

Nalah Kirkendall

Politics and Policies

12/22/2025

### Analysis of UKs Post-16 and Skills White Paper

Throughout 2025 the UK have implemented multiple policies/acts whether it's about energy, data, terrorism, education, or health. All things that can help millions of people save money and live a better and healthier lifestyle. The Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper aims to educate and train the workforce to strive for people to have the skills and knowledge they need to be eligible for jobs that they need or want. This helps those who are interested in higher education or are not interested in higher education; so, everyone can get the skills and knowledge they need to get the job they want. This policy came about because of the number of people that lack the skills needed for their desired job, and the education sector that has seen a decrease in adult education, increasing the gaps of skills in the economy. Therefore, we will look through the development process of how the government specifically aims to implement this policy and help increase the skills and knowledge of future generations and current generations too. With the implementation of said policy we get to see the practical outcomes of the policy; and the pros of how it can help the people in the UK, and how it can also be harmful to the education system. To fully understand the impact of the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper, it is necessary to examine what the policy entails, its key objectives, and the mechanisms through which it is intended to operate.

An examination of the policy begins with its core focus and primary objectives. The Post-16 education and skills white paper is focused on increasing the skills and education of workers within the UK. The main point according to the ministerial foreword is “the government's plan to ‘educate and train the workforce of the future and give people the skills and knowledge they need to succeed’,” helping people get the job they need to take care of themselves and/or family (Powell et al., 2026). Whether they are aiming for higher education or not, people can have the choice on whether they want to go to college/university, but still get the skills and knowledge for a job they desire. More specifically this white paper aims to address the “critical skills shortages, with Skills England reporting we'll need 900,000 more skilled workers in priority sectors by 2030,” which would be very difficult to achieve when the UK already has a skills shortage (Chessum, 2025). There seems to be no decrease in the number of jobs available or skills needed, so the UK needs to do as much as they can to keep up with the growing demands from companies and businesses. This policy is sort of in two parts, one being about the skills the companies and businesses are requiring for their workers, and the problem of lack of education in workers. The skills part of the policy aims to “support the development and implementation of local skills plans, and reduce the chances of young people becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) through the Youth Guarantee,” helping both older and younger

generations in their place of work (Powell et al., 2026). This allows for a decrease of stress on older and skilled workers not having to educate and train younger employees, because it would slow down work if skilled workers are having to pause their work to train others. Then, you have the further education part of the policy that has multiple elements, from “providing £1.2 billion of investment per year in skills by 2028/29 to maintain per-student funding for 16- to 19-year-olds in real terms,” to the introduction of the “current range of level 3 vocational qualifications with new ‘V Level’ qualifications, which will sit alongside A Levels and T Levels as the only level 3 options for 16- to 19-year-olds,” offering an alternative to A Levels (Powell et al., 2026). There are many parts of the policy; however, in simple terms it aims to help increase the number of skilled and educated workers in the UK.

We understand the policy itself and some aspects of its implementation in the UK, but our aim is to explain the specific problems that created the conditions for it to be introduced. This policy is more complicated than simply having “too many people” that “lack the skills to get into work and to get on at work,” but it is about a whole crisis in the UK skills gap (Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper, 2025). With the amount of skills shortages within the UK there is a “cost between £30–39 billion annually in lost GDP and productivity, with projections reaching £120 billion by 2030 if unaddressed,” meaning cuts in pay and shortages of staff in an already huge housing crisis on top of it all for workers (Simmanee, 2025). This policy will allow for more skilled and educated workers for companies to hire without having to risk terminating employees or lowering wages. If companies had to start letting employees go, it would only increase the problem even more rather than fix it. Since this is not an isolated issue, it affects the overall economy of the UK, with “the single largest quantified skills deficit, costing the UK economy £63 billion per year in lost potential GDP,” according to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee. Then we look at the education side of things, and the “further education sector has been treated as ‘second rate’ for several decades, which has contributed to declining participation in adult education and skills gaps in the economy,” which only hurts the education and work sectors altogether (Powell et al., 2025). People can pick and choose if they get an education or not; however, for several jobs even if they do not require a college degree, they require skills—skills that people need training and education to have in the first place. Therefore, when the education sector is being ignored, people do not feel like it is worth getting an education that is not focused on by the government they are under. However, the government is setting a bold goal for its country of having “two-thirds of young people participating in higher-level learning – academic, technical or apprenticeships – by age 25, with at least 10% going into level 4 or 5 study by 2040,” trying to further the education system and education in young adults; both helping the education system and unemployment in young adults (Chessum, 2025). In this context, the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper emerges as a policy response to long-standing failures in skills, education funding, and workforce development, aiming to address a system crisis rather than a simple shortage of labour.

The development of the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper followed a comprehensive process involving consultations with employers, education providers, and industry stakeholders. It was after consultations with employers, education providers, and industry groups that the policy was published “on 20 October 2025” by the government (Lewis et al., 2025). The thought of implementing a policy like the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper came about because of long-standing government reviews highlighting the skills shortages that not only affected those trying to get jobs but also “a range of sectors relating to the delivery of new homes, including construction, design, planning and green skills,” which can hurt the overall economy of a town or even a whole nation (House of Lords – Meeting Housing Demand – Built Environment Committee, 2019). Businesses and individuals were both suffering, and they knew there needed to be a change in order to help everyone out. There were previous reforms that were set in order to make a change in the skills gap and education of younger generations, starting with the “T Level initiative [which] substantially elevated the status of vocational education in the UK”; however, it “may become constrained by traditional mindsets among schools and teachers, resulting in path dependency on academic education,” making the government figure out other ways to grow education and skills across generations (Chen et al., 2025). Then, there is a reform such as the Adult Skills Fund that “aims to simplify the adult education funding model, consolidating separate funding lines into a single skills fund,” which provides flexibility to those wanting an education (Home, 2024). However, with these funds being in one area, multiple places are being underfunded without a set amount each area gets. After analysis of past reforms, the government had to get input from business organisations that were calling for stronger routes into skilled employment. They gained insight into the need for individuals to have skills in “digital and technologies, advanced manufacturing, clean energy, construction, and health and social care,” all the things that both businesses and individuals need in order to get more people employed (What You Need to Know about Post-16 Skills Reforms, 2025). This approach shows the political priorities around economic growth, technological change, and domestic workforce development within the UK that they are trying to inflict change in.

