



# COUNTRY STUDY

## UNITED KINGDOM

# Country Monitoring Report

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### Recommendations

- Address skills mismatches by increasing employers' engagement in the delivery of apprenticeships. Take action to further reduce the number of young people with low basic skills;
- Further improve the availability of affordable, high-quality, full-time childcare;
- Develop a UK-wide approach to the validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- Improve the transition from VET to higher education and reduce the gap between them;
- Take action in order to fight the discrimination of education systems towards vulnerable groups and ensure that employers are more inclusive.





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#### 1. Promoting access and participation in LLL

The UK has a relatively high percentage of adults participating in lifelong learning (16.1 % compared to an EU average of 10.5 %). The percentage of older adults, people with low levels of education and unemployed people who participate in lifelong learning is higher in the UK than the EU average<sup>1</sup>. However, it appears that there is a negative trend in adult participation in LLL in the UK, as the Skills

<sup>1</sup> European Commission (2014). *Education and Training Monitoring Report – The United Kingdom*.

Funding Agency confirms that 1.3 million fewer people participated in further education in 2014 compared to 2010. In 2014/2015, participation in government funded adult further education fell by 10.8 % compared to 2013/14.

With regards to on-the-job-training, the UK also presents a higher percentage of employees in its participation (30 % compared with the EU average of 21 %) but a lower percentage of employees participating in continuous vocational training courses (31 % compared to 38 % across the EU)<sup>2</sup>.

It is also interesting to note that those aged 25+ studying at higher level qualifications for employment access learner loans rather than grants. This does and will continue to put off some potential learners, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

As a matter of fact, the number of first-year students studying part time in 2014-15 fell by 6% on the previous year, according to the Higher Education Statistics Agency, whereas the number of part-time first years has fallen by 38% in five years - from more than 428,000 in 2010-11 to below 266,000 last year. Decline could be down to student funding after 2012 where in some cases tuition fees have tripled. The government continues to stress how the rise in fees has not affected full-time student numbers whilst ignoring the part time student statistics. Part-time students are hit doubly hard as they cannot access maintenance loans in England like their full-time counterparts. Students also cannot access tuition fee loans if they wish to study a qualification that is at the same level or lower than what they already obtained. A Higher Education Policy Institute study suggested two-thirds of would-be part-time students did not qualify for tuition fee loans, largely because they

<sup>2</sup> European Commission (2014). *Education and Training Monitoring Report – The United Kingdom*.



already had a degree. These combination of monetary barriers reduce the opportunity for lifelong learning and social mobility.

Nevertheless, in the November 2015 spending review, the Adult Skills Budget was protected and was not diminished. This can be considered as a positive development during a period of significant budget cuts in the UK.

## 2. Vocational Education and Training

Criticism has been levied, as the vocational qualifications system remains relatively complex in the UK.

The British apprenticeships, especially those delivered 'in house' by organisations are critically acclaimed because many qualifications are too context specific and may not prepare people for another role in a different organisation. They are too context specific and fail to focus enough on broader education (such as English and Mathematics), thus not providing transferable and transversal skills for the overall workplace. Moreover, the transition from vocational education to higher education still needs clear amelioration and the gap between them needs to be reduced. In contrast with the wider EU trend, initial vocational education and training graduates in the UK have an employment rate that is 2.4 percentage points lower than their counterparts from general education, and the employment advantage for this kind of qualifications compared with lower-level qualifications is less than in other EU countries<sup>3</sup>.

Furthermore, apprenticeships salaries are still relatively low, particularly for those aged under 18. Apprentices aged 16 to 18 years old are more likely to be underpaid, with 24 per cent receiving lower

<sup>3</sup> European Commission (2015). *Commission Staff Working Document, Country Report The United Kingdom 2015 Including an In-Depth Review on the prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances*.

pay than their legal entitlement. As a matter of fact every seventh apprentice is not receiving the minimum wage they are entitled to, despite the fact that the rates for apprentices are already substantially lower than the main adult rate. Additionally, a two tier system still exists placing 'academic education' and 'vocational education' on different ends of the spectrum. These divisions should be removed.

The UK introduced an apprenticeship levy of 0.5 % in the November 2015 spending review, which will be executed as of April 2017. The purpose of the new all-industry Levy is to encourage larger firms, in particular, to take on more apprentices and increase their contribution to staff training.

## 3. Validation of NFIL

There are five different qualifications frameworks currently operating in the UK. Scotland has a single comprehensive framework covering all regulated qualifications. While the UK has a firmly established set of qualifications frameworks, there is also training which is not part of these frameworks, but is instead certificated by companies, charities and independent training agencies. In August 2014, in advance of the 2014 annual review of the qualifications on offer, the government assessed vocational qualifications that are currently approved for funding in England and identified 174 that need to be further examined for compliance with specifications. Qualifications which focus on the skills needed to research and apply for jobs and those where there is no clear specialisation in a particular sector or job role will no longer be publicly funded. Currently, there is no UK-wide approach to the validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>4</sup>.

