Isle of Man Chamber of Commerce

DISCUSSION PAPER FOR CHAMBER MEMBERS

A Learning Island

Human Capability as Economic Infrastructure

A vision for a future-ready learning ecosystem for the Isle of Man

ISLE OF MAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

For discussion and co-creation – November 2026

THE CENTRAL PROPOSITION

A world-class learning system is economic infrastructure.

1. The proposition

The Isle of Man's future prosperity will depend not only on the businesses we attract or the sectors we grow, but on the capabilities of the people who live, learn and work here.

Education and learning are therefore more than public services. They are part of the Island's economic infrastructure - alongside housing, transport, digital connectivity, energy, regulation and the wider conditions that allow people and enterprise to flourish.

A strong learning system influences whether businesses can recruit and develop the people they need; whether young people can see ambitious futures for themselves here; whether skilled people and their families choose to relocate; whether entrepreneurs see the Isle of Man as somewhere to build both a business and a life; and whether people already here can keep adapting as technology and work change.

THE QUESTION IS BIGGER THAN "HOW SHOULD WE IMPROVE EDUCATION?"

What learning system will the Isle of Man need if we want our people and our economy to flourish over the next 10-20 years?

2. Why this matters to the economy

Chamber's Future of the Economy work already identifies people as one of the Island's greatest economic assets. Members report recruitment and skills shortages across sectors, want education and training to respond more quickly to changing economic needs, and increasingly value adaptability, curiosity, communication, problem-solving and AI fluency alongside technical skills.

The challenge is no longer simply to fill today's vacancies. It is to create a talent ecosystem capable of anticipating change, developing people continuously and making the Isle of Man an attractive place for capable people to build their lives.

Learning as part of the Island's competitive advantage

- **Develop our own people.** Every young person should build strong foundations in knowledge, literacy and numeracy while also learning to think, communicate, collaborate, create, exercise judgement, use AI intelligently and continue learning.
- **Attract skilled people and families.** For people considering relocation, the learning proposition matters. They need confidence that their children will have excellent opportunities, that partners can continue to develop careers, and that the whole family can grow here.
- **Retain and reconnect Manx talent.** Young people should be able to leave the Island to learn, work and explore without feeling that returning means narrowing their horizons. The Island should offer visible routes back into ambitious work, enterprise and further learning.

- **Create fertile soil for entrepreneurs.** Founders are also parents, partners, employers and learners. A place that combines excellent education, lifelong development, entrepreneurial learning, talent pipelines and quality of life is more attractive to people who create businesses.
- **Increase workforce participation and mobility.** Accessible childcare, flexible learning, reskilling and modular provision can make it easier for people to enter, return to or move within the workforce.
- **Build economic resilience.** As AI changes tasks, occupations and entry routes, the Island needs people who can learn, unlearn, transition and create new value rather than depend on one qualification or one occupational identity for life.
- **Make learning affordable and accessible.** Participation depends on more than the availability of a course. Fees, living costs, time away from work, childcare and the cost of providing placements can all prevent people and organisations from taking part. A Learning Island should examine those practical barriers, particularly for young residents, career changers, smaller employers and charities.

3. Our ambition: an Island that learns throughout life

We envisage a learning system extending from early childhood through school, further and higher education, employment, entrepreneurship, career transition and later life.

Not separate institutions. Not education on one side and employers on the other.

Instead: one connected Island learning ecosystem involving schools, UCM, employers, universities, training providers, Government, communities, families and learners themselves.

The system should also draw on what makes the Isle of Man distinctive: its culture, language, communities, Biosphere identity and natural environment. Responsible global citizenship, inclusion, sustainability and ethical enterprise belong alongside economic opportunity. These are assets for belonging, reputation and attracting people who want to build a life here.

The economic promise

To a business	Come here because you can find, grow and continually develop capable people.
To a skilled professional	Your children can receive an education designed for the world they are entering, not simply the world their parents entered.
To a partner or career returner	Relocating here does not have to pause your development. You can retrain, reskill and progress throughout life.
To an entrepreneur	You can build a business and a family here, access talent, connect with learning providers and contribute directly to developing future capability.
To someone whose work is changing	The learning system is not finished with you because you left school twenty years ago.

4. Six commitments for a Learning Island

1

Build strong human foundations

Literacy, numeracy, knowledge and disciplinary understanding remain essential. Alongside them, learning should deliberately develop curiosity, independent thought, critical thinking, judgement, creativity, communication, collaboration, resilience, agency and the ability to learn. In a world where information and machine-generated output are abundant, deep human capability becomes more, not less, important.

