



ROUTES TO OPPORTUNITY

– Addressing the non-university skills gap in England



UCL Grand Challenge of Justice and Equality
A scoping report prepared by **Aly Colman**

Routes to Opportunity

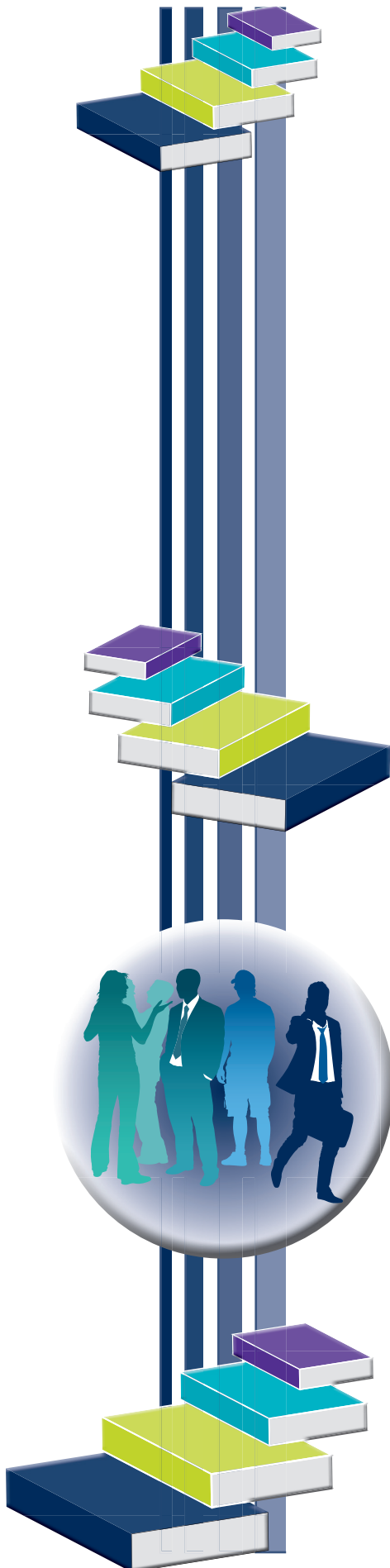
Addressing the non-university skills gap in England

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Executive Summary

The aim of this report is to investigate two problems brought to the attention of UCL's Grand Challenge of Justice and Equality, namely the mid-level skills gap and the difficulties established workers over 25 can face when seeking to upskill or retrain via non-university routes in England. These two problems are interlinked, as expanding opportunities for established workers to upskill and retrain has the potential to contribute to addressing the mid-level skills gap.

The mid-level skills gap is a problem for many employers as they struggle to recruit enough employees with the right skills and/or qualifications. This can leave jobs unfilled and companies unable to expand further. While there are many routes into higher education for the over 25s, it is more difficult for established workers to undertake technical or vocational education to upskill or retrain if they are not supported by their employer or cannot self-fund.

This report is based on a literature review of academic, government, think-tank, media and other sources undertaken by the author.

The report's key findings were:

- The mid-level skills gap in England has been widely documented and is already causing problems for employers as they struggle to recruit workers for medium skilled occupations.
- Over the last decade many measures have been identified to address the mid-level skills gap by enabling easier access to technical and vocational education to upskill or retrain established workers, but insufficient funds, scant implementation and a lack of follow-through have hampered these efforts. The result is that instead of moving forward, progress is actually in reverse.
- Those who would benefit the most from upskilling or retraining, namely low paid workers in unskilled jobs, are often unable to do so because insufficient opportunities and funding are made available to them. This represents a squandering of human potential as well as a missed opportunity to address the mid-level skills gap.
- Even where support and funding is available, for example, Advanced Learner Loans, many potential learners are unaware such support exists.
- There is a pattern of underusing the skills and qualifications of women who work part-time, as well as a perception that many women are content with such a situation; remedying this could be another way to address the mid-level skills gap.



• The welfare system currently only supports part-time students if they are willing to accept full time work should opportunities arise, which can force those individuals to discontinue education to retrain or upskill, and instead take a low-skill low paid job.

• The Brexit vote and the UK's future exit from the European Union is already discouraging skilled EU workers from staying in the UK or moving here to take up the medium skilled jobs employers struggle to fill. While the future situation for EU workers in the UK is currently unknown, it is expected that hiring EU workers will become more difficult for employers, which may exacerbate the situation further, at least in the short to medium term.

• Moves towards devolution offer some cautious optimism accompanied by grave concern. The proposed devolution of skills and the threat of automation provide further concern in addressing skills shortages and the implication of devolution for inequality.

• There is a societal case for economic investment in education and skills, as well as a moral case.

The report's recommendations include:

• The introduction of individual learning credits to provide enhanced funding for adults seeking upskilling or retraining.

• Further expansion of proposed Further Education maintenance loans to include all adult education and training providers and cover NVQ levels 2 and 3.

• Introduction of a career review for all adults aged 25+ to support initiatives designed to tackle the mid-level skills shortages and address the underutilisation of women in low paid, part-time employment, as well as other groups trapped in low paid, low skilled work.

• Development of a contributions based "career development sabbatical" for established workers to receive the equivalent of Job Seekers Allowance for up to six months to enable them to upskill or retrain.

• Exercise caution at each step of the devolution of funding for skills to local areas to ensure greater synergy with local needs while addressing social inequalities.

• Ensure that the skills devolution agenda recognises the greater threat of automation to jobs in some regions.

• Ensure that promises to replace the European Social Fund monies for adult education are sufficient to avoid further cuts.



Introduction

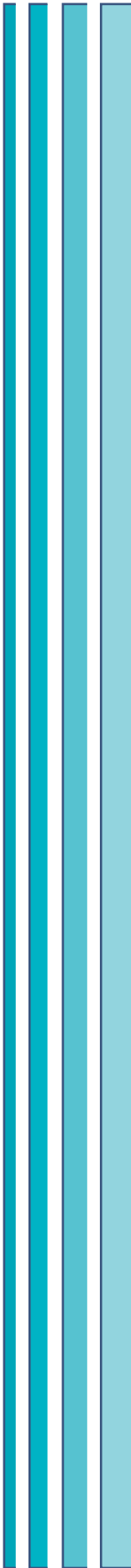
There are many well established routes for mature students entering university including Access to Higher Education courses, part-time study and distance learning. While there remain issues of access and participation relating to contextual factors, for example, class, ethnicity, locality, prior learning and gender (ONS, 2017), student finance is available for mature students. Much of the student finance is loan-based, but does include support towards living costs via maintenance loans, in addition to tuition fee loans.

