

N.I. IMPACT FORUM MEETING 27th March 2017

Present: Trevor Neilands (Chair), Paul Kelly (Libraries NI), Lorraine Boyd (VCS NEETS Forum), Saorlaith Ni Bhroin (AONTAS) Martin Flynn (OCN NI), Sandra Bailie (NICVA), Paul Donaghy (OCN NI), Claire Mulrone (Centre for Flexible & Continuing Education, Ulster Uni), Eileen Jack (Big Lottery), Kim Walsh (Belfast City Council), Jackie Patton (MEA Council), Jan Eldred (L&WI), and Colin Neilands (FALNI)

Apologies: John D'Arcy (OU), Ann Osborne (NOW Group), Norrie Breslin (Big Lottery), Joanne Morgan (Community Development Health Network), Emma Purdon (Extern), Brendan Murray (Dept of Econ), Cathy Wilson (Bryson Future Skills), Emma Dunseith (BBC), Arlene Bell (NMNI), Peter Shields (Action Mental Health), Arthur Scott & Susan Hunter (Dept of Communities), Gerry Campbell (Colleges NI), Ann Marie Doyle (Prince's Trust), Eileen Chan-Hu (CraicNI), Claire Gordon (Business in the Community) and Ben Harris (COP)

Welcome & Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed members and thanked Sandra Bailie for hosting the event in NICVA.

Trevor then ran through the agenda for the meeting and its desired outcomes.

EAAL in the UK - Jan Eldred

Jan updated members on developments in the other UK 'nations' and the overall project.

All the IFs have now moved into a new cycle of meetings and once more each nation is taking its own approach. Jan is looking at the impact of the IFs and the variations in the model that have evolved to meet regional needs - the EU is interested in this.

In Scotland the imperative driving discussion is the national debate on achievement in schools.

England recently looked at the work stimulus paper and also heard from What Works Well Being.



Wale has also begun to look at the Work paper but has had most success in engagement around health.

Jan again mentioned the recent 3rd GRALE report - Global Report on Adult Learning & Education: [The Impact of Adult Learning and Education on Health and Well-being; Employment and the Labor Market; and Social, Civic and Community Life](http://uil.unesco.org/system/files/grale-3.pdf) <http://uil.unesco.org/system/files/grale-3.pdf> which coincidentally focuses its discussion on almost exactly the same topics as we have been discussing.

Arising from Jan's input members has suggestions on good practice on health and well-being - the work of one of the community healthy living centres in Derry (possibly Bogside and Brandywell Health Forum) and the Community Navigator scheme run by the Northern and Southern (and possible other) Health and Social Care Trusts.

The UK Ref Group will be meeting shortly to look at the State of the Nation report, the autumn conference and a new application for funding. The Chair welcomed the possible 2 year extension of the project as that would give time to actually make an impact with the report, particularly if government is restored in NI. He welcomed the opportunity for a specific NI voice within the report, but reiterated his opinion that we also need something specific for local lobbying to complement this - maybe this can be an abstraction from the full report or perhaps a manifesto-like leaflet or card.

The LWI Papers and Reviewing Our 9 Recommendations

Before plenary discussion on the recommendations arising from the thematic meetings, the Chair explained that there would be brief summaries of the LWI papers. The Health & Well-being paper is finalised and has been developed somewhat from its presentation to the IF back in June 2016. The Work paper has recently been shared with members via our EPAL collaborative space. The Communities paper is not yet finalised - a draft is currently with LWI for feedback.

Paul Donaghy summarised the Health paper:

- while our intuition and experience see the link between AL and health this needs to be made more explicit, highlighting critical role of AL in achieving desired health outcomes
- recognition of both AL for health (i.e. enabling citizens to make informed decisions around health/well-being) and the health benefits of engaging in AL (recognised for example via prescriptions for learning).
- recognition of AL in building capital

- the positive impact of adult liberal education in engaging the 'learning poor' and the critical role played by the tutor - a methodology more commonly found in community learning than in statutory provision
- practitioners in health and education worlds, despite research on the importance of collaboration, continue to operate in silos - reinforced by silos of policy and funding. There needs to be investment in CPD to develop better inter-agency working.

Trevor Neilands spoke about the Work paper:

- there is a persistent inequality in terms of access to/take up of training in work. A high % have received no training since leaving school and often what is offered is very narrow, limiting progression/mobility
- social class, status, age and amount of prior learning all contribute to the take-up of in-work training
- the CBI is concerned at the difficulty of progression from L3 to L4, particularly as it estimates that soon 50% of jobs will require L4
- employers need to examine how improved skills actually impact on productivity and invest in unpacking employees' capabilities
- employers should be more involved in the design of training courses
- more research is needed into the use/effectiveness of online and e-learning
- should Government funding for training be more targeted?
- question also of the growth in self-employment and zero-hour contracts and how the development of these individuals can be supported.

