

Nurturing Engaged and Resilient Lifelong Learners in a World of Digital Transformation

Empowering Lifelong Learners
Through Strategic Business Engagement

Vision Paper
November 2025

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Introduction: The Business Perspective on Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning is essential for business and for ensuring employment opportunities across all sectors and at all ages. While this conversation has been ongoing for decades, rapid technological innovation and shifting global markets have instilled a new sense of urgency in finding a solution. Coupled with changing workforce expectations, the need for a culture and mindset of lifelong learning from early education throughout one's career path has become an economic and social imperative. As it is essential to business competitiveness, companies and business federations are investing in skilling, upskilling and reskilling and engaging in partnerships with education and public institutions to advance this important objective.

Business at OECD (BIAC) welcomes the OECD data and analysis emphasizing the importance of lifelong learning across four key life stages – early childhood, early adolescence, midcareer transitions and pre-retirement, as it is both timely and essential. The foundations for a resilient and future-ready workforce, which is the basis for competitive economies and societal wellbeing, must be laid early.

In our increasingly dynamic economies and in context of the ongoing digital transformation of work, including the implementation of AI across sectors, a sustainable mindset for lifelong learning should be cultivated from early childhood to help individuals remain curious, agile and capable of continuous development. A key observation from the OECD 2023 PIAAC Survey noted that within any given sector, a higher average level of adult skills will directly support aggregate productivity performance. proportion of highly skilled workers relative to lower-skilled workers will enable both the broader diffusion of new and existing ideas

and the generation of new ideas, via investments in R&D.

The Future of Jobs Report 2025 by the World Economic Forum reflects this transformation ¹. In a survey of global employers, "curiosity and lifelong learning" ranked 8th among 26 core skills, with 50% of employers identifying it as essential. In industries such as Insurance and Pensions Management, this figure reached 83%, reflecting a growing demand for learning-oriented mindsets. adaptive, Moreover, the report shows that these skills are expected to rise in importance over the next five years, underlining the urgency of embedding lifelong learning more deeply across all stages of education employment.

In the current environment, several factors have upset the historic expectation that employers would be best positioned to ensure the training of their employees and that governments would support those out of work. Companies are no longer training for developments, incremental but fundamental transformations which may exceed their capacity. Furthermore, increasing number of workers work under temporary or agency contracts, or as freelancers. This means they are often out of reach of traditional, employer-driven trainings. Finally, public employment services have traditionally focused on unemployed people. In today's low-hire, low-fire environment, they are struggling to expand their reach to active workers who may nonetheless need support.

In addition, improving the attractiveness of vocational education and training (VET) systems is key to ensuring a vibrant business environment. VET programmes provide hands-on experience, foster practical problem-solving skills and link learners directly with local businesses and industry

https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025/digest/

¹ World Economic Forum. (2025, January 7). *The Future of Jobs Report 2025.*

mentors. By integrating entrepreneurship modules into VET curricula and promoting collaboration between training institutions and enterprises, countries can better equip young people and workers with the technical and entrepreneurial skills needed to start and grow sustainable businesses.

The following report outlines perspective and action being taken by business to advance a culture and mindset of lifelong learning through education systems, in partnership with governments, academic institutions and key stakeholders.

Laying the Foundation for Lifelong Learning through Education Systems

Education systems, including academic programmes and Technical and Vocational Educations and Training (TVET), that cultivate curiosity, critical thinking and adaptability from an early age are important for laying the foundation of a culture of lifelong learning. The formation and development of a mindset that values continuous growth and embraces change is essential in today's world of digital transformation.

Employer organizations and companies alike are implementing partnerships across sectors and at different levels of education. Collectively, these diverse models enable schools and businesses to embed real-world problem solving, entrepreneurial mindsets and continuous professional development into the education system, thereby strengthening the foundation for lifelong learning and adaptability.

Across countries and sectors, employer organizations and companies are partnering with education institutions and governments to advance lifelong learning initiatives. The following examples highlight this partnership.

