

# Toward effective and efficient lifelong learning policies: the need for an evidence-based agenda.

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# OUTLINE OF MY TALK

The Project team

Why this project

5 issues with ALE research



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# THE PROJECT TEAM



Professor Ellen Boeren

Dr Sharon Clancy

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Professor John Holford

Dr Zyra Evangelysta

Dr Betul Babayigit

Dr Rhona Brown



# WHY THIS PROJECT?



- Fluctuations in participation rates in Adult Learning and Education (ALE) in the last two decades

## FEWEEK

*The 2019 survey by the Learning and Work Institute showed that adult participation has fallen 10 percentage points since 2010, from 43 per cent down to 33 per cent – the lowest figure on record.*

*It is equivalent to 3.8 million fewer adults taking part in learning since the start of the decade.*



# WHY THIS PROJECT?



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- Pressures to keep on learning throughout life in a rapidly changing economy / society: AI, automation, changing demographics, ..
- Expertise in advancing agendas on understanding variations in participation rates and adult learning systems and policies across Europe
- Previous projects paid attention to variation *across* Europe but not *within* the Anglo-Saxon cluster of European countries
- Research on ALE across the UK – and further afield – comes with several limitations!

# WHY THIS PROJECT?

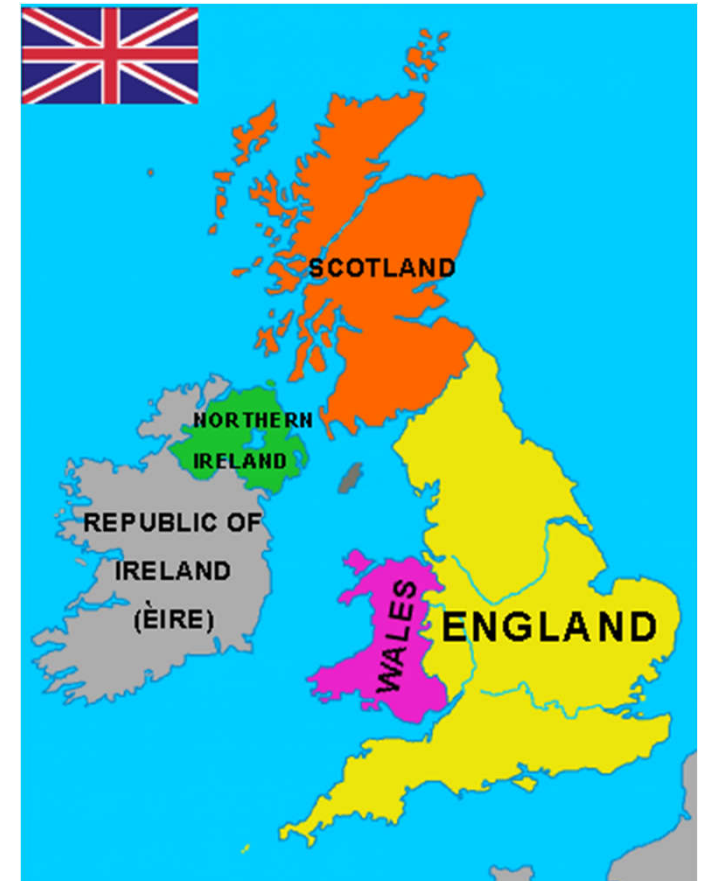
- Welfare regimes**
- Social-democratic
  - Continental
  - Liberal
  - Mediterranean
  - Post-communist



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# ISSUE 1 – Fuzzy Concepts



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- What do we mean by ALE? What are the differences between ALE and lifelong learning? Is informal learning ALE?  
→ Variation in definitions and measurements! E.g. 4 weeks / 12 months / 3 years
- Example from OECD – PIAAC: non-formal education and training = 4 categories
  1. courses conducted through open or distance education
  2. organized sessions for on-the-job training or training by supervisors or co workers
  3. seminars or workshops
  4. courses or private lessons

Versus Learning & Work Institute categorisation:

1. Work based training e.g. ‘on the job’, ‘on a training course at work’;
2. School, further education and higher education e.g. ‘through a university’, ‘through a further education college’;
3. Other locally based training e.g. ‘through a local adult education centre’, ‘through a leisure or health club’;
4. Online e.g. ‘through an app’, ‘through YouTube’;
5. Independently e.g. ‘independently on my own’, ‘independently with others’.

