

© Springer International Publishing AG, part of Springer Nature 2018

Simon McGrath

,  
Martin Mulder

,  
Joy Papier

and  
Rebecca Stuart

Handbook of Vocational Education and Training: Developments in the Changing World of Work

10.1007/978-3-319-49789-1\_59-1

# **Facilitating Lifelong Learning Through Vocational Education and Training: Promoting Inclusion and Opportunities for Young People in the UK**

Natasha Kersh<sup>1</sup> and Nathalie Huegler<sup>1</sup>

(1)UCL Institute of Education University College London, London, UK

**Natasha Kersh (Corresponding author)**

Email: [n.kersh@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:n.kersh@ucl.ac.uk)

**Nathalie Huegler**

Email: [n.huegler@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:n.huegler@ucl.ac.uk)

## **Abstract**

This chapter will consider the role of vocational education and training in contributing to strategies to enhance the life chances and social inclusion of young adults. Recent changes in economic and social development and the impact of globalization have contributed to the changes in perception of both vocational learning and skills required by contemporary workplaces. Vocational and work-based learning has been recognized as a core component of national and international strategies for lifelong learning (LLL) (Evans 2012; NIACE 1999; Aspin et al. (eds) (2012) The second international handbook of lifelong learning. Springer, Dordrecht), which aim to bring about higher participation and inclusion of young people, especially those who are considered to be vulnerable or disadvantaged. Engaging vulnerable young people through different forms of lifelong learning has been strongly related to addressing the specific needs and requirements that would facilitate their participation in social, economic, and civic/political life in their relevant contexts. The chapter will consider the links between LLL and VET, particularly discussing the extent to which the different discourses of LLL and adult education influence strategies and approaches for vulnerable young people and the implications of VET. The chapter will further consider some policy and practice developments in the UK context, in both historical and contemporary perspectives. Subsequently, some approaches will be considered to illustrate the debate and developments, particularly drawing on research findings from selected research projects. The chapter will conclude with discussing the potential of VET for promoting active citizenship specifically in providing the learners with both economic and social skills in a lifelong learning perspective.

**Keywords** Lifelong learning - Inclusion - Active citizenship - Young adults - Vocational education and training (VET)

## Introduction

Engaging young people through different forms of lifelong learning (LLL) has been strongly related to addressing the specific needs and requirements to facilitate their participation in social, economic, and civic/political life in their relevant contexts. The vocational education and training (VET) system, as a means to integrate young people into society and especially into the labor market, has been an important element of LLL and inclusion approaches (e.g., Evans and Niemeyer [2004](#); Holford et al. [2008](#)). Recent changes in economic and social development and the impact of globalization have contributed to the changes in perception of both vocational learning and the skills required by contemporary workplaces. Vocational and work-based learning has been recognized as a core component of national and international strategies for LLL (Evans [2009](#); Aspin et al. [2012](#); Malloch et al. [2011](#)), which aim to bring about higher participation and inclusion of young people, including those who are considered to be vulnerable or disadvantaged. The significance of the growing problem of social exclusion and disengagement of adults has been underpinned strongly by the current global challenges (such as youth unemployment, lack of involvement in employment or education, low levels of basic skills of the population, the refugee crisis). A recent EU report shows that around 25% of adults (aged 25–64 years) in the EU have not completed any formal education beyond the level of lower secondary education. In addition, of these, 6.5% of adults in the EU left the education system with no more than primary education (European Commission [2015](#)). Over the last decade, one of the main concerns of governments in Europe has been to raise the skill and education level of the adult population as a way of increasing competitiveness in the global economy. Addressing these complex problems specifically through engaging and reengaging the adult population in LLL and skills development has become an important target of national governments across Europe and globally. This chapter will consider the role of VET in contributing to strategies to enhance the life chances and social inclusion of young adults, specifically focusing on the UK (Although this chapter makes some general observations that relate to the UK, the discussion will focus largely on England.) context. The chapter will start with a discussion of recent policy developments of VET in England and will provide some theoretical considerations on the role of LLL and its discourses for VET in the UK context. The chapter will consider the notion of disadvantage in relation to young adults and will further discuss the links between LLL, VET, and inclusion, particularly discussing the extent to which the different discourses of LLL and adult education influence strategies and approaches for vulnerable young people and the implications of VET. Subsequently, some approaches will be considered to illustrate the debate and developments, drawing particularly on findings on research dealing with issues of VET, LLL, and disadvantaged young adults. The chapter will conclude with some recommendations for policy and practice and directions for future research.

## Theoretical Considerations and Policy Developments

The role of VET in promoting LLL and engaging young people, including those suffering from different types of disadvantage, has long been recognized in both policy and research (Saar et al. [2013](#); Jarvis [2012](#); Schuller [2009](#); European Commission [2015](#)). The VET system as a means to

integrate young people into society and especially into the labor market has become one of most integral configurations of LLL, fostering social inclusion through aiming to equip (vulnerable) young people with a range of skills, including vocational, basic, and personal skills. Both national and international research have stressed the potential of vocational education in combating elements of social exclusion, specifically through contributing to young adults' transition to employment, skills development, and reducing early school leaving. An investigation of young people's pathways undertaken by Cedefop demonstrates that VET attracts learners at risk of dropping out or those who have already dropped out because they prefer VET-specific pedagogies as a way of learning (Cedefop [2016](#)). Other commentators have made similar observations in relation to potential positive impact of VET on the life chances of young adults including both professional and personal development (Evans [2009](#); Malloch et al. [2011](#)).

