4 Making basic skills development more relevant for workers and employers in England, United Kingdom

Making basic skills development more relevant to work and career development can help to increase the learning and skills of low-skilled workers. This chapter explores three policy options for making basic skills development more relevant for workers and employers in England (United Kingdom): 1) tailoring basic skills content and programmes more closely to learners' vocational contexts; 2) strengthening the capacity of adult education teachers to deliver flexible and tailored basic skills; and 3) using and rewarding the skills of low-skilled workers more effectively in workplaces.

Key findings and recommendations: Making basic skills development more relevant

Motivating more low-skilled workers in England to learn requires more effective and relevant basic skills development opportunities. One reason why low-skilled workers may lack motivation to develop their skills is that basic skills programmes may not effectively raise workers' skills levels and/or help them meet their career goals. Longitudinal research in England has found that basic skills training can lead to skills or career improvements, but has not done so consistently for all participants. Broader quality assurance monitoring of basic skills programmes in England has yielded mixed results, and highlighted some quality problems.

Tailoring basic skills content to participants' vocational contexts can make it more relevant, attractive and effective for low-skilled workers. Data are lacking on the extent to which contextualisation of basic skills is taking place in England. The Army's contextualised approach to literacy training is one of several promising examples. Yet for the most part providers do not seem to be adapting the content of basic skills programmes to the vocations of adult learners. Examples from countries like Norway and the United States could inform England's progress.

Well-trained and supported teachers are critical for ensuring basic skills programmes are effective and relevant for low-skilled workers. However, England's adult education teaching workforce faces capacity and skills constraints to deliver flexible and tailored basic skills to low-skilled adults. Uptake of professional qualifications, professional development and specialisations related to basic skills are limited. England's Further Education (FE) Workforce Programme is one promising example to address these challenges, and England could draw on experience in Austria and Norway to strengthen basic skills teaching further.

How effectively employers encourage and reward the use of basic skills affects how relevant and attractive basic skills development is to low-skilled workers. Low-skilled workers' skills are not utilised to their full potential in England's workplaces or consistently leading to career improvements. In part, this reflects insufficient high-performance work practices and managerial capacity in many enterprises, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Lessons from the UK Futures Programme and Belgium, Singapore, Ireland and Poland are relevant for improving England's performance.

Policy options	Policy recommendations
4.1: Tailoring basic skills content and programmes more closely to low-skilled workers' vocational contexts	• The government and stakeholders should increase support for, and improve data on, contextualisation of basic skills content within vocational qualifications.
4.2: Strengthening the capacity of further education teachers to deliver flexible and tailored basic skills	• The government and adult learning sector should collaborate to strengthen initial training, professional development and overall conditions for adult education teachers.
4.3 Using and rewarding workers' basic skills more effectively in workplaces, to increase the benefits for workers and employers	• The government and social partners should support employers of low-skilled adults to adopt high performance work practices and provide career progression pathways. • The government and social partners should promote and increase support for professional development for managers in SMEs in low-skilled sectors.

The importance of effective and relevant basic skills development for workers and employers

Motivating more low-skilled workers in England to learn requires not only raising awareness (Chapter 2) and providing more accessible learning opportunities (Chapter 3), but also more effective and relevant

basic skills development opportunities. As noted earlier (Chapter 1), there are diverse and complex reasons why low-skilled workers may lack motivation to develop their skills. One of the reasons is that basic skills programmes may not be highly effective in raising workers' skills levels or career prospects, or highly relevant to workers' needs and career goals. As stated by England's House of Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, "If the government is successful in persuading adults to improve their maths and English skills, then those adults cannot be let down by inadequate provision" (Adult Literacy and Numeracy, Fifth Report of Session 2014-15).

Job relevance and career development opportunities are perhaps the strongest motivation factors for low-skilled workers to engage in learning. Low-skilled learners tend to be motivated to engage in learning more by extrinsic motivators (e.g. career progression or better pay) than by intrinsic motivators (e.g. personal aspirations for learning) (Windisch, 2015[1]). According to the OECD Survey of Adult Skills, a product of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), about 60% of low-skilled workers in England who participated in education and training (of any sort) reported that their main reason was "To do my job better and/or improve career prospects". Evidence from England's surveys and research tell a similar story. The vast majority (93%) of respondents in the Cost and Outreach Pilots interim report reported that their decision to enrol in their training course was work or career-related (Learning and Work Institute, 2019[2]). The majority of participants in formal learning aim to improve career prospects (78.3% in the United Kingdom), according to a 2016 Adult Education Survey (Department for Education, 2018[3]). Research conducted as part of the National Retraining Scheme[1] on the views of potential users and employers also highlights that most people would not sign up for training without first having further information and guidance on their career progression – most people will only consider training if there is a clear route to a new job (Department for Education, 2019[4]).

Work relevance is also critical for employers, who typically lack incentives to invest in transferable skills, and expect to see performance improvements following training investments. Indeed, 66% of England's employers with low-educated workforces formally assess the performance of employees who have received training, compared to 58% of employers with high-educated workforces (Winterbotham et al., 2018[5]).

Given the considerable barriers to learning faced by low-skilled adults in general, and the time constraints for workers and employers in particular (Chapter 3), basic skills programmes must be effective at raising skill levels to be attractive.

Making basic skills development effective and relevant for workers and employers is multi-faceted, and can involve, for example:

- Tailoring training to the basic skills levels of workers.
- Tailoring training to workers' and/or employers' individual or organisational goals.
- Linking the content of basic skills training to the learner's work context.
- Providing high quality, tailored and contextualised basic skills teaching.
- Providing ongoing peer and other support to low-skilled workers in basic skills programmes.
- Ensuring basic skills programmes are continuously improved based on evaluation evidence and stakeholder input.
- Ensuring workers' newly formed basic skills are subsequently used in the workplace.
- Proactively devising plans to follow basic skills training with further education and training, particularly formal qualifications, and/or career progression.

Current responsibilities and initiatives for ensuring relevant basic skills development

As in other OECD countries, responsibility for ensuring basic skills programmes are effective and relevant for workers and employers are shared across different government and non-government actors.

- The Department for Education (DFE) priorities in the area of "Post-16 and skills" include the review of qualifications at Level 3 and below, the improvement of the status of the further education teaching profession and the increase of adult learning and retraining (Department for Education, 2019[6]).
- The ESFA is accountable for GBP 58 billion of funding for the education and training sector. It regulates academies, further education and sixth-form colleges, and training providers, with interventions in cases of risk of failure or of potential mismanagement of public funds. Among the projects and services under its responsibility, there are the school capital programmes, the National Career Service, the National Apprenticeship Service and the Learning Records Service (Education & Skills Funding Agency, n.d.[7]).
- The Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) seeks to ensure that the UK workforce meets the skills needs of the economy by working with the Department for Education (DfE) to establish a world-class technical education system.
- The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) is responsible for inspecting the further education and skills providers, ensuring quality, relevance, outcomes and overall high standards for learners (Ofsted, n.d.[8]).
- The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulations (Ofqual) is responsible for regulating qualifications, examinations and assessments in England. Specifically, Ofqual is responsible for ensuring that regulated qualifications reliably indicate the level of knowledge or skill that learners have achieved, and assessments and exams accurately report what level students have reached (Ofqual, n.d.[9]).
- The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education oversees the development, approval and publication of apprenticeship standards and assessment plans, and occupational maps for apprenticeships (Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education, n.d.[10]).
- National Skills Academies (NSAs) have a leading role in developing the infrastructure needed to deliver specialist skills for key sectors and sub-sectors of the economy across the United Kingdom. Established from late 2006, they are employer-led and work with Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and other industry bodies to design and deliver skills programmes, qualifications and curricula to meet current and future sector needs. The academies cover many fields, from construction to health, energy, sports and fitness (National Skills Academies, 2017[11]).
- The Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) are business-led partnerships between local authorities and local private sector businesses. There are 38 across England. They contribute to determining local economic priorities, and undertaking activities aimed at driving economic growth and job creation, at improving infrastructure and at raising workforce skills within the local area (Local Enterprise Partnerships, n.d.[12]).

England's performance at ensuring the effectiveness and relevance of basic skills development

Official inspections of further education and skills providers suggest that publicly funded basic skills programmes are facing quality problems. On the other hand, survey data about adult education and training in general (not basic skills specifically), such as the 2017 and 2019 Employer Skills Survey, suggests that

low-skilled workers and employers in England are relatively satisfied with the effectiveness and relevance of the learning in which they participate. Yet low-skilled workers' skills are not effectively utilised in workplaces or consistently leading to career improvements, which likely limits the attractiveness of learning for individuals and the benefits accrued by employers.

Basic skills development could be more effective and relevant for workers and employers

For low-skilled workers who do not participate in learning, problems with the job relevance of available training appears to be a barrier (Figure 4.1). While not limited to basic skills training, low-educated workers in England report as reasons for not receiving any training "not needing additional training for their current job" in about 70% of cases, and "training would not help me get a better job in my organisation" in about 45% of cases (Henseke et al., 2018[13]). These responses could be interpreted in different ways. However, they do suggest the need for more job-relevant training and effective translation of training into better jobs for the low-skilled.

Figure 4.1. The job relevance of training in England (UK) appears to be a barrier for low-skilled workers

Reasons for not receiving any training, workers with no qualification, GCSE grades d-g, or NVQ Level 1, England

Note: The various categories add up to more than 100% as respondents could agree to more than one statement.
Source: Based on Henseke et al. (2018[13]), *Skills Trends at Work in Britain – First Findings from the Skills and Employment Survey 2017*, https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1229834/2_Skills_at_Work_Minireport_Final_edit.pdf.

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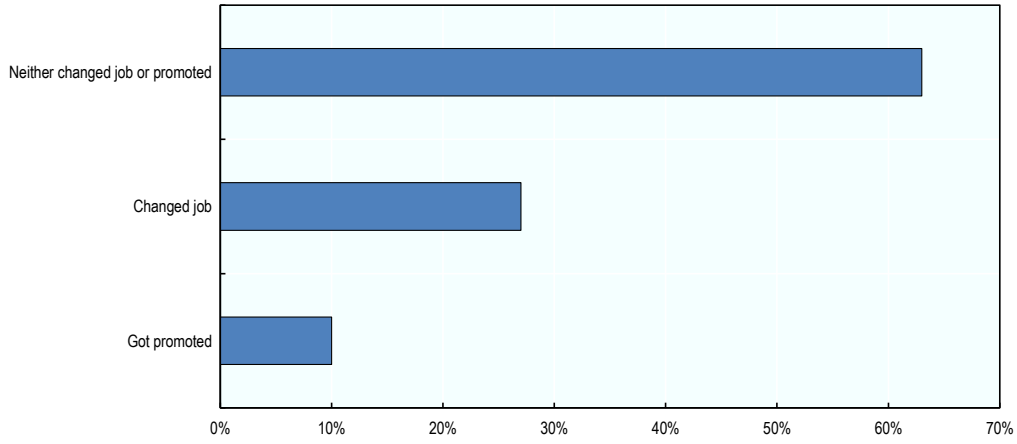
For low-skilled workers who do participate in learning, results on the effectiveness and job relevance of their learning appear to be mixed. A major longitudinal study in England (Panayiotou, 2018[14]) found that basic skills training did not consistently lead to skills or career improvements. While not specific to workers, about one in five adults who completed a Skills for Life funded basic skills course (English and/or maths) in the period 2002-06 did not improve their skills over the course of the programme. Also, most workers who completed a Skills for Life funded English course had not improved their job a year later (Figure 4.2). Only 10% were promoted, and 27% had changed their job (72% of whom much/slightly preferred their new job). The results were similar for workers who completed a Skills for Life funded maths course.

