



# COUNTRY STUDY

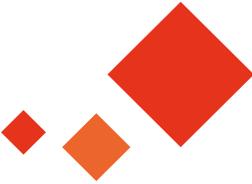


## UNITED KINGDOM

# Country monitoring report 2016

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In the United Kingdom there is 13.4% of young people who are neither in employment, education or training, and about two third of them are an inactive (not even looking for a job). The group of NEETs is composed for 39% out of early school leavers that have a low level of education. Moreover youth with low level of basic skills are as well much more likely to become NEETs. There is a big gender disparity, the NEETs rate for women is 52% higher than for men, and it is mostly due to family reasons. In the UK there is the highest rate of NEET single parents, what is partially resulting from a very high childcare costs. Lastly, there is no difference in likeliness of becoming a NEET between foreign- and native-born students.



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.





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### Promoting access and participation in Lifelong Learning

The UK has a relatively high percentage of adults participating in Lifelong Learning (LLL) (15.7 % compared to an EU average of 10.7 %). In 2014 the UK was a champion among other EU countries with regards to participation in Lifelong Learning by older people, people with low levels of education and unemployed people. However this trend appears to be declining, and impacts learning acquisition of people with disadvantaged background and from groups that are “difficult” to engage in learning. This might be caused by reduced accessibility to courses due to limited financial capacities of people in times of financial severity.

In 2015 many education and learning associations were actively campaigning to sustain budget for adult education that to be reduced. Thanks to efforts of organisations such as SOLIDAR Foundation members from the UK, “£ 1.5 billion was made available to support adult further education outside the costs of apprenticeship training<sup>1</sup>”. The new Adult Education Budget covers actions such as Adult skills budget, community learning and discretionary learner support. The main ambition of this funding is to provide support to most disadvantaged people in the society to progress in learning and having more possibilities to thrive. An important element of the British approach to Lifelong Learning is recognition of informal adult learning to improving people’s health and wellbeing, ability to access digital technologies, cultural development and active citizenship (BIS, 2011).

<sup>1</sup> WEA 2016 Impact Report <http://www.wea.org.uk/file/1292/download?token=7q5kl1pO>

### Vocational Education and Training

In the last years British system of vocational education and training (VET) was severely criticised for its complexity, big level of inequalities in comparison with general education, and preparation to World of Work. The curricula should be adapted to better prepare young people to access labour market and give them a set of transversal skills.

I.e. British apprenticeships, especially those delivered ‘in house’ by organisations are critically acclaimed because many qualifications are too context specific and may not provide young people with transferable skills that would allow them to find themselves in another role in a different organisation. Another challenge faced, is the transition from vocational education to higher education, which still needs clear amelioration and the gap between them needs to be reduced by simplifying the complexity of the professional education routes and increase transparency. Young people should be supported by better career guidance and received information on the possible pathways to employment and learning outcomes of the undertaken courses.

The apprenticeship system is being promoted, however 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% receiving lower 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, and youth receive a decent apprenticeship wage that will not incentivize working poor.



In July 2016 a post-16 skills plan, an ambitious reform of VET was introduced. It recommends amongst other, to structure way how professional education is delivered into thematic clusters of occupations with a respective technical level of qualifications. In England the government aims to expand apprenticeships to three million by 2020, however more efforts should be made to guarantee their quality.

### Validation of NFIL

In the UK there are diverse recognition systems operating in the countries. Currently, there is no UK-wide approach to the validation of learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning (NFIL), solely in England and Northern Ireland learners can benefit from recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning. Scotland has a single comprehensive framework covering all regulated qualifications. There are five different qualifications frameworks currently operating in the UK. While the UK has a firmly established set of qualification frameworks, there is also training which is not part of these frameworks, but is instead certificated by companies (National Vocational Qualification that validates workplace learning), charities and independent training agencies. Currently, recognition of prior learning (RPL) is used with regards to formal and regulated qualifications; in the context of vocational education it may provide access, exemption and awards. The non-regulated learning is being recognised throughout the RARPA (Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement) process that does not lead to an award of any type of certification. The present system does not allow validation of skills developed across the different sectors, and to put them under one umbrella of coordinated approach.

In the last years in the UK there is a strategy to shift the responsibility for validation from national authorities

to learning providers and awarding bodies. Therefore they are in charge of the procedures making the system much more flexible. This means that each validation procedure can be tailored to the needs of a learner.

### Early-school Leaving

The early school leaving (ESL) rate has been on a downward trend since 2011 and in 2015 was at 10.8% level that equals with the EU average of 11%. The UK is the only country that did not set national EU2020 targets for early school leaving.

It is important to acknowledge a good result achieved by the UK in combating early school leaving among foreign-born students that is now at 7.6% level in comparison with EU average of 19%, and lower than the rate of native-born students that is 11.2%. This makes the UK the only EU country where native pupils are more likely to drop out from school than migrant pupils.

