

European Agenda for Adult Learning UK Reference Group Meeting

Monday 25th March 2019
2.00pm – 4.00pm | Learning & Work Institute | Leicester

Notes and Actions

Present: Joyce Black (JB, L&W, Chair), Fiona Boucher (FB, Scotland), David Hagendyk (DH, Wales), Corrina Hickman (CH, Ecorys), Colin Neiland (CN, Northern Ireland), Helen Plant (HP, L&W, notes), Mark Ravenhall (MR, England).

1. Minutes and actions from last meeting

JB reminded the group that at the last meeting the key issues raised were the need to identify and develop case studies from the impact forums and the interim report.

JB thanked partners for their work on the interim report. L&W has received the evaluators' feedback, and the report received a rating of 87 per cent. The main comments related to the use of logos, and partners were reminded of the need to ensure that the correct logos are added to all outputs.

2. Update from European Programmes

CH updated the group on Erasmus+ and Epale as follows:

- **Erasmus + update**

The 2018 Call resulted in 25 KA1 (Mobility projects) and 34 KA2 (Strategic Partnership) projects funded for Adult Education (AE).

The 2019 Call is underway. The KA1 deadline for AE was 12th February. The KA2 AE deadline was extended from 21st March until 26th March due to technical issues with the EC application form. There has been a significant budget uplift for KA2 AE in 2019 to just over 10 million Euro (compared to approx. 7.7 million in 2018) and it is positive that there remains a good level of demand for funding from the sector.

A revised Technical Notice providing guidance to organisations and individuals on the UK's anticipated participation in the current Erasmus+ (2014-2020) and European Solidarity Corps (ESC) (2018-2020) programmes, after the UK leaves the EU was issued in January. This can be found on the Brexit page of the Erasmus



+website <https://www.erasmusplus.org.uk/brexit-update> . This page was updated again on 26th March following the extension of article 50.

- **EPALE update**

The 2019/20 phase of the EPLALE NSS work programme is now underway.

Priorities for this period include continuing to increase the number of registered users and increasing level of interactivity on the Platform.

A National User Survey will be launched in Q2 of this year.

On 25th March we launched the EPALE Star Supporter competition. This is open to UK contributors on the theme of Health, Wellbeing and Adult Learning.

The next EPALE thematic topic (March – May) is Citizenship Education. This will be followed by Informal Learning (June – July).

Our first EPALE Ambassador training day took place in March and a further training day will take place later in the year.

We are currently planning a joint cross- border event in June with Leargas, the NSS for Ireland.

- **EAAL**

JB reported that the on-going uncertainty over Brexit means that the position with regards to future funding for the work remains unclear. L&W has been unable to get an answer about continuation of funding beyond March 2019. An email received from DfE in January stated that “in the unlikely event of no deal” L&W would cease to be delegated as the UK national co-ordinator for EAAL on behalf of the UK government. JB has been attempting to find out from DfE what this means in practice from a funding and activity point of view, but so far has been unable to get an answer. The implication is that, in the event of a deal, L&W will continue to fulfil the role, but it is also not clear whether, in the event of a deal being passed, the work will be included in the transition agreement. More information might emerge this month. For now, L&W intends to work on the premise that they are still in the programme. No current contracts with partners and associates on the project go beyond 1st April, but L&W is not in a position to release 2019-20 contracts until funding is confirmed by the Commission. While the aim is to move forward and try and be positive, L&W recognises the risks of instability for partners if anyone is put in the position of having to pay money back.

The last financial report submitted was to end October 2018. JB confirmed that funding to cover the period to 31st March 2019 is not in jeopardy; the uncertainty relates to the period after UK leaves the EU.

DfE has told JB that they are talking to the other three national administrations. JB asked if partners had any further insights:

- FB reported that she has arranged to meet with Mike Russell, who has said that he will speak to her about the future of European funding but has given no further details at this stage.
- DH reported that there are ongoing discussions and pressure from Wales to the UK government about access to Erasmus etc, but nothing has been confirmed.

JB noted that, because the funding comes directly from the Commission, it is tied up with the wider political situation, as they take instructions from European Parliament.

3. Update from UK Impact Forums

- **England (MR)**

The notes and presentations are on EPAL. The most recent Forum meeting focused on outcomes-based approaches, including work which is being taken forward by local authority adult education services' network (LEAFEA), Greater London Authority work commissioned from L&W to inform AEB commissioning, and findings from the Community Learning Mental Health Research programme. CLMHR input included reflections from programme manager, which stressed that, despite the high level of investment by government, the findings have been largely ignored as they focus on adult mental health, which are not a priority for the current administration.

There was a lot of talking from presenters, and not much contribution from participants. This will be addressed through the format for the next one, which will be run as a seminar. This will take place 30th April and focus on the EAAL workforce development project. It will include an input from Education and Training Foundation and participation from six of the ten "thinkpiece" authors. MR stated that having the co-funding from FETL provides something of a buffer against no deal Brexit, as the dissemination and publication is FETL-funded.

