



European Agenda for Adult Learning: England Impact Forum

7 March 2017 | National Union of Students | London

10.30am – 1.00pm

Attendees: Cath Harcula (Derby Adult Learning Service); Chris Butcher (WEA); Chris Minter (National Careers Service); Helen Chicot (Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council); Iram Naz (WEA); Jaki Bradley (Thurrock Adult Community College); Jane Mansour (Learning and Work Institute); Dr Janine Eldred (Learning and Work Institute); Joyce Black (Learning and Work Institute); Mark Ravenhall (Independent Chair); Natalie Honeybun (National Unions of Students); Prof. Olga Tregaskis (University of East Anglia); Peter Moore (City Literary Institute); Richard Thickpenny (Ashley Community Housing Ltd); Dr Rob Smith (Birmingham City University); Rufna Hussain (UK Erasmus+ National Agency); Simon Beer (Haringey Adult Education Service); Sue Charlish (note-taker, Learning and Work Institute); Prof. Tom Schuller (Longview / Unesco UIL); Dr Vicky Duckworth (Edge Hill University).

Apologies: Adam Roe (WEA); Andrew Cleaves (Birmingham Metropolitan College); Ashfa Slater (EPALE UK); Dr Carol Azumah Dennis (University of Hull); Corrina Hickman (ECORYS); Dave Eva (Unionlearn); Dr Helen Plant (Senior Associate, Learning and Work Institute); Janet Solla (Community Health and Learning Foundation); Jessica Keller (ECORYS); Jev Bhalla (Walsall Adult & Community College); Jodie Crossley (EPALE UK); Lynne Amery (Coventry City Council); Margaret Lochrie (Capacity Consultants Ltd); Susan Pember (HOLEX).

Minutes

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the England impact forum for the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL).

Apologies, as listed above, were received ahead of today's meeting and in addition the Chair informed colleagues that Janet Solla from the Community Health and Learning Foundation is retiring at the end of March 2017. Janet has made a massive contribution to this group since it started in 2014 and we look forward to welcoming Mandy Wardle McKleish, who will be taking Janet's place as Director, once she is in post.



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Members of the group introduced themselves. Colleagues were advised of the meeting papers included in their pack and informed that the minutes from the last meeting wouldn't be gone through in detail as the matters arising would be addressed during the meeting. Introductions were made around the table.

2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising:
a. UK final conference and State of the Nation report
b. Feedback on the 'health and wellbeing' chapter

For the benefit of colleagues who haven't previously attended one of these meetings the Chair informed everyone that this forum is part of the European agenda for the adult learning programme in the United Kingdom. There are three other forums, one each in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. The aim of all the impact forums is to look at the evidence being generated through the European programme, together with evidence colleagues are generating via their own research programmes, considering the various policies in different parts of the UK. Papers, including case studies, will be produced, debated and contextualised with the ultimate aim being to produce a State of the Nations report by the end of this year. There will also be a conference at Europe House in Central London to which colleagues from approximately twenty other countries will be invited to attend to share their views.

Following on from the conversation at the last meeting with respect to the paper on the health theme and the final format of the research report Joyce advised colleagues that this is continuing to be discussed with members of the UK Reference Group as the report needs to serve as a 'tool', not just for English policy, but also for our colleagues in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

The conference will take place on 4th and 5th October 2017 at Europe House in Westminster and colleagues at Learning and Work Institute are working closely with colleagues at EPAL UK with conference planning activities. A communications campaign will take place in the run up to the conference and forum members may be invited to participate in some guest blogging to help stimulate interest and activity leading up to the event.

Action: Members were invited to let Joyce know of any areas of work, taking place in England or in Europe, that could be included in the campaign activities. **ALL.**

Joyce Black also represents UK government in the working group for adult learning. Colleagues will be aware that within the European agenda there is an emphasis on basic skills and a couple of weeks ago the group were hosted by Manchester College, who set up the first peer learning group in the UK since around 2014-15. Ministry officials from nine member states attended, approximately 20 attendees in total, and they met over a three-day period. During this time, there were three presentations that focussed on policy around workplace basic skills and the lead person from the Department for Education not only attended but they presented and took questions on



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policy around basic skills, English and maths, and what that meant for the workplace. The presentations received were from ourselves and ministerial colleagues from Norway and the Netherlands. An interim report will be published by the commission and we will ensure that anything relevant to the State of the Nations report in terms of workplace and the impact of adult learning in work will be included. Colleagues were assured that, irrespective of what happens in UK politics, the commission do value our work and research.