Figure 4.2. For most learners, basic skills training in England (UK) has not led to career improvements

Responses of participants in Skills for Life funded English courses about job changes one year after completion, 2012-13

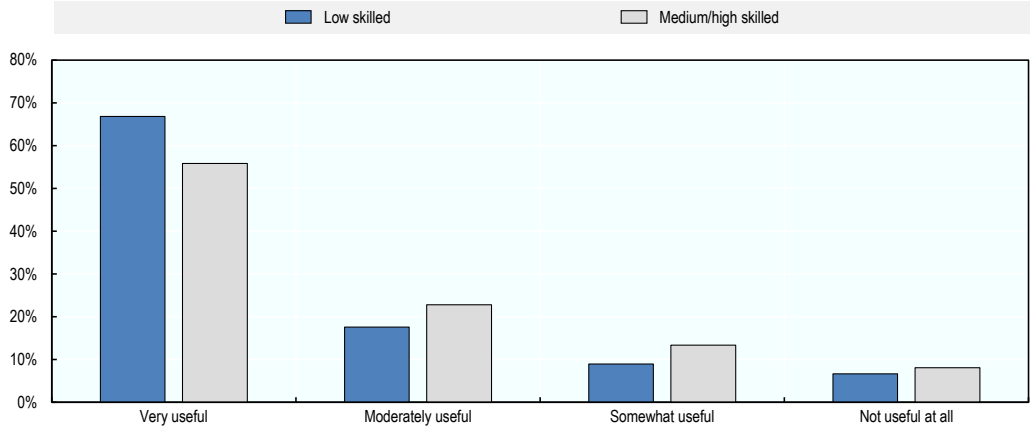


Source: Panayiotou S. et. al. (2018[14]), Quantitative Programme of Research for Adult English and Maths: Longitudinal Survey of Adult Learners, Final Research Report, https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/31139/4/Quantitative_programme_of_research_for_adult_English_and_maths-Technical_report.pdf.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888934220534

Although not specific to basic skills training, most low-skilled workers in England reported that the learning they undertake is relevant to their jobs, a result that is unsurprising given the most common type of training was 'On the job training'. As Annex A (Figure A A.6) shows, about 50% of England's low-skilled workers participated in formal and/or non-formal education and training in 2011/12 according to the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC). Almost 70% of these workers reported that their education and training was very useful for their job, higher than for medium- and high-skilled workers (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3. Most low-skilled workers report that their education and training was useful for their job, 2012



Note: The differences across low and medium/high-skilled individuals are insignificants, apart from the category "Very useful".
Source: Authors' calculations based on OECD (2012[15]), Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) (2012), https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/

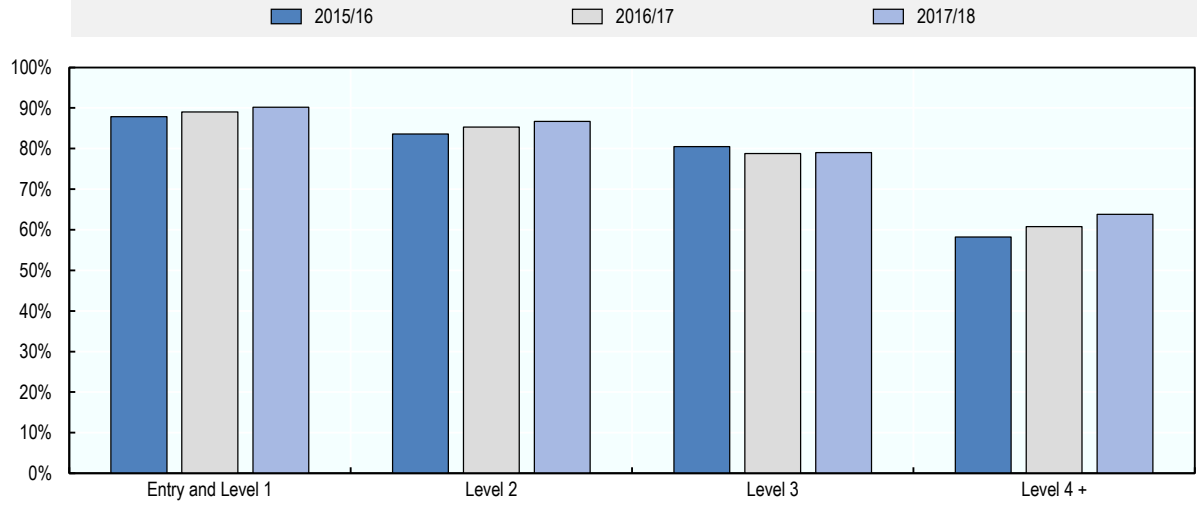
StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888934220553

For employers in England, the effectiveness and relevance of available education and training appear to be relatively minor barriers to providing training. While not specific to basic skills training, about 40% of England's employers with a low-educated workforce did not fund or arrange training for staff over past 12 months (Winterbotham et al., 2018[5]). Yet only about 4% of these employers cited "No training available in relevant subject area" as a reason, and less than 1% reported "The quality of the courses or providers locally is not satisfactory". In contrast, 68% cited "All our staff are fully proficient / no need for training" (68%) as a reason for no training (see Chapter 2 on raising awareness of basic skills development). A further 43% of England's employers with a low-educated workforce did provide training and wanted to provide more but were prevented from doing so (Winterbotham et al., 2018[5]). However, only about 5% of these employers cited "A lack of appropriate training / qualifications in the subject areas we need" as a barrier to more training, and 2% cited "A lack of good local training providers". In contrast, 47% cited "Lack of funds for training / training expensive" and/or "Can't spare more staff time (having them away on training)" as barriers (see Chapter 3 on making basic skills development more accessible and flexible).

Training relevance is connected to the broader quality of the training available to low-skilled workers in England. Broader evidence on quality also provides mixed results. On the one hand, adults (including workers) in lower level basic skills programmes have relatively high achievement rates (Figure 4.4). A high and growing share of participants in Entry and Level 1 qualifications achieve their learning aims.

Figure 4.4. Adults in lower level basic skills programmes have relatively high achievement rates

Learning achievement rates for adult learners by qualification level (2015/16 to 2017/18), England (UK)



Note: The overall achievement rate is the number of achieved learning aims as a percentage of the total number of learning aims in the cohort that ended. See Box 1.3 for more details on levels.
Source: Department for Education (2019[16]), National Rate Tables, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/789589/201718_NARTs_MainText.pdf.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888934220572

On the other hand, official inspections of publicly-funded basic skills programmes have highlighted quality problems. Of Ofsted's 54 inspections in foundation English and maths for adults (2012-13), over half required improvement or were inadequate. More than half (56%) of provision of foundation mathematics was judged to require improvement or be inadequate. And almost three quarters (74%) of foundation English required improvement or was inadequate (House of Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, 2014/15, Adult Literacy and Numeracy). Since then, the Ofsted Common Inspection

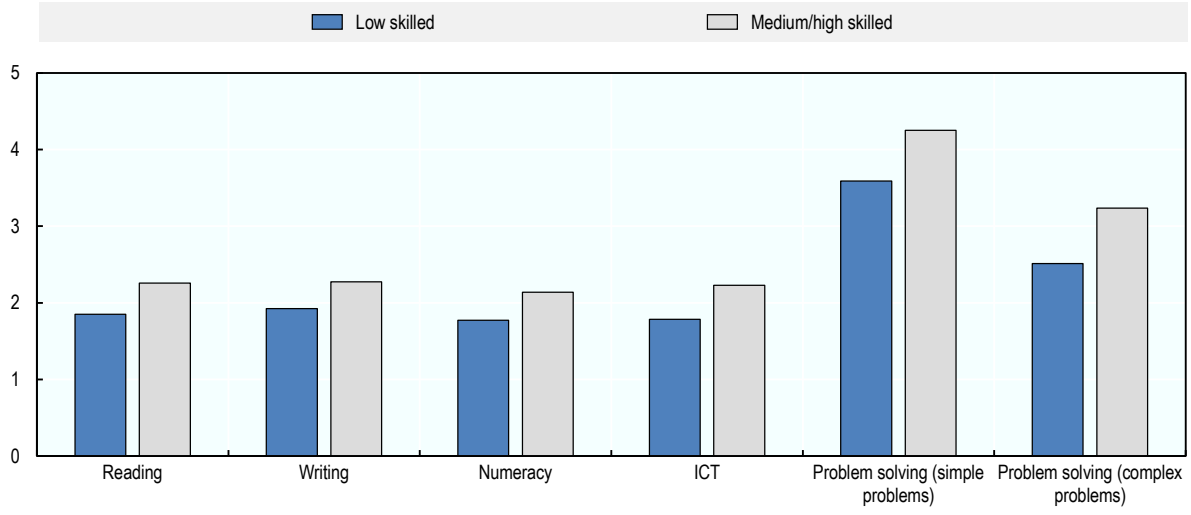
Framework was revised to give more attention to English and mathematics (Kuczera, Field and Windisch, 2016[17]). While not limited to basic skills programmes, more recent Ofsted inspections of further education and skills providers in England show some concerning results. In the year to August 2019, about 10% of inspected providers were judged as "inadequate" and about 35% were judged as "requires improvement" in the areas of "Quality of teaching, learning and assessment" and "Outcomes for learners". These results were worse for Independent learning providers (including employer providers), who provide a growing share of apprenticeships (Ofsted, further education and skills inspections and outcomes as at 31 August 2019).

Better utilising and rewarding workers' basic skills could make learning more attractive and impactful

Employers' use of low-skilled workers' basic skills may make basic skills development more or less relevant and attractive to workers. Employers use low-skilled workers' basic skills consistently less intensively than that of medium- to high-skilled workers (Figure 4.5). As using skills also helps maintain and build these skills, this also represents a missed opportunity for developing the basic skills of low-skilled workers. Furthermore, England's Employer Skills Survey (2017) suggests that about 600 000 (7%) workers in low-educated workplaces are "under-utilised", meaning they have both qualifications and skills that are more advanced than required for their current job role. By finding ways to utilise these skills, employers could potentially improve their productivity and value-added.

Figure 4.5. Low-skilled workers in England (UK) use their basic skills relatively infrequently at work

Workers' reports of the frequency with which they use different skills



Note: Skill use indicators show how often each skill is used, scaled from 1 "Never" to 5 "Every day". The gap between low and medium/high-skilled is significant for all the categories shown in the graph.
Source: Authors' calculations based on OECD (2012[15]), Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) (2012), https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888934220591

Policy options for making basic skills development more relevant to workers and employers

According to available data and evidence, as well as the insights provided by various stakeholders in England consulted during this project (see Annex B), England could further improve the effectiveness and relevance of basic skills development for workers and employers.

