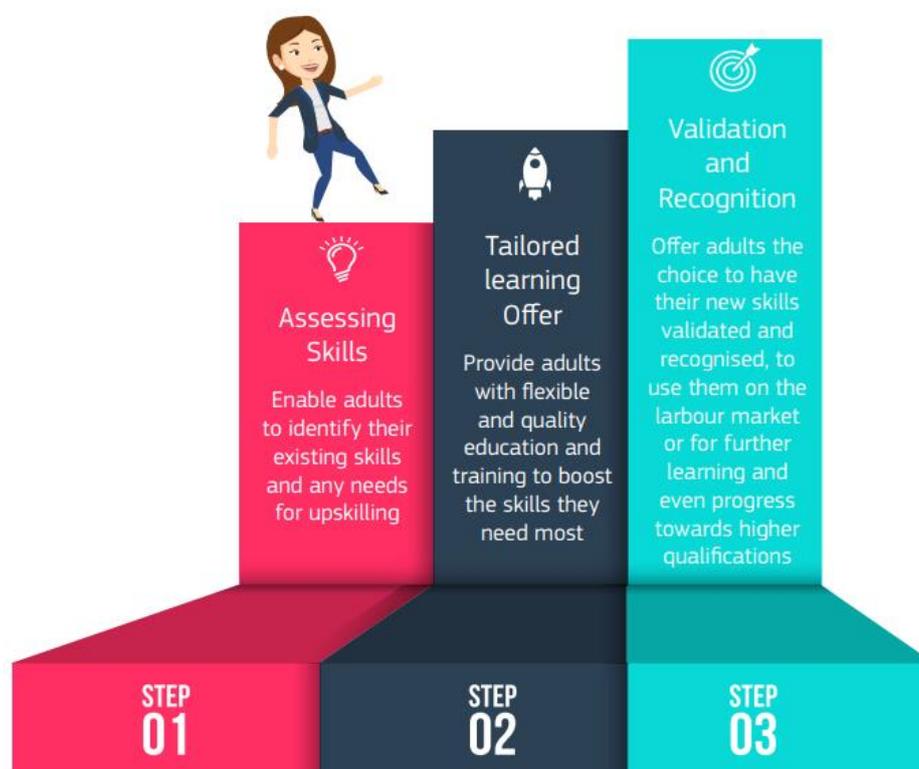


European Agenda for Adult Learning: Entry Pathways - A Discussion Paper (England)

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 England, 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 ENGLAND

In England, around 9m adults have low literacy and/or numeracy skills³, yet participation in adult English and maths classes has declined by around 20% since 2012⁴. This literacy and numeracy skills gap is often cited as a key limitation to people's opportunities to get on in life and at work. In part, falling participation is due to reductions in funding through the Adult Education Budget, and L&W has argued for an additional investment of £200m per year to help reverse this trend. Yet funding is not the only issue.

England has a relatively well-developed infrastructure to support adult basic skills, including the statutory entitlement to fully funded English and maths learning up to Level 2 for adults aged 19+. The national adult literacy and numeracy standards and the content of Functional Skills qualifications are being revised and updated, to ensure they remain fit for purpose, and meet the needs of adults who wish to improve their English and maths skills for life, study and for work.

Despite this, L&W's recent research on behalf of the Department for Education has revealed wider issues in the support provided for adults to improve their English and maths skills⁵. Reduced funding levels mean that providers struggle to undertake the kinds of outreach

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/>

³ OECD (2016) *Building Skills for All: A Review of England* p.9

⁴ DfE (2018) *Further Education and Skills: March 2018*. National statistics available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/further-education-and-skills-march-2018>

⁵ Learning and Work Institute (2018) *Participation in Adult English, Maths and ESOL*. Unpublished report to DfE.

activities, awareness raising and community delivery that helps to reduce barriers to accessing provision. There is a need to revitalise delivery models, such as basic skills in the workplace, to provide different kinds of opportunities to engage different kinds of adults. And recent research shows that, often it is the most disadvantaged, such as homeless adults, whose needs are not fully met by current models of provision⁶.