# ISSUE 1 – Fuzzy Concepts



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→ Review of survey questionnaires: participation, barriers, motivation, background, ...  
APiL (L&WI), Labour Force Survey, PIAAC, European Social Survey, European Company  
Survey, British Cohort Surveys, ...

Highlighting issues re:

- lack of detailed longitudinal data, more in-depth exploration needed, especially important for tracking of benefits
- categorisation of barriers and motivations and its links to theoretical classifications
- inconsistencies in measurement of barriers and motivation across but also within survey programmes





## APIL – General Outlook

Years	Number of questions
1996	25
1999	24
2002	54
2003	24
2004	11
2005	31
2006	11
2007	10
2008	54
2009	20
2010	12
2011	20
2012	25
2013	49
2014	38
2015	62
2017	26
2018	29
2019	24
2020	25
2021	19
2022	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>615</b>

- Ranging between 11 to 62 each year, APIL have included 615 questions (excl. demographic variables) in 22 different surveys between 1996-2022.
- 219 different variables (excl. demographic variables)
- **4 questions** were consistently asked –almost- every year.
- The number of questions that were asked 5 times or more is **24**.
- Out of 219, 125 questions/variables were only asked for once.

# ISSUE 2 – Potential lack of reliability of survey results

- Previous research with German data (Widany et al., 2019)



## The Quality of Data on Participation in Adult Education and Training. An Analysis of Varying Participation Rates and Patterns Under Consideration of Survey Design and Measurement Effects

Sarah Widany<sup>1\*</sup>, Johannes Christ<sup>1</sup>, Britta Gauly<sup>2</sup>, Natascha Massing<sup>2</sup> and Madlain Hoffmann<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department System and Politics, German Institute for Adult Education - Leibniz Centre for Lifelong Learning, Bonn, Germany, <sup>2</sup> Department of Survey Design and Methodology, GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, Mannheim, Germany, <sup>3</sup> Division of Further Education and Educational Management, Department of Education and Psychology, Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, Germany

- Comparison of 4 surveys
- Focus on Representation and Measurement
- Page 15: *‘Our analysis illustrates differences in how AET is represented and measured and how this contributes to cross-survey inconsistencies.’*
- Page 15: *‘A desirable goal for the long-term development of AET statistics would be a theoretically sound and empirically tested item set for AET-related information accepted by researchers as well as practitioners that can be used as standard in all surveys (including international surveys).’*

# ISSUE 2 – Potential lack of reliability of survey results

- Previous research with German data (Widany et al., 2019, p.3)

