PA Workforce Development Association
The Voice of Pennsylvania Workforce Development

Reimagining Apprenticeship

Lessons from the United Kingdom for Pennsylvania's Workforce System

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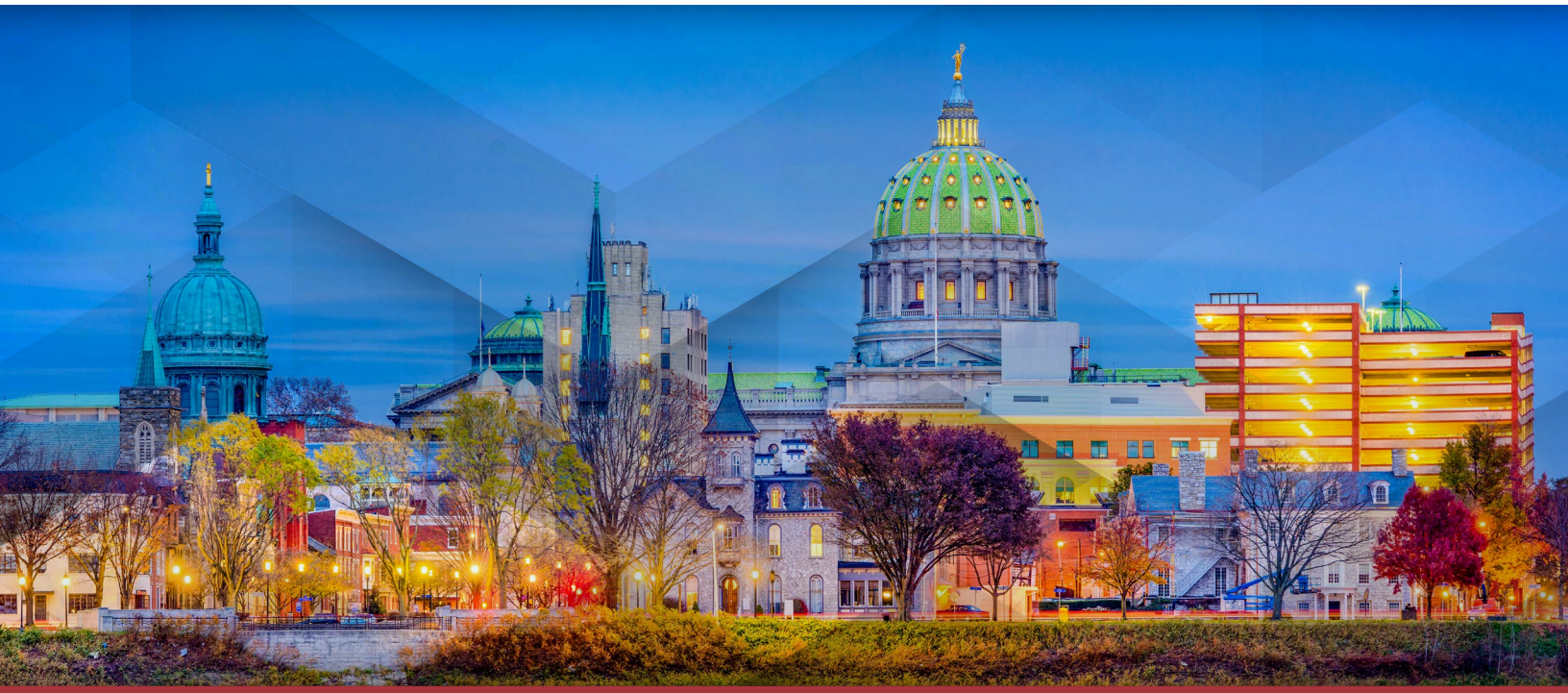

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Executive Summary

Pennsylvania has the infrastructure to become a national model for apprenticeship and workforce development. What it needs is greater alignment. In September 2025, the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association (PWDA) led a cross-sector delegation to the United Kingdom to study how an integrated approach to skills, employment, and education can create measurable economic and social returns. What delegates observed was not a system of perfection, but one of coherence- where education, industry, and government share a common vocabulary, mutual accountability, and unified purpose.

