

0501 - BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON CONTINUING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

LIFELONG LEARNING STRATEGY FRAMEWORK AND CONCEPTS

Lifelong learning in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is often taken to refer to learning that takes place after the young person has finished formal education and training. In Scotland lifelong learning has a broader 'cradle to grave' definition. The usual definition of 'continuing' in the UK context refers to learners over 19 years of age. Classifications vary.

In the UK, the decision on access to further education beyond statutory school age is left to the individual except in cases where a job requires certain entry qualifications (an individualistic approach). Although government places increasing importance on up-skilling the workforce, training policies are left to employers (a 'voluntarist' approach). The UK performs comparatively well on short, workplace training courses, but overall levels of qualification compare unfavourably with a number of other EU countries.

Since 2002 vocational education has received greater attention from policy-makers with a view to increasing the skills levels of the current and future workforce. Governments in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have identified priorities in lifelong learning and adult learning, in particular. For example, the Lifelong Strategy for Scotland [\(1\)](#) emphasises the 'cradle to grave' idea of lifelong learning and widening access to learning for all citizens. In Wales, the Assembly's government's strategy [\(2\)](#) for the promotion of lifelong learning emphasises broadening learning pathways.

The government has set priorities for lifelong learning in the UK. These are as follows:

- Achieve cross-government action to tackle skills gaps and shortages;
- Encourage employers to use higher levels of skills in the workforce to develop more ambitious and innovative business strategies;
- Motivate learners to continue in and return to learning;
- Make VET responsive to employers' needs;
- Raise the status and quality of initial VET.

Wales and Northern Ireland have a particular focus on the employability skills of the economically inactive, Scotland is concerned with community learning and unemployed.

Key principles of the government strategy across the UK are increased engagement of learners, parents and employers, the extension of individual choice, the raising of standards for all, and the easing of transitions between the phases of education.

Some specific challenges include the creation of a model of lifelong progression which stresses continuity throughout the education and training process; a less directive approach to quality assurance across all sectors; and a coherent qualifications framework. The Qualifications and Credit Frameworks (QCF) across all levels and sectors aims to provide a simple qualification structure for individuals and employers, promote lifelong learning and facilitative transfer between pathways.

Addressing a 'greying workforce' challenge, the government created an Education and Training Committee, which brings together all the relevant government departments and national agencies. The Committee examines the implications for lifelong learning policy, including the effects of broader educational policy and collection of data on older learners, as well as the implications of age discrimination law for older learners.

ACCESS TO LEARNING

The strategy of government relies on encouraging individuals to take up learning and training opportunities, with a strong focus on the learner's needs rather than on the institutional interest of the providers. [7]

Flexibility exists at many points in the UK education systems, helping people who lack formal qualifications or training earlier in life to achieve qualifications later on. Nevertheless, barriers to learning are particularly strong for those who are socially excluded or at risk.

In line with the key principles of the 14-19 reform and Skills Strategy, the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) was amended and extended in 2002 to prohibit discrimination against disabled people in relation to employment and vocational training.

Considerable research into the individual, social and economic barriers to continuing participation have highlighted the need for a major change. Approximately 9% of each age cohort still leaves school unqualified and without progressing to further education, training or a job with training. Moreover some seven to eight million adults are identified as lacking in basic skills. As such, finding ways that encourage large numbers of people to be involved in learning remains a key policy issue.

In its White Paper 21st Century Skills of 2003 ([4]), the government introduced a new entitlement to free learning to anyone without a good foundation of employability skills. This enables them to get the training needed to achieve a level 2 qualification ([5]) from 2007. There is also an increased government support (in terms of funding and access) for higher level skills at technician, higher craft or associated professional level (level 3 qualification) ([6]), in areas of sectoral or regional priority. The further skills strategy document of 2005 put employers' needs at the centre of the design and delivery of training¹¹ and set a new entitlement to free training for young people up to the age of 25 to achieve a level 3 (ISCED 3), while announcing a new programme to support in-company basic training¹², respectively.

The following is an illustrative list of initiatives and priorities that are intended to improve access to continuing training, but is not intended to be exhaustive:

RIGHT TO TIME OFF TO STUDY

(UK-wide) gives a statutory right to certain 16 and 17 year olds who are in employment (part or full-time, permanent or temporary) to paid time off work for study or training. The employer must provide 'reasonable' paid time off for the young person to study or train towards an approved qualification.

