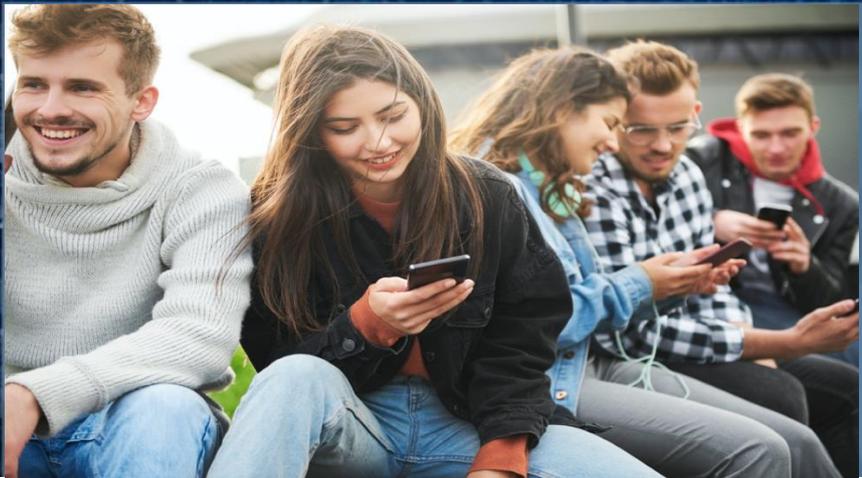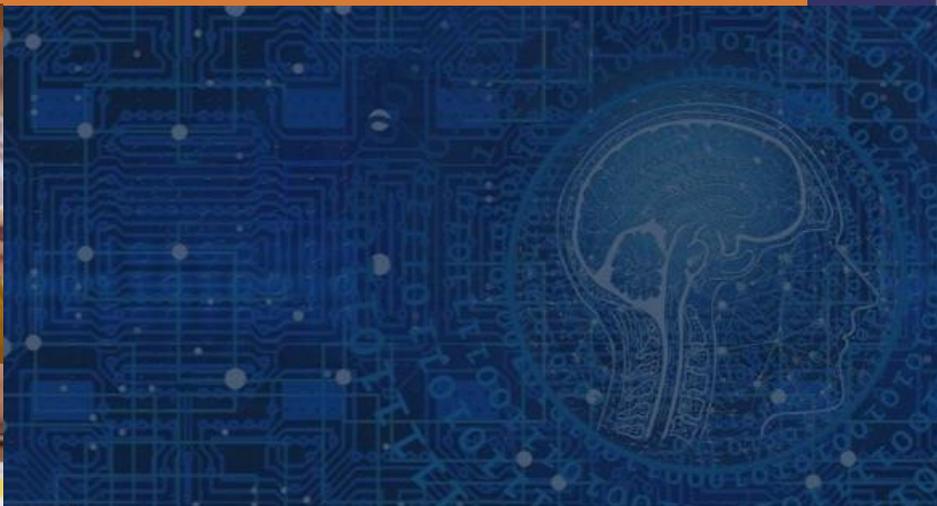# Ready for Change?
Longevity, Technology and Lifelong Learning

Summer 2022 Whitepaper, written by
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Foreword

Today, our society faces numerous pressures. This paper tackles two issues in particular: longer life expectancies and the rapid advancement of technology. Both of these are challenges in their own right. They also intertwine – interacting with each other and in some instances magnifying each other's effects. How can we deal with these two issues and ensure that we are prepared for the future?

There is one concept that is shared time and again in the literature as a possible part of the solution. To keep up with the pace of technological change, to deal with increasing life expectancies, to find new ways to thrive… we need to update our skills and we need to keep learning, throughout our lives.

This message, on the face of it, might seem to be directed at older generations – those who are already living the reality of an extended life whilst also being considered 'digital immigrants'. In truth, however, it is relevant to all of us – young and old. Lifelong learning is about how we relate to each other and work together. It is about how we participate in society together. It is in everyone's interests that we all keep ourselves 'up to speed' with the changes going on around us. These days, those changes so often involve technology – whether it is the cause, itself, of change or the solution to it.

Looking around us today, technology is reaching into every area of daily life. From the smartphones that keep so many of us connected, to smart technology in our homes and workplaces. As our population lives for longer, we will need to use these technologies for longer, and we will see them evolve over longer periods of time. They will evolve and we must too – or at the very least, our knowledge-base must.

Our education system and institutions undoubtedly have a role to play here. However, learning, and doing so over the duration of our lifetimes, is not just about the classroom. It can take place anywhere, in any environment. As we get older, learning in all its forms will help to keep us in employment for longer, it will support our health and our ability to age well, and it may even see an end to the concept of 'retirement' as we know it. A lifetime of learning offers many possibilities. So, how can we reap the rewards of this approach in the face of the challenges ahead?