2

Develop people for a Human + AI economy

AI literacy should become a core capability, but the objective is not simply to make tasks faster. Learning must distinguish between what should be built inside the human, what AI can extend, and what the human must ultimately understand, judge and own. Learners need both retained human capability and the ability to work intelligently with AI.

3

Connect learning with the real world

Young people should encounter work, enterprise, employers, technology and real problems throughout their learning journey - not only through a short placement immediately before leaving school. Applied projects, mentoring, job shadowing, workplace challenges, apprenticeships, entrepreneurship and community problem-solving can make learning more meaningful while exposing learners to the breadth of opportunity on and beyond the Island.

4

Create multiple high-quality pathways

University remains an important route, but it should not be the sole definition of success. Apprenticeships, degree apprenticeships, technical excellence, entrepreneurship, professional qualifications, creative careers, public service and direct employment should be visible and respected pathways. UCM can be central to a more flexible Island offer, using modular provision, work-integrated learning and external partnerships.

5

Make lifelong learning normal

The old sequence - educate first, work afterwards - is increasingly unrealistic. People will need to learn, work, relearn and transition repeatedly. The Island should make it straightforward to return for short courses, technical retraining, professional development, leadership, AI capability, entrepreneurship or a new career pathway.

That promise must include people changing direction in mid-career and older people who want to remain economically active, contribute their experience or mentor others. Support and funding arrangements should be reviewed against real transition journeys, including routes into shortage occupations. One member described a locally educated trainee teacher facing course and living costs; this is a useful case to investigate, not evidence on its own of a system-wide funding failure.

6

Turn the education estate into learning infrastructure

Schools, UCM and other publicly funded facilities are significant community assets. Subject to safeguarding, staffing, demand and affordability, the Island should explore how appropriate facilities can support children during the school day and families, employers and communities beyond it - including wraparound care, adult learning, digital learning, employer programmes, enterprise and community activity.

5. A new principle for learning in the AI era

DEVELOP THE HUMAN. EXTEND WITH AI.

Never outsource the capability you are trying to develop.

AI creates a new educational possibility and a new risk: the quality of an output can rise while the underlying capability of the person producing it does not. The learning system therefore needs to judge technology not only by speed, convenience or the quality of the finished product, but by what happens to the learner.

MIT Media Lab research on LLM-assisted essay writing found differences in neural connectivity, recall and ownership between participants writing with an LLM, using search, or working without tools. The study was relatively small and should not be treated as proof that AI is inherently harmful to learning. It does, however, strengthen the case for deliberately designing how and when AI is used.

MIT's wider Advancing Humans with AI programme is exploring systems that support critical thinking, reasoning, agency and learning rather than simply delivering passive answers. That distinction should be central to an Isle of Man learning strategy.

Responsible AI use also requires continuous professional development for educators and employees: practical AI literacy, data protection, transparency, bias awareness, verification, human judgement and clear accountability. Professional learning should evolve as the tools and evidence change.

The learning design test

- What capability are we trying to build in the human?
- Where is productive cognitive effort necessary for learning?
- What can AI explain, personalise, challenge, simulate or extend?
- What must the learner still be able to remember, explain, question, create or do independently?
- What should the learner be able to accomplish with AI that they could not accomplish alone?
- What decisions, judgement, meaning and consequences must remain human-owned?

A practical learning sequence

Stage	Mode	Purpose
BUILD	**Human first**	Think, struggle, remember, imagine and attempt. Build the underlying capability before acceleration.
STRETCH	**Human + AI**	Use AI to explain, question, challenge, adapt, simulate and open possibilities beyond the learner's current reach.
TEST	**Human alone**	Establish what has genuinely been retained and what the learner can now know, explain, create or do independently.
CO-CREATE	**Human + AI**	Combine human context, originality and judgement with AI capability to create stronger possibilities.
OWN	**Human**	Evaluate, decide, act and accept responsibility for the outcome and its consequences.

6. Business is not a customer of the learning system. It is a partner in it.

This is where Chamber's role becomes more than advocacy.

If employers want a learning system that understands the economy, develops future capability and gives young people meaningful exposure to work, business must be prepared to contribute more than a list of skills shortages.

The relationship should be reciprocal. Educators should not be expected to predict every future occupation or design learning around today's vacancy list. Equally, employers should not wait at the end of the pipeline and complain that people arrive without the experience, behaviours or capabilities they need.

A genuine learning ecosystem asks business to become part of the learning infrastructure.