### NEETs

In the United Kingdom there is 13.4%<sup>2</sup> of young people who are neither in employment, education or training, and about two third of them are an inactive (not even looking for a job). The group of NEETs is composed for 39% out of early school leavers that have a low level of education. Moreover youth with low level of basic skills are as well much more likely to become NEETs. There is a big gender disparity, the NEETs rate for women is 52% higher than for men, and it is mostly due to family reasons. In the UK there is the highest rate of NEET single parents, what is partially resulting from a very high childcare costs. Lastly, there is no difference in likeliness of becoming a NEET between foreign- and native-born students.

Overall, the UK has achieved some progress in

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef1602en2.pdf>



addressing youth unemployment challenges. However, it appears that employers in the UK are not inclusive and educational systems are discriminating, marginalising vulnerable groups.

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 Recommendations. This is motivated by possible complications related to the national subsidiarity rule. The UK has continued the implementation of already existing domestic measures such as the Work Programme and the Youth Contract, with a focus on providing apprenticeships and getting people into work.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless further improvement of outreach and activation measures to target specific needs of NEETs would be needed.

### Citizenship education

Community engagement, social inclusion, democratic participation, and active citizenship are expected learning outcomes of citizenship education that should be prominently included in the educational policy in the UK. Citizenship education is currently not part of the national curriculum in primary schools, although information is provided and it is encouraged. However, position of citizenship Education as an A Level<sup>4</sup> subject is unclear, and there is an overall lack of a coherent approach to citizenship education in the UK.

The British approach to Citizenship education in a very limited scope referring hardly to EU and Europe and strongly focuses on British values, partially because of the fear of radicalisation in schools. A set of anti-radicalisation policies were introduced to school's such as Prevent Duty.<sup>5</sup> Across all countries in the UK  
<sup>3</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=13663&langId=en>  
<sup>4</sup> A Levels are level 3 and they are being studied over 2 years  
<sup>5</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/439598/prevent-duty-departmental-advice-v6.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/439598/prevent-duty-departmental-advice-v6.pdf)

programs focusing on peace education and conflict resolution, respect, information on ways how social media is used for radicalisation etc. were implemented. Schools that do not implement and or teach this course risk to be closed down. This makes the UK's contribution to the realisation of Paris Declaration.

### Council recommendations

*The United Kingdom's labour market remains dynamic. In 2015, the employment rate (age group 20-64) reached 76.9% while the unemployment rate continued its downward trend, reaching 5.3%. Youth unemployment and rates of young people not in employment, education or training have also further decreased. Nonetheless, there remains scope for improvement in the prospects for inactive, underemployed and low skilled workers. Better labour market progression prospects and clearer routes to upskilling would assist those who find themselves confined to low-wage and/or low hours of work. It would also address the skills shortages that are apparent in some parts of the economy, such as construction. Successful deployment of the resources arising from the apprenticeship levy will require careful attention. Proposals to improve supply in childcare will require timely implementation as the availability and affordability of childcare remain a challenge. Therefore Council has recommended UK to address skills mismatches and provide for skills progression, including by strengthening the quality of apprenticeships. Further improve the availability of affordable, high-quality, full-time childcare.*

[Source, EUR-Lex: [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C\\_.2016.299.01.0012.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2016:299:TOC](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2016.299.01.0012.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2016:299:TOC)]



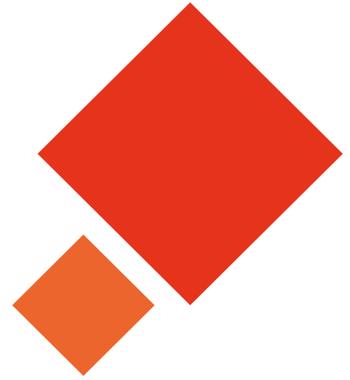
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As part of the Lifelong Learning Watch SOLIDAR Foundation has developed 12 country studies in 2016 covering the status in different Member States when it comes to; Promoting access and participation in Lifelong Learning, Vocational Education and Training, Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (NFIL), Early-school Leaving, NEETs and Citizenship education in reference to 2016 Council's country-specific recommendations.

The SOLIDAR Foundation is the cooperation platform of SOLIDAR; a European network of NGOs working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide. SOLIDAR brings together 60 member organisations based in 25 EU member states and in 6 candidate countries. We work together in Social Affairs, International Cooperation and Lifelong Learning. The Building Learning Societies pillar includes 23 members, covering 18 EU member states.

SOLIDAR Foundation engages through member and partner organisations citizens in EU decision making processes, empowers people through lifelong learning and VET, and voices their concerns to the EU institutions by carrying out active lobbying, project management and coordination, policy monitoring, research and awareness-raising.



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