We have received an invitation to submit our proposal to continue our activities as National Coordinator for EAAL from November 2017 – December 2019 and reporting activities will be in 2020. There is an agreement in principle from the Department for Education that they will support our application to act as their designated lead.

A review is taking place on how the process of bringing different organisations together via the impact forums is having an impact on policy and practice.

An update on the State of the Nation report was received as follows:

- The health paper is being peer reviewed.
- The paper on communities is with colleagues at the Learning and Work Institute and is being peer reviewed after which it will be presented at a future forum meeting.
- The stimulus paper on work will be presented during this meeting.

A discussion about the report took place during which a comment was made that it shouldn't detract from the GRALE report and anything else already published and that the intention is to add to the body of research evidence and not to conflict with anything. The report needs to be as rounded as possible so that it isn't siloed, it needs to be pertinent to the UK and it's important to consider the 'shelf-life' of the report. It was also suggested that, in writing the report, we look at other sectors and how they report on their impact, for example, a transport scheme and the impact it may have on health, wellbeing, employment, learning etc. The suggestion of writing the report from the 'outside' was made and to look at how other sectors make the case on impact.

Chris Butcher updated the meeting on the work of The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on adult education. The APPG commissioned the University of Warwick to conduct the study [Adult Education Too important to be left to chance](#). One of the recommendations from the study is for a national and regional strategy for adult education. The WEA are planning some work looking at health and wellbeing and to make this piece of work distinctive they hope to obtain viewpoints from outside the sector. It was suggested that this piece of work may feed in to the activities of the communications campaign leading up to the conference in October.

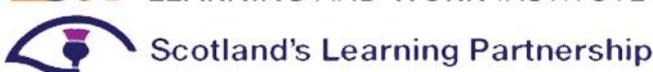
Action: To liaise about the possibility of inviting MP's on the APPG to attend the conference. **Joyce/Mark/Jan/Chris Butcher.**



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It will be an international conference and the planning team would like leaders in the sector to attend together with colleagues from the impact forums, national coordinators and learners.

Action: Submit any ideas about the conference which is hoped will be as impactful as possible. **ALL.**

The Transformative Further Education work will result in a conference taking place on 21st June 2017 which will be organised using a slightly different approach and format. They have a keynote speaker at the start of the event after which participants sign up to any one of five thematic strands which enables people with common interests to come together and have a chaired discussion and exchange ideas. The morning and afternoon sessions focus on a different theme and towards the end of the conference everyone reconvenes and someone reports back from each of the discussion groups. This approach enables participants to be more involved and it enables the event to be interactive. At previous conferences, they have also included a video booth.

Colleagues were informed that the State of the Nation report won't be published until after the conference taking place in October 2017. The conference will be used to workshop and agree the final version.

3 & 4 The impact of workplace learning and wellbeing

Presentation by Prof Olga Tregaskis, Professor of International Human Resource Management, Norwich Business School (NBS), University of East Anglia, followed by discussion.

Colleagues received the above presentation from Prof Olga Tregaskis together with a briefing paper on the evidence relating to retirement and wellbeing.

UK Government, through the ESRC and various other government departments, have provided funding to set up the What Works for Wellbeing Research Centre. The centre has several hubs that focus on a variety of streams of relationships between wellbeing and health and wellbeing and community. One of the hubs is looking at the relationship on wellbeing, work and adult learning. The programme of research, which will last for a period of three years and is currently half way through, is to review the current evidence base and to evaluate its strength to help make policy decisions in how you invest funding to yield a wellbeing outcome alongside a learning or training outcome and issues around work and employment.

The three main themes of which evidence is still being reviewed are:

- Employment & employment opportunities
- Work-based & community learning
- Good work and productivity.