Aligned with the UK's national skills policies, Microsoft collaborates closely government agencies, local schools and its apprenticeship delivery partner to keep curricula at the cutting edge. The training content is continually refreshed to integrate the latest in AI, cloud computing, data analysis and digital transformation. Cohorts are deliberately kept small to maintain a highquality and personalized experience for every apprentice. These partnerships guarantee that apprentices learn skills that are both academically rigorous and directly applicable to real business challenges ².

L'Oréal France works with 80 schools and 16 NGOs for recruitment, providing the company with access to diverse talent pools, including underrepresented youth, and ensuring that apprenticeships are accessible to students from various education levels. This is part of a commitment to the L'Oréal For Youth program where the company offers globally more than 25,000 professional opportunities for young people under 30 years old. Through

Global provides expertise and guidance and bridges the gap between the private and public sectors so young people can acquire future-ready skills and companies can access the talents they need.

Business Examples:
Partnership with
Education Institutions

² Microsoft is a member of the <u>Global</u> <u>Apprenticeship Network (GAN)</u>. GAN Global mobilizes member companies, international organizations and country networks working with governments to advance quality apprenticeships globally and locally. GAN

partnerships with schools and NGOs, L'Oréal can guarantee a strong and sustainable talent pipeline, while allowing students to earn a salary, study and gain work experience ³.

A sizable portion of students enrolled in **SAP**'s STAR program are in Germany where the program was first launched. With the company headquartered in the country, the company was also able to leverage a strong system grounded in dual education unique to the national context, with partnerships established with state and technical universities ⁴.

Accenture collaborates with community colleges, nonprofits, and workforce organizations to bring untapped talent through its apprenticeship programs. In the US, partnerships with organizations such as PeopleShores and Per Scholas supported Accenture in widening its talent pools beyond typical sources (four-year colleges) and in hiring more than 2,500 apprentices across the US and Canada⁵.

Adecco collaborates with the Lausanne Professional Business School and the State's education system to deliver a 3-year certified vocational training programme (commercial employee apprenticeship). These partnerships make sure apprentices meet national qualification standards and provide support by combining company-based training with formal education ⁶.

Nestlé collaborates with governments, vocational schools and community institutions to recruit apprentices and fortify training quality. In Nigeria, partnerships with educational institutions helps secure skilled trainers, while in South Africa collaboration with government bodies provides access to grants and funding. In Mexico, Nestlé works with government and legal teams to streamline apprenticeship agreements, while also engaging industry leaders to improve

buy-in. These partnerships allow the company to balance business needs with broader social impact goals ⁷.

In Switzerland, **dsm-firmenich** collaborates with professional associations and local educational institutions to secure resources in advance, including time, space and trainers for apprenticeship programs. These partners provide guidance on program milestones and support recruitment through national tools such as the federal apprenticeship job board. Events organized by the educational office also help attract diverse candidates and secure a steady pipeline of talent for the company ⁸.

UBS' apprenticeship programs contribute to social impact by offering inclusive, future-oriented training that supports long-term employability and workforce integration. It aligns training with evolving business needs, such as digitalization and client advisory skills and offers flexible pathways that accommodate diverse learner profiles. One example is UBS' support for dual careers for athletes through its partnership with the United School of Sports, offering flexible training paths and practical placements.

In the UK, UBS' apprenticeship program is designed specifically for school leavers from 18 years old. This program is positioned as a viable alternative to university and attracts a diverse, yet high quality pool of candidates. From Switzerland to the UK, these efforts promote integration, equal opportunity and improved career prospects for diverse youth group 10.

Bühler's apprenticeship programs are fortified through active partnerships with local high schools and educational institutions, bringing technical education closer to the community and raising awareness about career opportunities in advanced manufacturing. The company takes a hands-

³ This company is a member of GAN Global.

⁴ This company is a member of GAN Global.

⁵ This company is a member of GAN Global.

⁶ This company is a member of GAN Global.

⁷ This company is a member of GAN Global.

⁸ This company is a member of GAN Global.

⁹ Global Apprenticeship Network (GAN), Annual Report 2020 (Geneva: GAN Global, 2020), https://www.gan-global.org/wpcontent/uploads/2022/02/AR2020 package july FINAL.pdf.

