



# Comparing policy, participation and inequalities in education and training across the UK

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# Comparing UK Nations

- UK is an E&T policy laboratory
- Shared backgrounds, but divergent policy approaches
- Different underpinning political philosophies
- Post-16 E&T at an inflection point across all countries:
  - Sector facing pressure to contribute to productivity, economic growth and individual aspirations
  - Productivity stagnation
  - Pressure of changing skills demands (especially in relation to AI and Automation, Net Zero)
  - Challenge of geopolitics
- Discursive shift towards joined up Tertiary Education policy in post-16 E&T
- Much to be learned from comparison!





# Industry Case Studies

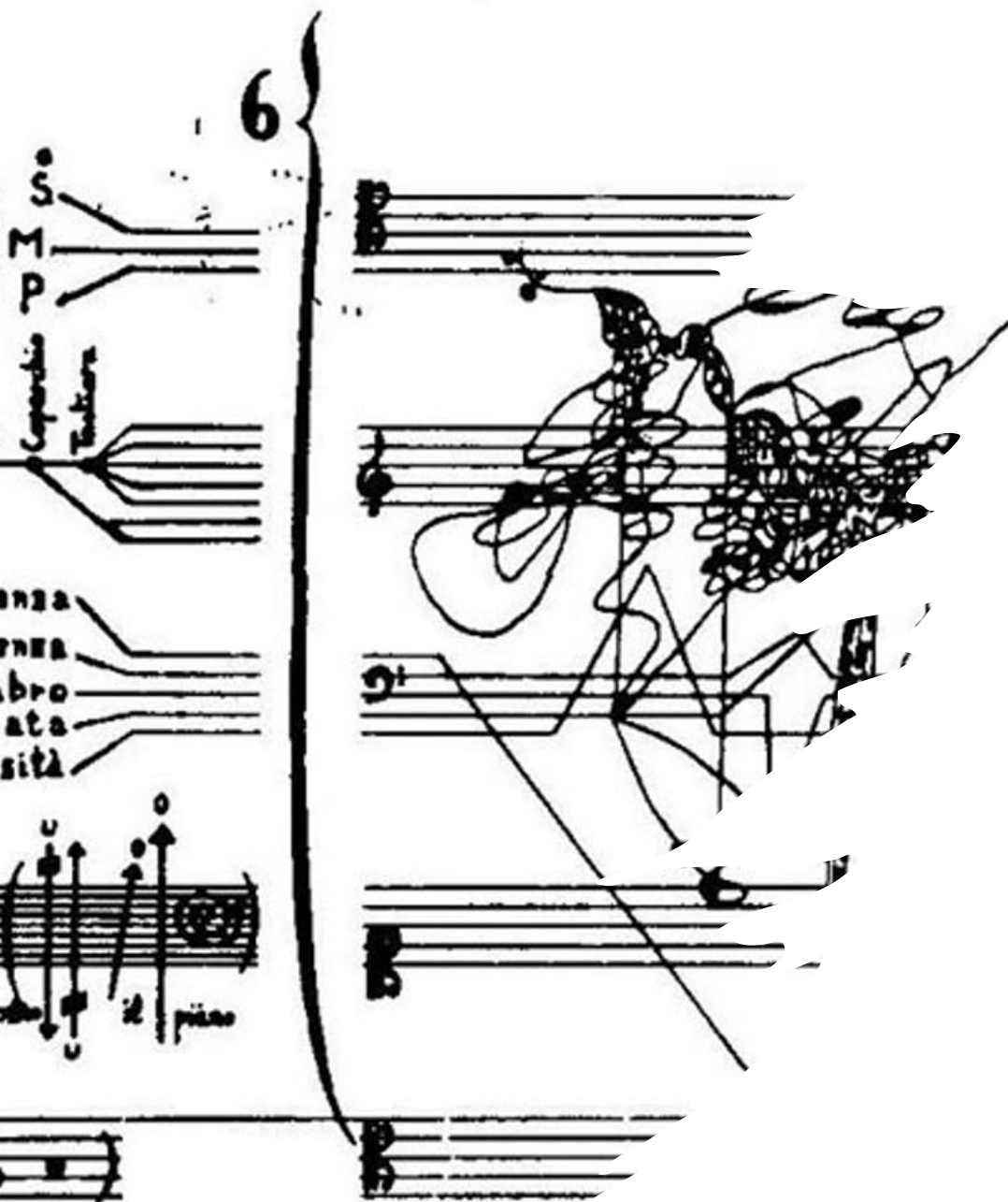
- Six Industries: gaming, cybersecurity, fashion, food, the automotive, and construction
- Document analysis
- 60 Semi-structured interviews:
  - Employer representatives (at least two companies per industry)
  - E&T providers (FE)
  - Young people
- Focused on perspectives and experiences of industry, skills needs, E&T pathways, policy
- Cutting across the four UK nations

