

YOUNG_ADULLLT: A Comparative European Study

Key Messages for Scottish Policy Actors

Dissemination Paper

Policies Supporting Young Adults in their Life Course:
A Comparative Study of Lifelong Learning and
Inclusion in Education and Work in Europe
(2016-2019)

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This dissemination paper presents findings and recommendations produced from the research project entitled *Policies Supporting Young Adults in their Life Course: A Comparative Study of Lifelong Learning and Inclusion in Education and Work in Europe (YOUNG_ADULLLT)*. The project ran from 2016 to 2019 and was funded by the European Commission's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation initiative.

This paper is intended for use by Scottish policymakers, practitioners and researchers in the fields of adult education, lifelong learning, youth policy and skills policy, as well as international audiences interested in the case of Scotland.

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1. Introduction

YOUNG_ADULLLT is a three-year research project funded as part of the European Commission Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation initiative.

The project focuses on the specific embeddedness of LLL policies in different regions across the European Union, starting from the assumption that these policies are best understood and assessed within their specific regional and local contexts. Thus, the project provides a thorough overview of the highly heterogeneous LLL policies and their specificities across the nine participating countries: *Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Scotland and Spain*.

The project consortium of YOUNG_ADULLLT comprises 15 partner institutions from nine countries, representing different geographical and socio-economic realities across Europe. Included are researchers and research institutions of high national and international reputation, with evidenced international experience in cross-national research, as well as solid theoretical, methodological and regional expertise in the areas that are relevant to the project. Together, these partners represent a body of international and multidisciplinary expertise in the fields of Comparative and International Education, Education Policy, Teacher Education, Youth Research and Youth Policy, Lifelong Learning, Sociology, Economics and Political Science.

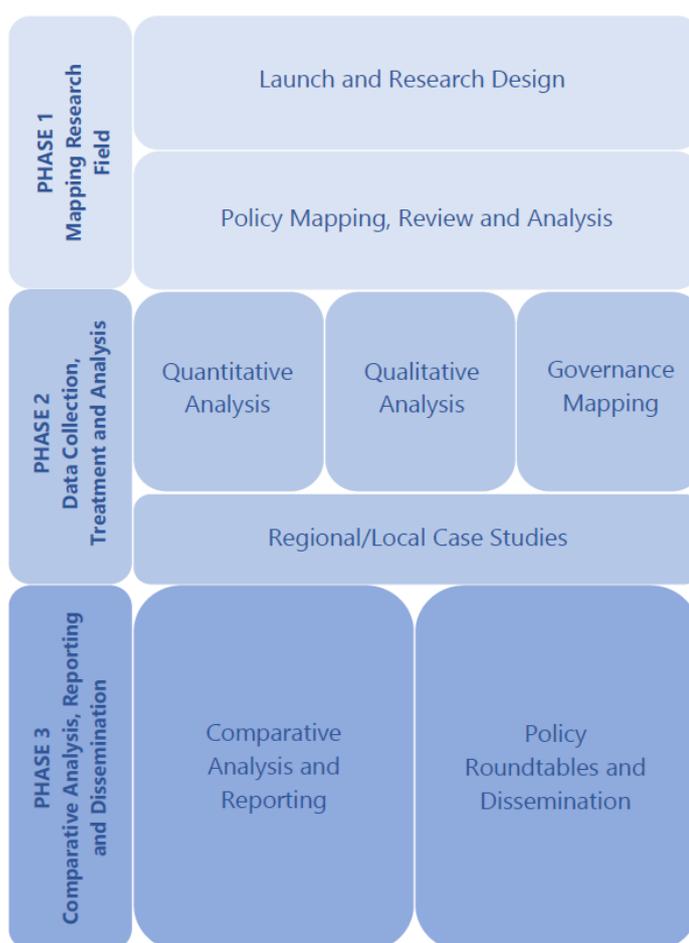


Figure 1. Summary of Project Workplan

YOUNG_ADULLLT aims to critically analyse current developments of LLL policies in Europe in order to prevent ill-fitting policies from further exacerbating existing imbalances and disparities. Therefore, the objectives of the YOUNG_ADULLLT project are:

- to understand the relationship and complementarity between LLL policies and young people's social conditions and assess their potential implications and (un)intended effects on young adults' life courses;
- to analyse LLL policies in terms of young adults' needs as well as their potential to successfully recognise and mobilise the hidden resources of young adults in pursuit of their life projects;
- to research LLL policies, understanding them as embedded in regional economies, labour markets and the individual life projects of young adults;
- to identify best practices and patterns of coordinated policy-making at local and regional levels.

Glossary of terms

Lifelong learning: LLL transcends schooling and implies a continuous process of learning in formal, informal and non- formal settings. LLL also encompasses forms of pedagogy related to e-learning, webinars, continuing education, home-schooling, etc. LLL generally has two comprehensive dimensions: individual development and autonomy on the one hand and strengthening or even maintaining employability on the other. Current European LLL policies mostly emphasise the importance of investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes and providing all European citizens with learning opportunities at all ages.

Young adults: In the YOUNG_ADULLLT research young adults are understood as a target groups of LLL policies (aged 18-29), who have to cope with societal needs and expectations while building their own life projects within the context of transition moments (e.g. school-to-work) and varied living conditions across Europe.

Vulnerability: The concept of vulnerability is used in different contexts to refer to a higher propensity among particular individuals or groups to risk, danger of deterioration in conditions or poor outcomes or achievements. Several factors may be seen as causing or influencing vulnerability, for instance: physical (e.g. sickness, disability), emotional/psychological (e.g. mental illness, immaturity, dependence), material (e.g. poverty, homelessness, health care, education), and social (lack of support by family or peer group, absence of guidance in difficult situations, and immediate risks from the environment). As such, vulnerability may be approached from different viewpoints and thus needs to be seen as a multidimensional concept and in relational terms.

2. Challenges for LLL policies targeting vulnerable young people in Europe

When reviewing the academic literature, it is possible to identify three key challenges shared across the diverse LLL policy contexts of European countries: the existence of contradictory policy agendas; problematic definitions of young adults as a target group; and fragmented governance structures.

2.1. Contradictory policy agendas

LLL is a policy idea that has evolved from an original humanistic and utopian conception developed by UNESCO (Delors, 1996; Faure et al., 1972) to the more utilitarian and economic one promoted by the OECD and EU (Elfert, 2015). This variation has allowed international agencies to accommodate very different and sometimes contradictory policy aims and orientations under this powerful idea (Jarvis, 2009). While the humanistic conception of LLL aimed to produce lifelong participation through adult education (Ouane, 2009), the more utilitarian conception envisages LLL mainly as a mechanism for reintegrating disadvantaged populations into society through employment (Coffield, 1999; Schuller, 2009).

