# BRIEFING

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF LIFELONG LEARNING

This briefing outlines the results of interviews with Business in the Community (BITC) members to understand the common challenges to implementing lifelong learning and identify what is currently working well.

### Background

A perfect storm of automation, COVID-19, Brexit and the climate crisis elevates businesses' need to focus on skills and development, prioritizing the employability of their future and current workforce. Much work has already been done on the type of skills needed to enable people to transition between job roles and sectors, including the importance of essential, digital and green skills.

### 30.5 million
*UK workers (94% of workforce) lack the skills they will require in 2030 to perform their jobs well[i]*

### 49%
*of people from lower socio-economic backgrounds have not had any training since leaving education[ii]*

### 6 in 10
*feel that their employer is not helping them get the skills they need to be part of the solution to the climate crisis[iii]*

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**BITC MEMBERS REFERENCED IN THIS BRIEFING**

- Asda
- Aviva
- Boots
- bp
- Capita
- City & Guilds
- Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water
- ENGIE
- Hydrock
- Jacobs
- National Grid
- Ricoh

### The process

In January 2021, BITC interviewed 12 member companies including Asda, Aviva, Boots, bp, Capita, City & Guilds, Dŵr Cymru Welsh, ENGIE, Hydrock, Jacobs, National Grid and Ricoh. Within the interviews we focused on the following key areas:

- What employers see as their main challenges/barriers to enabling lifelong learning within their current workforce; is it about cultural, capability or inclusion barriers?
- What works when it comes to inclusive learning and development practices and how can these methods be best amplified across the business community?
- Are there opportunities for collaboration across sectors to overcome/navigate the systemic challenges within the skills system which prevent people from being able to access the

training and learning and development they need?

- Is there a specific issue that BITC could work across its members to campaign on that would drive the greatest change for people from lower socio-economic backgrounds who are at most risk of being displaced?

## INSIGHTS FROM BITC MEMBERS

*Cultural barriers* were identified by nearly all respondents. With the common response being that a 'mindset shift' needed to take place for both the employer and the employee. Specific examples of cultural barriers identified included:

- *Learning not prioritised and is often cancelled* or rescheduled to prioritise the 'day job'. Respondents noted learning will never be a priority without role modelling and a culture that celebrates learning.
- *Shift away from 'paternal' employer* who will offer a narrow range of learning opportunities for specific job roles. Most employers interviewed have a large array of courses, volunteering opportunities and development programmes. The employee now has more independence but with this comes responsibility to take these opportunities up and to understand how they enable progression.
- *Entrenched views within the employer* that when an individual reaches 45/55 they are looking towards retirement and are, therefore, not invested in further learning and development. For individuals, a similar shift is also needed as they too believe that learning and development is for younger people.
- *Stepping out your comfort zone.* Learning requires an individual to be comfortable with not knowing the answers. This can be a barrier for those who did not have a positive learning experience at school but can also be barrier for those who are seen as 'experts' in their field.
- *How to recognise the skills and learning that is delivered through the 'day job' both from the employer and employee.* It is recognised that a lot learning and development is delivered

through people's jobs, but this is not recognised or acknowledged in the same way as formal learning programmes. There is a need to challenge the concept of what learning is and how it is achieved.

*Structural barriers* were common to several sectors including those who are customer facing, have hourly contracts or who have to account for their hours for clients or contracts. A common structural issue across these sectors is time pressures.

This goes beyond a culture of deprioritising to a challenge in the way that jobs are designed and success is measured. There was suggestion by some that in order to get greater learning and development traction in this context, employers needed to move away from measuring inputs, (i.e course completed) to outputs (i.e increased productivity of the employee, able to do job better, increase retention).

