' by the Lifelong Education Institute focuses on the 2024 election manifestos of the Conservatives, Labour, and Liberal Democrats, as the three main parties with recent government involvement. It provides a detailed overview of the positions they take, and considers their principal areas of focus as well as their key omissions. The thinkpiece explores the areas where the three parties align, where they differ, and where they could go further in their visions of lifelong learning, and offers a future-facing assessment of how the next Government should tackle the subject to realise the lifelong learning revolution.

## 2 MANIFESTOS AT A GLANCE: WHAT IS BEING SAID?

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This section explores how the Conservatives, Labour, and the Liberal Democrats have discussed the subjects of education and skills in their manifestos ahead of the UK General Election on 4 July 2024. It examines the various policy positions espoused across the political landscape and considers the three political parties' main areas of focus.

Our analysis and considerations are organised under the three pillars of **People**, **Productivity**, and **Place**, in line with the LEI's 2024 *Manifesto for Lifelong Education*.

### 2.1 Conservatives

As the UK's current governing party, the Conservative Party is in a key position to set the pace on what will feature in the education policy agenda. In their Manifesto, *Clear Plan; Bold Action; Secure Future*, released on 11 June 2024, the Conservatives proposed several education and skills development reforms which are intended to enhance opportunities for young people and address various sectors' needs.

#### People

- The Conservatives propose several key education reforms and policies to enhance opportunities and skills for young people. They plan to introduce mandatory National Service for all school leavers at 18, offering placements in military or civic roles.
- They will implement the Advanced British Standard for 16–19 education, to provide a broader curriculum that bridges academic and technical/vocational learning. This new standard aims to combine the best features of A-Levels and T-Levels, ending the divide between academic and technical education.
- The Conservatives argue that English children are now the top readers in the Western world and rank 11<sup>th</sup> globally in maths, a clear improvement from 27<sup>th</sup> in 2010. They intend to continue this progress by ensuring all children receive a world-class education. Currently, 90% of schools are rated Good or Outstanding, up from 68% in 2010.
- School funding is claimed to be at its highest in real terms per pupil, teacher numbers to have increased by 27,000 since 2010, and free school meals to have been extended to more children than under any previous government. The Conservatives also claim to have fulfilled their 2019 pledge to introduce starting salaries of £30,000 for teachers, and to support headteachers in managing behaviour. They intend for the pupil premium to allocate nearly £3 billion in 2025 to support disadvantaged children.
- To attract more talented teachers, the Manifesto notes Conservative plans to expand recruitment and retention incentives, offering new teachers in priority areas bonuses of up to £30,000 tax-free over five years.



- In primary schools, teaching focus will include phonics and maths skills, to ensure children that are better-prepared for secondary education.
- The Conservatives also want to continue expanding academy trusts to protect parental choice in education and rebuild or refurbish over 500 schools. They intend to close university courses with poor outcomes to ensure better value for students and taxpayers.
- In terms of lifelong learning and upskilling, the Conservatives will deliver the Lifelong Learning Entitlement, giving adults the support they need to train, retrain, and upskill flexibly throughout their working lives. Starting from the 2025 academic year, adults will be able to apply for loans to cover new qualifications. They will also continue to expand adult skills programmes, such as Skills Bootcamps, which address skills shortages.

### **LEI Response:**

- The LEI welcomes the Conservatives' commitment to delivering the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE), and calls for the new incoming government to commit to implementing it by 2026, as well as lower the minimum level for course eligibility to 10 credits.
- We want the new government to create a digital individual learner account (ILA) that enables learners to manage their Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE).
- We note the importance of implementing accessible modular options for all courses at levels 4–8, and allow learners the choice of any module for at least 25% of their courses in qualifications lasting over a year.
- We recommend introducing sectoral/subject-specific Lifelong Learning Pathways (LLPs), initially for all post-16 learning at levels 1–8.

### **Productivity**

- The Conservatives have outlined several key policies and commitments aimed at reducing migration, enhancing skill development, modernising defence, improving healthcare, securing the food supply, boosting rural economies, supporting creative industries, and transitioning to sustainable energy.
- To address migration, they plan to introduce a legal cap to ensure numbers decrease annually while meeting the needs of public services, businesses, and the NHS.
- In terms of training and skills, they aim to promote apprenticeships as an alternative to university, with a goal of adding 100,000 apprenticeships in England annually by the end of the next Parliament.
- Healthcare policies focus on increasing training places for clinicians, midwives, paramedics, and dental care professionals, alongside improving working conditions for NHS staff.