The EU has gained large influence over the LLL policies of member states through both the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) and the European Social Fund (ESF) (Rasmussen, 2014). In recent years, and particularly in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, European LLL policies have emphasised the importance of improving economic growth and, at the same time, guaranteeing social inclusion, particularly for unemployed young people (European Commission, 2010; Moutsios and Kotthoff, 2007; Saar, Ure, and Holford, 2013). However, as LLL policies attempt to accommodate both aims and simultaneously promote economic growth and social inclusion, they can also produce contradictions and unintended side effects, with important implications for young people.

2.2. Prioritising and problematising ‘young adults’ as a target group

In terms of target groups, LLL policies for young people have a long history in the European agenda (European Commission, 2000, 2006; European Council, 2001). Nonetheless, the recent emergence of young adults as their main priority group (European Commission, 2010) is a new policy shift, which has placed greater emphasis on LLL as a tool for tackling high levels of youth unemployment (Rasmussen, 2014; Riddell and Weedon, 2012). However, the very definition of ‘youth’ as an age category is problematic because it comprises a wide range of living conditions, cultures, education and labour market situations (Côté and Bynner, 2008; Rinne and Jarvinen, 2010).

Furthermore, policies tend to identify young people as their target group by focusing on some shortfall or problematic element of their pathway through education, the labour market or

other domains of social life (e.g. NEET) (Schneider and Ingram, 1997). To remedy such shortcomings, LLL policies typically place expectations on young adults to follow ‘normal’ trajectories in education and the labour market. However, these trajectories reflect and privilege particular social and cultural experiences, exacerbating existing inequalities of class, gender and ethnicity among young people (Alheit and Dausien, 2000, 2002).

2.3. Complex governance arrangements

At the governance level, most LLL policies have been incremental, emergency in nature, and highly focused on specific groups (e.g. youth, migrants) and particular issues (e.g. school drop-out rates, unemployment). This has led to the fragmented governance of LLL policies, which have proven largely ineffective in stimulating economic growth and securing social inclusion in European societies (Hake, 1999; Holford et al., 2008). One of the reasons for this fragmentation is that the supposed unity of the ‘lifelong learning policy field’ is more rhetorical than real. Policies tend to be oriented towards different sectoral problems or objectives such as reducing unemployment among specific groups (i.e. labour market policies), preventing or reducing early school leaving (i.e. education and training policies) or preventing social exclusion broadly or among specific groups (i.e. social and youth policies) (Kotthoff et al., 2017). In addition to sectoral, siloed policymaking, further challenges exist related to complex and/or conflicting funding and coordination mechanisms between different levels of government (e.g. European Social Fund) and beyond government (e.g. independent training providers).

3. Research questions

The YOUNG_ADULLLT research project begins with the observation of a high fragmentation and persistent weakness and ineffectiveness of adult education policies across Europe. It set out to enquire into the specific forms of embeddedness of these policies in the regional economy, the labour market, the education and training systems and the individual life projects of young adults. The focus is on lifelong learning policies aimed at creating economic growth and social inclusion that target young adults understood as ‘vulnerable’ (see glossary of terms), for instance those not in education, employment or training (NEETs) or those in situations of near social exclusion.



Figure 2. Thematic and analytical framework for YOUNG_ADULLLT

The research project focuses on three central research questions (see figure 2):

- *On an institutional level:* what lifelong learning (LLL) policies exist in each region and what are their potentially competing (and possibly ambivalent) orientations and objectives?
- *On an individual level:* what are young people's perceptions and expectations of these policies regarding their life projects and what are the intended and unintended impacts of the policies on their life projects?
- *On a structural level:* How are these policies and young people's experiences embedded within the local/regional context and what best practices and patterns of coordinated policy-making can be identified at regional/local level?

4. Methodology

YOUNG_ADULLLT begins from the observation that LLL policies are located in a regional/local context which influences the school-to-work (and other) transitions of young adults. Therefore, the living conditions of young adults are intertwined with the various LLL policies across Europe.

For this reason, Functional Regions (FRs) were selected as the unit of analysis across the project. FRs are not understood in purely geographic/administrative terms, but rather as the organisation of regions by functional relations, as well as by spatial flows and interactions within and across the borders of a particular territorial unit.

In each of the nine countries studied as part of YOUNG_ADULLLT, two FRs were

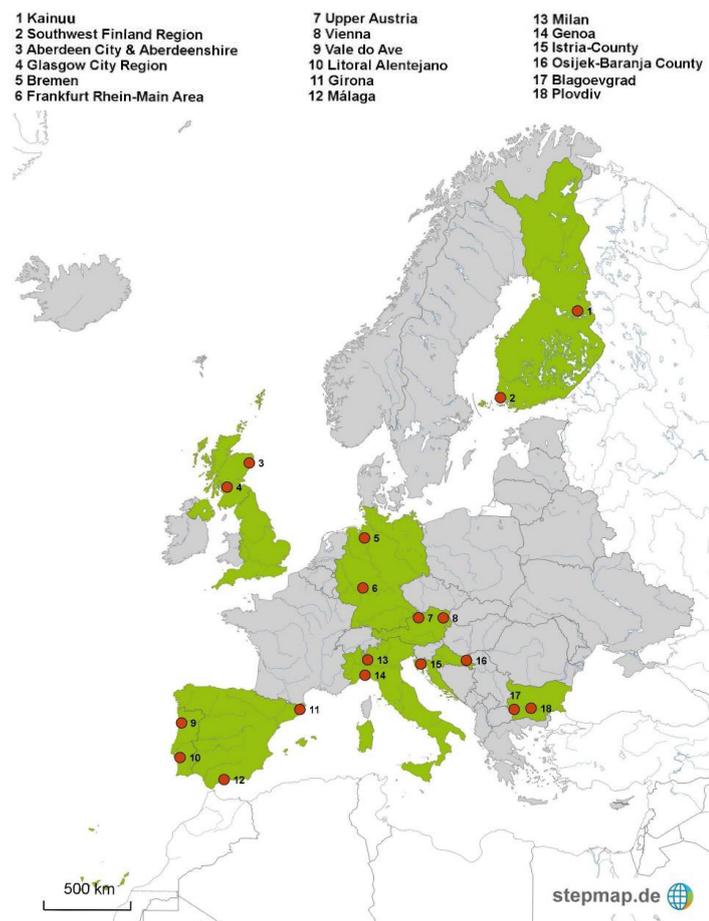


Figure 3. Overview of selected Functional Regions in YOUNG_ADULLLT (designed with Stepmap)

selected, producing 18 FRs in total (see figure 3). In Scotland, the chosen FRs were Glasgow City Region (GCR) and Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Region (ACAR).

