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# Cities of Learning in the UK

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## Prospectus

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# Acknowledgements

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# Contents

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<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
The promise of place-based and socially inclusive lifelong learning	5
How Cities of Learning works	6
Our work to date	7
<b>The opportunity</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>Focus on opportunity gap</i>	10
<i>Social divides and new technology</i>	11
<i>Non-cognitive skills and the future of work</i>	12
The policy landscape	13
Distinguishing features of place-based approaches	14
<i>Examples of place-based approaches to lifelong learning: LRNG Cities</i>	15
<i>Examples of place-based approaches to lifelong learning: Citizens' Curriculum</i>	16
How CofL can add value to existing place-based programmes	17
<b>Our approach</b>	<b>18</b>
Leadership	19
Networks	20
Platform	21
<i>Open Badges</i>	23
<i>Design principles for Cities of Learning</i>	24
<i>A City of Learning skills spine</i>	25
<b>Working with partner cities</b>	<b>26</b>
<i>Key themes from workshops and focus groups</i>	28
<i>The project process</i>	30
<i>The value proposition</i>	31
<b>Engage with us</b>	<b>32</b>

# Introduction

“  
*I know learning outside the classroom can give me the skills I need for the future, but I don't know what's out there in the city. If [Cities of Learning] can help with that, that will help a lot of young people like me.*  
”

-Participant of youth focus group

Cities of Learning (CofL) is a new approach for activating a grassroots, city-based, mass-engagement movement around learning and skills. It seeks to close gaps in opportunity and empower places to promote lifelong learning as core to their cultural and civic identity.

CofL can be a galvanising force for bringing people together with a city's economic and social aspirations. It can open new sources of city leadership, learning potential and civic energy. Cities can both make visible and amplify nascent systems of learning – involving learners, institutions, employers, civil society and the voluntary and cultural sectors. Learners, especially those from underserved communities, can benefit from much greater access to the wealth of enrichment experiences and opportunities their city offers. By deepening social and civic connections, CofL can be a means to developing a sense of place, identity, mission, ambition - and learning.

## The promise of place-based and socially inclusive lifelong learning

We face unprecedented challenges that have major implications for how we learn, develop our skills, and navigate the growing complexities of life. The nature of work is changing rapidly, becoming more fluid and less secure. Technological change and economic shifts are creating an ever more urgent need to ensure growth is inclusive and fairly shared. The capacity to lead creative lives is increasingly crucial to solving society's complex challenges, but it is a resource that is too often the preserve of the privileged, as RSA research on the 'creativity gap' shows.<sup>1</sup>

In response to these trends, we need a much greater focus on socially inclusive lifelong learning. This means equipping more people with the cognitive skills and knowledge that are developed through academic or vocational education, but it also means greater equity in the distribution of the non-cognitive ('soft') skills, such as resilience and confidence, that are increasingly important to success at work and to life chances more generally. CofL has the potential to stimulate the civic capacities, social resources and health assets that drive social and economic prosperity in places.

We believe that lifelong learning has an important place-based dimension, and should tap into non-formal and informal learning assets as much as formal education, training and work resources. Unlocking the potential of lifelong learning demands a mobilisation of movements and networks, not just top-down policy. This is why we are interested in exploring the CofL approach - inspired by the US programme of the same name but adapted for the UK.

<sup>1</sup> See Painter, A. and Bamfield, L. (2015) The New Digital Learning Age. The RSA: London. Available at: [www.thersa.org](http://www.thersa.org).

## How Cities of Learning works

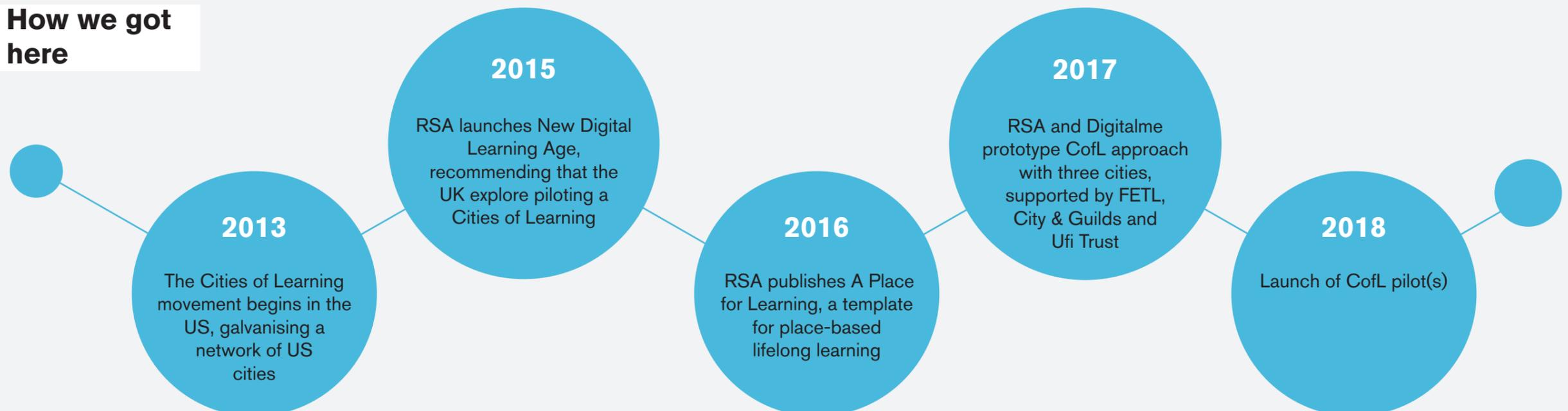
CofL mobilises the formal, non-formal and informal assets and resources in a city in order to close gaps in creativity, opportunity and outcomes.