¹⁰ This company is a member of GAN Global.

on approach to outreach by participating in career fairs, webinars and workforce development events to highlight the value of apprenticeships to students, parents and educators.

Bühler Minneapolis, for example, regularly hosts open houses, inviting students, teachers and career counsellors to experience its facilities, be exposed to advanced technology understand the meaningful work apprentices contribute to. Within the Swiss system, Bühler partners with the Association of **Swiss** Mechanical and Electrical Engineering industries (Swissmem), several government bodies at the federal level (e.g.: State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation) and training and vocational institutions at the cantonal level. The blend of partnerships, strategic community engagement and real-life models helps challenge outdated perceptions and attract the next generation of skilled workers ¹¹.

Emphasis on Teachers

Teachers play a central role in fostering a continuous leaning mindset, through both classroom experience and by serving as role models showcasing the importance of continuous learning. As such it is important that educators are provided with opportunities for continuous professional development, mentorship and innovative teaching tools. Investment in the continued learning of teachers and access to training opportunities should be a priority.

For example, the **Workday STEM Teacher** *Internship*, or *STint*, programme aims to inspire innovative learning by deepening future teachers' understanding about technology and career paths within technology companies so that they can share this understanding in the classroom. This is a partnership between Workday, DCU and

CWIT (Connecting Women in Technology). Between 2023 and 2025, Workday hosted five interns for two 12-week placements where they could get exposure to different parts of Workday's Learning organisation.

In Denmark, co-developed teaching offers refer to partnerships in which the school and the business jointly design a course or project, such that the curriculum is tailored to a specific context or challenge. An example in this context is the initiative 'Åben Virksomhed' coordinated by the **Confederation of Danish Employers**. The initiative facilitates free, tailormade educational programs with company visits that link school subjects to the reality of Danish workplaces.

...and Entrepreneurship

Likewise including entrepreneurship skills in education curricula, such as problem solving and innovation, can help learners have the confidence to take initiative, be resilient in the face of changing opportunities and risk-take responsibly. Integrating entrepreneurship into schools and universities will better prepare future generations view entrepreneurship as a viable and rewarding career path. Practical trainings, such as how to create a company, navigate administrative and legal requirements and access financing can support the development of an entrepreneurial mindset. Mentorship and guidance systems for entrepreneurs should also be expanded through greater peer learning, mentoring and role model engagement. Opportunities such as these allow entrepreneurs and aspiring founders to know who to turn to for advice and support.

By prioritizing role models, fostering resilience and integrating adaptability for emerging technologies, schools can help shape mindsets that encourage learning throughout the lifetime.

¹¹ This company is a member of GAN Global.

¹² Eng: Open enterprise.

Mid-Career Transitions: Challenges and Strategic Opportunities from Business

The mid-career stage for employers and employees alike presents both challenges and opportunities. As industries evolve, workers in their 30s, 40s and 50s must often transition to new roles or acquire entirely new skill sets as demands on their roles may evolve. Businesses are supporting actors in this transition – not just through internal training, but through partnerships with educational institutions and public employment systems.

For business, the mid-career stage represents a critical moment during which continued learning is essential for the professional advancement of employees in their careers, especially in rapidly changing environments. It is where companies can play an active role in enabling individuals to re-skill, upskill and adapt to evolving work environments. Today's labour markets are facing dual pressures: acute labour shortages in many sectors are occurring in tandem with rapid job transformation due to technological change, particularly given the implementation of artificial intelligence (AI) across sectors. Many roles are being redefined, with AI increasingly serving to augment human work. While certain tasks may be automated, Al is also workers' capabilities enhancing reshaping roles to enable more effective human-machine collaboration. In this context, continuous learning is not a luxury but a necessity.

Yet, a tension exists: companies may be reluctant to invest heavily in training if they fear losing employees to competitors. However, investing in lifelong learning can attract talent, incentivize existing employees to stay and contribute to greater levels of

engagement overall. From a broader economic and societal perspective, these investments are vital. A highly skilled, mobile workforce contributes to innovation, resilience and competitiveness across sectors.

