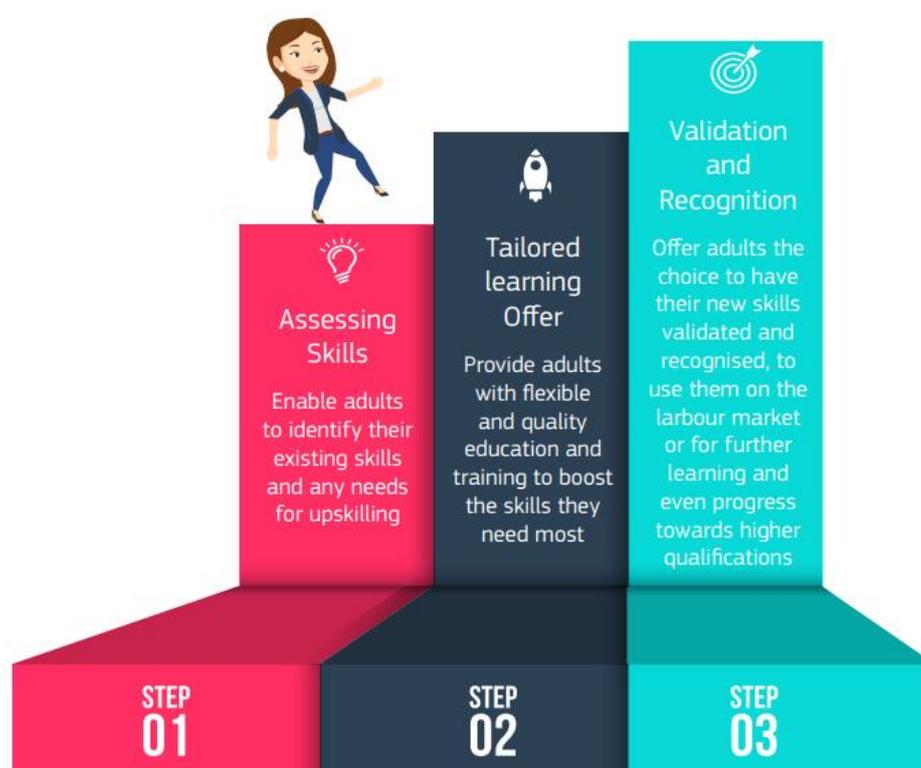


European Agenda for Adult Learning: Entry Pathways - A Discussion Paper (Wales)

INTRODUCTION

Learning and Work Institute's role as UK's national co-ordinator for the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL) includes a programme of research activity to evidence the impact of adult learning across the four UK nations. 'Entry pathways' is the focus of one strand of the research. In the European policy context, it links to the European Commission's 'Upskilling Pathways' initiative¹. This invites EU member states to build on their existing national initiatives, in partnership with all adult learning stakeholders, to develop and improve models of support for adults with basic skills needs. The Upskilling Pathways model is a simple, three-step process:



Source: European Commission 'Upskilling Pathways – New Opportunities for Adults' Leaflet

The Commission also stresses that, in addition to the three steps in the model, effective outreach, guidance and support measures will be required to underpin the implementation of Upskilling Pathways in practice. L&W's entry pathways research takes up the Commission's

¹ For further information about Upskilling Pathways, see: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1224>

invitation to build upon existing national practice and structures in adult basic skills, and interpret the Upskilling Pathways initiative for each UK nation.

L&W wishes to build upon and develop its 'Citizens' Curriculum' approach² in adult basic skills, which has been presented at previous EAAL Impact Forum meetings in each of the UK nations. Complementing other research strands in our EAAL programme, which focus on progression pathways in a range of contexts, we are interested to understand how the Citizens' Curriculum approach to basic skills can enhance other entry level learning. We also wish to understand how it can help support adults with low basic skills into vocational and technical education, through the creation of new progression routes and a 'line of sight' into further learning and career opportunities. In the context of Upskilling Pathways, it is Step 2 – the 'tailored learning offer' – that is our primary focus.

This discussion paper summarises the findings of the initial scoping and rapid review of existing entry level progression pathways models in Wales, along with the current policy context. The scoping explored relevant programmes offered at a national level and reviewed evidence from pilots which have tested more inclusive and holistic delivery models for entry level pathways which enhance employability, in-work progression, and progression to further learning.