Key findings:

- **Culture matters as much as policy:** The UK treats apprenticeship as a celebrated national institution, not an alternative pathway, with more than 740,000 active apprentices across 600+ occupational standards

- **Adaptive policy design drives results:** The UK's "test and learn" philosophy—exemplified by the Apprenticeship Levy—demonstrates how evidence-based experimentation strengthens workforce systems over time

- **Employer leadership must be embedded, not advisory:** UK employers co-design occupational standards, shape curricula, and co-invest in training as system architects

- **Transparency builds trust and performance:** Open data access enables all partners to make evidence-informed decisions and continuously improve outcomes

- **Integration creates capacity:** When workforce, education, and economic development align around shared goals, results multiply

This white paper translates those insights into actionable strategies for Pennsylvania's workforce ecosystem, focusing on practical steps that build on existing strengths while fostering deeper collaboration across the Commonwealth.

1. Context and Purpose

Pennsylvania has long been recognized as a national leader in workforce innovation, yet the need for adaptable, inclusive, and collaborative approaches remains strong. The United Kingdom's apprenticeship model offers valuable insight into how a cohesive national culture of skills and employment can support both individual and economic growth.

Through this international study visit, PWDA's delegation—composed of workforce board executives, business leaders, educators, and system innovators—gained first-hand understanding of how public and private partners align to build systems that balance employer needs, learner outcomes, and community development. The observations and experiences outlined here highlight practical strategies that can inform Pennsylvania's next phase of workforce innovation and collaboration.

What Makes This Timely: Federal workforce reforms, shifting labor demands, and rapid technological change require adaptable, collaborative systems. Pennsylvania stands at a pivotal moment to position itself as a national leader in next-generation apprenticeship and talent strategy.

2. Key Observations from the United Kingdom

2.1 Apprenticeship as a Cultural Institution

Delegates consistently observed that apprenticeship in the United Kingdom is not viewed as an alternative pathway, but as an integral and celebrated component of the national workforce system. From local governments to large employers, apprenticeship is understood as a foundation for both entry-level and advanced career progression.

The UK currently supports more than 740,000 active apprentices each year across over 600 occupational standards, representing both youth and adult learners.[1] Apprenticeships account for roughly one in ten workplace training opportunities, and outcomes demonstrate strong economic and social returns. Eighty-nine percent of apprentices remain in employment after completion, and 34 percent receive a promotion within six months.[2] Employers report significant benefits as well: 85 percent say apprenticeships help develop relevant skills, and 78 percent credit them with improved productivity and workforce morale.[3]

The visibility of apprenticeship across industries—including engineering, creative services, and advanced manufacturing—reinforces a public understanding that earning while learning is a respected and attainable route to prosperity.

To better understand how the UK's system functions as a unified educational and workforce pathway, the following outlines how its structured apprenticeship levels align with comparable programs in Pennsylvania.

[1]Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Skills Presentation to Pennsylvania Delegation. London: UK Government, 2025.
[2]Learning and Work Institute (LWI). Apprenticeships and Skills for Growth: PWDA Delegation Briefing. 2025.
[3]Learning and Work Institute. Employer Benefits of Apprenticeships. (2024). https://learningandwork.org.uk

Structure of Apprenticeship Pathways: United Kingdom and Pennsylvania

UK Apprenticeship Level	Approximate PA Equivalent	Primary Focus / Outcome	Key Difference
Level 2: Intermediate	CTE, Pre-Apprenticeship	Foundational skills, entry-level readiness	UK model is nationally standardized
Level 3: Advanced	Postsecondary Certificates, Registered Apprenticeship (early phase)	Skilled trades, technical competency	More employer co-investment in UK
Levels 4–5: Higher	Advanced Registered Apprenticeship, Incumbent Worker Training	Specialist, supervisory, or management-level training	UK pathways more formalized
Levels 6–7: Degree	College Credit Apprenticeship Programs, University Partnerships	Professional degree-level occupations, leadership development	Degree apprenticeships more established in UK

Important Note: This comparison illustrates approximate equivalencies, not direct parallels. The UK's nationally coordinated framework differs significantly from Pennsylvania's more decentralized system, which operates through multiple entry points and local control.

Together, these tiers create a cohesive national framework that connects education, employment, and career progression. While Pennsylvania's system offers multiple parallel entry points through CTE, pre-apprenticeship, registered apprenticeship, and college-integrated programs, it operates without the same level of national coordination seen in the UK model. **This suggests an opportunity for Pennsylvania to strengthen alignment across its existing structures and build a more coordinated approach to talent development-** not by imposing top-down mandates, but by creating clearer connections and shared understanding among partners.