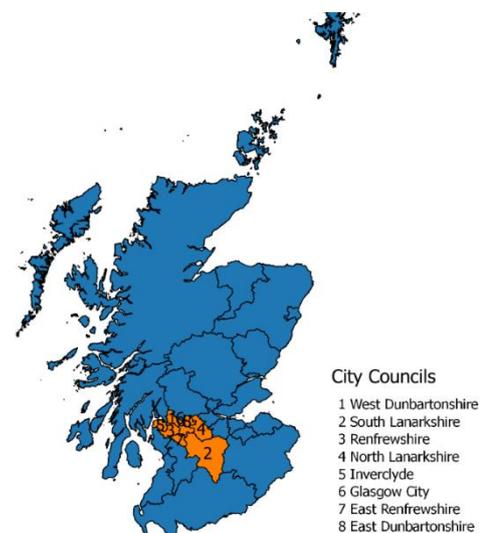
To allow the perspectives of various stakeholders to be embedded and analysed within their regional/national socio-economic and policy contexts, a mixed-method, multi-level approach was adopted. The use of a blend of qualitative and quantitative methods was designed to support a ‘problem solving’ approach in response to complex and multi-faceted research questions (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). The wide breadth of methods used allowed for triangulation and corroboration of results, contributing to the production of a robust analysis (Brannen 2005: 12). Meanwhile, the multi-level approach is used to capture “the interplay of macro-structures, regional environments, local institutions and individual expectations, life plans, and the informal competences of the addressees of the policies” (YOUNG_ADULLLT, 2019).

Methods were harmonised across the European project using a common research framework to allow for comparison across FRs and countries.

4.1. Introducing the Scottish functional regions: GCR and ACAR

Glasgow City Region (GCR) is one of the largest city regions in the United Kingdom with approximately 1,700,000 inhabitants, representing 32% of Scotland’s population. The region is formed of eight council areas, organised by the Glasgow City Region City Deal. Glasgow City has a high youth population (16-24) of 24.4%, well above the Scottish average of 18.5%. In contrast, the youth population is significantly lower in the other council areas, ranging from 14% to 19%. Formerly a major industrial centre, the now de-industrialised area has a strong predominance of service (84%) and public sector (34-5%) employment. The city also faces considerable challenges: a large proportion of the population lives in income deprivation compared to Scotland as a whole. In 2015, 34.1% of children in Glasgow City were considered to live in poverty (after housing costs) ¹. There is significant educational polarization among young people between those that possess high-level qualifications and those that leave school with none. Looking closely at the youth unemployment rate, the lowest is found in Glasgow City (27.8%), below the Scottish average (30.2%), while the largest is in North Lanarkshire (31.9%). Therefore, one of the main regional challenges appears to be

Figure 4. GCR council areas. Source: Capsada-Munsech and Valiente, 2017.



¹ The Glasgow Indicators Project at www.understandingglasgow.com

ensuring educational and job opportunities for such a diverse population, while also providing support for the most disadvantaged populations across the region.

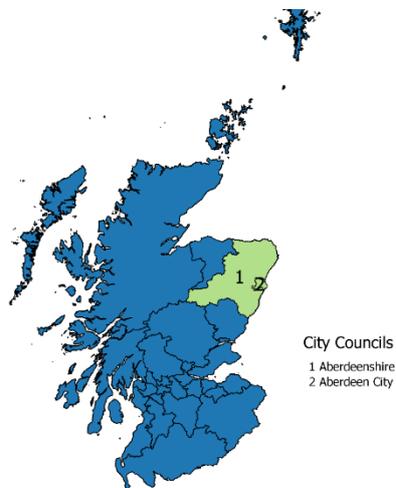


Figure 5. ACAR council areas.
Source: Capsada-Munsech and Valiente, 2017.

ACAR possesses characteristics that provide notable comparisons with GCR. It is far from the so called “central belt” of Scotland that unites Edinburgh City with Glasgow City, and Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire are two quite different council areas that form a single region representing roughly 9% of the Scottish population. In 2008, the Strategic Development Planning Authority (SDPA) partnership was created between the city councils of Aberdeen City and Shire with the objective to jointly plan and guide development over the next 25 years. Largely as a result of the dominant energy (oil and gas) and associated service sectors, ACAR has above-average incomes and low unemployment.

The relevance of the oil and gas industry has impacted ACAR in several ways. It has rapidly increased its population, mainly attracting young people with high educational qualifications from Scotland, the UK and abroad. In 2011 the share of people aged 16-29 in Aberdeen City was 25.6%, well above the Scottish average of 18.5%. Furthermore, there is a high percentage of trade apprenticeships in ACAR, ranking 3rd in Scotland for the share of the working age population with apprenticeship credentials. However, relatively recent changes in the global oil economy combined with variations in wealth and opportunity between different communities represent significant challenges for the region. For example, despite an above average rate of economic activity among the adult population, the unemployment rate among 16-24 year olds is similar to the Scottish average (30.2%) in Aberdeen City (29%) and in Aberdeenshire (31.7%).

For a more detailed discussion of the two functional regions, see Hermannsson and Scandurra (2017) and Capsada-Munsech and Valiente (2017).

4.2. Scotland as a case study

Scotland serves as an interesting case study to European and international audiences. Following the devolution of education (among other matters) in 1998 and the later arrival of the Scottish National Party (SNP) to power in 2007, Scotland’s approach to education and skills has become increasingly distinct from the rest of the UK. A new focus on partnership working and collaborative governance was signalled by the publication of the Christie Report (Scottish Government, 2011). In addition, the SNP’s desire to ensure economic self-sufficiency in pursuit of Scottish independence (particularly in a post-crisis context) has resulted in a pronounced

focus on skills development and increasing productivity, while also consistently foregrounding equity concerns. To support these changing goals and priorities, Scotland has introduced a raft of reforms to the education and skills system, looking outside of its own borders for inspiration and learning.

As a result, Scotland is a markedly distinct case, while also sharing key contextual characteristics with other European states. It shares a legacy of marketisation with the rest of the UK, yet is striving to work in a more coordinated and state-managed fashion inspired by practices in Germanic states. It has the highest share of graduate workers in Europe (Hermannsson and Scandurra, 2017: 19), but like many Southern European countries, also faces serious challenges in terms of poverty and youth unemployment. Within the country, there are stark regional variations in household income and a level of spatial inequality which is far higher than any other European nation (Scandurra et al. 2018: 49), as evident in the variation between GCR and ACAR. As a result of these diverse contextual conditions and recent policy reform, Scotland provides a fertile case for exploring the development of LLL policies and their enactment in varied contexts.

