



Department  
for Education

# **National Retraining Scheme: Key Findings Paper**

**October 2020**

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## **Expiry or review date**

This guidance will be reviewed before December 2020.

## **Who is this publication for?**

This guidance is for:

- local government, including mayoral, combined and local authorities
- employers
- individuals
- further education providers and other stakeholders

## **Summary**

The National Retraining Scheme was announced in 2017 to help adults to retrain as the economy changes. On 13 October 2020, we announced that it would be integrated with the Government's new £2.5bn National Skills Fund.

This key findings paper brings together the evidence we gathered as we developed the National Retraining Scheme, including trialling the Get Help to Retrain service with adults in six areas of the country, providing local labour market information through live job vacancies. These learnings will not only support government's ambitious plans for levelling up opportunity across the country through the National Skills Fund but will also inform future development of the National Careers Service.

## Background

The National Retraining Scheme was announced in the 2017 Budget to help adults retrain into better jobs and prepare them for future changes to the economy.

At the autumn 2018 budget the government announced £100 million over three years to test and develop the scheme. Using a proportion of this investment, we have taken a user-centred approach and focused on a targeted cohort of adults who are:

- already in work
- aged 24 and over
- earning low to medium wages
- and do not have a qualification at degree level

Our user-focused ‘test, build and iterate’ approach to developing the scheme has allowed us to focus on what works and delivers the most value to our cohort. It has also allowed us to adapt to the current challenges presented by COVID-19.

The scheme has been overseen by the National Retraining Partnership, an innovative no-cost partnership between government, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and the Trades Union Congress (TUC).

Through the partnership, business and workers have provided insight and feedback to support development of the scheme, making sure the voices of employers and employees were heard. Building on this feedback and extensive user research we have started delivering and testing the first part of the scheme, Get help to retrain.

We have designed Get help to retrain as an online and offline service which allows users to identify and input their current skills and then based on these skills, offer suggestions for training and alternative employment. The service is able to then direct users to vacancies in their area based on the suggestions provided.

We have been delivering Get help to retrain in six areas. To date over 3,600 individuals have accessed the service. The evidence gathered from testing is informing the development of future adult skills reforms.

To make it simpler for adults to access careers information, advice and guidance, we will continue to use the findings we have gathered by testing Get help to retrain to inform potential service developments to the National Careers Service in the future. Alongside Get help to retrain, we have also gathered valuable findings as we have looked to explore other parts of the scheme such as online training and hands-on training delivered in work.

As our work on Get help to retrain and the wider National Retraining Scheme is integrated into the wider skills offer, we will ensure the understanding and insights we

have gained are built upon through the National Skills Fund and other adult skills reforms.

## Context

Over recent years we have seen a number of trends that highlight the need for adult retraining:

- technological change will lead to both the loss and transformation of jobs in the labour market. This means existing workers will need to gain different skills<sup>1</sup>
- fewer adults are participating in learning and employer investment has been declining<sup>2</sup>
- as people work longer, the need to adapt to changing careers will become greater<sup>3</sup>
- UK productivity lags behind other G7 countries such as Germany, France and the US<sup>4</sup>

However, through our work on the National Retraining Scheme we have built a detailed understanding of the many issues that adults face in undertaking training.

For example, shortage of time and lack of financial resources, amongst other obstacles, can pose barriers for adults looking to retrain.<sup>5</sup>

The following sections outline these issues in more detail.

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/whichoccupationsareathighestriskofbeingautomated/2019-03-25>

2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/further-education-and-skills-january-2020>;

3 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/727776/Foresight-future-of-skills-lifelong-learning\\_V8.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/727776/Foresight-future-of-skills-lifelong-learning_V8.pdf);

4 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/economicoutputandproductivity/productivitymeasures/bulletins/internationalcomparisonsofproductivityfinalestimates/2016>

5 <http://www.oecd.org/employment/emp/engaging-low-skilled-adults-2019.pdf>

## Our approach

Learning from previous government initiatives, we have taken a 'test and learn' approach to developing the scheme and focused on understanding the needs of our intended cohort.

We have drawn on findings from wider research, making use of the existing evidence base on adult learning and retraining to inform our development work.

We have also run associated pilots and commissioned further research and evaluation to inform our thinking.

We have engaged with thousands of adults and hundreds of employers alongside other key stakeholders, such as providers and local areas, as we have tested our solutions.

This approach has ensured we can deliver a value for money service, by understanding the needs of the people who will use it.

We have:

- developed the scheme through collaboration with people and businesses
- started small and based our work on extensive research and testing, scaling up based on what works for the people using the service.

This has helped us understand what works for adults and businesses and provides a strong evidence on adults' motivations and barriers to retraining.

