

The decline of England's vocational/lifelong learning system and challenges to policy and practice

Paul Grainger and Ken Spours
UCL Institute of Education
October 2026

Abstract

In the early 21st Century, the main purposes of English vocational education and training (VET) and lifelong learning (LLL) concern their role in both the education system and the workplace. However, as this chapter reveals, both dimensions now play a minor role in England's tertiary education system as a result of a historical decline since the 1980s, together with the rapid contraction in the period 2010-24. The historical failure of a marketised system is contrasted to better fortunes experienced in more social and co-ordinated systems in Scotland and Wales within the UK and Nordic and Germanic models. The decline of English VET/LLL forms the key inheritance for the present Government. Here, its reform proposals are analysed, assisted by interviews with further education college leaders. The chapter concludes with a challenge facing the government and various stakeholders to fully confront the marginalisation of English VET/LLL by embarking on systemic reform, long-term investment and the creation of a new model that aligns with sustainable economic, technological and social development.

Part 1. English VET/LLL and the importance of system analysis and policy memory

Given the long-standing structural weaknesses of English vocational education and lifelong learning (VET/LLL), it is reasonable to ask whether a 'golden age' ever truly existed. Compared with the coordinated, social-partnership models of continental Europe—most notably Germany, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries—English VET has historically been characterised by voluntarism, weak employer commitment and a persistent status hierarchy that privileges academic education (Green, 1999).

Nevertheless, when viewed historically, vocational learning played a more substantial contributory role within the overall education and training settlement during the mid-20th-century Keynesian era. This period was marked by stronger state planning, a more stable industrial relations framework, and a significantly smaller higher education sector. Apprenticeship and further education colleges formed a recognisable—if still subordinate—pillar of the post-war tripartite settlement, supported by national

bargaining structures, industry training boards (after 1964) and comparatively clearer pathways into skilled employment (Keep & Mayhew, 1999).

Conversely, the policy-driven crisis of VET/LLL emerged during the marketised era beginning in the 1980s, when successive reforms intensified competition and eroded the collective frameworks that had previously underpinned vocational learning. It is within this period that this chapter reconstructs the trajectory of the English VET/LLL system, drawing on data extending back to the late 1970s, international comparative evidence, and contemporary perspectives from within the further education (FE) sector. This combined methodological approach—bringing together system-level analysis and the use of ‘policy memory’ (Higham & Yeomans, 2007)—provides a basis for understanding how the English VET/LLL landscape has evolved and, in significant respects, declined over recent decades.

England’s system has been shaped by a distinctive marketised governance model rooted in institutional autonomy, competition and employer-led reform; a policy orthodoxy promoted by successive Conservative governments of the 1980s and early 1990s and again during the period 2010-24. At the same time, and particularly relevant to the current Administration, New Labour governments (1997–2010), adapted the marketised system to promote performance-driven accountability through the imposition of targets, inspection and funding regimes (Coffield et al., 2008).

This overall system now faces two interrelated crises – acute and chronic. The acute crisis has been the rapid contraction of VET/LLL provision during the recent years of Conservative Government (2010-24), marked by significant declines in apprenticeship starts, vocational qualification enrolments and the near collapse of adult participation. The chronic crisis concerns a longer-term decline of English VET/LLL provision, particularly affecting adult and work-based learning. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately affected vocational learning (Spours et al., 2022), further exacerbated an already vulnerable position. These interrelated crises form the core system legacy facing the Labour Government in late 2025.

Conservative-led contraction of English VET/LLL (2010-24)

As Table 1 demonstrates, severe policy-led contraction was experienced across almost all English VET between 2010-24, with the only notable exception being growth in higher-level technical qualifications

reflecting the Conservative policy ideal of raising the status of vocational education by focusing on higher qualification levels (DfE, 2016).