4.3. Design and methods

The data collection and analysis were divided into four work packages (see table 1): Policy Review (WP3); Quantitative Analysis (WP4); Qualitative Analysis (WP5); and Governance Mapping (WP6).

The research methods used in the study comprised:

- A review of key policy documents and interviews with policy actors, used to systematically map and describe the most important LLL/skills policy documents at national and regional level.
- Quantitative analysis of data from Eurostat and surveys such as EU-LFS, EU-SILC, PISA and PIAAC, used to describe and analyse young people's living conditions in each region.
- Qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with young people and LLL practitioners/experts, used to document young people's experiences of LLL and experts' understandings of policy/programme aims.
- A further review of key policy documents and interviews with policy governance actors, used to map and describe the skills governance landscape at national and regional level.

Table 1. Summary of work package methodologies

	Theme	Methods	Data collected	Main outputs
WP3	Policy review	Document analysis	Analysis of 21 LLL/skills policy documents (6 policies in-depth)	Lowden, Valiente and Capsada-Munsech, 2016
		Semi-structured interviews	10 interviews with policymakers	Kotthoff et al., 2017
WP4	Quantitative analysis	Secondary analysis using existing datasets e.g. EU Labour Force Survey	Quantitative analysis following 6 harmonised indicators e.g. health and well-being conditions	Hermannsson and Scandurra, 2017
				Scandurra et al., 2018
WP5	Qualitative analysis	Semi-structured interviews	19 interviews with experts/practitioners	Doyle, 2017
			18 interviews with young adults	Rambla et al., 2018
WP6	Governance mapping	Content analysis of grey literature	Analysis of relevant grey literature	Capsada-Munsech and Valiente, 2017
		Semi-structured interviews	10 interviews with policymakers	Capsada-Munsech et al., 2018

4.4. Data and sampling

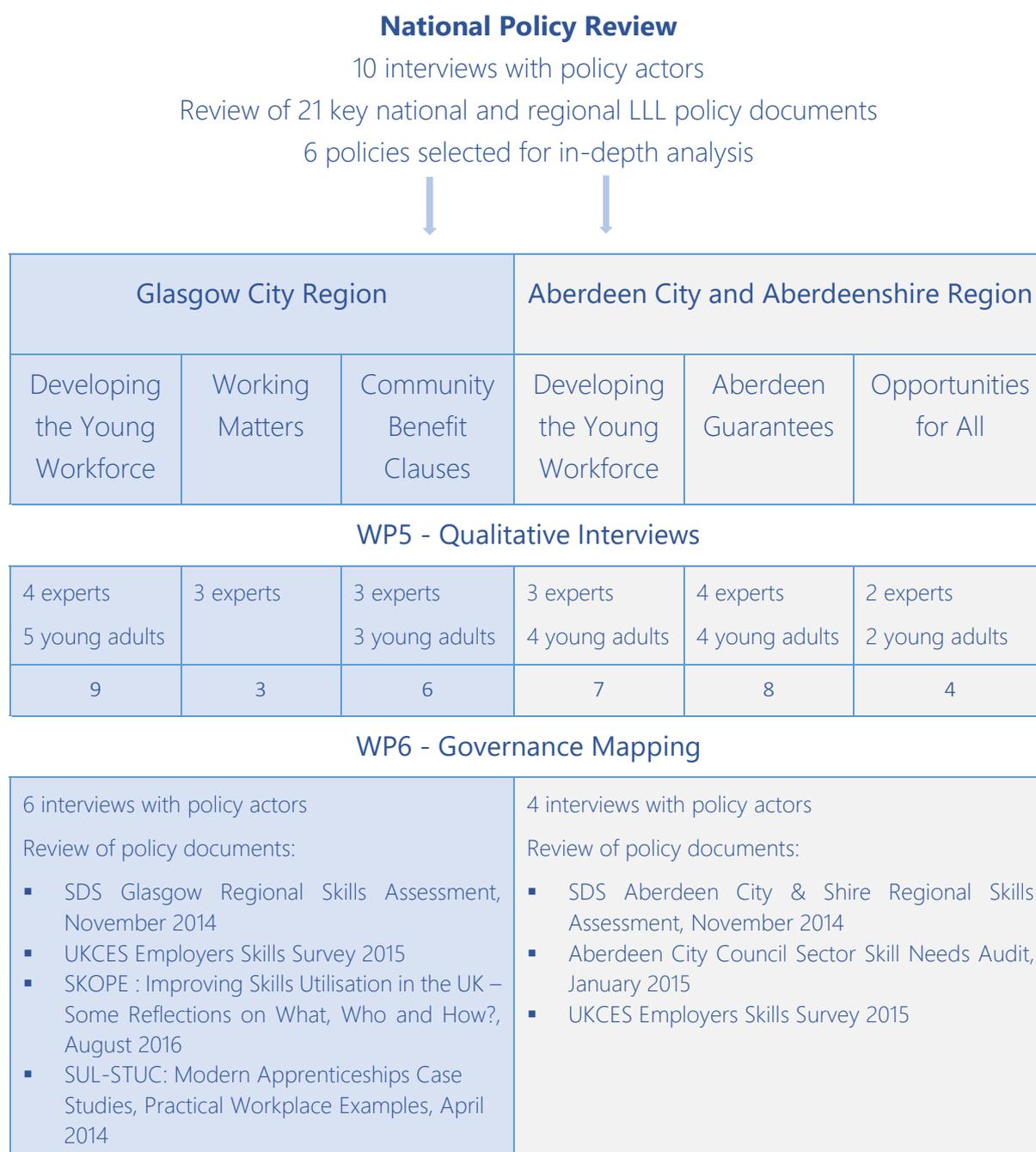


Figure 6. Summary of data sampling

4.5. Limitations

- Researchers encountered issues obtaining sufficiently detailed documentation and evidence about policies and related actions at regional level. This was addressed by organising a limited series of discussions with relevant policy actors within the two regions. Nonetheless, the availability and level of detail within the grey literature and data was relatively limited compared to that of national policies.

- There is a close but approximate fit between the Functional Region of GCR and the NUTS2 region South Western Scotland (used as equivalents for WP4 quantitative analysis). South Western Scotland includes the more rural area of Dumfries and Galloway (not part of GCR), diluting the urban and service-oriented character of Glasgow City Region. However, this bias is likely to be modest as the population of Dumfries and Galloway is only around 150,000 people, or less than a tenth of the overall population of GCR.
- It was not possible to conduct interviews with young people engaged in all the key policy programmes identified in WP3. In the case of Working Matters this was because no participants under the age of 29 could be identified. Similarly, only the youngest participants were still in school at the time when Developing the Young Workforce was launched. As a result, there is an oversampling of young people engaged in the other policies under study.