- **Northern Ireland (CN)**

The last meeting was attended by JB and MR. Focusing on the theme of adult learning and wellbeing, it was jointly sponsored by EAAL and EPAL and linked to

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Belfast Festival of Learning. Feedback from participants (collected via Survey Monkey) was mainly positive. Key issue is getting policymaker engagement - no politicians attended and only one civil servant.

The next meeting will take place on 10th May. Connor Stevens has been doing some research on opportunities for labour market progression for low waged in NI and will be presenting at the next forum. Seeking to identify suitable inputs from providers who have examples of effective practice to share.

Between the meetings, the programme's "friendly politician" continues to work with them to open doors. Also had positive meetings with:

- civil servant leading roll-out of Programme for Government, who has undertaken to organise a series of follow-on meetings;
- head of skills development and head of FE in Department – have also linked head of skills development to L&W, to support work on labour market progression.

Research also underway with Stormont Research Department to cross reference HWW and Programme for Government, which has been extended to include comparative analysis of Scotland and Wales. CN will share with group once it has been signed off.

- **Scotland (FB)**

Last meeting held on 14th February, and focused on developing the young workforce, an agenda which has received a lot of funding from Scottish Government and been supported by all parties and all sectors.

Plan to hold two in next month, which will focus on:

- Training for adult education staff (date tbc), linking to WFD project with input from Alan Sherry. Will also build on work done last year on the gaps in workforce training, and include discussion to influence imminent work to refresh the framework of competencies for adult education staff.
- The funding of adult learning (25th April). Will include input from OECD *Getting Skills Right: Future-Ready Adult Learning Systems*. FB suggested that the meeting could include a UK-wide input from the Forums.

Action: Other leads to contact FB if interested in attending Forum and / or developing a UK-wide perspective to inform an input to the meeting.

Minister has announced new policy for adult learning. A review has also been announced of funding arrangements for the whole “informal” sector (i.e. ACL), with a view to moving funding from some sectors to adult learning. Driver for this is a demographic drop in the numbers of young people in Scotland, which is shifting focus away from provision young people to lifelong learning.

Held an impact event at the Scottish Parliament, involving nine award finalists making presentations to politicians. This went very well and resulted in SALP being invited to speak to finance minister.

JB suggested that the England forum could offer an input on AEB and devolution deals to the 25th April event, and Wales could offer one on Personal Learning Accounts, as L&W has been doing work on these areas.

Action: MR and DH to follow up with FB.

- **Wales (DH)**

Recent impact forum focused on WFD, including inputs on WP6 and contribution from Dafydd Rees on “liberal” adult learning, with workshop activity linked to WP6.

Next impact forum will be on family learning (date tbc). Will contribute to development of Welsh Government policy on how parents and families can support children’s learning.

Welsh Government have developed a commitment to lifelong learning. L&W is working with them to shape what this will look like, and planning is underway for a conference. Inputs will include learning from Estonia around how a small country can develop LLL, and there is an opportunity for the impact forum to contribute.

4. Update on other work packages (HP)

HP shared the current plan for the development of impact forum case studies, which are being developed in conjunction with WP leads. The aim is to produce a case study for each of WPs 2-5, for each country. There are currently a lot of gaps in the plan, and no real sense of momentum behind the work. This is concerning, as the group agreed that producing a case study publication based on this would help to provide a shared focus for the work in this programme.

DH confirmed that they have identified three further potential case studies in Wales, which he will send through by email. These cover the excluded groups, family learning and entry pathways.

CN stressed that it will be important to ensure that the national case studies don't cover similar ground in relation to any theme, so there is a role for central co-ordination to share information about the examples that are being put forward.

FB noted that they have only received a request for a family learning case study, and have had no contact from other WP leads, which makes it difficult to suggest examples that might be suitable for inclusion in the work.

Overall, the group agreed that there seems to be a gap in communication between the Forums and WP leads. WP leads have not been taking the initiative in approaching the Forums for case studies and may not have been following up on potential case studies that have been highlighted to them.

Action: JB and HP to meet and follow up with WP leads and ensure that they adopt a more pro-active approach to develop this work.

DH updated on the Wales development project. Wales IF is doing some work with GMB Union looking at the skills and learning development needs of workers in the retail sector. This is a priority area for the Welsh Government and one of sectors that is anticipated to be heavily impacted by automation.

The project covers Wales and the SW of England. Have met with senior officials from GMB and held workshops with c. 50 of their workplace reps. Findings from the work so far (which are not surprising) include:

- The retail sector is very diverse with regards to the skills and qualifications of the workforce and their experience of being able to access learning and development opportunities.
- Digital by default in HR is having an impact – some staff do not have the skills or physical access to tech to be able to work in this way. Have identified an urgent unmet need for digital skills and are linking with a TUC Wales Union Learning Fund project to see how existing materials and support could be adapted.
- Low paid workers in the sector are very unprepared for the disruption that is going to be caused by automation.

The project will be written up and presented at a future impact forum.