One key obstacle to advancing learning opportunities is the disparity in resources between large firms and small and mediumsized enterprises (SMEs). While large businesses may have the means to fund inhouse academies or sponsor external certifications, SMEs often lack such capacity. Therefore, policy mechanisms must be designed to support inclusive access to training. These might include:

- Shared training infrastructure;
- **Tax incentives** for employer-provided learning;
- Public-private partnerships that align business needs with available programmes;

Governments should also encourage a culture where career mobility and continuous education is normalized, not stigmatized. Fostering this attitude shift is especially important in labour markets where long-term employment remains the norm.

In addition, as AI becomes increasingly widespread and skills development grows into an necessity to thrive in the changing world of work, a skills-first approach to hiring which focuses on an individual's capabilities rather solely credentials, qualifications or job titles, is essential for organisations to remain resilient.

Building AI and Data Literacy over a Lifetime

As AI technologies increasingly shape every sector, AI and data literacy are emerging as foundational skills. The 2025 Business at OECD (BIAC) report, "Boosting Productivity and Business Growth: The Role of Al Skills", highlights how businesses are responding to this need by investing in continuous workforce development. Their use cases showed that training needs to range from foundational digital literacy and responsible AI use to industry-specific advanced, applications. Across sectors, companies are launching various initiatives, both independently and collaboratively, between businesses, educational institutions and public agencies. These can take the forms of:

- Online courses focused on core Al concepts and practical use cases;
- Workshops and learning fairs to promote ethical and responsible Al use;
- Certification programmes tailored to the needs of employees, students, job seekers and professionals in specific sectors.

How social partners have responded to AI in Denmark and Sweden demonstrates how employers and employees on different levels have found solutions to ensure digital training and development for employees ¹³. In Denmark this included the establishment of a strategic tripartite forum at national level, advancing social dialogue and collective bargaining in the development, deployment monitoring of AI, initiatives for competence building and knowledge sharing and the promotion of research and development collaborations with the

participation of social partners. In addition, the cooperation agreement between The Confederation of Danish Employers and the Danish Trade Union Confederation ensures focus on employee involvement and reskilling ¹⁴.

From a business standpoint, this investment serves multiple goals: improving productivity, ensuring workforce relevance and addressing the ethical and practical dimensions of Al adoption. However, realizing the full potential of these efforts requires systemic support.

As digitalization continues across sectors, both public and private, AI and data literacy, together with the development of relevant competencies such as critical thinking and creativity, should be embedded throughout the education continuum - starting from primary school and extending through secondary, vocational and higher education. Early exposure to Al concepts, ethics and applications prepares students for the world they will inherit and work in. In parallel, vocational training and university programmes must equip learners with jobready, sector-specific AI competencies that align with labour market needs.

Importantly, lifelong learning opportunities must be accessible and affordable for all. Governments and institutions should ensure underserved populations and regions have access to lifelong learning opportunities, which includes providing access to digital tools, infrastructure and instruction. Alpowered platforms—such as career navigation tools and accessibility-enhancing

Samarbejdsnævnet, 2008), https://samarbejdsnaevnet.dk/media/dapko 24n/the_cooperation_agreement.pdf.

¹³ Negotiating about Algorithms: Social Partner Responses to Al in Denmark and Sweden - Anna Ilsøe, Trine Pernille Larsen, Christopher Mathieu, Bertil Rolandsson, 2024

¹⁴ The Confederation of Danish Employers and The Danish Trade Union Confederation, The Cooperation Agreement (Copenhagen:

technologies can play a vital role in creating inclusive and adaptable labour markets.

For example, InfyLearn is an AI interview module useful for student skill development, including resume building, interview preparation and campus recruitment. Working with educational institutions, the program is a unified ecosystem to enhance learning outcomes, boost employability and streamline placements. InfyLearn colleges and universities bridge the gap between education and employability, driving real student success at every stage of the journey 15.