4.6. The comparative approach

The final phase of the YOUNG_ADULLT project drew together empirical results from across the various work packages to produce comparative cross-case and cross-national analyses. Policy Roundtables were also prepared in each participating country to generate European/national/regional/local briefing papers.

The common research framework was used to support a shared and consistent approach to comparative analysis. A number of comparative reports have been produced detailing the cross-case and cross-national analyses (Palumbo et al, 2018; Parreira do Amaral et al, 2018) and resultant findings, which are used in this Dissemination Paper to place Scottish findings in European context.

5. Findings: Policy agendas

5.1. There has been a shift in policy orientation from lifelong learning to skills for work

There has been a shift in orientation from lifelong learning (in the broader humanistic sense) to 'skills for work' in national policy agendas. Before the 2008 financial crisis, the Scottish Government's skills strategy set the aim of upgrading the quality of employment and the productivity of companies but, after the crisis, the main aim of the updated skills strategy was simply to get people (i.e. young people) into employment.

Developing the Young Workforce (DYW), the Scottish Government's flagship policy for tackling youth unemployment through vocational pathways in secondary education, was launched in 2014. Given a 19% youth unemployment rate in the first term of 2014, the target of DYW was

to reduce youth unemployment by 40% (down to 11.4%) by 2021. To achieve such a target, DYW was designed as a seven-year initiative to expand the offer of vocational education and attract more students from the senior phase of secondary education to vocational routes. As such, DYW formed a central pillar of the Scottish Government's strategy for skills development and economic growth.

In the same year, *Adult Learning in Scotland: Statement of Ambition* was published by Education Scotland (2014) outlining a very different understanding of LLL (Britton, Schweisfurth, and Slade, 2018). The focus of this document was no longer on the recovery of the economy and youth employment, but on the empowerment of individuals and communities, understanding LLL as a social right of the whole population and a tool for meeting their needs and realising their personal aspirations (Education Scotland, 2014: 10). In contrast to DYW, the document did not include an implementation plan and has not led to significant material transformations of the system, leaving its ambitions at the level of a discursive declaration.

The comparatively low levels of retention of this initiative seem to indicate that broad and ambitious notions of LLL are seen as desirable and 'discursively useful' but have led to few policy changes. On the other hand, the narrower economic orientation of the skills agenda has generated more focused policy reforms (e.g. regionalisation of colleges, DYW) with higher levels of retention and concrete policy changes.

Policy maker, national: In the government we tend not to refer to it as lifelong learning policy [...] we don't comprehensively refer to it as lifelong learning which is quite interesting.

Policy maker, national: I don't think there is a forum any more for that overarching discussion of the true lifelong learning.

Policy maker, national: What about lifelong learning? We need to get back to lifelong learning. [...] *Opportunities for All* was important and needed because of the 2008 crash [...] but at some point you need to [...] go back to what we were looking at before which was more about lifelong learning and it was more about the learner journey.

This trend towards an increasing focus on employability and skills for work was prevalent to varying degrees across all countries and regions in the YOUNG_ADULLLT study. This may be

attributed in part to the employability agenda advanced by the European Social Fund (ESF), which helped fund almost all of the LLL programmes under study.

“LLL policies, in general and specifically for young adults, used to be aimed at the personal development of human beings and their LLL [...] in many countries. However, they are now focused on a more utilitarian vision as shown in some reports (Bulgaria, Italy, Finland, Germany and Scotland), they are related to a neoliberal ideology and they are mainly focused on employment, exclusive development of work capacities, and labour competitiveness.” (Kotthoff et al., 2017: 23)

5.2. LLL policies have mainly prioritised a narrow age range of young adults

Linked to an increasing focus on employability, there has been a related shift in emphasis towards the school-to-work transitions of young adults. As a result, there have been “insufficient opportunities for young adults over the age of 18 and there seems to be a ‘black hole’ of support and provision for young people in their 20s who had to survive the 2008 downturn.” (Doyle, 2017: 57)

As the economic recession developed and youth unemployment reached its peak in 2011 (15.2%), the Scottish Government’s focus on unemployed youth intensified. Between December 2011 and May 2012 the Scottish Government appointed a Minister for Youth Employment, published its youth employment strategy and announced that it would re-direct £25 million from the European Social Funding (ESF) to youth employment initiatives (Scottish Government, 2012: 19). An indication of this pronounced concern for school leavers’ post-16 trajectories is the use of the *positive destinations* indicator as a standard for assessing the performance of the whole school system.

Regional policy actor, GCR: we have quite strong practitioner groups and they are mostly focussed on this transition from school to the next stage - where there is work, further training and further learning.

Policymaker, national: I suppose the rationale was principally one of efficiency. So there was far less money to go round. The government’s priority was on youth and averting youth unemployment.

However, using age as the primary lens through which to understand education and labour market progression ignores variations in other influential characteristics such as gender, ethnic background, social class and so on. As a result, diverse experiences within the given age range remain unaccounted for, while older young people continue to be vulnerable as they fall outside of the scope of LLL policies.

Female, 29, GCR: I wouldn't have been accepted for an apprenticeship because of my age, because it was all 16-19 at the time and I was 19 by the time I was finished [...] that's why I ended up just deciding to go out and work after that.

There has been increasing recognition of this issue in Scottish policy-making indicated by the increased maximum age for entry to an apprenticeship (formerly 19, now 25 for a funded place), and the adoption of the *15-24 Learner Journey* for understanding and monitoring young people's progression. Nonetheless, this is still conceived in terms of an extended education-to-work transition period.

Underlying the focus on young adults' school-to-work transitions is an assumption of standardised life courses. A fundamental conception of 'normal' life trajectories positions de-standardised pathways as problematic and in need of correction. Scotland is not alone in understanding young people's life courses in this way, as European LLL policy narratives have failed to keep pace with changes in lifestyle and education/workplace trajectories.