As a starting point we, as a society, can benefit from changing our perception of education and learning. Each of us, supported by the right infrastructure, services and public policies, can choose to take a 'little and often' approach, step-by-step over time, as we go about our daily lives. Also, we can seek to create learning opportunities for those around us. Lifelong learning is, after all, a way of life as much as anything; it is a mindset. If we can stay interested in the world around us, preserve our curiosity, share our knowledge, then I believe we will be well on our way to a rewarding future.

Jonathan David Harris CBE

Founder & Chairman of the Harris Foundation for Lifelong Learning
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Executive Summary

These days, people in the UK are living longer than at any other point in history. At the same time, daily life is being reshaped by the rapidly evolving technology all around. Both of these trends, in their own right, present challenges for us – as individuals and as a society. Longer life expectancies raise various questions relating to the length of our working lives and how we can live and age well. Meanwhile, the rise of new technologies presents questions over how we can adapt to new ways of living and working alongside machines, including electronic and digital devices, and other associated technology. Taken together, these trends overlap and influence one another.

How can we deal with the challenges presented by longevity and technology? Time and again, experts and commentators have offered the same advice – that if we want to live well over an extended period of time and if we want to cope with the current pace of technological change, we need to keep on learning throughout our lives.

This includes learning to live with new technology. In our personal lives, new technology is impacting the way we shop, travel, access healthcare, manage our homes, find information, communicate and socialise. Keeping up to date with these changes helps individuals to stay connected in numerous ways. It is important, however, that the issue of inclusivity is addressed to ensure that those who are not accessing technology – for whatever reason – are not disadvantaged as a result.

In the working world, as individuals live for longer the way our working lives are structured has been shifting. Traditional, linear career models are no longer fit-for-purpose and some are now rethinking their approach to work. Technology feeds into this, with many workers being forced to reassess their jobs as the landscape changes around them. It is predicted that automation will cause millions of job losses in the years to come, while many other roles will be significantly altered by new and emerging technologies. To keep up with these changes, individuals will need to focus on learning – whether upskilling or retraining, while engaging in continuing professional development. Meanwhile, businesses and government will need to enable learning and provide support.

Alongside helping to secure our jobs of the future, lifelong learning offers another benefit. This time it relates to wellbeing. A sense of wellbeing, which is of course desirable at any age, is key when looking to tackle the issue of how to age well. Technology can support this in a number of ways – in particular by helping individuals to stay connected and participate in social activities. Meanwhile, the act of learning itself has been recognised as a core focus when maintaining wellbeing.

Lifelong learning offers benefits and opportunities across many areas of our working and personal lives. Formal education is part of the picture. However, learning can take many forms, and our daily lives present many informal opportunities to pick up new skills.

In order to reap the rewards of a lifelong approach to learning and to ready ourselves for the changes ahead, we will need to make certain choices in our own lives. We will also need to work together with others. Government, businesses and individuals all have a role to play. Ultimately, we stand to gain the most – as a society and as individuals – if we can shift our collective mindset and embrace learning and knowledge sharing throughout our lives.

Introduction

Looking back over the last fifty years, daily life in the UK has changed considerably. In that time, life expectancy has continued to increase, with averages surpassing the eighty-year mark for the first time. For 2021, the average life expectancy from birth in the UK has been recorded as 81.52 years, compared with 72.01 years in 1971[1].

During the same period, our society has witnessed a surge in technological advances across a wide variety of fields, from information to medical to industrial technology. The last fifty years have seen, for example, the emergence of laser eye surgery, the first successfully cloned animal and the first self-driving car. We have seen the global spread of the internet, the rise of social media, and the development of artificial intelligence. These are, of course, just a handful of the incredible innovations that have taken place.

As our population lives for longer, we will be living and working with technologies, such as these, over longer periods of time. In addition, the question of how we can live and age well becomes even more pressing as life expectancies increase. Technology presents both challenges and opportunities here.

Some have already named this current period in history the fourth industrial revolution, as technological advances reach into almost every area of our lives. With such a rapid pace of change, questions have to be asked: What will the technology landscape look like in another fifty years? Or even in forty or thirty years? What devices and machines will we be encountering as we seek to live well and thrive in old age? And, crucially, will we be ready for what is to come?

This paper explores the twin challenges of longevity and technology. It also highlights an approach that has been hailed as one way forward: lifelong learning. The chapters that follow will examine the ways we are using technology in our personal lives, and the value and challenges associated with it; the changing nature of our workplaces and careers, and the need to adapt; and how we can support our wellbeing for a good quality of life, while young and in old age. The final chapter will explore lifelong learning as an approach to manage the changes and challenges ahead.

1. Learning to Live with New Technology

'There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home.'