There remains a need 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 shows⁷.

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

The idea of a holistic programme based on underlying principles and outcomes for learners rather than achievement of qualifications has some clear parallels with the Study Programme concept, which now operates in 16-19 Further Education provision in England. 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

Study Programmes for 16-19 year-olds 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).⁸

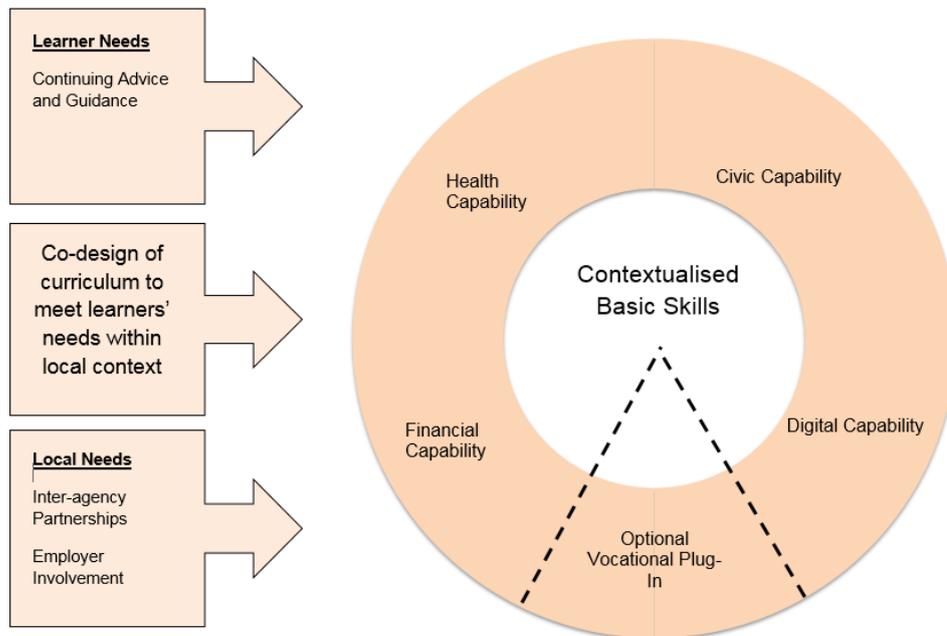
⁶ Jones, K. (2018) ‘Literacy and numeracy support for homeless adults: an exploration of third sector employment and skills provision’.

⁷ For further information, see the Life Skills for Europe project webpages: <https://eaea.org/project/life-skills-for-europe-lse/>

⁸ AELP (2012) *Implementing Study Programmes (including traineeships)*. Bristol: AELP, p. 5.

