

**Tenders sought for research project**

**Adult skills – who gets invested in and how has this changed over time?**

**Overview**

In absolute terms, the skills level of adults in the UK have increased in the last few decades with the proportion of people with higher level qualifications rising and the proportion with no or few qualifications falling. This shift in the skills base reflects the rise in the school leaving age and the increase in graduates, as well as policies aimed at increasing adult skills[[1]](#footnote-1).

Although we know this has benefitted people from a number of different starting points, with a range of targeted investment from government including Maths and English at level 2 and uplifting technical and specialist skills; we lack data on adults’ skills profile based on socio-economic background once an individual leaves education. This leaves us in the dark regarding the impact of adult skills investment by socio-economic background and how people from different backgrounds develop their qualifications and progress in the workplace once they enter employment. In a world where learning and adapting to technological changes is essential and automation of jobs is ongoing, career learning will be ever more important, particularly for people with lower skills where jobs are most at risk.

This research will seek to better understand and interrogate whether the patterns of disadvantage continue in peoples working lives. There is a well-evidenced attainment gap at every key stage at school and in higher education, with higher proportions of young people from privileged backgrounds taking higher yield subjects at school and higher numbers going to the highest yield universities[[2]](#footnote-2). We also know that there are varied returns dependent on the qualifications and skills gained as an adult. So if there is a relationship that exists between social background and increases in skills/qualifications after the education system, what form do they take, in what ways are people being invested in differently and has this increased or decreased over time?

It will be important to consider how outcomes and trends differ in the context of policy changes to inform how this can be improved in the future. There may be some initiatives or ways of organising learning that engage people from different backgrounds in more effective ways than others including innovative arrangements between companies, Government and training providers. There also may correlations with socio-economic background that differ by gender, region or ethnicity. Occupation, employment type and an individual’s skills upon entering the world of work will also influence outcomes. We want to understand how these interact, but with socio-economic background at the heart of the analysis.

**Scope of the work**

We are commissioning this short piece of analysis to explore **whether there is any link between social background and the likelihood of an individual increasing their qualifications after they have entered the labour market.** The scope of this work will be England only, given the devolved nature of adult skills. We are seeking data and analysis to shed light on trends in and patterns of adult skills levels, including:

* Analysis of the correlation between the social background of individuals and the level of investment in skills levels. This should explore how this differs by individual characteristics including; area of residence, gender, ethnicity, age, skills level and type upon leaving formal education and type of post-16 education (vocational, higher, apprenticeship), and occupation characteristics including; employment status (including unemployed), working patterns, occupational class, earnings.
* Within this, it would be helpful if distinctions were drawn between the investment in adult skills by type of learning (such as e-learning, formal qualifications) and source of funding (different sources of government funding via the adult skills budget, employer investment, individual’s self-funding, charity or voluntary sector investment).
* Exploration of how the findings can inform policy goals of improving social mobility, in light of the government agenda of this Parliament (apprenticeship levy, Opportunity Areas, Career Learning, devolution of the adults skills budget and the role of the LEPS) and longer term changes to jobs and skills, and any recommendations about measuring and monitoring data going forward.

Where possible, we would also welcome:

* Analysis of the impact of the level of investment in an individual’s skill level on their experience in the labour market, for example in their job and/or wage progression, this may also drawn upon returns data of qualifications.
* Analysis of how this has changed over time, ideally considering a time period back to 2010 or earlier, but with the overall intention of drawing out trends and changes over time.
* Relevant learning or conclusions for the adult skills systems in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

**Methodology**

The Commission envisages that this project will mostly involve desk-based statistical analysis. We would suggest the data and analysis should be gathered via one of, or a selection of, the following sources:

* The Labour Force Survey: an assessment of the responses could include a comprehensive analysis of the current state of adult skills levels and how this correlates with a number of complex occupational and individual characteristics.
* Understanding Society: an assessment of the responses could include data on changes over time to the skills levels.
* The Individualised Learner Record: an assessment of the responses could include a detailed analysis of the investment of public spending on adult skills and outcome data.
* Ongoing/ad hoc/decommissioned surveys or studies, such as the [Employee Skills Surveys](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ukces-employer-skills-survey-2015), [Mapping Investment](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adult-skills-mapping-investment) and the [National Adult Learner Survey](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-adult-learner-survey-2010): to enable triangulation with quantitative data, to inform the picture for multiple strands of learning and to consider the impact of skills investment and how policy changes effect this.