In this respect, the role of VET in equipping individuals with skills to succeed in the labor market has been emphasized in both research literature and policy papers (e.g., Evans et al. [2006](#)). It has been observed that the number of job roles requiring intermediate and higher skills and education is rising in the UK, and it is expected that it will become even more important to possess specialist skills in the coming years, in order to participate in a more advanced labor market (UK NARIC [2016](#)). Vocational qualifications provide practical skills that are directly related to employment in one or more occupations and can also prepare learners to progress to academic education, and therefore, vocational learning plays a critical role in both building a skilled and productive workforce and equipping learners with employment-related skills.

In the UK context, it has been observed (e.g., Stasz et al. [2004](#)) that government policy for VET has been directed toward two broad purposes. The first is related to economic objectives, focusing on the development of economic capabilities and employability skills of the population. This policy discourse emphasizes that higher skills levels will lead to national economic prosperity, increased benefits for companies, as well as higher earnings and better life chances for the individual. Policy developments related to this discourse in the LLL and VET fields in the UK have been strongly underpinned by neoliberalism, emphasizing global competitiveness, the market economy, and its skill demands, and this was reflected in policy documents such as the *Leitch Review of Skills* (HM Treasury [2006](#)). The corresponding market-related or economics-associated discourse of LLL, "the more we learn, the more we earn" (Evans [2009](#)), has affected the development of adult education both in Europe and globally over the last two decades. For both VET and LLL, economic and market-related integration have therefore been important objectives; and the development of young people's employability skills has been considered a key factor for their successful integration into European societies. The second purpose of VET is social, emphasizing that vocational education is not simply about occupationally relevant skills and qualifications but also about developing the motivation, confidence, and transferrable skills of individuals. A substantial body of literature identifies a range of nonvocational outcomes associated with VET provision, which include increased positive learning attitudes among young people and adults, promoting social inclusion, as well as facilitating progression to further learning (e.g., Evans [2009](#); Guile [2011](#); Cedefop [2016](#)). The success of this agenda for young people may vary across contexts and depends largely on a number of external and internal factors such as teachers' competences and support for students, students' attitudes, individual biographies, financial and social setup, etc.

In the UK context, the problem of social exclusion and the need for developing policies and strategies for social integration have been increasingly recognized among policy-makers and practitioners over the past two decades; specifically the term "social exclusion" has mainly been used in policy agendas since the 1997 New Labour government. These two broad purposes, both economic and social, have been evident in relevant policies and strategies implemented by the government. In the latter part of

the last century, some influential policy papers contributed to developing both the social and the economic agenda of VET. *A Basis for Choice*, published by the Further Education Unit (FEU) in 1979, became an important policy document in setting the agenda for vocational education, which emphasized the significance of helping young adults to make informed and meaningful choices in relation to their education and employment and opportunities. As noted by Pring ( [1995](#)), the agenda emphasized the provision of guidance to enable young people to make a more informed choice about their routes into society, adult life, and employment, as one of the dimensions of VET. The policy also underpinned the importance of developing young adults' transferable skills to ensure that their options are kept open (FEU [1979](#), [1982](#)). Furthermore, a review of courses conducted on behalf of the FEU (Pratley [1980](#)) identified that young adults are likely to need help in areas that relate not only to general education but also to job finding, employment skills, and personal skills development. Through the Manpower Services Commission (later succeeded by the Training Agency), some important programs were initiated in the 1970s to tackle youth unemployment (e.g., the Job Creation Programme and the Work Experience Programme, later succeeded by the Youth Opportunities Programme). An "employment program" – work experience, training, and work preparation courses for unemployed school leavers – was another example of addressing unemployment and the disengaged. However, as Evans ( [1991](#)) notes, the program did not succeed in solving the problems of unemployment and social exclusion. An additional concern was the widespread abuse of the programs by employers, who often saw them as a source of cheap labor. The Youth Training Scheme (YTS) was set up to replace these schemes in 1983. As Lucas ( [2007](#)) observes, this was intended to be a modernized apprenticeship for everybody, committed to providing places for all unemployed 16- and 17-year-old school leavers in order to enhance their employability chances. The 4-year Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) and the 1-year Certificate in Prevocational Education (CPVE) were introduced in 1983 and 1986, respectively. The TVEI was introduced to offer full-time students aged 14–18 years a 4-year course combining general with technical and vocational education in schools. The primary aim of this initiative was to make the school-based curriculum more relevant to the world of work. The CPVE included common core options for developing skills in selected occupational areas, as well as job seeking and enterprise skills. However, as Evans ( [1991](#), pp. 55–56) notes, the initiatives introduced in the 1980s presented "a confusing array of possible pathways to young people as well as to teachers, counsellors and parents who seek to guide them and the companies who might offer them employment." During the 1980s Further Education (FE) colleges played an important role in providing "new vocational" or "prevocational" programs by offering a range of courses which emphasized preparation for work in general, not for specific jobs (Lucas [2007](#)). In 1990 Youth Training replaced the YTS and became a significant program for unemployed 16- and 17-year-olds until April 1998, when it was replaced by Work-Based Training for Young People. Youth Training was delivered by training providers under contract to the local Training and Enterprise Councils. Work-Based Training for Young People retained most of the main characteristics of Youth Training. Taking the CPVE initiative further, General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) were introduced in 1992 at three levels (foundation, intermediate, and advanced). They were aimed at young people who wanted to keep their career options open rather than embarking on specific NVQs. The introduction of GNVQs (phased out in 2007) and more recently the vocational General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) in applied subjects have meant that aspects of a 14- to 16-year-old's program of studies may be vocationally related, providing what Pring ( [1995](#)) defined as "the prevocational context." With the variety of vocational training courses that could be offered in different contexts (e.g., college or workplace), there are certain common features of this type of learning, such as the incorporation of vocational relevance, providing opportunities for

