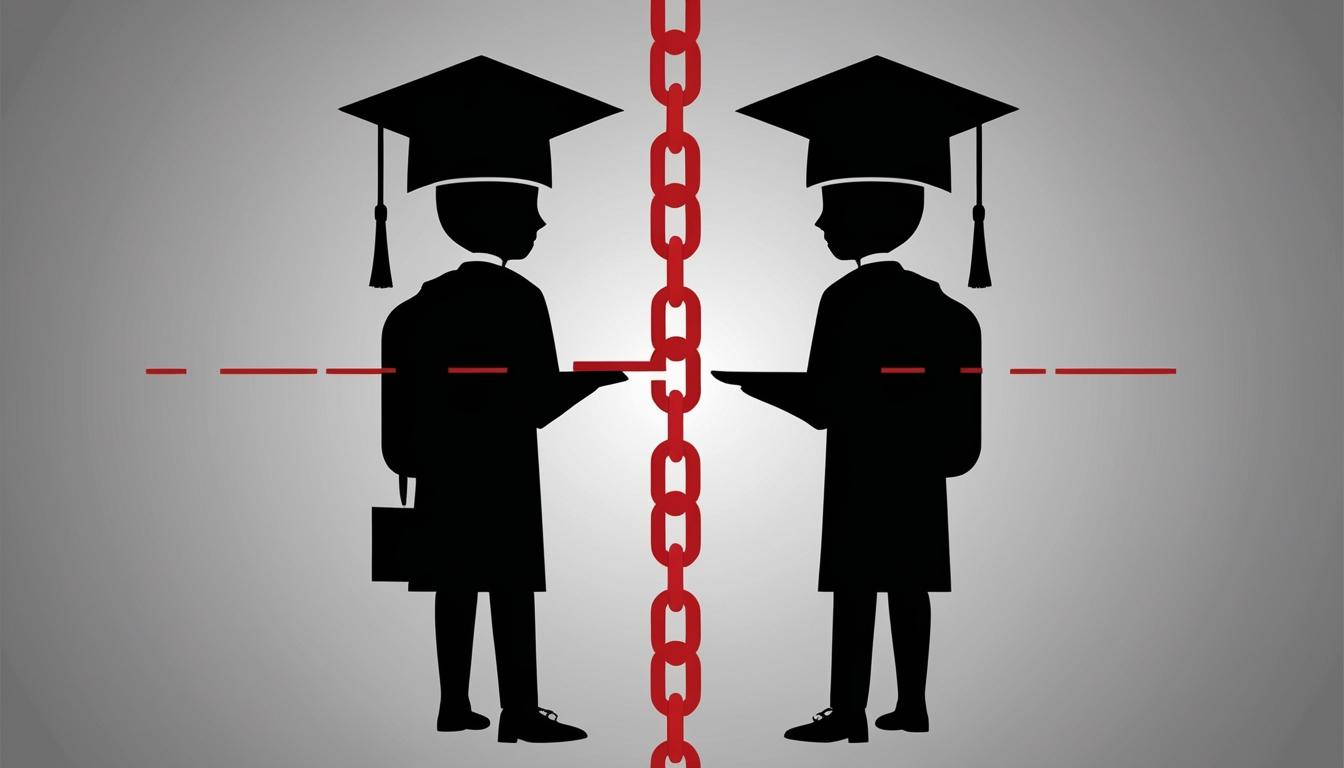
# Warning over alarming skills divide across the UK



The Learning and Work Institute has warned of an alarming skills divide across the UK, revealing significant disparities between urban and rural areas in educational attainment. According to their latest report, 66% of people in London hold a degree, compared to just 33% in regions like Greater Lincolnshire. This divide poses a threat to the economic growth of the UK, as London and the South-East continue to attract highly qualified workers while other areas lag behind.

The report forecasts that by 2035, an estimated 71% of Londoners and 65% of adults in Scotland will hold a degree, while conversely, only 29% of East Yorkshire residents and 39% in Norfolk are projected to achieve the same level of education. This trends presents a considerable challenge to increasing nationwide educational qualifications.

The findings also highlight stark differences within regions, noting that 27% of adults in the West Midlands possess qualifications below the GCSE level, whereas only 9% of adults in West London fall into this category. The gap in educational attainment noted is more pronounced than in countries such as Ireland, Norway, or Finland.

Laura Lodwick, Chief of Hub Operations for Talent at AND Digital, stated, “For the UK to grow as a whole, the government, local councils and regional businesses need an aligned investment strategy across education and training and a strategy to retain top local talent.” She emphasized the importance of skills training within local businesses to provide courses and upskilling opportunities that facilitate career progression and encourage individuals to remain within their local communities. Lodwick argued that growth will be fuelled by a combination of people and innovation, particularly in high-demand sectors like artificial intelligence, which are vital for improving productivity and efficiency across the UK.

The Learning and Work Institute has calculated that closing the educational gap between London and the rest of the UK would necessitate an additional 4 million non-London residents obtaining higher education qualifications. In England, the newly established Skills England is tasked with overseeing training and educational reforms, including the apprenticeships system, while Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland maintain their own similar agencies.

Sheila Flavell CBE, COO of FDM Group, remarked, “For the UK to expect significant growth in crucial sectors such as technology, the UK workforce needs to be equipped with core skills including data and analytics, software engineering and IT operations in order to drive that growth across all regions.” She highlighted the urgent need for businesses across the regions to collaborate with Skills England in identifying high-growth disciplines and essential skills necessary for developing a highly skilled digital workforce. Flavell noted that degrees are not the sole pathway to acquiring digital skills; apprenticeships and business training initiatives offer practical opportunities for upskilling and reskilling. She added that experiential learning in training programmes can provide industry-standard experience and help cultivate a workforce capable of spearheading global innovation.

The necessity for improved skills within the UK workforce aligns with Prime Minister Keir Starmer's Plan for Change announced in December, which aims for “more people in good jobs, higher living standards, and productivity growth in every part of the United Kingdom.”

In addition to educational gaps, Elizabeth Anderson, CEO of the Digital Poverty Alliance, brought attention to the growing issue of digital exclusion in the UK. “There are upwards of 19 million people in the UK who are digitally excluded according to our research with Deloitte,” she stated. Anderson underscored that many of these individuals lack the essential digital skills required to access online services or pursue higher education. She stressed the importance of recognising the skills gap faced by those without digital access, particularly in terms of online learning and essential services that many may take for granted.

Anderson also voiced support for the government's commitment to addressing opportunity inequities, particularly for disadvantaged children, underlined in its Plan for Change. She pointed out that as education increasingly relies on digital platforms, it is crucial that children across all schools receive at least a basic level of digital education, encompassing digital literacy, critical thinking, and online safety. The Digital Poverty Alliance advocates for a comprehensive approach to ensure that technology and educational resources are accessible universally, aiming to bridge the prevailing skills divide throughout the UK.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

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