Publicly-funded basic skills programmes in England have standardised, generic content. For the most part, providers do not adapt the content of formal basic skills programmes (General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)), functional skills qualifications, stepping stone qualifications) to the vocations of adult learners, even when this content is delivered as part of a vocational qualification. Non-formal basic skills programmes are rarely tailored and publicly funded (see Chapter 3). Well-trained and supported teachers are critical for ensuring basic skills programmes are effective and relevant for low-skilled workers, because the process of adapting the basic skills content to the vocational context can be complex and time-consuming. Yet England's adult education teaching workforce faces capacity and skills constraints to deliver flexible and tailored basic skills to low-skilled adults. Employers generally do not encourage the use of basic skills in the workplace, which is related to a low level of high-performance workplace practices (HPWP) and leadership and management skills, especially in SMEs.

England has opportunities to make basic skills development more effective and relevant to workers and employers, in order to increase workers' and employers' willingness to engage in learning. It can do this by:

1. Tailoring basic skills content and programmes more closely to low-skilled workers' vocational contexts.
2. Strengthening the capacity of further education and skills teachers to deliver flexible and tailored basic skills.
3. Using and rewarding basic skills more effectively in workplaces.

Policy option 4.1: Tailoring basic skills content and programmes to low-skilled workers' vocational contexts

Tailoring basic skills programmes to learners' work contexts, and embedding them into vocational training can make this type of training more relevant, attractive and ultimately effective for low-skilled workers. Under a 'contextualised' approach, basic skills are acquired in the context of learning something else, often an occupational skill. Contextualising basic skills content can have several benefits, in terms of engaging and retaining low-skilled adult learners; improving their attitudes towards learning and self-confidence, and resulting in the skills that are used and maintained in the workplace.

Publicly-funded basic skills programmes in England have standardised, generic content. Awarding organisations, learning providers and teachers do not currently have strong incentives, capacity or flexibility to adapt the content of basic skills programmes (GCSEs, functional skills qualifications, stepping stone qualifications) to the vocations of adult learners. Although functional skills in English and maths were recently reformed to take into account labour market relevance, adult learners are still required to complete the same curriculum as those from other sectors, and in the case of GCSEs the same curriculum as school students. Such generic delivery of basic skills content may hinder motivation, participation, retention and completion by low-skilled workers. Although there are some impressive examples of contextualised basic skills instruction in England, they appear to be limited in scope rather than systematic practices. Pilots of contextualising basic skills have often focused on youth, and the benefits may well be larger for low-skilled workers with a clear vocational direction.

Contextualise the basic skills content within vocational qualifications

Tailoring basic skills content to learners' work contexts, and embedding it into vocational training can make it more relevant and attractive for workers.

Integrating basic skills training into technical skills training can help low-skilled workers progress to the next steps – either further education and training, or new tasks/jobs. Integrating basic skills provision into other forms of learning activity (i.e. contextualised and embedded approaches to provision) can make courses more attractive and effective (Windisch, 2015[1]). Learning materials linked to specific occupational areas can be expected to resonate more strongly with learners who are reluctant to engage directly in "mathematics", "English", "literacy" or "numeracy" learning. The literature confirms that such embedding is a very effective means of securing learning outcomes (Carpentieri, 2014[18]; Melrose, 2014[19]; Booth, 2017[20]).

Under a 'contextualised' approach, basic skills are acquired in the context of learning something else. Very often the context is the acquisition of an occupational skill, but basic skills can also be embedded in an academic programme (Casey et al., 2006[21]; Leach et al., 2010[22]; Lesgold and Welch-Ross, 2012[23]; National Centre of Literacy and Numeracy for Adults, 2015[24]; Ryan et al., 2012[25]; Salomon, 2009[26]). It has been argued that this approach has many advantages. First, it is more likely than other approaches to engage and retain low-skilled adult learners who have negative feelings about classroom numeracy and literacy (Vorhaus et al., 2011[27]; House of Commons, 2014[28]). Second, it can help retain adult learners, positively change their attitudes towards further education and training, improve their self-confidence and parenting and employability skills, and achieve literacy and numeracy and/or vocational qualifications (Benseman, Sutton and Lander, 2005[29]; Brooks et al., 1996[30]; Casey et al., 2006[21]; Carpentieri, 2007[31]; Coben et al., 2007[32]; Ofsted, 2011[33]; Ryan et al., 2012[25]; Vorhaus et al., 2011[27]). Third, basic skills linked to an occupational skill are more likely to be sustained through use in the occupation.

There are challenges to adopting this approach: managing the gap between learning outcomes and qualifications; organisational planning; sufficient resourcing to support the embedded teaching; assessing and diagnosing learners' needs and strengthening the quality of teachers and teamwork among the tutors (Windisch, 2015[1]). For all its merits, it is hard to deliver effective contextual learning. In particular, it often makes quite complex organisational demands for literacy and numeracy teachers to work together with vocational teachers (see policy option 4.2).

Publicly funded basic skills development for adults is formal and qualification-centric in England, quite narrowly defined in terms of qualifications, subjects, and the type of training (ESFA, 2019[34]). Although formal English and maths teaching and assessment is mandatory for low-skilled adults in apprenticeships, the content of these basic skills programmes appears to be often disconnected from vocational context. During the OECD review visits, stakeholders shared their views that the experience from the mandatory basic skills training within apprenticeships is not always positive and effective. This may have to do with the fact that basic skills are parallel rather than integrated into the apprenticeships – in this context, the relevance of learning basic skills is often unclear, especially for low-skilled workers and their employers.

Any adaptation and contextualisation of basic skills content is left up to awarding bodies, providers and teachers. Yet, they have limited incentives, and may find it difficult to adapt the content to vocational contexts. For example, Ofqual allows awarding organisations to permit providers of Functional Skills Qualifications in English and maths to adapt the context presented by questions or tasks in assessments, but only certain components (e.g. reading and/or writing) and only for Entry Level qualifications. Awarding bodies must document whether they will allow providers to adapt assessments, and if so the rationale for this, how any risks will be managed, and how they will guide, oversee and train providers to contextualise English and maths (Ofqual, 2019[35]).

Data are lacking on the extent to which contextualisation of basic skills is taking place, but there have been some highly beneficial examples for adult learners in England. The Learning and Work Institute (2017[36])

found that embedding English and maths was consistently perceived to be integral to effective practice across six case studies on contextualisation in apprenticeships and traineeships. Providers spoke of the importance of making English and maths relevant by connecting these subjects with the interests, intentions and aspirations of the trainee/apprentice. A study of young adults (aged 16-24) who had not achieved GCSE grade A*-C in maths and/or English at school, but had since re-enrolled or achieved grade A*-C, found that learners are more likely to engage and have positive attitudes to maths and English when they can relate these qualifications to real life situations, understand the personal relevance and the relevance to the qualification they are studying for (Robey, Jones and Emily, 2015[37]).

Yet contextualisation is difficult to implement, as it ultimately requires cultural change in the skills system. A pilot intervention in England trained English and maths teachers to contextualise GCSE content for disadvantaged 16- to 18-year-old students who were repeating GCSE English or maths. English and maths teachers received four face-to-face training days and developed action plans and contextualisation resources with support from trainers. The evaluation concluded that the intervention led to only limited increases in the use of contextualised learning in the classroom, making it difficult to assess impacts (Runge, Munro-Lott and Buzzeo, 2019[38]).

Furthermore, at some point contextualising formal basic skills programmes compromises standardisation. The same evaluation (Runge, Munro-Lott and Buzzeo, 2019[38]) revealed mixed experiences of students' ability to apply their contextualised knowledge to the non-contextualised GCSE exam papers. Some teachers also pointed out that they had limited time in each GCSE lesson to cover the syllabus and that their priority had to be to prepare students for the (non-contextualised) GCSE exam.

Effective contextualisation of basic skills training will be most effective if all relevant stakeholders are effectively engaged. Evidence shows that from conception through to planning, design, marketing, implementation, delivery and evaluation, managers, supervisors, workers, union representatives, providers and instructors must work together as a team to determine where the training needs are, what the goals of training should be, how training should be delivered and how the entire process and its results should be evaluated (Folinsbee, 2007[39]; Gray, 2006[40]; Townsend and Waterhouse, 2008[41]; Parker, 2007[42]). The various stakeholders have their own interests and objectives but it is only by recognising this and incorporating the diversity into the training agenda that strong support for and participation in the programme can be ensured. Giving everyone an equal voice fosters confidence and trust and strengthens the stakeholders' commitment to the programme and ownership of it, thereby promoting not only quality and relevance, but also sustainability (Folinsbee, 2007[39]; Gray, 2006[40]; Townsend and Waterhouse, 2008[41]; Parker, 2007[42]). Learner motivation can also be stimulated by involving them in the content and design of their own literacy and numeracy courses and learning material (BIS, 2011[43]). An analysis of existing good practices that help those with low or no qualifications to achieve a qualification at least one level higher concur that learners should be involved in the planning and arrangement of their learning process (Windisch, 2015[1]).

England continues to strengthen efforts for contextualising basic skills. Some colleges are trying to embed English and mathematics within technical and vocational study; as part of this effort, they have engaged English and mathematics teachers to train vocational teachers on how best to teach basic skills within vocational courses (Ofsted, 2018[44]).Through the Flexible Learning Funds, the government has supported some pilot projects that will adapt basic skills to professions. For example, the NA College Trust in North East England will develop online packages for Level 1/2 maths and English functional skills for engineering, manufacturing and service sector workers (Department for Education, 2019a[45]). In addition, there are other promising examples of contextualisation of basic skills for low-skilled workers in England such as the Army embedding basic skills into vocational training and tailoring basic skills programmes to occupational contexts (Box 4.1).

Box 4.1. Relevant domestic examples: Contextualised basic skills learning in England

Unionlearn programme for young offenders

Contextualised approaches to learning have proven quite effective for young offenders participating in education. For example, a Unionlearn programme at the Parva Young Offenders Institute contextualised the teaching of literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology (ICT) within the framework of a course in logistics, aimed at giving inmates the skills to be employed in a warehouse. Participants were taught ICT, literacy and numeracy in the context of how to drive a forklift truck and how to work in a warehouse, all embedded together. Unionlearn reported that participants were far more likely to learn because they could see the point of it, it was contextualised, and they knew it was going to help them get a job. Indeed, Unionlearn concluded that this approach is the most effective way to deal with massive literacy and numeracy problems in prisons and young offender institutes.

