

IMPACT FORUM MEETING 30 Sept 2016

Present: Trevor Neilands (Chair), John D'Arcy (OU), Brendan Murray (Dept of Econ), Emma Purdon (Extern), Anne McVicker (WRDA), Sandra Bailie (NICVA), Peter Shields (Action Mental Health), Paul Donaghy (OCN NI), Emma Dunseith (BBC), Eileen Chan-Hu (CraicNI), Claire Mulrone (Centre for Flexible & Continuing Education, Ulster Uni), Arthur Scott (Dept of Communities), Gareth Hetherington (Ulster Uni), Mary Boyle (Belfast Health Trust), Dwyer Gorman (Allstate), Katie O'Rourke (AONTAS), Jan Eldred (L&WI), and Colin Neilands (FALNI)

Apologies: Ann Osborne (NOW Group), Norrie Breslin (Big Lottery), Paul Kelly (Libraries NI), Lorraine Boyd (VCS NEETS Forum), Joanne Morgan (Community Development Health Network), Saorlaith Ni Bhroin (AONTAS) Niall Casey (Invest NI), Arlene Bell (NMNI), Cathy Wilson (Bryson Future Skills), Gerry Campbell (Colleges NI), Claire Gordon (Business in the Community)

Welcome & Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed new members in particular and thanked John D'Arcy/Open University for hosting the event.

He then recapped on the wider project of which the NI Impact Forum is a part. He explained the role of the thematic sub-groups and thanked the Work Sub-Group and its Chair, John D'Arcy, for guiding the design of today's event. A third Sub-group on the theme of Communities has also met (chaired by Sandra Bailie) to advance planning for the third thematic meeting.

He reminded members that since the last meeting a small working group prepared a submission on the draft Programme for Government. This has been widely shared with politicians and senior civil servants and there have been some encouraging responses: the Committee for the Economy has agreed to sponsor an event in the Long Gallery in the New year and there is an offer to meet its Chair; the Committee on Health will invite the Forum to a forthcoming stakeholder engagement event; and Arthur Scott, Head of the Voluntary and Community Division of the Dept of Communities, has joined the Forum.

Trevor then ran through the format for the meeting. He acknowledged the contributions to the collated paper on workplace and employability training programmes which provides excellent evidence to complement the presentations to be given today. This further exemplified the strength of diversity in the membership of the Forum.



Forum for Adult Learning

NI

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EAAL in the UK - Jan Eldred

Jan updated members on developments in the other UK 'nations'. Both Scotland and Wales have had success through tying Impact Forum meetings in with large scale events/conferences. Scotland will complete the three themes by the end of the year: Wales to date has just had the discussion around health. The English IF has concentrated on preparing a response to the OECD/PIAAC report and already has had positive feedback on that from Westminster: it will address the work theme shortly.

Progress on the research strands to complement the IFs' discussions has varied. The paper on health (present in NI back in June) is complete, but some revisions are happening to reflect IF discussions. The paper on work needs to be extended to cover employability as well as workplace learning. Tom Schuller is being approached to write the paper on communities.

The UK Ref Group has responsibility to design the format for the proposed 'State of the Nation(s)' final report and related conference. Members will be updated on progress via Colin.

Adult Learning and Work Presentations

There were three presentations - Gareth Hetherington, Associate Director of Ulster University Economic Policy Centre; Dwyer Gorman, Training Manager at Allstate NI; and Mary Boyle, HR Manager at Belfast Trust. NI Chamber of Commerce had been approached to contribute, but in the end was unable to do so.

Gareth Hetherington described the predictions of the **Skills Barometer** in terms of job demands and supply over the next decade in NI. The statistics can be seen in his (attached) slides. There is a good balance between demand and supply at postgrad levels; levels 3,4,5 are where greatest demands lie; while the number of jobs for those with qualifications below L2 will continue to shrink. There are subject area gaps - increased STEM needs from the private sector; while there is an over-supply of graduates in social sciences, education and law at a time of falling demand from a shrinking public sector. Degrees in themselves don't necessarily ensure the quality applicants employers are looking for - employers want employability skills at all levels e.g. attitude, personal skills, team work; these influence recruitment. There is therefore a big challenge for education sector re. how to incorporate these within qualifications. Work placements are seen as a vital part of courses. The uneven status of FE and HE should be addressed and sector attractiveness also e.g. Agri-food in NI has shortages, as does engineering, but negative/limited perceptions amongst many students prevent them from pursuing careers in these sectors.

Dwyer Gorman – Allstate has consciously developed processes to encourage and support employees to take up learning opportunities and take responsibility for their own development - Own It!. Critical is to offer flexibility and responsiveness –so there is a mix of classroom, self study, on- the- job training, coaching and mentoring. There is also the aim for learning to be available 24/7 on computers, tablets and mobile phones. They operate a delivery schedule that allows their employees scattered from USA, India and UK to flow in and out of training delivery according to their time-zones. Industry can't wait for HE to develop the courses it needs - it has to take initiatives now too. Accreditation of some credit-bearing units has been developed with Ulster University.

Allstate NI believes in engaging with different local communities; they are linking up to show that large non-traditional organisations could be for them.