# Key Cross-cutting Themes

- **Governance issues: market vs system; competition vs coordination**
  - Fragmented, complex and confusing system
  - Skills gaps and shortages and a lack of agility
  - confusion described above over whether E&T should be prioritising serving students as consumers or employers as skills customers.
  - *I want to be helping people develop careers. That's what the majority of the young people I work with want to. They want good jobs now, but they want skills that will last and help them longer term. I'm not sure that's always what employers want. You know, there's this big push for something or other... loads of publicity, maybe the minister gets involved, but then by the time you've trained someone, employers don't care about those skills anymore. They've moved on.* (E&T, cross-case participant)
- **Place-based approaches matter**
- **A better role for employers**
  - *'I get what they're trying to do with LSIPs but there's not really enough real discussions between us and the local college or the university. Not much we say has actual impact on the ground.'* (Employer, automotive)







# Key Cross-cutting Themes 2

- **Demand-side interventions**

- *'There's a lot of emphasis on green jobs and green skills, but it's hard to know what's really meant by that and it's hard to really see how some of what's being talked about can translate into attractive careers'* (employer, construction)
- *'I know I've been talking a lot about EVs, mechatronics, battery management, everything like that, but I also know that plenty of companies are slow to change what they do...'* (employer, automotive)

- **Pay and conditions for E&T staff**

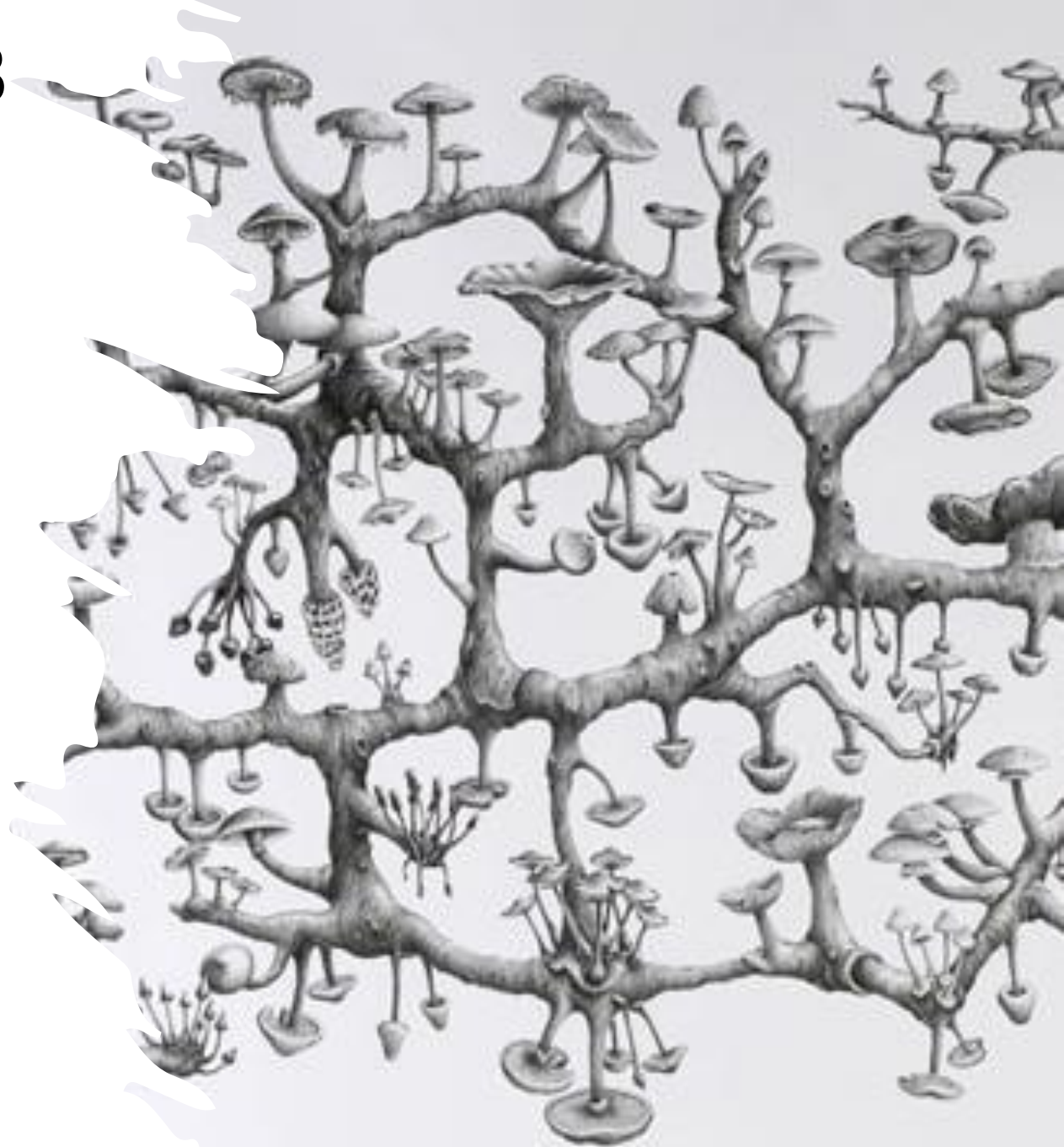
- *'Every single College in the northeast and there's lots of them, are really struggling to find the people who can teach those topics [battery systems].'* (E&T, automotive)