Table 1. England's VET system 2010-24

Indicator	2010 (Baseline)	2019 (Pre-Covid)	Post-Covid 2020–24	% Change (2010–24)
Apprenticeship starts (All Ages)	490,000	390,000	340,000	–31%
16–18 Apprenticeship starts	130,000	120,000	110,000	–15%
19+ Apprenticeship starts	360,000	270,000	230,000	–36%
Employer involvement in Apprenticeships	200,000 employers	220,000 employers	230,000 employers	+15%
Adult FE Participation	3.2 million	1.9 million	1.6 million	–50%
Community learning & basic skills	700,000	450,000	400,000	–43%
FE College Enrolments (16–18)	1.1 million	1.0 million	1.05 million	–5%
Vocational qualification enrolments	3.6 million	2.2 million	2.0 million	–44%
Funding (FE & Adult Skills)	£4.3bn	£3.3bn (real terms)	£3.6bn (real terms)	–16%
Achievement rate – Level 2 vocational	75%	70%	68%	–7%
Achievement rate – Level 3 vocational	80%	78%	76%	–5%
Technical Qualifications (Levels 4–5)	90,000 enrolments	110,000 enrolments	150,000 enrolments	+67%
Total 16–18 Vocational Learners	1.23 million	1.12 million	1.16 million	–6%
Total Adult Vocational Learners	4.26 million	2.62 million	2.23 million	–48%
Overall Vocational Sector Size	5.5 million	3.74 million	3.39 million	–38%

Sources. Office for National Statistics (ONS), various years; Department for Education (DfE), annual series; Learning and Work Institute, annual series.

The most profound factor came from without – austerity policy – in which funding cuts led to a 16 per cent real-terms reduction in FE and adult skills budgets (from £4.3bn to £3.6bn), disproportionately impacting adult and community learning (Evans, 2025). Apprenticeship participation also declined, with particular problems of SME engagement (Huddleston & Laczik, 2018). Vocational qualification enrolments suffered a similar fate, with the much-touted T-Levels becoming at best a niche qualification. Apprenticeship and qualification participation were also constrained by the Conservative Government's aim of increasing vocational esteem by focusing on Levels 3 and above.

VET/LLL system stasis and decline (1980-present)

This policy-led contraction of 2010-24 can be seen as the sharp edge of 'system stasis' - the overall stagnation of the English VET/LLL system (young people and adults) over the past five decades. However, stasis should not be equated with the absence of change. Constant policy churn from the 1980s onwards resulted in a lack of vocational continuity, confusing employers and blurring the popular image of vocational education (Lumby & Foskett, 2007). At the same time, the overall shape of tertiary education changed with an expansion of general upper secondary education (i.e. rising 16+ staying on rates,

improved GCSE and A Level pass rates in the late 1980s/early 1990s), fuelling the massification of higher education, that came to numerically and culturally overshadow VET (Welch, 2021).

As Table 2 illustrates, the five-decade period for English VET can be divided into three distinct phases, reflecting both policies of successive Conservative and Labour Administrations and underlying economic structural shifts ¹.

Table 2. Vocational Education and Training in England: 1980–2024

Indicator	1980–1997 Youth unemployment phase	1997–2010 New Labour partial expansion	2010–2024 Conservative contraction
Youth Training & Employment Schemes	250k starts/year (YTS peak)	Phased out → Modern Apprenticeships (75k starts)	N/A – replaced by Apprenticeship system
Apprenticeship Starts (All Ages)	75k	75k - 490k (+553%)	490k - 340k (–31%)
16–18 Apprenticeship Starts	50k	50k - 130k (+160%)	130k - 110k (–15%)
19+ Apprenticeship Starts	20k	25k - 360k (+1,340%)	360k - 230k (–36%)
FE College Enrolments (16–18)	1.0m	1.05m - 1.1m (+10%)	1.1m - 1.05m (–5%)
Adult FE Participation	4.3m	4.26m - 3.2m (–42%)	3.2m - 1.6m (–50%)
Vocational Qualification Awards	2.8m	2.8m - 3.6m (+29%)	3.6m - 2.0m (–44%)
Funding (FE & Adult Skills)	£3.0–£3.5bn	£3.5bn - £4.3bn (+23%)	£4.3bn - £3.6bn (–16%)
Achievement Rate – Level 2	65%	65% - 75% (+15%)	75% - 68% (–7%)
Achievement Rate – Level 3	70%	70% - 80% (+14%)	80% - 76% (–5%)
Higher-Level Technical (L4–5)	40k	40k - 90k (+125%)	90k - 150k (+67%)
Overall Vocational Sector Size (excluding employer training)	5.5m learners	5.5m - 5.5m (stable)	5.5m - 3.39m (–38%)