ENCOURAGEMENT OF COMMUNITY LEARNING

The UK's devolved administrations sponsor initiatives and schemes to encourage learning in the community. Research suggests that many such schemes may overcome the barriers that more formal learning raises.

BRINGING LEARNING CLOSER TO THE LEARNER

BECTA is responsible for ensuring that providers make maximum use of ICT, and to ensure that opportunities to learn are tailored to the needs of a wide range of people. 'UK on line' is a government-funded campaign to ensure that organisations and individuals make best use of Internet learning, and to encourage people to make maximum use of the learning potential of ICT.

UNIVERSITY FOR INDUSTRY/LEARNDIRECT, AND SCOTTISH UNIVERSITY FOR INDUSTRY/LEARNDIRECT SCOTLAND

Learndirect and Learndirect scotland stimulate demand for learning by providing easily accessible information and advice to potential learners about all kinds of opportunities. Learndirect Scotland provides learners with advice on learning opportunities available throughout Scotland, including information on childcare facilities. Its network of over 460 Learndirect Scotland branded learning centres takes learning into the community, making access to learning easier and more flexible. These learning centres are located

¹¹ White Paper, Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work, DfES, 2005, <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/skillsstrategy/uploads/documents/Skills%20WP%20Part%201.pdf>

¹² White Paper, Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances, DfES, 2006, <http://official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm67/6768/6768.pdf>

in libraries; shopping centres, leisure centres and other locally based facilities. Learndirect Scotland is also working closely with businesses, providing advice on training needs and to identify appropriate courses.

A RANGE OF APPROACHES TO WORKPLACE LEARNING

Government, the CBI and the trade unions are encouraging a range of approaches to workplace learning. To raise the profile of workplace learning and to involve the trade unions in a more focused way, legislation now enables the election or appointment of learning representatives by trade union branches. The Union Learning Fund has been set up with government funding through the TUC, to encourage an innovative approach whereby unions extend the training they give, for example to tackling basic skills weaknesses among their members, often at a workplace. In Scotland the Scottish Executive funds the Scottish Union Learning Fund (SULF) as part of the strategy to tackle skills issues.

PLANNING AND FORECASTING MECHANISMS

The recent shake-up of sectoral arrangements aims to improve their capacity for undertaking labour market analysis in anticipation of emerging sector skill requirements. The developing Sector Skills Councils and awarding bodies respectively review the labour market need and uptake of qualifications with specific priority being given to employers' needs. Relevant labour market data comes from a variety of national sources including the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Annual Employment Survey (AES), and from national, regional or sectoral surveys, and skill audits. Quantitative methods include mechanistic/extrapolative techniques, behavioural/econometric models, surveys of employers' opinions and skills audits. Qualitative approaches include Delphi techniques, case studies, focus groups and holistic modelling approaches, such as scenarios.

Strong emphasis is now placed on identifying and planning skill development programmes to meet regional/local labour market needs.

Each of the 25 Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) - which have been established from smaller scale industrial lead bodies in the UK and are led by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES), which replaced the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) in March 2008 - are required by government to develop Sector Qualifications Strategies and a Sector Skills Agreement (SSA) between employers and providers of learning and training in their sector. SSCs are employer led organisations with the role of representing employers' skills needs to government and raising employer demand for skills, also representing the interests of other stakeholders, particularly the unions. The process of developing a SSA involves 5 stages [8] and starts with a Skills Needs Assessment (SNA). Within this SSCs are required to forecast employment and skills needs within their sector. This is achieved through two means:

- By using the existing quantitative forecasts for the UK (i.e. Working Futures 2004-2014¹³) which provide cross sector, comparable projections at national and regional levels using national sources of information based on the SIC system. These can be supplemented by bespoke, sector specific forecasts for qualifications. A publicly accessible online research database Sector Skills Matrix¹⁴ contains the data from all sectors' surveys.
- Qualitative scenarios with sector employers.

The Sector Skills Agreement is now recognised as the mechanism through which employer skills needs in the UK are identified and met.

Target groups include the full range of groups that are likely to be represented among the low skills, including NEETs, immigrants, members of some ethnic minorities, those lacking in basic skills.

¹³ Dickerson, Homenidou and Wilson (2006) Working Futures 2004-2014: National Report
<http://ssda.org.uk/PDF/Working%20Future%2020042014%20National%20Summary%20R%20060215.pdf>

¹⁴ Sector Skills Matrix <http://www.ssdamatrix.org.uk>

[1] Scottish Executive. Learning through Life: Life through Learning. The Lifelong Learning Strategy for Scotland. February 2003. Available from Internet: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/lifelong/lism.pdf> [cited 3.5.2005].