## Findings from developing the National Retraining Scheme with individuals

We know adults face many barriers to retraining. Some of the most common barriers are:

- lack of interest
- work or other time pressures
- feeling too old
- cost
- childcare and other caring responsibilities<sup>6</sup>

Over 3,600 individuals have accessed our first digital service, Get help to retrain, in the six regions it was available. Get help to retrain helped adults to understand their current skills, explore alternative jobs, and find and sign up to training.

Through testing Get help to retrain and talking to users about their experiences, we have also learned more about the behaviours and preferences of the people using the service..

Adults tended to want a clear route to a new job. It was clear from our engagement that the primary motivation for our cohort to undertake training was to gain a better job.

Talking to users about their experiences of Get help to retrain, our cohort reflected the need for a simple, linear user journey, that guided them through the service and created a personal action plan.

The findings have also showed that adults benefit from support to recognise the skills they already have. This helps build their confidence.

We have also found that many adults in our cohort value support from qualified careers advisers to understand and evaluate their training and career options.

However, support from careers advisers was available through a phonenumber and few users accessed this support. Some users have highlighted barriers to accessing support through the phonenumber, such as it not being open at a time of day that worked for them.

We were aware that not all adults find web chat functions useful and accessible. However, during engagement some of our cohort have expressed more enthusiasm for accessing support from advisers through an online webchat than telephone.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2019-Participation-Survey-Report.pdf>



We have also undertaken qualitative research into online training tailored for adults' needs. The findings indicated online training could help individuals fit training into their busy lives.

Our findings have indicated that effective online training should aim to offer:

- short lessons with feedback that is relevant to adults
- the ability to use a device that is convenient to the individual, for example, a mobile phone
- the choice of different learning media to suit different situations and preferences
- support from tutors who understand and empathise with adults
- learning designed for adults that encourages independence and reward
- learning that is relevant, and takes into account participants' prior learning
- accessible platform features with content design that works on mobile phones

To support the work on online training we have also launched the CareerTech Challenge, managed by innovation foundation Nesta, on behalf of DfE. The fund provides up to £5m of financial backing for innovators, entrepreneurs and technology companies to develop cutting-edge online training and career guidance solutions and will add to our evidence base on online learning. The supported solutions will run until March 2021 and evaluation will take place until Autumn 2021.

We have also conducted several associated pilots, including the Flexible Learning Fund and Cost and Outreach pilots. The interim findings from these pilots are already being used to inform the development of the National Skills Fund, and full evaluation reports will be published in the coming months.

The Flexible Learning Fund has supported adults to participate in training that will help them progress in current employment or secure a new job. The fund has supported 30 projects to design and test flexible ways of delivering learning to working adults with low or intermediate skills.

The aim of the Cost and Outreach pilots was to develop the evidence base on how more adults can be engaged and supported in learning by testing:

- what approaches to outreach are most successful at engaging adults in learning; and
- whether offering a course fee subsidy makes a difference to the uptake and completion of learning.

The interim findings of the Cost and Outreach Pilots have highlighted the importance of outreach being perceived as personally relevant to adults and linked to their career development.

They have also indicated that endorsement of training by their employer can be an important factor in encouraging some adults to participate in learning. This included both

endorsement through seeing promotional materials in the workplace and/or encouragement from employers to take part in training.

Participants' testimonies have suggested that, in most cases where pilot Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) was experienced, this did not take the form of in-depth advice or guidance, but rather signposting and providing practical information about courses. Some participants said that they would have welcomed more substantive IAG.

Through the pilots we have found that commonly reported barriers to retraining were:

- lack of direct experience
- concerns about childcare
- lack of confidence

The adults surveyed who were looking to retrain to a significantly different type of job reported that they were less likely to know where to access information on how to advance their career, compared to those adults surveyed who wanted to build on their existing skills.

A key aim of the pilots was to test how course subsidies impact on adults' motivation to take up learning. The pilots tested this by offering three levels of course fee subsidy to participants (25, 75 and 100 per cent).

The majority (89%) of survey respondents had been aware of the course fee subsidy at the time of enrolment; one in ten (11%) had not been aware of it.

It is too early to judge the full impact of the course subsidy on take-up, but initial findings show that nearly three quarters of enrolments were for courses that were fully subsidised.<sup>7</sup> Those on fully subsidised courses were more likely to report a positive influence on their decision to take up the course, compared with those on part subsidised courses. Three quarters of those who were aware of the course fee subsidy suggested that it was a factor in encouraging them to take up the learning opportunity

However, the survey also suggested that the subsidy had no behavioural influence for one third of the overall cohort, either because they reported that the subsidy did not encourage them to take up their course, or because they were unaware of the subsidy.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cost-and-outreach-pilot-evaluation-interim-findings>

## Findings from research with employers

Employers have a vital role to play in the adult retraining landscape, not least because of the importance of a clear route to a new job for adults who are undertaking training. During the testing and development of the scheme we have gathered insights from and engaged with hundreds of employers across a range of sectors and regions in England.