However, concerns have been raised in recent years that maintenance loans are insufficient to cover rising living costs at university and that this problem is a key driver in less affluent students dropping out of university (Minsky, 2016). The implication of insufficient funds is likely to be more acutely experienced for mature students who may have more significant associated living costs. Many mature students will have financial and other responsibilities and may have to continue to work throughout further study, sometimes accessing part time provision. Between 2010-13 there was a 40% fall in part time undergraduates, caused in part by the removal of government loans for equivalent or lower qualifications (ELQ) (University Alliance, 2014) most likely where an adult is seeking a retraining opportunity.

If, however, we consider non-university based education for those aged over twenty-four¹ who seek to improve their career prospects by undertaking professional or vocational education, the routes are considerably less well established than for university education. Currently, workers in England wanting to undertake professional or vocational education are eligible to apply for an Advanced Learner Loan (ALL). This is a product provided by The Student Loans Company similar to that which serves students in higher education (SLC, 2015). A professional and career development loan (PCDL) from a bank is the main alternative to this. Those undertaking apprenticeships have access to ALLs and PCDLs in addition to their apprentice wage. Generally, these options cover tuition fees alongside some financial support for childcare, travel or course related trips, and those in greatest hardship may be able to access a discretionary Loan Bursary Fund.

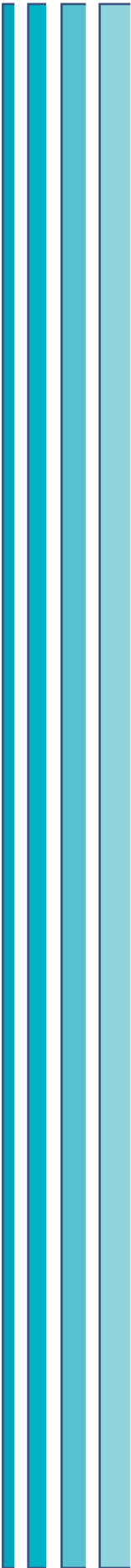

¹For young people aged 18-23, various government funding streams are available for those seeking technical or vocational training, for example funding or part-funding the cost of an apprenticeship.





Maintenance costs for potential students, however, have not, to date, been available. A Department for Education consultation, *Further Education Maintenance Loans* was undertaken in 2016 and found strong support for the introduction of maintenance loans for Further Education (Department for Education, 2016a). In the *Spring Budget of 2017* (HM Treasury, 2017), the government announced a monetary commitment to Further Education maintenance loans from 2019 - 20 for students on technical programmes at level 4 to 6 and support for adults retraining at National Colleges and Institutes of Technology. This provides some optimism regarding scope for adults wanting to retrain as this strategy becomes developed, however the lack of parity that might emerge between different technical education providers has raised concerns (Chowen, 2016, Learning and Work Institute, 2017c). While there have been initiatives in the past designed to support the upskilling or retraining of adults, this report will demonstrate however, that many initiatives are not widely promoted to ensure ease of access to funds and support. Additionally, in the Spring Budget, learning at Level 3 is not likely to attract a maintenance loan. This is a crucial learning level for any adult wanting to retrain and upskill before entering higher level learning or skill acquisition.

It was estimated in 2013 that by 2022 there would be an additional 3.6 million jobs within medium-skilled occupations (HM Treasury, 2015) which represented a “critical need for high numbers of new technical and professional skilled workers to enter the workforce in the coming years” (ibid. p. 24). This ‘critical need’ demonstrates an economic case for societal investment to ensure that workforce demands are met. The Employer Skills Survey for 2015 states that “vacancies and skill-shortage vacancies have increased significantly over the last two years” (UK Commission for Employment and Skills, 2016a, p.17). The construction, finance and manufacturing industries, for example, are most likely to report shortages and more specifically, the category of ‘Skilled Trades’ is most likely to report skill-shortage vacancies (ibid.). As well as the economic case for societal investment, there is also a moral case to provide an opportunity for people from poorer backgrounds to upskill in order to meet the workforce needs, and at the same time receive the benefits that come from more skilled labour, for example, higher income and its concomitant benefits. The need to upskill people to address the 3.6 million job gap has become a central concern across recent policymaking and strategic initiatives, for example, the *Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education* (Department of BIS/DFE, 2016a), the Post-16 Skills Plan (Department for BIS/DFE, 2016b) the Technical and Further Education Bill (Department for Education, 2016b) and the *Institute for Apprenticeships* (Institute for Apprenticeships, 2017).



Recently, in the light of the exit vote in the European Union referendum in June 2016, there is a further factor in addressing skills shortages for employers. As employers still await precise details regarding the EU exit strategy, there has already been a reduction in applications from EU nationals observed by 26% of manufacturers (EEF, 2017) and one in ten employers (11%) recruiting fewer EU nationals since the leave vote (CIPD, 2017). *Power up the workforce* (Deloitte, 2017) acknowledged that 36% of all non-British workers in the UK are considering leaving the UK within the next five years. The authors suggest that this represents 1.2 million UK jobs and recommends investment as crucial to upskill both current and future workers by bringing policymakers, businesses and educators together (ibid. p. 17).

Citing automation and the use of robots as offering scope to address the skills gap, the report acknowledges that the UK is less well placed to advance in this way compared to other European countries (ibid. p.16). This offers further concern to the threat automation may have on future skills shortages. The risk of automation by the early 2030s has been identified as varying from 22% to 39% depending on the geographical area (Future Advocacy, 2017). Training providers are also facing some uncertainty regarding the exit from the EU as the European Social Fund (ESF) which has supported colleges up to over £100 million at its peak in 2014-15 will need to be replaced (AOC website, 2017). In the 2016 Autumn Statement government ministers promised to replace the ESF with the Shared Prosperity Fund (ibid.). Consultation will be forthcoming and the AOC suggest that funds could be more specifically targeted “where economic activity is lower and unemployment is higher to narrow gaps in our society and to make the country work for everyone” (ibid.).