Ken Olsen, president, chairman and founder of Digital Equipment Corp. 1977

Learning to Live with New Technology

There is no denying that advances in technology over recent years have had a huge impact on the way individuals in the UK go about their daily lives. Use of digital technology, for example, has become a personal life skill, which can enable people to perform everyday tasks and to participate in wider society. Keeping up with all of this, as far as possible, requires a learning mindset.

Living a Digital Life

There are very few spheres of our daily, personal lives that have remained untouched by digital technology. This manifests itself in a wide variety of ways, as can be seen in the examples that follow.

- **Shopping:** Our shopping experiences have been transformed by the opportunities available in a digital world, ranging from online ordering to contactless payments.

- **Travel:** Public transport has also embraced contactless payment, alongside live departure information and online timetables. Meanwhile, individuals are increasingly using ride-hailing apps to help them travel around[2].

- **Healthcare:** In healthcare, technology enabled care services – such as telehealth, telecare and self-care apps – are being offered as ways for individuals to engage with services and take control of their health.

- **Home life:** At home, a rising number of households own a smart television[3]. Meanwhile it is estimated that nearly half of UK adults now consider online video services to be their main way of watching TV and film[4]. Increasing numbers of households also use smart speakers in order to play music, find information and more.

- **Information:** The way we seek out and receive information has changed considerably in recent years. Information sources that were once a part of daily life in their physical form, such as newspapers and telephone directories, can now be found online – in some cases exclusively so[5]. We are now able to open the doors to the world's knowledge via laptops at home or via the smartphones in our pockets.

- **Communication:** Mobile devices play a huge role in the way people communicate with each other, whether via a phone call, video call, email or instant message. With social media networks at our fingertips, via smartphones, tablets and laptops, individuals around the world can be in touch 24/7.

- **Socialising:** When we do meet with others, our social habits have also been affected by technology. These days, 'meeting up' with someone does not automatically mean that the encounter will be face-to-face. Driven by necessity during the Covid-19 pandemic, individuals have become increasingly familiar with video conferencing and calls. Meanwhile, people can meet, play games and socialise online within highly immersive virtual worlds.

For some, these varied technologies may feel like a natural evolution – particularly those who have grown up in the digital age. Others, however, may find the changes more challenging. While there has been recognition that some emerging technologies can prove uncomfortable for those who are reaching older age, there are many reasons why individuals – old and young – might not use technology. From digital poverty to accessibility issues to concerns over privacy and safety, technology can present a range of challenges and drawbacks. All of this needs to be taken into consideration when examining the two issues of longevity and rapidly advancing technology.

The Challenge of Inclusivity

'Although the number of older people who are digitally connected continues to rise, there are still around 5 million people over the age of 55 who are not online.'

Centre for Ageing Better

With products and services increasingly gravitating towards digital solutions – accelerated by the pandemic – what does this mean for those who are currently not accessing such technologies?

An example of this in practice can be found in the world of personal finance. In recent years, banks and building societies have been closing down their branches at a significant rate in favour of online banking alternatives. According to the bank closure tracker by Which?, 4,851 branches are reported to have closed or be scheduled for closure since January 2015[6]. However, the Access to Cash Action Group, set up by UK Finance, has been highlighting the plight of the millions of people in the UK that still rely on cash – and has been pushing for the issue to be addressed.

Travel is another area where digital technology has been replacing the traditional, cash-based approach. Passengers on London's cash-free buses, for example, are required to either use a digital form of payment or to have pre-purchased a travelcard or pass. For many this process might be straightforward, but it is not universally so.

There are a wide variety of reasons why an individual might not access certain technologies. These can range from accessibility issues, whether due to physical or cognitive impairment, through to the challenge of digital poverty where a person cannot afford the devices or software required to interact with particular services. In addition, some people actively choose not to engage with various types of technology, and this can be for a multitude of reasons. Concerns around privacy, safety or social responsibility[7], for example, can lead to people choosing to be 'non-users'.

There is, at least, general recognition that inclusivity is important. Many would agree that individuals who are not part of the digital world – whether out of preference or necessity – must be given the opportunity to participate fully in society.

For those who are, indeed, online – or even for those who consider themselves to be tech-savvy – there is still little room for complacency. The way we live our lives and interact with the world is evolving at a rapid pace. According to author and futurist Bernard Marr, technology trends to watch in 2022 include: enhanced computer power; smarter devices (including the introduction of intelligent home robots); quantum computing; datafication; artificial intelligence and machine learning; extended reality; blockchain, distributed ledgers and non-fungible tokens; 3D printing; genomics; and new energy solutions[8].

For some, this list could well read like science fiction. However, all of these are already shaping our lives in one form or another. How we respond to this challenge – as individuals and as a society – will determine how integrated and inclusive our communities are in the future.

Many of these trends to watch can be seen making an impact within the world of work. Here, a working knowledge of new technology helps individuals to stay competitive and take advantage of modern benefits (such as flexible and remote working). The effects of technology and longevity on our working lives will be explored in the next chapter.