sampling or “tasting” a range of jobs to allow informed choices as well as taking into account the individual needs and circumstances of young people.

More specific policy developments to address the social exclusion of adults became evident in the UK political agenda at the end of the 1990s. The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) was set up in 1997, in order “to help improve government action to reduce social exclusion by producing ‘joined-up solutions to joined-up problems’” (SEU [2004](#), p. 2). One of the SEU’s most influential reports, the *Bridging the Gap* report (SEU [1999](#)), as well as its subsequent Policy Action Team report on young people (SEU [2000](#)), raised the issue of social exclusion as one of the most significant social challenges, affecting adults and young people. The need to develop various programs and schemes that aim to engage young people, specifically those who are disadvantaged or disengaged, has also been strongly articulated in the SEU’s reports.

Subsequent policy developments to address the issues of social exclusion raised by the SEU have been focused strongly on the economic dimension of LLL, with a focus on labor market skills and employability. Under New Labour (New Labour is a term that refers to various British Labour Party governments, during the period from the mid-1990s until 2010, under the leadership of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.) policies, social exclusion was to be countered by economic inclusion, focusing primarily on providing education, training, and employment opportunities (Coffield et al. [2008](#)). Schemes for young adults were usually geared toward employability and training, to help with job search, interview, and personal skills and, ultimately, move them into employment.

During recent years a number of reforms and initiatives have been launched with the purpose of improving VET for young people and adults and to make it more responsive to the needs of employers and the labor market. The provision of VET, primarily post-16, includes FE colleges, apprenticeships, and systems of work-based learning. Many recent reforms have aimed to enhance the status of VET and make it an equal alternative to higher education. University degrees have become increasingly expensive since the introduction of fees in 1998 and at the time of writing cost up to £92,500 per annum. A wide range of vocational opportunities is available for learners at the end of compulsory education, including qualifications within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)/Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), other qualifications outside the NQF/QCF (e.g., RSA or City & Guilds, vendor certifications offered by Microsoft and others), short training courses (not necessarily leading to a qualification), as well as publicly funded work-based training, e.g., apprenticeships or traineeships. The issue of concern, however, is the potential for confusion over a wide range of different qualifications, resembling a junglelike landscape of post-compulsory training in the UK (Unwin [1999](#)). A further, and very damaging, feature of the fragmented and turbulent vocational scene is that employers have little confidence in – or indeed knowledge of – the awards designed to prepare young people for entry to their businesses. There is a range of education and training providers within the UK VET sector, including secondary schools, sixth form schools, sixth form colleges, private training companies and academies, FE colleges, and higher education institutions. FE colleges make up the largest group of VET providers, providing education for both young people and adults.

Formal VET opportunities for disadvantaged groups are mostly offered by the same providers that also cater for other students; however, additional funding might be available. Funding for young people in England between the ages of 14 and 17 to succeed in education and training is available through the Youth Engagement Fund. It was created as a set of measures to address the attainment gap between children and young people from different social and economic backgrounds and to reduce the number of young people classified as “not in employment, education or training” (NEET) (HM Government [2014](#), p. 3). The purpose is to support disadvantaged 14- to 17-year-olds and to enhance their motivation to participate in education or training, thus improving their life chances and



success for their future professional and personal development. Another example are Lifelong Learning Partnerships (LLPs), which consist of a variety of education providers ranging from voluntary sector providers to further and higher education institutions as well as employers and trade unions. LLPs often reach out to disadvantaged communities and assist disadvantaged learners to engage with education and training again (UK NARIC [2016](#)).