While there is evidence to suggest that the UK faces serious skills shortages in the next five years, this scoping report aims to illustrate how recent education policy and its implementation in England has failed to fully address the needs of those adults aged 24 or over, seeking further education and training beyond traditional university routes. If these needs were met more fully, it is likely that some of the serious skills shortages faced currently and in the future might be addressed. Despite an abundance of policy initiatives to promote adult retraining, there remain serious inequalities relating to socio-economic background, gender, ethnicity, disability etc. alongside regional disparity. Finally, recommendations for strategies that attempt to address these inequalities and expand opportunities are articulated in the conclusion.





Running backwards?

Addressing the skills shortage in England

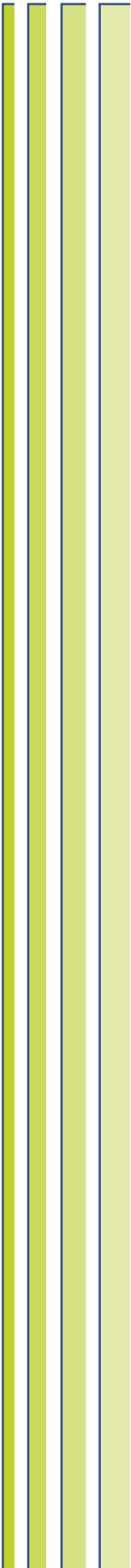

While recognising strengths in the UK, such as a strong higher education system, some initiatives in vocational training, and an increasingly effective and improving school system, the Leitch Review (Leitch, 2006), *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy – World Class Skills*, identified that the UK’s skills were not “world class”. Citing some of the social disparities that threaten to impact the UK’s long term prosperity, for example, high levels of child poverty, poor employment rates for the disadvantaged, regional disparities and relatively high income inequality, the review suggested that “an ambitious vision” for 2020 was required to ensure that the UK did not continue “to run to stand still” (Ibid, p.2).

As we approach 2020, there have been a flurry of skills based education policy activities that relate to Leitch’s vision including, for example, *the Technical and Further Education Bill* (Department for Education, 2016), a Green paper, *Building our Industrial Strategy* (HM Government, 2017), and a reformed Institute for Apprenticeships outlined in the report, *Driving the Quality of Apprenticeships in England* (Institute for Apprentices, 2017b). Rather than being on track to realise Leitch’s ambitious vision in 2020, data suggests that recent policy has resulted in moving backwards, not forwards: the recent *Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education* (Department for BIS/DFE, 2016a) estimated that by 2020, the UK is set to fall in terms of developing intermediate skills to 28th out of 33 OECD countries. At the time of the Leitch Review the UK was placed as 20th of 30 OECD countries (Leitch, 2006).

In this section, first, the implications of the *Leitch Review* in relation to non-university education for adults aged 24 and over will be considered. Discussions will then move onto further reviews and policy initiatives that inform the central issue: adults aged over 24 wanting to gain, or further develop skills in non-university based education and training, and the financial and other implications of seeking to do this.

The Leitch Review was clear that “the best investment we could ever make” (p.2) was to realise the mantra of “economically valuable skills” (p.3) by embedding a culture of learning to promote change “across the skills spectrum” (p.2). This investment would be made by society; state, employers and individuals. There were strong claims from Leitch, for example, “The UK will be able to compete





with the best in the world. Productivity and employment rates will increase. Poverty and inequality will decrease”, yet as this scoping report will demonstrate in the next section, as we approach 2020 we are far from the ambitious vision Leitch offered. The following recommendations were made by Leitch: 95% of adults to have the basic skills of functional literacy and numeracy; more than 90% of the adult population to be qualified to at least Level 2, and of particular importance for this study, a shift in balance of intermediate skills from Level 2 to Level 3; and commitment to exceed 40% of the population being qualified to Level 4 or above.

A new partnership between the Government, employers and individuals was advocated by Leitch that would lead to demand led funding, strengthened employer voice, increased employer engagement and economically valued qualifications. To further embed the culture of learning for all and ensure adults can afford to learn, clear and transparent financial support and greater use of Career Development Loans was recommended. Adult skills funding was to be routed through Train to Gain and Learner Accounts by 2010 and individual skill needs and strengths were to be identified through a full Skills Health Check. Following Leitch’s review, the government’s initiative in 2006, Train to Gain, was scrapped as part of the Coalition government’s comprehensive spending review in 2010. Similarly, the Personal Learner Accounts (PLA) that offered a replacement for the Individual Learner Accounts (ILA) programme that operated between June 2000 and October 2001, have failed to be developed in England. The Learning and Work Institute (2016b) provide a compelling case for Personal Learning Accounts.

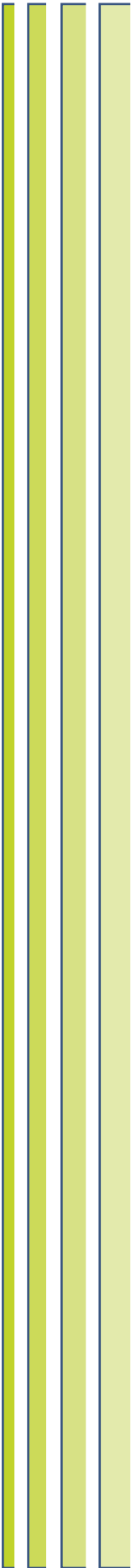

At the mid-way point between 2006 and the deadline to realise the 2020 *Leitch Review goals*, Henderson-Morrow (2013) produced an assessment of the relevance and progress of the goals for learndirect. As the author stated, following a global economic crisis in 2008 – “the first recession in an internet age”, the UK was now a different place seven years on from the Leitch Report. While locating the abandonment of Leitch’s challenging goals by the Coalition government in May 2010, Henderson-Morrow (2013) identified the literacy and numeracy targets for adults and the shift in balance of intermediate skills from Level 2 to Level 3 as remaining a priority for government funding, recognising that employment and skills continued to remain integrated under the Coalition government. An increased role for schools in preparing young people for the workforce, better integration of employment and skills and improved use of technology were also advocated.