- In agriculture, they seek to support food security through a five-year visa scheme, investment in automation, and the promotion of agri-food careers and skills. Given the rural economy's contribution of over £250 billion, they plan to support jobs, growth, and education in these communities.
- Recognising the importance of apprenticeships for the creative industries, the Conservatives propose a flexible coordination service to provide more secure training opportunities in the film, TV, gaming, and music sectors.
- For Scotland, their aim is to support the workforce's transition to new industries such as carbon capture, offshore wind, hydrogen, and tidal energy. This includes a £15 million fund for the Energy Transition Zone's skills programmes and ongoing preparations for nuclear projects to provide cheaper, cleaner, and more secure energy.

### **LEI Response:**

- We welcome the Conservatives' commitment to the LLE and call for an incoming government to allow employer contributions to the lifelong learning levy to fund individual learner accounts (ILAs).
- The LEI asks the new government to turn the apprenticeship levy into a lifelong learning levy, split 50/50 between apprenticeships and other work-based courses.
- We ask for the creation of an Institute for British Productivity to oversee Regional Skills Improvement Plans (RSIPs), with business, trade union, education provider, learner, and community representatives.
- We emphasise the need to consolidate all skills funds into a Productivity Investment Fund (PIF) for large public projects.
- The LEI calls for the introduction of a mandatory subject-relevant industry placement as a core requirement of qualifications at level 4+.

### **Place**

- The Conservatives have outlined several key commitments aimed at improving education, healthcare, and community support across the UK. They plan to work with schools and local authorities to improve school attendance by providing more mental health support, claiming that this strategy has already resulted in 440,000 fewer children being persistently absent last year compared to the previous year. To ensure all children receive a high-quality education, including those who are home-schooled, they intend to legislate for a register of children not in school.
- To improve access to NHS services across England, the Conservatives plan to train more staff in rural and coastal areas, and update the NHS Constitution to reflect the unique healthcare needs of these communities, tailoring services accordingly.

- They also plan to extend the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for three years at the next Spending Review. This funding will support a UK-wide National Service and community groups focused on boosting skills.

#### **LEI Response:**

- We are pleased to see more planned community-based projects.
- The LEI calls for the introduction of Skills Academies for key sectors in each region, to act as hubs for curriculum co-design, industry-expert teaching, and pedagogical training.
- We recommend introducing a requirement for every tertiary education provider to draw 5% of their intake from local 'community learners', and 20% from their region.

## **2.2 Labour**

As the main opposition party, the Labour Party has sought to position itself strongly on the importance of education and skills development. In their manifesto *Change*, published on 13 June, Labour set out the primary changes that they aim to introduce if they form the next government after the election.

### **People**

- Labour acknowledges the significant role foreign workers play in the UK's economy and public services. However, they criticise the Conservatives for fostering an excessive dependence on foreign labour, which has led to record-high levels of net migration. To address this, Labour proposes reducing net migration by implementing proper control measures and managing overall levels to stimulate local business training initiatives.
- Their strategy involves reforming the points-based immigration system to better align with skills policies. They aim to ensure that steering migration towards addressing skill shortages will also foster upskilling and enhance working conditions across the UK.
- Additionally, Labour plans to enhance the effectiveness of the Migration Advisory Committee by collaborating with skills bodies, the Industrial Strategy Council, and the Department for Work and Pensions. Their goal is to decrease reliance on overseas workers, particularly in key sectors such as health, social care, and construction.
- Regarding education, Labour emphasises the challenges of unaffordable childcare, early education accessibility, teacher burnout, and the lack of readiness among children entering primary school. To tackle these issues, they intend to overhaul the education system by expanding childcare provisions, modernising the curriculum, reforming assessments, and establishing better training and employment pathways.

- Labour's education agenda includes recruiting 6,500 new expert teachers, elevating the status of teaching, and ensuring that all new teachers work towards achieving Qualified Teacher Status through continuous professional development.
- They also recognise the importance of school support staff and propose reinstating the School Support Staff Negotiating Body to address recruitment and retention challenges.
- Labour also plan to introduce an Excellence in Leadership Programme for headteachers and leaders, alongside Regional Improvement Teams aimed at promoting best practices.
- Central to Labour's education vision is a broad curriculum that priorities strong foundations in reading, writing, and mathematics, while also fostering essential digital, speaking, and creative skills.