Army apprenticeships

In 2013, around 38% of trainees joining the Army were assessed with literacy skills below Level 1, and around 38.5% had numeracy skills below Level 1. The Army takes a comprehensive approach to English and maths learning, using the whole spectrum of specialist and informal teaching. In the Army's apprenticeship programmes, literacy and numeracy is embedded in the workplace. Learners practically apply what they are doing to their roles – infantry man, signaller, and gunner – and to real-life problems contextualised for their workplace. A range of other structures are in place to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of basic skills training - the Army has some specialists who target trainees who are struggling, soldiers who have recently acquired basic skills also support other soldiers, and more generalist teaching staff support these targeted approaches.

More than 10 000 Functional Skills English or maths awards were achieved through the Army apprenticeships route during 2012-13. Standalone provision for Level 1 and Level 2 has consistently delivered annual pass rates above 87% over the last four academic years. The Business, Innovation and Skills Committee of the House of Commons concluded that the Army's provision of literacy and numeracy is to be highly commended, and it has a good record of delivery. Although their military training might not always translate into other organisations, their approach to adult literacy and numeracy, embedded within functional skills, and contextualised to make it relevant to the learners' lives, has been shown to be extremely successful, with tangible benefits for Army personnel.

Source: House of Commons (2014[28]), *Adult Literacy and Numeracy, Fifth Report of Session 2014-15*, https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/21150/1/9780215075864.pdf.

In other countries, contextualisation of basic skills is undertaken in more systematic ways. For example, Norway and the United States both have successful examples of contextualising and tailoring basic skills instruction to learners' vocational contexts (Box 4.2). These two examples confirm for England not only that contextualised basic skills are easier to develop for workers, but that a co-operative ecosystem – bringing together instructors, providers and enterprises – is required to make contextualisation a reality.

Box 4.2. Relevant international examples: Contextualising basic skills to vocational contexts

Norway – SkillsPlus programme

As in England, Norway has many low-skilled adults in employment. It implemented the Norwegian Skills Plus Work programme which subsidises employers to provide their employees with job-related basic skills. This is a continuation of the Programme for Basic Competences in Working Life (BKA) introduced in 2006 (Kompetanse Norge, 2016[46]; Eurydice - European Commission, 2017[47]).

One of the key aspects of SkillsPlus is learning through work-related tasks and practices. The programme is aligned with the country's Framework for Basic Skills, and operates in co-operation with professional organisations. The programme focuses on basic skills such as reading, writing, numeracy and digital skills, and more recently oral communication, and it combines basic skills training and work practices. Enterprises co-operate with providers in order to define basic skill programmes that are tailored to the needs of the employees as well as those of employers. SMEs and industries that display a higher share of low-skilled workers are primarily encouraged to participate to the programme.

The Skillsplus programme also includes the establishment of a database to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme itself, as well as monitoring whether the desired target group is reached. It is considered an expensive but successful programme in reaching individuals who otherwise would not participate in learning activities.

United States – Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) programme

Introduced by the state of Washington in 2007, I-BEST is designed to provide occupational training and basic skills in a structured career pathway to students who have basic skills levels too low to enter college. I-BEST occupational training courses are required to have both an occupational instructor and a basic skills instructor, with the latter present for at least 50% of class time. The two instructors provide contextualised basic skills instruction, especially in learning labs and support courses. The aim is to provide students with both basic skills in literacy and numeracy, and practical knowledge that would allow them to immediately enter the job market.

According to a recent evaluation report, the programme had large positive impacts on college course enrolment and increased enrolment in and completion of courses such as college-level algebra and English. The programme supports advancement to high-level college coursework, since these algebra and English courses serve as prerequisites for many other required courses leading to two-year associate degrees.

These two policies confirm for England not only that contextualised basic skills are easier to develop for workers, but that effective co-operation will be essential for making improvements in England. In the case of Norway, co-operation between employers and providers was essential to contextualise basic skills content, and in the United States, co-operation in the classroom between instructors was essential.

Source: Glosser et al. (2018[48]), *Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) Program in Three Colleges: Implementation and Early Impact Report*, https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/i_best_implementation_and_early_impact_report_es_508.pdf; OECD (2020[49]), *Continuous Learning in Working Life in Finland*, https://doi.org/10.1787/2ffcffe6-en; Kompetanse Norge (2016[46]), SkillsPlus, https://www.kompetansenorge.no/English/Basic-skills/Competenceplus/.

Recommendation for contextualising the basic skills content within vocational qualifications:

- **The government and stakeholders should increase support for, and improve data on, contextualisation of basic skills content within vocational qualifications**: The government should work with representatives of awarding bodies, providers and teachers to understand and reduce barriers to contextualised basic skills training for employed adult learners. England should consider pilots to contextualise GCSEs, functional skills and/or stepping stones to specific sectors, qualifications or trades. Sector bodies, employers and learners should be consulted in the design of such content. The government should ensure public funding is available to support contextualised learning of basic skills and offer guidance and promote providers' engagement with employers and learners to better contextualise basic skills programmes. Ofqual and Ofsted should improve monitoring of the extent and impact of embedded and contextualised basic skills content in vocational qualifications, starting with adult apprenticeships in low-skilled sectors and occupations.

Policy option 4.2: Strengthening the capacity of further education teachers to deliver flexible and tailored basic skills

Well trained and supported teachers are critical for ensuring basic skills programmes are effective and relevant for low-skilled workers. Even for online English and maths courses in England, researchers found a strong correlation between students' predicted first-attempt exam score and the tutor who taught them (Hume et al., 2018[50]). Effectively teaching basic skills to adults is complex and time-consuming, often requiring formative assessment, e-learning, and contextualisation and embedding of basic skills content. Teachers typically need to build on learners' experience, facilitate reciprocal teaching between learners, and link exercises to learners' contexts to achieve the best results. Qualified teachers who regularly assess learning progress to adjust teaching and who have professional development opportunities have been shown to be important for learners' progress. Vocational teachers may need to work together with specialist basic skills teachers to get the best results.

England's adult education teaching workforce faces capacity and skills constraints to deliver flexible and tailored basic skills to low-skilled adults. Few teachers have acquired England's professional qualifications for basic skills in further education – English, maths and English for Speakers of Other languages. Opportunities and incentives for engaging in professional development and specialising in basic skills instruction are limited, especially for the many volunteer teachers involved in the sector. Low pay limits the expansion, professionalisation and specialisation of the adult education workforce. England has taken steps to professionalise the basic skills teaching workforce, but more is needed to ensure teachers can design and deliver flexible, tailored and effective basic skills training to low-skilled workers.

Strengthen initial training and professional development for further education and skills teachers

Skilling and supporting teachers to embed basic skills into vocational training, tailor basic skills programmes to occupational contexts and deliver more flexible learning can help make training more relevant, effective and attractive for low-skilled workers and employers.

Strong teachers are needed to assist learners who often have a long history of struggling in school, but low pay is a common barrier to attract qualified and experienced teachers (Besser et al., 2004[51]; Kruidenier, MacArthur and Wrigley, 2010[52]; EU High-Level Group of Experts on Literacy, 2012[53]). Wages for teaching basic skills to adults are not highly competitive in England. For example, the National Careers Service estimates that functional skills teachers (or skills for life teachers) who teach adults English and maths earn from GBP 19 000 for entrants to 27 000 for experienced teachers. Their roles include teaching, designing a tailored learning plan, carrying out skills assessment, preparing teaching materials, interacting with learners, and guiding and supporting learning support assistants and volunteers. To compare this, the average salary for a primary or secondary school teacher is estimated from GBP 24 000 to 40 500 and for

further education teacher of vocational subjects from GBP 24 000 to 80 000 (National Careers Service, n.d.[54]).

England currently experiences shortage of teachers, in particular well-qualified mathematics and English teachers. According to the College Staff Survey 2018, three-quarters (75%) of principals in further education (FE) colleges identified maths as the most difficult academic subject to recruit teachers (42% for English). Numeracy and literacy also held some of the highest vacancy rates in the sector (Thornton et al., 2018[55]). A key reasons for this is the high number of lower-attaining post-16 students[2] progressing to FE (Noyes, Dalby and Lavis, 2018[56]). Also, over half of ESOL providers (two-thirds of colleges) reported struggling to meet high levels of demand due to teacher shortages at pre-entry and entry levels, according to the Learning and Work Institute's report on "Mapping ESOL Provision in Greater London" (Stevenson, Kings and Sterland, 2017[57]).

Volunteer staff play a big role, partly in response to the low pay and limited job security for adult basic skills educators. This makes recruitment of professional, well-trained staff more difficult (EU High-Level Group of Experts on Literacy, 2012[53]; Kruidenier, MacArthur and Wrigley, 2010[52]; OECD, 2008[58]; UNESCO, 2014b[59]). While volunteers are often familiar with the life circumstances of course participants and try hard to help, they may lack the necessary pedagogical skills and require at least some training (Windisch, 2015[1]).

Professional training for the basic skills teaching workforce remains limited in many countries (Windisch, 2015[1]). According to the recent annual FE workforce data report (Education and Training Foundation, 2018[60]) and training needs analysis (Education and Training Foundation, 2018[61]), one of most frequent concerns among people working in the sector was skills in the teaching of mathematics and English and competence in the use of digital and other new technologies in teaching programmes. A substantial portion of people working in the sector reported that they did not receive all the training they wanted or needed, and some training they undertook was of little value to them.

Recognising this challenge, England has taken steps to professionalise the further education and skills teaching workforce.

The House of Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Committee recommended that post-graduate qualifications be reintroduced to reinforce the fact that adult learning is a specialist job and to ensure that the best teachers are helping adults to improve their English and maths (House of Commons, 2014[28]). This was the result of the inquiry into Adult Literacy and Numeracy, which concluded that there was a lack of support available to teachers of adult literacy and numeracy in England (House of Commons, 2014[28]). Teaching English and maths to adults who have not been able to succeed in the past is a difficult thing to do, and it needs to be recognised as a high professional career with post-graduate qualifications and support to ensure they really have the expertise to motivate them.

Moreover, considering the variety of entry and recruitment channels of FE teachers, provision of appropriate continued professional development (CPD) is essential. According to the 2018 Mathematics in Further Education Colleges (MiFEC) survey, FE Mathematics teachers require substantial training. Prior to teaching the subject in FE, only a quarter of respondents had direct contact with mathematics and almost half of the respondents worked in sectors other than teaching – thus a mandatory teaching qualification will not be a solution in a time of shortage. Most teachers of FE mathematics experience relatively little mathematics-specific CPD (e.g. 55% reported 5 hours or less for 2017/18) (Noyes, Dalby and Lavis, 2018[56]). Also, according to the College Staff Survey 2018, teachers of stand-alone numeracy / adult maths skills were more likely to be dissatisfied with the opportunities available for career development (39%) than other staff (33%) (Thornton et al., 2018[55]).

Recent initiatives under the Further Education (FE) Workforce Programme have sought to better prepare FE teachers of mathematics and English. With a view to upskilling the FE workforce in the teaching of maths and English, a GBP 30 million package was put in place for 2014/2015. It included bursaries of

GBP 9 000 for students in English teachers programmes, and of GBP 20 000 for those in maths teachers programmes in an effort to attract good graduates into teaching, and programmes to enhance the skills of existing maths and English teachers so they can teach GCSE. Support was also offered for the professional development of up to 2 000 teachers teaching maths to GCSE standard. Evaluations showed that the initiatives under the FE Workforce Programme helped to increase the number of maths and English teachers with the skills to deliver GCSEs and helped to up-skill existing teachers (Box 4.3).