[2] National Assembly for Wales. The learning country: a paving document: a comprehensive education and lifelong learning programme to 2010 in Wales. Cardiff: National Assembly for Wales, 2001. Available from Internet: <http://www.wales.gov.uk/subieducationtraining/content/PDF/learningcountry-e.pdf> [cited 13.5.2005].

[3] DfES. White Paper: Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work. March 2005.

[4] DfES. 21st century skills: realising our potential. London: DfES, 2003. Available from Internet: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/14-19educationandskills/index.shtml> [cited 13.05.05].

[5] A full level 2 refers to any qualification equivalent in standard and breadth to 5 GCSEs at A*-C or National Vocational Qualification at level 2 (see Fig. 2 and 4).

[6] A full level 3 refers to a standard equivalent to two A-levels or a National Vocational Qualification at level 3 (see Fig. 2 and 4).

[7] The 'New Deal' system of placing requirements on young jobseekers is the clearest exception to this rule, where conditions must be met before there is an entitlement to benefit.

[8] Five stages are as follows: 1. Assessment of current and future skill needs. 2. Assessment of current provision. 3. Analysis of the gaps and weaknesses in current workforce development activity. 4. Assessment of the scope for collaborative action by employers. 5. The development of a costed action plan with key delivery partners.

0502 - PUBLICLY PROMOTED CVET FOR ALL

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES

The main bodies responsible for developing and implementing national policy for training are undergoing another major reform, the national and local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) in England will be replaced by 2010 by two new planning and funding bodies and the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA), (UK-wide), has been transformed into the UK Commission for Employment and Skills in early 2008. UKCES leads and licenses the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs). Each is referred to elsewhere in this overview. Other main bodies involved include:

- Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (England), The Welsh Assembly, The Assembly of Northern Ireland, the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive;
- Jobcentre Plus;
- Government Offices for the Regions;
- Basic Skills Agency;
- National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education;
- LSN and QIA (formerly, LSDA);
- Local authorities;
- Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD);
- Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (and Local Enterprise Companies -LECs).¹⁵

¹⁵ Qualifications and Participation in Learning at a local level: England 2006, DIUS, 2007, <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/DB/STA/t000747/addition6ParticipationInLearning.xls>

PARTICIPATION RATES

The UK has a continuing challenge to increase participation in learning among adults, especially those 'hard to reach'. The government's Annual Population Survey (APS) in England measures adults aged 16 to 69 participating in learning of any kind. In 2006, 68.2% of all adults reported participating in some type of learning and 46.6% (14.9 million) participated in taught courses. The Adult Learning Survey, which is carried out annually by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) has shown a downward trend in adult participation for the last three years. The corresponding rates in Scotland remain quite low compared with other parts of the UK.

DELIVERY MECHANISMS AND PROVIDERS

While much initial training is government-funded, the employer funds most workplace continuing training. Much continuing training is provided in-company or through specialist consultants or agencies. Most community and leisure learning provision, while it may be part-funded by a body such as the local authority, carries a financial cost to the individual. At the same time the public further and higher education establishments are major training providers. A wide range of private training organisations is involved. The following list of mechanisms and providers indicates many of the important ones, but is not exhaustive.

Investors in People (IiP) are a nationally recognised business standard that encourages employers to invest in training. IiP UK is an executive non-departmental public body set up in 1993. The award maintains a national standard. The IiP award indicates that a company or workplace has a high commitment to develop all employees, reviews training for all employees regularly, takes action to train and develop employees effectively, and evaluates the outcome of training and HR development.

There is a diverse range of provision within the post-compulsory education and training sector in addition to 6th form and FE colleges. This includes VET within enterprises, voluntary organisations, the prison service, uniformed services (police, armed services, emergency services), health and care services. There are, for example, many independent colleges (e.g. secretarial colleges for secretarial and administrative training). There are also many private language training schools. None of these private or independent colleges require government approval, but about 100 of them are registered with the British Accreditation Council for Independent Further and Higher Education.

There are also numerous private training providers contracted by employers and local authorities to deliver specified training programmes (e.g. courses in human resource development and qualifications in particular occupational areas). Nationally, there is significant in-house training provided by employers. In-house trainers may work for an employer organisation and may be dedicated full-time to provide training; or they may be employed to undertake such training duties alongside other work. Other trainers may be contracted by the organisation to provide training or to assess employees' levels of competence.

