GRAND CHALLENGE OF JUSTICE & EQUALITY SEEKS RESEARCHER FOR SHORT TERM PROJECT

TOPIC: Access & participation – access to non-university education for over 25s

Background
The Grand Challenge of Justice and Equality’s flagship theme is “Access and Participation”. This includes access to education, health, housing and more. Under this theme, GCJE would like to look at access to non-university education for the over 25s.

While there are many routes to university for mature students (access courses, part-time courses, distance learning etc) and student finance is available, albeit mostly loan-based. However, it appears far more difficult for adults aged over 25 to improve their career prospects by undertaking vocational or technical education/qualifications unless they are self-funding, as government policies and funding favour the under 25s.

Already established workers wishing to undertake professional or vocational qualifications are eligible for advanced learner loans (similar to student loans) or career development loans (commercial loans) to cover course fees. However there is no support for living costs, although a government consultation took place in 2016 on extending maintenance loans to higher vocational and technical education.

The welfare system offers little or no support even for unemployed people as studying full time or part-time means a person would be classed as “not available for work” and thus ineligible for jobseeker’s allowance. This appears to leave many people, especially those on modest incomes, with little opportunity to gain new skills and qualifications unless supported by their employer or their own/family funds.

Scoping report
A first start on this topic would be the development of scoping report focusing on England (budget up to £2.5k) which should examine:

- Existing support measures for the over 25s to undertake non-university education and training including apprenticeships.
- Availability of part-time/distance learning courses enabling people to study/train while continuing to work.

In addition, if possible:
- Exploring the creation of a (contributions based) “training sabbatical” for up to one year for workers on low or modest incomes.

If interested, please contact Rebecca Taylor in the Grand Challenges team (contact details below).