



# ENLIVEN



Encouraging Lifelong Learning for an Inclusive & Vibrant Europe

ENLIVEN BRIEFING 41

# Post-School Education for Marginalised Young People

## Evidence from Scotland

Alan Mackie, Ellen Boeren and Sheila Riddell

Centre for Research in Education, Inclusion and Diversity (CREID)  
Moray House School of Education  
University of Edinburgh



Centre for Research in  
Education Inclusion  
and Diversity

February 2019



---

## Introduction

This policy brief reports work undertaken in Scotland to broaden our understanding of the types of programmes that young people who leave school with few, if any, qualifications engage with. As part of this project we investigated two programmes – one focused on young people’s employability, the other on improving young people’s basic skills. Our aim was to investigate and analyse what learning activities, qualifications, skills and other opportunities these types of programme open up to these young people. We also sought to research how these programmes are experienced by the young participants, what had led the young people to the point where they were engaging with these programmes and the outcomes of these programmes – in terms of soft skills, qualifications and progression routes.

Youth unemployment in Scotland is comparatively low in comparison to other EU countries, with approximately 28,000 16–24 year-olds (10.1%) currently unemployed ([Scottish Government, 2018a](#)). However, an identifiable group of young people appear to be at risk of long-term education and labour market marginalisation, specifically those who leave school with few or no qualifications (about 10% of school leavers) living in the most deprived parts of Scotland ([Scottish Government, 2017](#)). Young people from the least deprived areas are nearly twice as likely to obtain higher level qualifications compared with their counterparts in the most deprived parts of Scotland.

The research was carried out as part of ENLIVEN’s Work Package 2 (funded through the EU’s Horizon 2020 research programme), coordinated at the University of Edinburgh. The overall aim of the research was comparative and international in nature; to investigate and analyse the similarities and differences between opportunities available across a range of European countries: Austria, Belgium (Flanders), Bulgaria, England, Estonia, Italy, Slovakia, Scotland and Spain. To provide a point of comparison, we also examine Australia. As an aid to policy development, we suggest some key recommendations.

## Evidence and Analysis

As part of this comparative study, researchers in the nine jurisdictions mentioned above analysed post-school educational provision aimed at enhancing employability and basic skills. As this was a comparative study across ten different nations, we had to select programmes based on some common guidelines for the entire European consortium to ensure sufficient similarities. In order to

---

ensure this, we decided to focus upon programmes funded firstly, through the Youth Guarantee scheme<sup>1</sup> and secondly, through the Upskilling Pathways initiative<sup>2</sup>. We interviewed at least one policy-maker, one practitioner and five young people in each programme.

Our employability programme took place within a college in a major Scottish city. The programme's aims are to work with young people with few or no qualifications, with a view to re-engaging them in mainstream education, providing a platform for progression into further education or employment. All the participants interviewed for this study were moving on to higher level college courses, provided they completed the programme successfully.

Our basic skills programme is an 'Activity Agreement'<sup>3</sup> programme that takes place in a more rural setting within Scotland. Our project sought to interrogate the role of place in the educational transition and the additional challenges that young people may face in an area out-with a major city. As Boeren ([2016](#)) notes, geographical factors are important to take into account as those living in rural areas can find opportunities to access educational institutions and training offers more limited and more difficult to travel to.

Although we only interviewed ten young people across the two programmes, there is a remarkable consistency in terms of the barriers they experienced prior to and during their participation in education. These experiences have scarred their time at school and in some cases, continue to impact on their life on the programmes. Mental health issues (depression and anxiety,

---

<sup>1</sup> The Youth Guarantee is a European scheme which stipulates that that every young person under the age of 25 receives an offer for employment, continued participation in education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months after leaving school or becoming unemployed. Scotland, as part of the UK, has not signed up to this as it was felt that the Youth Contract was deemed to be sufficiently similar to the aims of the Youth Guarantee.

<sup>2</sup> The Upskilling Pathways 'new opportunities for adults' initiative targets those adults who lack basic skills in literacy, numeracy and the use of digital tools in their everyday lives. For young adults who have low proficiency in these basic skills, participation in the Youth Guarantee is challenging. Therefore, a scheme in which they can initially work on their basic competencies is required to prepare them for either entry into the labour market or participation in further study to obtain a final qualification of upper secondary education – or equivalent. Given that the Upskilling Pathways scheme is still in an early stage, it has been challenging for the consortium to select education and training programmes that have already received funding under the scheme and are in operation. Consortium partners were encouraged to locate a similar programme for the empirical component of the work package.