- **Post-16 teaching, learning and curricula**

- *'Whatever part of the industry you're in, you really should know something about the basics of where the food comes from, how it's produced...'* (employer, food)
- *'I'm really supportive of apprentices... But they disappear to college for like a day a week and I struggle to really see much connection with what they do there and what they do with us.'* (Employer, gaming)

# Key Cross-cutting Themes 3

- **Access and navigability of the system**
  - *‘I was looking for apprenticeships all last week online. The site [find an apprenticeship] was like only showing 30 results with no filters on, then it would show 44000, then none. It’s terrible. Someone told me I should just go through an agency’ (Young person 5)*
- **Inequalities and inter-generational conflict**
  - *‘apprenticeships... they’re really hard to get and they’re being taken by people who’ve got degrees already...’ (young person 5)*
  - *‘They’re [older workers] literally stealing them [apprenticeships]. They’ve got jobs. They [apprenticeships] should be for young people like 18 year olds, you know, not people who basically know it. Like how can we compete with people like that’ (Young person, 4)*



# Recommendations

- Move from competition to coordination
- Introduction of a national tertiary framework for place-based implementation
- Develop better mechanisms for supporting meaningful employer engagement in E&T
- Undertake an urgent review of pay and conditions for FE college staff
- Explicitly build employability skills into post-16 curricula as part of the Curriculum and Assessment Review
- Develop stronger guidance of tools for young people to find decent E&T opportunities, particularly apprenticeships
- Conduct an urgent review of apprenticeship participation and introduce regulatory mechanisms to support fair access to apprenticeships