2. Embracing New Ways of Working

> 'Work is, above all, an activity through which an individual fits into the world.'
>
> Estelle M. Morin

Embracing New Ways of Working

As people live for longer, career paths have also been evolving. Increasingly, we are moving away from the traditional, linear model. Meanwhile, new and emerging technologies are changing the nature of jobs that are available. Individuals will need to stay alert and adapt if they are to remain competitive in the labour market, and employers will need to allow space for this transformation – both metaphorically and literally, as far as possible.

Implementing a Multi-Stage Career

A European Commission report published in 2021 commented that 'the traditional stages of education and training, work and retirement are becoming less rigidly defined and more flexible'[9]. Some individuals are choosing to take career breaks earlier in life, rather than waiting for retirement to enjoy leisure time. Others are switching careers to help meet their changing needs or changing workplace environments. Others still are 'un-retiring' or relaunching previous careers.

Lynda Gratton, co-author of *The New Long Life: A Framework for Flourishing in a Changing World*, explores this new multi-stage life paradigm which 'breaks away from the linear'. Work, leisure, learning, caring and sabbaticals can take place across our lifetimes, Gratton says. This will involve rethinking how we use and value our time at various stages throughout our lives[10].

Meanwhile, Camilla Cavendish, author of *Extra Time: 10 Lessons for an Ageing World*, comments on how the traditional concept of a 'rigid' career ladder also needs to be rethought. Cavendish prefers to think in terms of 'lattices' which allow people more flexibility – to go sideways, for example[11]. She has also posed the question of whether it is 'time to retire the idea of retirement' in its current form[12].

How can we embrace the type of multi-stage life approach described above? Employers need to take some responsibility, particularly when it comes to workplace culture, attitudes and opportunities. Governments must also shoulder some of the load. Andrew Scott, co-author alongside Gratton, highlights the need for us to have the right 'infrastructure' in place[13].

Alongside this, individuals can begin to prepare themselves by regularly seeking out opportunities for upskilling and training. A key recommendation in the European Commission report mentioned above is, indeed, a focus on lifelong learning.

The issue of longevity, and its requirement for us work for longer, is not the only challenge facing individuals in the workplace, of course. Technology is also having an impact, as will be explored in the next section.

The Question of Automation

In recent years, many have commented on the way technology is affecting our working lives. This can include altering certain aspects of our current role and how we perform it, or changing our job altogether.

A report by McKinsey Global Institute predicted that up to 800 million workers could lose their jobs worldwide due to robotic automation by 2030[14]. This figure paints an alarming picture. What might the future look like as this trend evolves? Experts have been debating just how much of a threat automation might prove to be for society over the longer term. Computer scientist Stuart Russell, who founded the Center for Human-Compatible AI, explores the idea that if humans were no longer needed to perform routine physical and mental tasks then we could, perhaps, be free to focus on providing interpersonal services – to 'become good at being human'. However, reaching this state of affairs, Russell explains, would require radical changes in the nature of our science and education.[15]

What does automation mean in the short term? Where jobs are currently being lost to technology, there will need to be other employment opportunities for those individuals who suffer as a consequence, and it is likely that this will involve some form of retraining or upskilling. In some cases, a career change may be welcomed by the individuals themselves. In a survey by the Learning & Work Institute, one in three (34%) of the UK adults who responded said they wanted to change job – however two thirds (69%) believed they lacked the necessary skills to switch[16]. Even for those who are keen to make a change, the threat and challenges presented are very real. Support from government and businesses to facilitate learning and employment opportunities could go a long way to help.

For those whose jobs are not at risk of automation for the time being, there are other challenges to consider. In the World Economic Forum's *Future of Jobs Report 2020* companies were said to have estimated that approximately 40% of workers will 'require reskilling of six months or less'. Meanwhile 94% of business leaders said that they expect employees to pick up new skills on the job[17]. Modern technologies for business are constantly evolving, from cloud computing to artificial intelligence to blockchain. Those using these technologies – individual workers themselves – will need to keep up.

Learning While Earning for Longer

In the working world, continuing professional development (CPD) has long been part of many people's careers. As individuals embrace multi-stage lives and cope with advances in technology, the concept of CPD takes on new significance. Originally it was reserved for those working within recognised 'professions'. The remit has expanded in more recent years as new membership organisations have been established across a wide range of industries and disciplines[18]. Nowadays, when viewed under the broader umbrella of lifelong learning, CPD can apply to any worker who wants, and increasingly needs, to adapt in the face of change.

There is, indeed, broad agreement about the ability of lifelong learning to enhance the lives of workers and the wider economy. However, there are issues to resolve when it comes to older individuals. A 2021 UNESCO report on lifelong learning in ageing societies comments that 'wide sectors of the older working population currently remain excluded from any form of vocational training'[19].