Recent years have seen widespread interest among different stakeholders in VET. Both current and previous governments have issued major reports, each having quite different approaches to the problems raised by Britain's poor record in this field (Winch [2012](#)). Improving the VET system through making it accessible and understandable to young people has been and remains an important objective of a number of national strategies. There are concerns that the system is too complex and lacks clear routes for progression to higher-level skills or a sustainable career, with too many young people obtaining qualifications which are of little or no value to the labor market and many employers reporting hard-to-fill vacancies due to a lack of skills (DfE [2017](#)). Recent decades have witnessed a series of reviews that have raised the debate about the need to make the VET system more responsive to the needs of both individuals and employers. The main objective of the *Leitch Review* of 2006 (HM Treasury [2006](#)) was to raise the skills levels of the British workforce to facilitate the country's economic competitiveness. Some of the main targets identified by the *Leitch Review* included recommendations to increase adult basic skills across all levels and strengthen employer voice and engagement as well as to increase people's aspirations and awareness of the value of skills (HM Treasury [2006](#)). Subsequently, the then Liberal Democrat-Conservative Coalition government recognized the need to carry on reforms in the VET sector. The independent *Wolf Review* (Wolf [2011](#)), commissioned by then Education Secretary Michael Gove, has further underpinned the significance of VET reforms. Following the *Wolf Review*, the "Building Engagement, Building Futures" strategy was launched in 2011, which focused on raising attainment in school and beyond to ensure that young people have the skills they need to compete in a global economy; helping local partners to provide effective and coordinated services that support all young people, including the most vulnerable, aiming to achieve full participation for 16- to 17-year-olds by 2015; and encouraging and incentivizing employers to inspire and recruit young people by offering more high-quality apprenticeships and work experience places and ensuring that work pays and giving young people the personalized support they need to find the work, through universal credit (HM Government [2011](#), p. 5). The program has had an explicit focus on VET, specifically, making a clear commitment to improve vocational education and specifically emphasizing the role of apprenticeships and incentivizing small businesses to take on young people and make it easier for employers to offer opportunities for apprentices. The strategy makes a clear link between vocational education and economic prosperity, suggesting that VET can yield considerable returns for young people and the economy (Cedefop [2016](#)). Correspondingly, most recent strategies aiming to tackle youth unemployment and to provide more choices for disadvantaged young people have focused on improving apprenticeship provision, making it more accessible for different types of young adults. Traineeships provide an example of opportunities for those who are not ready to start apprenticeships due to a lack of appropriate skills or experience. This may apply to different types of disadvantaged/vulnerable young adults, including those who newly arrived in the country (immigrants or refugees), dropouts from the mainstream education system, as well as young people lacking basic skills. The trainee scheme endeavors to give young people the skills they need to progress into an apprenticeship, further education, and training or employment, specifically through developing their literacy and numeracy skills as well as providing them with opportunities to engage in work preparation and training. As noted elsewhere, the Coalition vision was one in which young people would be empowered consumers of training opportunities and where informed choice in a market of

opportunities would improve standards (Swift and Fisher [2012](#)). This was underpinned by the tradition of neoliberalism that has been centered around features such as the promotion of free competition, deregulation, privatization, internationalization, consumer choice, and the use of market proxies in the public sector (Souto-Otero [2013](#)). Individuals with low skills levels are more likely to be unemployed or in insecure, underpaid employment (Swift and Fisher [2012](#)). As a result, various schemes in the area of VET have often been explicitly aimed at, and seem to have a greater impact on, those individuals who are not succeeding at school or at work or whose skills do not meet the needs of the economy and therefore hamper their ability to enter employment.

The conclusion is that major government vocational education policies and reforms have been driven primarily by economic purposes and less by the need to address the problem of social exclusion.

Another concern is that of the status of VET within society, as it has been perceived as a “second choice” option, while “academic” education, especially as represented by the General Certificate of Education at Advanced Level (GCE A Level), “has been widely regarded as the prestigious option to which the best should aspire” (Swift and Fisher [2012](#), p. 208). As the discussion above indicates, a number of reforms and initiatives have been launched with the purpose of improving VET for young people and adults and to make it more responsive to the needs of both employers and individuals.

However, as Evans and Niemeyer ( [2004](#)) warn, getting vulnerable young people into employment does not immediately solve the challenge of social exclusion and disengagement, and even successful entry into the labor market can bring another set of limitations and instabilities. While recognizing the significance of the economic agenda, i.e., equipping adults with employability skills and moving them into employment, a substantial body of research (Holford et al. 2011; Evans [1995](#); Evans [2009](#); Evans and Niemeyer [2004](#)) supports the idea of developing and promoting the LLL perspective that would enable vulnerable young adults not only to develop their economic and employability skills but would also encourage their social inclusion, personal development, and participation in their communities and wider society. Beck ( [2015](#)) also notes that in investigating the issue of learning providers who work with young people with experiences of being NEET, the problems of the quality of provision, which open few opportunities for participants, need to be taken into account. In addition, she makes a point that the low expectations of providers can result in additional barriers for young people as they may be discouraged from following their ambitions with potential implications for the development of their own sense of agency. Correspondingly, White and Laczik ( [2016](#)) make a similar argument and support the view that successful programs for disadvantaged young adults need to incorporate specific features that contribute to making the programs successful. They identify some characteristics of successful programs that need to be taken into account, such as offering young people tailored provision to reengage them in education and training, offering them a choice in vocational areas and other skills development programs, and supporting them in making an informed choice. The significance of tutors’ attitudes and taking into account learners’ backgrounds has also been cited in relation to programs provided for vulnerable learners (e.g., refugees) (Chadderton and Edmonds [2015](#)), as well as developing meaningful VET pedagogies that contribute to individual success, motivation, and improved life chances of young adults.

Providing opportunities to engage vulnerable young adults in VET alone is, therefore, not sufficient, and the successful strategies to facilitate social inclusion through VET require taking into account the LLL perspective, to make the process of VET-related learning meaningful and have an impact on individual life courses. As Evans ( [2009](#)) argues, LLL is more than simply about equipping learners with labor market-related skills and competences. The expansion of human capabilities rather than merely economic development should be the central aim of this process, which extends beyond the economic dimension, and emphasizes the importance of social and political participation as well as the responsibilities of participation, developing capabilities, and the rights to participate (Evans [2009](#)).

