

REPORT ON NORTHERN IRELAND IMPACT FORUM MEETING
10 May 2019 – E3 Belfast Metropolitan College

In work Learning and development

Opening remarks from Chair

Thanks to BMC for hosting today.

Context of today sits within the EAAL which is managed in the UK by Learning & Work Institute (L&W) which set up regional Impact Forums back in 2014. A highlight recently of this work across the 4 jurisdictions of the UK has been the Healthy, Wealthy & Wise report (2017) –

<https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/LW-EU-Report-April-2018-Final-Print-LRd.pdf>. Since then we have been continuing discussions and lobbying on these themes and those of the 2017-19 contract.

The themes we are looking at this morning link back to the HWW report – looking at the support that is required to help those in low-waged positions progress and then at the learning also needed to support those within the broad field of learning provision.

First we are looking at the important issue of developing the NI economy and the wellbeing of all of those who contribute to economy. In review the Forum were concerned about the issue of those in low pay and their lack of learning support. The Forum thought there was lack of evidence in NI around what was needed and what was already happening. It is of course great that employment has increased but there are many issues lying within these stats – people can be in work and still be trapped in poverty – so what role can adult learning play to remedy this. Therefore the NI Impact Forum commissioned research from L&W and initial findings will now be presented by Connor Stevens and Naomi Clayton.

Presentation from Learning & Work

(The slides are quite comprehensive so notes here are minimal)

Connor set the context for the research and showed contrasts across the 4 jurisdictions of the UK, identifying that generally stats for NI are worse than in the other regions. There is a disconnect currently between the relevant stakeholders and the current lack of government at Stormont is also exacerbating the situation and slowing solutions.

Connor also presented 3 interventions foci – the individual, the employer and the skills provider.

Following Connor's presentation discussion was led by Naomi over 2 sections –



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First Questions

What are the most significant barriers to in-work progression?

- ▶ Do the barriers set out in the presentation resonate?
- ▶ Are there barriers that are specific to Northern Ireland?

What more can be done to address these barriers?

- ▶ Where are the gaps in current provision?
- ▶ Is current provision helping to enable progression?
- ▶ Can these barriers be effectively addressed through public sector intervention?

Responses from discussion groups:

Barriers are quite generic across UK although in NI specifically the high number of SMEs will impact and they will struggle more than larger employers. With local in-work programmes some job seekers have geographic problems because of sectarianism divides. We also continue to experience an inter-generational impact in traditional work sectors associated with particular communities and where there is a significant educational achievement gap. Going forward there needs to be funding for programmes above L1 or L2 and support to assist access to university.

People don't see sufficient incentive to upskill: there is low self-belief to access the learning opportunities that exist and people need rewards to incentivise them. Civic issues in NI still lead to very silo-ed approaches – what is needed are cross departmental approaches. The question is - even if people are upskilled, if this does not result in higher pay then is this problem going to go away? Salaries not growing at same rate as in RoI and other parts of UK.

Second Questions

What specific interventions might be developed and piloted?

- ▶ What groups would the programme target?
- ▶ What would support look like? How might it build on the three different models (individual, employer, skills-focused)?
- ▶ What partners need to be involved? And who would lead the programme? (Govt depts, local authorities, commissioners, providers and practitioners and wider stakeholders)

- ▶ Who would be the main beneficiaries of the programme? And how should it be funded?
- ▶ How would you measure success?
- ▶ What challenges can you foresee and how might these be overcome?

Responses

An audit of existing provision is needed and a campaign to raise awareness of opportunities that exist. Within provision there is a need for coherence. It should be remembered that employers are the largest provider of learning, more so than Government.

Partnerships need to be built to forge collaboration between government and councils and which recognise the role of the community/voluntary sector - cohesion is key for access and success.

There have been all sorts of schemes in the past, but where has the impact gone? Employers need to invest in their staff, but have the worry that trained staff become poached.

Council led academies are good – but sustaining these is difficult.