Jan Eldred is one of the authors of the paper on Communities. As this paper has not yet been approved by LWI she could only highlight some of the questions it is trying to address:

- there is a general dearth of academics interested in this area
- terminology needs to be explored - we lack a common language/understanding of key concepts e.g. learning, culture ...
- how does AL build social capital? - interplay of human capital gains to social capital through attending classes
- fewer adult educators are being trained - in England at least teachers are not receiving a rounded training to skill them for community-based delivery
- should we be more explicit about the social benefit outcomes of AL? and about the forms of AL that are most effective in achieving these outcomes?

Arising from these summaries members had the following comments -

- should we lobby for the NI ULR system (Unique Learner Record), which is still being created, to include informal learning as well as qualifications?
- much of what has been raised, particularly from the Work paper, echoes the Rowntree report on poverty

Discussion shifted to the 9 Recommendations and the Chair asked if there were suggestions for any overarching recommendations to supplement those thematically focused.

- the lack of a permanent, funded organisation in NI to continue this work and advocate for AL and adult learners
- some reallocation of funding across the lifespan
- recognition of the effectiveness of 'alternative' models of provision to challenge 'one size fits all' e.g. community based, informal, non-accredited etc.
- state the obvious - the impact of AL could be greater if it received greater recognition and support

As numbers at the meeting were quite low and time was pressing the editing of the recommendations will pass to Trevor and Colin as part of the writing of the NI section for the UK Report, but members will be consulted once a draft is ready.

Members suggested that the recommendations be written as punchier asks and include relevant statistics where possible. If producing a separate publication perhaps think in terms of infographics.

Local Council Community Plans

The Chair introduced Kim Walsh from Belfast City Council and Jackie Patton of Mid & East Antrim Borough Council to present on their respective plans. He reminded members that the IF had spoken often of the desire to engage with councils and the paper circulated by Colin showed that the community plans offer opportunities to do so across our range of interests.

Kim and Jackie's presentations are attached. In addition please remember that all 10 published plans (we still await Derry and Strabane) are accessible via our collaborative space on EPALE.

Kim gave some general background to community planning in addition to highlighting elements of the Belfast Agenda. The plans are co-owned by the council and its named public sector partners. The plans are live documents for the next 4 years and are expected to change/evolve. A critical phrase is **collaborative gain**. At some point they are likely to be asked to align with the

PfG, which could be challenging as there is not a uniform approach across the 11 councils.

The Belfast Agenda recognised that it was not starting off with a blank sheet and therefore has endeavoured to incorporate pre-existing plans. Adult education/learning falls mainly under the Working and Learning theme and there is much there that will echo concerns of the IF and through the commitment to develop Belfast as a learning city there is mention of lifelong learning. However Kim raised that the named indicators for the theme are predominantly school focused. She would welcome suggestions for additions. Likewise she would welcome input from members as to how the role of AL in the achievement of other core themes might be identified. The consultation deadline has been extended to 20 April.

Jackie explained that the MEA plan had emerged from thematic Task & Finish Working Groups. The plan had also greatly benefited by seconding a statistician from NISRA (NI Statistics & Research Agency). A clear link between deprivation and low educational achievement was identified with a high % of the population having no qualifications. There is also the challenge of having lifelong learning valued throughout the community. In line with other councils, MEA has yet to move to the costing of the plan.

The ensuing discussion all parties were keen to see today as the start of ongoing relations as there is much common ground to build on. As the plans will be evolving there are opportunities for the IF to feed in beyond this initial consultation period. It was suggested that the LWI papers could be shared and that council representatives should be invited to the proposed autumn conference.

UK Report and its Launch

As already reported there will be a specific NI section within the report and this will be written by Trevor and Colin - members will be consulted on the draft.

The UK Report will be launched in London at a conference (joint with EPALE) on **4-5 October**. Colin will keep members updated with details and it is hoped that as many as possible will attend.

It is proposed that the NI launch of the report will be later in October and will take the form of a conference to reach out to build alliances and engage decision-makers. If the Assembly is again working we will try to hold this at Stormont.

Next Meeting

The Chair said that the next meeting would shift emphasis from policy to practice to challenge ourselves as to our commitment to collaborative working.



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Examples would be sought of good practice in partnership working across the sectors. A second theme for the meeting would be pedagogic issues for the 21st century.

Martin Flynn offered to host the next meeting at OCN and the date has now been set as morning of **Thurs 15 June.**