POLICY CONTEXT IN WALES

In Wales, the introduction of Essential Skills Wales (ESW) in September 2010 brought clarity and consistency to Basic and Key Skills qualifications. These standards and the associated qualifications provided a single ladder of progression from Entry Level 1 to Level 4 in the skills of Communication, Application of Number and Information and Communication Technology (ICT). These standards were developed by converging and drawing on best practice from the standards for Adult Literacy, Adult Numeracy and Adult ICT, and the standards for Key Skills Communication, Application of Number and ICT.

As with elsewhere in the UK there have been significant funding cuts to adult learning have impacted heavily on participation levels. Learners at entry level, across all settings, are down from 90,000 a year in 2011/12 to less than 60,000 in 2016/17. A 70 per cent cut in funding for part-time provision in FE has further reduced opportunities for progression for adult learners.

The wider key skills (Working with Others, Improving Own Learning and Performance and Problem Solving) were a set of thinking, organisational and people skills aimed at equipping individuals for further learning and for work and adult life. New stand-alone Essential Employability Skills (EES) have been developed to replace the wider key skills. In the spirit of the *Review of Qualifications* (2012), one suite of Essential Skills qualifications for Wales has been developed to include Essential Skills for Work and Life. The aim is to simplify and

² For further information about L&W's Citizens' Curriculum, and our pilot evaluation, see: <https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/our-work/life-and-society/citizens-curriculum/>

clarify the qualification offer to ensure the relevance and value of this learning and these qualifications for candidates.³

The opportunity remains to integrate literacy and numeracy into more holistic programmes of life skills and capabilities – as in the Citizens’ Curriculum model, and to extend this into a wider range of skills and capabilities, as L&W’s work with the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) to develop a life skills learning framework shows⁴.

THE CITIZENS’ CURRICULUM AS THE BASIS FOR AN ENTRY LEVEL PATHWAY

In 2015/16, L&W explored the extent to which the Citizens’ Curriculum could form the (or a) basis for a programme of study or Entry Level pathway for adult learners. Whilst a study programme for 16 – 19s is generally a full-time programme, the work explored ways in which the concept could be applied to part-time, more flexible delivery for adult learners.

The Citizens’ Curriculum is an innovative and flexible approach to language, literacy and numeracy provision which places the needs of learners and communities at its core. The underpinning principles of the Citizens’ Curriculum approach are:

- A holistic approach to provision for adult learners interpreted through the local context
- Learner involvement in determining the curriculum to meet their needs and interests
- An interlinked combination of literacy, numeracy, ESOL, financial, health, digital and civic capabilities

A helpful example is the Study Programme for 16-19 year-olds in England, which were introduced in September 2013.. Programmes are to be designed around the needs of the learners and can take many forms. All Study Programmes offer:

- a core aim (substantial Level 2/3 vocational or academic qualification; or substantial work experience for those unable to study at Level 2).
- participation in non-qualifying activity, including work experience.
- study of maths and English to GCSE Grade C or above (or stepping-stone qualifications towards GCSEs).⁵