### **LEI Response:**

- We are disappointed by the clear omission of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) or any specific move towards dedicated lifelong learning pathways.
- The LEI calls for the introduction a skills tax credit for businesses in strategic growth sectors, to incentivise staff training.
- We recommend that businesses should be required to set aside a percentage of their profits (in line with the EU average) for a business-wide Human Capital Investment Fund (HCIF).

### **Productivity**

- In the UK, the landscape of health education in schools is of particular concern. Labour aims to tackle the issue of young people not in education, employment, or training by implementing a youth guarantee. This initiative will ensure that all 18–21-year-olds have access to training, apprenticeships, or support to find work. Additionally, Labour pledges to provide two weeks of work experience for all those eligible for it, and to enhance career advice services in schools and colleges.
- To achieve this, Labour plans to collaborate with the Scottish and Welsh Governments, as well as Mayors and Combined Authorities in England, to establish effective employment support partnerships nationwide.
- Labour expresses severe concern about the confusion in England's skills system brought about by Conservative policies, citing a decline in apprenticeships and widespread skills shortages. To address this, they propose establishing Skills England, which will bring together businesses, training providers, unions, and government bodies to cultivate the strategy needed to create a highly-trained workforce. Skills England will work closely with the Migration Advisory Committee to align training programmes with labour market demands, and devolve adult skills funding to Combined Authorities for more localised control.

- Furthermore, Labour intends to reform the Apprenticeship Levy by introducing a flexible Growth and Skills Levy. This levy, in consultation with Skills England, will ensure that courses funded through it offer value for money.
- Recognising the importance of higher education in creating opportunities, Labour's post-16 skills strategy will integrate Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE), improve teaching quality, and enhance access to universities. They also aim to reform the current higher education funding system to better serve taxpayers, universities, staff, and students.
- Labour also plans to establish new partnerships with international allies. This includes a strategic partnership with India focusing on trade, security, education, and technology, as well as deepening cooperation with Gulf partners on regional security, energy, and trade.
- Labour wants to transform FE colleges into specialist Technical Excellence Colleges, with these colleges working with businesses, trade unions, and local government to provide young people with better job opportunities as well as contribute to the highly trained workforce that local economies need.

#### **LEI Response:**

- The LEI welcomes the idea of linking Skills England to the Migration Advisory Committee, as this will hopefully provide much greater clarity and direction on skills training priorities in different occupational sectors.
- We also endorse Labour's intention to integrate FE and HE into a single unified category of tertiary education, as this will help redress the long-standing inequality in resources between different parts of the post-16 education sector.
- We support in principle the plan to reform the Apprenticeship Levy into a flexible Growth and Skills Levy. The detail behind this will be important, to ensure a good balance between apprenticeships and other forms of training, and make sure the levy is fully utilised in future.
- The LEI calls for the Apprenticeship Levy to become a lifelong learning levy, which would be split 50/50 between apprenticeships and other work-based courses.

#### **Place**

- Labour intends to bolster devolution settlements for existing Combined Authorities in England and expand devolution to more areas, thereby empowering local authorities to collaborate and gain new powers.
- Towns and cities will be equipped with the necessary tools to stimulate growth, generate employment opportunities, and elevate living standards. This includes granting local areas authority over crucial domains such as transport, adult education and skills, housing and planning, and employment support.

- Labour emphasises the significance of robust governance, capacity, and capability at the local level, with central support provided as necessary.
- Furthermore, Labour aims to partner with local areas to develop initiatives that facilitate the employment of more disabled individuals and those with health conditions. They propose devolving funding to enable local areas to establish integrated work, health, and skills programmes tailored to the specific needs of their communities.

### **LEI Response:**

- The LEI calls for an incoming government to consolidate Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) into Regional Skills Improvement Plans (RSIPs), overseen by Regional Skills Councils (RSCs), for England's nine International Territorial Level 1 regions: North East, North West, Yorkshire and the Humber, East Midlands, West Midlands, East of England, South East, South West, Greater London.
- We recommend creating regional Skills Observatories to identify skills gaps and skills matching opportunities within these RSIP areas.
- The LEI also suggests creating Regional Education Partnerships (REPs) to act as a unified voice for education providers within each of the RSIP areas.
- We propose introducing Skills Academies for key sectors in each region, to act as hubs for curriculum co-design, industry-expert teaching, and pedagogical training.
- We argue in favour of a requirement that every tertiary education provider ought to draw 5% of their intake from local 'community learners', and 20% from their region.