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At the start of this process a wide range of stakeholders were asked how they understood wellbeing and what it meant to them. The things they identified as yielding wellbeing are listed in the slide below.

Stakeholder views on work, wellbeing & productivity



Views from over 400 people across UK
 – consultations, interviews, events
 – experts, learners and workers

Stakeholder concern
Life satisfaction/ happiness
Mental health
Competence & self-determination
Productive economic activity
Belonging to a (workplace) community*

* Happy-productive-socially embedded worker thesis

Prof Olga Tregaskis presented the centre’s study of the evidence that has taken place so far across unemployment and reemployment; job quality; work-based learning; learning delivery and context and adult and community learning.

In explanation of the symbols used on some of the slides, the number of “happy faces” allocated to positive statements or sad faces allocated to negative statements indicate the amount and robustness of evidence available, i.e. the greater the number of faces equates to a lot of available evidence and vice versa.

In summary, the below slide indicates some of the conclusions reached within the study.

Some conclusions



Unemployment is bad for wellbeing and can have spillover effects

High quality employment is good for wellbeing
 Important for younger workers to have access to ‘career’ jobs

Work-based & community based learning can have benefits

Work-based learning is part of a suite of supporting HR practices for happy, productive, quality work

17/03/2017 Welcome to LEA

11



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A copy of Olga' presentation has been circulated with these minutes. Technical reports are produced which multiple stakeholders review to check that the evidence is robust. The evidence and outcomes are then distilled into published briefing papers. The technical papers will not be published but if colleagues would like to receive a copy to support any arguments they are making in their area of work they are invited to contact Olga who would be happy to provide a copy.

After the presentation, colleagues were invited to ask any questions which prompted further detailed discussion amongst the group during which the following points were raised.

The comment was made that employers are interested in soft skills and that employers involved with apprenticeships value individuals who, having demonstrated the soft skills, can then be trained up. It was suggested therefore that a reference to the relevance of the impact of community learning and wellbeing might be a missed opportunity. In response, colleagues were informed that the 'follow-on' with these individuals is missing from the evidence reviews. Whilst training measures the outcome of the individual once they have obtained the soft skills and the attainment of the soft skill might be measured qualitatively or anecdotally unfortunately, possibly due to funding issues, there isn't a 'follow-on' with the individual.

As we are moving towards a changing economy there is a need for people to be skilled up for the gig economy and it was suggested that we need to think how, in terms of education, we prepare people for that area of work.

In terms of health and wellbeing there had been a reference to this being addressed by the employee. The point was made that the employer should look at their position as some problems may be due to the culture within the workplace.

Colleagues were informed of the [Family Learning Impact Fund](#) (FLIF) which was a significant piece of work that included the tracking of individuals at 3 months, 6 months and one year.

It was pointed out that there has been an analysis of vacancy data which has identified what soft skills employers are asking for in their job adverts. When looking at employers' recruitment mechanisms and methodologies it is evident that they are increasingly focussed on soft skills and that there is a trend that is moving away from the more 'mechanical fit'.

Two current pieces of work include the [Taylor review on modern employment practices](#) which is looking at how the workplace is changing and secondly the Stoddart review which looks at the workplace environment. The Stoddart review *The Workplace Advantage* can be downloaded from [here](#).

The question as to whether underemployment could be referenced in the paper was asked as this is a significant issue. Also, related but slightly different, is the underutilisation of the outcomes of the training and how far the skills acquired by individuals are put into use and rewarded. In answer to these points, around underemployment the research hasn't focussed on this specifically but there is an awareness of it and indeed some gender differences have become apparent when looking at wellbeing and the different jobs people are in. With respect to the second point the presenter stated that this has been the benefit of looking at wellbeing which has previously been missed from managers' analysis of what the outcome of training is and the fact that wellbeing isn't being increased.

Age UK have recently produced the Active Ageing Index. This found that two of the main factors that affect older people, 50+, is cognitive engagement and creative and community participation. This study tracked over 14,000 people over a period of time thereby offering solid evidence. In discussion about the inclusion of life course analysis it was confirmed that not all cohort studies data include measures of wellbeing. However, the Understanding Society – The UK Household Longitudinal Survey has been used. From this, looking at the four cohorts and age differences and what they are gaining from wellbeing and the wellbeing outcomes in employment it is less for older people. It is at its best when people are in the middle of their career.