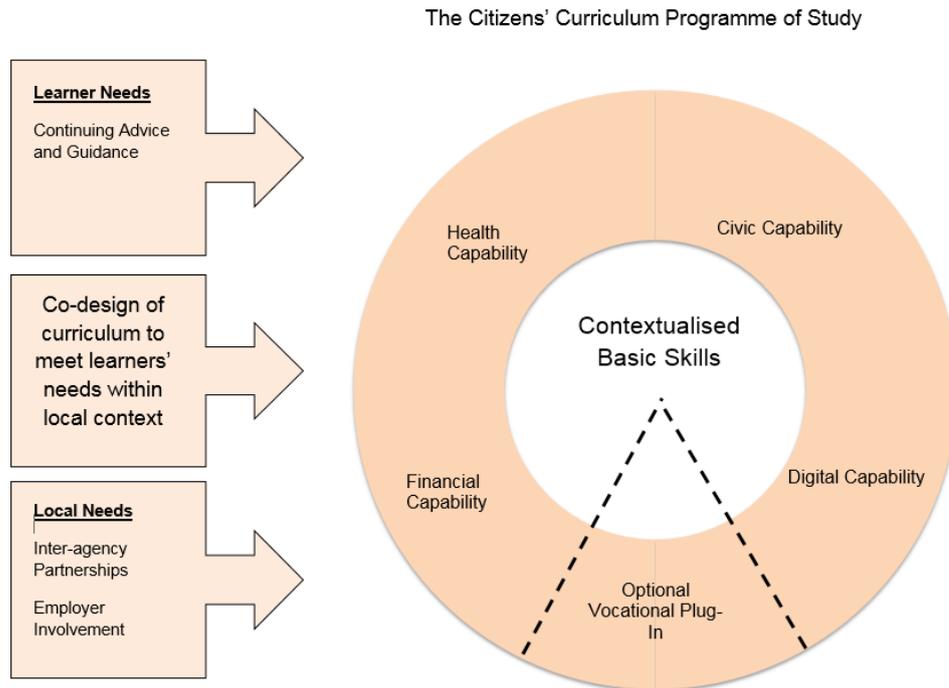
To explore whether the Citizens’ Curriculum could be used as the basis for an equivalent Study Programme for adult learners, L&W consulted with a range of sector specialists, providers and adult learners. A key finding of the consultation was that, in addition to providing a more engaging Entry Level offer, the Citizens’ Curriculum could provide a ‘wrap

³ Qualifications Wales. (2015). *Design Principles for the Essential Skills Wales. Suite of Qualifications*. Available at: <http://qualificationswales.org/media/1371/qwr1088-final - esw suite design principles - june 2015 pdf2.pdf> [Accessed: 9 October 2017]

⁴ For further information, see the Life Skills for Europe project webpages: <https://eaea.org/project/life-skills-for-europe-lse/>

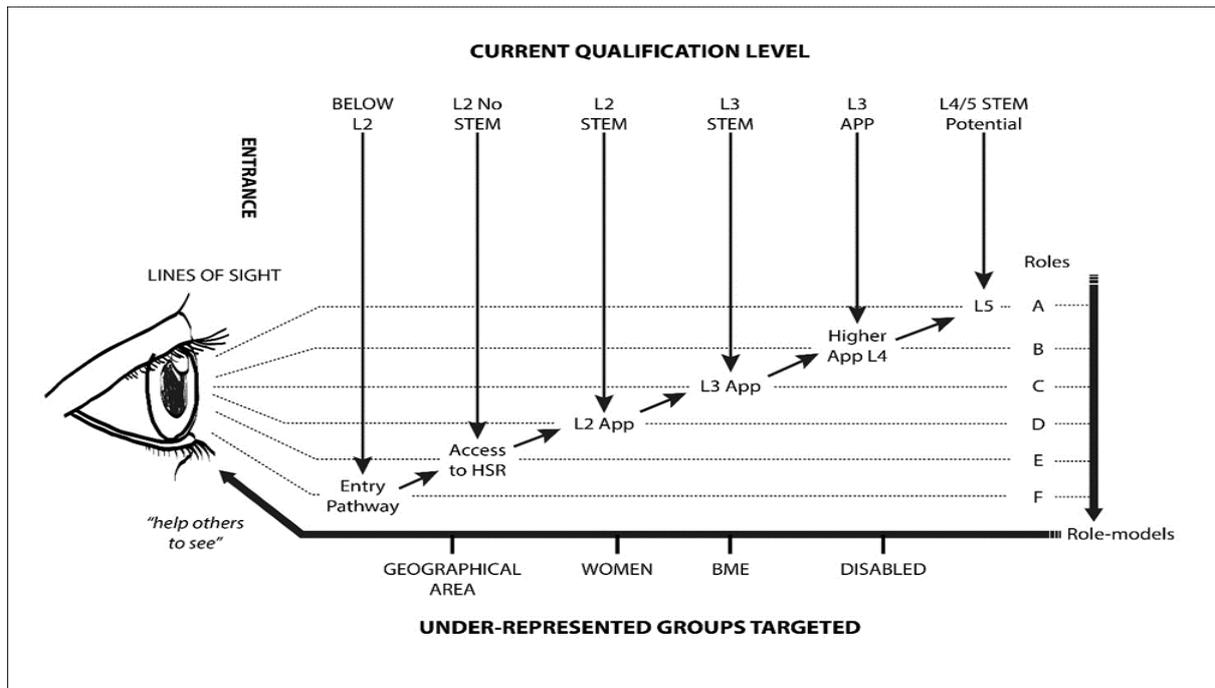
⁵ AELP (2012) *Implementing Study Programmes (including traineeships)*. Bristol: AELP, p. 5.

around' programme for vocational learning at Levels 1 and 2, offering greater support for progression. The proposed model for such a programme is below.