*Impact of COVID-19* has meant there has been an increase in online learning and teaching which has meant that there are more bitesize, learn-on-the-go offers than ever before. This, in part, can offer a solution to the challenge of time as people are no longer expected to be in a classroom for a whole week and can spread their learning to suit them. However, these innovations also present challenges for some employees, including;

- *Access to devices* needed to complete the training. This includes a divide within the workplace for some employers where certain job roles have daily access to computers and reliable Wi-Fi and others have no access.
- *Lack of opportunity for on-the-job learning* through in-person collaboration. This is one that was highlighted across the employers we spoke too, but particularly in those industries that rely on creativity and curiosity – there was a concern that remote working did not facilitate this type of learning and development well.
- *The pandemic has halted progress* that had been made in retaining older workers and in

closing the disadvantage gap for young people leaving education. More work will now need to be done to support these specific groups in accessing opportunities and re-establishing a culture that enables them to take part.

### What is working within organisations and what lessons were shared for all employers?

1. **One size doesn't fit all**. Success has come from recognising different learning styles and developing a blended approach. This includes targeted programmes for certain groups, tailored conversations around performance and wellbeing which put the individual first.

2. **Create better ways for employees to navigate and access learning.** Some interviewees highlighted that the key factor for successful delivery was that they had created better ways for these groups to access the opportunities and navigate the system.

## 'WE HAVE ALL THE RIGHT THINGS ON THE SHOP SHELF, BUT WE NEEDED TO CHANGE THE SHOP FRONTAGE TO GET PEOPLE THROUGH THE DOORS'
### Lifelong Learning Interviewee

*Examples of this approach include:*

- *Mid-life MOT's which work with employees 45 and over to review where they are across a framework and helping them map actions that they can take to progress.*
- *Mutual mentoring and Coaching programmes which focus on diversity and inclusion driving equality across race and gender.*
- *Internal careers fairs that open up roles and careers to colleagues.*

3. **Role modelling and leadership from executive sponsors** has had a positive impact for most employers. Having leaders share and show that they have prioritised learning and what this has meant for them and the organisation is an important part of ensuring that employees feel they can also prioritise it within their working day.

4. **Transparency around progression** was seen as beneficial to increasing uptake. This has included publishing job and skills frameworks so that all employees are aware of what skills and competencies are needed within each job role. This should exist alongside ensuring employees are aware of where they are within an organisation's progression plans.

   This transparency means that individuals have greater ownership of their own progression and development and can act so that they are able to move between departments and roles. This could also be applied at a place level using initiatives such as City and Guild's 'Skills Bridges' to support transition across sectors.

### Skills and climate action - are these two strategies aligning?

Overall, the picture on this is mixed. There are employers for whom a drive to a climate positive future is a central focus and this is having a direct impact on the job roles being recruited for, but also on the learning and development being offered.

However, most employers noted that, on the whole, this was not about new green skills or green jobs but instead about organisational change and embedding essential skills; elements which are important within a drive to net zero but which also exist outside of this drive.

Some employers issued caution in trying to bring together lifelong learning and climate action into one call to action, believing instead that the two need to work in parallel and that the benefits will align, but in bringing them together we run the risk of diluting the impact.

This agenda did offer one potential area of innovation or opportunity, in shifting the focus from specific skills to emerging sectors and /or technologies, such as hydrogen.

The success of that technology relies on a range of skills across the value chain, including upstream and downstream industries. This creates opportunities to invest in skills across conventional

industry boundaries and drive collaboration across sectors to address skills gaps, and potentially provide more interesting opportunities for people over time - e.g., applying skills in different industries.

## NEXT STEPS

Taking these insights, BITC is currently developing a campaign plan for how we engage employers in defining and implementing responsible practice across lifelong learning.

The campaign will likely focus on establishing and promoting the roadmap for employers and we will work over the year to co-create this with members and key partners.

If you are interested in being part of the solution or in finding out more please contact your Relationship Manager or katy.neep@bitc.org.uk

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- find out more about our Climate Action work
- learn more about our advisory services
- join us for one of our upcoming events

Talk to one of our expert team today to learn how membership of BITC can help you take your responsible business journey further and drive lasting global change.

## REFERENCES

i McKinsey & Co, 'The Economic case for reskilling in the UK: How employers can thrive by boosting workers' skills, Nov 2020;

ii Social Mobility Commission, Adult Skills Gap Report, 2019

iii Business in the Community, Just Transition Research Report, January 2022