It brings together learners, learning, work and civic institutions (schools, colleges, employers, training providers, charities, local authorities, libraries, museums, coding clubs, makerspaces and so on) as well as learning and work opportunities to form purposeful city-wide networks. These networks are supported by a digital platform that facilitates the recognition of informal learning and connects learners to a wealth of enrichment experiences and opportunities through digital open badges (an online and shareable recognition of learning), which respond to local priorities and labour market needs.

By combining shared and dispersed leadership, purposeful networks and innovative technology, CofL has the potential to disrupt the centralised, hierarchical and fragmented systems of the past (and present), with 'new power' networks.<sup>2</sup> But CofL is a **quiet disruptor**: it doesn't seek to replace or recreate existing formal or non-formal learning provision, but instead builds on what's there already and helps to connect it all together more effectively through open and collaborative networks.

<sup>2</sup> See for example the RSA's concept of 'Think like a system, Act like an entrepreneur.' See Conway, R., Masters, J. and Thorold, J. (2017) From Design Thinking to Systems Change. The RSA. Available at: [www.thersa.org](http://www.thersa.org).

## How we got here



The RSA aims to bridge research, policy, and social change by practically testing new models of innovation and systems change. CofL is one such approach.

## Our work to date

Supported by the Further Education Trust for Leadership (FETL), City & Guilds and Ufi charitable trust, The RSA and Digitalme have been working with a range of anchor organisations and dozens of stakeholders, including learners themselves, in partner cities (Brighton, Plymouth and Greater Manchester). We have spent six months testing, developing and prototyping the CofL approach and co-designing city blueprints that will help inform future pilots.

The aim of this prospectus is to stimulate interest and engagement with CofL and to develop it as a movement in the UK. Alongside this we have published city blueprints and demonstrators of the tech platform.<sup>3</sup>

We hope this prospectus is of interest in particular to educators, civic and community leaders, policymakers, employers, learners, charities, social entrepreneurs and strategic funders.

<sup>3</sup> These additional outputs can be found at: [www.thersa.org/citiesoflearning](http://www.thersa.org/citiesoflearning).

# The opportunity

“*Lifelong learning should be at the core of Cities of Learning and our approach to meeting the challenges we face. We must see people of all ages as our region’s core assets.*”

-Participant of co-design workshop, Greater Manchester

The UK faces unprecedented challenges which demand bold action. The RSA believes that testing innovative approaches to promoting lifelong learning across society should form a key part of our response. There are four types of challenges that we must confront: **Persistent challenges**, **Escalating challenges**, **Future challenges**, and **System challenges**.

- ◀ **Persistent challenges** are those that we have failed to address despite significant state investment. These include continuing education and attainment gaps; inequality of opportunity and the chronic lack of upwards mobility; and the entrenched social and regional inequalities that limit the life chances of disadvantaged individuals and places.
- ▲ **Escalating challenges** are those that are intensifying as a result of major social, economic and technological trends. These include rising economic insecurity; unequal access to the fruits of technology; the growing value of core skills as well as their unequal distribution; and the rising costs associated with health inequalities and demographic change.
- ▶ **Future challenges** are those that will have major implications for society, work and the way we govern and deliver public services. This includes the potential impact of automation and artificial intelligence on how we study, train, work and live our lives.
- ▼ **System challenges** are those that constrain the innovative capacity of policy and collective action. This includes issues such as the fragmented, rigid and centralised nature of public services.

**Socially inclusive lifelong learning should be at the heart of how we respond to these challenges.** Keeping pace with economic and work-related trends, and responding creatively to complex problems, requires individuals and communities to develop skills, competencies and habits that promote resilience, collaboration, civic entrepreneurship and social and emotional learning. We must recognise the value of non-academic routes into work, as well as continuous formal and informal learning throughout life.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See for example: OECD (2016) Global competency for an inclusive world. OECD. Available at: [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org). See also World Economic Forum (2015) New Vision for Education: Unlocking the Potential of Technology. Available at: [www.weforum.org](http://www.weforum.org). See also Lucas, B. and Hanson, J. (2015) Learning to be employable: Practical lessons from research into developing character. City & Guilds. Available at: [www.cityandguilds.com](http://www.cityandguilds.com).