Sources. Office for National Statistics (ONS), various years; Department for Education (DfE), annual series; Learning and Work Institute, annual series.

Phase 1 (1980–1997) was characterised by significant change to the character of the VET system with the launch of Youth Training Schemes (YTS) as a response to high youth unemployment. The formal vocational sector remained relatively large (around 5.5 million learners), dominated by FE colleges and adult learning. Phase 2 (1997–2010) under New Labour was marked by the expansion of provision for younger learners

¹ Tables 1–5 were compiled with the assistance of Microsoft Copilot. Data in Table 2 represents a narrow definition of VET associated with vocational providers and public funding, while private employer-based training is reported in Table 3.

offset by a sharp decline in adult learner participation, resulting in the overall size of the VET/LLL system remaining static. Phase 3 (2010–2024), as already reported, led to a sharp contraction of the English VET system (average of – 40%).

Employer-based training – a new Low Skills Equilibrium?

If you look at the patterns in the data below, we see an overall historical decline that has accelerated since 2010 – nearly 50 per cent decline in the number of vocational learners despite a marked growth in the workforce. At the heart of this is what Finegold and Soskice (1988) referred to as a ‘Low Skills Equilibrium’ (LSE)- a self-reinforcing cycle in which employers competed on low cost rather than high skill, leading to limited demand for advanced skills and weak incentives for workers to upskill.

Table 3. Employer-Based Training in England: 1980–2024

Period	Estimated learners in employer training	Policy context	Trend
1980–1997	7.0-8.0 million in late 1970s, declining to 5.5-6.0 million in 1997	Statutory training boards and levy systems in key sectors.	Decline throughout the 1980s due to abolition of industrial boards dismantled and deindustrialisation.
1997–2010	5.5–6.0 million annually	New Labour initiatives (Train to Gain, Sector Skills Councils); voluntary employer investment.	Further decline despite policy efforts; training concentrated in compliance & basic skills.
2010–2024	4.5 million annually (down from 6.5m in 2010)	Apprenticeship Levy introduced (2017); austerity cuts; marketisation entrenched.	Sharp decline (–31%); limited impact of levy; persistent ‘Low-Skills Equilibrium’.

Sources. ONS Labour Force Survey, various years.

Although the low-skills equilibrium (LSE) thesis first emerged in the late 1980s, evidence indicates that it has continued to shape the English skills landscape, sustained not only by market-driven policy approaches but also by deeper structural shifts—most notably long-term industrial decline and the rise of a financialised services economy (Keep & Mayhew, 2010). While some large firms in high-value, technologically advanced sectors have maintained structured training regimes, many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) continue to underinvest in workforce development, thereby reinforcing entrenched sectoral disparities (Learning & Work Institute, 2023). The prevailing pattern has thus been one of external recruitment rather than internal skill formation, with too many employers preferring to ‘poach’ already-trained workers from elsewhere rather than investing in the long-term development of their own labour force (Keep, 2006).

Part 2. The comparative stories of Scottish/Welsh, Nordic and Continental models

Home international comparisons

Vocational and lifelong learning systems in Scotland and Wales have not suffered the same fate as the English case, at least not to the same extent (see Table 4 below).