“Research has evidenced that young people are themselves blamed for their failure to enter the labour market because they did not follow a ‘standard’ life course. This approach of LLL policies must be characterised as obsolete and demonstrates that something has to be done in order to reformulate and develop LLL policies that are relevant to the real social and individual worlds and life trajectories of young adults.” (Kotthoff and Carillo Gáfaró, 2017: 3)

5.3. The skills agenda has emphasised economic growth over equity

LLL policies for vulnerable young people in Scotland have been trying to balance an emphasis on developing the skills of the workforce to enhance economic growth with the equitable provision of education to guarantee social inclusion for populations deemed to be 'vulnerable'

(see Scandurra et al., 2018: 10). This is grounded in a particular ideal that education provision should be personalised to the needs of individuals in order to promote equity, build their capacity to succeed personally, but also enable people to contribute to their community and wider society. While there has been a significant rhetorical focus on the social inclusion aims of post-16 education policy in Scotland, this appears to have predominantly been addressed using Widening Access initiatives and agendas within higher education.

Meanwhile, within the skills for work agenda, greater emphasis has been placed on the pursuit of economic growth, with increased equity and social integration of vulnerable young people being narrowly addressed by facilitating access to work.

Policy maker, national: we just said, reduce youth unemployment, that is what we are aiming to do but don't worry too much about how you do it in terms of different characteristics, [but] then you wouldn't have had a chance, which you still have, of addressing some of those structural changes that are in there: gender segregation, people from disabled backgrounds struggling with the transition from education to work, the imbalance between academic and vocational pathways for young people from BME communities.

Nonetheless, in no other country in the YOUNG_ADULLLT study is there such a strong rhetorical emphasis on equity within LLL policies. Problems arise however when labour market integration is understood as the primary, if not the only, mechanism for securing social inclusion outcomes, considering evidence that:

“Promoting employability does not fully or necessarily equate with promoting equity, the empowerment of individuals and tackling poverty and social exclusion.” (Neves et al., 2019: 4)

5.4. Recommendations

1. *Incorporate the lifelong perspective* and a more holistic development of the individual beyond employability aims into policies targeting vulnerable young people.
2. *Expand the target of LLL and skills for work policies beyond a narrow age range* centred on school-to-work transitions to ensure that all young adults are able to access the benefits of policies.

3. *Ensure that the social justice goals of LLL policies are enacted* as consistently as those addressing economic growth. Strong discursive commitment should be reinforced with tangible plans to tackle the structural causes of disadvantage among young people.

6. Findings: Young people's views and trajectories

There are some challenges within the LLL/skills policy landscape related to young people's experiences that have already been identified by system actors and steps are being taken to produce policies which address these. For example, *Developing the Young Workforce*, the *Learner Journey Review*, Progressive Partnership's research into the role of parents and carers as well as Young Scot's current consultation regarding the *Learner Journey* all represent positive efforts to tackle some of the shortcomings in the current LLL/skills policy landscape. To support and provide evidence of the importance of these positive steps, we offer the following findings based on interviews with young people and practitioners, which highlight the ongoing challenges and opportunities young people face associated with LLL/skills policies.

6.1. There is a lack of information about vocational routes available to young people

Whilst some young adults received good careers advice and guidance prior to leaving school, others were very critical of the lack of support and information they received regarding vocational pathways. Many interviewees reported that their school-based careers advice heavily encouraged further and higher education, and that as a result they had experienced pressure, even if only through a lack of alternatives, to take an academic path when they had decided against this.

Apprentice, female, 20, GCR: There was careers advice, but it was more not careers advice [...] what stone are you jumping onto next, are you going to college or University?

Apprentice, female, 20, ACAR: I think if apprenticeships were better advertised more people would go into a job where they're learning at the same time [...] I knew apprenticeships were a thing, it just wasn't – nobody ever really recommended it as such.

Apprentice, female, 21, GCR: If you were doing a certain amount of Highers [...] it was like a conveyor belt kinda situation and it got to the point where I was like wait a minute, I don't even know if I want to go to University.

However, Scotland is not alone in presenting an overemphasis on academic pathways. This phenomenon of ‘academic drift’ was observed across all YOUNG_ADULLLT countries, resulting in a similar lack of diversity in young people’s information and/or options.

LLL policies “are still directed at a standard lifecourse involving full time education, mostly academic, and from then on toward full time employment” (Kovacheva et al. 2016: 41).

6.2. Families play a key role in influencing and supporting young people’s decision-making and transitions

For young adults, family is still a very important factor for their past, present and future plans and aspirations. Combined with uneven access to quality career guidance, this risks exacerbating inequalities between young people.

Young apprentices were more likely to have personal contacts with first-hand experience of the apprenticeship system or their chosen industry:

Apprentice, female, 20, ACAR: My dad is a technician. He’s a big influence and used to take me to work with him. I just thought if my dad can do it, I can do it.

In contrast, those without access to information via personal contacts were more likely to have moved directly into short-term, precarious and intermittent employment.

Unemployed, male, 20s, ACAR: I just went into job after job, they didn’t last very long

There was evidence that class inequalities correlate with access to different forms of LLL and skills development training: apprentices were more likely to come from highly skilled working-, or newly middle-class backgrounds, while those on employability programmes tended to come from lower skilled working-class backgrounds (Doyle, 2017: 52).

A better understanding of the role of key influencers and young adults' decision-making processes is needed in order to design more effective career advice and guidance services that can counteract, rather than exacerbate, social inequalities.

Apart from individual exceptions resulting from extreme vulnerability, families represented one of the most important key influencers and sources of support across all the countries studied in YOUNG_ADULLLT.

“The family is the most mentioned source of support in the lives of the young adults. Family could also be a supportive instance with regard to the vocational orientation of young adults. Some of the young adults mentioned their parents as role models.” (Rambla et al., 2018: 28)

6.3. There are insufficient meaningful LLL opportunities available to young people not in higher education or formal vocational routes.

Young people in our study predominantly fell into two camps: those following a structured vocational trajectory – in our sample this was predominantly apprenticeships – and those interacting with more short-term employability initiatives.

Policy maker, GCR: We have made lots of progress [...] that has resulted in a bigger percentage in the amount of young people going to university.

Apprentice, female, 20, ACAR: I don't know how I would be if I wasn't an apprentice [...] I don't think I would have it any other way.

Practitioner, ACAR: [young people on employability programmes] It is that kind of hardest-to-reach cohort that primarily would have just fallen into that black hole when they're due to leave school.

While apprenticeships provide a useful pathway for some, they are not suitable for all young adults. For example, young people completing employability programmes displayed more consistent and profound features of vulnerability than those on apprenticeships, including poor health, caring responsibilities, unstable home environments, abuse, grief and more. Those who do not fit the standardised trajectories of either university or formal vocational routes risk falling into a “black hole” of fragmented and inadequate employability support.

Although there was evidence that practitioners were very aware of and concerned by perceived vulnerability among young people, the content of employability initiatives appeared limited to ‘skills for work’ training or work experience placements, while social inclusion priorities did not seem reflected in young people’s experiences. Instead, programmes were largely designed as remedial interventions against the current or future threat of unemployment.

