Awaiting for further developments, local authorities are still key actors in ALE

According to EAEA's member, the Learning and Work Institute (L&W), there have been significant developments in adult learning and education across the United Kingdom. The 2024 general election brought a change of government, with the incoming Labour administration pledging new missions focused on growth and opportunity. In England, much of the detail on adult learning and skills policy is still forthcoming, with a new post-16 education strategy expected in 2025. The Government is also legislating to establish Skills England, a new body intended to provide strategic oversight of adult skills, although its precise remit and responsibilities have yet to be defined.

Responsibility for adult education and skills - including non-formal community education - continues to be increasingly devolved to city regions and local authorities. The new Government plans to build on this process by extending devolution to new areas and granting further powers to those already involved in managing adult education funding.

In Wales, the key development has been the creation of Medr, the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research. This arms-length government body oversees the funding and regulation of all tertiary education, including higher education, further education, and adult community learning. Medr recently published its Strategic Plan 2025- 2030, which includes several commitments to lifelong learning and adult community education, such as:

- Facilitating learning throughout life through flexible approaches to time, place, language, and learner support.

- Creating coherent and accessible learning pathways available at any point in life.
- Reviewing adult community learning provision and improving essential skills and basic language education.

In Scotland, the main development in non-formal adult community education is the publication of the independent report Learning for All. Life Outcome Review: Learning and Development. It sets out a series of policy and funding recommendations, including that the Scottish Government should fund Scotlands participation in the OECD PIAAC programme.

Skills dimension

From the perspective of L&W, which has operated within a skills narrative in adult learning policy for many years, it is important not to focus too narrowly on the terminology used by policymakers. While educators distinguish between concepts such as skills, education, training, competences, and capabilities, policy discourse often does not. The organisation emphasises that engaging with the substance and implementation of policy is more valuable than debating terminology, as this approach helps identify opportunities for collaboration and common purpose.

AI in adult learning

L&W has been exploring the use of artificial intelligence within its policy and research activities. The organisation has tested how AI can improve the efficiency of research tasks, such as transcribing interviews and meetings. However, it notes that AI still faces limitations as a comprehensive solution - for instance, accurately transcribing focus groups with adult learners remains a significant challenge.

Participation in education and training

The United Kingdom is not included in the European Training Monitor. Since it is not an EU Member State and it has ceased all agreements on data survey after Brexit, no data

from the EU is available on this matter.

Participation in decision-making

L&W has responded to a range of national government consultations in England and Wales, including the Education Select Committees call for evidence on further education and skills, as well as the consultation on priorities for Medr in Wales. The organisation is currently preparing a response to a call for evidence on essential digital skills for adults. Learners, however, are not generally part of policy-making processes.

UK member's view on the PIAAC results

L&W agrees with the results presented by the OECDs PIAAC.

Funding of adult education

According to L&W, the funding situation of adult education in the United Kingdom has slightly deteriorated in 2024-2025. The Governments spending plans suggest that there is very little prospect of significant new investment in adult learning. Providers report that delivery costs continue to rise, meaning that the overall picture is of a slight deterioration.

L&W mentions multiple sources of funding of adult education, including:

- project funding
- programme funding
- operating grants/structural funding
- fees paid by individuals
- contribution paid by employers
- formula funding