Since 2013, education policy has seen a renewed interest in the development of technical, vocational and professional education. Building on Further Education – *New Horizon: Investing in skills for sustainable growth* (2010), the *Review of Vocational Education - the Wolf Report* (Wolf, 2011) and the *Richard Review of Apprenticeships* (Richard, 2012) provided welcome reviews of current practices. *Rigour and Responsiveness* (Department for BIS/DFE, 2013) aimed to address the future skills shortages by becoming more responsive to the need of both employers and individuals while creating rigorous systems to ensure robustness. The reforming of apprenticeships and the creation of traineeships, were two of the six central areas outlined in the report to achieve these aims. This was followed by a *Guide to the Skills System* (Skills Commission, 2017) which included a remit to boost employer engagement, enhance quality and provision and to ensure fair and sustainable funding to address skills development.

More recently, the *Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education* led by Lord Sainsbury (Department for BIS/DFE, 2016a) identified thirty-four recommendations to ensure a more simplified educational system for the skills development required for the twenty first century. The report suggested that by 2020, the UK, as stated earlier (p.4) is set to fall to 28th out of 33 OECD countries in terms of developing intermediate skills, and that technical education qualifications have too often “become divorced from the occupations they should be preparing individuals for because there have been no, or only weak, requirements that they meet such needs” (Department for BIS/DFE, 2016a, p.8). Enabling greater fluidity between academic and technical routes is advocated in the report through the development of short, flexible bridging provision, alongside an ease of choices for adults wanting to pursue a new career or upskill within their current career. Emphasis is placed on allowing adults to join a technical education route at the highest possible point and funding for this would continue to be available from the advanced learner loans (Education, training and skills, n.d.).

To support adults in their studies, Advanced Learner Loans were introduced in 2013 enabling access to funds for course fees that are paid back under same terms as university student loans for those aged 19 or over (Education, training and skills, n.d.). *Supporting Learners through the Advanced Learner Loans Process* (Learning and Work Institute, 2016a) identified good practice amongst the sample used for this report. It also recognised however, that there needs to be greater awareness of Advanced Learner Loans to support learning at Level 3 and 4 amongst potential learners and employers (p.5) alongside



more investigation made into what modes of study potential learners would find attractive including, for example, the ways a more modularised approach might be funded through the Advanced Learner Loans.

In addition to Advanced Learner Loans, Further Education providers themselves may offer a Loan Bursary Fund to help students with accommodation and travel costs, course materials and equipment, childcare and classroom assistance for a disability or learning difficulty. Eligibility is set by the training provider and is discretionary, usually based on hardship or specific learning requirements, for example, vulnerable and disadvantaged learners with disabilities or learning difficulties (Education, training and skills, n.d.). For many adults looking to make a transition from their current employment position to a more technical or vocational career, even if the course fees are addressed by the Advanced Learner Loan, the lack of eligibility for further funds may result in a considerable loss of earnings that places serious pressure on household budgets throughout the period of study. This is likely to impact adversely on all but the very wealthiest adults. The impact however for those who are on lower incomes at the start of the period of learning and for whom up-skilling or re-training might be most beneficial, is likely to be significant.

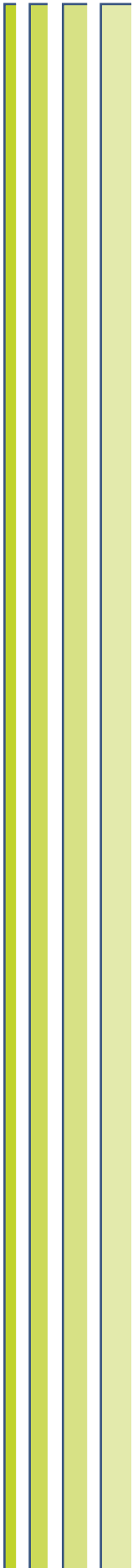
A Post-16 Skills Plan (Department for BIS/DFE, 2016b) was developed from the *Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education* (Department for BIS/DFE, 2016a) and provided a “road map for reform” (Department for BIS/DFE, 2016b, p.9). Amongst its aims was to ensure the new system for post-16 skills worked for everyone by offering reformed careers guidance and providing funding and accountability arrangements. Unlike the *Post-16 Skills Plan*, the Sainsbury led panel report had suggested that the system needs to work for all groups of students and highlighted that the system must work as well for adults as young people. The report was clear in its commitment that adults “already in skilled employment who want to pursue a new career or progress higher in their chosen career will want to ensure they can join a technical education route at the highest possible point” (p.9) as stated earlier. *The Post-16 Skills Plan* however contains only occasional reference to adults across the whole document, placing a central focus instead on young people at age 16 “and adults who can start at the beginning of the route and move upwards” (p.28). The Plan was also to address the meeting of short term skills pressures recognising the need “to grow and upskill the workforce to secure the benefits of the investment” (ibid. p.39). The lack of specific focus on the retraining of adults in the Skills Plan is of concern within the context of this scoping report.



To further realise the Sainsbury reforms, the *2017 Spring Budget proposed* Further Education Maintenance Loans to commence from 2019. As stated earlier (p. 2-3), these are proposed for learning at Levels 4-6 within National Colleges and Institutes of Technology, but not within other Further Education providers, nor at Level 3. Moving adults from Level 2 to 3 had been a central ambition for Leitch (see p.5) and therefore this remains a principle concern which should not be overlooked. The Spring Budget also allocated up to forty million pounds to be available for testing different approaches to retraining adults throughout their working lives. New funding of five million pounds has been allocated to supporting “returnships” for those returning to work after a long break (Gov.UK 2017). There is a lack of clarity here about exactly how the funds will be used and at the time of this report going to print, there were no further details available.