## Focus on opportunity gap

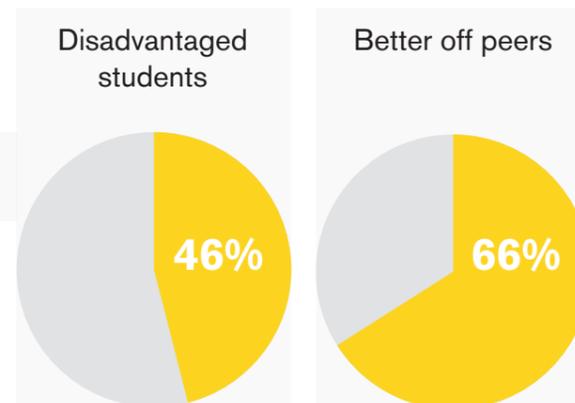
The UK has some of the highest levels of income inequality and lowest levels of social mobility amongst the richer countries. **The scale of the opportunity gap between poorer and more affluent people is dramatic.**

It will take **120 years** before disadvantaged young people are as likely as more affluent peers to achieve A-Levels or equivalent qualifications.

In higher education, it will take **80 years** before the participation gap closes. [Source: Social Mobility Commission, Time For Change (2017)].

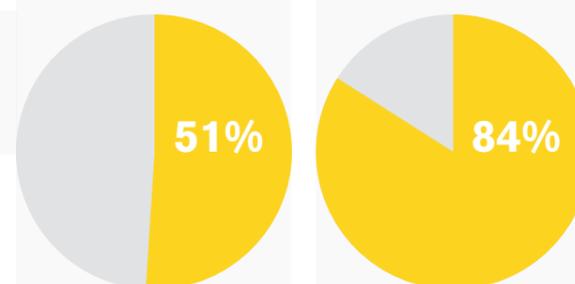
But poorer people also have far fewer opportunities to develop the non-cognitive 'life skills' that are increasingly important for work and wellbeing outcomes.

### Participation in extra-curricular activities



Source: Sutton Trust, Life Lessons (2017).

### Participation in cultural activities: art gallery attendance



Source: Social Mobility Commission, The Childhood Origins of Social Mobility (2017).

## Social divides and new technology

Technology is transforming how we live our lives and opening up a wealth of opportunities for work, education and civic engagement. But without positive intervention it also risks widening inequalities. An RSA survey of working age people found that:

**11%** are 'confident creators' who are adept at using new technology to develop their knowledge and creativity, helped by greater access to social networks and resources.



**20%** are the 'held back' who are using new technologies to learn, and have similar aspirations to confident creators, but lack confidence, access to networks and opportunities for support in achieving their ambitions.



**30%** of the population are 'safety firsters' who are least engaged with technology and don't see it as an essential part of their lives in the way the other groups do.



Source: RSA, New Digital Learning Age (2015)

## Non-cognitive skills and the future of work

As technological and structural economic change takes shape, non-cognitive skills (such as confidence, motivation and communication) will become more critical to the economy and to people's access to labour market opportunities. According to Deloitte, the resulting workforce change may be in the magnitude of the shift from blue-collar to white-collar work in previous decades.



Source: Development Economics, the Value of Soft Skills to the UK economy (2015)

But non-cognitive skills are unequally distributed, disproportionately benefiting those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. [Source: Sutton Trust, A Winning Personality, 2017]

The increasing value of non-cognitive skills and the loss of routine jobs from automation will have significant impacts on low and middle income people. [Source: Sutton Trust, The State of Social Mobility in the UK, 2017]



## The policy landscape

CofL aligns with a growing policy agenda that seeks to find innovative, collaborative and place-based solutions to achieving inclusive economic growth, better quality work and greater civic action and social belonging.

The government's **Industrial Strategy** has identified skills and lifelong learning as critical to shared prosperity, while also affirming 'place' as a key pillar of the strategy.

The **Post-16 Skills Plan and Apprenticeship Levy** aims to simplify non-academic education and work pathways, improve careers advice and guidance, and strengthen training. CofL approaches could help build pathways from informal learning to formal opportunities, and promote the levy as a tool for lifelong learning.

The **Department for Education (DfE)** is seeking to promote greater social mobility through an 'Opportunity Areas' programme that will help local place-based partnerships to form and provide integrated, long-term support to young people to develop their skills and access opportunities.

The **Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices** recognised the importance of the development of non-cognitive (soft) skills and highlighted CofL as a valuable approach for supporting this.

The **Inclusive Growth Commission** identified place-based lifelong learning as critical to a more socially inclusive economy with labour markets that provide opportunities for all.

The **devolution agenda in England** is enabling towns and cities to take greater control of how resources are spent locally and develop more place-based policy. Local enterprise partnerships and combined authorities are increasingly linking lifelong learning to the priorities for their place, seen for example in Greater Manchester's pursuit of an integrated skills and work system.

Growing interest in place-based interventions has created an opening to explore experimental approaches such as CofL. There is a growing recognition that centralised, one size fits all programmes are unlikely to address the complex, multi-faceted challenges we face. As one recent extensive review into place and policy suggested, too much of what we do from a policy and public services perspective is 'place-blind'.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> British Academy (2017) Where We Live Now: Making the case for place-based policy. British Academy. Available at: [www.britac.ac.uk](http://www.britac.ac.uk).

