Overview: adult education in the United Kingdom

Adult Education in the United Kingdom takes a range of different forms across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In England some of the main objectives for adult learning and education provision are to

- raise achievement in basic skills (math, English)
- enhance recognition and qualification for adult education
- support the transition to the labor market, focusing on hardest to reach adults, helping them to return to learning and employment.
- provide liberal (popular) adult education, which focuses on community learning (not an area of strategic importance)
- provide other types of adult learning, focus on apprentices and vocational.

There have been substantial efforts in the UK towards the validation of non-formal and informal leaning because so far, there is no legal national approach for recognition. The participation in adult education, ages 25-64 in the United Kingdom decreased from 20,7% in 2009 to 14,6%, assessing learning in the respective past 4 weeks (LFS, 2009, 2018). Nevertheless, the United Kingdom has disproportionately high participation in adult education, compared to the 2018 EU average of 11,1% (LFS, 2018).

Although most adults in the UK are better educated than their European counterparts, it has a large percentage of low qualified adults (65,7% UK, 56,8 EU average). The Council of the European Union addressed the UK in 2019, calling on it to focus investment-related economic policy on [] training and improving skills (Council of the European Union, 2019).

Some of the challenges in the UK include making adult education accessible to all learners, including under-represented groups like older learners, immigrants, low-skilled workers. Furthermore, the UK will enhance its focus on digital skills, alongside continuous basic skill provision of Math and English. Adapting to the new circumstances of work, regional disparities, an ageing population and the current mismatch between the supply and demand of skills will be other challenges.