As an additional example, in October 2025, Workday announced a three-year €175 million investment and creation of 200 specialised roles to establish an Al Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Dublin, Ireland 16. The investment, supported by IDA Ireland, expands the role of Workday's EMEA headquarters in the company's global innovation strategy ¹⁷. Since 2008, Workday's Dublin-based teams have driven impactful R&D, including Aldriven solutions like Workday Learning and Workday Assistant 18 19. The Al Centre of Excellence will focus on four key areas including product development, Al upskilling, Partnership with Irish tech scale ups and Al fellowships and partnerships in collaboration with leading universities in Ireland.

https://www.workday.com/en-gb/products/talent-management/learning.html.

19 Workday, Inc., Workday Assistant, accessed November 20, 2025, https://www.workday.com/en-us/products/platform-product-extensions/workday-assistant.html.

¹⁵ Infylearn: Empowering Educational Institutions | Infylearn

Workday, Inc., Workday Announces New Al Centre of Excellence in Dublin to Accelerate European Innovation, October 15, 2025,
 IDA Ireland, Workday to Invest €175m in Dublin Al Centre of Excellence, October 15, 2025,

¹⁸ Workday, Inc., *Learning*, accessed November 20, 2025,

Moving Forward: Policy Recommendations and Partnership Opportunities

Looking ahead, it is crucial to understand that no single actor can address the learning challenges of the future alone. Governments, educational institutions, businesses and international organizations must work together to build an agile, inclusive and future-ready learning ecosystem. In this context, *Business at OECD* makes the following recommendations, which require collaboration among relevant stakeholders:

- Instil a culture of lifelong learning in education systems from early education, including through vocational education systems;
- Maintain a close dialogue with employers to ensure that learning opportunities are available and match labour market needs;
- Ensure the continuous education of teachers through opportunities that keep pace with changing demands in the labour market and emerging technologies;
- Expand public-private partnerships in workforce development. Governments should leverage the expertise and practical experience of the private sector to co-design relevant learning programmes and identify emerging skill needs.
- **Increase** effective funding mechanisms to make learning opportunities accessible all. regardless company size, geographic location or socioeconomic status.
- Integrate AI and data literacy into national curricula and lifelong learning strategies, ensuring that all learners, from primary school students to mid-career professionals, gain

familiarity with technologies that are reshaping the economy.

 Promote a skills-first approach to hiring, focused on the specific capabilities an individual possesses and those an organisation needs, rather than relying solely on credentials, qualifications or job titles, for resilient organisations and workforces in the rapidly evolving world of work.

Policymakers should acknowledge that raising the standard of the workforce is a shared benefit, not a zero-sum game. By creating aligned incentives and reducing friction in job transitions, we can foster a culture of continuous learning that benefits individuals, employers and broader society.

The case for strategic business engagement in lifelong learning has never been stronger. In a world defined by uncertainty, transformation and opportunity, equipping individuals with the mindset and tools to learn continuously is essential. Through thoughtful policy, targeted investment and cross-sector collaboration, we can build education systems that not only meet today's challenges but anticipate tomorrow's needs.

Recommendations for the OECD

Business looks to the OECD as an important forum both for dialogue and for the collection of data on lifelong learning systems, in service of improving the effectiveness of programmes and partnerships between relevant stakeholders including business.

We welcome the 2025 OECD Education Policy Outlook on Nurturing Engaged and Resilient Lifelong Learners in a World of Digital Transformation, which provides important data and analysis on this issue. We underline the value and importance of OECD data, particularly as provided through the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Their continued future inclusion in the annual Education at a Glance report supports the need for accessible, quality data to be used in advancing meaningful, evidence-based lifelong learning policies and strategies.

The following are recommendations to shape further OECD work with relation to lifelong learning, with the engagement of business:

- Continue to build the evidence base on the importance of lifelong learning including to highlight investment in lifelong learning programmes and their impacts/outcomes.
- Emphasize lifelong learning at upcoming dialogues, including at Ministerial level, as opportunities to deepen international cooperation, share best practices and further integrate the business voice into education policy design and implementation.
- Encourage business partnership with government and academic institutions to ensure that educational systems provide the necessary foundational skills and nurture a mindset of lifelong learning, inspiring individuals to enhance their employability in a dynamic work environment.
- Underline the importance of digital infrastructure for affordable connectivity and high-quality hardware for both teachers and learners, thereby ensuring access to learning opportunities.
- Underline the need for support of reskilling and upskilling for all ages to cope with the digital transformation of our economies and jobs through

apprenticeships, work based learning and vocational trainings over the course of the career path.