Facilitating inclusion through LLL in VET settings may involve a range of dimensions, such as learning contexts, skills development and recognition, and promoting opportunities for active citizenship.

## Facilitating Inclusion Through Lifelong Learning: Implications for VET-Related Training

As the concept of LLL has taken prominence both nationally and globally, as one of the most influential concepts affecting educational initiatives in a range of contexts, the UK VET developments have been increasingly drawing on the LLL agenda, specifically in the way of rethinking the objectives of VET. The LLL vision of VET is that not only should vocational programs equip young adults with occupationally related skills but they should also be aiming to facilitate their transferrable skills, improve life chances, and facilitate social inclusion. Engaging young adults to be lifelong learners through VET and facilitating the inclusion of those who are considered to be disadvantaged and at risk of social exclusion have become significant elements of VET-related and work-based learning provision. In the research literature, facilitating LLL and inclusion through VET and workplace learning has been identified as related to a range of dimensions, including the significance of learning contexts and spaces, skills and competence development, and encouraging young adults to become active citizens.

## Learning Spaces and VET: Promoting Inclusion Through Inclusive Learning Contexts

The notion of contexts and spaces and their role in facilitating learning and inclusion has received recognition in the research literature in the past two decades. The ways that learning spaces facilitate individual engagement and perceptions of knowledge and learning at work have been reconceptualized in response to the changing requirements of contemporary economies and, more specifically, workplaces (Kolb and Kolb [2005](#); Malloch et al. [2011](#); Evans and Kersh [2014](#)). The complex interdependencies between types of learning spaces and learner engagement have been underpinned by research exploring school to work transitions, work-related learning, and VET as well as issues of social integration and inclusion. This research has been characterized by perceiving and conceptualizing VET and work-related spaces not simply as settings for the development and deployment of occupationally related skills but as contexts that may play an important role in contributing to personal development, improved life chances, and reducing social exclusion (e.g., Malloch et al. [2011](#); Evans and Kersh [2014](#); Evans [2009](#); Kersh [2015](#)). VET-related contexts have been considered and recognized as multifaceted spaces that may promote opportunities for enhancing motivation, positive attitudes, and skills development. Fuller and Unwin ( [2004](#)) have conceptualized expansive and restrictive learning environments that may exist and coexist in work-/VET-related contexts, where the former provides affordances for engagement and personal development (i.e., vision goes beyond immediate job requirements – to progression for personal development and career) and the latter restricts opportunities for wider professional and personal development (i.e., the focus is on the minimum skills required to fulfil current job tasks). The expansive/restrictive framework provides a foundation for considering potential affordances of the learning spaces in VET-related settings and the role that spaces in contexts may play in facilitating engagement and inclusion. The study by Evans and Kersh ( [2004](#)) of unemployed adults has demonstrated how expansive



learning environments might contribute to the development of confidence and positive learning outcomes of disadvantaged adults in work-related settings. Furthermore, Evans and Niemeyer ( [2004](#)) have identified a link between engagement and situated learning contexts; specifically, their research has found that those suffering from social exclusion could be better motivated and reintegrated through VET-related programs that provide opportunities for situated learning. The situated learning context has been perceived as a space where the individual biography of each person is highly significant for their engagement in the learning environment and communities and where workplace learning that does not take place in closed communities may have the goal of enabling people to move through and to move on. Arguing that within work-based learning contexts, situated learning potentially plays a part in countering the social and economic exclusion of young people, the researchers further identify some important dimensions of situated learning, such as pedagogical, motivational, social, and economic as well as the dimension of diversity that contributes to the flexibility of opportunities required in a modern education system (p. 29).

## Promoting Inclusion Through Skills Recognition and Development

Learning spaces that provide affordances for inclusion and engagement of vulnerable young adults (expansive learning spaces) have been linked to the development and recognition of a range of skills and competences, not restricted to immediate work-related skills. Engaging and reengaging adults through the development and recognition of their personal skills in vocational and work-related contexts has been receiving attention in research on work-related contexts and settings in the last two decades (Evans et al. [2006](#); Eraut [2000](#)). Evans's research (Evans et al. [2006](#)) has suggested the significance of past experiences and prior skills acquisition from a range of experiences, such as work experience, formal education, and various life experiences (e.g., running of households, bringing up children, travel, etc.). Further research has demonstrated the ways in which adult learners that have come from disadvantaged backgrounds draw on their past experiences in their new settings and contexts, including work-related contexts. The research underpins the notion of tacit skills recognition, specifically in a range of workplace contexts. Such skills have strong tacit dimensions that may become explicit or visible to the holder when deployed or recognized in a relevant context or environment. The benefits of capturing such skills for the purpose of recognition and accreditation in VET settings have been found to be the most relevant measure of progress for a number of learners experiencing different kinds of disadvantages. Improved motivation, increased confidence, self-assurance, and self-esteem are good examples associated with tacit skills recognition (Evans et al. [2004](#)).

Lacking basic skills such as literacy, numeracy, and information technology has been identified as one of the crucial factors that may prevent employees from engaging in learning and competence development within their workplaces (Evans and Waite [2009](#); Wolf and Evans [2011](#)). The issue of the significance of employing "basic skills" in the workplace has been identified as related both to employees' biographical life experiences and their workplace learning as well as career and life chances.