A question was raised about individuals who are at pivotal stages in life and the impact on their wellbeing. For example, a person who has participated in community learning who then moves into a job and drops out because of the need for a work-life balance. The hub doesn't have evidence that has looked specifically at those who have made the transition from community based learning into work and what those experiences are but having reviewed other evidence the argument is that if there is an investment in an individual and their upskilling then their job needs to have a quality basis to it.

In answer to a question about the availability of evidence on the relative wellbeing impact of learning for unemployed people for different purposes, e.g. young people and the enforced English and maths provision compared to self-directed learning and the thoughts of how a co-commission programme might look like colleagues were informed that the Department for Work and Pensions have commissioned some randomised control trials but the centre would make this argument further to evidence that shows worker engagement in training, for people that commit to it, they do get wellbeing outcomes if the training is designed in a way that it is meaningful.

In September, there was a report which identified that if a person knows about sourcing a quality job that enables them to better plan and achieve a quality position. When this happens, as opposed to getting a job at any cost, the person is better able to find the job they want and as a result they stay in employment longer. Currently, within a housing association, there is a feeling that some clients they work with are



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deliberately misrepresenting their ESOL level because they want a quality job and they don't want to accept certain positions. From a wellbeing perspective, it was agreed that there is a job to do in educating the learner in terms of empowering them to demand certain aspects from their job and employers and there is also an educational component for employers and for self-employed people they need the skills to ensure their employment delivers what they want.

In general, the UK tends to have more jobs of a higher quality than of a lesser quality but most high quality jobs are in London and the south east. Another issue raised in a conversation with analysts around productivity is that self-employed and small businesses are the least productive. However, whilst they might be the least productive in terms of productivity it raises a question about how we measure this. You could argue that a small business could be the most productive in providing everything a family needs within a family run business. This raised a question about the strength of the evidence on the association between positive wellbeing and productivity and if there is a universal matrix of measuring productivity. In answer colleagues heard that some organisations will use things such as employer satisfaction surveys as a proxy for productivity or for success in an organisation and this has grown and widened over the last 20 years. More recently there is an adaption of the social matrix and the inclusion of the green agenda and environmental impacts of the organisation and how that relates to wellbeing. An interesting development is around organisations publishing wellbeing in annual reports and using this as a proxy for productivity, using it as a social measure of a brand and as an employer.

A colleague asked if trade unions had been involved in the research and how we can work with them to be stronger advocates about empowering and who gets training and at what level. It was reported that the voice of the trade unions hasn't been evident in a lot of the studies. However, there was one case study where there was a very positive relationship between management and the union which resulted in massive organisational changes that affected positive wellbeing for the individual and profits for the organisation so this was used to evidence that it is possible in the UK to work positively with trade unions and that they can transform an organisation which they did in this case. However, a lot of employers are still very sceptical about the relationships with unions.

5 & 6 The impact of adult learning on work

Presentation by Jane Mansour, Senior Associate, Learning and Work Institute, followed by discussion.

The stimulus paper '*The impact of learning on participation in work, progression and productivity*', was circulated to members of the impact forum ahead of this meeting. Prior to the presentation, Jane highlighted the key themes and questions that have arisen and colleagues were asked to identify any areas they felt had been omitted from the paper or any areas that may need to be tweaked further. Jane will give a



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similar presentation to the impact forums in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales and it's important that the paper captures the experience, understanding and knowledge from all four groups.

Jane explained that the purpose of this strand of the work is to look at the impact of learning and work. Understanding what is happening in work has been a good starting place as there have been some very big changes in the labour market and the need to adapt to some of these changes has been highlighted. The current situation with respect to work in the UK and the key issues are highlighted below.

Work in the UK

- High employment rate
- Low pay
- Poor productivity
- Hollowing out of jobs market with less obvious progression – particularly from low pay sectors

- Work first – lessons? Participation?
- Improving quality



Regarding the high employment rate, there has been a significant increase in self-employment which raises a question about access to learning.