More recent investments bode well for strengthening England's further education workforce overall, but their impact on basic skills teaching remains to be seen. In February 2020, the government announced a GBP 24 million package to help FE providers across the country recruit, retain and develop excellent teachers. The package includes GBP 11 million for bursaries and grants to attract talented people to train to teach in FE, in priority subject areas including English; a GBP 10 million boost to expand the Taking Teaching Further programme incentivising industry professionals to retrain as FE teachers, and GBP 3 million for high-quality mentor training programmes to support FE teachers to develop and progress (The Education and Training Foundation, 2020[62]).

The Education and Training Foundation (ETF), England's national workforce development body for the Further Education and Training sector, will implement many of these new measures. It also continues to support a range of activities to improve teaching, including of basic skills. The ETF has developed Professional Standards for Teachers and Trainers, and implemented over 200 collaborative projects on teaching, learning and assessment since 2015 under the banner of its Outstanding Teaching Learning and Assessment (OTLA). The ETF has also made case studies and resources developed by practitioners available on its Improving Teaching exhibition site (The Education and Training Foundation, 2020[63]). The ETF also offers a comprehensive range of courses to support effective teaching of maths and English for teachers of GCSE, Functional Skills, apprenticeships and study programmes. Each year around 4 000 practitioners complete these face to face, online and blended courses (The Education and Training Foundation, n.d.[64]).

Box 4.3. Relevant domestic examples: Capacity building for England's adult learning workforce

Further Education (FE) Workforce Programme

The joint BIS and Department for Education (DfE) Further Education (FE) Workforce Programme was established in April 2013 to address FE workforce challenges arising from policy changes including those relating to maths, English, and supporting learners with special educational needs and disabilities. Among its activities, the programme included bursaries for FE Initial Training Education (ranging from GBP 4 000 to GBP 25 000), a Maths Enhancement Programme (MEP) and English Enhancement Programme (EEP) training literacy and numeracy teachers to deliver GCSEs, and recruitment incentive grants for new maths teachers.

In terms of the maths and English workforce, the Programme aimed to train an additional 2 500 maths teachers and 2 600 English teachers with the skills to deliver GCSEs by the end of the 2015/16 academic year. According to the official evaluation report, the three programmes for Continued Professional Development exceeded their targets for learners and the bursaries appeared to have been successful in promoting enrolment in Initial Training Education (53% of the recipients surveyed reported that they would not have enrolled in such programme without the bursary). An evaluation of the MEP and EEP found that they helped to increase the number of maths and English teachers, and improved the quality of teaching according to participants.

Source: Zaidi, Howat and Rose (2018[65]), *FE Workforce Programme Evaluation: Research Report*, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/767260/Further_education_workforce_programme_evaluation.pdf.

Well embedded teaching requires a team of tutors and co-operation between them. In their research in England, Casey and colleagues (2006[21]) compared two types of embedded instruction: i) courses in which vocational tutors were required to deliver literacy training; and ii) courses in which vocational tutors delivered vocational training but specialist literacy tutors delivered literacy instruction. The study revealed that where a single teacher was asked to take dual responsibility for teaching vocational and basic skills, learners were less likely to succeed than learners taught by two tutors (Casey et al., 2006[21]). Similarly, research from Australia and New Zealand found that where tutors work as a team, for instance a numeracy specialist supporting the vocational teacher to plan and deliver sessions, learners were more likely to stay in training and complete vocational qualifications (Windisch, 2015[1]).

In order to strengthen initial training and professional development for further education and skills teachers, Austria has focused on validating and filling gaps in the skills of adult educators, while Norway has focused on ensuring and publicly funding high-quality training and development for basic skills teachers specifically (Box 4.4). These examples highlight for England the importance of publicly-subsidised training, professional development and qualifications specifically for basic skills teachers, and the importance of recognising and validating further education teachers' prior learning as a way to encourage participation in professional development.

Box 4.4. Relevant international examples: Equipping teachers for basic skills provision

Austria - Academy of Continuing Education (Weiterbildungsakademie, wba)

Launched in 2007, the Academy of Continuing Education (wba) acknowledges prior learning results and offers guidance and counselling to adult educators on the acquisition of missing skills. This supports the professionalisation of Austrian adult education, and encourages teachers to address gaps in their skills on the path to a widely recognised qualification.

Wba targets educational managers, teachers/trainers, guidance counsellors and librarians. Adult educators can submit evidence of competences and practical experience acquired in various ways and with different types of proof. This evidence is assessed on the basis of the wba-qualification profiles and then validated. Lack of competences can be made up by attending further courses or by submitting further evidence. Although wba does not offer further education programmes itself (it accredits suitable courses offered by various AE institutions), wba-graduates receive a recognised wba-certificate or wba-diploma. Wba is unique because it is supported by all ten major Austrian AE umbrella organisations.

Since the start of the initiative, 1 095 educators have registered for the certification process, and 635 wba certificates and 152 wba diplomas have been awarded. According to an evaluation carried out in 2010, the programme had been well received by the candidates who attest to its high quality, and was over-subscribed, raising questions about the sufficiency of public funding.

Norway – Skills Norway

Skills Norway, in co-operation with teacher training institutions, universities and university colleges, developed a formal training model for teachers of basic skills to adults. The training model involves a 30-credit programme spread over two semesters that focuses on teaching digital skills as part of basic skills. The goal is to qualify and certify teachers of basic digital skills to adults, so that they can enable adults to master the challenges of working and community life in an increasingly digitised world. Skills Norway also organises one-day seminars for the professional development of adult teachers (Kompetanse Norge, 2018[66]). Moreover, VOX (Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning) organises courses for teachers of basic skills and provides grants to those who engage in further education courses in this field.

These examples highlight for England the importance of publicly-subsidised training, professional development and qualifications for basic skills teachers, developed in co-operation with all key stakeholders. They also highlight the importance of recognising and validating basic skills' teachers prior learning, in order to fast-track the process of gaining formal qualifications, which in turns makes further training (and formal qualifications) more accessible and attractive for the FE workforce.

Source: Glosser et al. (2018[48]), *Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) Program in Three Colleges: Implementation and Early Impact Report,* https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/i_best_implementation_and_early_impact_report_es_508.pdf; Weiterbildungsakademie Österreich (n.d.[67]), *Weiterbildungsakademie (wba) - zertifiziert und diplomiert Erwachsenenbildner/innen*, https://wba.or.at/de/english/about-us.php#; Prokopp and Luomi-Messerer (2010[68]), *European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning Case Study: Recognition for Professionalisation in the Adult Learning Sector-Academy of Continuing Education (wba), Austria,* http://docplayer.net/23733811-By-monika-prokopp-and-karin-luomi-messerer.html; Kompetanse Norge (2016[46]), *SkillsPlus,* https://www.kompetansenorge.no/English/Basic-skills/Competenceplus/.

Recommendation for strengthening initial training and professional development for further education and skills teachers:

- **The government should ensure that the new package for strengthening the further education workforce also targets basic skills teaching specifically**. Drawing on the experience of the previous Further Education (FE) Workforce Programme, the government should ensure that the new multi-million pound package for strengthening the further education workforce also targets and improves attraction and retention of basic skills teachers, as well as their initial training and professional development. As part of this, the government and further education stakeholders should raise awareness of qualifications, continuous learning and incentives for basic skills teachers. England should consider developing higher level qualifications for teaching adults English and maths, similar to Norway's approach, to help improve quality and relevance in delivery of basic skills. It could seek to expand uptake of qualifications for teaching basic skills to adults through efficient and effective recognition of prior learning, as in Austria.

Policy option 4.3: Using and rewarding workers' basic skills more effectively in workplaces, to increase the benefits of training for workers and employers

Skills use at work contributes to basic skills formation particularly for adults with lower levels of qualifications (OECD, 2016[69]). Evidence from the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) shows that the contribution of work experience (i.e. on-the-job learning, learning by doing) to building basic skills is equivalent to a third of compulsory schooling's contribution (Jimeno et al., 2016[70]). In the United Kingdom, a worker (26 to 45 years old) with basic schooling and 15 years of experience scores 11 points higher in the PIAAC numeracy test than a similarly schooled worker with 5 years of working experience.[3] Such links between years of working experience and basic skills is stronger among low-educated individuals than among highly-educated ones. Earlier research also found the importance and effectiveness of workplace learning, as initial education raises skill but is subject to diminishing returns (Green, Ashton and Felstead, 2001[71]).[4]

Adults with lower levels of skills tend to work in less skill-intensive jobs, and therefore use basic skills at work less frequently compared with those with higher levels of skills proficiency who are mostly working in highly learning-oriented environments – and this cycle becomes entrenched in later life (Mallows and Litster, 2016[72]).[5] Also, workers who perform specific and technical tasks at work may see basic skills gradually erode over time if they do not or rarely use them. ICT skills appear to be particularly subject to obsolescence due to rapid changes in both hardware and software (OECD, 2019[73]). For those adults trapped in a low-skill job, a working environment that does not require the use of basic skills in practice is less likely to enable or motivate them to enhance their basic skills.

Increasing the use of basic skills in the workplace therefore requires considerable effort in terms of designing work practices to accommodate workers with low basic skills. It may involve reorganising work tasks and practices as well as redefining job descriptions and performance, increasing employee responsibility or obliging employers and supervisors to be more aware of basic skills. International literature highlights that workplace basic skills programmes were successful where managers from senior level through to supervisors supported the provision and created environments that allow the use of new skills (Windisch, 2015[1]).