Table 4. Home international comparisons (1999-2024)

Phase 1: 1999–2010 (Early devolution & expansion)

Indicator	England	Scotland	Wales
HE Participation (18-year-olds)	33% → 42% (+27%)	30% → 36% (+20%)	32% → 38% (+19%)
Total HE Students	1.8m → 2.5m (+39%)	0.23m → 0.29m (+26%)	0.12m → 0.15m (+25%)
Adult FE Participation	5.5m → 3.2m (–42%)	0.6m → 0.55m (–8%)	0.35m → 0.3m (–14%)
FE College Enrolments (16–18)	1.05m → ~1.23m (+17%)	0.3m → 0.32m (+7%)	0.15m → 0.16m (+7%)
Apprenticeship Starts	75k → 490k (+553%)	20k → 35k (+75%)	10k → 20k (+100%)
Funding (FE & Skills)	£3.5bn → £4.3bn (+23%)	Stable, real terms	Slight increase

Phase 2: 2010–2024 (Austerity & divergence)

Indicator	England	Scotland	Wales
HE Participation (18-year-olds)	42% - 47% (+12%)	36% - 37% (+3%)	38% → 43% (+13%)
Total HE Students	2.5m - 3.0m (+20%)	0.29m - 0.31m (+7%)	0.15m - 0.17m (+13%)
Adult FE Participation	3.2m - 1.6m (–50%)	0.55m - 0.45m (–18%)	0.3m - 0.25m (–17%)
FE College Enrolments (16–18)	1.23m - 1.16m (–6%)	0.32m - 0.31m (–3%)	0.16m - 0.15m (–6%)
Apprenticeship Starts	490k - 340k (–31%)	35k - 25k (–29%)	20k - 15k (–25%)
Funding (FE & Skills)	£4.3bn → £3.6bn (–16%)	Slight decline	Slight decline

Sources. ONS Education Statistics, various years. *Participation in Education and Training by Country*.

Since democratic devolution in 1999, Scotland and Wales have pursued different tertiary education models from England. Scotland has retained a strong commitment to public funding, sustaining an integrated tertiary framework through the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework while preserving the vocational status of FE colleges as providers of Higher National Certificates and Diplomas. Wales, on the other hand, has continued to prioritise community learning and skills strategies (Gallacher, 2017). Thus, both Scotland and Wales have mitigated the effects of English marketisation through policy choices emphasising social inclusion and vocational continuity (Holtom et al., 2022).

However, the extent to which these policies have been successful is mixed. While they have helped preserve more coherent vocational pathways than in England, both nations continue to face structural

challenges in participation, funding resilience and long-term skills outcomes, suggesting that protective policy frameworks alone are not sufficient to fully counter wider economic and institutional pressures (Welsh Government, 2026; Bell, 2025).

Nordic and Continental vocational experiences

Looking further afield to comparable VET/LLL systems in the Nordic countries and Continental Europe, Table 5 shows that these more social and coordinated systems have experienced relative stability and gradual evolution over recent decades.

Table 5. Comparative vocational education trends: Nordic vs Continental vs England (1980–2024)]

Indicator	Finland (Nordic)	Germany/Austria/Switzerland (Continental)	England (Marketised)
Young people VET (% of cohort) 1980-24	43% & stable	68/70% to 52/58% (–20%)	65% to 35% (–46%)
Adult Learning Participation 1980-2024	48% to 47% (world leading - stable)	28/30% to 36/38% – modest increase	40% to 19% (-100%) – collapse
Employer Role in Initial VET	Limited; state-funded	Central; 50–60% of training costs	Weak - levy introduced 2017, participation falling
Funding Model	Public investment; equity focus	Shared (state + employers); corporatist	Marketised; public share falling rapidly
Status of VET	High; integrated with HE	High; strong labour market link	Low; residual and fragmented
Overall Trend 1980–2024	Stability + modernisation	Stability + incremental reform	Severe contraction since 2010)

Sources. OECD, various years. *Education at a Glance*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Finland, an example of the Nordic education-based VET model, has promoted parity between VET and HE by developing a strong lifelong learning culture and an integrated tertiary system (Virolainen et al., 2018). In Germany, Austria and Switzerland (the Continental Model), the Dual employer-based system, while experiencing globalised pressures, continues to display high levels of employer engagement and remains attractive to learners from across the social spectrum (Deissinger, 2025). In Switzerland, for example, nearly 65 per cent of learners leave the upper secondary school system for apprenticeships (FSO, 2023).