<sup>3</sup> Activity Agreement programmes are aimed at 'those young people whose immediate and future learning and skills needs have been assessed and it has been recognised that without this first step engagement and support, they would not make a successful transition toward and into further learning or training and ultimately employment' ([Scottish Government, 2018b, p. 1](#)). These are individually tailored packages of learning, typically centred on building confidence, improving core skills and developing a plan for progression towards more formal employability programmes or on to further education or directly into employment.

---

primarily), additional support needs, financial difficulties, family breakdown, bereavement, and bullying at school were cited as common difficulties encountered. Two of the young women had suffered sexual assaults whilst at school. As a consequence of these experiences, the young people have achieved very few, if any, qualifications.

## **Our Findings**

The **first** finding from the study is that success is defined differently by policy-makers, practitioners and young people.

For policy-makers and practitioners, success is defined purely in terms of achieving qualifications, student retention and progression. In both settings, they were under considerable pressure to ensure that participants moved on to positive destinations:

***Policy-maker (Employability):*** You get the individual course target then you get your department target. Then you get the faculty target and then you get the college target. So your bit will need to look okay. We have to hit the targets. And the staff are chasing up people that are behind, just so that we can try and hit the targets.

For Activity Agreement staff, the more rural setting provided additional challenges. Post-transition education and employment opportunities were very limited in the immediate vicinity and often involved further travel. Often young people had to wait to join the next available employability programme, which was problematic for those who had just engaged in the process of building confidence. In addition, public transport in rural areas is often infrequent and costly. Despite these challenges, programmes in rural and urban areas have to meet similar targets.

Young people recognised the importance of qualifications, but also defined success in terms of the social aspects of educational engagement.

***Participant (Employability):*** Well, I'll have more [qualifications] on my SQA sheet. Like, bit of paper, I'll have quite a few more qualifications, it's just things on a bit of paper to me. Just again, like, my confidence, it's a more personal meaning for me. My confidence has went crazy since I started.

As a consequence of their poor previous experiences in education the primary finding from our research is that the young people placed a greater emphasis on building confidence and meeting new people in order to overcome anxiety.

---

The **second** finding, in line with other studies, is that funding bodies' focus on hard outcomes misses a large proportion of the work undertaken - and the 'distance travelled' – with and by young people ([Lindsay, Osborne, & Bond, 2014](#)). That is, rather than simply measuring the outcomes of any work undertaken with young people, a more accurate measure of 'success' is the progress a young person makes towards these outcomes. Practitioners feel that focusing only on hard outcomes (in particular moving on to further education or employment) may be detrimental to staff morale if they feel that their work is seen as having 'failed.' A young person may have made significant progress towards a hard outcome, even if they were unable to secure a 'positive destination' at the conclusion of the course ([Egdell, Dutton, & McQuaid, 2016](#)). The frustration was apparent:

**Policy-maker (Activity Agreement):** *Scottish Government have their eyes in terms of how many people are signing up, how many people are moving to positive destination, how many people are negative or unknown leavers. Why, you know, why is that happening? I liken it a bit to a duck. Most people actually see what's going on above the water and that's all good, that's your positive destination stuff, that's your hardcore stats. It's the bit that's going underneath, that's going five million times at the rate of what's going on at top that's expending all the energy that is completely unrecognised. It's not documented. We're measuring it but it's not going anywhere in the bigger picture.*

This would appear particularly important for young people furthest from the labour market and for whom hard outcomes may be more challenging to achieve. On the other hand, from the young person's point of view, it is important to keep in mind the ultimate goal of gaining employment and improving future life chances, rather than getting stuck in endless training cycles.

The **third** finding from the study concerns the relationship between the practitioners and the young people. It was apparent in most of the participant interviews that their relationship with their trusted professional or course tutor was of critical importance. This is also something young people highlighted as crucial in the recently published *15-24 Learner Journey Review* ([Scottish Government, 2018c](#)). Participants spoke about the less formal approach taken by practitioners, the importance of being listened to and the support they felt they received from staff:

**Participant (Employability):** *Since I've been on this course my confidence has went up, like I've made friends and that and confidence has went up. The way I look at myself is completely different from how it was when I first got here, yeah like the lecturers, they make you feel*

---

*intelligent ... [...] ... we have a laugh during it but we'll get this done as well. Make sure we get the work done and have a bit a' fun, it's like a bit more casual and it's like a lot, learning because of that cause it's like you're not, you're not scared to go, 'I'm a bit stuck, can you help me?'*

