

PRESS RELEASE

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New Policy Report Calls for Regional Education Partnerships to Drive Skills Development

A major [new report from the Lifelong Education Institute](#), reveals how England's shifting regional policy has hampered skills provision and collaboration between education institutions, businesses and government. ***"Mapping the course: Education Partnerships for Continuous Skills Development"***, in association with Newcastle University, proposes a new model for **Regional Education Partnerships (REPs)** and **Lifelong Learning Pathways (LLPs)** to knit together schools, colleges, universities and employers across each region.

Key Findings

- Over fifty years of stop-start regional and local initiatives have created patchy geographies, duplication of effort and missed opportunities for place-based specialisms.
- During this period England has cycled through more than 130 dedicated skills-partnership bodies over the last five decades—72 Training and Enterprise Councils (1988–93), nine Regional Development Agencies (1998–2012), 38 Local Enterprise Partnerships (2011–24) and 38 Local Skills Improvement Plans (2022–25).
- In the North East there are 5 universities, 9 further-education colleges and over 20 private training providers serving a population of some 2 million. Yet there is no single entity that can speak to the regional skills agenda, shape interventions or influence funding allocations across a myriad of programmes and initiatives.
- Newcastle University has undertaken a number of place-based pilots - Institute of Electrification and Sustainable Advanced Manufacturing (IESAM), North East Institute of Technology (NEIoT), Northern Accelerator, Cultural and Creative Zone - which demonstrate how regional collaborations and targeted interventions in cross-sector pipelines can increase the commercialisation of R&D activity, as well as boosting skills in vital sectors like green energy and the creative industries.
- These pilots have delivered clear, measurable results: the Northern Accelerator helped increase spin-outs rise from 1.8 per year (2011–16) to 6.8 per year (2016–21); IESAM will train 7,500 learners annually through its Power Electronics, Machines and Drives (PEMD) centre partnership; and the Cultural and Creative Zone secured £1.7 million to support 151 creative-sector hubs across England.
- Education providers need a unified regional voice to negotiate funding with devolved authorities and Skills England, to strengthen the link between course design and local labour-market needs.

Key Policy Recommendations

- Formalise the role of a Regional Education Partnership within existing governance arrangements in the North East to advise, guide and inform skills development.
- Support the development of place-based Lifelong Learning Pathways and interoperable credit-transfer frameworks ahead of the 2026/27 Lifelong Learning Entitlement.
- Commit to a dedicated Regional Skills Innovation Fund that consolidates existing resource (e.g. Local Skills Improvement Fund) into one pot, with ring-fenced allocations for Regional Education Partnerships to support pilot pipelines, shared infrastructure and staff capacity.
- Require Government to fully devolve the 16–19 and the Adult Skills Fund into single integrated settlements by 2026, enabling Mayoral Combined Authorities and their aligned Regional Education Partnerships to coordinate local funding decisions and remove duplication.
- Mandate creation of a regional “Skills Passport” digital platform—integrated with GOV.UK accounts—to track individual Lifelong Learning Pathway progress, Regional Education Partnership-badged credits, CPD achievements and approved industry placements across education and employment.
- Incentivise employer co-investment by matching public funds for sector-focused hubs (e.g. green energy, digital, health) delivered via Regional Education Partnership-led partnerships, to guarantee that local businesses have skin in the game for skills supply.
- Commission an independent review of post-16 and adult education funding allocations—covering Department for Education; Department for Work and Pensions; Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government; and Department for Culture, Media and Sport budgets—to ensure transparent, data-led resource distribution aligned to Regional Education Partnership-identified regional priorities.

Quotes

Professor Jane Robinson, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Engagement at Place at Newcastle University commented on the timeliness of the report:

“We are at a pivotal moment in our approach to skills. It has never been more important for us to co-ordinate activity to meet the needs of the future workforce. This timely report demonstrates that universities are well-placed to work in partnership with other providers, employers, local leaders, and learners to deliver opportunities for all and support growth across the UK.”

Report Author, Mark Morrin (Lifelong Education Institute) commented:

“Place must be at the heart of the UK’s skills and industrial strategy. To meet the government’s mission for growth, we need regional partnerships that unite schools, colleges, universities, and employers in service of their local economy. Collaboration across educational institutions isn’t just desirable—it’s essential to unlock innovation, deliver lifelong learning, and ensure that people and places across the UK benefit from economic transformation.”

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