Introduction

After the next election, how the next government delivers post-school education will be key in defining whether they can address the major challenges the country faces. We know that improving participation in learning from the teenage years and through adulthood helps both break down barriers to opportunity and improve economic growth. However, recent years have seen financial pressures on those delivering learning and learners increase while inequalities between those benefitting from learning remain entrenched. Over the last 4 years Right2Learn (R2L) has been campaigning for greater access to learning for all groups bringing together nearly 1,000 people from skills, further education, higher education, charities, employers, combined authorities, elected mayors, Parliamentarians and government to our events.

We believe only by working across silos can we achieve the step change required in lifelong learning in the UK and this is reflected in the partner organisations supporting this paper. The 10 Future Priorities described here provide the foundation for the next government to unleash the potential that learning and learners have to drive the UK economy forward over the next decade. They cover qualifications, delivery, strategy, careers support and funding highlighting how and where we can better utilise existing and new resources to support learning. Crucially, they also point to the need for a more strategic approach which can unlock the benefits for learners of regional and national collaboration in a tertiary system.

R2L looks forward to campaigning for the implementation of the 10 Future Priorities over the coming months.

Professor Graeme Atherton, Director, National Education Opportunities Network
Gordon Marsden, Former Shadow Minister for Higher Education, Further Education and Skills
Vicky Duckworth, Edge Hill University

What is Right2Learn?
The Right2Learn (R2L) campaign was launched in 2020. It advocates for a policy agenda that supports the right to learn throughout life for all. Since 2020 we have engaged over 400 different organisations through our programme of events. R2L is led by Gordon Marsden, former Shadow Minister for Higher Education, Further Education and Skills, Professor Vicky Duckworth of Edge Hill University and Professor Graeme Atherton Director of the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) and Head of the Centre for Inequality and Levelling Up (CIELUP) at the University of West London. R2L is supported by the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON).

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- Lord David Blunkett • Professor Deirdre Hughes
- Birkbeck, University of London • Careers England • City & Guilds
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- National Education Opportunities Network (NEON)
- UK Career Development Institute (CDI) • University of Salford
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The **10 Future Priorities** for Lifelong Learning, Skills and Tertiary Education

Lifelong access to education is a central driver of the creation of a more equal, fair, and productive society and should be of the highest priority for any incoming government committed to increasing growth and opportunity. As the next election approaches, the Right2Learn campaign has brought together a group of organisations from across higher education, further education and the skills sector to establish a set of 10 key points to address in order to build a lifelong learning system that can drive the UK economy forward. These points are listed below.

1. **An urgent review of current Department of Education policy in relation to post 16 education, higher education and lifelong learning is needed including the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE).**
   
   This review should address the future of BTECs and other advanced qualifications which are a vital progression route for learners, T-Levels, the need for improved literacy, numeracy and digital skills, provision for those who are NEET and support for older workers who are economically inactive.

2. **As part of this policy review the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) needs reform.**
   
   The LLE is a good concept but the wrong design for what is needed. Learners can currently only access LLE if they are studying at levels 4 to 6. This approach has severe limitations, risks excluding older people and low/middle income groups and having a negative impact on economic growth and productivity. Would be learners should be able to receive appropriate financial support directly and via the LLE to progress fully from levels 1, 2 and 3.

3. **Lift the current block on maintenance support for distance learners.**
   
   The Government insisted on keeping the current block on maintenance support for distance learners in the proceedings on the Lifelong Learning Bill (even though they had permitted it during the Covid pandemic). Other learners at risk included rural learners, older learners, young carers, SEND learners and others who cannot access childcare or afford it. If student drop out increases this will hit FE colleges offering HE courses, the Open University and other long-standing adult colleges.

4. **Assess the investment related to skills, lifelong learning and post 16 education made by different government departments.**
   
   The aim would be to identify how by greater co-operation, collaboration and pooling of resource the impact of this investment could be increased to address the ‘compartmentalisation’ of the skills and lifelong learning agenda identified in the Labour Council of Skills Advisors report of 2022.

5. **Produce a new sustainable, stable long-term strategy to develop the post 16 tertiary sector that embodies a vision of lifelong learning into the next decade and beyond in the UK.**
   
   A tertiary sector gives greater parity to different forms of learning and puts the mechanisms in place that enable co-ordination and co-operation across higher education, further education and the skills sector which will benefit all learners.
6 Address the under-investment across post 16 learning, further, higher education and skills.

Any incoming government will face a challenging economic environment, but it must invest in skill development and learning if the economy is to experience the growth required to allow the environment to improve. Such investment includes enabling better financial support for higher education students and funding for learning & teaching across higher/further education and the skills sector. Improving conditions and pay for those working across the tertiary sector and reversing the £1bn cuts in investment in adult learning since 2010 is also essential.

7 Ensure that apprenticeships are available for all ages, all levels, in all sectors and implement a new growth levy that ensures that what is spent equals what is contributed from employers.

Greater flexibility is required than in the current apprenticeship system. It should be permissible to transfer funds to small and medium sized enterprises in the supply chain to give them a stake in the upskilling of their staff and to incentivise training providers to work with them. A reformed levy needs to unlock greater employer investment as spend in training per employee has fallen 26% since 2005.

8 Review skills related tax relief entitlement for employers.

The fall in investment in skills (10-15%) by major employers over a ten-year period needs to be urgently reviewed by an incoming government. Treasury ministers could look as a priority at how effective tax relief on the costs of training for companies and self-employed people has been in driving productivity in the economy. Current Treasury skills tax relief has been estimated to be in the region of £1.3–2 billion. Some of that relief could be spread to SMEs more widely, as well as supporting would be learners and employers in reskilling and upskilling to get from levels 2 to 4 – options that are laid out above.

9 At regional level strategic capacity planning is critical to maximise the benefit of devolution of responsibility for lifelong learning and skills.

Moving ahead with this requires careful planning and co-ordination to maximise the benefit of bringing learning closer to the learner without introducing regional variations and greater challenges to providers. A process is required that brings together FE providers, schools, national and regional commissioners, unions and devolved administration annually, to ensure that capacity can meet current and future demand.

10 Develop a comprehensive, national all-age Careers Information, Advice, and Guidance (CIAG) service.

This service would be seamlessly integrated with localised, advice services within communities, encompassing aspects such as careers, health, wellbeing, and employability. This service would build upon and extends the recommendations outlined in the 2022 Labour Council of Skills Advisors report.