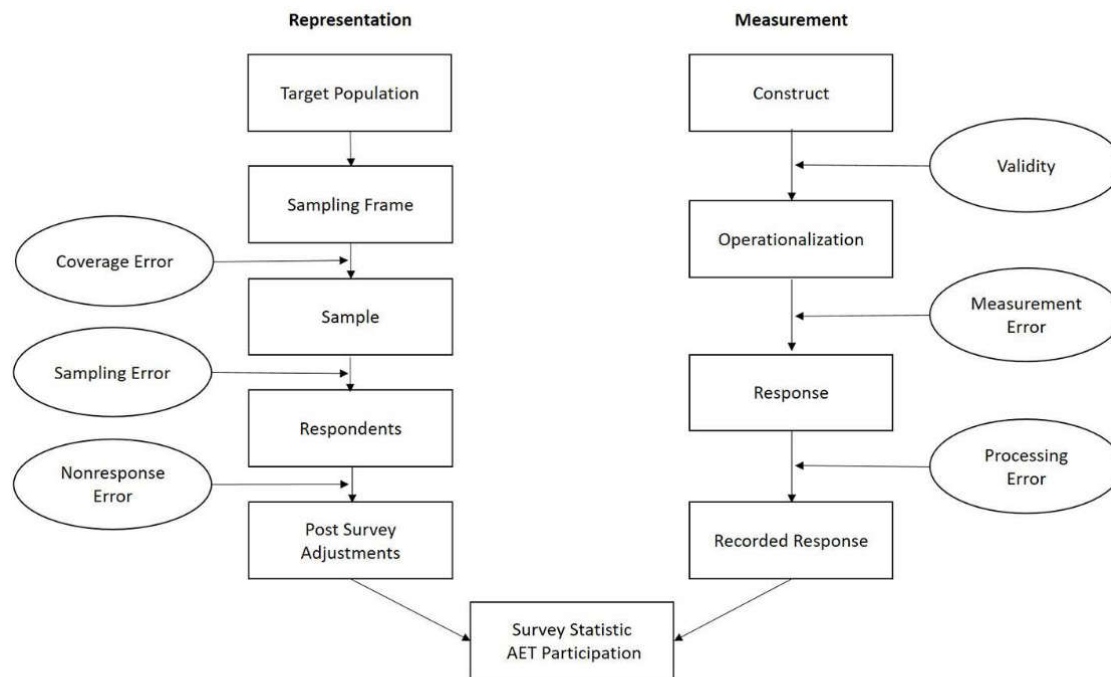


FIGURE 1 | AET surveys from a quality perspective, following Groves et al. (2009) (Figure 2.2, p. 42 and Figure 2.5, p. 48).

→ Replicate with UK data  
→ investigate the (potential lack of) consistency of the current statistical evidence base on ALE

From our proposal:  
*'Providing a robust assessment on the reliability of findings across surveys will urge to prevent the cherry picking of results by policy makers and practitioners whose desires for change might be more driven by ideology than evidence (see Stoker & Evans, 2016).'*

# ISSUE 2 – Potential lack of reliability of survey results



- Goglio & Meroni (2014) European Commission JRC technical briefing on *‘The impact of using a 12-months or 4-weeks reference period’*

Table 2: Kendal tau rank correlation coefficients by age group

25-34					
Formal and non-formal learning					
	LFS	AES	PIAAC	LFS	AES
LFS	1			LFS	1
AES	0.456*	1		AES	0.499* 1
PIAAC	0.721*	0.471*	1		
Formal learning					
	LFS	AES	PIAAC	LFS	AES
LFS	1			LFS	1
AES	0.676*	1		AES	0.573* 1
PIAAC	0.574*	0.485*	1		
Non-formal learning					
	LFS	AES	PIAAC	LFS	AES
LFS	1			LFS	1
AES	0.324	1		AES	0.452* 1
PIAAC	0.574*	0.309	1		

European Commission has now revised its Benchmarks and Indicators to reflect on participation rates using a 12-months reference period.

- Inclusion of new measure in Quarterly Labour Force Survey
- Used to be 15 percent by 2020 (4 weeks)

Now:

- At least 47 % of adults aged 25-64 should have participated in learning during the last 12 months, by 2025.
- At least 60 % of adults aged 25-64 should have participated in learning during the last 12 months, by 2030.