## Facilitating Active Citizenship

The promotion of active participatory citizenship of young people, both directly and indirectly, is an area where many adult education and VET programs overlap. Research undertaken as part of the EduMAP project (Kersh and Toivainen [2017](#)) supported the view that the development of social,

political, and economic skills can take place through different types of adult education and LLL (e.g., vocational education, basic skills classes, second-chance education) in both formal and informal settings (see also Saar et al. [2013](#); Jarvis [2012](#)). While some programs are specifically focused on citizenship (e.g., programs for migrants), often “citizenship” is not used explicitly and/or may be embedded. Adult education programs and initiatives across all countries are seen as related to social, political, or economic dimensions of active citizenship. In particular, the:

(a)

Social dimension focuses on the development of social competences and social capital.

(b)

Political dimension encourages civic and political participation, running for boards and neighborhood activities.

(c)

Economic dimension relates to employment (e.g., developing employability skills) and access to social benefits.

The potential of VET for promoting active citizenship lies in providing the learners with both economic and social skills in a LLL perspective and facilitating their career aspirations and life chances, as well as progression and transition to employment. At the same time, the concept of citizenship has been described as linking the different domains of employment, education, and “life in general” in its various personal and social configurations (Further Education Funding Council [2000](#), p. 4). In this context, distinctions can be drawn between learning *about*, *for*, and *through* citizenship (Kersh and Toiviainen [2017](#)).

The more “traditional” dimension of learning about citizenship may be incorporated into and embedded within VET-specific curricula themselves, for example, where issues such as equal opportunities in diverse societies, employment-related rights and responsibilities, or consumer rights are concerned. Hopkins ( [2014](#)) considers the issue of embedded versus “stand-alone” approaches to citizenship education in VET in England and finds that the latter is more difficult to realize in the specific context of further education in the UK, as the predominant site of VET. He attributes this to various factors, including the relatively “downgraded” status (financially and image-wise) of vocational education and the institutions delivering it compared to their more academic counterparts (i.e., higher education). At the same time, he describes processes by which VET has seen a narrowing of curricula based on specific work-related competences, influenced by market-driven concerns. In contrast, both historically and in international comparison, there are examples of VET aspiring to providing more holistic forms of education, where citizenship studies form an integrated part of the school- or college-based learning accompanying vocational craftsmanship training (e.g., in Germany). Examples of an embedded approach to including learning for and about citizenship in VET programs provided by Hopkins ( [2014](#)) include exploring issues of sustainability of wood sources within carpentry courses or considering training practices in hairdressing through a lens of cultural and ethnic diversity. In this way, the real-life contexts of VET can facilitate citizenship education uniquely and far removed from the seemingly “dry” and theoretical domains of political philosophy.

However, real-life contexts can also have their own challenges, and some would argue that they may be particularly prone to political instrumentalization. In recent years, a specific form of “citizenship education” has been introduced for a majority of VET providers (further education colleges and many independent training providers) in England and Wales through the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, requiring both the promotion of the so-called British values and various measures under the

anti-extremism and anti-terrorism agenda of the “Prevent duty.” These measures have been controversial, not least because of concerns that a focus on “British” values might in fact be used to promote assimilationist agendas, revealing tensions between central government concerns based on normative concepts of “citizenship” and the diversity encountered at the local level of educational and community contexts (McGhee and Zhang [2017](#)). These challenges are by no means unique to VET, but they demonstrate that the contexts and ways in which young people learn *about* and *for* citizenship can be complex and sometimes contested.

As mentioned above, holistic models of citizenship education also emphasize the dimension of learning *through* the practice of citizenship (EduMAP [2017](#)), which provides a focus on how VET pedagogies and (organizational) processes promote citizenship practice. At the same time, considering citizenship as a practice, and the specific contributions made by VET as part of that, also reveals some fundamental social, economic, and political challenges. In the UK as in many other postindustrial countries, social-integrational discourses (Levitas [2005](#)) which consider participation in the labor market as a key remedy against social exclusion are being increasingly challenged in the wake of increased digitalization as well as the exhaustion of market growth and natural resources. If paid employment itself is becoming a scarcer resource in the future, this undermines not only neoliberal discourses of LLL and economic models of the integrated citizen as “taxpayer” but also threatens some of the fundamental tenets of VET itself. In this context, Avis et al. ( [2017](#)) raise concerns about risks that some young people in VET programs, particularly black and ethnic minority learners, may be subject to “warehousing,” a process by which attendance of some education and training programs not only does little to facilitate young people’s entry into the labor market but effectively contributes to their removal from it (and, as a result, from unemployment statistics). Whether such a damning verdict of specific VET programs is justified or not, this emphasizes the pertinence of exploring factors such as race, gender, and disability as part of LLL research, in order to critically analyze the ways in which VET can and does promote inclusion and active participatory citizenship. A current example in the UK context of trying to raise the particularly low labor market participation rate of adults with learning disabilities are programs of supported internship for young people aged 16–24 (Department for Education [2013](#)). While initial evaluations suggest that the programs have been effective in terms of more young people involved in the schemes moving on to paid employment than the national average, the long-term sustainability of their employment is not yet known. Overall, both the significant potentials of LLL and VET in contributing to inclusion and promoting active participatory citizenship and the challenges described above point toward a somewhat reciprocal relationship: as much as the practical focus of VET can give citizenship education a real-life context, a holistic concept of active citizenship (as outlined above) can support VET policy and practice in facing the fallacies of neoliberalism. What both concepts (VET and citizenship) also have in common is that in the current era of change, they need to be continuously explored and critically reexamined as part of research and practice.