As part of the *Technical and Further Education Bill* (Department for Education, 2016b), apprenticeships were reformed to develop first, *The Institute for Apprenticeships* (2017a) and then the forthcoming revised Institute including a remit for all technical education commencing in April 2018, as the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. This organisation will have direct responsibility for the quality of apprenticeships and technical education being led by employers, in an attempt to address the issues relating to responsiveness for both employer and individual need in relation to skills development. The rapid expansion of apprenticeships in relation to quality has been subject to some discussion (e.g. Learning and Work, 2017a) and therefore the work of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education will be potentially significant. The recent Apprenticeship Levy is paid by those employers with wage bills of over three million pounds, but it is too early to identify the impact this will have as yet.

While the Apprenticeship Levy has yet to take effect, the most recent Statistical Data Return for 2016-17 (SDR, 2017) shows a marked decrease for adult participation rates. While there was an increase of 37.4% within one year for higher level apprenticeships and 5.3% for advanced level, there was a decrease of 5.4% in participation rates for apprenticeships at intermediate level. Participation levels in English and Maths fell by 6% over the same period and by 34.2% on full level two programmes (ibid.). The Learning and Work Institute (2017b) stated on the day this data was launched, “The word disastrous is overused. But it feels apt when looking at the latest data on participation in learning by adults”. These



results emerged in the same week that the government launched the first three new T levels in Digital, Construction, Education & Childcare which will be taught from 2020 (Department for Education, 2017a). The T levels offer a new qualification framework for technical education that Justine Greening, the Education Secretary suggests, aims to develop “our home grown talent so our young people have the world class skills and knowledge that employers need” (Department for Education, 2017b). There is currently no equivalent to the T levels proposed for adult learners.

The recent policy history demonstrates concern from government and employers regarding existing and emerging skills shortages alongside a series of major review points, most notably, Leitch (2006), Wolf (2011), Richards (2012) and Sainsbury (2016). While there are no shortage of strategies and schemes that attempt to develop “home grown talent”, there are signs of both ‘running forwards’ to achieve a highly skilled workforce, for example recent policy interest in Apprenticeships, T levels etc. alongside worrying evidence that England is instead ‘running backwards’, for example the Statistical Data Return for 2016-17 (SDR, 2017) and the fall from 20th to 28th in terms of developing intermediate skills (Department for BIS/DFE, 2016a).

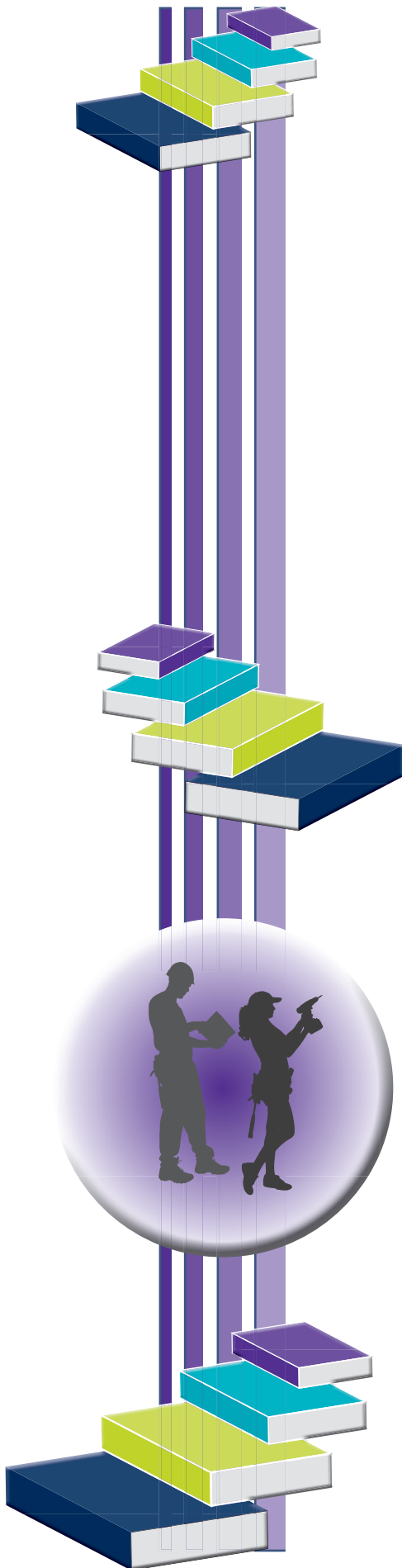


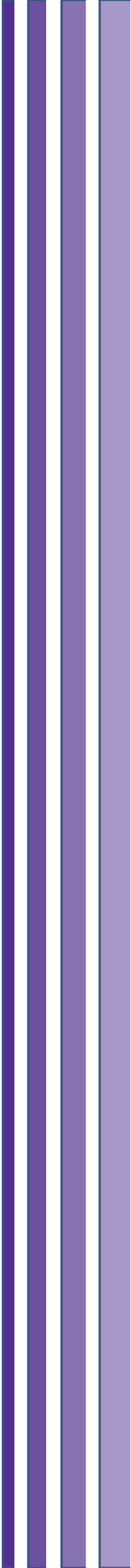



2020: Progress and inequality

Progress towards realisation of the Leitch Review goals was considered in *Ambition 2020* (UKCES, 2009) and the subsequent progress report in 2010 (UKCES, 2010). Responding to Leitch’s earlier ambitions for 2020, the first report (2009) identified the significance of building a system to address “the high skill, people-driven economy of the future” (UKCES, 2009, p.6). The need to address the gap between earnings of the highest and lowest paid employees was a central priority, particularly as the jobs requiring little or no skill were in decline, while the number of jobs for skilled workers continued to grow. The report also highlighted the “profound significance” for those vulnerable groups and people facing multiple barriers to employment (ibid, p.8). Similar inequalities were cited too in *Three Million Apprenticeships: Building ladders of opportunity* (Learning and Work, 2017a) relating to participation rates for apprenticeships including those from BAME backgrounds, low income families and those with health problems and disabilities (ibid, p.11). This is likely to impact not only on the skills shortage, but also on the quality of living for those groups affected. A full explanation of the profound effect that pay gaps are likely to make can be seen in *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone* (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010).