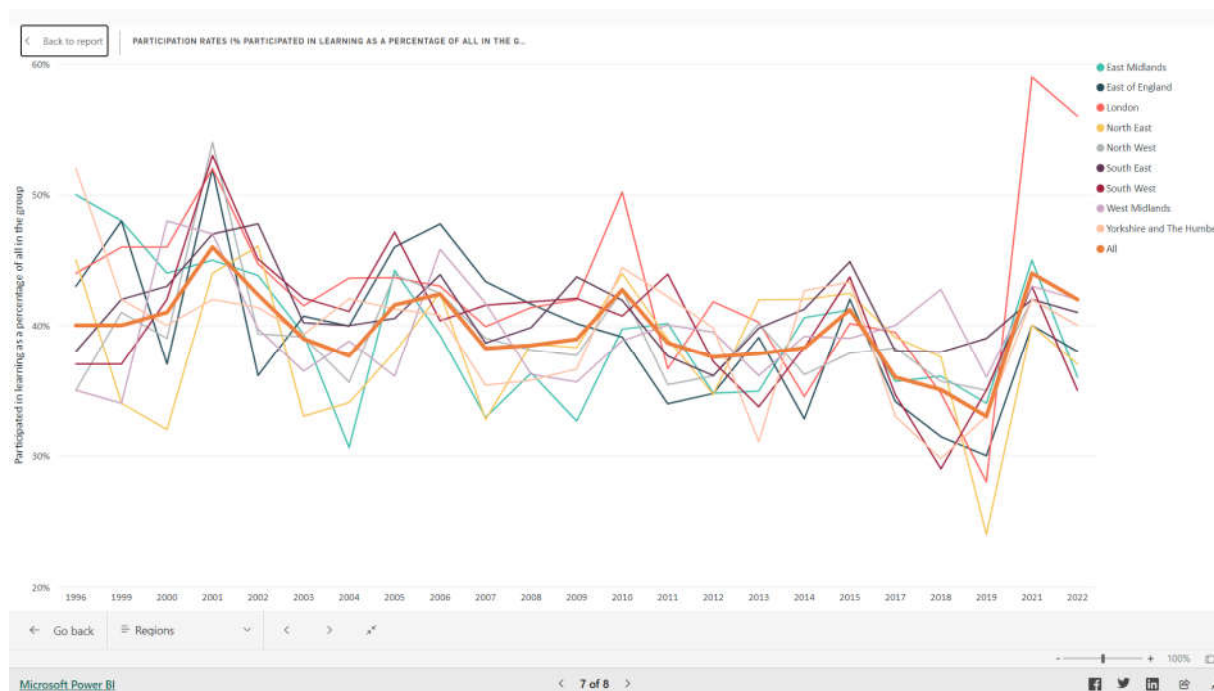
# ISSUE 3 – Lack of insights into trends over time



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- Specialist surveys like APIL, PIAAC and Adult Education survey are cross-sectional
- L&WI tracks trends over time but not in a very in-depth way