Part 3. The VET/LLL system inheritance and current reform agenda

Challenges and responses

This VET/LLL system inheritance presents three key challenges for the current Government in the current Parliament and beyond.

1. To urgently remediate the effects of Conservative policy-led contraction, particularly in adult learning and work-based training.
2. To move to a new governance model – social and coordinated – to replace the failed marketised model.
3. To align VET policy and practice with the goals of the Green Transition.

Shift to a more co-ordinated model? As a response to market failure, Labour’s vision for the VET system is the creation of stronger social partnerships between government, employers, and providers, alongside greater regional responsiveness to local economic priorities by embedding skills policy within a broader industrial strategy (Labour Party, 2024). A key question at this early stage of policy implementation is whether its policies are reactive and incremental or represent a significant strategic shift?

Greater inclusivity in vocational qualifications. Labour proposes to introduce V-Levels at Level 3 (yet another attempt at vocational parity of A-Levels), while retaining popular qualifications like BTECs. The intention is to broaden access and inclusivity, ensuring that vocational education offers clearer progression routes and greater flexibility for learners (DfE, 2024).

Apprenticeships and employer engagement. Labour also plans to replace the Apprenticeship Levy with a Growth & Skills Levy, designed to allow employers more flexibility in how funds are used. Alongside this, the Government proposes the introduction of Foundation Apprenticeships to support younger learners and those at lower NQF levels, and a simplification of assessment processes to make participation easier for employers and learners alike (DfE, 2025).

Strengthening further education colleges. Labour’s reforms aim to strengthen the role of FE colleges as civic anchor institutions, expand Institutes of Technology, and link provision more closely to local and regional economic needs. This reflects a desire to position FE at the heart of industrial strategy and economic development (Labour Party, 2024).

Governance arrangements. It is intended that a highly centralised and market-driven logic be replaced by a more coordinated approach, in which ‘Skills England’ will be established to align skills policy with industrial strategy and promote social partnership between government, employers and providers.

Voices from the English further education sector

Perspectives on the Government’s reforms of civil society organisations, which have emphasised the need for systemic reform and adequate funding (e.g. Emden et al., 2024; Evans, 2025; Hughes, 2025), have been reinforced by evidence gathered from the FE Sector through interviews, written contributions and participation in sector conferences. A total of 10 participants included college leaders and senior managers from diverse localities, providing a mix of national and place-based perspectives.

Support for policy direction and system coherence. There was broad agreement that Labour’s policy narrative appeared to be moving in the right direction, with leaders welcoming the emphasis on skills as fundamental to growth, the creation of Skills England, and the ambition to link FE provision to industrial strategy. Senior leaders broadly welcome the Government’s recognition of FE as central to economic growth and social mobility. As one leader noted:

‘At last we have coherence with a genuine link between vision, overarching goals and policy development.’

Concerns about funding and the pace of delivery. This optimism, however, was tempered by concern about the current lack of urgency.

‘Pious, good intentions, but short on action.’

‘we need to see some tangible investments to truly deliver the commitments in the White Paper’

‘Change is taking too long’

Funding, unsurprisingly, emerged as a dominant concern with leaders emphasising that the gap with school budgets remains ‘deeply unfair.’ One leader stated bluntly:

‘Investment is both too little and too slow to enable the policy announcements to gain real traction’.

Apprenticeships and employer engagement. Labour’s plan to replace the Apprenticeship Levy with a Growth & Skills Levy and introduce Foundation Apprenticeships was generally welcomed as a step toward flexibility and inclusivity. However, leaders stressed that employer engagement remains weak and largely voluntary, with one CEO observing.

‘The government is asking employers to step up, contribute and invest, which is essential.’

Questions about qualifications reform. The introduction of V-Levels was highlighted as potentially positive, but leaders expressed strong reservations about timing and implementation with some fearing that introducing yet another credential could add to *‘qualifications turmoil and public confusion’*.