The impact on existing inequality can be seen by the slow decline of participation rates in the final *National Adult Learning Survey for 2010* (Department for BIS, 2012). The survey showed a decreased participation in all categories of learning from 80% to 69% over a five-year period. The links to household income, employment status and previous educational attainment were all identified in the survey as being central to overall participation rates in learning, and while formal learning rates are similar across income groups, the gaps widened by 29% across all forms of learning (ibid, p.6). The economic downturn since 2008 appeared to contribute to the increase from 21% of adults in 2005 citing cost as an obstacle to learning, to 58% in 2010. Similar trends are detected in the most recent *NIACE Adult Participation in Learning Survey* (Learning and Work Institute, 2015) where an uneven distribution of engagement in learning across society is evidenced. Socio-economic class was a key predictor of participation in learning (ibid. 2015, p.1), alongside participation rates related to age, employment status and geographical location.

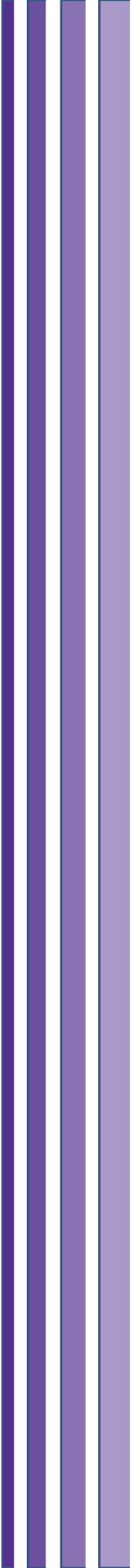





In addition to specific characteristics that impact on participation in further learning and skills acquisition programmes, there are also concerns illustrated, for example, in *No Limits: from getting by to getting on* (NIACE, 2015) regarding the “missing middle”. This group consists of low earners who while not having access to self-directed and funded support of the mid to high earners, do not receive ‘out of work’ support or funding from learning and the skills system either. This group forms a crucial target group for future policy related to the skills shortages and routes to retraining. In the Resolution Foundation’s *Escape Plan* (D’arcy and Hurrell, 2014), the authors examined the reasons that why some people ‘escaped’ low paid work (25% of low earners), some people remained (11%) and the majority (64%) while escaping low pay, did not earn consistently high earnings by the end of the period researched (p.6). The authors suggest that single parents and people with disabilities are least likely to progress to higher earnings. Those undertaking part time work, which may of course include single parents and people with disabilities, are also associated with lower earnings.

Low pay has also been associated with gender; over half of women working in low paid, part time jobs are undertaking “work below their potential” (Grant et al, 2006, p.81), and are therefore not utilising their skills, qualifications and experience in their current position. The authors found that part time work was “a typical and long-term form of employment” for many women from their thirties upwards, whereas men tend to enter part time work only in the earliest and very latest parts of their career (p.83). This aligns with statistical data from the Office for National Statistics (2017) that analysed the impact of being a mother on employment. While the employment rate for mothers has increased by 11.8% in the last twenty years, the report found mothers aged under fifty were less likely to be in employment than women under fifty without dependent children, yet the opposite was true for men. Mothers with children aged between one and twelve were more likely to be in part-time employment than the full-time employment (ibid.). Grant et al (2006) also found that many managers were “unaware of the talents, experience and aspirations of their part-time workforce” (p.ix) with some viewing the women as “content” to work in low graded jobs and some managers characterising the part-time pay as being “‘pin money’ or ‘pocket money’” (ibid.). There has been a long term decline in training participation from 38% in 2006 to 34% in 2012, yet for the training of women, the decline is 10% over the same period (Skills & Employment Survey, 2012). There is scope here for reframing perceptions of employers/managers to recognise the underutilised skills of women currently in part time employment. This has the potential in turn, to address the skills shortages currently being faced in England.

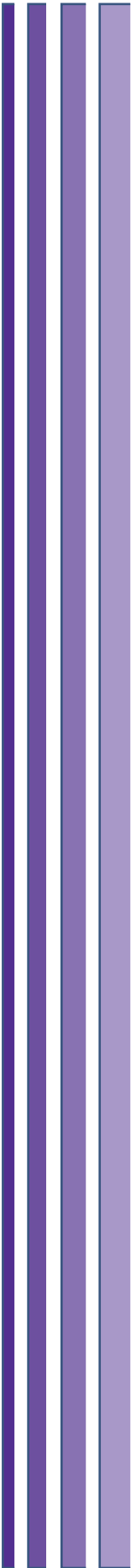





Those working outside of large companies are also negatively impacted, in part because of the training opportunities that larger companies were able to provide. Additionally, the welfare system is structured so that unemployed adults in full time education will be classed as “not available for work” thus making them ineligible for Jobseeker’s Allowance and those studying part time need to demonstrate that they would be available for full time work if the opportunity arose (Gov.uk, n.d., Turn 2 Us, 2017). This appears to be a disincentive to upskill or retrain for unemployed people, as well as a barrier to such individuals being able to complete their course of study. People who are unemployed or on modest incomes are therefore left with little opportunity to gain new skills and qualifications unless supported by their employer or their own or family funds.

Since the *Leitch Review*, the Individual or Personal Learning Account (PLA) has been conceived as a strategy to offer all individuals the opportunity to access funds for training, thereby addressing inequalities in participation rates between groups while boosting “individual investment in learning” (Learning and Work Institute, July 2016). The PLA would enable individuals to invest in their own learning and skills development with a tax incentive based learning account supported by potential contributions from employers. In *Power to the People: The Case for Personal Learning Accounts*, the authors set out a clear plan including a Help to Learn Bonus, a coherent family of Help to Learn loans, alongside Learning City pilots working with Local Authorities. For further discussion of Personal Learning Accounts see the UK Commission for Employment and Skills report, *Personal Learning Accounts: Building on Lessons Learnt* (Johnson et al, 2010).