Mary Boyle - The Belfast Trust is a massive employer: 35 facilities across Belfast with 22k workforce – 40% nurses, but the majority of employees are in non-regulated posts e.g. admin, porters, cleaners and support staff. 70% of learning amongst employees is at work. There is a big emphasis now on values, both at recruitment and professional development. The Trust sees it as vital to invest in staff with benefits to both the organisation and individuals, helping employees feel a vital part of the organisation with a resulting economic impact e.g. a 25% reduction in absenteeism equates to savings of £35m.

Small Group Discussion on Adult Learning and Work

1. What contributions does Adult Learning make to improving employability and career development? Identify examples of good practice.
2. What policy/funding/practice changes would increase the effectiveness of these contributions? Agree 3-4 recommendations
3. What research/action is needed to provide a stronger evidence base for your recommendations?

The Forum split into 2 groups to discuss these questions. The Chair asked that particular emphasis be given to Q2.

Group 1

- jobs are not for life and therefore there need to be opportunities to learn throughout life
- we need to promote lifelong learning and help people understand what that means
- we must continue to invest in people at all levels, not just those who have been left behind

- we need greater flexibility in provision and more emphasis on CPD, moving to individualised progression and personalised goals, with recognition of small units of learning
- how can we measure distance travelled? RARPA (see <http://www.natspec.org.uk/information-for-professionals/supporting-progression-rarpa/> and <http://www.learningcurve.org.uk/courses/ladder4learning/resources/rarpatoolkit>)
- there should be more work placement opportunities
- to complement the outcomes-based approach of the PfG we need a national performance framework to indicate what makes a difference; there needs to be greater collaboration between policymakers and practitioners, between education and employers
- employers should come together to promote positive stories of learning at work
- FE colleges should extend their work with local employers
- learning in work is not always seen as a priority - there needs to be incentives and practitioners need to work with employers in reciprocal ways
- this is a particular challenge for SMEs, especially in terms of job release and cover - Government needs to help, especially for employees with no/low qualifications
- most learning happens on the job - and so does not get the recognition it deserves

Group 2

- community outreach by employers, as mentioned in the Allstate presentation, is important, but it needs to be more than one-off projects as young people from disadvantaged areas need to be supported all the way through to tertiary level
- apprenticeships can be a great incentive for young people
- more pupils from grammars appear to be choosing the FE route which is encouraging, but we have to bear in mind that grammars in the same period have been lowering their entry requirements
- SMEs find it particularly hard to support in work training - this raises the question of who should pay for learning - that state? the employer? the individual?
- Individual Learning Accounts where the money follows the individual, where he/she retains control of choice, are still a sound idea even if they didn't work in the past

- can more open access courses be developed
- can more open access courses be developed or those created by employers opened up to others?
- employability schemes as run in the VCS and private sector are very successful in teaching soft skills, although these (like ES provision) are remedial - ultimately we need to see reform in school provision so that greater confidence is built at an earlier age
- related to employability schemes, the restrictions under ESF to only deliver at L1 ignores the variation of circumstances of the learners - greater flexibility is needed
- age restrictions on apprenticeships should be removed and these should be opened up to include those currently in work or made redundant
- new life/work demographics need to be recognised - soon working life will routinely extend into 70s and we need to plan now to address this
- this raises the recommendation from the Inquiry into Lifelong Learning (Learning Through Life, 2009) that ages 25, 50 & 75 should be points where everyone receives guidance to assist learning and career development to adjust to individual and societal changes

The Chair closed the discussion by offering his summary of the points around which recommendations could be built:

- with the constant and rapid changes happening socially, economically and politically, the role of adult learning in and for work is more important than ever;
- access to learning in and for work must be facilitated by the removal of unnecessary and unfair barriers and by challenging stereotypical and elitist perceptions around provision and employment opportunities;
- learning provision should be flexible and based on individual needs rather than around rigid systems. It must also adapt to the new demographics where working lives will extend for 50+ years, requiring on-going access to learning and to structured independent guidance;
- the outcomes approach of the PfG offers opportunities to show how adult learning can significantly contribute to build the desired society;
- it is important to build closer relationships between practitioners in adult learning and employers, other trainers and learners.

Next Steps

1. John D'Arcy and Colin will work to edit discussions down to 3-4 recommendations: these will be shared via the Impact Forum space on EPALE. Recommendations from the 3 themes will eventually form a paper for lobbying.
2. Lobbying will commence next year with an event in the Long Gallery, Stormont on **Monday 27th Feb 2017**. A small working group will design the event which will straddle lunchtime, but for the moment **please save the date**.
3. To encourage attendance at our event and generally build political support around our PfG submission and our recommendations paper, the Chair asked that members identify MLAs most likely to be sympathetic to our cause and to pass their names to Colin asap. **ACTION - ALL**

Next Meeting

The next meeting takes place on **Thursday 24th November 10.00-13.15** in The Junction in Dungannon (12 Beechvalley Way, Dungannon BT70 1BS) to look at the theme of adult learning and communities. There is ample parking in the Tesco carpark next to the venue and the bus station is also nearby.

