Skills briefing: embedding learning within work

Introduction
This briefing is provided as input to techUK’s General Election Hub resources for newly elected MPs and their teams. It is based on recent discussions with employers who are collaborating through TechSkills to address priority industry skills issues.

TechSkills is the sister company of techUK and accreditation body for Tech Industry Gold, the employer-led accreditation for tech education and training.

What is the problem?
With the rollout and adoption accelerating technology driven change - not least the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which is affecting every walk of life - it is increasingly difficult to give people the right skills at the right time. Every employee today needs to keep learning throughout their life, and that learning needs to be current and agile.

Why is this important?
This is a critical problem to address in a world where it is essential to keep with or ahead of the curve of technological advances. The productivity of individuals, the competitiveness of businesses, and the prosperity of the nation all depend on this.

Considering AI specifically, recent scholarly articles point to the impact of AI on the emerging world order, with the global AI race paving the way for the rise and fall of great powers, similar to the impact caused by the three industrial revolutions of the past¹.

What can we do to solve it?
We propose a new approach of embedding learning within work. This means designing work so that it incorporates Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as central to and directly relevant to a person’s job. Key elements of this new approach include:

- Developing a national strategy for training for this new industrial revolution.
- Establishing a culture of “cradle-to-grave” CPD in the workplace that provides a roadmap of training from new entrant to senior leader. This should be supported by a centralised national resource hub of readily accessible and scalable learning

¹ For example: 'The potential impact of artificial intelligence on the emerging world order', Anupama Vijayakumar, 2023
programs. This also means promoting an ambition for UK tech leadership supported by embedded CPD. Sharing of best practice in approach and evaluation of effectiveness of embedded learning, building on experiences in mainland Europe, in particular Germany.

- Incorporating innovative approaches to achieve better informed strategic thinking on the implications of technological change, such as ‘reverse mentoring for the C-suite’ to open senior leaders’ eyes to impact and skills needs.
- Undertaking research into best ways to assess the efficacy of training, for example the extent to which learners acquire the right skills at the right time to meet the needs of their companies, and methods to ensure new skills are embedded into working practices.
- Supporting high quality, rapidly scalable and industry recognised training programmes which deliver critical skills relevant across all sectors, such as Cloud, AI and cyber security.
- Promote the creation of hubs that provide freely available learning (for example from technology leaders such as AWS, Microsoft and IBM).
- Research best practice in enabling learners to apply their training to deliver measurable business outcomes.
- Delivering longitudinal studies into investment and impact of CPD across the UK.

What are the benefits of solving it?

Solving this problem will give individuals greater job security, accelerate business growth and increase inward investment – particularly in sectors where decisions are heavily influenced by access to tech skills.

Research papers such as the CPD Institute’s ‘Ready for Change’ provide a compelling case for the importance of lifelong learning in an era marked by technological innovation and extended life expectancies².

How can I follow up?

If you’d like to know more about TechSkills and the work of techUK, please get in touch with archie.breare@techuk.org and alice.campbell@techuk.org

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² ‘Ready for Change? Longevity, Technology and Lifelong Learning’, Jonathan David Harris CBE, 2023