Governance and devolution. The creation of Skills England was widely seen as a positive development, with one leader describing Minister Jacqui Smith as *‘a safe pair of hands’*. Regional governance, while viewed positively, remains a point of debate with a mixture of enthusiasm about devolution with concerns about continued complexity and competition.

‘In theory, yes—but in reality, increased competition and demographic shifts mean that we are all competing within smaller pools.’

Cultural and social dimensions. Several leaders highlighted the broader social context shaping FE policy. Colleges are grappling with the long tail of COVID, rising poverty, and mental health challenges among students with one CEO warning: *‘We are dealing with crime and health-related issues because we have more families in poverty, poorer nutrition, and swathes of our population who are very much left behind.’*

The overall mood amongst college leaders was support for the promised direction of reform, but with tangible anxieties about the lack of pace of change thus far and lack of system-changing investment. Tables 2 and 3 suggest that these concerns appear historically justified when looking back to the record of New Labour Governments (1997-2010) on which the present Labour Administration has modelled itself. Only time will tell if the proposed strategic direction marks a break with the historical logic of a voluntarist and under-funded VET/LLL system.

Part 4. Final reflections

The historical decline of the English VET/LLL system since the end of the 1970s comprises two fundamental elements - the relative stagnation in the participation of younger learners and the severe contraction of adult learning in colleges and workplaces. The apprenticeship system, a fundamental part of any VET system, has also been reduced to a historic low. As a result of these combined trends, the number of people involved in vocational learning annually has been reduced from an estimated 13 million in 1979 to seven million in 2024. However, factoring in labour market growth over recent decades (40+ per cent), lays bare the true extent of decline. In 1979 over a third of adults were involved in VET annually. By 2024 this had dropped to one in eight.

In the light of this history, the prime 21st Century purpose of English VET must be to play a greater role in the building of a lifelong learning system. Moreover, it is only through a steady growth process that a reformed system can meaningfully contribute to sustainable technological, economic and social development. Organisations surrounding the current government appear to understand the situation and have called for bold measures. Reflecting on these and the true nature of the crisis revealed in the historical statistics, policy priorities should focus on:

- system-changing levels of investment in VET/LLL to impact particularly on apprenticeship and adult learning participation,
- strengthening the FE college sector with a particular emphasis on building their role as civic anchor institutions,
- greater labour market planning with an increase in incentives and obligations for employers to train and upskill,
- bold devolution and regional economic and technological integration programmes to nurture sustainable social and skills ecosystems (Spours & Grainger, 2024).

Judging by its current policy responses, the current Government is likely to be aware of the impact of Conservative policy on vocational learning during the previous 15 years. However, it is far less likely to understand the true nature of the historical decline over nearly five decades. Political memories tend to be short. By exercising system and policy memory, informed by rigorous comparative analysis and policy learning, the Government can begin to realise the true extent of the market failure of English VET/LLL and, therefore, the need to start building an alternative, coordinated social model.

