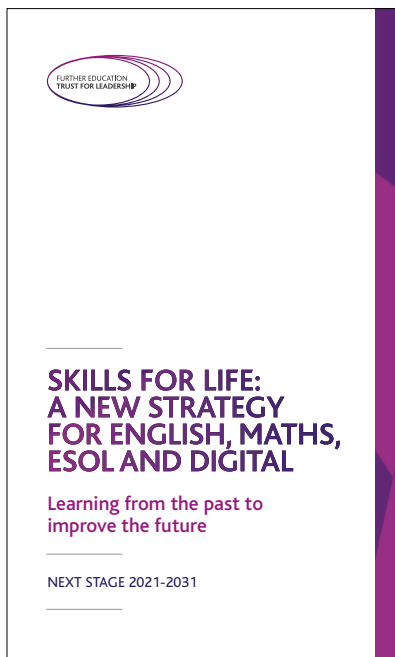


Mind the knowledge gap: Understanding the contribution of ACE

A new FETL report asks what we can learn from the successes of Skills for Life and urges FE policymakers to build on the lessons of the past

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The Skills for Life strategy, which engaged 14 million people in adult literacy and numeracy and supported the achievement of 8 million qualifications in England between 2001 and 2011, is probably the most prominent example of policy success in this area in recent years. Nevertheless, low levels of literacy and numeracy in the adult population continue to present an enormous problem to further education policy.

A new report, funded by the Further Education Trust for Leadership (FETL), considers the lessons to be learned from Skills for Life and asks how the next generation of policy-makers might build on it to enable England to rise to the challenge of poor adult basic skills.

Skills for Life: A new strategy for English, maths, ESOL and digital urges politicians and policymakers to redouble their efforts in this area, presenting a set of forward-looking recommendations to guide the next phase of policy development.

Dame Ruth Silver, President of FETL, said of the report: 'The fact that adult participation has dropped further since the programme finished reflects both the chronic short-termism of government policy and the failure of ministers to learn from or build on the successes of the past. Further education, perhaps more than any other part of the education system, suffers acutely from this shortness in policy memory. Little wonder, then, that every few years we find ourselves rolling up our sleeves and gathering around the drawing board to reinvent the wheel.'

'That is why I particularly value this publication, and why FETL has been pleased to fund it. Rather than proposing a revolution in our approach to skills, I would much prefer we took a careful, measured approach to improving the system, building thoughtfully on what worked before and reflecting intelligently on how fresh interventions can articulate with what is already in place. This is what this report attempts to do.

'There is an important lesson in this for politicians and civil servants. In reforming further education and skills, we must ensure policy does not repeat the mistakes of the past and reflect on the challenges we face now in a way that learns these lessons and coheres with the wider policy architecture of the present.'

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