> **Delegate Reflection:** *"It wasn't any one policy that impressed me; it was the cohesion. Everyone knew their lane, and that made collaboration feel natural."*

2.2 Setting a National Employment Target

The United Kingdom's target of 80 percent employment among working-age adults serves as a national focal point, aligning workforce, education, and economic development systems toward a shared purpose. Since 2010, this target-driven strategy has contributed to **over 3.5 million additional people entering employment,** bringing participation rates to approximately **76.3 percent as of 2024.**[4][5]

The Greater Manchester region provides a clear example of how local alignment under this framework can accelerate outcomes. Through coordinated skills and employment programs, Manchester's employment growth has **outpaced the national average by 1.5 percentage points since 2017.**[6] Importantly, this target hasn't constrained local innovation- it has provided a shared reference point that allows regions to measure progress while pursuing strategies tailored to their unique economies.

[4]Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Skills for Growth: Pennsylvania Delegation – UK Employment Trends. London, 2025.
[5]Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). Labour Market and Skills Board Report. September 2023.
[6]Office for National Statistics (ONS). Labour Market Overview, UK: August 2024. https://www.ons.gov.uk

What This Means for Pennsylvania: Partners across the Commonwealth already pursue strong local goals that reflect the needs of their communities and industries. A statewide employment or participation goal could serve as a collective rallying point, providing a common reference for progress without limiting local flexibility. Such a goal would connect directly to apprenticeship outcomes by establishing clear expectations for how earn-and-learn pathways contribute to overall workforce participation and economic vitality.

Through the State Workforce Development Board (SWDB), Pennsylvania could use this framework to:

- **Align local and regional strategies** under a shared vision for participation and growth.
- **Encourage data-informed planning,** ensuring that goals are grounded in labor market realities and regional strengths.
- **Facilitate collaboration,** with the backing of the Commonwealth, between local boards, education partners, and employers to coordinate efforts and measure shared outcomes.
- **Create accountability** that demonstrates collective progress toward a stronger, more inclusive workforce system.

By using shared goals as a unifying tool, supported by accessible data and collaborative governance, Pennsylvania can strengthen coordination and demonstrate measurable impact.

2.3 Adaptive Policy Design and the Apprenticeship Levy

The lesson from the UK's Apprenticeship Levy is not to replicate the policy, but to embrace the adaptive mindset it represents.

Introduced in 2016, the levy requires large employers to contribute a portion of their payroll to a shared national fund that supports approved apprenticeship training. Employers can reclaim these contributions to finance their own programs, while smaller employers receive public co-investment to ensure equitable access. Since implementation, the levy has raised roughly **£3 billion annually** for workforce training.[7]

What worked:

- Created a sustainable funding mechanism for workforce development
- Established the principle of collective employer responsibility for skills investment
- Generated significant resources: 57 percent of levy-paying employers now use funds to support management or upskilling programs[8]

[7]Department for Education (DfE). Apprenticeship Levy Evaluation: Annual Report 2023. London: UK Government, 2023.
[8]Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). Work and Skills Board Progress Report. September 2023.

What proved challenging:

- Apprenticeship starts initially fell by 26 percent between 2016 and 2018 as the system adjusted[9]
- Some employers redirected funds toward higher-level training rather than entry-level apprenticeships
- Balancing flexibility with quality standards required ongoing policy refinement

Importantly, the UK has adapted continuously based on evidence. Subsequent reforms stabilized participation by expanding flexibility and digital account transfers, demonstrating that the system can evolve in response to real-world outcomes. Approximately 95 percent of non-levy apprenticeships remain publicly funded, illustrating the government's continued role in sustaining access and opportunity.[10]

Key Takeaway: The Apprenticeship Levy reflects a broader "test and learn" philosophy in UK policy design. Government and industry collaborate to pilot programs, assess results, and adjust strategy based on evidence. This iterative approach allows for continuous improvement over time.

For Pennsylvania, applying a similar model of evidence-based experimentation could strengthen the Commonwealth's ability to refine workforce initiatives, evaluate outcomes, and ensure that public and private investments remain aligned with emerging skill needs.

There is potential to explore how employers can contribute more directly to a shared workforce vision. Pennsylvania could pilot models that encourage employer investment in earn-and-learn opportunities—whether through registered apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, on-the-job training, or incumbent-worker upskilling. These efforts could operate as **voluntary co-investment strategies,** designed to reward engagement and measurable outcomes rather than compliance.

State and local partners, together with employer and education networks, could collaborate to identify approaches that balance shared responsibility with flexibility. Such a framework could:

- Encourage employers to reinvest in their workforce and benefit from a stable, skilled talent pipeline
- Strengthen collaboration between workforce boards, education partners, and industry
- Demonstrate that shared investment produces value for workers, employers, and local economies
- Start small through time-limited pilots with clear evaluation criteria

[9]Manchester City Council. Growth and Regeneration: Delegate Visit Summary. Manchester, 2025.
[10]Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce. Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) Update. (2024).