What business can contribute

- **Real problems, not invented exercises.** Offer age-appropriate live challenges drawn from business, public service and community life so learners practise research, teamwork, judgement, communication, design and problem-solving on something that matters.
- **Meaningful experience of work.** Move beyond a single week of observation. Create short encounters, project days, job shadowing, placements, paid opportunities, apprenticeships and repeated exposure to different workplaces across the learner journey.
- **People as mentors and contributors.** Enable employees, founders, technicians, professionals and leaders to mentor, speak, coach, demonstrate work and give feedback. Young people need access to a much wider range of possible futures than any school can provide alone.
- **Entrepreneurship and enterprise.** Give learners opportunities to identify problems, test ideas, understand customers, work with money, pitch, build, sell and learn from failure. Employers and entrepreneurs can make enterprise real rather than theoretical.
- **Home-grown research and innovation.** Invite learners, employers, universities and community organisations to investigate questions arising from the Island itself - its businesses, environment, culture and social needs - and turn good research into locally developed ideas, products, services and enterprises. Research partnerships should complement, not replace, the attraction of external investment and expertise.
- **Current intelligence about changing work.** Share emerging capability needs, technology adoption, changing tasks and hard-to-fill roles through a regular employer intelligence loop. This should inform learning without reducing education to short-term workforce planning.
- **Teacher and educator exposure to industry.** Offer structured industry insight, placements and exchanges so educators can see how work, technology and organisations are changing and bring that understanding back into learning design.
- **Equipment, environments and expertise.** Where appropriate, share specialist equipment, facilities, datasets, software, demonstrations and technical expertise that would be inefficient for every school to replicate.
- **Routes into opportunity.** Build clear pathways from learning into apprenticeships, employment, internships, further study and entrepreneurship. A learner should be able to see where capability can take them.
- **Time and leadership.** Senior business leaders should participate in the system, not delegate the relationship entirely to HR or corporate social responsibility. Talent development is an economic issue and a leadership issue.
- **Evidence and accountability.** Provide feedback on what is working: quality of applicants, transition into work, capability gaps, retention, progression and the usefulness of pathways. Business should be prepared to be measured on its own contribution too.

A possible Chamber compact with education

Chamber could explore an Employer Learning Compact: a voluntary commitment through which participating businesses contribute practical opportunities to the Island learning ecosystem. The aim would not be bureaucracy or a new accreditation scheme, but a visible pool of real-world learning capacity that schools, UCM and providers can draw upon.

- one or more meaningful learner projects or challenges each year;
- workplace encounters, placements, shadowing or apprenticeship opportunities appropriate to the business;
- employees willing to mentor, demonstrate expertise or support learning;
- participation in an employer intelligence loop on emerging skills and task change;
- where feasible, opportunities for educator industry exposure;
- feedback on transitions, capability and what learners need next.

For small businesses, contribution must be simple and proportionate. Chamber can play a valuable brokerage role: aggregating opportunities, reducing duplication, helping businesses understand safeguarding and practical requirements, and making it easier to say yes.

Support is a condition of participation, not an afterthought. Employers need a named point of contact, clear descriptions of opportunities, straightforward safeguarding and insurance guidance, manageable lead times, templates and help matching opportunities to learners. For small businesses and charities, the time and cost of supervision, releasing staff and supporting placements must be recognised; proportionate financial or shared-service support may need testing rather than assuming every employer can contribute on the same basis.

Build on what exists. UCM's WorkReady Partnership has been highlighted by members as a practical starting point for employer engagement and meaningful placements. Chamber should explore how an Employer Learning Compact could complement WorkReady and other established school, UCM, employer and community initiatives, rather than create a parallel programme. The first task is to map current offers, identify gaps and agree how referrals and information can connect.

7. A learning journey for life

- **Early years.** Play, language, relationships, movement, curiosity, creativity, confidence and strong foundations. Accessible childcare and early years provision also support parents' economic participation.
- **School years.** Strong knowledge and fundamentals alongside deliberate development of thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, digital and AI fluency, financial literacy, enterprise, wellbeing and real-world application.
- **14-19 pathways.** Greater connection with employers, technical and academic pathways, meaningful work experience, apprenticeships, enterprise and visible routes into future sectors and opportunities.
- **Higher and further learning.** A distinctive UCM and Island offer: flexible, applied, modular and connected to employers and high-quality external partners. Educate where we can; partner where we should; lead where the Island has genuine advantage.
- **Working life.** Easy access to modular upskilling, reskilling, leadership, AI capability and career transition, designed around people who are already working and around changing employer need.
- **Later life and community.** Learning as part of healthy, connected communities, allowing people to keep contributing knowledge, experience, mentoring and civic value.

8. What should success look like?

A future learning system should not be judged only by examination results, course completions or the number of people entering university. Those remain useful measures, but they do not describe the whole system.

