2019 OECD Skills Strategy: England

Since its launch in 2012, the OECD Skills Strategy has provided countries with a strategic and comprehensive approach to assessing their skills challenges and opportunities. The 2019 OECD Skills Strategy incorporates lessons learned from applying the OECD Skills Strategy framework in eleven countries, including new evidence about the implications of so-called megatrends, such as globalisation, digitalisation, population ageing or migration. It also accounts for new evidence about skills policies that work under the proper governance arrangements, including effective co-ordination and accountability mechanisms, efficient funding from different sources and information systems. This document describes key findings for England.

Note on Israel: The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and are under the responsibility of relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

England’s skills performance

The Skills Strategy Dashboard provides a snapshot of England’s comparative skills performance. England is a relatively strong performer overall in developing and using people’s skills. The performance of 15 year-olds in PISA is above the OECD average in science and reading, and around the OECD average in mathematics. Tertiary attainment is...
high and England ranks in the top 40% for the strength of its learning culture. England is also comparatively successful at activating skills of the workforce with employment and labour force participation rates above the OECD average.

Despite this success, there continues to be room for could improvement. England has a comparatively high share of university educated young adults with low basic skills. Furthermore, more than one quarter of working-age adults has low levels of literacy and/or numeracy skills.

Although England performs comparatively well in aligning the skills of its workforce with the needs of the labour market, there is evidence of important skills imbalances in specific areas. The OECD Skills for Jobs database reveals a number of skills pressures in the United Kingdom1, including shortages of complex problem-solving and basic skills. Shortages have also been identified in the knowledge of education and training, technology and engineering, medicine and dentistry, and science.

England is a top-performer in making effective use of the skills of its workers, and in the adoption of high-performance workplace practices. However, labour productivity is relatively low, especially outside Greater London and South East England. Up-skilling low-skilled workers and using their skills even more effectively will be key to raising productivity and bolstering growth.

England is taking important steps to respond to many of these challenges. England is currently developing new models for adults to upskill and retrain while they are in work, especially targeted towards people who are working in low paid sectors or industries at risk of automation. They include a National Retraining Scheme which will support adults whose jobs are at risk due to automation who wish to retrain and find better jobs to work in new growth sectors; an adult apprenticeship programme funded through an employer levy; and a Flexible Learning Fund which has been launched to stimulate new delivery methods that make learning more attractive and easier to access for adults.

Still, England could benefit from a renewal of its strategic vision for the future to ensure that all of its people have the skills to respond to the challenges and opportunities of a complex and rapidly changing world. A whole-of-government approach is needed to achieve this aim.

### Key recommendations for improving the performance of countries’ skills system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developing relevant skills over the life course: Making skills systems responsive</th>
<th>Using skills effectively in work and society: Making the most of everyone’s potential</th>
<th>Strengthening the governance of skills systems: Tackling increased complexity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Making each stage of learning a foundation for success in the next</td>
<td>- Make full use of everyone’s skills</td>
<td>- Promoting co-ordination, co-operation and collaboration across the whole of government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Enabling policies to support learning in adulthood</td>
<td>- Making the most of migrants’ skills</td>
<td>- Engaging stakeholders throughout the policy cycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Supporting teachers to become lifelong learners</td>
<td>- Activating skills to build more inclusive and cohesive societies</td>
<td>- Building integrated information systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Financing adult learning</td>
<td>- Making intensive use of skills in work</td>
<td>- Aligning and co-ordinating financing arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Harnessing the power of technology as a tool for learning</td>
<td>- Aligning skills with the needs of the economy and society</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Further reading


---

1 The OECD Skills for Jobs database currently only covers the whole of the United Kingdom.

### Contact

Montserrat Gomendio, Head of the OECD Centre for Skills: montserrat.gomendio@oecd.org

For more information on OECD National Skills Strategy projects, contact

Montserrat Gomendio, Head of the OECD Centre for Skills: montserrat.gomendio@oecd.org

Andrew Bell, Head, National Skills Strategy projects: andrew.bell@oecd.org