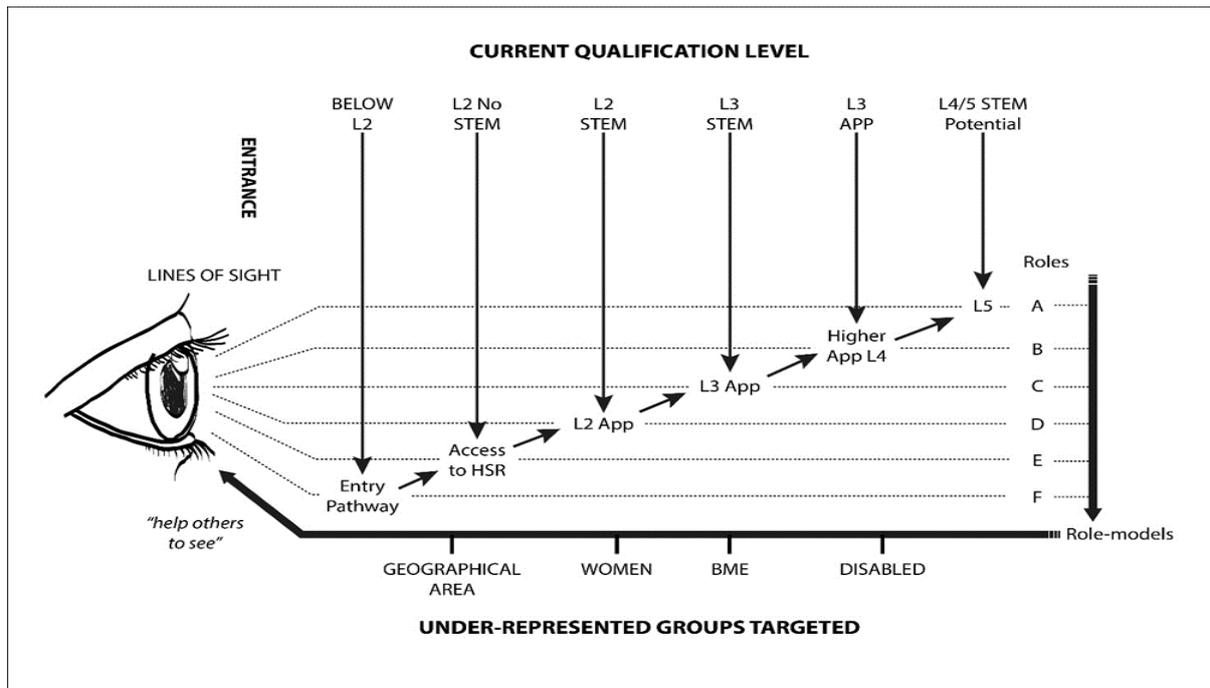
To explore whether the Citizens' Curriculum could be used as the basis for an equivalent Study Programme for adult learners, L&W consulted with a range of sector specialists, providers and adult learners. A key finding of the consultation was that, in addition to providing a more engaging Entry Level offer, the Citizens' Curriculum could provide a 'wrap around' programme for vocational learning at Levels 1 and 2, offering greater support for progression. The proposed model for such a programme is below.

The Citizens' Curriculum Programme of Study



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 HS2⁹. 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:

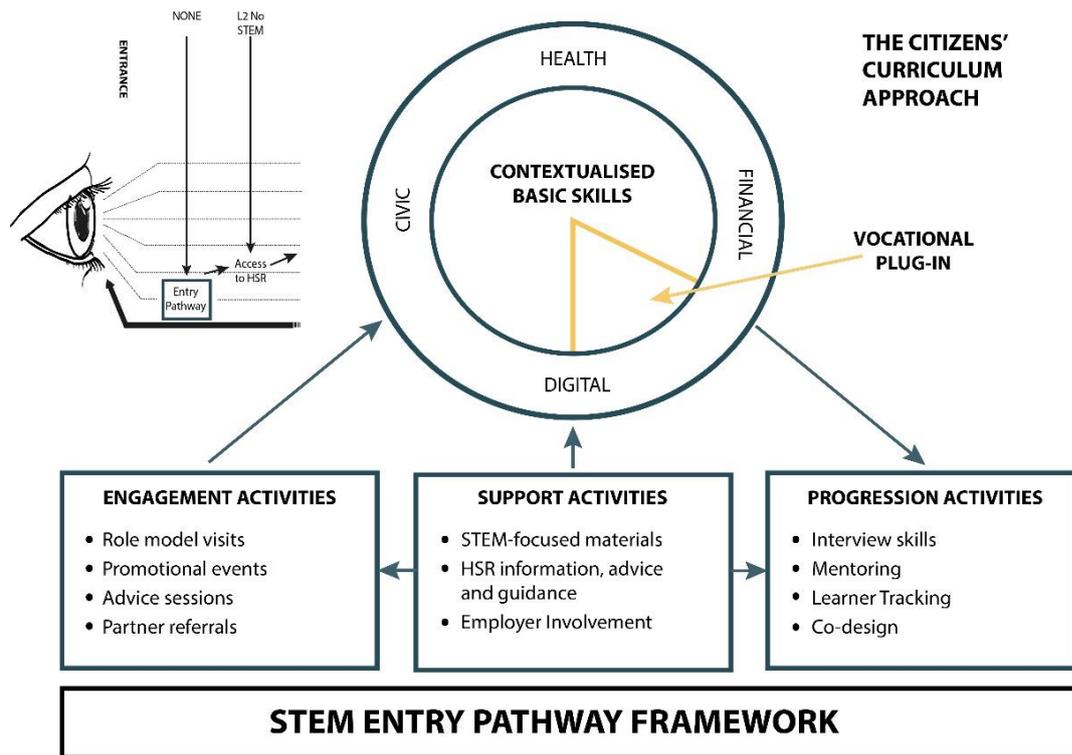
⁹ Aldridge, F., Gannaway, H., Plant, H., Ravenhall, M. (2017) *PROGRESSION PATHWAYS INTO STEM CAREERS: A Strategy for Birmingham* Leicester: L&W