**Participant (Activity Agreement):** *I've just, like, met her over the last few weeks and stuff, but I feel like I'm able to just, like, speak to her about anything, just with feeling like someone is actually there and is going to fight to help you as well. And, she was able to just turn around and be like, 'you don't look happy'. My mum and stepdad couldn't even do that. And it was just that feeling like you could feel like someone is there and you're not alone.*

In both research sites, the young people consistently highlighted the support they received from staff as an important aspect in educational re-engagement. This was a common finding across all partner countries. It is also interesting to note that many participants highlighted the importance of learning in groups to combat social isolation and to build relationships, solidarity and to benefit from peer support. But it is evident that young adults appear to value the one-to-one support, want individualised guidance and see building strong relationships with their mentors as one of the most valuable aspects of their participation in an education and training programme. While group sessions can enable benefits like peer support and new friendships, it seems important to offer these on top of individualised approaches, not as a replacement.

The **fourth** finding concerns the rural location of the Activity Agreement programme, where there were difficulties in accessing the course, sometimes to do with anxieties in using public transport:

**Practitioner (Activity Agreement):** *I think the frustrating thing for us is watching people progress really well but ultimately leave without a job and then they're considered a negative because the work that we've done with them hasn't been negative. They came to us not being able to get on a bus and now they can get on a bus. Everyone's expected to be able to get on a bus so that's just kind of swept under the carpet. Whereas for that young person it's been a huge challenge. And just things like that. Being, being more independent and learning how to articulate what you want. Learning how to communicate. Learning to text when you're going to be late.*

Progression routes were scarcer compared with urban areas and considerably more difficult to access. Buses to larger urban areas are infrequent and expensive for young people with little, if any, income.

---

## Policy Implications and Recommendations

- (1). For young people who are some considerable distance from labour market readiness, it may be the case that less pressure should be placed on young people (and staff working with them) to 'achieve' qualifications, particularly if such a focus risks the young people's disengagement. Instead, there should perhaps be an emphasis on confidence building, overcoming issues of anxiety and the more social aspects of education to be brought to the fore, as a 'first-step' on what may be a long road back into education, employment or training.
- (2). Following on from point 1, there requires to be some thought given to how funders can better measure the 'softer' outcomes that young people achieve (such as increased confidence, overcoming anxiety or achieving independent travel) in order that these not inconsequential steps can be better recognised.
- (3). It appears crucial that staff working with young people have an awareness of and understand the importance of their role in working with these young people. And, to emphasise, this is particularly important when we consider the often complex and chaotic backgrounds that many young people on these types of programmes are coming from (or are still experiencing challenging issues which may be impinging on their ability to fully commit to engagement).
- (4). There needs to be a greater focus on the problems faced by young people living in rural communities, such as those in our basic skills programme. This might involve addressing the additional costs of further education, including travel costs ([Hoskins, 2017](#)). It is crucial that there are adequate and accessible opportunities for all young people to develop, grow and achieve their full potential, socially and culturally as well as economically. This is, after all, the commitment made to young learners in Scottish policy ([Scottish Government, 2010; 2014](#)).