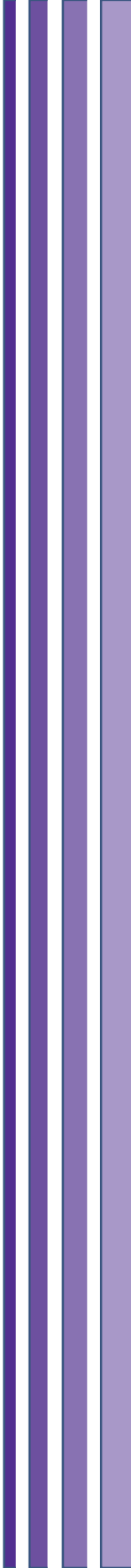
Similarly, the University and College Union have also recommended a personalised approach that recognises an individual learning and career journey, identifying directions towards realising personal goals in *The Future of Vocational Education* (Tabrizi, 2014). Here, Tabrizi recommends that adults over-25 should have a bespoke career change or fresh start programme that would enable new career pathways to be possible. The report suggests that the current design of apprenticeships is unsuitable for adults who will have already been able to develop the wider skills required from previous experience. Instead, Tabrizi (2014) proposes that a newly designed apprenticeship style model should be in place for adults who decide to make a career change. Tabrizi is also critical of the “work first” approach that is imposed on job seekers, leaving little opportunity for career or training decisions and instead



often pushing job seekers to accept low skilled, low paid employment (ibid. p.4). This may, in turn, discourage potential candidates from important skills development that has the capacity to address the current and future skills shortages.

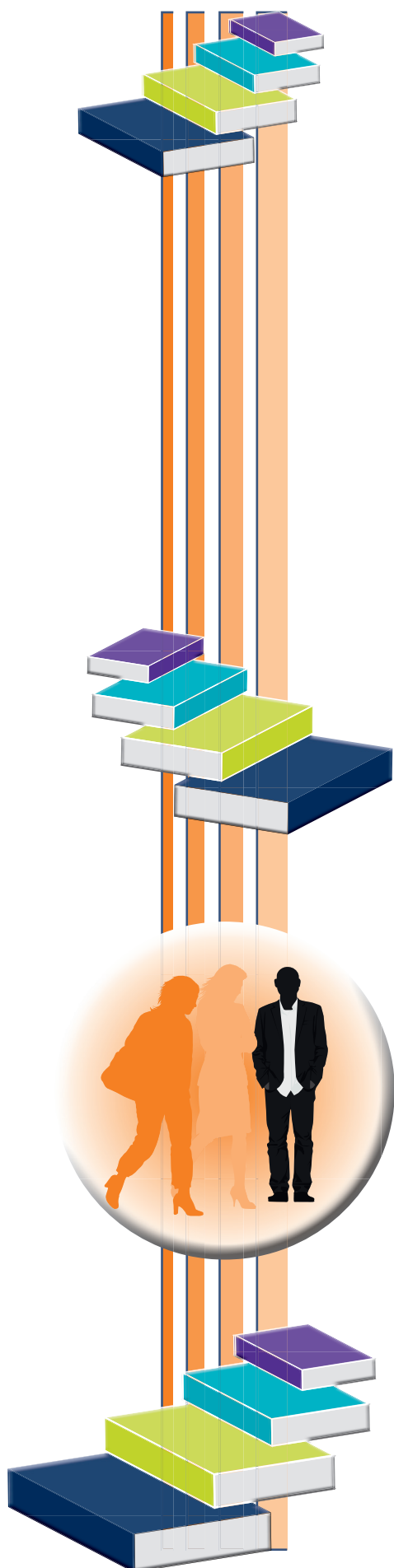
Good Work: The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices, (Taylor, 2017) centralises the notion of “fair and decent work with realistic scope for development and fulfilment” (p.6) and this applies particularly to those on lower incomes who should have the opportunity to progress in work and increase their earning potential. The seventh recommendation of the review suggests “sectoral strategies” (p.111) that ensure individuals “can progress in their current and future work” (ibid.). Recognition of the lack of public funding available for adults over the age of 24 to take intermediate Level 3 (post GCSE) courses or above is identified in the Social Mobility Commission’s *State of the Nation* report (2016) as “inhibiting social mobility”. A Second Chance Career Fund is advocated, and this aligns with some of the PLA recommendations from the Learning and Work Institute cited above. The Social Mobility Commission suggests that this could enable older workers at risk from technological change to retrain ahead of possible redundancies while additionally writing off any unpaid Advanced Learner Loans for those seeking Level Three qualifications.

Further change is afoot however, and recent proposals suggest the responsibility for adult education will lie less with national level strategy and instead at regional and local level. Devolution of skills by the regional administration of the Adult Education Budget is set in motion with the London budget being trialled in 2019-20 and the consultative green paper *Building an Industrial Strategy* (HM Government, 2017) suggesting “driving growth across the whole country” and “creating the right institutions to bring together sectors and places” as the ninth and tenth pillars of the document. This move towards localism may well prove significant for imminent strategy to address skills shortages in relation to specific geographical contexts (UK Commission for Employment and Skills, 2016b). For those providers of adult education however, Keep (2016) concludes “At present, devolution is a multi-actor, multi-speed quest in search of a weakly specified and contested ‘grail’ – both generally and in relation to skills” (p. 40). The move to devolution and localism may offer the opportunity for “space for fresh thinking and to forge new alliances at a range of levels” (ibid. p.42) although as Keep points out, this will depend on both conversations “within and between individual localities” as well as at national level (ibid.). In Sweden, for example, there are clear local, regional and national level analyses to inform appropriate training



needs alongside career counselling for those unemployed, and affordable training opportunities for those in lower skilled work (OECD, 2015). This “joined up” approach to skills development for a workforce in Sweden that has only 5% employed in low skilled work (OECD, 2016, p.14) could offer some input to inform new arrangements in England, although the author recognises the stark distinction between Sweden and England/UK in terms of income inequality—Sweden being generally identified as a more equal country and the UK as a significantly less equal country (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010, p.17, Dorling, 2017, p.23). It is therefore important that all current measures that attempt to address inequality are maintained under any future devolution. Keep (2016) identifies some of the activities that are currently funded under existing arrangements which include, for example, adult re-training for those at risk of being made redundant, and adult re-training for those changing careers who are not eligible under the adult entitlements etc. (ibid. p.20) that will result in “hard choices” needing to be made.