Support employers of low-skilled adults to adopt high performance work practices, and provide career progression pathways

Many factors affect how well low-skilled workers' skills are used in workplaces, including the fact that they typically work in low-productivity sectors and occupations where higher levels of skills are not valued (see Chapter 1). However, one of the most important factors is the way workplaces are organised (OECD/ILO, 2017[74]). A variety of organisational and management practices shape how and why skills are used in the workplace, and are known to positively affect performance of employees and businesses. These are often referred to as high-performance workplace practices (HPWP). HPWP can include (OECD, 2016[75]):

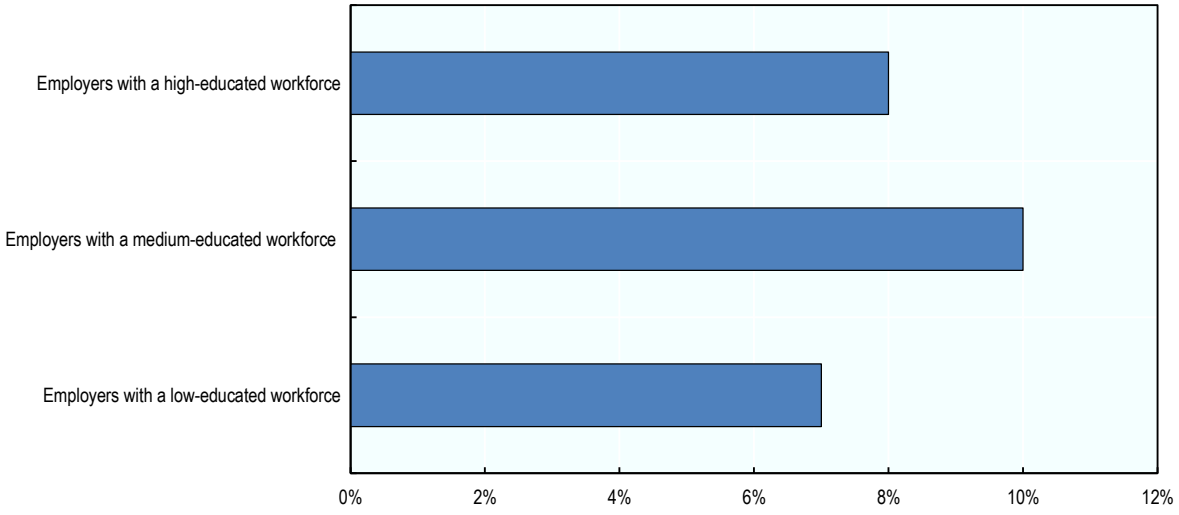
- *Flexibility and autonomy*: including flexibility in working time and tasks, involvement in setting tasks, planning activities and applying own ideas.
- *Teamwork and information sharing*: including receiving support from colleagues, working in a team, and sharing work-related information with colleagues.
- *Training and development*: including participation in continuing vocational training, and on-the-job training.
- *Benefits, career progression and performance management*: including bonuses, career advancement, performance appraisal, and competency profiles data.

For businesses, it is important to implement a bundle of HPWP, given that partial implementation of HPWP may not result in significant performance gains. Career planning and pathways for low-skilled workers are one important aspect of HPWP, which could help increase both skills use and training participation. Developing career progression routes for low-skilled workers can make training more relevant for them, and motivate them to upskill. Better using the existing and newly acquired skills of low-skilled workers may also help reduce retention and recruitment costs, as companies do not need to pay for job advertisements or organise interviews, and the company can skip much of the initial training that external recruits need (OECD, 2018[76]). In addition, the wage returns to informal learning (i.e. learning by doing, learning from others, keeping up to date with products and services) are higher for workers exposed to HPWP – high returns for workers can make training more relevant to them (Fialho, Quintini and Vandeweyer, 2019[77]).

Relatively few employers in England implement a large number of HPWP. For example, only 7% of employers with a low-educated workforce are high performing workplaces, according to the Employer Skills Survey (ESS) 2017 measure (implemented more than 14 of the 21 HPWP identified in the ESS) (Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6. Employers with a low-educated workforce are less likely to have high-performance workplaces in England (UK)

Share (%) of establishments that are high-performance workplaces, by skill level of workplace



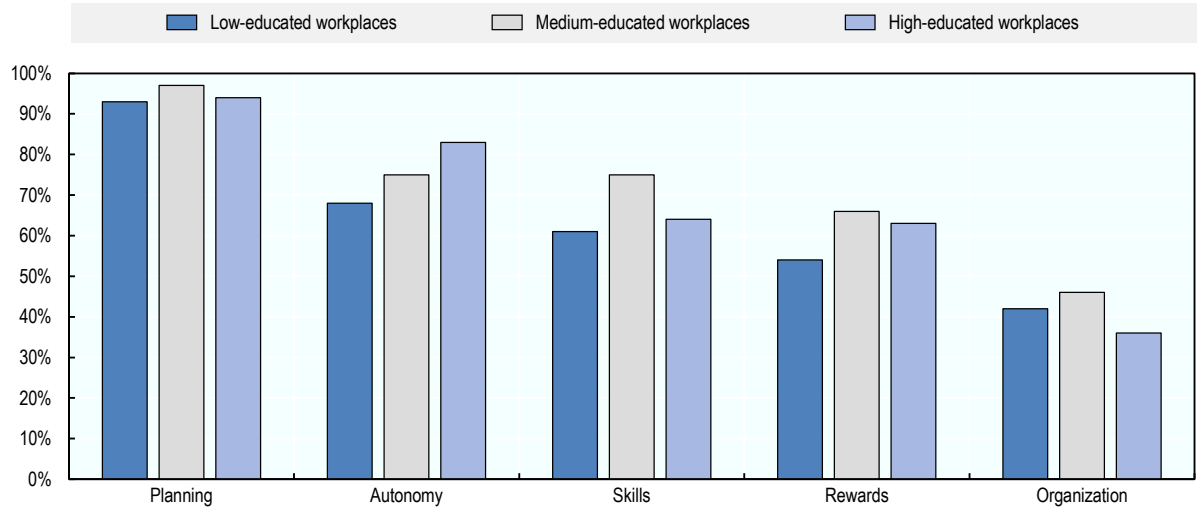
Note: Establishments of high-performance work practices are those reporting that they utilise more than 14 of the 21 high-performance work practices identified in the Employer Skills Survey. The 21 HPWP are: Awards performance related bonuses; Individual performance related pay; Flexible benefits; On or off job training; Training plan; Training budget; Annual performance review; Work shadowing/stretching/supervision; Formally assess performance after training; IIP; Holds ISO9000; Employee consultation / trade union; Creates teams to work on projects; Business plan; Task variety; Task discretion; Flexible working; Equal opportunity policy; Processes to identify high potential or talented individuals; Trade union consultation; Training needs assessment.
Source: Based on Winterbotham et al. (2018[5]), *Employer Skills Survey 2017 Research Report*, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/746493/ESS_2017_UK_Report_Controlled_v06.00.pdf.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888934220610

Although the vast majority of workplaces implement at least one HPWP in the five categories captured by the ESS 2017, employers with a low-educated workforce are less likely to implement some HPWP than employers with medium- and high-educated workforces (Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.7. Employers with a low-educated workforce are less likely to implement some high-performing work practices, England (UK)

Share (%) of establishments reporting that they utilise at least one of the high-performing work practices in each category identified in the Employer Skills Survey, by skill level of workplace



Note: "Planning" HPWPs include having a training plan, annual performance review, training budget, work shadowing, business plan, equal opportunities policy and/or training needs assessment; "Organisation" HPWPs include having an Investors in People (IIP) certification, ISO 9000 certification, trade union consultation, employee consultation, teams to work on projects, and/or a process to identify talented individuals; "Skills" HPWPs include having on or off the job training and/or formal performance review after training; "Rewards" include having a bonus scheme, performance related pay and/or flexible benefits; "Autonomy" include having task variety, task discretion and/or flexible working.
Source: Based on Winterbotham et al. (2018[5]), *Employer Skills Survey 2017 Research Report,* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/746493/ESS_2017_UK_Report_Controlled_v06.00.pdf.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888934220629

The lack of HPWP in England's workplaces may be contributing to a lack of career progression for low-skilled workers, which in turn makes upskilling less relevant and attractive.

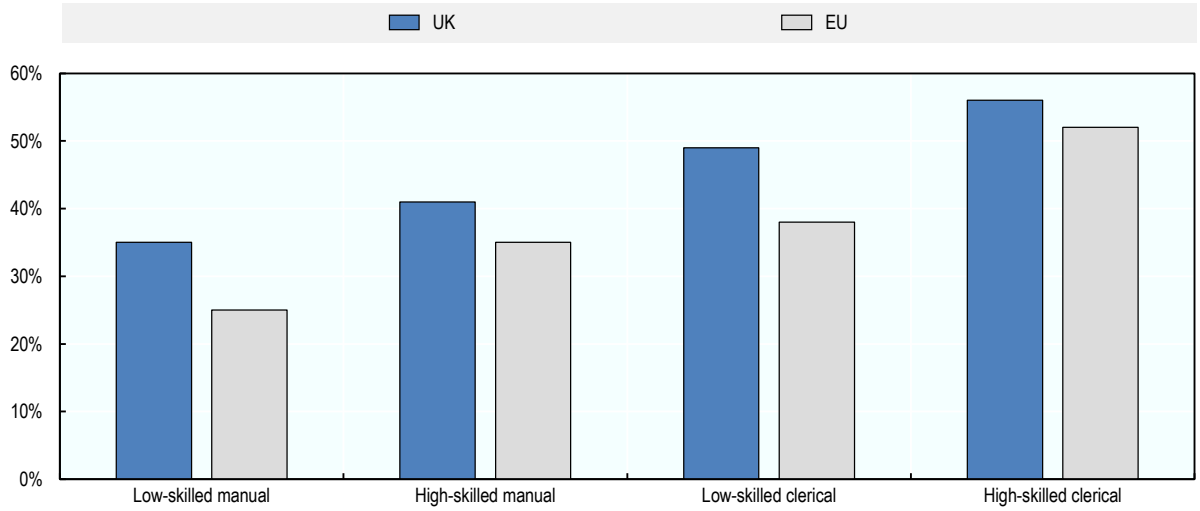
Low-skilled workers are usually low-paid and in low-skilled jobs (OECD, 2013[78]), and these jobs typically offer few prospects for career (or pay) progression. For example, according to a survey of 3 000 UK employees across 28 sectors, lower-paid workers feel that they are offered fewer opportunities for career development than highly paid workers (Matthews and Meyler, 2018[79]). The survey reveals that 72% of those earning below GBP 15 000, 51% of those earning between 30 000 and 39 000, and 38% of those earning over GBP 75 000 indicate that there is no support for career development with their current employer. Compared to workers in high-skilled jobs, few workers in low-skilled jobs in the United Kingdom agree that they have good prospects for career advancement (Figure 4.8). In low skilled manual jobs in the United Kingdom, only one-third of workers agree that they have good career prospects. However, positive perceptions about job prospects are consistently higher in the United Kingdom than across the EU on average.

Even when England's employers face hard-to-fill vacancies, they appear reluctant to invest in and utilise the skills of low-skilled workers. About 55 000 (9%) employers with a low-educated workforce in England report having at least one vacancy that is hard-to-fill. Of these employers, only 10% are prepared to offer training to less well qualified recruits, and only 14% redefine existing jobs in order to overcome difficulties

filling vacancies. Given the lack of opportunity for low-skilled workers to advance, it is not surprising that their motivation for learning is low.

Figure 4.8. Low-skilled workers report relatively less prospects for career advancement

Share (%) of workers who "agree" that they have good prospects for career advancement, by skill level of job, the United Kingdom and EU-28, 2015



Source: Based on Eurofound (2016), European Working Conditions Survey: 2015, https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-working-conditions-surveys/sixth-european-working-conditions-survey-2015.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888934220648

England is in many ways a leader in the OECD in researching and trialling policies to encourage HPWP and progression pathways.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has focused on the supply side - supporting and requiring low-skilled workers who receive benefits to increase their earnings, including through progression. DWP commissioned three proof-of-concept projects in 2014-16, covering one-to-one tailored support for parents and employers; motivational coaching for low-income, part-time workers; and job redesign to include part-time and flexible workers access to promotion to managerial roles (DWP, 2017[80]). DWP's In-work Progression randomised control trial aimed to test whether increased Work Coach support and applying conditionality drove behaviours that led to earnings progression. It found a small and positive statistically significant monetary progression impact one year after the trial for individuals receiving frequent or moderate support compared to individuals receiving only minimal support (Department for Work & Pensions, 2018[81]).