Training is available through a wide range of private and public providers. This includes:

- Further education colleges;
- Higher education providers;
- Local authority adult provision;
- The Open University;
- National extension college;
- National open college network;
- BBC education and other TV media;

- Home Office, National Health Service and other major public sector organisations;
- Private consultancies and training agencies;
- Trade unions;
- Churches and voluntary organisations;
- The growing availability of public and private web-based provision.

The further education sector in the UK (2005-06) consists of 476 colleges, of which 102 are Sixth Form Colleges providing mainly full time academic courses to students aged 16-19. The remainder of the sector comprises general further education colleges, tertiary colleges, specialist colleges (mainly in land-based provision and art and design) and colleges that cater for people who have learning difficulties or disabilities, or both. All of these provide both initial and continuing vocational education and training, catering for both young people and adults and normally with a range of both short and long courses. According to the UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Services) annual datasets, in 2004, FE institutions in the UK supplied 42% of students for higher education [1].

There is a long tradition of people who lacked formal qualifications or training earlier in life achieving qualifications flexibly later on. Access courses to HE are recognised by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) through their inclusion in a national scheme. A student who successfully completes an Access course is awarded a certificate bearing the QAA Access logo.

QAA regulates the national recognition of Access courses. It is responsible for assuring the quality of recognised Access courses, and the adequacy of standards of student achievement on these courses. QAA has established a scheme through which it can meet these responsibilities, The QAA Recognition Scheme for Access to Higher Education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (the recognition Scheme).

The QAA Recognition Scheme is not applicable in Scotland. The Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP) initiative works in partnership with further education colleges and higher education institutions within Scotland, to co-ordinate their access initiatives and develops progression pathways. Students who successfully complete SWAP programmes – and gain a positive tutor reference – are guaranteed a place on an appropriate higher education course (HNC/D or degree) either in either in a Further Education College or Higher Education Institution.

Articulation arrangements also exist for learners progressing from HNC/Ds to degrees. Under these arrangements learners undertake an HNC or D and articulated onto the second or third year of a specified degree programme. The amount of credit offered, for learning at HN level, and level of entry to the degree programme by higher education institutions depends on the specific demands of the course, which the learner wishes to join. A comprehensive outline of the existing HN-degree articulation routes is available at <http://www.napier.ac.uk/mapping/college.aspx>

This overview indicates elsewhere many of the initiatives that government and other stakeholders have taken. Five such policies are cited below:

- 'Work-Life Balance' policies;
- The expansion of higher education;
- Emphasis on developing Foundation Degrees (NB not in Scotland);
- The reform of management and administrative frameworks for VET;
- An emphasis on e-learning, community and workplace learning. The intention is to put the learner at the centre.

The following is an illustrative list of government's initiatives, including financial incentives, and priorities that are intended to improve access to continuing training, but is not intended to be exhaustive:

EMPLOYER TRAINING PILOTS (ETPs) – KNOWN AS 'TRAIN TO GAIN' AS OF 2006

The ETPs, a government initiative of 2002, encourage employers to train low-skilled employees by reimbursing employers the cost of granting low-skilled employees paid time off work to pursue education and training courses. By 2006, 18 000 employers and 80 000 employees, who lack basic skills or vocational qualifications at level 2 were trained.

The nationwide Train to Gain programme, which replaced the ETPs, attracted 169,400 learners in its first full year.

FOUNDATION DEGREES (NOT SCOTLAND)

The Foundation Degree is a vocationally oriented qualification below the level of a BA degree level, which allows for progression to a full degree. They are meant for learners with non-traditional academic background and are designed in conjunction with employers.

BUSINESS LEARNING ACCOUNTS (BLAs)

The Scottish Executive has piloted 300 Business Learning Accounts (BLAs) to stimulate learning in small businesses. The scheme provides businesses with the tools to link training needs with business growth and funding to support the businesses' own investment.

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ADULT LITERACY AND NUMERACY IN SCOTLAND

While research suggests that in Scotland 800,000 adults may have low levels of literacy and numeracy, the report 'Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland' contains recommendations for transforming Scotland's literacy service. Since 2001, GBP51 million (EUR61 million) of new funding has been invested and 71,000 new learners have been helped. Learning Connections, the national research and development unit created within Communities Scotland, offering consolidated national advice.

Similar schemes to improve literacy and numeracy levels of adult skills, including Skills for Life, exist across the UK.