2.4 Local Leadership and Partnership Alignment

Manchester offers a compelling example of how local coordination and employer leadership can drive an effective workforce strategy. The alignment among the Manchester City Council, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, and the Chamber of Commerce demonstrates how civic, business, and education leaders can collectively shape priorities, measure outcomes, and sustain progress.

The regional Work and Skills Board model engages **more than 1,000 employers annually** through Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs), guiding a **£120 million skills budget** across priority sectors including health, logistics, digital, and green technologies. This collaborative structure has produced **34 new training programs** co-designed by employers and education institutions since 2021.[9]

For Pennsylvania, this structure closely mirrors the role of Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs), which already require 51 percent business and industry leadership in their federally mandated composition. LWDBs bring together employers, educators, economic development entities, and community partners to plan and oversee workforce strategies that reflect regional economies. In many respects, Pennsylvania's LWDB framework already functions as a "Manchester model," grounded in regional leadership and employer engagement.

The challenge lies not in structure but in coordination. Greater alignment is needed among state agencies, workforce partners, and education systems to ensure that local insights inform statewide priorities and funding decisions.[10] Delegates observed that Manchester's success is built on the principle that national and regional entities operate as partners: national bodies set direction, but local leaders are empowered to act.

> **Delegate Reflection:** *"Seeing how employers directly shape curriculum made me rethink how we engage our local industries. They weren't just advising—they were co-creating."*

To achieve a similar balance, Pennsylvania could strengthen the connection between workforce and education systems through:

- **Joint planning processes** that align LWDB strategies with K–12, career and technical education (CTE), and postsecondary goals.
- **Collaborative governance structures** that ensure regular communication between workforce boards, education departments, and economic development agencies.
- **Shared accountability measures** that reflect both employment and educational outcomes at the regional level.
- **Flexible funding mechanisms** that allow local boards to integrate education and workforce initiatives in response to local demand.

[9]Manchester City Council. Growth and Regeneration: Delegate Visit Summary. Manchester, 2025.
[10]Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce. Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) Update. (2024).

Statewide coordination and professional associations can help sustain these efforts by creating opportunities for shared learning, connecting regions, and supporting consistent dialogue between local boards and state partners. Strengthening these connections would ensure that Pennsylvania's regional leaders have both the flexibility and the support needed to build coordinated, demand-driven workforce strategies.

Empowering LWDBs with the authority and resources to lead, while ensuring that education and state partners are engaged as collaborators, would create a stronger and more cohesive foundation for regional workforce and talent development across Pennsylvania.

2.5 Supporting the Transition from Education to Employment

The United Kingdom's Youth Guarantee commits to ensuring that every young person has access to education, employment, or an apprenticeship by age 18. The program currently serves approximately **900,000 youth each year,** offering coordinated support through schools, training providers, and employment services.[11] Delegates found this model to be an effective response to the challenge of young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET). The approach focuses on early intervention, individualized guidance, and structured transitions that help youth connect learning to work.

Outcomes from the Youth Guarantee and related apprenticeship pathways are significant. Young people who complete an apprenticeship earn on average **20 percent higher wages** than peers who do not.[12] Digital innovation has also expanded opportunity: the UK's Skills Toolkit now offers **more than 2,000 free online micro-qualifications,** allowing learners to build recognized credentials that link directly to occupational standards and in-demand careers.[13] Together, these elements demonstrate how policy, technology, and employer engagement can align to create a truly inclusive youth employment strategy.

For Pennsylvania, the lesson extends beyond coordination. The Commonwealth has an opportunity to redefine youth workforce development around career navigation, skill mobility, and accessible on-ramps that make it easier for young people to build and demonstrate employability. Rather than treating education and work as sequential steps, a modern approach could view them as parallel, interconnected experiences that evolve throughout a person's career.

> **Delegate Reflection:** *"The emphasis on 'careers, not courses' reframed how we think about lifelong learning and advancement. It's not about completing programs—it's about building momentum toward meaningful work."*

Emerging practices in youth workforce design increasingly emphasize:

- **Stackable and transferable learning** that allows credentials, certifications, and degrees to build on one another without loss of value.

- **Early and continuous career exposure,** beginning in middle or high school, through internships, pre-apprenticeships, or employer projects that link classroom learning to real work.

[11]Learning and Work Institute. Youth Transitions and the UK Youth Guarantee: PWDA Delegation Presentation. 2025.
[12]Learning and Work Institute. Measuring Outcomes of Youth Apprenticeships. 2024
[13]UK Government. The Skills Toolkit – Free Online Courses for the UK Workforce. https://theskillstoolkit.campaign.gov.uk

- **Unified digital tools or "skills passports"** that help individuals document competencies earned through education, apprenticeships, and on-the-job learning, giving employers a clearer picture of skill attainment.