References

- Bell, D. (2025). *Tertiary Education in Scotland 2025*, University of Edinburgh - https://rse.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Funding_tertiary_paper_Bell.pdf - accessed 10 March 2026.
- Coffield, F., Edward, S., Finlay, I., Hodgson, A., Spours, K., & Steer, R. (2008). *Improving learning, skills and inclusion: The impact of policy on post-compulsory education*. London: Routledge.
- Deissinger, T. (2025). The German dual vocational education and training system as 'good practice'? *Local Economy*. 30. 557-567.
- Department for Education (DfE) (2016). *Post-16 Skills Plan*. UK Government.
- DfE (2024) *New V levels and post-16 qualifications explained* The Education Hub - <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2025/10/new-v-levels-and-post-16-qualifications-explained/> (accessed 29 December 2025).
- DfE (2025). *Post-16 Education and Skills*: CP 1412. London: HM Government - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-16-education-and-skills-cp-1412> [Accessed 29 Dec. 2025].
- Hughes, D. (2025). *AoC responds to Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper*. Association of Colleges - <https://www.aoc.co.uk/news-campaigns-parliament/aoc-newsroom/aoc-responds-to-post-16-education-and-skills-white-paper> (accessed 29 December 2025).
- Emden, J., Sudmant, A. & Farhina, T. (2024). *Skills matter: Shaping a just transition for workers in the energy sector*. Institute of Public Policy Research. – https://ippr-org.files.svdcn.com/production/Downloads/Skills_matter_May24.pdf (accessed 29 December 2025).
- Evans, S. (2025). *Ambition skills: toward a lifelong learning century*. London: Learning and Work Institute - <https://learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Ambition-skills-final-report.pdf> (Accessed: 17 December 2025).
- Federal Statistical Office of Switzerland (FSO) (2023). Vocational education and training (VET) – Apprenticeships. Neuchâtel: Federal Statistical Office. Available at: <https://www.bfs.admin.ch>
- Finegold, D. and Soskice, D. (1988). The failure of training in Britain: Analysis and prescription. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 4(3), 21–53.
- Gallacher, J. (2017). Higher education in the college sector: widening access or diversion? Questions and challenges from the Scottish experience. *Journal of Education and Work*. 30. 1-10.
- Green, A. (1990). *Education and State Formation: The Rise of Education Systems in England, France and the USA*. London: Macmillan.

Higham, J., & Yeomans, D. (2007). Policy memory and policy amnesia in 14–19 education: Learning from the past? In D. Raffe & K. Spours (Eds.), *Policymaking and policy learning in 14–19 education*. Institute of Education, University of London.

Holtom, D., Bowen, R. & Pells, H. (2022). *The Benefits to the Individual, to Society, and to the Wider Economy in Wales of Widening Participation in Community-Based Adult Learning*. Cardiff: Wavehill Social and Economic Research.

Huddleston, P. & Laczik, A. (2018). 'In the driving seat', or reluctant passengers? Employer engagement in qualifications development: some evidence from two recent 14–19 qualification reforms in England. *Journal of Education and Work*, 31 (3), 262–276.

Keep, E. (2006). 'State control of the English education and training system—playing with the biggest train set in the world', *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 58(1), pp. 47–64.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820500505819>.

Keep, E. & Mayhew, K. (1999). 'The Assessment: Knowledge, Skills, and Competitiveness', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 15(1), 1–15.

Keep, E. and Mayhew, K. (2010). Moving beyond skills as a social and economic panacea. *Work, Employment and Society*, 24(3), 565–577.

Labour Party (2024). *Labour Party Manifesto 2024: Change*. London: Labour Party. -
<https://labour.org.uk/change> [Accessed 29 Dec. 2025].

Learning and Work Institute (2023). *Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2023*. Leicester: Learning and Work Institute.

Lumby, J., & Foskett, N. (2007). "Turbulence masquerading as change: exploring 14–19 policy." In D. Raffe & K. Spours (Eds.), *Policymaking and policy learning in 14–19 education*. Institute of Education, University of London.

Spours, K., Grainger, P., & Vigurs, C. (2022). 'We are all in the same storm but not in the same boat': The COVID pandemic and the Further Education sector. *Journal of Education and Work*, 35(8), 782–797.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2022.2149715>.

Spours, K., & Grainger, P. (2024). The mediating role of further and higher education in a Just Transition social ecosystem. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 76(2), 307–330.

Welsh Government (2026). *The Future of Tertiary Education in Wales: Five Challenges and Calls for Submission*. Cardiff: Welsh Government. Digital ISBN 978-1-80633-991-4. Cardiff: Welsh Government. Digital ISBN 978-1-80633-991-4.

Virolainen, M. Virolainen, M., & Tønder, A. H. (2018). Progression to higher education from vocational education in Nordic countries - Mixed policies and pathways. In C. H. Jørgensen, O. J. Olsen, & D. P. Thunqvist (Eds.), *Vocational Education in the Nordic Countries: Learning from Diversity*. Oxon: Routledge.