EDUCATION TRAINING FOUNDATION

POWERING THE GOVERNMENT'S MISSIONS: A VISION FOR FURTHER EDUCATION AND SKILLS

BUILDING THE FUTURE

The further education (FE) and skills sector is central to Britain's future. It is urgent and vital, sitting at the heart of tackling skills gaps, social mobility and industrial transformation. Yet without action, shortages, fragmentation and underinvestment will limit the sector's ability to deliver.





MISSIONS FOR BRITAIN

The Government aims to drive economic growth, make Britain a clean energy superpower, build an NHS for the future, make our streets safe and break down barriers to opportunity. Skills are essential to delivering these missions, but there are serious challenges affecting the skills landscape.

Three quarters of business leaders believe a lack of essential skills is a barrier to productivity (Grant Thornton, 2024). On a national economic scale, the Recruitment and Employment Federation (2022) estimates that failing to address skills shortages will cost £39 billion every year from 2024 to 2027. This is equivalent to a 1.2% fall in GDP.

Skills challenges are acute in target industries. One in five workers will be affected by the transition to a net-zero carbon economy and around 3 million workers will require upskilling during the transition (Place-Based Climate Action Network, 2019). In health, NHS England (2022) forecasted that inaction in the face of demographic change would leave a shortfall of between 260,000 and 360,000 staff by 2036–37.



The FE and skills sector is key to addressing these challenges, equipping learners with the skills that employers need to boost productivity and drive growth. The sector is an essential driver of green skills, and is expanding vocational routes into construction, clean energy, manufacturing, and health and care careers – amongst others – to tackle workforce shortages. But its contribution does not stop with the delivery of skills and qualifications. FE and skills providers across the country are among the UK's most undervalued assets; they provide opportunities to adults of all ages and bring people together from all backgrounds to build communities.

At local and regional levels, FE and skills providers are anchor institutions, engaging with businesses, local authorities and social organisations to meet community needs. The sector is a beacon of opportunity and supports a disproportionate number of learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and learners from disadvantaged backgrounds when compared to other parts of the wider education ecosystem (such as schools and universities). The Social Mobility Commission (2020) identified that a third of FE students come from the 20% most deprived areas in England. The FE and skills sector is an engine of social mobility and enables learners of all ages and backgrounds to upskill or reskill so they can contribute to their local communities and our national economy.

In short, a strong FE and skills sector unlocks the potential of each Government mission. But the sector is only as strong as its workforce – and the workforce needs an organised and sustained strategy to help educators, leaders and support teams realise the sector's full positive impact.

ENABLING THE WORKFORCE TO DELIVER

Every learner deserves to be taught by teachers and trainers who are highly skilled, valued and vocationally expert so it is essential that the FE and skills sector provides a dedicated, professional workforce. Yet, the sector's workforce faces recruitment and retention challenges, heavy workloads, and lack of consistency in training opportunities and investment in staff (Edge Foundation, 2024).

ETF's vision, grounded in practice and evidence, is for a system in which:



every teacher is trained and supported to high, consistent standards



every region has the data, funding and capacity to meet local skills needs



every learner is taught by professionals who are highly skilled, valued and vocationally expert.

Therefore, ETF is calling for a set of urgent, mutually reinforcing reforms:

- a national, targeted workforce strategy to recruit, retain and develop the diverse, dual professionals needed across the FE and skills system
- kitemarking for initial teacher education (ITE) providers to ensure programmes consistently meet rigorous professional standards and deliver quality and value for trainee teachers
- clear and transparent data on workforce training spend and provision that informs decision-making and aligns to skills gaps
- ringfenced, targeted devolved funding to regional and combined authorities to enable evidence-led workforce development solutions aligned to local growth and skills priorities.

HOW ETF CAN HELP

ETF is an independent charity and the professional body with a remit covering the whole FE and skills sector. We have significant experience in developing workforce plans and delivering national professional development programmes on behalf of Government, and we convene stakeholders to address system-wide issues that affect high-quality teaching.

We have a track record of:

- supplying intelligence and insights
- delivering analyses of national training needs and upskilling against national priorities
- developing national continuing professional development programmes to improve professional practice and learner outcomes.

The FE and skills sector is one of Britain's most powerful and underutilised levers for equitable growth, productivity, and opportunity.





With a strategic workforce strategy, standardised initial teacher education, better data, and ringfenced support for workforce development at a regional and local level, the UK can ensure FE and skills educators and leaders are fully equipped to deliver the highest-quality teaching and learning across the whole sector. With a strong, supported workforce, we can ensure all learners are skilled, motivated, and empowered to contribute to their communities and the economy, propelling every Government mission forward at a local, regional and national level. Valuing and working with the FE and skills sector in this way will bring huge returns and will demonstrate that the UK is serious about growth, equity and renewal, both now and long into the future.

Through our commitment to evidence-informed practice, provision of high-quality CPD and development and oversight of professional standards, ETF is uniquely positioned to take the FE and skills sector forward. As the professional body for the FE and skills workforce, ETF has the mechanisms in place (CPD, standards and statuses, thought leadership and advocacy) to support the sector so that it, in turn, can transform the skills landscape and deliver the Government's ambitions.



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