In 2016, L&W further explored the application of the Citizens' Curriculum to progression pathways through a piece of work with Birmingham City Council (BCC) and Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council. In the context of future economic opportunities associated with the construction of the High Speed 2 (HS2) railway, the work aimed to create a progression pathway and a 'line of sight' to help skills commissioners, providers and individuals to understand how participation in learning could support progression for people with low basic skills to move towards opportunities for work and further learning associated with HS2⁶. A proposed Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) Entry Pathway for those with the lowest skills levels was developed, based on the Citizens' Curriculum approach:

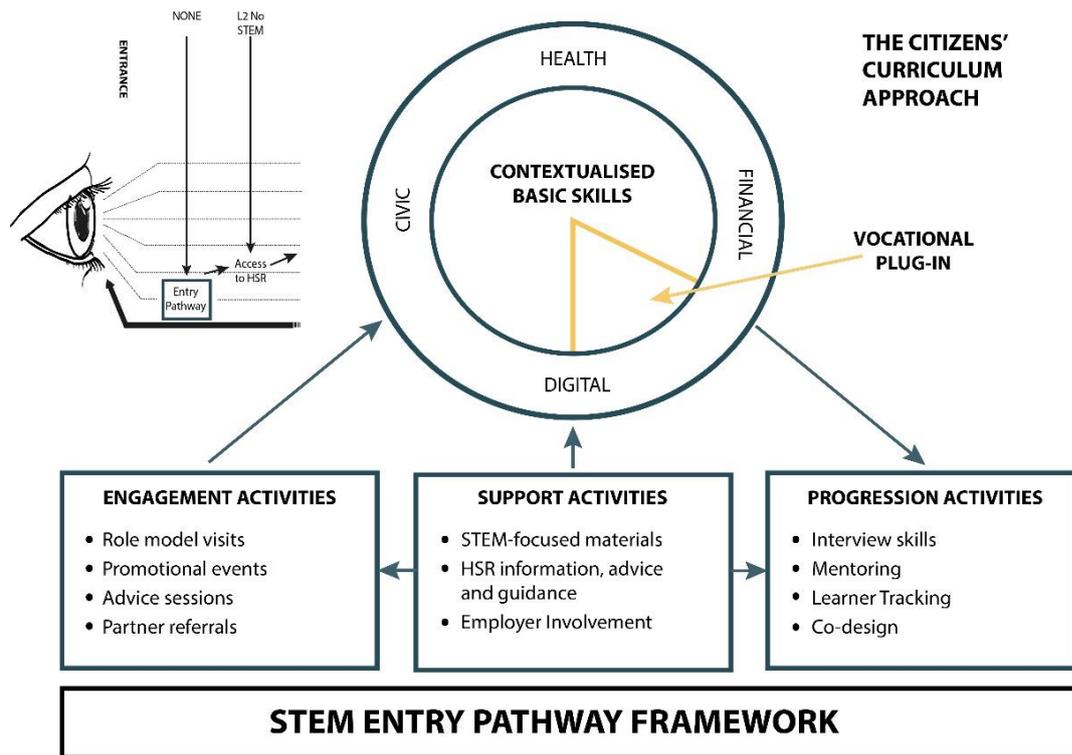
⁶ Aldridge, F., Gannaway, H., Plant, H., Ravenhall, M. (2017) *PROGRESSION PATHWAYS INTO STEM CAREERS: A Strategy for Birmingham* Leicester: L&W



The 'line of sight', showing how a STEM Entry Pathway supports progression.

