



## Lifelong learning in the UK

The UK has a devolved system for education funding; this is a complex system which the reader does not need to understand here. Suffice to say that central control over devolved budgets is paramount; how the administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland spend their adult learning budgets is a matter for them but within the parameters of this funding. LLL has not done well under successive governments and there will be a continuing battle to support wider adult learning in the years to come; this will be difficult given the constraints on public funding. There are legislated rights to LLL in the UK.

For a glimpse of the future read [The right to make the wrong choices - liberty, learning and credit systems in the 21st century](#) a paper from a NIACE publication on the future of lifelong learning. Hosted by NIACE, the Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning was launched in September 2007 and reported on 17 September 2009. The [Learning Through Life](#) report provides the best and most current insight into Lifelong learning in the UK and has far reaching implications for government policy and spending. LLL is often viewed as marginal to economic success. The report explains why LL is central to a successful society.

*“Learning Through Life ... is a fundamental and convincing report about the necessity to finally take the implementation of Lifelong Learning seriously. The analysis and data in the report helps the reader to understand the limits of our present learning and educational models, based on the principle of learning early on for later life, and the enormous potential in economic, social, cultural, and individual terms of learning through life. The recommendations in the report ... are based upon the UK situation but they are highly relevant for all OECD countries and many new emerging economies on the global scene. It will be very difficult for the political community during the coming decade to ignore the recommendations in this report.”*

### **Jarl Bengtsson, former head of the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation at OECD**

The concept of ‘lifelong learning’ implies an understanding of learning as stretching out across an individual’s lifetime. It is a concept of learning from ‘cradle to grave’, which is not limited to the formal instruction received within educational institutions. Lifelong learning is a vital ingredient of being able to lead an autonomous, self-directed and responsible life.

The UK policy view of lifelong learning, which in practice is increasingly employer-led, has largely followed an agenda of developing a more productive and efficient workforce and raising Britain’s economic competitiveness through a ‘skills revolution’.

The dominant understanding of lifelong learning in official policy discourse continues to place an emphasis on vocational learning. A ‘skills revolution’, which is predominantly led by employers with sectoral interests is meant to equip learners with the knowledge, skills and understanding needed for economic and therefore societal success.

Finbar Lillis [www.creditworks.org.uk](http://www.creditworks.org.uk)