## **2.3 Liberal Democrats**

Of the remaining major parties within the UK, the Liberal Democrats have most consistently championed several lifelong learning initiatives, including the creation of a 'Skills Wallet', designed as a dedicated fund to help adults retrain during their working lives. The Liberal Democrat manifesto, *For a Fair Deal*, was launched on 10 June 2024.

### **People**

- The Liberal Democrats' manifesto underscores a commitment to prioritise education, climate change, and economic reform, emphasising a people-first approach. A cornerstone of their plans is the introduction of Lifelong Skills Grants, providing adults with £5,000 for education and training, potentially increasing to £10,000 in the future.
- They intend to replace the apprenticeship levy with a more flexible skills and training levy, elevate apprenticeships to meet the National Minimum Wage, and establish National Colleges for advanced vocational skills.

- Addressing skills gaps is a priority, with proposals to introduce higher vocational training, enhance the quality of vocational education, and improve career guidance and employer connections in schools and colleges.
- The manifesto also proposes additional support for entrepreneurs and small businesses, alongside reforming business rates to rejuvenate high streets, which ties closely into boosting productivity and local development.
- The Liberal Democrats aim to repair the UK's relationship with Europe, in particular by eliminating trade barriers imposed by the Conservatives.
- Regarding climate change, industrial strategy, and skills development, the manifesto outlines plans for a new industrial strategy featuring a Home Energy Upgrade programme and investments in clean energy and transportation. The Liberal Democrats also set out skills training incentives to facilitate the transition to net zero emissions.
- Support for university research and innovation remains a focal point, with an explicit commitment to continue the UK's participation in Horizon Europe, and to rejoin the European Innovation Council.
- The Manifesto also stresses the importance of increasing access for disadvantaged groups in universities and enhancing transparency in selection criteria.
- Healthcare workforce initiatives include exempting NHS and care staff from the Immigration Skills Charge and permitting care workers to bring their partners and children.

### **LEI Response:**

- The LEI welcomes the commitment to Lifelong Skills Grants, and notes that this headline skills proposal for 'Lifelong Skills Grants' is a re-working of the Skills Wallet, which the party first trailed in the 2019 election. Since there are currently 37.5m people of working age in England, these Grants would cost the public purse £185bn, potentially rising to £370bn over the next 36 years, which is the course of an expected working life.
- We support Adult Skills Accounts as a policy initiative. However, we have argued for a further-reaching contribution scheme that can help share the cost of training between learners/workers, businesses, and government. A reformed apprenticeship levy could further help with the business costs of workforce upskilling.
- We also recommend introducing requirements for businesses to offer support for continuing professional development (CPD) as part of their workers' career development.

### **Productivity**

- The Liberal Democrats advocate a comprehensive economic policy aimed at fostering stability and growth through responsible public finance management and rectifying the UK's trading relationship with Europe.

- A key focus is on industrial strategy, with emphasis placed on the skills required by the future UK economy, particularly in sectors such as renewable energy, digital technology, and biosciences.
- Investments in green infrastructure, innovation, and skills are held up as essential to driving economic growth and creating job opportunities across the country.
- Collaboration with businesses is seen as crucial to maximising opportunities for investment, growth, and employment. The Liberal Democrats aspire to position the UK as a leader in ethical and inclusive technology, including the use of AI and clean technologies.
- Efforts to enhance productivity include facilitating the active participation of parents, carers, and disabled individuals in the job market through the adoption of technology and innovative working methods.
- Improving the quality of vocational education is presented as a key priority, along with promoting skills for entrepreneurship and self-employment, and strengthening career guidance and employer partnerships in schools and colleges.
- There is a call for a review of FE funding and HE finances to ensure fair access, participation, and quality without retroactive rate increases or the sale of loans to private firms.
- The Liberal Democrats propose replacing the Conservatives' salary threshold for work visas with a more flexible merit-based system tailored to sector-specific needs. This would be part of a broader long-term workforce strategy aimed at addressing domestic skills gaps.

### **LEI Response:**

- The LEI welcomes the Liberal Democrats' intention to address skills gaps through measures including vocational training and high-quality career advice, especially in areas such as renewable energy, digital, and bioscience sectors. We emphasise that this must be connected to a new industrial strategy focused on boosting productivity and helping the UK become a world leader in new technologies. In our view this must be driven by better labour market intelligence. To this end, we have recommended the creation of Local Skills Observatories that can help match the supply and demand of skills.
- The LEI calls for productivity to be added as an explicit evaluation criterion for future research, teaching, and knowledge exchange evaluation.
- We argue that it is necessary to reform course development to ensure all qualifications deliver a mixture of academic and vocational learning.