- L&WI's interest to dig deeper
- lack of time and funding

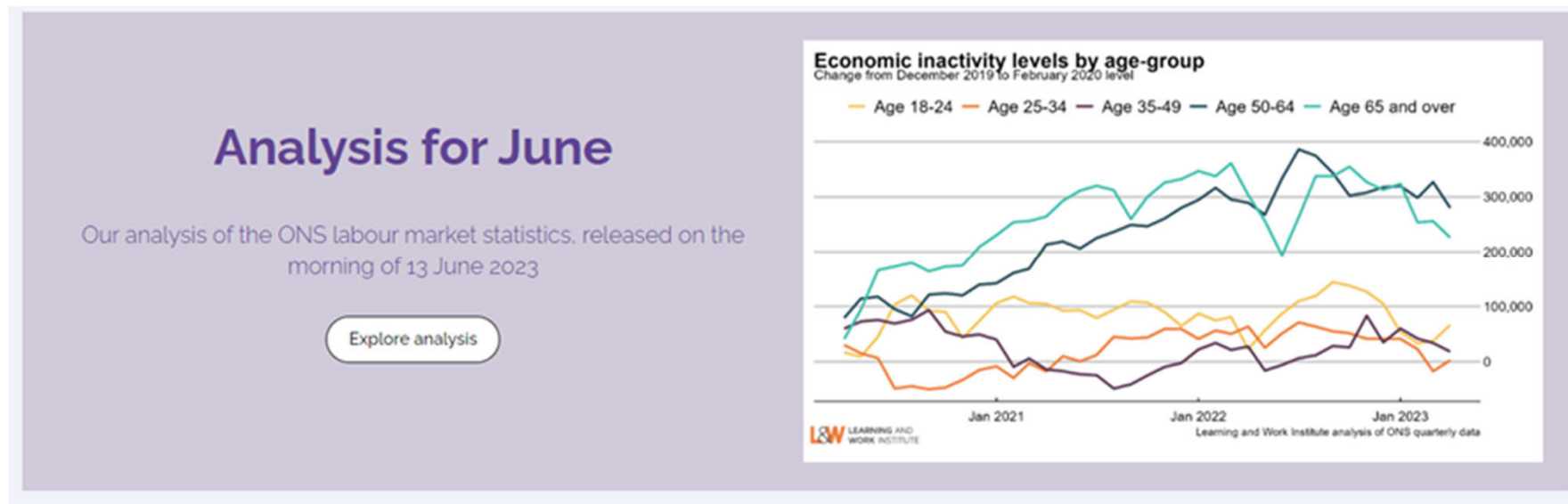


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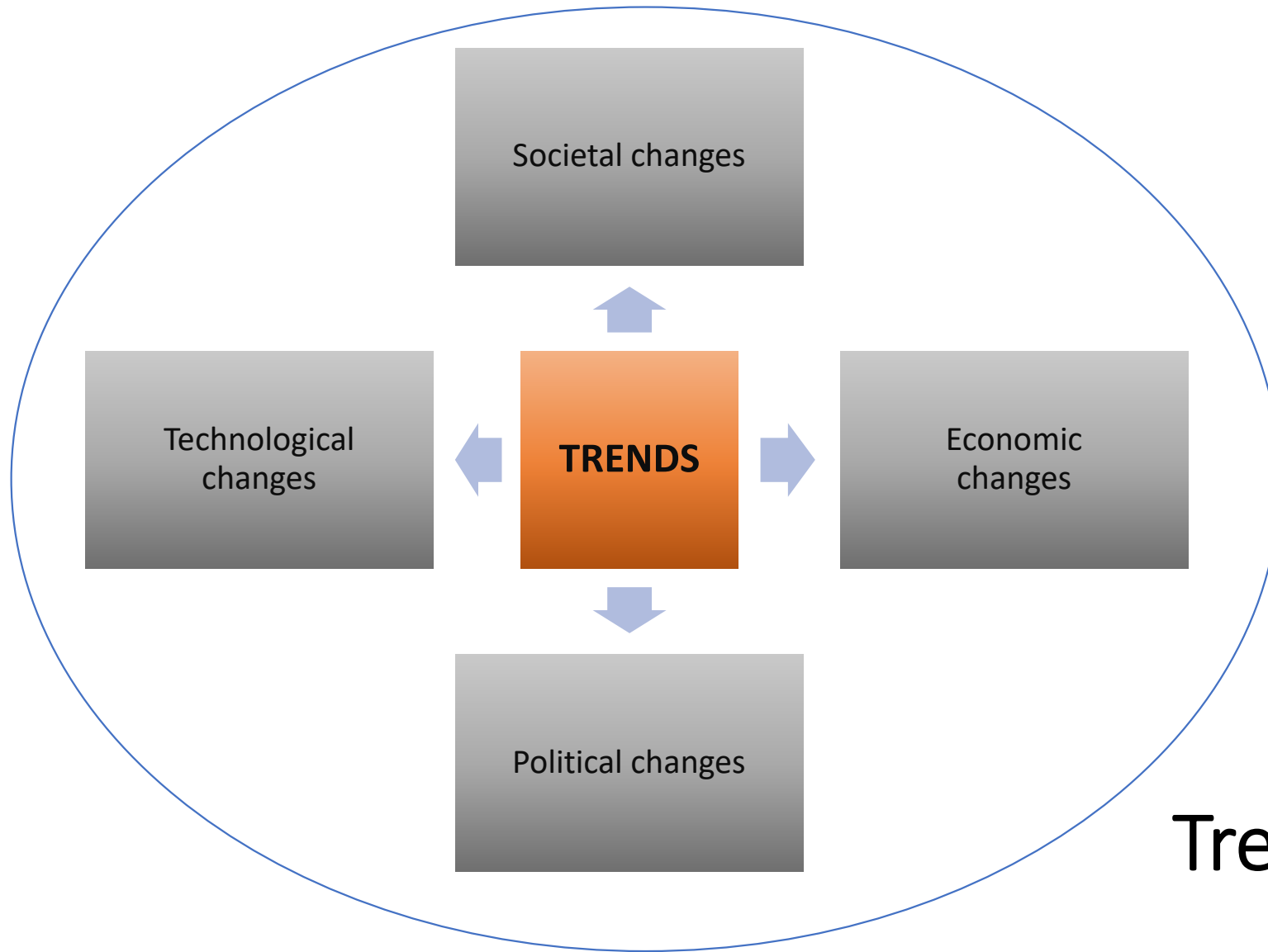