## Distinguishing features of place-based approaches

We regard 'place' as a central organising principle for lifelong learning; there are a number of features that distinguish place-based approaches.

- They allow us to get under the skin of local problems, map the systems and circumstances in which they emerge and identify the most suitable responses by mobilising local resources and leadership.
- Place is often where barriers exist, fragmentation occurs, and capabilities go unrecognised and fail to flourish. New and untapped powers and resources are located at a place level.
- Learning systems - formal, non-formal, informal - are experienced by people in places and form a fundamental part of how they experience life within their neighbourhoods, communities, and towns and cities.
- They operate outside of the silos of traditional programmes, allowing organisations to work together to focus on shared outcomes rather than individual concerns.
- They provide an appropriate scale at which networks can form, collaboration is catalysed and multiple organisations are able to work together effectively.
- They capitalise on crucial intangible factors that drive collective action, such as identity, heritage and community. Places are where people build trust, connection, and access opportunity.

## Examples of place-based approaches to lifelong learning: LRNG Cities

The Cities of Learning movement originated in the US (with 11 cities currently involved), with the aim of mobilising the learning assets across a city and transforming them into a network of seamless pathways of in-school, out-of-school and online experiences, enabling young people (especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds) to explore their interests, develop new skills and connect their learning to real world opportunities through an online digital platform. LRNG works with city networks and broad-based local coalitions to develop and co-design digital open badges and learning pathways ('playlists') linked to city priorities and skills needs, with the aim of closing opportunity gaps for young people.

Over 34,000 learners and hundreds of organisations are currently participating in LRNG Cities. Interviews and engagement with LRNG stakeholders has uncovered a number of key lessons and insights which have informed the UK approach. In particular:

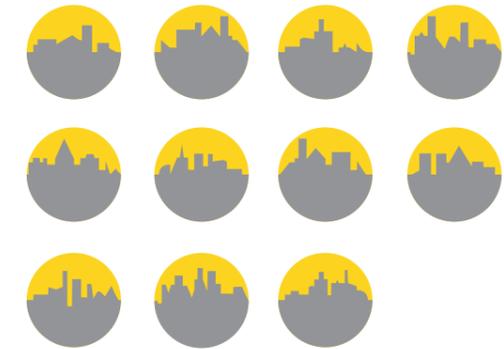
**The importance of political and civic leadership at city level**, for example Mayor Rahm Emmanuel led the development of the CofL movement in Chicago.

**Local anchor organisations** with dense networks and relationships are key coordinators and drivers of success.

**Forging relationships** with a broad range of actors - non-formal learning organisations but also schools, colleges, employers, policymakers, community leaders, and others - will significantly impact engagement with the initiative and the quality of the outcomes.

**The flexibility, shareability and transferability of open badges** is a significant selling point - something that's missing in conventional non-academic certifications.

**Continuous co-design, tailoring and targeting** is critical to ensuring engagement and high-quality learning experiences that are linked to clear opportunities such as internships, work experience and employment.



11 US cities currently involved

# 34,000

Number of learners currently participating in LRNG Cities

## Examples of place-based approaches to lifelong learning: Citizens' Curriculum

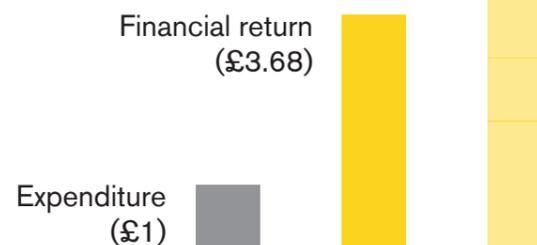
Citizens' Curriculum is a holistic, locally-led approach to supporting adult learners distant from the labour market to develop the numeracy, language, literacy, digital, health and financial skills and the capabilities they need. The programme seeks to motivate learners by deploying coaching techniques, empowering them to co-design curriculum content and ensuring that learning experiences are contextualised so that they build the skills that are relevant to their lives and their work. The Learning and Work Institute partnered with 13 organisations to pilot the Citizens' Curriculum with 160 learners in a number of places. Some of the impact included:

- 8% of learners found a new job
- 33% started looking for work
- 49% improved their work related skills
- 59% reported an improved social life
- 67% improved their self-confidence
- 94% felt more motivated to learn
- 65% had greater satisfaction with their life
- 31% experienced improved physical health.

Learning from the initiative has informed the CofL work in the UK, in particular the importance of co-design; contextualised learning experiences that build on people's passions, interests and priorities; and the importance of practical 'scaffolding' support to help learners navigate and access the opportunities available to them.

More case studies will be published in forthcoming research at: [www.thersa.org/citiesoflearning](http://www.thersa.org/citiesoflearning).

### Rochdale Borough Council's cost-benefit analysis



Source: Learning and Work Institute.

