

Developments: Adult education strategies reviewed

According to the EAEA member in the UK Learning and Work Institute, there are promising actions on adult education and skills across the UK, but these need to be supported by investment and strategic co-ordination with wider policy. Adult learning and skills policy in the UK is devolved to the four UK nations, and, increasingly, to large city regions in England. This means that the policy landscape is complex, with multiple strategies and programmes at national, regional and local levels.

It is notable that across the UK, policy makers are reviewing strategies on employment, skills and adult learning, often in response to the economic impacts of both the coronavirus pandemic and Brexit. A number of consultations are currently underway or have recently taken place.

One key development in England is the publication of Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth. This White Paper outlines how the Government proposes to support people to develop the skills they need to get good jobs, including measures providing flexible pathways and supporting outstanding teaching. That said, few specific measures on progression pathways target adults with low skills, for example with basic skills needs.

In Northern Ireland, the Department for the Economy has recently consulted on a Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland: Skills for a 10x Economy, which will set out the strategic direction of Northern Ireland's skills system to 2030.

In Wales, the new Welsh Government has promised to review adult education to increase the number of adults learning in Wales.

Funding of ALE

The following funding tools have been reported by the EAEA member in the UK:

- Project funding
- Programme funding
- Structural funding
- Fees (paid by individuals or employers)
- Formula funding

Overall, it is estimated that funding for adult learning and education stayed the same in 2021.

Sustainability

Learning and Work Institute is currently working on a plan/strategy to promote sustainability in their learning programmes but is unaware of the implementation process of the SDGs at the national level.

Challenges: Loss of opportunity for international exchange and

collaboration

The UK no longer participates in Erasmus+. This means that there is a loss of opportunity for exchange and collaboration in adult learning and education, as there is no provision for this in the UK's replacement programme, the Turing Scheme.

In Wales, the Welsh government has announced its intention to develop an international exchange programme that will include adult education opportunities.

Looking forward

Learning and Work Institute's strategic plan 2021 - 24 sets out the following priority areas:

- Lifelong learning
- Employment and social security
- Essential and life skills
- Pay, progression and job security
- Apprenticeships and technical education
- Social justice and inclusion

Recommendations

Learning and Work Institute calls on policymakers to ensure sufficient investment to underpin a broad-based and strategic adult learning offer that joins up with other policy agendas (e.g. employment, health) and supports adults at all ages and stages of life to learn and progress.