Practitioner, GCR: We’re an employability service. We’re here to help people get into work (yet) that is the furthest thing from someone’s mind who comes to us.

Frequently, training, funding and eligibility structures limited young peoples’ ability to experiment, make ‘mistakes’ and follow non-linear trajectories, instead placing significant pressure on the ‘transition period’ immediately after leaving school. There was little sense of a culture of *lifelong* learning, with young peoples’ opportunities to determine their interests and possible life courses limited to their late teens and early twenties. As a result, some (especially older) young people continued to ‘fall through the cracks’ and were unable to access appropriate LLL opportunities to support their personal development.

Policymaker, national: For some people, stepping inside a college to do a hobby course to find out are they interested in this, that or to give them the confidence actually was a positive thing, so I think sometimes that’s forgotten.

Overall, apprenticeships are a powerful policy for improving young people’s opportunities. Nonetheless, the countries under study with relatively well-established apprenticeship systems (Germany, Austria, Finland, Scotland) share two common issues:

- i) ensuring parity of esteem between academic and vocational routes (here Germany and Austria are more successful);
- ii) the neglect of those young people who do not follow standardised trajectories. For example, in Finland, “deviation from this standardized trajectory is seen as a threat to both the individual and the society” (Rinne et al., 2016: 38). This presents issues as the idea of a ‘normal’ life course becomes decreasingly relevant for all young people.

**“A lack of concern of the LLL policies with regard to the biographical experiences of the target population [...] could also generate “black holes” or gaps in LLL policies, which can reproduce processes of social exclusion”
(Kotthoff et al., 2017: 26)**

6.4. Young people who are able to successfully engage with LLL policies report positive experiences

Nonetheless, where young people were engaged in programmes and apprenticeships they spoke very positively about their experiences and the perceived outcomes. This corroborated the policy and programme intentions as expressed by experts, particularly those practitioners who had experience of working directly with the young adults.

Female, 24, work placement, GCR: I think now I’ve learned more about transferrable skills. I could take the skills into different places.

Male, 19, employability course, ACAR: It’s so much fun. I enjoyed it. I really did. They really make you bring out the person you didn’t think you were. Like, you feel a lot more confident, speak a lot better.

Male, 23, employability course, ACAR: I clearly remember it was a good time. I enjoyed it [...] it strongly built up my confidence.

In comparison with other countries, Scottish young people appeared particularly satisfied with their experiences of LLL in terms of skills development and fulfilment of their expectations. In some cases, such as one young woman in Croatia, young people in other countries had ‘no expectations whatsoever’ of employment services (Parreira do Amaral et al., 2018: 102). Nonetheless, the flexibility and personalisation on offer in Austria, Germany and Finland was especially praised by young people.

“Independently of their current life stage the young adults stated that participation in the [Austrian LLL] policies had increased their feelings of self-esteem, self-worth and self-efficacy.” (Pot et al., 2017: 39)

6.5. Recommendations

4. *Continue ongoing work to improve the quality and availability of information about vocational pathways.* This should be understood in terms of social justice promotion, mitigating the influence of unequal social resources available to young people.
5. *Take into consideration young people's voices and views* when designing and evaluating LLL policies. In particular, insights from young people with different levels of engagement with policies are likely to improve others' experiences. The *Learner Journey Advisory Group* coordinated by *Young Scot* is a positive example of engagement of this kind.
6. *Design flexible alternatives to traditional training and employment routes*, informed by young adults' motivations and personal decisions. These should include comprehensive and high-quality alternatives to formalised routes through vocational and higher education.

7. Findings: Governance of the skills system

Based on a review of policy documents and interviews with policy actors from across the skills system, the following key features of Scottish skills system governance have been identified:

7.1. The Scottish Government is providing consistent strategic coordination to the skills system

The role of Scottish Government in regulating and shaping skills system supply and demand has acquired more interventionist features. This is intended to ensure that the different actors involved in LLL follow the policy priorities set at national level, resulting in decentralised responsibility for execution and centralised control of outcomes through monitoring and evaluation.

At the national level, LLL initiatives across the associated policy sectors in Scotland are designed to articulate with each other and to focus their actions and resources on national priorities, defined by mid- and long-term governmental strategies. These national priorities are set out in the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework², which provides a list of indicators to measure progress against strategic goals using an outcomes-based approach.

This strategic coordination of the skills system is presented as necessary on two counts. Firstly, skills development has been identified as a tool to help alleviate inequality and resolve broad social challenges such as intergenerational poverty and youth unemployment. Secondly, the post-crisis context, combined with the SNP's focus on increasing national economic stability

² Frequently updated at <http://nationalperformance.gov.scot>

and self-sufficiency, positions skills development and increased productivity as key priorities for Scotland.

Policy maker, national: How do you focus a whole system on tackling this [youth unemployment] because it requires multi-agency intervention at various stages, and what is the government's role in making that happen? How does government facilitate it? How does government mandate it?

Compared with other countries, Scotland is relatively strategic in its governance of the skills system, with strong, clear priorities and intentions set at the national level. This helps support actors and institutions within the skills system to work in more coherent and collaborative ways.

“In Austria, Finland, Germany and Scotland (UK), the authorities have elaborated a systematic theory of change of lifelong learning policies [...] made of a systematic set of factual claims on the expected outcomes of lifelong learning policies.” (Rambla et al., 2018: 51)

7.2. There is a recognised need to increase employers' engagement in coordination and collaboration mechanisms

To support this increasingly state-managed model, coordination and collaboration have increased significantly at national and regional levels, reflecting trends across Scottish public service delivery following the Christie Report (Scottish Government, 2011). The use of national skills policy priorities and coordinating bodies/boards has produced a more articulate system for the provision of publicly-funded programmes related to young adults' employability.