### **Place**

- The Liberal Democrats highlight the key role of private enterprise in driving forward the UK's growth and prosperity. They emphasise the need to support businesses by creating a stable environment through smart regulation and investments in skills, infrastructure, research, and



innovation. In return, businesses are expected to contribute to skills development, equality, good governance, and community support.

- The manifesto proposes giving local authorities more education responsibilities to act as Strategic Education Authorities. This expanded role should include overseeing place planning, managing exclusions, administering admissions, and addressing Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) functions.
- The party also calls for increased involvement of devolved administrations in shaping the evidence base for UK-wide policies on work permits and student visas. This collaborative approach aims to ensure that immigration rules are responsive to the skills needs of all regions and sectors across the UK.

### *LEI Response:*

- The LEI recommends consolidating Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) into Regional Skills Improvement Plans (RSIPs), overseen by Regional Skills Councils (RSCs).
- We endorse the proposal to devolve more powers to Mayoral Combined Authorities, and to move responsibility for local education authorities into the remit of devolved administrations, in both cases to help develop new policies. This must include the design and delivery of skills initiatives, which are essential for a place-sensitive approach to narrowing regional disparities in skills attainment and employment opportunities.

### 3 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

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This thinkpiece has explored the key policies outlined in the Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrat manifestos regarding education, training, and skills development. While we welcome many of the positions put forward, there is still a long way to go before they provide the foundations for the UK to become a lifelong learning society by 2030.

The UK's student finance system is in serious need of stabilisation, which includes providing education providers and learners with clarity and certainty around the future of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE). To make the LLE effective, it is vital that the next government lowers the eligibility thresholds to capture specialised microcredentials and short courses, and takes on the logistical work needed to create a user-friendly digital Individual Learner Account (ILA) to let learners manage their upskilling journey. Learners also need to be given genuine choice and guidance in their learning trajectories, which will need government support for more modular options and structured Lifelong Learning Pathways (LLPs) for all post-16 learning.

The role of business also needs far more fundamental reconsideration than any of the three main parties have so far undertaken. This includes incentivising businesses to set aside more of their profits for workforce development and training, and creating more opportunities for bilateral education–business partnerships, such as subject-specific industry placements for all qualifications at level 4 and above. The lack of reforms to the apprenticeship levy also risk becoming a deadweight preventing more extensive employer investment in upskilling their workforces. This must be addressed by making the levy more flexible, and by integrating the revenue it raises more closely with student finance and government funding 'pots'. Part of giving the whole skills system greater coherence, especially to help it rise to the challenge of restoring productivity growth to the UK economy, has to be a central place of oversight, in the form of an Institute for British Productivity.

But a more concerted, streamlined effort by central government to put skills and productivity at the centre of the UK's future economic strategy is not enough. Whichever party wins the general election needs to find better ways of embedding regional and sectoral sensitivity into every level of administration and regulation, and commit to distributing meaningful control over investment funding, to make a real difference in skills improvement across the country. Skills need to be made available to learners when and where they need them. This means a greater focus on ensuring that FE and HE providers draw at least part of their intake from learners in their local community and region, and creating a network of sector Skills Academies to act as local hubs for matching skills supply to skills demand.

Overall, there is still much to play for in the lifelong learning revolution. The UK needs far-sighted strategic thinking and planning to help its labour force adapt their skills to the coming economic and social challenges, and limit the risk of long-term unemployment and stagnation. A globally competitive UK needs large-scale investment to tackle its skills gaps in areas such

as digital literacy and advanced IT, health and social care, green energy, and sustainable manufacturing and construction. Investing in learners of all ages and at all career stages fosters innovation, promotes greater inclusion and mobility, and helps the UK move towards a more cohesive, equitable, and stable society.

This burden falls on the private and public sector alike. It is not just the special responsibility of business or education providers, of central government or local communities, nor for that matter of individual learners and workers. Giving upskilling the resources it needs is a task for UK society as a whole, with particular attention needed for moments of transition, when individuals are looking to move into new specialisms, or when businesses and education providers are foraying into new areas of knowledge application and exchange.

To become a lifelong learning society, the UK needs to build on and build out the learning and training we have all acquired up to now, through formal teaching and informal practice alike. This means putting a renewed emphasis on innovative ways to make upskilling flexible and accessible to all who want it, at a pace and in a format that works for them. It means launching a campaign to raise the profile of lifelong education across the UK population. And it means embedding upskilling into every dimension of the next government's vision for the future of the UK.