DH observed that a lot of trade union learning seems to be focused on making their reps better at that role, rather than developing wider learning opportunities.

5. 2019 Conference

JB confirmed that there is budget for a conference and L&W is keen to build on success of 2017 conference and again to deliver in partnership with EPALE. Nothing is confirmed yet, but it will be timely to begin thinking about where, what, etc.

Threefold aim will be to:

- share what has been produced through the programme
- inform the development of practice
- influence policy, both directly or indirectly according to audience.

Would like to have a clear theme, as HWW provided this for 2017 and it provides coherence to the event.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- CH noted that they would like to involve some of the contributors to EPALE and bring in a European dimension.
- FB observed that the context will be quite different by September. A possible focus be how we would like to work with European partners in the future, and the conference would provide an opportunity to involve stakeholders in thinking through this issue. E.g. How can we continue to collaborate effectively? How do we create collaborative spaces?
- DH noted that now feels like an important time for LLL, which is being linked to other high-profile agendas e.g. loneliness, automation. HWW gave real momentum to this kind of thinking and produced a good conference. How could we harness such momentum again?
- CN stressed that the relationship with Ireland is also important, particularly but not only for NI. Could the conference offer a “Five Nations” perspective?
- MR observed that, if the UK is involved with a new programme, the conference will also provide an opportunity to launch this and start the discussion about what case studies and examples should be included.
- Possible themes:
 - Issues from HWW are still relevant;
 - Focus on collaboration and cooperation.

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- Find something newsworthy to generate wider interest, and which would lend itself to a state of the nations approach. E.g. apprenticeships, funding – how are these done differently in different countries of UK?
- Citizenship, with a panel of contributors on this from the five countries?
- Audience - as well as politicians, it would be good to use the conference as an opportunity to expose civil servants from across the UK and Ireland to some of the developments in the other nations.
- Location – London was expensive so should consider alternatives, although it is possible to get some good deals on London venues.
- Format - having space to talk and network and short presentations seemed to work well.
- Timing - 24 hrs is helpful for getting European participants and those from further afield.
- Cost – Would it be cheaper to have a drinks reception rather than dinner? Could involve learners in this and invite a wider audience.

Action: JB and MR to take forward once funding situation is more certain.

6. Next EAAL Programme

JB advised the group on the current position with regards to the next EAAL programme.

- Although the role of L&W as the UK National Coordinator is agreed, the Commission will not confirm it until a deal is agreed (see note above). There will be a briefing on the next programme from Commission next week.
- The deadline for submission of the proposal is 6th May (bank holiday, so 3rd May in practice), which effectively means that there is a month in which to make the submission.
- The programme is based on the same set of priorities as for this year's work.
- Following submission, programmes will be agreed by September, with work to commence on 1st January 2020.
- In terms of eligibility, the UK has been included, but If the UK withdraws from the EU during the grant period without concluding an agreement, funding will

be withdrawn but participation would be encouraged. This is not realistic as participation couldn't continue without funding. If the UK leaves with a deal, there is still potential to be funded. Norway received 121,000 Euros to participate.

- L&W is going to propose a similar level of funding as there is insufficient time to do otherwise. This will include funding for Impact Forums. The rest of the programme is to be agreed.

JB also reported that Stephen Evans is determined that L&W should continue to drive forward UK-wide work, and this would remain the case in the event of no deal Brexit, e.g. through an annual conference with the 4 nations and Ireland.

MR noted that the basis for the next programme can be found in the ET2020 joint report of 2015 (Strategic Framework for European Cooperation). The priorities set out there are: governance; supply and take-up; flexibility and access; and quality. The Impact Forums would sit under governance. JB confirmed that the Impact Forums would be a key area to continue, if the Brexit situation leads to receiving a reduced amount of funding.

MR said that this is an opportunity to consider whether we want to structure the impact forums differently for the future. Previously it was done around HWW. Should something like this happen again, or should we just continue as they are currently arranged? Themes that have been suggested for conference could be a starting point? E.g. funding, apprenticeships / upskilling and reskilling.

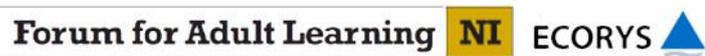
JB suggested that it would be good to take soundings from the Impact Forum leads on the key issues that are exercising policymakers and are likely to be key concerns over the next couple of years.

Action: IF leads to send JB a note of current concerns and what is on the horizon that could be a focus for work in the proposal by **Wednesday 10th April**.

MR suggested that it would be helpful to pull together some benchmarks across the UK linked to the priority areas – e.g. supply and take-up – participation rates, English Maths and digital skills, then benchmark these against EU? Having some comparative benchmarks which showed where each of the four nations was stronger or weaker would help to sharpen politicians' and policymakers' minds.

7. AOB

JB's term of office as vice president of EAEA is coming to an end and she will be standing as President. Support from partners and their networks would be appreciated.



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JB has an article in FE Week this week, which includes reference to HWW and NHS at 70 reports.

8. Date of next meeting

Action: L&W to canvass for dates.