The model of union learning fund delivery is good – relationship built with the employer and then delivery set up via learning rep - so everyone has a shared goal.

In terms of support we need a single model using elements of the three foci set out by L&W slides, all working as partners i.e. all stakeholders together, beneficiaries, employers and employees.

Larger employers can set up learning for themselves, but smaller employers need support from DfE.

To conclude

Participants are asked to continue to feed in and send to Connor/Naomi asap (Connor.Stevens@learningandwork.org.uk and naomi.clayton@learningandwork.org.uk)

Healthy, Wealthy & Wise – Implications for Workforce Development

Mark Ravenhall

Workforce development was a theme under EAAL during the 2015-17 contract, but under the current contract the focus was to look at implications for those working in field of Adult Learning (AL). Of course, this is quite a challenge as the



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boundaries of AL are vague –it cuts across many areas/fields etc. and AL professionals need to work in multi-disciplinary settings and thus need a wide range of skills.

The other Impact Forums have already engaged with this activity and the published document should be ready by end May/early June. This work will be highlighted at the UK EAAL conference in Oct/Nov and will be incorporated into next programme, 2020-21

Healthy, Wealthy & Wise (HWW) was influenced by the UNESCO GRALE 3 report – with the recognition that the three areas of its title (health, economy and community) intersect as a venn diagram. If we get support for the skills programme right, it will impact on health and communities also. While lots of research has shown this already, we need to build on this and policy and practice need to change.

There were 12 proposals made in HWW – so what about workforce development? This is not just about development in AL –we need co-training with other services, to work better with, for example, career services. How do we develop person-centred curricula? How can we promote dual-professionalism – give/take across AL and other professions? How do we measure what we do and not just through qualifications?

The report being produced has 9 think pieces from across UK and across different aspects of AL provision and management. It looks at AL profession beyond just teachers/lecturers across the wide range of roles that exist.

The core themes are – partnership, collaboration, integration and coherence. It is about how to become leaders of learning and not of institutions. It is boundary spanning – how can we co-produce – how do we learn to let go and give others space?

The essays identify a number of barriers and enablers (see slide 11) for development. Most current investment in workforce in England is on the introduction of P Levels and vocational education – leadership training is all about running effective organisations. Is that the best model?

We can be guilty of exclusion ourselves – how do we keep fluid progression routes into the profession e.g. from learner to deliverer?

There are great leaders out there, but they need permission to be unlocked and lead in new ways – we need to rethink how we view and practice professionalism

The report will contain many recommendations but they centre around initial teacher education/training, continuing (or joint) professional development and leadership and management.

Paul Donaghy

Paul has a think piece in the publication.

HWW provided a lot of the answers – so we know answers, so what are barriers to achieving these? We need to grow human and social capital alongside economic capital – there is a need for joined-up approaches. Within our PfG we should focus on enablers to bring about changes we need e.g. joint practice development. We need to liberate our practitioners, helping teachers to understand that kids also need health and wellbeing looked after as well as knowledge on STEM etc. –the kids need models of self-help to manage themselves. Our shared goal should be a better life for all.

Points from Discussions

In terms of professional development, we have the capability out there already, so we just need a joined up approach – the co-training of social workers, health workers and others, so perhaps a common Yr 1 programme.

Leadership and Management – leaders from industry need to be brought together with those from other sectors (statutory and community/voluntary) to discuss emerging challenges and not just to create short-term solutions. For example, issues of mental ill health cross all boundaries and need addressed holistically. At present interventions are just plugging holes.

To Finish

Trevor thanked all the contributors and participants. The reports on which the presentations were based will come out over the course of the year and we hope to explore these further. We hope that there will be more Impact Forum events for a couple of years to come, as an application has been submitted for an extension, but regardless the next event will be a conference in October here in Belfast. This conference will flag up our advocacy work, particularly the research undertaken for us by RaSe comparing the PfG with Healthy, Wealthy & Wise and also comparing with the PfGs of Scotland and Wales – that piece of work should be ready in early autumn, in time for our conference.