## How CofL can add value to existing place-based programmes

CofL does not seek to replace formal assessments, existing initiatives or other place-based learning programmes. Rather, it seeks to integrate them into wider a movement, network and platform that can drive increased engagement, promote more equal opportunity and cultivate a culture of learning. There are a number of ways in which existing programmes can benefit from being part of CofL. CofL has the potential to help existing initiatives to:

- Widen their reach and engagement, especially with disadvantaged communities.
- Benefit from potential opportunities to access additional expertise and resources.
- Strengthen their impact and value proposition by awarding locally valued digital credentials and linking programme participants to other opportunities by being part of learning pathways.
- Find new ways to track and demonstrate their impact (including to funders) through CofL programme data.
- Generate richer insights into learner behaviour and motivations, and continuously improve programme design through local (and national) knowledge networks.
- Address fragmentation in the delivery of local learning by working with complementary organisations and programmes to collaborate, co-design and develop distinctive learning experiences and pathways.
- Further enhance service users' self-efficacy, including increased motivation to learn, increased confidence and better access to social, economic and cultural resources
- Support improved holistic outcomes by badging activities such as civic participation and healthy living, and linking these to concrete opportunities

# Our approach

“*It’s great for learning systems to be more joined-up and impactful. But we also need to cultivate active civic engagement and empower learners to shape priorities.*”

-Participant of co-design workshop, Brighton



CofL aims to build a place-based learning movement that achieves four overarching outcomes:

- Narrowing opportunity, achievement and skills gaps.
- Improving industry relevant skills and supporting progression through education and work.
- Amplifying a passion for learning.
- Driving increased inclusivity in places.

There are three core features of the CofL approach: **Leadership**, **Network** and **Platform**. CofL is a technology-enabled intervention, but the potential of the platform is realised by mobilising leaders and collaborative networks.

The design, activities and priorities of CofL programmes in individual places are shaped by a **skills spine**. This is a framework that articulates the knowledge, skills, and character attributes that stakeholders will seek to improve when developing the learning experiences, digital credentials, learning pathways and opportunities for their city.

## Leadership

CofL relies on shared, distributed leadership to achieve scale, systems change and innovation. National and local anchor organisations work in partnership with influential leaders from across education, business, public services, and the community to inspire a movement for change and collective impact. Leaders play an essential role in:

**Championing:** Advocating CofL and being imaginative and visionary in creating local energy and momentum.

**Validating:** Playing a role in defining a skills spine and designing learning pathways, ensuring their quality and articulating the value proposition to learners, employers and institutions.

**Influencing:** Ensuring CofL is implemented and widely adopted, influencing behaviour and systems change where needed.

**Embedding:** Establishing CofL as a strategic priority for their place, linked to local needs and aligned to existing activity.

**Troubleshooting:** Addressing practical barriers and creating incentives to engage with CofL.

**What this can look like in practice:** A major employer overhauls their recruitment process, recognising digital badges as valuable currency

and offering interviews to people that have completed learning pathways that show evidence of the knowledge, skills and competencies needed. The employer uses its local influence and supply chains to work with local anchors, schools, colleges and other employers to create in-work progression pathways and talent pipelines. Because the employer is part of a CofL leadership group, it works closely with local community leaders to prioritise entry level opportunities for badge earners from deprived backgrounds, as well as match funding 'badgeable' pre-employment schemes that are promoted on the CofL platform. As part of this the employer works with college and university partners to validate the badges offered by small employers, work support or community organisations.



## Networks

CofL isn't about re-designing or replacing formal systems of provision, or replicating existing learning activities and programmes. Rather, it aims to make existing activity go much further through forging purposeful, open and collaborative networks that cut across institutions, settings and spaces (formal, informal, online, physical). This can enable the co-creation and dispersion of ideas, innovation, resources and know-how. The approach is based on an understanding of innovation and social change that is rooted in 'upstream' forces, where social practices and shared norms rather than top-down directives alone create opportunities for doing things differently.<sup>6</sup>

CofL aims to promote both formal and informal networks; and institutional as well as self-organised networks. To help coordinate networks, CofL draws on a 'hub-and-spoke' model, where local anchor organisations and influential change makers act as stewards or 'network hubs', providing the intermediary space between the wider programme and the individual organisations in the sectors, organisations or interests they represent. Remake Learning in the US describes the roles of network hubs as:



Convenors (bringing others together)



Catalysts (supporting activity to get off the ground)



Communicators (sharing stories and evidence)



Champions (promoting achievements) and



Coordinators (connecting the dots).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See for example Tuomi, I. (2002) Networks of Innovation. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>7</sup> Remake Learning (2015) Remake Learning Playbook. Available at: [www.remakelearning.org/playbook](http://www.remakelearning.org/playbook).

National anchors ensure learning and innovation is shared between participating cities, build and curate evidence for national audiences, and create links to national resources and decision-makers.

**What this can look like in practice:** An anchor institution in a participating city fosters a culture of open collaboration by creating free physical and online spaces that allow for network members to get together informally to share insights on designing and badging activities that make best use of the CofL platform. A local university and college are commissioned to work together to help capture and disseminate learning and evidence. To share and learn with others across the country, they participate regularly in a national knowledge network coordinated by the RSA and Digitalme.