The Citizens' Curriculum STEM Entry Pathway included a "vocational plug-in" to ensure that occupational skills and STEM-related materials were fully integrated into the programme. The model for the pathway is presented below. The STEM Entry Pathway model was underpinned by three sets of activity:

- **engagement** (including community outreach, role model visits, promotional events, advice sessions, partner referrals);
- **support** (STEM-focused materials, tailored information and materials on local labour market opportunities, employer involvement, visits to workplaces); and
- **progression** (tailored interview skills, mentoring from role-models and employers, learner destinations tracking, co-design of the curriculum with learners, ex-students, and volunteers).



The Citizens' Curriculum STEM Entry Pathway

EXISTING ENTRY VOCATIONAL PATHWAYS

This section details the range of programmes available in England which aim to progress entry level learners through vocational pathways. It is notable that many of the programmes are either specifically intended for younger adults, or primarily accessed by 16 – 19 year olds in Further Education.

Traineeships

Traineeships in Wales are designed to act as an entry point for 16 – 18 year olds and to offer an opportunity to gain relevant skills and experience to enable them to progress into employment or an apprenticeship. Three different levels are offered within the traineeship programmes; engagement, Level 1 and Bridge to Employment. Traineeships are flexible programmes which providers can tailor to their local context, to the needs of particular groups of young people and to local employers. This flexibility means providers can offer additional programme elements such as vocational training qualifications or digital skills support as appropriate. Apprenticeships are an important progression route for trainees. These begin at intermediate level, which is the equivalent of a Level 2 qualification.⁷

⁷ House of Commons Library (2017) Apprenticeships Policy in England 2017.

Entry Level qualifications

In Wales, Entry Level qualifications are available at three sub-levels: 1, 2, and 3. These programmes can vary in length and delivery, but broadly provide opportunities for learners to develop their skills and start on a pathway to higher level learning.

National Awarding Organisations offer a range of Entry Level qualifications focussed on employability. For example, Agored Cymru offers a range of entry level qualifications, including qualifications in communications, literacy and employability.

, retail, health and social care, and hospitality and catering) at Entry 3 and Level 1.

As well as employability-focussed Entry Level qualifications, Awarding Organisations often offer personal and social progression courses at this level. These tend to be targeted at learners with learning difficulties but are also suitable for individuals who need additional support to progress into independent living or employment. They include a wide range of units and can therefore be tailored to learners' needs, covering subjects such as rights and responsibilities, using services, community participation, managing money and developing skills for the workplace.

Foundation Learning

Foundation Learning was a national programme of learning at Entry Level and Level 1. While no longer a term used by the Department for Education, many programmes still follow the format of Foundation Learning courses. They offered personalised programmes of engaging and rewarding learning focused on progression, that supported young people (aged 14-19) to develop the skills they needed to progress to further education or employment. Learners could select from a range of courses to improve their general employability skills or to specialise in a particular vocational area. All courses included English and maths components. The majority of students used this as a spring board to progress into Level 2 or Level 3 study.

LOCAL INITIATIVES THAT OFFER ENTRY LEVEL PATHWAYS

L&W's entry pathways scoping review identified a range of projects and pilots that benefit adults. This section summarises key learning on the most effective characteristics of these approaches. They include:

- **Skills Escalator**⁸ was an innovative model supporting people on housing benefits in west London by providing very focussed engagement at an individual and an employer level.
- **Step UP** was a pilot run by Trust for London and the Walcot Foundation, and evaluated by Learning and Work Institute (L&W). It trialled new approaches to help low-paid workers progress in their careers and move into better work, aiming to increase the

⁸ Colechin, J. et al. (2017) *Evaluation of the Skills Escalator Pilot*. Leicester: L&W.

earnings of participants and support them into work that has improved conditions, responsibility and skills.⁹

- **MyGO** is the UK's first dedicated youth employment centre, bringing together Jobcentre Plus, careers services and personalised employment support, as part of the Greater Ipswich City Deal.
- **The Liverpool Youth Employment Gateway (YEG)** was an initiative to reduce youth unemployment across the six local authorities in the Liverpool City Region through an offer of personalised support to young claimants.¹⁰
- **Progression pathways into STEM careers: A strategy for Birmingham.** L&W was commissioned jointly by Birmingham City Council (BCC) and Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council to develop this strategy to develop pathways to STEM careers. The strategy focuses on enabling the lowest-skilled and least-advantaged citizens in the two localities to progress towards high-skill, high-value jobs in STEM industries.