## 4 ABOUT THE LIFELONG EDUCATION INSTITUTE

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The **Lifelong Education Institute** (LEI) exists to promote learning and skills training for people at all ages and stages of their lives and careers. We believe that education should be available and accessible to everyone whenever and wherever they need it. Whether they are school leavers or university graduates, new recruits or long-serving employees, recent arrivals or long-term residents, working people or those who have entered retirement.

### 4.1 Our approach is based on four principles:

- Putting the lifelong learner first
- Building an integrated tertiary education system
- Bringing stakeholders together
- Looking to the four nations of the UK and beyond

Together, these principles underpin every part of our work, from research to advocacy, from convening to commentary. They are the bedrock on which we must build the 21st-century education system that the UK's learners urgently deserve.

The Lifelong Education Institute's Secretariat is hosted by the thinktank ResPublica. The Institute gets its strategic direction from its Advisory Board, which comprises prominent and forward-thinking figures in education and skills space. In addition, the Institute has asked political figures to form a Board of Patrons, who will advise on the current political environment, and help by progressing the Institute's positions in Whitehall.

## 5 APPENDIX – KEY QUOTES

This Appendix includes key Quotes from the Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrat 2024 manifestos under the three key headings of **People, Productivity, and Place**, in line with the areas of focus of the LEI’s Manifesto for Lifelong Education.

### People

Figure 1: Key quotes on ‘People’ from the Conservative Manifesto 2024

People
‘Give young people the skills and opportunities they deserve by introducing mandatory National Service for all school leavers at 18, with the choice between competitive placement in the military or civic service roles’ (p.4)
‘Transform 16-19 education by introducing the Advanced British Standard, enabling young people to receive a broader education and removing the artificial divide between academic and technical learning.’ (p.4)
‘We will attract more talented teachers by expanding our recruitment and retention premium and reducing workload. From this September, new teachers in priority areas and key STEM and technical subjects will receive bonuses of up to £30,000 tax-free over five years. We will extend the payments to eligible teachers in our further education colleges. We will always support and celebrate our further education colleges’ (p.26)
‘We will expand strong academy trusts. This builds on our record to date, where half of all state-funded schools are now academies and over 700 free schools have been delivered, with more in the pipeline. We will further protect parents’ choice on where to send their child to school, including preserving the rights of independent and grammar schools. We will lift the cap on faith schools, allowing them to offer more places to children based on faith and encouraging them to expand. We will back Ofsted to provide clear judgements to parents on the quality and safety of schools. We are rebuilding over 500 schools through the School Rebuilding Programme, including rebuilding or refurbishing every school identified to have RAAC.’ (p.27).
‘We will fund this by changing the law to close university courses in England with the worst outcomes for their students. Courses that have excessive drop-out rates or leave students worse off than had they not gone to university will be prevented from recruiting students by the universities regulator. This will protect students from being missold and the taxpayer from having to pay where the graduate can’t. We are committed to delivering the best value for students, so have already reformed student loans to make them fairer, meaning no one will pay back more than what they borrowed in real terms. And we will work with universities to

ensure students get the contact hours they are promised and their exams get marked.’ (p.28)

Figure 2: Key quotes on ‘People’ from the Labour Manifesto 2024

People
‘Labour will bring joined-up thinking, ensuring that migration to address skills shortages triggers a plan to upskill workers and improve working conditions in the UK’. (p.42)
‘We will strengthen the Migration Advisory Committee, and establish a framework for joint working with skills bodies across the UK, the Industrial Strategy Council and the Department for Work and Pensions. We will end the long-term reliance on overseas workers in some parts of the economy by bringing in workforce and training plans for sectors such as health and social care, and construction’ (p.42)
‘Childcare and early education are increasingly unaffordable and unavailable. Too many children arrive at primary school not ready to learn. Too many children are not even getting to school. Teachers are burnt out and leaving in droves. Fewer people are participating in apprenticeships and training. Higher education is in crisis. Meanwhile, too many of our young people leave school unprepared for the future.’ (p.77)
‘The factor that makes the biggest difference to a child’s education is high-quality teaching; but there are shortages of qualified teachers across the country. Labour will recruit an additional 6,500 new expert teachers’ (p.82)
‘Labour will transform Further Education colleges into specialist Technical Excellence Colleges. These colleges will work with businesses, trade unions, and local government to provide young people with better job opportunities and the highly trained workforce that local economies need.’ (p.85)