- **Flexible earn-and-learn models** that integrate part-time employment, education, and training so youth can gain experience while continuing to progress academically.

- **Career navigation support** that helps young people understand labor market opportunities, program options, and long-term career pathways.

These approaches collectively create a **latticework of opportunity** rather than a single, linear pathway. They allow young people to move between education and employment as their goals evolve, accumulating experience and credentials that are both portable and recognized by employers.

Local Workforce Development Boards are uniquely positioned to build these networks by linking employers, schools, and postsecondary institutions to co-design regional talent systems. State-level alignment, along with technology and data infrastructure that supports credential transparency, can help scale this work. PWDA can serve as a statewide intermediary that helps translate these ideas into practical policy conversations, bridging the insights of local workforce boards and educators with the systems-level planning of state agencies.

By modernizing youth workforce development around career navigation, stackable learning, and skill visibility, Pennsylvania can move from coordination to innovation, building a system where young people can see, access, and move confidently through pathways that lead to long-term success.

2.6 Social Value as an Accountability Framework

The Social Value Framework implemented in Manchester demonstrates how workforce, economic, and community goals can be aligned through data and accountability. Employers engaged in publicly funded projects are required to demonstrate how their investments generate measurable benefits for local residents through employment, training, and inclusion. This approach—sometimes called a "community impact framework" in US contexts—links procurement and public spending directly to workforce outcomes, creating a feedback loop that shows how economic growth contributes to social progress.

Across Manchester's regional development programs, this framework has generated more than **£30.3 million in reported social value,** with **over 34 percent of jobs** on major development projects filled by residents from priority localities. All participating employers commit to paying at least the **Real Living Wage,** and many provide additional training and volunteering support to strengthen local communities. Evaluations from the Centre for Local Economic Strategies show that employers adopting social value practices experience gains in **productivity, retention, and brand reputation,** underscoring that investment in people is also good business.[14]

[14]Manchester City Council and Centre for Local Economic Strategies. Growth and Development: Social Value Development Frameworks V 0.1. (2024).

The Learning and Work Institute further quantifies these returns, estimating that each adult learner in the UK generates approximately **£1,100 in social value** through increased earnings, higher productivity, and greater civic participation.[15] These outcomes represent a measurable return on investment for both public and private sectors, demonstrating that workforce development yields value beyond immediate employment results.

What This Means for Pennsylvania: Adopting similar principles could strengthen how workforce and education initiatives demonstrate their collective impact- not just comply with performance measures, but to tell a fuller story about community benefit and economic contribution.

A social value framework could:

- **Quantify workforce ROI** by measuring not only enrollments and placements, but also retention, wage growth, and local economic contributions.
- **Encourage employer participation** by recognizing businesses that invest in apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and incumbent-worker development.
- **Link public investment to inclusive growth,** showing how workforce programs support equitable opportunity and community well-being.
- **Provide consistent metrics** that help local workforce boards communicate their broader value to policymakers, employers, and residents.

Practical Example: Imagine a Pennsylvania LWDB reporting not just "200 apprentices placed" but also "200 apprentices placed, with 85% earning family-sustaining wages, contributing an estimated $1.2 million in increased local purchasing power, and reducing public assistance usage by 40% among participants."

PWDA, alongside state and local partners, can help facilitate discussions on how elements of a social value approach could align with existing workforce reporting and performance systems. By combining quantitative measures with stories of community impact, Pennsylvania can present a fuller picture of the return on investment in skills—one that captures benefits for individuals, businesses, and the Commonwealth as a whole.

2.7 Youth Hubs and UCEN Manchester's Model

Delegates visited **UCEN Manchester** and several local **Youth Hubs** that bring together career services, employer engagement, and student support in shared spaces. UCEN's guiding philosophy of "careers, not courses" reframes education around pathways to meaningful employment and lifelong learning. Students and apprentices are encouraged to mentor peers and guide younger learners, creating a cycle of progression that strengthens connection, confidence, and purpose within the learning environment.

[15]Learning and Work Institute. Adult Learning for Work: Measuring Social Value. (2023).

These centers illustrate how design, environment, and employer collaboration can converge to support lasting workforce participation. By integrating education, employment services, and wraparound supports in one place, Youth Hubs reduce barriers to engagement and help learners navigate transitions between school, work, and training. At UCEN, employer engagement is embedded through co-developed curricula, applied projects, and live industry briefs that ensure learning aligns directly with regional labor-market demand.

