

Festival of Learning

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Gillian Keegan MP

Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills

Festival of Learning is a wonderful celebration of the difference that education can make to people's lives.

The stories of the winners and finalists from this year's awards are extremely motivating. Be it learning to support your children's education, learning to improve your health, or to help find a job or progress in work, the people recognised are real examples of just how lifelong learning can transform and enrich lives.

Lifelong learning has always been important, but it is more crucial today than ever before. We must all work together to ensure more adults are able to learn, and we must redouble our efforts to remove the barriers that get in an individual's way as we seek to level up opportunity, life chances and prosperity across the country after the pandemic.

I want to congratulate every winner and finalist as well as all nominees for this year's Festival of Learning awards. Their achievements serve as an example to us all. I hope that their stories help inspire more adults to take the first steps in their learning journey.

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Stephen Evans

Chief Executive, Learning and Work
Institute

Congratulations to all our Festival of Learning award winners and nominees. Your stories and achievements show the many and varied ways in which learning can make a difference.

Coronavirus has changed the ways in which people engage in learning but not the importance of doing so. Learning can help to improve health and wellbeing, build community connections, and support finding work and changing careers. Talent is equally distributed across the country, but opportunity isn't: adult learning can help bridge that gap.

Yet the proportion of adults engaging in learning has fallen over the last decade and there are large inequalities in access to learning between groups and areas of the country. Through the years, our Festival of Learning winners have been ambassadors for learning and I'm sure you will inspire many more people into learning.

Your stories offer a kaleidoscope of reasons for renewed investment in adult learning and developing new ways to engage adults. I look forward to celebrating your success and working for a renewed and widespread commitment to adult learning.

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Graham Hasting-Evans
Managing Director, NOCN Group

NOCN Group has been involved with the Festival of Learning Awards for several years and we are delighted to be able to offer our support again in 2021. The awards are an opportunity to promote our shared purpose of inspiring adults to learn and celebrating the positive impact of lifelong learning. We are particularly passionate about supporting the Festival of Learning because we share a common background. NIACE, who initiated the Festival of Learning (previously Adult Learner's Week), was also instrumental in our early beginnings at NOCN.

Now a leading education and skills charity, our focus is social and economic mobility, not profit. We offer a wide range of education and skills services, including regulated qualifications, EPA for apprenticeships and Access to HE Diplomas.

We are proud to be working closely with Learning and Work Institute to champion the importance of adult learning. The coronavirus pandemic has had a huge impact on the economic landscape and as the country begins to emerge from lockdown there will be an increasing need to re-skill adult workers and create new employment opportunities.

NOCN Group are proud to offer 'lifetime skills' solutions for work, arming learners with not just job-specific competences but also the ability to adapt to a working environment that is changing at pace.

The Festival of Learning Awards shine a light on what can be achieved through learning, changing not only careers and enhancing prospects, but improving health and happiness too. Every year we are privileged to hear the stories of inspirational people and organisations, and with the right help and attitude, we can all achieve great things

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Paul Eeles

Chief Executive, Skills and Education
Group

It is a real pleasure for the Skills and Education Group to support the Festival of Learning again in 2021. Every year, the awards are an excellent event and a fitting celebration of lifelong learning. Last year's online ceremony was a great occasion and we are looking forward to more of the same this year.

Our vision at Skills and Education Group is the advancement of skills and education to improve the lives of individuals. Adult education and lifelong learning make a positive impact on so many people, and this deserves to be celebrated.

One of the great things about education, and adult education in particular, is that it enables individuals to reinvent themselves and make a fresh start. Adults can enrol on a course in a sector that may be completely unfamiliar to them, and this could lead to an exciting new career.

We are therefore really proud to be supporting the New Directions Award again this year, an award that celebrates those who have used learning to facilitate a change in their life.

It has been another difficult twelve months for everyone in education and wider society, yet this sector remains full of inspiring individuals, as shown by this year's list of nominees – congratulations to all of you.

We cannot wait for the ceremony in July, and we look forward to presenting the New Directions Award to another worthy winner.

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David Russell

Chief Executive, The Education and Training Foundation

Championing adult learners and the tutors who have helped them every step along the way has never been more important. The vital role that lifelong learning plays has long been recognised of course, but the pandemic that has confronted society during the past two years, and the focus we must now start to put on recovering from it, underlines how absolutely critical it is now.

As the national workforce development body for the Further Education and Training sector, the Education and Training Foundation is particularly pleased that the Festival of Learning celebrates and champions the inspirational tutors whose dedication makes adult learning what it is. The way that they have overcome new challenges and adapted to new ways of working during the pandemic has helped to ensure that learners are continuing to achieve their goals.

The stories of those who have been nominated for the Tutor of the Year category are reminders of the transformative effect of adult learning and the impact that those working across the sector make. The system can only be as good as the teachers, trainers and tutors that work in it, and these individuals demonstrate that it can be very good indeed. By supporting, showcasing and promoting the very best, our professional community sets a standard for others to reach.

We are looking forward to the presentation of the award, marking the great achievements of every winner and nominee, and continuing our support for the Festival of Learning, which plays a crucial role in the world of skills.

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Mark Malcomson

Principal and Chief Executive, City Lit

In the wake of the global pandemic, we believe that lifelong learning, retraining and upskilling has a hugely important part to play in building a fairer and more inclusive society. Adult education opens up opportunities for individuals and communities often under-served by traditional support. That's why City Lit is delighted that The Festival of Learning celebrates those individuals who have returned to learning as an adult, and through this learning have transformed their own lives. We look forward to presenting the award for Return to Learning, marking the great achievements of every winner and nominee.

City Lit is famous for bringing people together to enrich lives through learning. Since we opened in 1919, well over a million people have benefitted from our unique offering. This year, City Lit is opening its doors again for in-person teaching and continuing online courses, as well as opening up to even more people throughout the UK through online learning.

We are proud to support Festival of Learning, which play an invaluable role in ensuring that lifelong learning is recognised for the vital contribution it makes to developing people's skills and confidence. It also helps to underscore the economic importance of adult education in helping transform people's lives on a professional and personal level.

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Simon Parkinson

Chief Executive and General Secretary,
The WEA

The WEA is delighted to continue our support of Festival of Learning. The campaign is an important way of showcasing the tremendous impact adult learning has on individuals and communities across the country.

Having the opportunity to celebrate the Health award is perhaps more important than ever, after the year and a half that we have had. Post-pandemic, initiatives that drive improvements to community health will be vital so that we can start recovering on a local, national and global scale. The WEA congratulates all of the award winners on their incredible achievements.

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