## Conclusion

Engagement and reengagement through equipping young adults with employability skills has been considered to be one of the most significant elements for combating social exclusion across European countries. This is also underpinned by the market or economically associated discourse of LLL affecting the development of adult education both in Europe and globally. The role of VET as a means to facilitate social integration and contribute to LLL of young people has been and remains a significant area of research. Over the last decade, the global recognition of LLL and learning

throughout the lifespan has brought attention to the significance of the changing nature of the relationships between education, life, work, and learning in the knowledge-driven economy (Aspin et al. [2012](#)). One of the most influential discourses of recent decades emphasizes the economic justification of LLL, where the value of LLL is in acquiring job-related skills and competences, i.e., skills that would enable individuals to succeed in the job market. The second perspective provides a different view of LLL, where education is seen as intrinsically valuable, as something that is good in and of itself (Aspin et al. [2012](#), p. 1). The developments of VET have been strongly influenced by the former, specifically in relation to improving the chances of young people through their integration into the labor market and by fostering lifelong learning.

The relationship between education, life, and learning has been defined by the knowledge-driven economy where the relationship between education and “real life” is that “the more we learn, the more we earn” (Evans [2009](#)), and this has contributed to a strong focus on equipping young people with job-related skills. This chapter has debated the potentials of vocational education and training in promoting the inclusion and active participation of young people while also pointing toward some of increasing challenges facing the VET and LLL fields in the postindustrial era.

## References

Aspin D, Chapman J, Evans K, Bagnall R (eds) (2012) The second international handbook of lifelong learning. Springer, Dordrecht

Avis J, Orr K, Warmington P (2017) Race and vocational education and training in England. *J Vocat Educ Train* 69(3):292–310

[CrossRef](#)

Beck V (2015) Learning providers’ work with NEET young people. *J Vocat Educ Train* 67(4):482–496. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2015.1086412>

[CrossRef](#)

Cedefop (2016) Leaving education early: putting vocational education and training centre stage. Volume II: evaluating policy impact, Cedefop research paper, no. 58. Publications Office, Luxembourg. <https://doi.org/10.2801/967263>

[CrossRef](#)

Chadderton C, Edmonds C (2015) Refugees and access to vocational education and training across Europe: a case of protection of white privilege? *J Vocat Educ Train* 67(2):136–152. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2014.922114>

[CrossRef](#)

Coffield F, Edward S, Finlay I, Spours K, Steer R, Hodgson A (2008) Improving learning, skills and inclusion: the impact of policy on post-compulsory education. Improving learning TLRP series. Abingdon: Routledge

Department for Education (2017) Assessing the vocational qualifications market in England. Research report. Frontier Economics, Place

Department for Education (Dfe) (2013) Supported internship trial for 16 to 24 year old learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities: an evaluation. Research Report December 2013. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/263205/DFE-RR314.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/263205/DFE-RR314.pdf)

EduMAP (2017) Adult education as a means to active participatory citizenship: a concept note. <http://blogs.uta.fi/edumap/2017/08/21/adult-education-as-a-means-to-active-participatory-citizenship-a-concept-note/>

Eraut M (2000) Non-formal learning and tacit knowledge in professional work. Br J Educ Psychol 70(1):113–136

[CrossRef](#)

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2015) Adult education and training in Europe: programmes to raise achievement in basic skills. Eurydice report. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg

Evans K (1991) Vocational preparation in the United Kingdom: policy trends in education and training for young adults. In: Evans K, Haffended I (eds) Education for young adults: international perspectives. Routledge, Place

Evans K (1995) Competence and citizenship: towards a complementary model for times of critical social change. Br J Educ Work 8:14–27

[CrossRef](#)

Evans K (2009) Learning, work and social responsibility. Springer, Dordrecht

[CrossRef](#)

Evans K, Kersh N (2004) Recognition of tacit skills and knowledge: sustaining learning outcomes in workplace environments. J Work Learn 16(1/2):63–74

[CrossRef](#)



Evans K, Kersh N (2014) Training and workplace learning. In: Kraiger K, Passmore J, Santos NR, Malvezzi S (eds) *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of the psychology of training, development and performance improvement*. Wiley Blackwell, Chichester

Evans K, Niemeyer B (eds) (2004) *Reconnection countering social exclusion through situated learning*. Springer, Place

Evans K, Waite E (2009) Adults learning in and through the workplace. In: Ecclestone K, Biesta G, Hughes M (eds) *Change and becoming through the lifecourse: transitions and learning in education and life*. Routledge, Abingdon

Evans K, Kersh N, Kontiainen S (2004) Recognition of tacit skills: sustaining learning outcomes in adult learning and work re-entry. *Int J Train Dev* 8(1):54–72

[CrossRef](#)

Evans K, Hodkinson P, Rainbird H, Unwin L (2006) *Improving workplace learning*. Routledge, New York

FEU (1982) *A basis for choice: report of a study group on post-16 pre-employment courses*, 2nd edn. Further Education Unit, London