Key issues

- Too many low paying, low skilled jobs
- Lack of clear progression structures tied to skills acquisition
- Little pressure on employers to increase pay or invest in training
- Move to contracted out models



Within the presentation Jane spoke of participation in learning and its impact; the gaps in the data collected; the impact on progression in work and on productivity. The research has identified several questions as listed on the following slide.

Interesting questions arising

- What will be the impact of increase in online learning?
- Better data collection and measurement – and funding linked to employment/progression outcomes?
- How to support self-employed or contracted workers?
- Advice and support for people in work?
- How can learning that meets employer needs, but is not tied to employers and so can be accessed by people wishing to change jobs be funded? Personal Learning Accounts?
- What is the impact of devolution – to the four nations, and also to cities?
- What will be impact of the apprenticeship levy be – would a wider 'skills levy' be more appropriate?



Concluding the presentation colleagues were asked to consider the following questions and to forward any comments they may have on the stimulus paper to Jane. In addition, colleagues were also requested to forward any information or links to other projects that she should be made aware of.

- Have we got the right evidence and analysis on these issues?
- Is there other evidence in England that would strengthen the paper?
- Is there specific English policy or practice that is designed to meet these challenges?

The Chair thanked Jane for her presentation and the stimulus paper and clarified that the content from these papers will form part of the State of the Nation report. A discussion followed during which colleagues debated the difference between employers and government in that government recognises success by qualifications rather than by skills and outcomes, often recognised by employers and which may enable an individual to progress in or at work.

It was commented upon that the whilst the current system equates qualifications with skills we need to ensure that whilst learning will take place via recognised routes there is also a need, for some adult employees and employers, to experience training and learning in or for work that is not linked to a qualification. There is a need to provide opportunities for upskilling.



Colleagues learned of a case study with an employer in the construction industry based in Lichfield. This employer designed an apprenticeship with a local college. Most of the employees that did the apprenticeship were younger members of his workforce but when they returned to the workplace they shared the new techniques and skills with their colleagues who had been in the industry for 25-30 years. This enabled a 'ripple effect' where the formal qualification spilled over to other members of the workforce.

On the slide titled 'Productivity' (slide no. 8), the use of the term 'flexibility' was questioned as it has many connotations. In this context, it had been used in terms of careers and progression but the term could mean flexibility with respect to a daily, weekly or monthly schedule. It was highlighted that anyone who deviates from the full-time path is not seen to be career interested. Highlighting the inaccuracy of this within the paper and gathering data evidence was thought to be of great importance.

It was suggested that a reference to learning for groups which we know to be disadvantaged in the labour market should be included in the final paper. In addition, as already explored in the communities' stimulus paper, it was suggested that all three papers need to draw out the relational aspect of what types of adult learning have the most effect with what groups and in what context.

The Learning and Work Institute have worked for several years on a longitudinal study, which is ongoing, with the British Army on the acquisition of basic skills. The British Army do link the acquisition of basic skills to progression within the armed service and as a large employer they do view learning as an integral part of the job.

Action: Forward further details to Jane. **JB.**

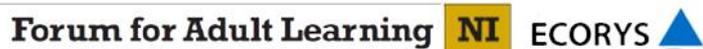
7. Next Steps

The Chair reiterated the request to receive further feedback on the theme of work from members of the forum and what colleagues think the State of the Nation report should look like.

Work on the bid to continue as National Coordinator for EAAL from November 2017 – December 2019 will start soon so colleagues were invited to submit any ideas on what might be included.

The next England Impact Forum meeting will take place on **Tuesday 16th May in Leicester** and it will focus on the theme of the impact on communities. If colleagues would like to contribute to the next session they were invited to let Mark or Sue know.

Action: Email Mark with suggestions on content of the next proposal to the EC.
ALL



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In closing the meeting the Chair thanked Natalie and the NUS for hosting the forum.

8. Any other business

Colleagues were asked if their organisation was intending to respond to the industrial strategy which includes a specific question on basic skills. If so, it was suggested that any responses could be circulated to ensure a collaborated response. The deadline for responses is 17th April 2017.

Action: Email comments on the [Building our Industrial Strategy](#) paper to Sue. **ALL.**

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