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- L&WI employs a team of economists to track labour market statistics



- Advancing analyses on understanding micro-level variations through engagement with macro-level statistics → 25 years of L&WI APIL data
- Critical conjunctures, policy changes, changes in finance regimes, economic climate...



# Trends in APIL

## Technological Advancements & Reflections on APiL



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- Leisure time activities, access to technology & the way learning took place
  - *'What is/was the main place where you do/did this learning?'*
    - *from TV/Radio (1999)*
    - *At home using computer, CD rom, internet (2002)*
    - *Online (2009)*
- A separate question starting from 2018
  - *'Have you taken part in any course(s) involving online learning, either in whole or part? Please select all of the following that you have experienced (2019; 2018) / And did your MAIN learning take place face-to-face or online? (2021, 2022)'*
- Reflection in choices for the question related to 'barriers'
  - *i.e. Lack of digital skills/confidence for online learning, Lack of digital equipment/broadband for online learning (2021)*



## Political Changes & Reflections on APiL

- The Government of Wales Act 1998
  - Reflections in the choices of questions related to **'learning subject'**, **'language preference'** and **'barriers and challenges'** (i.e. *lack of opportunity to learn in Welsh*)
  - Heavy focus on Welsh in 2002's APiL
- European Social Fund – 2 questions from 1996 to 2011
  - Agenda 2000
  - The European Employment Strategy 1997
- Skills for Life Strategy – Assessing confidence in literacy and numeracy skills of adults between 2011-2013.
- The Welsh Government's policy to tackle child poverty which entailed 'working with the whole family and emphasised preventative and early intervention, encouraging an overarching 'team around the family' approach' (NIACE, 2013)
  - Focus on family learning in 2013's APiL



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## Societal Changes & Reflections in APiL

- Extinction Rebellion & climate crisis
  - Leading APiL to focus on green skills in 2022.
- The effects of COVID19
  - Questioning the effects of lockdown on learning and employment
- The great resignation movement
  - Questioning the intention to quit or change career in near future in 2021 & 2022's APiL
  - Assessing the need for support to change career



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## Economic Changes & Reflections on APiL



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- Global crisis in 2008
- Austerity measures starting in 2010
  - Heavy focus on the funding of adult learning & education in 2009, 2010, 2012 & 2015.
    - How respondents would prioritise spending for different age groups (2012)
    - Willingness to pay for learning (2012, 2015)
    - Employer contribution to fees (2012)
- Outcomes and benefits of learning were widely questioned after 2013.
- A subtle transition to a more **employment, career and funding oriented APiL** – starting in mid 2000s.

