

Upskilling Scotland

The Future of Skills and the Fourth Industrial Revolution

BITESIZE BRIEFING



How is the world of work changing? What is the future of skills? And how should Scotland respond?

The technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution – from automation and Artificial Intelligence, to digitisation and Big Data – are transforming and disrupting our society and our economy. Work will not disappear, but it will change.

We need to ensure that our people have the skills they need to compete and thrive – and that our businesses and organisations have the skills they need to compete and grow – on the global stage.

We need a paradigm shift in how we think about and invest in learning. We need a greater commitment to lifelong learning for everyone at all stages of their lives and careers to accelerate reskilling and upskilling across the workforce through flexible, bitesize learning.

Key Recommendations

Recommendation #1

The Scottish Government should convene a Scottish Disruption Council of government, business, industry, academia, trade unions and citizens to inform, agree and coordinate Scotland's response to the Fourth Industrial Revolution which manages social and economic disruption and responds to public concerns.

Recommendation #4

Universities and colleges should expand and develop their offer of flexible, bitesize learning opportunities underpinned by support and incentives from the Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council.

Recommendation #34

Everyone in Scotland should have a lifelong entitlement to learning. The Scottish Government should establish an ambitious, universal and flexible Upskilling & Lifelong Learning Fund which empowers every Scottish adult to partly or wholly fund reskilling or upskilling opportunities at any stage of their life or career.

Three Pillars of a High Performing Scottish Economy in the Fourth Industrial Revolution

1. High Performing Individuals

People with the skills to compete and thrive

Employers are struggling to identify the right people with the right skills. The learning ecosystem needs to support the workforce to develop 'Meta-Skills' in self-management, social intelligence and innovation, topped up throughout their career with specific technical skills.

Learning opportunities need to be flexible to improve access and widen participation; tailored to employer, sector or personal needs and priorities; responsive to new and emerging trends and technologies; informed by enhanced engagement with industry; and delivered in short, modular or bitesize segments. Employers need access to global talent through an immigration system tailored to Scotland's distinct needs.

2. High Performing Workplaces

Teams with the skills to compete and thrive

We need to expand the talent pool to better support employers to build more diverse, more successful teams. Widening labour market participation, improving recognition of prior learning and supporting more older workers to remain in the workforce can reduce wasted talent, reduce labour shortages and close skills gaps.

Scotland faces a serious leadership skills gap due to under-investment and emigration of talent. Many leaders and managers are not given training or support to build their capacity to get the best out of their teams. A lack of time, capacity and resources is a critical challenge for smaller employers.

Many businesses and organisations are experimenting with radical new business models which empower people by transforming leadership and management approaches. Less hierarchical, more agile workplaces can improve team morale, collaboration and productivity.

Record numbers of people in Scotland are in work. But there are growing concerns about the quality of work. Atypical work, from zero-hours contracts to self-employment, has never been more common. The rise of the gig economy is causing precarity, insecurity and low pay for many workers.

Mental health and wellbeing is being undermined by work-related stress, over-work, depression and isolation. But the Fourth Industrial Revolution creates opportunities for employers to support their employees to increase their productivity and enjoy better working lives by automating dull, dirty and dangerous tasks.

3. In-Work Development

Reskilling, Upskilling, Work-Based Learning and Lifelong Learning for People and Teams

Scotland will need to be a nation of lifelong learning to ensure our people continually refresh and develop their skills in a challenging, fast-changing global economy. Workers whose jobs could be displaced will need to reskill to access other jobs. Everyone will need to upskill to adapt to new technologies or transition into new roles or sectors.

Delivery will need to be ever more flexible, bitesize and digital. Formal, informal and non-formal work-based learning will deliver increasing value for learners and employers. Graduate Apprenticeships will have to develop and expand to meet demand.

Everyone in Scotland should have a lifelong entitlement to learning. We need to move from our current focus on pre-employment and early-career stage education to a more holistic commitment to lifelong learning for everyone at all stages of their life – especially those in-work and at mid- or late-career stage.

Individuals need to be empowered to direct their own learning. Most workers are unable to fund their own learning. Government and employers have to work together to raise levels of investment in the workforce to match our competitors and improve our global competitiveness.

An ambitious, universal and flexible Upskilling & Lifelong Learning Fund in Scotland would empower all learners and all workers to partly or wholly fund reskilling or upskilling opportunities at any stage of their life or career.

For example:

- Bitesize digital upskilling courses in their early career.
- Further or higher education qualifications to develop their leadership and management skills through part-time study in mid-career.
- Online, distance and global learning to reskill to keep pace with technological change or facilitate career change in late career.

Further Information

To find out more about the report, and its recommendations, visit:

www.scdi.org.uk/policy/upskillingscotland

To discuss the report, or give any feedback, contact: david.kelly@scdi.org.uk