- strong literacy, numeracy, knowledge and academic attainment;
- retained human capability: what learners can understand, explain, reason and do without AI;
- augmented capability: what learners can accomplish intelligently with AI;
- learner agency, curiosity, confidence and ability to learn;
- participation in real-world projects, work experience, enterprise and mentoring;
- successful transitions into further learning, employment, apprenticeships and entrepreneurship;
- employer ability to recruit, retain and develop people;
- adult participation in reskilling and lifelong learning;
- return and retention of Manx talent;
- the role of education and learning in attracting families, skilled workers and entrepreneurs;
- workforce participation and progression;
- employer contribution to the learning ecosystem.

9. How we could begin: small, evidence-led and Island-scale

This paper is a vision, not a prescription for DESC or a blueprint for reorganising schools. The Isle of Man's size gives us the opportunity to test ideas at manageable scale, measure them properly, adapt quickly and expand what works.

Initial member feedback supports the broad direction while highlighting an essential delivery test: who helps people and businesses take part, how existing initiatives connect and who coordinates the work? Three responses provide useful early perspectives, not a representative endorsement or a commitment by employers to participate.

> **Start small. Measure. Learn. Adapt. Scale.**

- **Agree the shared outcome.** Co-create a clear Island learning-system vision across education, employers, learners, parents, UCM, Government and communities.
- **Map the current system before adding anything new.** With UCM, DESC, schools, training providers, charities and employers, identify existing work-related learning, placements, adult learning, support and advice - including UCM's WorkReady Partnership - and where learners or employers encounter gaps, duplication or unclear routes in.

- **Agree a light-touch coordinating function.** Explore whether Chamber and existing education partners can jointly provide a clear front door for employer offers and learner opportunities, with named operational ownership, referral routes, safeguarding responsibilities and simple reporting. This should be a defined function within existing arrangements where possible, not an automatic case for a new body.
- **Test access and affordability alongside each pilot.** Record the costs to learners and employers - course fees, living expenses, travel, staff release, supervision and administration - and investigate targeted support, shared provision or co-funding where a genuine barrier is demonstrated. Compare options before making funding commitments.
- **Create the intelligence loop.** Establish a light-touch, recurring mechanism through Chamber for employers to identify changing tasks, capability needs and emerging opportunities.
- **Launch an Employer Learning Compact pilot.** Recruit a first cohort of businesses prepared to offer projects, people, places and pathways, with Chamber brokering access and reducing friction.
- **Test 3-5 practical learning pilots.** For example: employer challenge projects; expanded work exposure; educator industry placements; an AI learning protocol; modular adult reskilling; or a regional learning-hub pilot.
- **Develop an AI learning protocol.** Define when learners should work unaided, when AI should tutor or challenge, when human + AI co-creation is appropriate, and how retained capability will be checked.
- **Measure what matters.** Track learning, transition, employer and economic outcomes from the outset. Stop what does not work; scale what does.
- **Measure participation as well as ambition.** Track the number and range of employers taking part, especially smaller firms and charities; learner take-up and completion; unmet demand; practical costs; time to arrange a placement; educator participation; and the proportion of offers that become sustained opportunities. Employer enthusiasm should be distinguished from actual offers and delivered activity.

Closing proposition

> **The Isle of Man does not need to become a larger education system. It needs to become a more connected learning system.**

One that develops strong human capability, uses AI intelligently, connects learning with life and work, gives people multiple routes to grow, and makes continuous learning part of what it means to live and work here.

If we can create that, learning becomes more than preparation for the economy. It becomes part of the fertile soil from which the Island's future economy, communities and opportunities can grow.

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Isle of Man Chamber of Commerce (2026). Barriers to Business and the Route to Yes.

Identifies education, childcare and lifelong learning as part of the essential conditions for growth, with links to recruitment, workforce participation, retention and regional learning hubs.

Department of Education, Sport and Culture (2024/25). An Island Campus: A Research Paper.

Explores the Island's higher-education offer, population and labour-market challenges, UCM, external university partnerships and the potential economic contribution of an Island campus.

Manx Technology Group (2024). AI and Workforce Insights from Isle of Man Job Listings.

An exploratory analysis of Isle of Man vacancy data, digital-skill demand and potential exposure to AI and automation. Its stated limitations mean it should be treated as a discussion stimulus rather than a definitive labour-market forecast.

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A 54-participant study (18 in a fourth crossover session) comparing LLM, search-engine and brain-only essay writing, examining neural connectivity, recall, authorship and behavioural outcomes. The study is important but limited in scale and task, so this paper uses it as a design signal rather than a universal causal claim.

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