Employers clearly have work to do when it comes to supporting their older workforce. According to Age UK, over the next decade it is likely that there will be more people over 50 in work than those under the age of 30[20]. The charity poses the idea that as more

people work into their 60s and beyond, there is the chance we will see up to five different generations working together for the first time. Workplaces will need to adapt in order to accommodate the varying needs of these different age groups.

When the system does work, there are positives for older workers. Workplaces can set the stage for intergenerational learning, which offers many opportunities for professional and personal development as the skills of different age-groups are brought together.

Meanwhile, it has been suggested that older workers may experience higher job satisfaction than their younger colleagues[21] [22]. This feeling of being fulfilled by one's career feeds into another important aspect of our working, and personal, lives: wellbeing. This will be explored in the chapter which follows.

3. Journeying Towards Lifelong Wellbeing
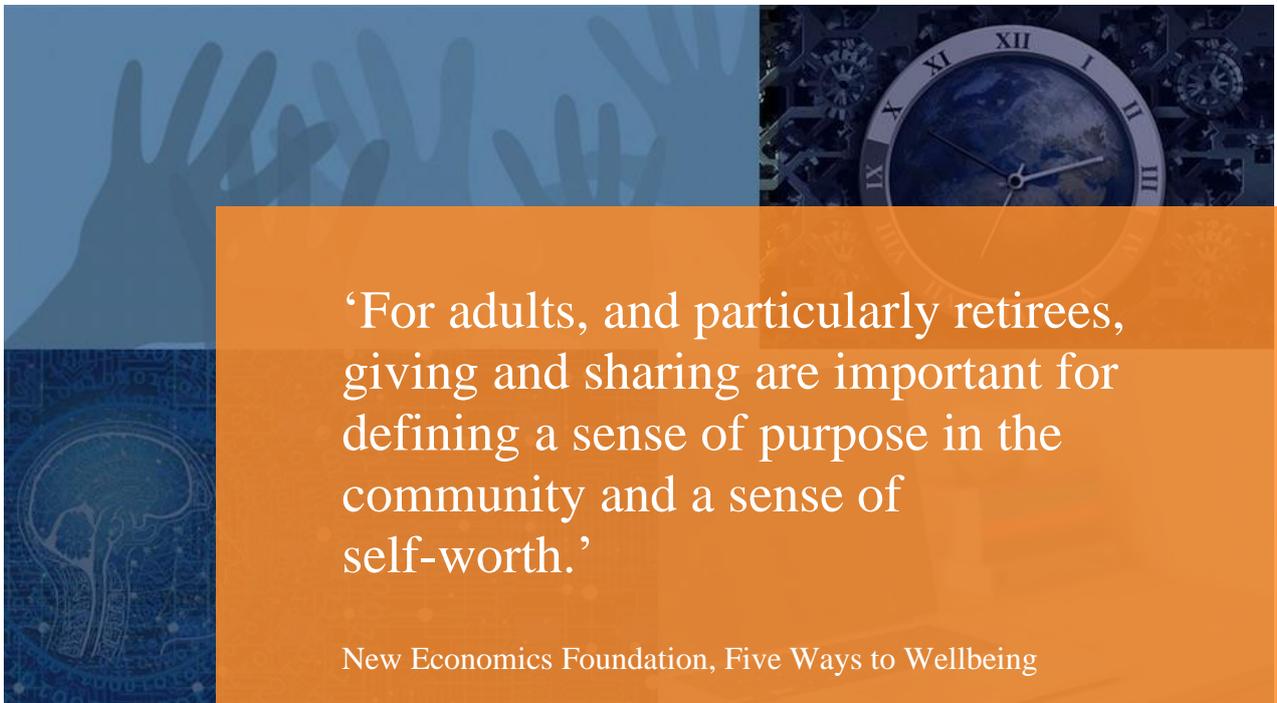
'For adults, and particularly retirees, giving and sharing are important for defining a sense of purpose in the community and a sense of self-worth.'

New Economics Foundation, Five Ways to Wellbeing

Journeying Towards Lifelong Wellbeing

Whether an individual is young or old, a focus on health and wellbeing is widely recognised as a vital part of maintaining a good quality of life. Its importance takes on new significance when we consider that our quality of life in later years depends, to some extent, on the foundations we have laid earlier on – and nowadays it is possible that those 'later years' could last for a considerable time. Here we see how technology can help to support wellbeing. To reap its benefits fully, however, individuals must be willing and able to participate.