Fuller A, Unwin L (2004) Expansive learning environments: integrating organisational and personal development. In: Rainbird H, Fuller A, Munro A (eds) *Workplace learning in context*. Routledge, London

Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) (2000) *Citizenship for 16–19 Year Olds*. [dera.ioe.ac.uk/15157/1/citizenship%20for%2016-19%20year%20olds.pdf](http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/15157/1/citizenship%20for%2016-19%20year%20olds.pdf) [last accessed on 22.06.2018]

Further Education Unit (FEU) (1979) *A basis for choice: report of a study group on post-16 pre-employment courses*. FEU, London

Guile D (2011) Workplace learning in the knowledge economy: the development of vocational practice and social capital. In: Malloch M et al (eds) *The sage handbook on workplace learning*. Sage, Place, pp 385–394

[CrossRef](#)

HM Government (2011) Building engagement, building futures: our strategy to maximise the participation of 16–24 year olds in education, training and work. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/300215/Building\\_Engagement\\_\\_Building\\_Futures.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/300215/Building_Engagement__Building_Futures.pdf)

HM Government (2014) Youth engagement fund. Prospectus. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/313589/Youth\\_Engagement\\_Fund\\_prospectus.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/313589/Youth_Engagement_Fund_prospectus.pdf)

HM Treasury (2006) The Leitch review of skills: prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills. Final report. HMSO, Norwich

Holford et al (2008) Patterns of lifelong learning: policies and practice in an expanding Europe. Lit Verlag, Vienna

Hopkins N (2014) Citizenship and democracy in further and adult education. Springer Dordrecht, London  
[CrossRef](#)

Jarvis P (2012) Adult learning in the social context. Routledge, London

Kersh N (2015) Rethinking the learning space at work and beyond: the achievement of agency across the boundaries of work-related spaces and environments. Int Rev Educ 61(6):835–851. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-015-9529-2>  
[CrossRef](#)

Kersh N, Toiviainen H (eds) (2017) Broad research on adult education in the EU: research report. Deliverable 2.1, June 2017, EU 2020 EduMap project. Available at <http://www.uta.fi/edu/en/transit/index/D2.1.Report.30.6.2017.pdf>

Kolb A, Kolb D (2005) Learning styles and learning spaces: enhancing experiential learning in higher education. Acad Manag Learn Educ 4(2):193–212  
[CrossRef](#)

Levitas R (2005) Three discourses of social exclusion. In: The inclusive society? Palgrave Macmillan, London  
[CrossRef](#)

Lucas N (2007) Rethinking initial teacher education for further education teachers: from a standards-led to a knowledge-based approach. Teach Educ 18(2):93–106  
[CrossRef](#)

Malloch M, Cairns L, Evans K, O'Connor B (eds) (2011) The Sage handbook on workplace learning. Sage, London

McGhee D, Zhang S (2017) Nurturing resilient future citizens through value consistency vs. the retreat from multiculturalism and securitisation in the promotion of British values in schools in the UK. Citizenship Stud 21(8):937–950  
[CrossRef](#)

Pratley B (1980) Signposts: a review of course 16-19 conducted on behalf of the further education curriculum review and development unit. FEU

Pring R (1995) Closing the gap: liberal education and vocational preparation. Hodder and Stoughton, London

Saar E, Ure OB, Holford J (eds) (2013) Building a European lifelong learning society: national patterns and challenges. Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, pp 165–186

Schuller T (2009) Learning through life: inquiry into the future for lifelong learning

SEU (2004) The social exclusion unit. Pamphlet. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/social\\_exclusion\\_task\\_force/assets/publications\\_1997\\_to\\_2006/seu\\_leaflet.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/social_exclusion_task_force/assets/publications_1997_to_2006/seu_leaflet.pdf)

Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) (1999) Bridging the gap. Social Exclusion Unit, London

Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) (2000) Policy action team report on young people. Social Exclusion Unit, London

Souto-Otero M (2013) Neo-liberalism and continuing vocational training governance in the UK: an examination of three theoretical accounts. *Educ Rev* 65(1):20–35

[CrossRef](#)

Stasz K, Hayward G, Oh S, Wright S (2004) Outcomes and processes for vocational learning. Report published by the LSRC

Swift J, Fisher R (2012) Choosing vocational education: some views from young people in West Yorkshire. *Res Post-Compulsory Educ* 17(2):207–221

[CrossRef](#)

UK NARIC (2016) Vocational education and training in Europe – United Kingdom. Cedefop ReferNet VET in Europe reports; 2016. Available at: [http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2016/2016\\_CR\\_UK.pdf](http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2016/2016_CR_UK.pdf)

Unwin L (1999) Jungle trekking: vocational courses and qualifications for young people. Skills task force, Research paper 5. University of Sheffield, Centre for Research in Post-Compulsory, Education and Training, Sheffield

White C, Laczik A (2016) Engaging disaffected learners in key stage 4 through work-related learning in England. *J Vocat Educ Train* 68(1):17–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2015.1104713>

[CrossRef](#)

Winch C (2012) Vocational and civic education: whither British policy? *J Philos Educ* 46(4):603–618

[CrossRef](#)

Wolf A (2011) Review of vocational education – the wolf report. <http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/youngpeople/qandlearning/a0074953/review-of-vocational-education-the-wolf-report>

Wolf A, Evans K (2011) Improving literacy at work. Routledge, Abingdon