## 4. Early-school Leaving

The early school leaving rate has been on a downward trend since 2011 (14.9 % in 2010; 15 % in 2011; 13.5 % in 2012 and 12.4 % in 2013)<sup>5</sup> but remains

<sup>4</sup> European Commission (2014). *Education and Training Monitoring Report – The United Kingdom*.

<sup>5</sup> European Commission (2015). *Commission Staff Working*



slightly above the EU average (12 % in 2013). One of the possible reasons might be the increase of the leaving age from 16 to 17 in 2013, and to 18 in 2015. However data and tracking of learners is patchy. Local authorities and learning organisations are expected to track learner journey however they often do not have sufficient resources to do this. As such the data can be outdated or questionable. Another possible factor that could fight early school leaving would be an increased assessment and testing in the national curriculum. Testing and assessment is considered problematic with at risk early school leavers.

Regarding the rate of four-year-olds in early childhood education and care, it remains stable and is above the EU average (97.3 % compared to an EU average of 93.9 %), despite average monthly childcare fees for younger children being the third highest in the EU<sup>6</sup>.

## 5. NEETs

Overall, the UK has achieved some progress in addressing youth unemployment challenges. However, it appears that employers in the UK are not inclusive and educational systems are discriminating, marginalising vulnerable groups. While men were more likely to be NEET in 2008, the recession has reversed this trend and young women became 15 times more likely to be NEET in 2011. Young people who are of Black Caribbean ethnicity are 1.4 times more likely to be NEET compared to White young people. (21% compared to 15%). Furthermore, disabled young people are exposed to twice higher risk of becoming a NEET (28% compared to 13%). Young parents are also at more risk of becoming NEET and this is twice as likely if they are female and had a child by the age of 19 than if they were male and fathered a child at the same point (69% and 36% respectively).

<sup>6</sup> European Commission (2015). *Commission Staff Working Document, Country Report The United Kingdom 2015 Including an In-Depth Review on the prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances.*

<sup>7</sup> European Commission (2015). *Commission Staff Working Document, Country Report The United Kingdom 2015 Including an In-Depth Review on the prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances.*

It is interesting to note that the UK has not established a Youth Guarantee as outlined in the Council Recommendation, even though it has expressed support for the aims of this initiative and agrees with the broad approach as set out in the Council Recommendation. The UK has continued the implementation of domestic measures such as the Work Programme and the Youth Contract, with a focus on providing apprenticeships and getting people into work<sup>7</sup>.

## 6. Citizenship education

Citizenship education is currently not part of the national curriculum in primary schools, although information is provided and it is encouraged. However, citizenship Education as an A Level<sup>8</sup> is currently under consultation and is likely to be removed. As such for post 16, there won't be a main stream qualification for citizenship. Moreover, the courses refer only very little to the EU.

Citizenship education strongly focuses on British values, partly because of fear of radicalisation in schools. Schools that do not implement and or teach this course risk to be closed down. However, not only British values are being taught, but also European values in general.

## 7. Council recommendations

For the year 2015, the UK is invited to address skills mismatches by increasing employers' engagement in the delivery of apprenticeships as well as to take action to further reduce the number of young people with low basic skills. Moreover, the Council called on the UK to further improve the availability of affordable, high- quality, full-time childcare<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> 'A level' is equal to level 3 in the National Qualification Frameworks. They are being studied over 2 years.

<sup>9</sup> European Council (2015). *Council Recommendation of 14 July 2015 on the 2015 National Reform Programme of the United Kingdom and delivering a Council opinion on the 2015 Convergence Programme of the United Kingdom*





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SOLIDAR, together with our national members and partners, has developed 15 case studies in 2014, presenting innovative, effective, sustainable and tailor made models to promote social inclusion, the social economy and quality job creation by adapting a social investment approach. In their daily work, SOLIDAR members and partners anticipate new or unmet needs of socio-economically vulnerable people and empower them to actively participate in society and to access the labour market.

These case studies gather strong evidence of the social impact of the activities undertaken by our members and partners to help Member States making progress towards the achievement of the social and employment objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the implementation of the Social Investment Package.

SOLIDAR Foundation in cooperation with national members and partners has gathered an examples of national programmes and initiatives that present the innovative and successful approaches that contribute to the process of building inclusive learning societies. The case studies are centred on themes of lifelong learning, civic and citizenship education, the validation of learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning, and NEETs (young people Not in Employment, Education or Training).



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