Key outcomes observed in Manchester include:

- More than 70 percent of UCEN Manchester learners progress directly into employment or higher education within six months.[16]
- Youth Hub participants demonstrate measurable gains in sustained employment and reductions in NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) rates across the region.[17]
- Integration of digital learning access, mental-health resources, and community partnerships increases participation among underrepresented youth.

For Pennsylvania, the Youth Hub and UCEN models offer valuable insight into how education and workforce systems can operate as interconnected supports rather than parallel tracks. The Commonwealth could explore:

- **Co-located service models** that align workforce, education, and support services through partnerships among community colleges, CTE centers, and local employers.
- **Applied-learning design** that embeds employer projects and mentorship directly within education settings to enhance skill relevance and career readiness.
- **Career-navigation tools** such as digital skills passports or credential-tracking systems that help young people visualize their progress and plan next steps.
- **Mentorship and peer-learning networks** connecting current apprentices and students with younger participants to strengthen guidance and retention.

Regional partnerships between workforce, education, and industry leaders could pilot similar models tailored to local needs. Such collaborations would help Pennsylvania build a more connected infrastructure that supports young people in navigating learning and career opportunities while strengthening the state's overall talent pipeline.

[16]Greater Manchester Combined Authority (2024). Youth Hub Network and UCEN Manchester Outcomes Report.
[17]GUCEN Manchester (2023). Career-Focused Learning and Apprenticeship Progression Data.

2.8 Data, Evidence, and Continuous Improvement

Delegates observed that the United Kingdom's workforce and education systems rely on a shared evidence base that connects national data, regional insights, and local delivery.[18] Institutions such as the Learning and Work Institute, the Office for National Statistics (ONS), and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) maintain consistent, publicly accessible datasets on employment, training participation, and apprenticeship outcomes. These resources allow policymakers, training providers, and employers to analyze performance and adapt programs in real time.

In Greater Manchester, data are used not only for compliance but also for collaborative learning and decision-making.[19] The region's Work and Skills Observatory integrates data from education, welfare, and labor sources to identify emerging trends and guide investment priorities. For example, regional data analysis has helped align training capacity with growth in health, green technology, and logistics sectors, ensuring that local skills strategies remain responsive to changing economic conditions.

> **Delegate Reflection:** *"Data sharing was not seen as compliance but as shared responsibility that improves decisions at every level. Transparency built public confidence, which is something we could strengthen here at home."*

Delegates noted that this culture of continuous improvement is strengthened by transparency. Providers, employers, and local authorities regularly share outcomes and best practices, creating a feedback loop that connects innovation to measurable results. This approach reflects the UK's emphasis on "test and learn," where new initiatives are piloted, evaluated, and refined based on evidence.

For Pennsylvania, adopting similar principles could enhance the use of data as a collective asset rather than as a compliance requirement. Improving access to timely, actionable information would allow workforce boards, education partners, and employers to align decisions with current labor market conditions.

Opportunities include:

- **Expanding data access and integration** so local boards and regional partners can analyze wage, employment, and training outcomes to inform planning.
- **Using evidence-driven pilots** to test new workforce or apprenticeship strategies and refine them based on measurable results.
- **Creating regional dashboards** that track progress toward shared workforce goals and support transparency across systems.
- **Encouraging consistent metrics** for outcomes such as completion rates, employment retention, and wage progression to strengthen evaluation and accountability.

Pennsylvania's workforce system would benefit from a more open, shared approach to data that allows local boards and partners to access the same information that guides state-level decision-making. Expanding access to program and outcomes data at the regional level would support alignment with statewide goals while also empowering local leaders to innovate and respond to employer and community needs.

[18]Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Skills for Growth: Pennsylvania Delegation – Data and Evaluation Overview. London, 2025.
[19]Greater Manchester Combined Authority. Work and Skills Observatory Report. Manchester, 2023.

This vision aligns with ongoing efforts to increase transparency and accessibility in Pennsylvania's workforce data systems. Broader access to information reflects the principle of "freeing the data" so that every partner, from state agencies to local boards, can contribute to shared analysis and collective progress. By connecting data, decision-making, and local insight, Pennsylvania can foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement that strengthens both performance and collaboration across the workforce system.[20]

3. Cross-Cutting Themes and Lessons

Across the visits in London and Manchester, several themes emerged that transcend geography or program design. Together, they describe what makes the UK system durable: shared purpose, mutual accountability, and an appetite for experimentation. These lessons can guide Pennsylvania as it refines its own approach to apprenticeship and workforce strategy.