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EDUCATION MAINTENANCE ALLOWANCES (EMAs)

EMAs target young people from less well-off backgrounds and are linked to course attendance and progression requirements, aiming to improve levels of participation and retention, particularly in deprived areas. EMAs became a national scheme across the UK in 2004. The grant is up to EUR42 a week for 16-17 year olds from low-income families to stay on in learning.

INDIVIDUAL LEARNING ACCOUNTS (ILAs)

An individual could open an ILA and access a range of discounts on the costs of learning provided they make some contribution as well. This approach is fully operational in Wales. In England the scheme was suspended in 2004 (apart from National Health Service NHS) and a new one was piloted in two regions in the year 2007-08 academic year, and funds were made available to buy programmes above level 2. A similar scheme of Bursaries is available to teachers in their third and fourth year: they decide how to spend the money on their own personal/professional development.

In Scotland, a new scheme is under review, which will initially target low-income learners and will allow the learner up to GBP200 (EUR 320) support per year.

[1] UCAS Annual Pivot Tables, <http://www.ucas.com/figures/about/pivot.html>

0503 - TRAINING FOR UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE AND OTHERS VULNERABLE TO EXCLUSION IN THE LABOUR MARKET

The UK government welfare to work policy is delivered through a number of training programmes targeted at specific groups of unemployed and vulnerable (New Deal, Ambition Programme, etc).

Since April 2002, in England and Wales, state provided work-based learning for long term unemployed adults has been delivered through the Jobcentre Plus, under the responsibility of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Scotland delivers its Adult training through Training for Work.

THE NEW DEAL

New Deal is a key part of the Government's Welfare to Work strategy. It is an active labour market policy designed to move people into work quickly, and provide those who need it with extra help to improve their employability. More than 1.8 million people have found a job through the New Deal since its launch in 1998 (as of January 2008). At the end of 2007 the government published Ready for Work¹⁶, which set out its plans for a more flexible personalised New Deal with a strong focus on helping the most disadvantaged jobseekers get and sustain work.

The New Deal for Young People (NDYP) and New Deal 25+ are mandatory programmes for those who are unemployed for six and eighteen months respectively. New Deal for Partners, New Deal 50+, New Deal for Disabled People and New Deal for Lone Parents are voluntary programmes.

As well as providing Personal Adviser support, the New Deal consists of:

- Activation through incentives, e.g. working family tax credit;

¹⁶ Ready for Work is available on the DWP website at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/welfarereform/readyforwork/>

- Activation through sanctions, e.g. young people must meet criteria for seeking and applying for jobs and taking training opportunities;
- Help through training and improving vocational skills;
- Help through job search support/counselling and improved job matching;
- Help through subsidies, including subsidised placements.

Retraining is more accurately understood as part of the national skills agenda, than as a specific response to decline in particular areas or industries.

Large-scale retraining programmes tend not to be the approach taken by government, nor in the regions or localities. Very large numbers of people have retrained to participate in tertiary occupations rather than manufacturing, as the latter has continued to decline. The labour market tends not to be highly regulated, thus people can move from occupation to occupation in a more fluid way than in countries where labour market entry is regulated for most occupations.

The Regional Development Agencies have an important role. England has 9 RDAs, and devolved government in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland also leads on regional development. The role of RDAs is to provide effective and well co-ordinated regional economic development and regeneration, and to enable each region to increase its competitiveness. London now has an elected mayor, though the powers are limited, and the North East may experiment first with an elected regional assembly.

In England, the Learning and Skills Councils leads on the national, regional, and local skills agenda. The National LSC has two main committees: an adult learning committee and a young people's learning committee. It has a clear responsibility to develop the national skills strategy and to lead strategically in each local area to raise skills levels, participation in education and training for those aged 16 and over, and to improve local provision.

Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) focus on meeting employers' skills needs at craft and technical level. Initially aimed at further education colleges, the programme has been extended to include work based learning providers. There is a developing network of over 150 CoVEs across the English regions, covering a wide range of key economic sectors. CoVEs should demonstrate links with schools and progression to employers to ensure that the developing network is tightly focused on meeting local employers' skills needs.

0504 - CVET AT THE INITIATIVE OF ENTERPRISES OR SOCIAL PARTNERS

A RANGE OF APPROACHES TO WORKPLACE LEARNING

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EMPLOYERS

The IES Report on Adult Learning in England indicates that over 80 % of firms with 25+ employees provide off the job training, and over 90% of those with 200+ employees. Much of this training concerns induction, health and safety – and four out of five employers provide job specific training. The most common form of training is training companies, followed by further education colleges, then equipment providers. Most on the job training is provided by a line manager, supervisor or an experienced colleague, followed by specialist training staff. Increasingly, IT based packages are used for training.

