

National Extension College launches free online learning challenge for anyone who wants to learn

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Online and distance learning provider the National Extension College (NEC) is giving people the chance to improve their knowledge and skills with its **2014 Learning Challenge**. Launched in time for this year's Adult Learners' Week, which begins on 14 June, and continuing until The Campaign for Learning's in October, the college is challenging people to learn something new. Visitors to <https://www.nec.ac.uk/content/learning-challenge-2014> can sign up for free online courses covering science, the humanities and skills for work.

One course is being released in each month of the challenge: Personal Development Planning, which is available now; Critical Thinking later this month; Cognitive Theory in July; Childcare in August; Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar in September; and Biology in October. Each course is a self-contained extract from a full NEC course and includes activities and self-assessments.

NEC, the UK's only national not-for-profit provider of GCSEs, A levels and vocational courses, inaugurated the annual learning challenge last year to celebrate its 50th anniversary. Between May and October, over 2,000 people took part, the majority newcomers to NEC. Between them they downloaded more than 5,000 courses. Hundreds of people went on to enrol on an NEC course.

For anyone serious about their employability, learning throughout adult life is essential. In just six years time, there will be two million more highly skilled jobs on offer than there are now, and hundreds of thousands of people are likely to be employed in new jobs such as those in the caring, leisure and other service sectors, according to research carried out by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills.

These predicted changes mean that most people of working age will need to update their skills to be attractive to potential employers. Adults in the UK are reluctant to learn beyond the age of compulsory education, however, with only 38% having done any learning over the last three years (NIACE Adult Learning Participation Survey 2013). NEC's 2014 Learning Challenge offers an easy way for people to rediscover their appetite for learning and find out what interests them most.

Ros Morpeth, NEC Chief Executive and the Times Educational Supplement's Further Education Leader of the Year 2014, said: 'NEC's learning challenge is inspired by our founder Michael Young's belief that everyone, regardless of their qualifications and previous experience of education, should have the opportunity to carry on learning throughout their lives. He could not have foreseen in 1963 how extensively the world of work would change over the succeeding 50 years. NEC's 2014 Learning Challenge is for everyone with access to the internet who wants to brush up their skills for work or delve into a subject that has always fascinated them.'

Sir Charlie Mayfield, Chairman of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills and Chairman of the John Lewis Partnership, said: 'The demand for skills which people can take with them as they move careers and shift across sectors is growing. Project-based employment is becoming increasingly common, making organising, marketing, contract negotiation and project management highly sought after. That's why it's important for people to work on developing their skills and to take charge of managing what they have to offer employers. These free courses from the NEC are an excellent start.'

Keep up with the 2014 Learning Challenge on Twitter [#learningchallenge2014](#)

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