## Platform

A digital technology platform - in the form of a website or mobile app, with links to other portals such as Facebook and LinkedIn - will link together and catalogue the city's activities, digital credentials and opportunities and place them at learners' fingertips. The platform awards **digital open badges** and offers learners roadmaps to access their city's learning activities and opportunities through **learning pathways**.

**Digital open badges** are micro-credentials that provide a visual representation of an achievement. Badges can be awarded for a range of both formal and informal achievements, from participation and attendance, through to demonstration of (or proficiency in) particular skills, behaviours or dispositions, as well as formal achievements such as degrees or certificates. By recognising latent skills and learning that is rarely captured formally, they provide a more holistic picture of people's abilities and talents.

Open badges contain verifiable (ie evidenced) 'meta-data' that includes information such as the activity the learner undertook to receive the badge, the evidence that supports their achievement, who issued the badge and how it was verified. This allows digital badges to be developed for a range of purposes, and for stakeholders (colleges, employers, learning organisations etc) to be able to discern their value based on the evidence underpinning them. Because they are based on open badge standards, they can be developed openly; combined with other badges to form portfolios; and transferred between different contexts and institutions, so that badges from a coding club, for example, can be recognised in university, college or job applications. Digital badges are especially valuable when they are linked together through learning pathways.

**Learning pathways** are the progression routes that learners take to pursue their interests, develop their skills and discover new opportunities. Pathways consist of a range of 'badged' experiences that learners complete in order to unlock an opportunity (such as a job interview, apprenticeship or internship). They help build learner motivation and confidence by 'gamifying' learning engagement and progression, helping them uncover and articulate the skills that they have, and providing them with the tools and guidance to progress further.

There are two key types of pathway:

**Interest-driven pathways** allow learners to find their own way based on the passions and interests that they have. Deep learning in the platform can suggest activities that can fill in their skill gaps, or further develop existing skills, including through formal education or training. Mentors and peers can also help recommend activities that learners may want to take to strengthen their personal learning pathways.

**Destination-driven pathways** are pre-defined routes designed by, for example, learning providers and employers. They will typically be more linear and structured, and create links between informal learning and formal opportunities in education and the labour market. They can help ensure CofL is linked to local labour market needs and wider priorities of the city.

**What this can look like in practice:** Digitalme has developed demonstrator prototypes for CofL city partners.

View them at: [www.thersa.org/citiesoflearning](http://www.thersa.org/citiesoflearning).



## Open Badges

Mozilla created Open Badges in 2011 with funding from the MacArthur Foundation and a network of partners committed to developing a new way to recognise learning wherever it happened – in and out of formal education and online. As part of this effort, the Open Badges technical specification which defines what information the badge must represent for both issuers and earners was created and made available free and open source.

Digitalme worked in partnership with Mozilla to launch Open Badges in the UK, developing a network of 120 of early adopters including employers, universities and charities.

Open Badges have gained widespread interest and adoption by policy, technology, and education stakeholders. As a disruptive innovation, adopters are using these digital credentials to reimagine ways to recognise learning beyond formal credentialing systems.

Millions of Open Badges have been awarded to hundreds of thousands of recipients. The Mozilla Backpack alone hosts over 1 million badges on behalf of learners around the globe as of October 2016.

By adopting a single standard for capturing and communicating learning across education and the workplace Open Badges enables learners to build and share a rich picture of all their achievements throughout a life-long learning journey and employers to develop and identify talent in their workforce. The standard protects individuals by ensuring they have control over their learning data and can store and share their credentials across the web.

Major employers, educators, charities and awarding bodies have adapted the standard including O2, Siemens, Barclays, ILM, and the Children's Society have adopted the standard for recognition professional development in the workplace and for developing talent pipelines.

Matthew Taylor's 2017 'Good Work' report commission by UK Prime Minister Theresa May supported Cities of Learning and the use of Open Badges to recognise non-cognitive skills developed across education, employers and the third-sector.

Ongoing management and development of the Open Badge standard is stewarded by IMS Global.

## Design principles for Cities of Learning

The three core features of a CofL - leadership, networks and platform - are supported by a number of key design principles, outlined below:

**Persuasion.** Businesses, communities, networks and institutions become part of the persuasive effort.

**Infrastructure.** The underlying infrastructure should be peer-to-peer, tech enabled and impact focused (and evaluated).

**Openness.** The programme should be easy to engage with, provide a unifying platform and offer multiple and continuous learning opportunities.

**Institutional pluralism.** CofL should work with a diverse range of actors and work with existing structures and institutions wherever possible.

**Co-design.** The initiative should be co-designed between learning institutions, community organisations, employers, cultural organisations and learners themselves.

**Trust building.** Trust can be built through collaboration, engagement and shared feedback to ensure the quality and consistency of digital credentials.

**Developmental.** CofL should inspire a love of learning and open up real civic, work and well-being opportunities.

## A City of Learning skills spine

A 'skills spine' is a foundational component of a CofL approach. It is a framework that articulates the knowledge, skills and character attributes that cities will seek to build as they develop the learning experiences, digital credentials, learning pathways and opportunities available through CofL.