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 IN ENGLAND

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 were introduced in 2013. They are designed to support young people (aged 16-24, and those with a Learning Difficulty Assessment or Education, Health and Care plan up to the age of 25) to gain relevant skills and experience to enable them to progress into employment or an apprenticeship. Traineeships last between six weeks and six months. They consist of work preparation training; an unpaid, quality work experience placement; and support with English and maths, where required.¹⁰ 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

¹⁰ Department for Education (2015) Traineeships: Supporting young people to develop the skills for apprenticeships and sustainable employment: Framework for delivery 2015 to 2016.

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.¹¹

T-Levels ‘transition year’

In England, T-Levels are being introduced as a vocational equivalent to the more academic A-Levels, providing young people with a choice between technical and academic education at post-16. However, it is recognised that not all learners are ready to study at Level 2 or 3 at age 16/17. As such, the government has proposed a T-Level ‘transition year’ to bridge this gap for learners, offering tailored and flexible support based on prior attainment and aspirations, which will include employer-related activity. It provides participants with a year to sample different vocational options with the intention that they will select one and begin on a T-Level pathway at the end of the transition year.

Entry Level qualifications

In England, 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, ASDAN employability qualifications provide a framework for developing and recognising general employability skills at Entry 2 to Level 2. Similar qualifications are offered by City & Guilds, OCR, Gateway Qualifications and other recognised Awarding Organisations. City & Guilds also offer a set of vocational employability courses focussed on particular sectors (construction, 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. For example, City & Guilds offers Entry 1 units in personal progress and Gateway Qualifications offer a range of qualifications in personal and social development from Entry 1 to Level 3.

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

¹¹ House of Commons Library (2017) Apprenticeships Policy in England 2017.

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 in England that benefit adults. This section summarises key learning on the most effective characteristics of these approaches. They include:

- **Skills Escalator**¹² 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 earnings of participants and support them into work that has improved conditions, responsibility and skills.¹³
- **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.¹⁴
- **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.

¹² Colechin, J. et al. (2017) *Evaluation of the Skills Escalator Pilot*. Leicester: L&W.

¹³ Murphy, H. et al. (2018) *Step Up*. Leicester: L&W.

¹⁴ Ray, K., Crunden, O. and Murphy, H. (2018) *Liverpool City Region Youth Employment Gateway (YEG) Evaluation*. Leicester: L&W.

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.¹⁵

- **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 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

¹⁵ The database can be found at: <https://eaea.org/project/life-skills-for-europe-lse/?pid=10141>

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 England? What are the opportunities and challenges? *(For example, funding, adult skills devolution ...)*
2. What role could better developed entry pathways play in the adult learning landscape in England? 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 England? 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?