These programmes have different target groups. For instance, some, like YEG, were aimed at young people, while others were focused on work and pay progression, which may be more relevant to older adults. They test more inclusive and holistic models for entry level pathways, and across them, a number of effective practices emerged. These are informative for the development of programmes that link the Citizens' Curriculum approach with entry pathways via the development of a 'vocational plug-in' model.

VOCATIONAL ENTRY PATHWAYS MODELS IN EUROPE

Numerous relevant examples of entry pathway models can be found in other European countries. There is a broad spectrum, from those which are primarily focused on vocational skills and the labour market, to 'life skills' models which adopt a holistic approach to adult basic skills and are focused on outcomes which include both labour market and social integration. Of the latter, many have been developed for the purpose of supporting refugee and migrant resettlement and integration.

The following examples were identified as good practices by the Life Skills for Europe project consortium. Further information on each is available online in the project's database of good practices.¹¹

- **Learning for Successful Life** is an initiative of the Slovenian Institute of Adult Education. It takes a holistic, learner-centred approach to literacy, numeracy and basic digital skills, focussing primarily on those with low skills and unemployed adults.
- **The Second Chance Systematic Development of Functional Elementary Education of Adults** is an initiative of the Ministry of Education in Serbia. It aims to strengthen civic, personal and interpersonal capabilities of adults, for those with

⁹ Murphy, H. et al. (2018) *Step Up*. Leicester: L&W.

¹⁰ Ray, K., Crunden, O. and Murphy, H. (2018) *Liverpool City Region Youth Employment Gateway (YEG) Evaluation*. Leicester: L&W.

¹¹ The database can be found at: <https://eaea.org/project/life-skills-for-europe-lse/?pid=10141>

incomplete schooling or without vocational qualifications. The programme links life skills competences with 35 vocational profiles, and labour market needs.

- **Danish Language and Culture** is a Danish Folk High School residential programme aimed at young adult refugees, aged 18 – 30. Refugees live together with young Danes and participate in a programme of language classes, social and cultural studies, and study visits. Towards the end of the programme, participants undertake an internship in a local company for one day a week, providing opportunities for language skills development and experience of the labour market.

SUMMARY

Our review of existing entry level pathways identified four key elements of these programmes which would need to be considered in the development of a vocational entry pathway based on the Citizens' Curriculum. These include:

- **Personalised, often one-to-one, approaches** to tailor the programme to the capabilities, future aims, aspirations and intentions of the learner. Advisors and practitioners who are good at listening, developing rapport and tailoring their work to individual aspirations are highly valued. The most effective offers also provide digital and/or remote support options to ensure flexibility and an 'out-of-hours' support offer.
- **Employability-focused support** to help participants prepare for, find and take up new jobs. This includes a range of features, which go beyond basic support with job searches, CV and job application writing, and interview techniques (in the Citizens' Curriculum model, these are a context for literacy and digital capabilities learning). Working with employers to offer inspiration and effective work-related activities (such as placements) can be beneficial to participants by helping them develop key employability, vocational and social skills, and to better understand the future opportunities available to them.
- **A partnership approach** which involves local stakeholders to ensure that programmes are nested within a wider local or regional focus on economic productivity. Stakeholders should include: employers; economic development agencies and LEPs; colleges, private sector training providers and universities; trade unions; employers and trade associations; local authorities; and employment services providers.
- **Locating the delivery of programmes** in places with a friendly and welcoming feel in locations that are easy and affordable to access.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE IMPACT FORUM

1. What is the current picture in relation to entry pathways in Wales? What are the opportunities and challenges? *(For example, funding ...)*
2. What role could better developed entry pathways play in the adult learning landscape in Wales? Who might benefit, and how?

3. To what extent is the Citizens' Curriculum model useful as a framework for a vocational entry level pathway programme for adults?
4. What other examples of entry level vocational pathways (curriculum models, projects, pilots etc.) exist in Wales? What impact have they achieved?
5. Are there any other key elements of entry level vocational pathways that we have not covered in our review?
6. What opportunities are there currently, to explore the development of such an approach in Wales?