The data source/s used will need to enable a **comparison of spending on adult skills against socio-economic background and the individual and occupational characteristics listed above.** We would expect the final written report to include:

* A concise summary of the headline findings on adult skills investment in England and how it correlates with socio-economic background and individual and occupational factors.
* Presentation of the analysis undertaken, including commentary, tables, charts and, if relevant, maps.
* Analysis of the impact of the findings on social mobility, how this has changed over time, and what has driven changes (policy, economy, societal).
* Conclusions and recommendations.
* Detailed methodology and supporting tables provided as appendixes.

Where possible we would also welcome the following:

* An overview of the current context of the adult skills agenda, and employer investment in skills, and how this correlates with socio-economic background, based on existing evidence and analysis. This should draw upon recent principles and analysis set out by report such as, The Taylor Review of Modern Employment Practices.
* Consideration, throughout the report, of the context and impact of automation on the future of jobs and the skills required from this, based on existing evidence and analysis.
* A section exploring how social mobility could be improved through investment in skills, in light of the future of jobs and existing commitments in this space (apprenticeship levy, Career Learning). This section should also explore where there needs to be more data and/or analysis to inform this agenda and ensure monitoring can take place.

**Commissioning process**

Bids are invited to work with the Social Mobility Commission on our exciting agenda to improve social mobility in the UK. This research will be commissioned via a single procurement phase for which succinct proposals are invited. Assessment of tenders will be done on the basis of the criteria at the end of this document. The contract between the Commission and the successful bidder will run from the date of issue until no later than the end of January 2018. Research will be published on the Commission’s website and should be drafted with Social Mobility Commission branding and format.

Tenders should be submitted to [contact@smcpcommission.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:contact@smcpcommission.gsi.gov.uk) **no later than 5pm on Wednesday 20 September 2017**. They should be in Word or PDF format and include:

* Your proposed approach to the research (2-3 sides max). You may wish to set out in this section:
  + Overview of proposal.
  + Proposed methodology and approach.
  + Methodological constraints.
  + How you can add value and why you should be selected.
  + Timeline and risks.
* Examples of key relevant experience and individual/staff expertise and qualifications (1-2 sides max).
* Summary of costs (1 side max).

Communication of complex information in a straightforward way is necessary for this project. Therefore, **tenders that exceed 5 sides of A4 will not be considered**.

**Acceptable standards of bidders**

The following sets out the acceptable standards of bidders for this research and how these should be evidenced:

* Strong related policy knowledge and experience on adult skills/training/the labour market and social mobility, including access to and familiarity with the dataset/s proposed to be analysed.
* Experience of working flexibly with clients in developing concise, well drafted research reports which draw out clear, newsworthy conclusions and policy recommendations;
* Clarity in communicating progress of work to clients and explaining issues that arise in a timely manner.

**Evaluation criteria**

Tenders will be evaluated against the criteria below. A primary weighting means the criteria will be given greater consideration in assessment of bids.

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| **Criteria** | **Potential examples** | **Weighting** |
| Team and organisational experience in conducting similar work | * Experience of previous work on the theme of adult skills and social mobility, with a solid understanding of the current policy and research context. * Experience of presenting findings in catching and clear ways for a wide, non-expert audience. * Experience of similar types of research. * Access to the proposed data set and familiarity with carrying out analysis with it including statistical methods. | Primary |
| Methodology | * A robust methodological approach which addresses the research questions and is likely to provide new insights into the issue of how adult skills might be improved. | Primary |
| Cost | * Estimation of cost. | Primary |

**Delivery Requirements**

Based on commissioning in late September, the Commission will require a full report by February 2018. Final products should be in electronic format, using a template supplied by the Social Mobility Commission.

We estimate the research should cost no more than £15,000 (excluding VAT).

All costs should be quoted exclusive of VAT but please indicate if the project will attract VAT.

If your proposal includes costs for sub-contractors these costs must be shown inclusive of any VAT element (e.g. sub-contractor’s costs to you are £5,000 plus VAT, your proposal should show sub-contractors costs as £6,000 inclusive of VAT @ 20%).

1. Social Mobility Commission, Time For Change: An analysis of Social Mobility policies 1997-2017, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Social Mobility Commission, Ethnicity, Gender and FSM, 2016 / Social Mobility Commission, State of the Nation 2016, 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)