Shared Accountability and Collective Ownership
The UK's success rests on the expectation that every stakeholder—government, employers, and education providers—owns a portion of workforce outcomes. Pennsylvania can emulate this balance by clarifying shared metrics across agencies and Local Workforce Development Boards, ensuring that performance measures reflect both employment and educational impact.

Employer Leadership as System Design, Not Advisory Input
In the UK, employers are embedded in the system architecture itself—helping to write occupational standards, shape curricula, and co-invest in training. Pennsylvania already engages business through sector partnerships, but deeper involvement in credential design, validation, and mentorship could make programs more responsive and enduring.

System Integration and Policy Alignment
The UK's ability to braid education, employment, and economic development reflects intentional policy coherence. Pennsylvania can move closer to this alignment by integrating state education, labor, and commerce initiatives around common workforce goals. This does not require creating new structures- it requires strengthening communication and coordination among existing partners.

Transparency, Data Access, and Continuous Learning
Transparency was repeatedly cited as a cultural norm rather than a compliance exercise. Pennsylvania could develop regional dashboards to track apprenticeship participation, completion, and wage outcomes. Open access builds trust and drives continuous improvement.

Inclusion and Lifelong Learning as Economic Imperatives
Flexible, stackable pathways enable workers to re-enter the labor market without penalty. Embedding lifelong learning into economic planning through tuition-assistance partnerships and digital-skills passports would help residents stay competitive throughout their careers.

Culture of Experimentation and "Test and Learn" Policy
The UK's willingness to pilot, evaluate, and iterate fuels innovation. Pennsylvania can adopt this mindset by funding time-limited pilots and refining initiatives based on evidence.

Collectively, these themes point to a single conclusion: coordination creates capacity. When information, investment, and intent are aligned, results follow.

[20]Learning and Work Institute. Data for Skills: Evidence-Based Improvement in Workforce Policy. 2024.

4. Participant Insight Highlights

Delegates described the study visit as both eye-opening and affirming—revealing how aligned leadership and shared accountability create the conditions for innovation. Their reflections underscored that Pennsylvania already possesses many of the same building blocks but must connect them more intentionally.

"It wasn't any one policy that impressed me; it was the cohesion. Everyone knew their lane, and that made collaboration feel natural."

— Workforce Board Executive

"Seeing how employers directly shape curriculum made me rethink how we engage our local industries. They weren't just advising—they were co-creating."

— Business Leader

"The emphasis on 'careers, not courses' reframed how we think about lifelong learning and advancement. It's not about completing programs—it's about building momentum toward meaningful work."

— Education Partner

"Data sharing was not seen as compliance but as shared responsibility that improves decisions at every level. Transparency built public confidence, which is something we could strengthen here at home."

— System Innovator

"The system's transparency and coordination created a sense that everyone was working toward the same goal. That's the culture we need to build."

— Regional Convener

These reflections echo the cross-cutting themes of shared accountability, employer partnership, and continuous learning, grounding them in personal observation and renewed commitment to system-wide improvement.

5. Next Steps for Pennsylvania

Building on the delegation's findings, Pennsylvania can translate insight into action through a coordinated agenda of experimentation, alignment, and communication. The following recommendations are organized by the scale and nature of effort required, allowing regions and partners to pursue actions based on readiness, resources, and local priorities.

Quick Wins: Building Momentum Through Immediate Action

These actions can begin with existing resources and create visible progress while building a foundation for deeper work.

- **Communicate a Unified Workforce Narrative**
  Use PWDA's statewide platform to champion the idea that workforce development is economic development. Develop consistent messaging that resonates across policy, employer, and education audiences, helping all stakeholders see their role in a shared vision.

- **Establish Baseline Data Access**
  Identify what workforce and education data currently exist but are not readily accessible to regional partners. Begin "freeing the data" by creating pathways for LWDBs and education institutions to access labor market information, wage outcomes, and program performance metrics.

- **Launch a Commonwealth Apprenticeship and Workforce Innovation Network**
  Create a multi-agency, multi-regional network facilitated by PWDA to share promising practices in employer engagement, data integration, and youth transitions. Start with quarterly convenings and a digital platform for knowledge exchange.

- **Recognize and Reward Shared Success**
  Establish recognition for regional teams that demonstrate measurable progress in integration, employer engagement, or equity outcomes. Celebrate innovation and create opportunities for high-performing regions to mentor peers.

Foundational Shifts: Piloting New Approaches and Building Capacity

These initiatives require dedicated resources, cross-partner collaboration, and willingness to experiment with new models.