Figure 3: Key quotes on ‘People’ from the LibDem Manifesto 2024

People
‘We will put people first, investing in more apprenticeships and new Lifelong Skills Grants. We will overhaul parental leave to give families more choice and flexibility over how to juggle work and home life. We will support entrepreneurs, back small businesses, and reform business rates to help our high streets. We will make Britain a world leader in the new infrastructure, businesses and technologies needed to Liberal Democrat Election Manifesto 2024 tackle climate change. We will manage the public finances with the utmost care and responsibility. We will fix the UK’s broken relationship with Europe and tear down the Conservatives’ damaging barriers to trade.’ (p.7/8)
‘We will put tackling climate change at the heart of a new industrial strategy. We will cut emissions and bills with an emergency Home Energy Upgrade programme.

<p>We will drive a rooftop solar revolution and invest in clean energy, transport and industry. We will restore nature and tackle toxic air pollution. And we will provide skills training, incentives and advice to help families and businesses with the transition to net zero.’ (p.9)</p>
<p>‘Create new Lifelong Skills Grants, giving all adults £5,000 to spend on education and training throughout their lives, and aim to increase them to £10,000 in the future when the public finances allow.’ (p.42)</p>
<p>‘Urgently establish a standing commission to build a long-term consensus across parties and teachers to broaden the curriculum and make qualifications at 16 and 18 fit for the 21st century. This will draw on best practice such as the International Baccalaureate and ensure children learn core skills such as critical thinking, verbal reasoning and creativity.’ (p.42)</p>

## Productivity

Figure 4: Key quotes on ‘Productivity’ from the Conservative Manifesto 2024

Productivity
<p>‘Facilitating training and skills at every stage of life. We believe in giving young people the best possible start to their adult lives and going to university is not the only route to success. The Conservatives have prioritised apprenticeships after they were neglected under Labour. Since 2010, we have delivered 5.8 million apprenticeships and have created apprenticeship routes into 70% of occupations, including through degree apprenticeships. We passed new laws requiring children to be taught about technical education opportunities, not just university routes, and have set up 21 Institutes of Technology. We will build on this by creating 100,000 more apprenticeships in England every year by the end of next Parliament.’ (p.27)</p>
<p>‘We are also delivering record increases in training places for other clinicians, such as midwives and paramedics and we are boosting training places for dentists and other dental care professionals by 40%. We will improve working conditions for all NHS staff’ (p.40)’</p>
<p>‘Stick to our plan to support the agricultural sector with the labour it needs to maintain our food security, while moving away from the reliance on seasonal migrant labour with a five-year visa tapered scheme, alongside clear investment in automation and promoting agri-food careers and skills.’ (p.62)</p>
<p>‘Conservatives are committed to nurturing a thriving rural economy. Rural areas already contribute over £250 billion to the economy. We will build on this, supporting jobs, growth and education in rural communities’ (p.66).</p>
<p>‘We believe apprenticeships are a key pipeline of talent into our world-leading creative industries. We will work with industry to deliver a dedicated flexible coordination service so that everyone who wants to work in the film, TV, gaming</p>

and music sectors can work on live productions whilst benefiting from at least 12 months of secure training.’ (p.70)

Figure 5: Key quotes on ‘Productivity’ from the Labour Manifesto 2024

Productivity
<p>‘One in eight young people are not in education, employment, or training, with those lacking good qualifications and with poor mental health facing particular disadvantages. Drawing together existing funding and entitlements, Labour will establish a youth guarantee of access to training, an apprenticeship, or support to find work for all 18- to 21-year-olds, to bring down the number of young people who are not learning or earning. We will also guarantee two weeks’ worth of work experience for every young person, and improve careers advice in schools and colleges.’ (p.43/44)</p>
<p>‘We will work with the Scottish and Welsh Governments, and Mayors and Combined Authorities in England, to ensure all aspects of our new approach to Jobcentre Plus and employment support partner effectively with devolved provision, to offer the best opportunities for people right across the country.’ (p.44)</p>
<p>‘Labour will also reform the Conservatives’ broken Apprenticeships Levy. The current rigid rules ignore vital skills and training needed to access apprenticeships. Labour will create a flexible Growth and Skills Levy, with Skills England consulting on eligible courses to ensure qualifications offer value for money’ (p.86)</p>
<p>‘The current higher education funding settlement does not work for the taxpayer, universities, staff, or students. Labour will act to create a secure future for higher education and the opportunities it creates across the UK. We will work with universities to deliver for students and our economy’ (p.86)</p>