Each city will have a locally tailored dimension of their skills spine, linked to their own priorities, needs and target groups. But the skills spine will also have a universal core and a CofL layer that is shared across participating cities, ensuring local personalisation is complemented by national and global relevance and application.

The structure of the skills spine includes four layers:

**1. Universal core** - the fundamental building blocks of modern learning, contained in the OECD's 2030 Framework. This links knowledge, skills and values to the development of competencies which in turn help people engage with and act in the world.

**2. City of Learning layer** - the capacities and capabilities that characterise what it means to be a learning citizen and a learning place, based on key frameworks from OECD, the World Economic Forum as well as RSA research. This includes knowledge, skills and character attributes that are:

- Interpersonal, social and emotional
- Civic and global

- Creative and entrepreneurial
- Demonstrate ethic of craft and business awareness
- Digital

**3. City-specific layer** - the local learning and skills priorities. This includes key:

- Domains - thematic areas of focus, such as STEM, or health and wellbeing.
- Knowledge and skills - which may be linked to existing frameworks or priorities.
- Dispositions - locally important character and behaviour traits, such as resilience and confidence.

**4. Strategic layer** - the formal local, regional and national priorities and frameworks. Incorporating this layer will help participating cities to create links between informal learning and formal opportunities around work and education.

The skills spine concept has been tested through our prototyping work with city partners, and initial skill spine frameworks can be found in the blueprint documents that accompany this prospectus.

# Working with partner cities

“ *The Cities of Learning approach supports Plymouth’s commitment to developing the city as a place to learn and achieve, providing a vehicle for civic engagement, employability, skills, and talent retention driving economic and cultural growth.* ”

-Simon Wainwright – Plymouth City Council

As an experimental approach built around the design principles identified above, CofL deploys an intensive process of co-design, network building, prototyping, blueprinting and piloting.

The RSA and Digitalme have worked as national anchors, developing the intellectual core of the model, selecting partners, developing and leading programmes of co-design with partner cities, building national profile and helping to create the business case for further inquiry and investment.

We followed two types of local partnership and engagement with participating cities:

- Working in close partnership with anchor organisations that understand the local terrain and can help to convene, coordinate, champion and catalyse engagement and interest. Anchors included Our Future City in Brighton, Plymouth City Council and the Real Ideas Organisation in Plymouth, and the Museum of Science and Industry in Greater Manchester.
- Developing collaboration and co-design networks, working with a committed core of key individuals and organisations as well as a wider group of stakeholders drawn from education (formal and informal), business, culture and arts, policy and the community sector.

The stakeholder engagement and user testing also included focus groups, interviews and a learning festival (in Brighton) with learners themselves.

## Key themes from workshops and focus groups

The engagement with city stakeholders and development of theories of change surfaced a number of overarching themes – including opportunities and challenges – for CofL as it develops in the UK.

### CofL as the basis for a holistic model of place-based change

While recognising the central importance of improving skills and labour market outcomes, participants saw the value of CofL as extending beyond learning and work achievements. CofL – by mobilising and empowering learners and system actors to develop and pursue a joint vision for their place – may also have significant health, cultural and social impacts. When developing theories of change for CofL in their place, all three city partners selected overarching goals and outcomes that included health and wellbeing, civic engagement and active participation.

### The ability to be both passion-driven and open sourced, and destination-driven and quality assured

Engagement with CofL will be driven by learner passions, and it will be open source so that all can engage and develop badges. But the initiative – through skills spines that respond to local needs and learning pathways which define the routes that learners can take to access formal opportunities – will be able to harness learner passions and direct them towards certain paths. These pathways – and the badges that underpin them – can be quality assured so that they have currency with employers and educational institutions.

### Universal, but reaching key target groups

A central challenge will be ensuring that CofL is universal – without the ‘stigma’ that tends to be attached to initiatives for disadvantaged communities – but also able to engage and benefit those that need it most, in order to close opportunity gaps. City stakeholders explored approaches to programme design and outreach that may help to achieve this.

### Connected and peer-based learning

City stakeholders, including young people, emphasised the importance of CofL as a platform for peer-based learning. Social norms around learning and peer support can be key drivers of learning engagement. For CofL this may mean building social exchange into the platform, for example by making all badges shareable and transferrable, and by credentialing peer mentors.

A fuller synthesis of our city engagement can be found on [www.thersa.org/citiesoflearning](http://www.thersa.org/citiesoflearning).

The first phase of the programme involved **prototyping** (typically lasting up to six months), with three key components:

**A research programme** that provides a knowledge and evidence backbone for CofL. This includes literature and evidence reviews on place-based learning models and their impact; understanding the links between formal, non-formal and informal learning; and identifying the ‘skills spine’ that underpins CofL initiatives. A research report will be published in late 2017.

**Co-designing city blueprints.** Convening a wide range of stakeholders and running workshops, focus groups and user testing sessions to develop bespoke CofL programme blueprints and theories of change related to locally identified economic, social, civic and cultural needs. Go to [www.thersa.org/citiesoflearning](http://www.thersa.org/citiesoflearning) to access the blueprints developed in Brighton, Plymouth and Greater Manchester.