- **Expand Regional Pilot Projects Focused on Integration**
  Select several regions to test co-located service models that unite LWDBs, community colleges, and industry partners. Pilots should focus on specific outcomes (e.g., youth employment, adult upskilling) with clear evaluation frameworks. Document results to inform future funding models and statewide policy.

- **Pilot Employer Co-Investment Strategies**
  Test voluntary models that reward employer participation in training and upskilling, such as matching funds, tax credits, or public recognition programs. Start with interested employer coalitions and evaluate impact on apprenticeship participation and retention before scaling.

- **Reimagine Youth and Career Pathways**
  Integrate career navigation tools, digital credential tracking, and paid work experience within middle- and high-school programs. Partner with education leaders to pilot "skills passport" models that help students document competencies across learning and work settings.

- **Develop an Open Workforce Data Dashboard**
  Build a public-facing dashboard tracking apprenticeship enrollment, completion, wage outcomes, and demographic reach. Make data accessible to local boards, employers, educators, and the public to support transparency and continuous improvement.

System Transformation: Embedding New Culture and Structures

These actions require sustained commitment, policy changes, and multi-year coordination to fundamentally strengthen how Pennsylvania's workforce system operates.

- **Institutionalize "Test and Learn" Policy Design**
  Adopt an iterative approach to workforce policy by funding time-limited pilots with clear evaluation frameworks. Establish a process for scaling successful initiatives and sunsetting those that don't produce results. Create feedback loops that allow practitioners to inform policy refinement.

- **Strengthen State-Level Coordination**
  Facilitate ongoing dialogue between the Department of Labor & Industry, Department of Education, Department of Community and Economic Development, and the State Workforce Development Board to ensure policy alignment and reduce siloed planning. Establish joint planning processes that connect workforce, education, and economic development goals.

- **Formalize Social Value Measurement**
  Work with state agencies and local boards to develop a Pennsylvania-specific framework for measuring community impact alongside traditional workforce metrics. Align this with existing WIOA performance measures while expanding to capture wage progression, retention, and local economic contribution.

- **Consider a Statewide Employment or Participation Goal**
  Explore whether Pennsylvania would benefit from a shared employment or workforce participation target that unifies efforts across regions while allowing local flexibility in strategies. Use data and stakeholder input to determine if such a goal would strengthen coordination and accountability.

Cross Cutting Principles

These values should guide all actions, regardless of scale:

- **PWDA as Convener and Connector:** Facilitate peer learning, translate research into practice, and bridge local innovation with state policy
- **Transparent Communication:** Share progress, challenges, and lessons learned openly across the system
- **Employer Leadership:** Ensure business leaders remain central to design, not just implementation
- **Equity and Inclusion:** Embed inclusive practices in every initiative to ensure all Pennsylvanians can access opportunity
- **Evidence-Based Adaptation:** Measure outcomes, learn from results, and adjust strategies accordingly

Pennsylvania's workforce system is strong, diverse, and adaptable. The UK delegation affirmed that sustainable progress depends not on new structures, but on intentional connection between people, data, and purpose. These recommendations offer multiple entry points for action: partners can begin where they have capacity and build momentum toward broader transformation.

6. Conclusion

The UK study visit reaffirmed that world-class workforce systems are not defined by the number of programs they administer, but by the clarity of purpose, alignment of effort, and consistency of collaboration among their partners. What delegates observed in London and Manchester was not a system of perfection, but one of coherence—where education, industry, and government share a common vocabulary, a shared understanding of outcomes, and mutual accountability for results.

Pennsylvania's workforce system already possesses the ingredients of such a model: a strong network of Local Workforce Development Boards, committed state partners, innovative education institutions, and engaged employers. The opportunity is to weave these assets into a more unified fabric through alignment, data transparency, and shared investment.

The Commonwealth stands at a pivotal moment. Federal reforms, shifting labor demands, and rapid technological change require adaptable, collaborative systems. By applying lessons from this international exchange, Pennsylvania can position itself as a national leader in next-generation apprenticeship and talent strategy—not by importing another country's model wholesale, but by adapting its principles to Pennsylvania's unique strengths and governance structure.

PWDA is uniquely positioned to lead this evolution by connecting practitioners, policymakers, and employers, and by translating promising practices into scalable policy. When workforce systems operate with transparency, trust, and shared vision, they generate more than jobs—they generate confidence, dignity, and opportunity.

The next chapter of workforce innovation will belong to those willing to learn, adapt, and lead together. Pennsylvania has already begun writing it.

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