The Work and Pensions Committee is currently holding a follow-up inquiry to its 2016 inquiry on "in-work progression" for people claiming Universal Credit. The new inquiry looks at the progress the government is making, the readiness of Jobcentre Plus work coaches, and what more the government could do to support people to progress in work (UK Parliament, 2020[82]).

The demand side – how employers use and rewards skills through HPWP – is equally important for policy. The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) (closed in 2017) was a key organisation in this area. It was a social partnership led by Commissioners from large and small employers, trade unions and the voluntary sector. Its aims included working with businesses to develop the best market solutions which leverage greater investment in skills. UKCES funded the UK Futures Programme (UKFP) ran from April

2014 to June 2016 and offered small scale investments to research, develop, pilot and/or scale innovative solutions to workforce development issues (Box 4.5). In particular, Productivity Challenge 3 (PC3) supported projects to improve pay and progression within the retail and hospitality sectors (Mackay et al., 2016[83]).

Several practices have potential for expanding the implementation of HPWP at workplaces and improving career progression pathways for low-skilled workers in England. These include designing new job specifications and clearly structured progression pathways for entry level staff, and diagnostic tools to highlight HPWP needs with coaching support for individual businesses (UKCES, 2016[84]). Furthermore, adults who upskill are more likely to experience job progression by switching employers rather than within their existing workplace. The international literature provides little evidence of 'proven' (i.e. robustly assessed) initiatives targeting progression, but localised and sector-focused initiatives appear to have the most potential, especially those that target entry into good quality employment opportunities (Sisson, Gree and Lee, 2016[85]).

Box 4.5. Relevant domestic examples: UK Futures Programme (UKFP)

UK Futures Programme (UKFP)

The UK Futures Programme (UKFP) ran between April 2014 and June 2016, and was funded by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills' (UKCES). The UKFP sought to tackle workforce development issues by offering small scale public co-investment to employers and industry to design and test their own solutions to emerging or long-standing skills and productivity challenges. The UKFP funded five Productivity Challenges, each of which was focused around a specific skills and workplace productivity challenge: in the offsite construction industry; leadership and management through supply chains and networked organisations; progression pathways in the retail and hospitality industries; skills for innovation management and commercialisation in the manufacturing sector; and leadership and entrepreneurship skills in small firms.

There were projects across all the Productivity Challenges that worked on developing high performance working practices within businesses, through focussing on multiskilling staff, creating new progression pathways and refining job design. Several projects on PC3 were particularly focused on these issues, helping businesses to understand how to support staff to develop their careers, and add value to the retail and hospitality sector. The projects accomplished this by designing new job specifications that were more suited to particular types of staff, as well as building clearly structured progression pathways for entry level staff, to assist them in adding more value to their companies. One particular project on PC2 also addressed high performance working practices, through development of a model and approach to high performance working which is now being offered as a complementary approach to workforce development with the intention of building a community of practitioners.

According to a 2016 evaluation report, the UKFP was successful in attracting new partners that the UKCES could not previously. It generally met the objectives of collaboration and co-creation, and met the objectives of innovation to some extent.

Source: UKCES (2016[84]), *Evaluation of the UK Futures Programme: Conclusions and Guidance,* https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/27339/1/Evaluation_of_UK_Futures_Programme_-_conclusions_and_guidance.pdf; Be the Business (2020[86]), *Make your business more productive,* https://www.bethebusiness.com/.

Flanders (Belgium) and Singapore have implemented public programmes to improve HPWP and career progression, especially for lower-skilled workers (Box 4.6). Although evaluation evidence is relative scarce in this domain, these international examples highlight an area in which England may help to create the conditions for basic skills investments being rewarded in enterprises, through various interventions ranging

from information and guidance, to financial support. Indeed, basic skills development and use are interrelated processes, which are best addressed comprehensively.

Box 4.6. Relevant international examples: Job progression initiatives for low-skilled workers

Flanders, Belgium - Career mobility programmes

Flanders' Project 2030 promotes career mobility opportunities for entry-level workers in the care sector. This initiative began in 2009 as a partnership between the association of services for family care and unions to improve the quality of jobs and mitigate skill shortages within the family care sector.

Training is provided on a modular basis to enable entry-level staff to progress within the sector to higher-level positions (e.g. care workers could become nursing assistants). Moreover, employers can enhance career mobility opportunities while also better linking remuneration systems to workplace tasks. For example, Marine Harvest Pieters, a large Belgian company in the food services sector, changed its remuneration scheme in a way to account for skills as well as experience, while recognising the importance of lifelong learning. Employers were offered a variety of courses to learn new skills and move from one competency cluster to another.

While causal evidence is lacking, companies that adopt these competency and career planning practices tend to display higher levels of innovativeness and higher revenues with respect to enterprises who do not.

Singapore - Enterprise Training Support scheme

Under Singapore's Enterprise Training Support (ETS) scheme, which was introduced in 2013, employers can apply for public subsidies for projects aimed at improving skills utilisation. The main aims of the ETS are to improve employees' productivity and skills levels and to attract and retain valued employees.

There are five components of the ETS, to which employers can apply: i) training grant, with the aims of formalising skills training within the business operations and of making training more easily accessible; ii) training capability grant, to allow organisations to build an in-house capability in terms of training delivery or infrastructure; iii) curriculum contextualisation and alignment grant, to support the contextualisation of the training offered; iv) HR development grants, to activate skills' utilisation through a well-developed HR; and v) compensation and benefits systems review grant, aimed at covering the expenses incurred when engaging with consultancy agencies with the aim of building a wage structure that supports career progression and skills retention.

Although evaluation evidence is relative scarce in this domain, these international examples highlight an area in which England may help to create the conditions for basic skills investments being rewarded in enterprises, through various interventions ranging from information and guidance, to financial support. Indeed, basic skills development and use are interrelated processes, which are best addressed comprehensively.

Source: OECD (2019[87]), *OECD Skills Strategy Flanders: Assessment and Recommendations*, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264309791-en; OECD/ILO (2017[88]), *Better Use of Skills in the Workplace: Why It Matters for Productivity and Local Jobs*, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264281394-en; OECD (2016[69]), *OECD Employment Outlook 2016*, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/empl_outlook-2016-en.

Recommendation for increasing high performance work practices and career progression opportunities:

- **The government and social partners should support employers of low-skilled adults to adopt high performance work practices and provide career progression pathways**. To complement the guidance and other services available to low-skilled workers receiving Universal Credit, the government and social partners should support employers of low-skilled workers to adopt HPWP and develop career progression pathways. This support could come in the form of information and guidance, toolkits, and/or subsidies for services such as HR consultancy, building on the experience of the UK Futures Programme (UKFP), Flanders (Belgium) and Singapore. It could be piloted for SMEs in sectors with high numbers of low-skilled adults, such as wholesale and retail trade, with strong involvement from sectoral bodies and associations.

Invest in the management and leadership capabilities of SMEs, to support HPWP and skills use

Strong leadership and management capabilities can drive organisational change to optimise the use of skills and the adoption of high-performing work practices (HPWP). Indeed, weak leadership and management have been identified as one of the main constraints on performance of businesses, especially for SMEs, across the United Kingdom. Weak leadership and management have been identified as one of the main constraints on business performance in England, especially for SMEs. Management training is relatively limited in England, and almost non-existent for small firms. England has some support mechanisms in place to develop management and leadership skills in businesses. Building on this evidence and ongoing activities, it will be important for England to ensure managers in SMEs in particular have greater support and incentives to participate in flexible and relevant management training.

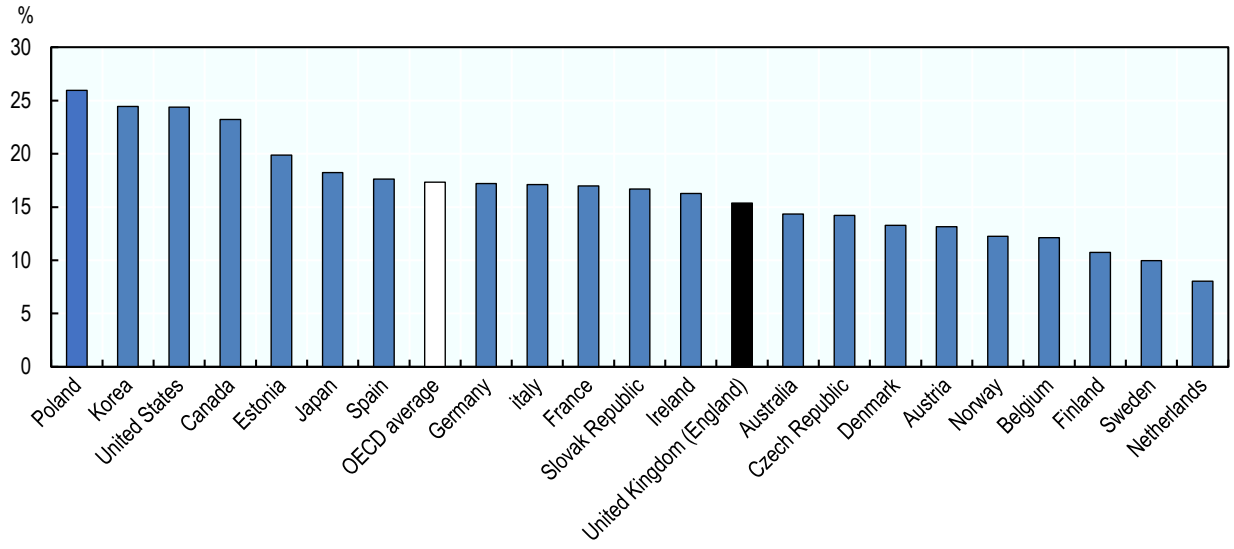
Strong and effective leadership and management have many benefits for businesses – they are associated with higher levels of employee engagement, willingness to invest effort in work, innovation in the workplace, a higher likeliness of adopting HPWP, and higher productivity (Marchese et al., 2019[89]; Bloom et al., 2019[90]; UKCES, 2014[91]). Studies suggest that management skills could account for a quarter of the productivity gap between the United Kingdom and the United States (Bloom, Sadun and Van Reenen, 2016[92]).

In the United Kingdom, weak leadership and management have been identified as one of the main constraints on performance of businesses, especially for SMEs (BIS, 2015[93]). About 15% of managers in England have low levels of literacy and/or numeracy skills, similar to the OECD average (Figure 4.9). Low-skilled managers in particular need to be motivated to raise their skill levels in flexible and relevant basic skills training. Many employers across the United Kingdom self-evaluate their leadership skills – motivating and influencing others and delegating work – to be 'good'. However, there is a long tail of employers who deem their leadership skills to be weaker (BIS, 2015[93]).