Enjoying a Sense of Purpose

Time and again, a sense of purpose has been identified as one of the keys to living a fulfilling life. As summed up by Barb Leonard, PhD and Mary Jo Kreitzer, PhD in their article on the topic, 'Your life purpose consists of the central motivating aims of your life—the reasons you get up in the morning.'[23]

Purpose is relevant at any time of life, but it is worth mentioning here in relation to longer life expectancies. As highlighted by author, journalist and former Director of Policy Camilla Cavendish, evidence suggests that people age better if they have a strong sense of purpose – 'feeling needed & feeling useful are absolutely vital'[24].

So, how can this sense of purpose be cultivated? For many, their purpose is revealed through work. As discussed previously, an individual's work can be supported by a focus on continuous learning and development of new skills. Lifelong learning in this context, then, is not purely about preserving one's career for financial support; it is also about preserving one's sense of purpose for future wellbeing.

Meanwhile, away from the world of work, many individuals find a sense of purpose outside their career. This might be through their hobbies, or spiritual beliefs and practices, or it might be found through caring for loved ones or volunteering within the local community.

In many of these cases, technology can play a useful role. The digital realm, for example, is an increasingly important part of the way we connect and communicate with each other. The value of this will be expanded upon in the next section.

Staying Connected with Others

Social connection is widely considered to be an important aspect of wellbeing. The New Economics Foundation's well-respected 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' model promotes connection as the first theme in its list of five areas for wellbeing. The evidence-base which lies behind this model indicates that 'social relationships are critical for promoting well-being and for acting as a buffer against mental ill health.'[25]

Connection is relevant for individuals of any age, as highlighted in the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' report. When considered in the context of longer life expectancies, social relationships continue to be highly significant. Loneliness in later life has been recognised as a major issue, and opportunities for connection are part of the solution.

There is a compelling case for using technology here. The Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdowns that came with it demonstrated the many ways that technology can help us to keep in touch. From video conferencing to social media, the nation was forced to find ways to stay connected while being kept physically apart. For many, face-to-face contact was able to resume once the restrictions eased. For others – the physically vulnerable and those living in remote areas, for example – the situation is more complex.

A report produced by the Government Office for Science titled *The Future of An Ageing Population* highlights some of the ways that technology can keep people connected. These include email and video calling services, augmented reality services – which can allow people to take part in live events or enjoy virtual tourism – and online information services[26]. However, while technology can enable individuals to connect in new and varied ways, it has been noted that these virtual solutions are not a full substitute for face-to-face interactions. They are purely one part of the picture when it comes to supporting our health and wellbeing.

Alongside social connection in the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' model is another theme which is highly relevant to this paper: that is, to 'keep learning'. This will be explored in the section that follows.

Learning for Wellbeing

'Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a bike. Learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.'

New Economics Foundation, *Five Ways to Wellbeing*

The New Economics Foundation's 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' report includes the recommendation to 'keep learning' as one of its core themes. According to the report, there is a direct link between adult learning and positive impact on wellbeing[27].

When an individual learns new skills that equip them to look after themselves more effectively, then it stands to reason that their wellbeing should improve. Similarly, if learning helps someone to improve their job prospects, then this should also have a positive effect on wellbeing. There is even more to this picture, however. The *act of learning in itself* can help to improve wellbeing.

There are a number of elements that make up this positive relationship between learning and wellbeing. The Government Office for Science report on *The Future of An Ageing Population,* highlights how education and training can improve 'mental capital'. This, the authors say, can go on to increase resilience in later life[28].

Indeed, it appears that learning can physically affect the brain in positive ways, which can help to support wellbeing in later years. Senior lecturer in psychology at Goldsmiths, University of London, Dr Marinella Cappelletti, comments that 'Learning in later life is seen by some researchers as a way to protect the brain against ageing because it promotes "neuroplasticity".'[29]

Meanwhile, learning a new skill can also offer individuals a sense of control. Psychologist Natasha Tiwari believes that learners can feel empowered as they come to 'trust in their ability to bring about change in their lives'.[30]

A sense of control, it could be argued, might prove an important stabilising factor in these fast-paced times. As technology continues to evolve, we need to learn and evolve alongside it. We can also make use of this technology to support our learning and wellbeing aspirations – whether we choose to join an online wellbeing course, use a self-care mobile app or wear a personal fitness tracker.

In the final chapter of this paper, the concept of lifelong learning as a way to manage the changes and challenges presented by longevity and technology will be explored.