# ISSUE 4 – Need to unpack devolved ALE discourses



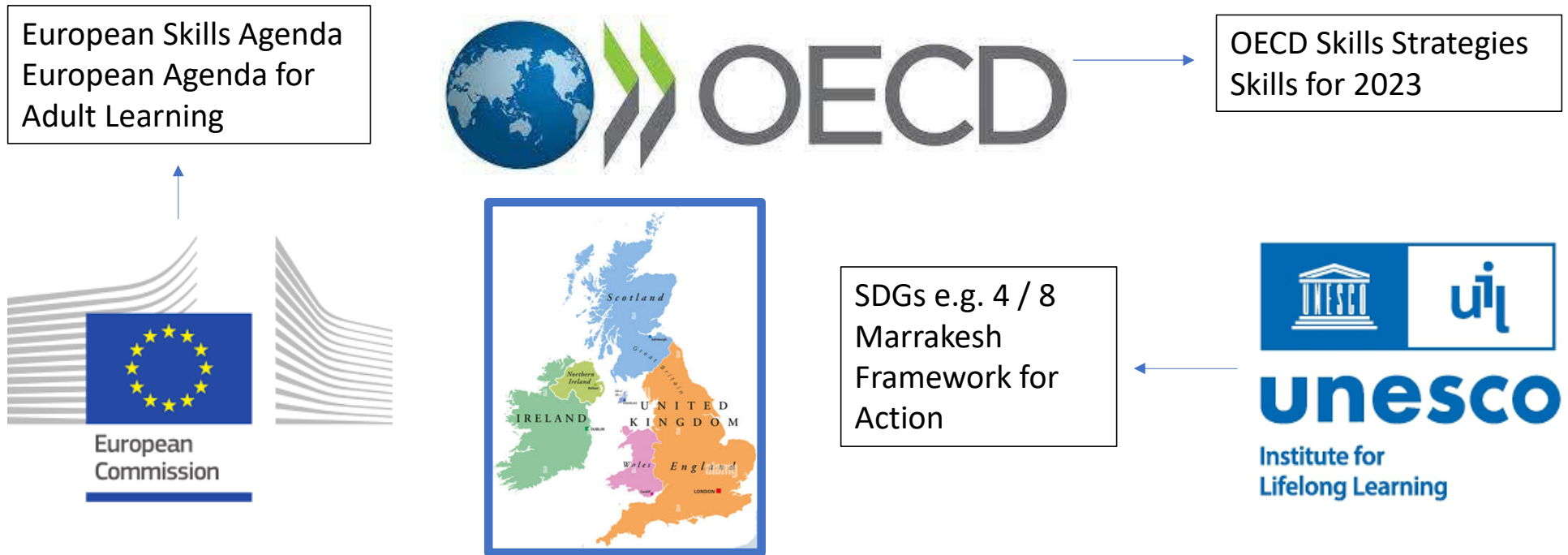
- to investigate convergence and divergence of ALE discourses between the devolved administrations of the UK and Ireland with a specific focus on the role of evidence-based policy making through documentary analyses and in-depth interviews.
- **Home international comparisons** - Raffe and Byrne (2005, p. 1): *'Educational institutions and contextual factors vary less across the home countries than in other cross-national comparisons. This makes the UK a natural laboratory for analysing the effects of policy change on educational outcomes.'*



- **Support from NALAB: Network for Adult Learning Across Borders: England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland**
- **Political Economy of Adult Learning Systems**

# ISSUE 4 – Need to unpack devolved ALE discourses

- Additional interest in convergence or divergence of ALE policy discourses in the different countries with those from leading International Organisations



# ISSUE 5 – Devolved data deserts



- APIL survey data 2022



		COUNTRY			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Scotland	412	8.0	8.0	8.0
	England	4341	84.2	84.2	92.2
	Wales	275	5.3	5.3	97.5
	Northern Ireland	127	2.5	2.5	100.0
	Total	5155	100.0	100.0	

- PIAAC Cycle 1: England and Northern Ireland

- PIAAC Cycle 2: England

- Eurostat Adult Education Survey and Continuing Vocational Training Survey no longer undertaken in the UK after Brexit

→ What evidence do policy-makers in the five countries draw upon?

→ What are their data needs?

→ Project budget to do some work on construction of new survey questions, cooperative work with Learning & Work Institute.



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Comments, questions, suggestions?