<b>PROJECT NAME</b>	Encouraging Lifelong Learning for an Inclusive & Vibrant Europe (ENLIVEN)
<b>COORDINATOR</b>	Professor John Holford University of Nottingham, Nottingham, England, United Kingdom <a href="mailto:john.holford@nottingham.ac.uk">john.holford@nottingham.ac.uk</a>
<b>CONSORTIUM</b>	University of Nottingham – Nottingham, England, United Kingdom 3s Unternehmensberatung GmbH – Vienna, Austria Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge – Sofia, Bulgaria KU Leuven/University of Leuven, Leuven – Belgium Slovak Academy of Sciences, Centre of Social and Psychological Sciences – Bratislava, Slovakia Tallinn University/Tallinna Ülikool –Tallinn, Estonia Universidad de Deusto – Bilbao, Spain University of Edinburgh – Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom University of Melbourne – Melbourne, Australia University of Verona/Università degli Studi di Verona – Verona, Italy
<b>FUNDING SCHEME</b>	European Union Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020) – Societal Challenge 6 – Europe in a changing world: inclusive, innovative and reflective societies", call YOUNG-3-2015, topic “Encouraging Lifelong Learning for an Inclusive and Vibrant Europe (ENLIVEN)” Grant Agreement No. 693989
<b>DURATION</b>	October 2016 – September 2019 (36 months).
<b>BUDGET</b>	EU contribution: €2 499 788.50.
<b>WEBSITE</b>	<a href="https://h2020enliven.org/">https://h2020enliven.org/</a>
<b>FOR MORE INFORMATION</b>	Contact: Professor John Holford <a href="mailto:john.holford@nottingham.ac.uk">john.holford@nottingham.ac.uk</a> Contact: Ruth Elmer <a href="mailto:ruth.elmer@nottingham.ac.uk">ruth.elmer@nottingham.ac.uk</a>
<b>FURTHER READING</b>	Related ENLIVEN publications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boyadjieva, P., &amp; Ilieva-Trichkova, P. (published online, 30 May 2018). Adult education as a common good: Conceptualisation and measurement. <i>International Journal of Lifelong Education</i>. doi: 10.1080/02601370.2018.1478458</li> <li>• Boere, E. (2017). Understanding adult lifelong learning participation as a layered problem. <i>Studies in Continuing Education</i>, 39(2), 161-175. doi: <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2017.1310096">10.1080/0158037X.2017.1310096</a></li> <li>• Boyadjieva, P., &amp; Ilieva-Trichkova, P. (2017). Between inclusion and fairness: Social justice perspective to participation in adult education. <i>Adult Education Quarterly</i>, 67(2), 97–117. doi: 10.1177/0741713616685398</li> <li>• Räis, M.-L., &amp; Saar, E. (2017). Participation in job-related training in European countries: The impact of skill supply and demand characteristics. <i>Journal of Education and Work</i>, 30(5), 531–551. doi: 10.1080/13639080.2016.1243229</li> <li>• Roosmaa, E.-L., &amp; Saar, E. (2017). Adults who do not want to participate in learning: A cross-national European analysis of their perceived barriers. <i>International Journal of Lifelong Education</i>, 36(3), 254–277. doi: 10.1080/02601370.2016.1246485</li> </ul>



---

## References

- Boeren, E. (2016). *Lifelong learning participation in a changing policy context*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Egdell, V., Dutton, M. and McQuaid, R. (2016). Third sector experiences of work programme delivery. *Journal of Social Policy*, 45(4), 729–746.
- Hoskins, K. (2017). *Youth identities, education and employment*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lindsay, C., Osborne, S. P., & Bond, S. U. E. (2014). The ‘new public governance’ and employability services in an era of crisis: Challenges for third sector organizations in Scotland. *Public Administration*, 92(1), 192–207.
- Scottish Government. (2010). *16+ learning choices: Policy and practice framework*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government
- Scottish Government. (2014). *Developing the young workforce: Scotland’s youth employment strategy*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government
- Scottish Government. (2017). *The life chances of young people in Scotland: An evidence review for the First Minister’s Independent Advisor on Poverty and Inequality*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.
- Scottish Government. (2018a). *Summary statistics for attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living* (No. 8, 2018 Ed.). Retrieved from <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0053/00536953.pdf> (Accessed on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2018).
- Scottish Government. (2018b). *The activity agreement model*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government.
- Scottish Government. (2018c). *The 15-24 learner journey review*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.



THE UNIVERSITY  
of EDINBURGH



The University of  
Nottingham

UNITED KINGDOM • CHINA • MALAYSIA



CENTRE OF SOCIAL  
AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCES SAS  
INSTITUTE FOR FORECASTING  
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
INSTITUTE OF EXPERIMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY



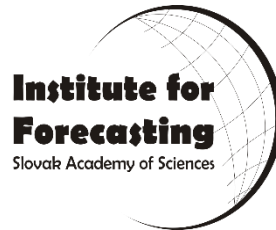
Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge  
at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences



UNIVERSITÀ  
di VERONA



TALLINN UNIVERSITY



Institute for  
Forecasting  
Slovak Academy of Sciences



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

## Disclaimer

Encouraging Lifelong Learning for an Inclusive & Vibrant Europe (ENLIVEN) is coordinated by the University of Nottingham (England, United Kingdom). All news and resources of this project are available at <https://h2020enliven.org/>. For any enquiries, please contact our project leader Professor John Holford [john.holford@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:john.holford@nottingham.ac.uk), project administrator Ruth Elmer [ruth.elmer@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:ruth.elmer@nottingham.ac.uk) or dissemination coordinator Dr Ellen Boeren [Ellen.Boeren@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Ellen.Boeren@ed.ac.uk)

You may also follow us on Twitter @H2020enliven or visit our Facebook page <http://bit.ly/h2020enliven-facebook> for all our latest news and events.