**Digital demonstrations and technical specifications for the platform.** The platform specification and design are based on open badge standards, and structured around learning and skills pathways drawn from individual cities’ blueprints. You can find demonstrators for partner cities in the current phase at [www.thersa.org/citiesoflearning](http://www.thersa.org/citiesoflearning).

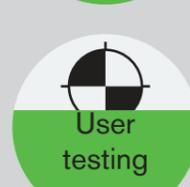
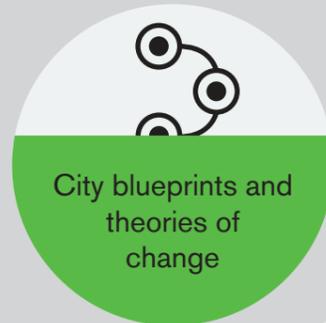
Following successful prototyping, cities with interest and capacity to further develop their CofL model are invited to participate in **pilots** lasting 18-24 months. The pilots will be designed to robustly test the key hypotheses and principles of the CofL approach, as well as investigating how it might be implemented and scaled.

## The project process

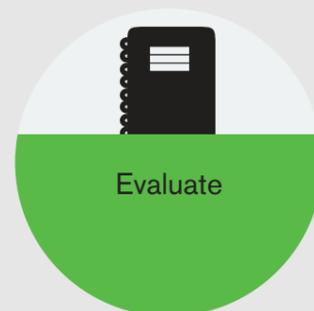
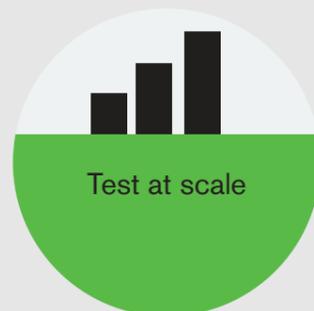
### Discovery



### Prototyping (6 months)



### Piloting (1.5-2 years)



## The value proposition

CofL has the potential to unlock significant benefits for cities, learners, and employers.

**For places and learning organisations this includes:**

- Providing support in widening participation and inclusion in learning.
- Providing an effective platform to forge networks, increase collaboration and achieve collective impact.
- Creating stronger and more coherent links between formal, non-formal and informal learning.
- Tangibly linking learning to wider priorities such as economic development, civic engagement and health and wellbeing.
- Enhancing the visibility and accessibility of existing programmes.
- Potentially reducing duplication and silo working, making programmes more coherent, holistic and complementary.
- Stimulating learner motivation and participation through new learning and 'credentialisation' models.
- Harnessing the tech platform as an effective careers advice and guidance tool, influencing the choices and progression routes of learners.
- Generating new insight through rich data generated by the platform.
- Developing connections to national and global networks on city-led Learning, allowing a community of cities to work and learn together.

**For learners:**

- Significantly increasing access to a wide range of opportunities. Previous RSA research has found that more than half of 18-24 year olds wanted more opportunities to access education and support, or lacked the motivation to engage with learning opportunities.
- Getting recognition for skills and capabilities that aren't recognised by formal assessment.
- Exploring new learning and life experiences and increase opportunities to pursue passions.
- Getting the support, guidance and skills needed to progress through education and work.
- Unlocking tangible opportunities through personalised pathways, with links to networks, mentors and peers.

**For employers:**

- Benefiting from greater work readiness and employability.
- Accessing opportunities to better define local skills and learning pathways.
- Possibilities to think innovatively about recruitment, progression and workforce development.
- Building talent pipelines by using digital badges to define skills and attributes that they need and offering opportunities to learners from schools, colleges and universities that are part of the CofL platform.
- Enabling an earlier and more effective engagement with schools and young people.

# Engage with us

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Our aim is for programme pilot(s) to begin in the second half of 2018. We are keen to further develop our approach and would invite constructive challenge and engagement. We are especially interested in:

**Cities:** To explore our theory of change and express interest in engaging with the CofL initiative.

**National partners:** To join us in moving from prototype and blueprints to pilots.

**Wider stakeholders:** We would love to hear from a range of voices, including business, employers and unions, educators, learners, learning platforms and providers, voluntary and cultural organisations, and public services. Join our knowledge and learning network as the CofL concept develops.

To get in touch and share your reflections, please contact Anthony Painter, Director of RSA Action and Research Centre, at:

[Anthony.Painter@rsa.org.uk](mailto:Anthony.Painter@rsa.org.uk).

## Supported by



## About the RSA

The RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) believes that everyone should have the freedom and power to turn their ideas into reality – we call this the Power to Create. Through our ideas, research and 29,000-strong Fellowship, we seek to realise a society where creative power is distributed, where concentrations of power are confronted, and where creative values are nurtured.

## About Digitalme

Digitalme, A City & Guilds Group Business, offers digital credentialing services to help organisations and individuals realise their potential by making all skills visible. Digitalme worked in partnership with Mozilla to launch Open Badges in the UK developing a network of 120 of early adopters and continues to work with employers, universities and charities across the UK and beyond.



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