4. Lifelong Learning as Part of the Solution
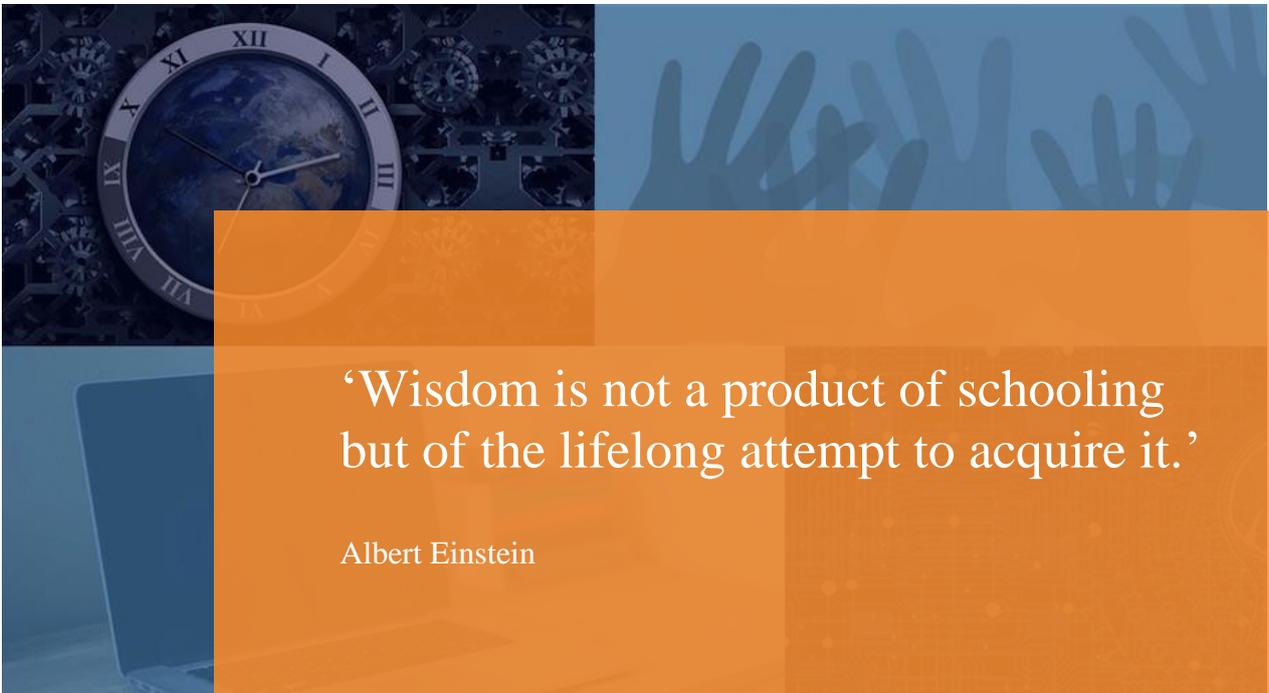
'Wisdom is not a product of schooling but of the lifelong attempt to acquire it.'

Albert Einstein

Lifelong Learning as Part of the Solution

Throughout this paper, lifelong learning has been highlighted as a way to tackle some of the challenges presented by longer life expectancies and new technologies. Time and again in the literature, it is made clear that individuals need to keep learning and refreshing their skills if they want to keep up with this fast-paced, modern world. This applies to people's personal and professional lives.

The European Commission's 2021 *Green Paper on Ageing* sums up the value of lifelong learning as follows[31]:

'Continuous investment in learning has many positive effects: acquiring and updating skills helps people remain employable, succeed in job transitions and advance professionally, keeping them in work and adding to job satisfaction. In a fast changing world, lifelong learning is a necessity, as careers and education opportunities change at a rapid pace. Continued learning can also help to delay the onset of dementia and prevent cognitive decline related to old age. It is also a way for older people to play an active role in society. Developing citizenship competences is important for lifelong democratic participation.'

European Commission

What might this look like in practice? There are many, flexible ways we can learn, and technology can help with this. It offers opportunities to learn from home or on-the-go, to connect with teachers and other learners from around the world, and to access knowledge that would once have only been available from specialist libraries. With the rise in popularity of microcredentials and bitesized learning, individuals can take a little-by-little approach as they adapt and evolve in the face of change.

Increasingly, however, the environment in which people are learning is, itself, changing. These days, technology is embedded in many formal educational settings. This brings with it many advantages but for some there are challenges too.

Relearning How to Learn

The worlds of EdTech and e-learning have been expanding over a number of years. Virtual learning environments began growing in popularity in the 1990s, and it has now become common for learners to join massive open online courses (MOOCs) or to engage with each other via e-learning tools. Even before the pandemic, 'technology enhanced learning' had become a way of life within many of the UK's formal educational establishments.

Then came the pandemic itself, which brought about a necessary surge in e-learning. The circumstances were undoubtedly dire. However, having been forced online, education providers and learners had the chance to experience some of the benefits that remote learning and online collaboration can bring. As Universities UK commented recently, this provided opportunities for 'innovation and creativity'[32].

Now, with Covid-19 restrictions having eased, some of the enforced technology and e-learning practices will likely stay in place. Universities, for example, are increasingly turning to blended solutions – where classes take place face-to-face and online, and hybrid solutions – where classes take place simultaneously in person and online.