Within the context of this scoping report centred upon non-university based pathways to equip adults to address the skills shortages in England, the inequalities cited above have significance for future policymaking and are considered in the recommendations that follow. Vulnerable and disadvantaged groups have much to gain and much to offer from further retraining that could lead to undertaking more skilled employment. The “missing middle” too, have the potential to play a significant role in the critical skills shortages currently being faced. Explicit and widely available information about access to retraining and upskilling is therefore crucial. That these groups currently miss out on opportunities is both a squandering of human potential and a missed opportunity to address the mid-level skills gap. Moves towards devolution offer some cautious optimism accompanied by grave concern. Inequalities are subject to a multiplier effect, or intersectionality of social factors, and if areas of deprivation, for example, some coastal areas and less affluent rural areas etc. are not to see an exacerbation of existing inequality, due care must be exercised in forthcoming discussions and decision making.



Conclusions

This scoping report has reported on the critical skills shortage that England currently faces. This is already being deepened by the future exit of the UK from the European Union and could get worse if restrictions on medium skilled EU workers were to be introduced in future. An economic strategy has been proposed in the 2017 *Spring Budget*. This offers considerable optimism for the apprenticeships, access to technical education at Level 4 to 6, the new T levels, and opportunities to retrain. It will be interesting to see how the proposed Further Education Maintenance Loans are implemented and whether their remit will widen beyond the National Colleges and Institutes of Technology. Maintenance loans in higher education are cited as being insufficient, even for those without the additional financial responsibilities that many mature students have. This will need to be scrutinised in relation to adults undertaking new career paths. Whether the crucial upskilling from Level 2 to Level 3 will be supported in the same way is less well understood. This was a central aim in the *Leitch Review* and remains so. The devolution agenda will also require careful scrutiny and there is still opportunity for productive and sensitive discussions to inform this development, in order to avoid “skills ghettos” (Corke, 2016).

The renewed interest in the development of technical and vocational education is welcome but recent retraining and upskilling strategies and initiatives have sometimes failed to be widely understood, for example, the Advanced Learner Loans. If the new initiatives aimed at addressing skills shortages are to be successful, it is imperative that the strategies are well understood by all, including current workers and job seekers as well as those providing training and careers advice. The 2017 Spring Budget allocated funds for testing different approaches to retraining adults throughout their working lives and to support returnships for those returning to work after a long break. How these funds will be used will be crucial to the outcomes.

If Leitch’s claims that “The UK will be able to compete with the best in the world. Productivity and employment rates will increase. Poverty and inequality will decrease” are to be realised, then current significant inequalities must be addressed by the recent skills reforms that have been outlined throughout this report. Further investment is required to provide greater opportunity for people from poorer backgrounds to upskill in order to meet workforce needs. The



report has indicated that a number of factors including the underutilisation of women in part-time low paid work, the significance of household budgets on the likelihood of undertaking education or training, single parenthood, belonging to a BAME group, having a disability and working part-time as resulting in a lower likelihood that a person will retrain or upskill. Sustained commitment to realising the skills reforms is essential alongside additional strategies to ensure that the underutilised and overlooked groups identified in this report are mobilised through accessible and sensitive policy activity. This will have the capacity to address skills gaps in the future – the economic case for societal investment, alongside providing the many benefits that come from higher skilled and higher paid employment for all groups – the moral case for societal investment.





Recommendations

1. The introduction of the Personalised Learning Account, that would provide enhanced funding for those adults seeking upskilling or retraining and acknowledge the financial responsibilities that frequently accompany mature adulthood, especially for those on low incomes;
2. A more expansive approach to the proposed Further Education maintenance loans to include study within all providers of adult skills;
3. Use of the proposed Further Education maintenance loans for learning at NVQ levels 2 and 3;
4. The introduction of a career review for all adults aged 24 and over that would seek to address the skills shortages and provide a point of reflection for all adults. This could be undertaken through an online tool and used to inform discussions for those employed e.g. appraisal, review etc. This would have the capacity to address the underutilisation of women in low paid, part-time employment, as well as other groups trapped in low paid, low skilled work;
5. The development of a contributions based “career development sabbatical” for established workers to receive the equivalent of Job Seekers Allowance for up to six months to enable them to upskill or retrain through technical or vocational education;
6. Public information and awareness campaigns to promote the support for retraining, for those currently working or job seeking, as well as those providing training and careers advice;
7. Exercise caution at each step of the devolution of funding for skills to local areas. While greater synergy between local needs and social characteristics may be offered, it is vital that funding remains to promote access and participation. This will promote more specific response to skills shortages and also provide greater activity to address local social inequalities;
8. Ensure that the skills devolution agenda recognises the threat of automation to jobs in specific regions to address the potential gap between some areas that might be affected by up to 17% more than others;
9. Ensure the promises made by government regarding the funding to replace the European Social Fund are sufficient to avoid cuts in the overall Adult Education budget.

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UCL GRAND CHALLENGE OF JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

The Grand Challenge of Justice and Equality (GCJE) is one of six Grand Challenges. The Grand Challenges programme based in the Office of the Vice Provost for Research (OVPR) brings together expertise from across the university to help address key global problems. Grand Challenges helps to create and support new cross-disciplinary research collaborations and promotes the resulting research outputs including through public engagement and policy maker outreach.

MISSION

UCL's Grand Challenge of Justice and Equality (GCJE) was launched in 2016 to promote attention to the barriers that people face in securing adequate healthcare, safe living and working conditions, education and employment. GCJE seeks to ask how societal structures that limit access to just solutions or sustain persistent inequalities, either by design or unintentionally, can be overcome or improved.

PRIORITIES

The priorities agreed by the GCJE Working Group in late 2016 are:

1. Access and participation (Flagship theme)
2. Structural and relational inequality
3. Societal exclusion including displaced people
4. Intergenerational equity
5. Cultural heritage, diversity and equality
6. Environmental justice & equality

ORGANISATION

GCJE has two academic co-chairs, Professor Colm O'Conneide from Laws and Professor Margaret O'Brien from the Institute of Education, and a coordinator based in OVPR.

A GCJE Working Group with representatives from across UCL including the Department of Geography, the Global Governance Institute, the Division of Psychiatry, the Bartlett, Widening Participation, Enterprise, Public Engagement and Public Policy, oversees the programme and provides academic and other input to the priorities and activities of GCJE.



UCL GRAND CHALLENGE OF JUSTICE AND EQUALITY