Despite these results, management training is relatively limited in England. While a relatively high share of managers receive training (Figure 4.10 – Panel A) little of this training is provided for management and leadership skills (Figure 4.10 – Panel B).

Figure 4.9. About 15% of managers in England (UK) have low basic skills

Share of low-skilled managers, 2012



Source: Authors' calculations based on OECD (2012[15]), Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) (2012), https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/

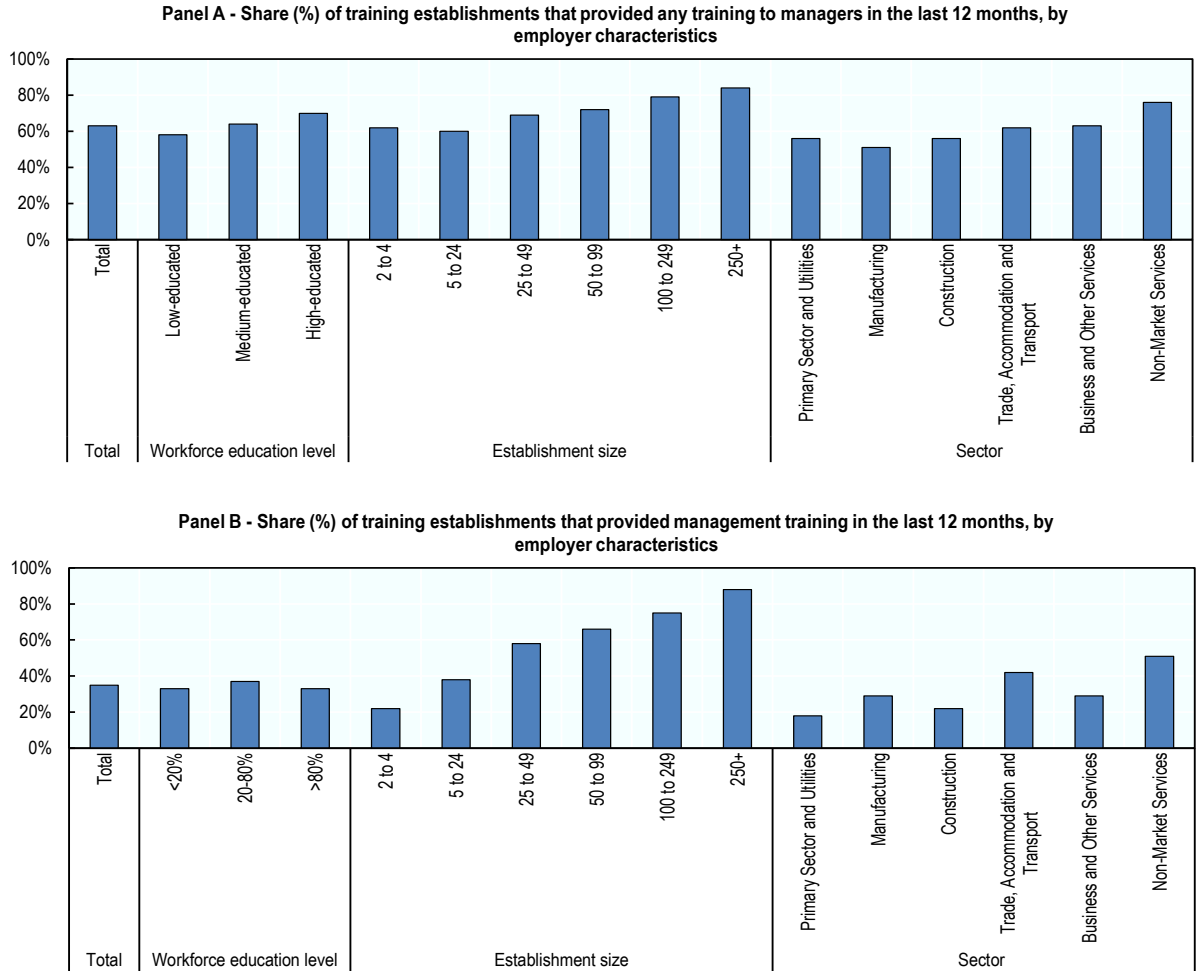
StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888934220667

England has taken several steps to support management and leadership skills in businesses. England's 2017 Industrial Strategy identifies lack of access to management skills as a challenge. The Business Basics Programme tests innovative ways of encouraging small and medium sized enterprises to adopt tried and tested technologies and management techniques. The 4-year programme runs from 2018 to 2022. It has a GBP 9.2 million budget, and grant funding is allocated to a range of projects through the Business Basics Fund. The Programme is delivered in partnership with Innovate UK and the Innovation Growth Lab at Nesta. The programme is part of a series of measures to improve firm level productivity, including the Business Productivity Review, Be the Business and Made Smarter (Department for Business, 2019[94]).

Under the UK Futures Programme (UKFP), the UKCES funded seven projects for improving management and leadership in supply chains and networked organisations (Box 4.7). An evaluation found that the projects appear to have been effective. Prime and intermediary business can use their influence to encourage supply chain businesses to engage in management and leadership development (UKCES, 2016[84]). Another initiative under UKFP sought to develop leadership and entrepreneurship skills in small firms through anchor institutions - organisations that have an important presence in the local community. An evaluation found that the vast majority of projects deemed their approach had been successful, even though there was significant variation between the approaches (UKCES, 2016[84]).

Building on this evidence and ongoing activities, it will be important for England to ensure managers in SMEs in particular have greater support and incentives to participate in flexible and relevant management training. In some cases this will require basic skills remediation. Doing so, can support the proliferation of more HPWP in England's firms.

Figure 4.10. Employer provision of management training is limited in England (UK), 2017



Source: Based on Winterbotham et al. (2018[5]), Employer Skills Survey 2017 Research Report, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/746493/ESS_2017_UK_Report_Controlled_v06.00.pdf.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888934220686

Box 4.7. Relevant domestic examples: Management and Leadership in Supply Chains and Networked Organisations, UK

One project funded by the UKCES under the UK Futures Programme (UKFP) sought to engage a sector in a country-wide research project. The research intended to identify a common understanding of the leadership and management challenges faced by the sector, and develop an industry recognised view of what good leadership and management 'looked like'.

The programme involved various approaches. First, it adopted tailored training sessions to encourage the end users in supply chain businesses to engage in more learning. Then, it engaged industries in discussions regarding possible managerial issues. The different projects adopted various strategies to gain the views of the industry, such as employers steering groups. Some projects also adopted

simulations and one-to-one support to show supply chain businesses what managerial practices were effective. In addition to this, several projects undertook an exercise to baseline the existing managerial capabilities either at an individual, business or sector level, a practice that contributed to provide intelligence useful for communicating to end users and tailoring solutions. Finally, the projects applied a smart targeting of engagement activities, on the basis that engaging with managers at the right level would translate into cascading improvement in practices at lower levels.

The approaches enacted under the programme in terms of encouraging better management practices appeared to have been partly successful. In fact, although over the lifetime of the programme the extent to which the projects had improved the capabilities of managers was limited, more impact was achieved through the most intensive approaches. However, these solutions had limited reach, as they were applied in only a small number of supply chain businesses.

Source: Thom and MacLeod (2016[95]), *Evaluation of UK Futures Programme*, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/504218/UKFP_PC2_Evaluation.pdf.

The Polish Agency for Enterprise Development has provided targeted support to raise managerial and leadership skills in SMEs, and achieved very high participation numbers (Box 4.8). This presents England with an alternative, more proactive approach to raising managers' skills. This in turn would help to foster HPWP, career progression and skills use in England's SMEs, potentially making training more rewarding for low-skilled workers.

Box 4.8. Relevant international example: Supporting skills development for managers in SMEs

Poland - Manager programmes by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP)

PARP has a number of programmes targeting managers, which are generally aimed at providing them with the skills needed to improve their managerial practices and contribute to the success of their businesses.

For instance, the SME Manager Academy, launched in 2018, finances training and advisory support for managerial staff in SMEs in the area of business management, including human resources. The academy aims to: 1) diagnose the needs of SMEs and skills gaps of owners and managers; and 2) train managers of enterprises from the SME sector. Financial support covers up to 80% of the project, while the remaining 20% is covered by the SME. Then, PARP has also introduced the PARP Academy in 2006, which is an e-learning platform that offers 50 free-of-charge online training sessions tailored to the needs of SME sector. The sessions are in four thematic areas related to setting up and running a business (e.g. "managerial and personal skills"). Since 2006, over 180 000 participants have benefited from PARP Academy training. Moreover, PARP introduced the Innovation Manager Academy which is a programme aimed at increasing the skills and expertise of managers and their companies in the field of innovation.

Although in a better position than Poland in terms of managers' skills, England could adopt more proactive and targeted initiatives to address management skills gaps, which in turn would help to support HPWP, career progression and skills use in SMEs.

Source: OECD (2019[96]), *OECD Skills Strategy Poland: Assessment and Recommendations,* https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/b377fbcc-en.

Recommendation for supporting management and leadership capabilities of SMEs:

- **The government and social partners should promote and increase support for professional development for managers in SMEs in low-skilled sectors**. Government and social partners should seek to raise SMEs awareness of the importance and benefits of, and opportunities for basic skills training for low-skilled managers, as well as management training specifically (see Chapter 2). They could introduce sector level solutions with public contributions to fund such training, which will need to be accessible (see Chapters 3) and relevant (see Chapter 4) to managers. The support could focus on employers with the largest management skill challenges (micro and small sized firms) in sectors with many low-skilled adults (e.g. wholesale and retail, human health and social work activities).

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Notes

[1] As of 13 October 2020, the National Retraining Scheme is being integrated into the National Skills Fund. According to a recent communication, it will no longer continue as a separate programme but rather its work and learning will be rolled into the development of the National Skills Fund (UK Parliament, 2020[97]).

[2] Recent policy changes to the condition of funding require students without a GCSE Mathematics grade 4 (previously grade C) to continue their study of mathematics post-16 and for those with grade 3 (previously grade D) to re-sit the GCSE examination rather than taking an alternative mathematics qualification.

[3] The size of impacts are considerable, with one estimate suggesting that one year of work experience in a numerical occupation increases numeracy skills by between 0.7% and 1.8% of a standard deviation (Jimeno et al., 2016[70]).

[4] There are other factors that help explain the variation in economic returns to skills that an individual worker might expect, such as worker-firm matching or firm quality (e.g. in terms of firm-wage distribution or training provision).

[5] The relatively strong correspondence between engagement in literacy and numeracy practices and proficiency levels may be a consequence of a number of mechanisms (Mallows and Litster, 2016[72]):

- Low-skilled adults are likely to use their skills less simply because of their lower proficiency in literacy and numeracy.

- Lower skills prevent adults from accessing those jobs or situations in which they would have opportunities to use literacy and numeracy skills more often.
- Low-skilled adults self-select into jobs and situations that require less engagement in these practices, thus avoiding possible situations in which their skills could be found to be insufficient.
- Reduced opportunity to practise these skills prevents maintenance of existing and development of new skills, thus creating a vicious cycle of skills decline.