For younger generations, all this may be familiar territory – for now. However, the technology of the future will likely present many new opportunities and challenges. In the case of some mature learners, meanwhile, there will be ways of learning in the 'here and now' that feel less than comfortable.

In both these scenarios, lifelong learning has a role to play. Learning little-by-little throughout one's lifetime and experiencing technological changes first-hand as they happen is one way to 'future-proof' our knowledge. The jump in knowledge and skills needed will not be so significant if we are returning to education on a regular basis.

There is a question, of course, about how technology enabled learning can serve individuals who have limited access to technology and how it can do so in a fair and inclusive way. Whether due to digital poverty, accessibility issues or personal preference, technology-driven solutions are not suited to everyone.

There is also a question about how much *formal* teaching a person might need throughout their lifetime. This issue of formal versus informal learning will be tackled in the next section.

Formal and Informal Learning

Taking a formal approach to education, perhaps by attending a class or completing a course, is one way to approach lifelong learning. It is, of course, not the only way to learn. There are many informal ways that individuals can develop and sharpen their skills. This is the type of learning that we may do throughout our daily lives – sometimes without realising it.

The dynamic between formal and informal education is discussed in The Centenary Commission's 2019 report '*A Permanent National Necessity…' Adult Education and Lifelong Learning for 21st Century Britain*. The report suggests that, when it comes to education, we are not facing an either-or situation. Instead, all forms of learning should be embraced to offer a rounded, inclusive experience:

> 'Formal, non-formal and informal modes of adult learning are not alternatives. Each provides "progression routes" of various kinds: individual and collective. These routes need to work together and interact, particularly for the benefits of excluded communities and individuals.'[33]

This principle applies to each of us in our daily lives. We can learn from the day-to-day happenings going on around us, from the people we meet and the new situations that we encounter. When we ask a friend for advice, when a family member shows us how to use a new device, or when we seek out a 'How to' guide we are equipping ourselves with new knowledge and skills. A question that could be asked here is: how far are we pushing ourselves?

The concept of embracing alternative modes of learning is also highly relevant in a work context. A 2017 report by The CPD Standards Office highlights the role of both formal and informal learning in the context of continuing professional development. Here it addresses the myth of CPD being purely about 'going on a course'. Instead, professional development opportunities can be found within everyday work practices. Individuals can learn 'from work not for work'[34].

Opportunities to learn are all around us; we need not be confined to the classroom – whether virtual or otherwise. So, what does this mean for our collective future? A shared outlook on the true value of learning, in all its forms, could be key to our success.

Conclusion: A Lifelong Learning Mindset

As we have seen, there are many compelling reasons to keep learning throughout our lifetimes. Whether we are going about our daily lives, seeking employment or wishing to age well, continuous learning is clearly important when it comes to the challenges presented by longevity and by technological change.

How can we make progress in the face of these challenges? We can start by changing our collective mindset: by embedding lifelong learning as a concept within our society and our lives.

We all have a role to play in making this happen. To realise lifelong learning's potential, action needs to be taken across a number of domains:

- **Government** – It is vital that lifelong learning is supported by appropriate infrastructure, funding and policies. By creating and championing opportunities for both formal and informal education, and by promoting policies that encourage inclusion, our government can help to ensure we are in a strong position to meet the challenges ahead. Recommendations have been offered by The Centenary Commission and other similar groups. Now, the UK's political leaders need to take decisive action.

- **Businesses** – We know from best practice examples that workplaces can be thriving hubs of learning. Employers need to take responsibility for this, via practical means and by nurturing a culture of knowledge sharing and inclusivity. Business leaders, managers and employees can consider how 'learning for all' can be embedded within their organisations – from formal CPD through to informal, intergenerational learning opportunities.

- **Individuals** – We can all make the choice within our own lives to seize opportunities when they are presented. By discovering how to learn in the most effective way for ourselves, we can increase our chances of benefiting from a lifelong learning approach. If unsure where to start, we can begin by approaching organisations within our local communities – whether charities, community groups, educational institutions or cultural hubs.

With all this in mind, it is clear that each of us can add value when it comes to securing our collective future. Whether we 'wear the hat' of a public servant, a business leader, an employee, a community member, a family member or an individual seeking to live a long and fulfilling life, all of us can make a difference. We can choose to learn from others, and we have a responsibility to share our own knowledge too.

This paper concludes with a call to action: **that we each seek to change our own mindsets *and* create opportunities for the people we are close to, in whatever position and capacity we can.** That we ask ourselves, what actions – small or large – can we take in our homes, communities, workplaces or lives to make a difference?

By appreciating the value of knowledge in the first place, we can come to situations with an open-mind, ready and willing to absorb new information. Also, we can share the knowledge we have already with others, and smooth their path towards a lifetime of learning and thriving. By embracing learning as a valuable and necessary part of our entire lives, we can make sure that – as individuals and a society – we are prepared for change.

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