Considerable differences exist between employers in the same industry or sector. The type and quality of training also varies. About 40% of employer-funded training leads to

qualification or part qualification, and a considerable proportion related to induction rather than medium term skills development.

The above Report categorises employers by their approach to learning as: non-trainers; ad hoc or informal trainers; formal, systematic trainers; and, learning organisations.

Many workplaces offer employees the opportunity to achieve formal recognition of their level of competence through the work-based route of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs or SVQs, Scottish Vocational Qualifications), which are designed to assess job-specific skills. Performance is assessed on-the-job at five different levels of standards as set by the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for that occupational area of employment.

In 2006, 26.6 per cent of people of working age had received job-related training in the last four weeks in the UK, which compares favourably to the EU average of 9.6%¹⁷. Employees were more likely to receive job-related training than self-employed, the unemployed or the economically inactive.

SOCIAL PARTNERS - UNIONLEARNITY

Unionlearn, is the Trade Union Council's (TUC) learning and skills organisation, which was established in 2006 to provide a strategic framework and support for unions' work on learning and skills. Mostly funded by the government, it's a union-led organisation, with a Board comprising 15 senior TUC General Council members. The mission of unionlearn is to increase workers' life chances through opening more learning opportunities to their members, particularly those disadvantaged in the labour market. There are two targets set: that by 2010 there should be 22,000 trained and accredited ULRs and that these will help a quarter of a million employees per year into training.

0505 - CVET AT THE INITIATIVE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

The strategy of government relies on encouraging individuals to take up learning and training opportunities, with a strong focus on the learner's needs rather than on the institutional interest of the providers. The 'New Deal' system of placing requirements on young jobseekers is the clearest exception to this rule, where conditions must be met before there is an entitlement to benefit.

Flexibility exists at many points in the UK education systems, such that people who are highly motivated to learn and to gain qualifications can usually find a way into the systems. In school-age qualifications and, increasingly, degrees and other higher education qualifications, access is open irrespective of age. There is a long tradition of people who lacked formal qualifications or training earlier in life achieving qualifications flexibly later on. Nevertheless, barriers to learning are strong for many people, particularly those who are socially excluded or at risk, and distribution of qualifications and access continue to show marked inequalities.

Considerable research into the individual, social and economic aspects of barriers to continuing participation have highlighted the need for a major change. This has had some influence on government policy. In a scenario where approximately 9 % of each age cohort still leaves school unqualified and without progressing to further education, training or a job with training, and where some seven or eight million adults are identified as lacking in basic skills, finding ways that encourage large numbers of people to be involved in learning remains a key policy issue.

Access courses to HE are recognised by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) through their inclusion in a national scheme. A student who successfully completes an Access course is awarded a certificate bearing the QAA Access logo.

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¹⁷ Draft 2008 Joint Progress Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme "Delivering lifelong learning for knowledge, creativity and innovation", 31 January 2008.

achievement on these courses. QAA has established a scheme through which it can meet these responsibilities, The QAA Recognition Scheme for Access to Higher Education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (the recognition Scheme).

The QAA Recognition Scheme is not applicable in Scotland. The Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP) initiative works in partnership with further education colleges and higher education institutions within Scotland, to co-ordinate their access initiatives and develops progression pathways. Students who successfully complete SWAP programmes – and gain a positive tutor reference – are guaranteed a place on an appropriate higher education course (Higher National Certificate/Higher National Diploma or degree) either in either in a Further Education College or Higher Education Institution.

Articulation arrangements also exist for learners progressing from Higher National Certificate/Higher National Diploma's to degrees. Under these arrangements learners undertake a Higher National Certificate or Higher National Diploma's and articulated onto the second or third year of a specified degree programme. The amount of credit offered, for learning at Higher National level, and level of entry to the degree programme by higher education institutions depends on the specific demands of the course, which the learner wishes to join. A comprehensive outline of the existing Higher National degree articulation routes is available at www.napier.ac.uk/mapping/college.aspx

The UK's system allows for flexible access, although the evidence is that many experience the barriers to learning as strong. In terms of workplace learning for example, there is little emphasis in several sectors on progression beyond qualifications at level 2 or 3. Even qualifications included in the National Qualifications Framework often lack units that would of themselves encourage successful applicants to progress to more advanced qualifications, or to preparation for management.