The implementation of the policy has produced tangible outcomes, particularly in enhancing education and skills development among younger generations. One of the practical outcomes that comes from this policy that was not present in past policies was more of a focus on technical and vocational qualifications, such as “opportunities for 14- to 19-year-olds to learn vocational and applied subjects, in order to increase the number of young people with the skills needed for technician careers,” increasing education opportunities and decreasing the skills gap (Powell et al., 2026). This allows for more opportunities for students to gain different skills in different areas. This also allows for more interest among those who were not interested in going to college, but gives them the opportunity to get the skills they need for the job they want. Then, there is the streamlining of funding systems, with plans to replace adult loans and maintenance systems with a lifelong learning entitlement from 2026 to 2027. This is a system that is “continuing to increase maintenance loans in line with forecast inflation every academic year and

making care leavers automatically eligible to receive the maximum rate of maintenance loans,” allowing for less stress on those wanting to go back to college or start college years after they had started work (Powell et al., 2026). This gives more opportunities for others that cannot afford college to be able to afford it now, without the stress of having to take all of their money or savings out. In the early steps of increasing education for younger employees and meeting the demand of employers, there are targeted skills investment packages to create more opportunities for individuals to gain these skills. These initiatives aim to address shortages in employee skills by ensuring that training is more closely matched to the skills needed to be able to grow sectors in the overall economy.

At the end of the day the Post- 16 Education and Skills White Paper represents the government's strategy to take note of the UK's long-standing education and skills challenges. Implemented in order to respond to the widespread shortages and declining participation in adult education, the policy aims to equip both younger and older generations with the skills and training needed for future employment. Whether these skills or the training is through higher education or if they choose to go through vocational pathways. This dual focuses on meeting employer demands for skilled workers, while also accessing further education recognized because of the skills gap as not only a labor issue but an economic issue as well. The development of the policy was through informed meetings of what employers were specifically looking for in future and current employees, as well as talking with education providers on how they can get more students involved in the workforce. Early outcomes, such as increased opportunities in technical and vocational qualifications and the introduction of a streamlined lifelong learning funding system, show tangible progress in reducing barriers to education and preparing students for a range of careers. Overall, the White Paper seeks to strengthen the workforce, support economic growth, and ensure that all individuals, regardless of educational background, can access the skills and training necessary to succeed in the modern UK labor market.

Work Cited:

- Chen, P., Hayward, G., Schmidtke, C., & Tong, X. (2025). Integration Between Academic and Vocational Education in England: Historical Review. *World Vocational and Technical Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1515/wvte-2025-0012>
- Chessum, C. (2025). *Understanding the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper*. City & Guilds. <https://www.cityandguilds.com/en/news/October-2025/understanding-the-post-16-education-and-skills-white-paper>
- Home. (2024). *What is the Adult Skills Fund?* What Is the Adult Skills Fund? | NCFE. <https://www.ncfe.org.uk/all-articles/what-is-the-adult-skills-fund/>
- House of Lords - Meeting housing demand - Built Environment Committee*. (2019). Parliament.uk. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5802/ldselect/ldbuiltenv/132/13211.htm>
- Lewis, J., Powell, A., & Bolton, P. (2025). *The post-16 education and skills white paper Summary 1 Skills, training, and employment 2 Further education 3 Higher education 4 Comment and reaction*. <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-10388/CBP-10388.pdf>
- Post-16 education and skills white paper*. (2025). GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-16-education-and-skills-white-paper/post-16-education-and-skills-white-paper>
- Powell, A., Lewis, J., & Bolton, P. (2026, January 2). *The post-16 education and skills white paper*. House of Commons Library. [https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10388/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10388/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

Rathbone, D. (2025, October 23). *What does the post-16 skills white paper mean for research?* -

CaSE. CaSE. <https://www.sciencecampaign.org.uk/analysis-and-publications/detail/what-does-the-post-16-skills-white-paper-mean-for-research/>

Simman, C. (2025, October 31). *UK Skills Gap Costs the Economy £39 Billion Annually.*

Enterprise Skills Ltd; Enterprise Skills. <https://enterpriseskills.co.uk/articles/uk-skills-gap-crisis/>

Tahir, I. (2022, September 13). *The UK Education System Preserves Inequality - New Report.*

Institute for Fiscal Studies; The conversation. <https://ifs.org.uk/articles/uk-education-system-preserves-inequality-new-report>

*Treasury Committee publishes Government and FCA responses to LCF Report - Committees -*

UK Parliament. (2021). Parliament.uk. <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/1000/the-financial-conduct-authoritys-regulation-of-london-capital-finance-plc/news/157420/treasury-committee-publishes-government-and-fca-responses-to-lcf-report/>

*What you need to know about post-16 skills reforms.* (2025). Ise.org.uk.

[https://ise.org.uk/knowledge/insights/501/what\\_you\\_need\\_to\\_know\\_about\\_post16\\_skills\\_reforms/](https://ise.org.uk/knowledge/insights/501/what_you_need_to_know_about_post16_skills_reforms/)