Figure 6: Key quotes on ‘Productivity’ from the LibDem Manifesto 2024

Productivity
<p>‘Core to our economic policy for improving stability and growth will be responsible management of the public finances, fixing the broken trading relationship with Europe, and an industrial strategy focused on the skills the future UK economy will need, from the renewables industry to the digital and bioscience sectors.’ (p.11)</p>
<p>‘We will work in partnership with business to offer stability and ensure that we maximise the opportunities for investment, growth and employment across the country. We will make the UK a world leader in ethical, inclusive new technology, including artificial intelligence, and a global centre for the development, manufacture and export of clean technologies.’ (p.17).</p>



‘Boost productivity and empower more people to enter the job market – such as parents, carers and disabled people – by making the most of technology and new ways of working.’ (p.18)

‘Establishing a review of higher education finance in the next Parliament to consider any necessary reforms in the light of the latest evidence of the impact of the existing financing system on access, participation and quality, and make sure there are no more retrospective raising of rates or selling-off of loans to private companies.’ (p.45)

## Place

Figure 7: Key quotes on ‘Place’ from the Conservative Manifesto 2024

Place
‘We will continue to work with schools and local authorities to improve school attendance, including through more mental health support, building on our plan that is working – there were 440,000 fewer children persistently absent last year compared to the year before. And to ensure all children are getting a high-quality education, including those who are home schooled, we will legislate to create a register of children not in school.’ (p.27)
‘We will further improve access to NHS services across England by training more staff in rural and coastal areas. For the first time the NHS Constitution will reflect the bespoke healthcare needs of rural and coastal communities and the need for the NHS to tailor services accordingly’ (p.40)
‘Extend the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for three years at the next Spending Review, before using this funding to support UKwide National Service. Both schemes will involve funding community groups focused on increasing life chances, instilling civic pride and boosting people’s skills.’ (p.56)

Figure 8: Key quotes on ‘Place’ from the Labour Manifesto 2024

Place
‘In England, Labour will deepen devolution settlements for existing Combined Authorities. We will also widen devolution to more areas, encouraging local authorities to come together and take on new powers. Towns and cities will be able to take hold of the tools they need to pursue growth, create jobs, and improve living standards. Local areas will be able to gain new powers over transport, adult education and skills, housing and planning, and employment support. We will ensure those places have the strong governance arrangements, capacity, and capability to deliver, providing central support where needed.’ (p.40)
‘Labour will work with local areas to create plans to support more disabled people and those with health conditions into work. We will devolve funding so local areas can shape a joined-up work, health, and skills offer for local people.’ (p.43)

‘We will establish Skills England to bring together business, training providers and unions with national and local government to ensure we have the highly trained workforce needed to deliver Labour’s Industrial Strategy. Skills England will formally work with the Migration Advisory Committee to make sure training in England accounts for the overall needs of the labour market. And we are committed to devolving adult skills funding to Combined Authorities, empowering local leaders to have greater control of skills development in their areas, alongside a greater role in supporting people into work. Skills England will co-ordinate between local areas to ensure everyone can access all the opportunities available.’ (p.85)

Figure 9: Key quotes on ‘Place’ from the LibDem Manifesto 2024

Place
<p>‘Private enterprise is the principal engine of growth and prosperity in the UK. We will support it by creating a stable business environment with smart regulation and investing in skills, infrastructure, research and innovation. In return, we expect businesses to commit to promote skills, equality and good governance, and to support their local communities.’ (p.11)</p>
<p>‘Give local authorities with responsibility for education the powers and resources to act as Strategic Education Authorities for their area, including responsibility for places planning, exclusions, administering admissions including in-year admissions, and SEND functions.’ (p.44)</p>
<p>‘Extend the participation of devolved administrations in the development of the evidence base for UK-wide policy on work permits and student visas, helping ensure rules are sensitive to the skills needs of every corner of the UK and every sector of the economy.’ (p.90)</p>

# UK General Election 2024: *What can we expect for lifelong learning?*

This thinkpiece examines the 2024 election manifestos put out by the Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrat parties ahead of the General Election on 4 July. It provides a detailed overview of the positions each of the three parties sets out on questions of education, skills, and lifelong learning, highlighting their headline policies and principal areas of focus as well as their key omissions. The thinkpiece explores the areas where the three parties align, where they differ, and where they could go further in their visions of lifelong learning, and offers a future-facing assessment of how the next Government should tackle the subject to realise the lifelong learning revolution.



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