From existing research we know that despite an increase in the number of employer-reported skills shortage vacancies (which mirrors an increase in the overall number of vacancies), employer investment in training has declined over time<sup>8</sup>.

Existing research has also indicated that some employers view investing in training for existing employees as a risk, citing concerns that employees will leave the company after gaining more skills.<sup>9</sup>

We have also undertaken some focused research and engagement with employers, to further understand their behaviours and attitudes around recruitment and technical training.

During this research we have spoken to employers of varying sizes, including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), medium-large organisations and multinational employers. These included:

- charity, public and private sector employers
- employers with skills gaps in retail, logistics, finance, care, technology, and engineering
- organisations with at least one base in the North East or the North West

During this engagement some employers have showed a strong preference for employing someone that can 'hit the ground running' over offering technical training to new recruits.

However, employers have reported being more likely to consider training once employees have demonstrated cultural fit and competency in their role.

They have also reported being more likely to consider technical training where specialist skills can be taught 'quickly' on-the-job.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employer-skills-survey-2017-uk-report>

<sup>9</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/522980/BIS-16-260-research-skills-mismatches-in-the-economy-May-2016.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/522980/BIS-16-260-research-skills-mismatches-in-the-economy-May-2016.pdf)

This engagement with employers also highlighted unmet needs for flexibility.

We have discovered that employers face many barriers to offering training, including on the job training, such as balancing training delivery with other business needs.

For example, balancing release of experienced colleagues to support on-the-job training can be difficult for employers, particularly for those with skills shortages. Employers stated their top priorities were making a profit, business planning, strategy, development and delivery.

Some employers have expressed an interest in a shorter, more flexible retraining offer than those currently available.

However, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, employers' approaches to training and recruitment may have changed significantly and will likely continue to do so.

## Using our findings

The extensive evidence we have gathered as we have developed the National Retraining Scheme will be a key part of the evidence base that will inform the National Skills Fund and support government's ambitious plans for levelling up opportunity across the country.

The government is providing £2.5 billion (£3 billion when including Barnett funding for devolved administrations), for the National Skills Fund. This exciting new policy will look to transform and reenergise the adult training landscape.

The fund aims to boost productivity and presents a great opportunity to support reform that will create a simpler system that individuals, providers, local areas, and employers can more easily understand.

To support these wider ambitions, we will continue to engage with a broad range of stakeholders. We will continue to build on the work of the National Retraining Partnership, engaging a wide number of stakeholders, to deliver the most effective range of adult skills reforms possible.

The Department for Education has been working to respond to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, through initiatives such as The Skills Toolkit. Through the development of the National Retraining Scheme we have explored the benefits of online learning to provide flexible accessible training. The findings from this research have already provided valuable information that has informed the design and delivery of The Skills Toolkit. Building on our existing evidence base, we are also continuing to explore how online training for adults can help tackle the barriers that many face to retraining.

The findings we have gathered by testing Get help to retrain have already provided useful insights for the National Careers Service. This will help inform the further development of the National Careers Service website for people considering a change to their career.

Our engagement with employers on the National Retraining Scheme also ensured we were better sighted on the skills they need their workers to have, as well as their and individuals' need for a more flexible approach to the delivery of skills. Both of these factors have been central to the design and delivery of the recently launched bootcamps.

These bootcamps will support local regions and employers to fill in-demand vacancies by providing valuable skills based on employer demand and will offer a guaranteed job interview on completion. In doing so, they help to address key areas of uncertainty and risk in the retraining process identified in the National Retraining Scheme user research. For example, employers' concerns around taking on new staff from a new sector and individuals' concerns around undertaking training when there are not clear links to jobs.

The bootcamp courses will be delivered flexibly over approximately 12-16 weeks, initially focusing on digital skills and then expanding to other technical skills. They will initially be available in six areas:

**Current live areas:**

- The West Midlands
- Greater Manchester and Lancashire
- Liverpool City Region

**Going live in winter 2020/21:**

- Leeds City Region
- Heart of the South West
- Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire

We are planning to expand the bootcamps to more of the country from Spring 2021 and we want to extend this model to include other technical skills training. We will build on the research and engagement that we have done through the National Retraining Scheme and continue to work with employers as we design and deliver the digital bootcamps.

The information gathered through these bootcamps will also help inform the design and delivery of the National Skills Fund, helping us to develop a fund that works for businesses and employees.

We have also announced, that for adults who do not currently have a level 3 qualification, we will be fully funding their first full level 3. The offer will focus on the valuable courses that will help adults get ahead in the labour market. The offer will be funded from the National Skills Fund and offered from April 2021.



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