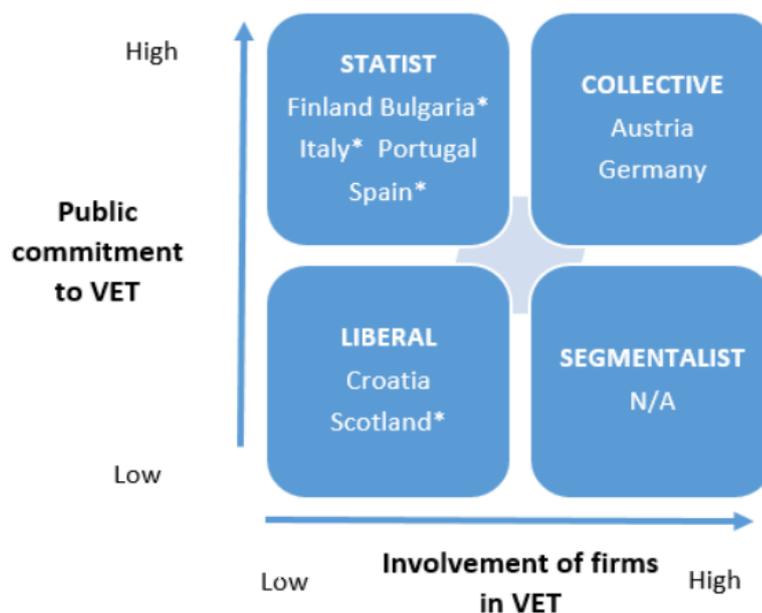
However, while there are strong incentives for publicly-funded and publicly-accountable actors to participate effectively in such collaboration, some doubts exist about the capacity of these

Policy manager, ACAR: Do you do this through collaboration or do you do it with a stick? Actually we have got no stick, so we will have to do it through collaboration. You can only do that if there is a will [...] this is going to have to be a cultural change programme rather than an enforcement programme.

coordination mechanisms to mobilise other actors, especially employers. It is difficult to foresee how new state initiatives to coordinate the system can be effective in the context of a demand-led skills system. In particular, mobilising employers to provide high-quality training and employment would appear challenging. There is a need for cultural change across the diverse skills system actors if this is to be addressed.

The two regions of GCR and ACAR present differences in the success of this shift to a state-managed model. Coordination and collaboration with employers have been more successful in ACAR, building on pre-existing practices of strong employer involvement necessitated by the clustered economy centred on the dominant oil and gas sector. In addition, there appears to have been greater alignment between national targets and local priorities in comparison to GCR.

Figure 7. Classification of countries according to the degree of public commitment and private involvement in Vocational Education and Training (VET)



*Indicates countries are at the edge of the liberal or statist regime. Source: (Capsada-Munsech and Valiente, 2017: 29)

While other countries in the YOUNG_ADULLLT study also display low employer engagement, Germany and Austria have social contract models and patterns of past investment that more effectively compel and support employers to participate in collaborative skills governance. Nonetheless, “in most cases employers only contribute to the provision of VET if no extra direct costs are to be assumed on their part” (Capsada-Munsech and Valiente, 2017: 8).

In collectivist countries “VET has a long tradition of collaborative effort between employers and the state. Adult education is partly state-funded, but also relies on a system of formalised social partnerships. Employers and trade unions also take part in the decision-making of the VET system and take responsibility for it. Thus, the suggested solution involves the collaboration between firms, associations and the state in providing and financing vocational skills.” (Capsada-Munsech and Valiente, 2017: 17)

7.3. Centralised accountability mechanisms are limiting regional autonomy and adaptation

The transition to a state-managed system based on national targets and centrally-led policies has challenged decentralisation and led to more demanding accountability frameworks. This challenges the autonomy and discretion of local authorities and education and training providers (e.g. colleges) who must now work to carefully balance regional/local adaptation of policy implementation with adherence to national targets and priorities.

Policy maker, national: Hitherto there had been a clear understanding that government provided the money, [and then] local government did it how they wanted it [...] So this was unusual that you had central government bureaucrats meeting local authority bureaucrats and saying ‘account to us for what you are doing’.

As a result, some tensions arise among regional and local actors, producing power struggles, ambivalence towards the reforms and resistance. Clear communication, leadership and broad actor engagement will be key to managing such tensions. In addition, greater support at national level for localised adaptation of policy agendas may increase effectiveness across diverse contexts as well as ensuring positive local actor engagement, and thus fidelity to the aims of national policies.

Policy manager, GCR: Our target is 15% [number of beneficiaries who move into employment]. We are nowhere near achieving the 15% yet [...] we have achieved 57 people into work [...] but when you hear about the clients and their journey and what their issues are, it is really successful.

While Scotland is one of the more pronounced examples of centralised monitoring and accountability mechanisms, in general this is a trend shared across all the YOUNG_ADULLLT countries. As a result of this centralisation:

LLL policies “often face challenges in attending to regional/local specificities. This makes their adaptability to the different regions highly dependent on the performance of local actors and the adequacy of the sub-national arrangements. Thus, it is important to allow for local and regional variation in the monitoring and evaluation processes given that clear, accessible and relevant data are a fundamental prerequisite for effective LLL policy planning.”
(Neves et al., 2019: 4)

7.4. Recommendations

7. *Evaluate the effectiveness of LLL policies and move beyond the monitoring of descriptive targets against KPIs.* This includes considering qualitative feedback from local and regional LLL policy actors, which should be used to evaluate and further improve the regional governance of LLL policies.
8. *Allow for local and regional variation* in the accountability, monitoring targets and evaluation of local and regional partnerships responsible for the implementation of LLL policies. This is likely to improve fidelity to nationally-devised policies and promote local actor engagement.

8. Summary of recommendations

Based on the findings from the YOUNG-ADULLLT project, we make the following recommendations for consideration by skills system actors, including policymakers, politicians, educators, careers counsellors, training providers and researchers, among others:

1. *Incorporate the lifelong perspective* and a more holistic development of the individual beyond employability aims into policies targeting vulnerable young people.
2. *Expand the target of LLL and skills for work policies beyond a narrow age range* centred on school-to-work transitions to ensure that all young adults are able to access the benefits of policies.
3. *Ensure that the social justice goals of LLL policies are enacted* as consistently as those addressing economic growth. Strong discursive commitment should be reinforced with tangible plans to tackle the structural causes of disadvantage among young people.
4. *Continue ongoing work to improve the quality and availability of information about vocational pathways*. This should be understood in terms of social justice promotion, mitigating the influence of unequal social resources available to young people.
5. *Take into consideration young people's voices and views* when designing and evaluating LLL policies. In particular, insights from young people with different levels of engagement with policies are likely to improve others' experiences. The *Learner Journey Advisory Group* coordinated by *Young Scot* is a positive example of engagement of this kind.
6. *Design flexible alternatives to traditional training and employment routes*, informed by young adults' motivations and personal decisions. These should include comprehensive and high-quality alternatives to formalised routes through vocational and higher education.
7. *Evaluate the effectiveness of LLL policies and move beyond the monitoring of descriptive targets against KPIs*. This includes considering qualitative feedback from local and regional LLL policy actors, which should be used to evaluate and further improve the regional governance of LLL policies.
8. *Allow for local and regional variation* in the accountability, monitoring targets and evaluation of local and regional partnerships responsible for the implementation of LLL policies. This is likely to improve fidelity to nationally-devised policies and promote local actor engagement.

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