- Identify effective technology solutions
 by working with schools, institutions and
 businesses including SMEs that
 support learning and work continuity and
 leverage connectivity infrastructure and
 hardware for those without access
- Emphasize the value of social dialogue to ensure that lifelong learning initiatives and policies respond to immediate needs of business and employees.
- Adopt and encourage a national skilling target of 0.5% of GDP, aligned with the recommendation of the B20 Employment and Education Taskforce.

In light of the above recommendations, Business at OECD further recommends that the OECD consider development of an OECD Framework for Lifelong Learning.

An OECD Comparative Lifelong Learning Framework could draw upon lessons from international approaches, to guide countries in designing a framework that would address such issues as:

- Portable funding accounts for individuals to access learning throughout their life, whether that be higher education, VET or micro credentials;
- Cross-sector credit recognition systems linking higher education, VET and micro credentials;
- Models to ensure access, quality and return on investment;
- Metrics for individuals, business and national outcomes from lifelong learning investments.

This framework could serve as a global benchmark to accelerate policy adoption and alignment among OECD members, supported by the establishment of a global multistakeholder dialogue on lifelong learning best practice. This may be aided by the development of toolkits for each of the above elements to assist member nations.

Business at OECD and its members look forward to continued engagement with the OECD on the important issue of advancing effective measures to ensure lifelong learning across generations and the development of a positive and proactive mindset and culture for this important issue.

Business at OECD (BIAC) National Members

Australia Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI)

Austria Federation of Austrian Industries (IV)

Belgium Federation of Belgian Enterprises (VBO FEB)

Canada Canadian Chamber of Commerce

Chile Confederation of Production and Commerce of Chile (CPC)

Colombia National Business Association of Colombia (ANDI)

Costa Rica Union of Chambers and Associations of the Private Business Sector (UCCAEP)

Costa Rica Chamber of Industries of Costa Rica (CICR)

Czech Republic Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic (SP)

Denmark
Denmark
Denmark
Confederation of Danish Industry (DI)
Estonia
Estonian Employers' Confederation
Finland
Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK)

France Movement of the Enterprises of France (MEDEF)

Germany Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA)

Germany Federation of German Industries (BDI)
Greece Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV)

Hungary Confederation of Hungarian Employers and Industrialists (MGYOSZ)

Hungary National Association of Entrepreneurs and Employers (VOSZ)

Iceland Confederation of Icelandic Enterprise (SA)

Ireland Ibec (Irish Business and Employers Confederation)

Israel Manufacturers' Association of Israel (MAI)

ItalyThe Association of Italian Joint Stock Companies (Assonime)ItalyGeneral Confederation of Italian Industry (Confindustria)ItalyItalian Banking Insurance and Finance Federation (FeBAF)

Japan Keidanren (Japan Business Federation)
South Korea Federation of Korean Industries (FKI)
Latvia Employers' Confederation of Latvia (LDDK)
Lithuania Confederation of Industrialists (LPK)
Luxembourg FEDIL - The Voice of Luxembourg's Industry

Mexico Employers Confederation of the Mexican Republic (COPARMEX)

Netherlands Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers (VNO-NCW)

New Zealand BusinessNZ

Norway Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO)
Portugal Confederation of Portuguese Business (CIP)

Poland Polish Confederation Lewiatan
Slovakia National Union of Employers (NUE)

Slovenia Association of Employers of Slovenia (ZDS)

Spain Confederation of Employers and Industries of Spain (CEOE)

Sweden Confederation of Swedish Enterprise

Switzerland economiesuisse - Swiss Business Federation

Switzerland Swiss Employers Confederation

Türkiye Turkish Confederation of Employer Associations (TISK)

Türkiye Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Türkiye (TOBB)

Türkiye Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSIAD)

United Kingdom Confederation of British Industry (CBI)

United States United States Council for International Business (USCIB)



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