

ADULT LEARNING IN NORTHERN IRELAND

COLIN NEILANDS – CHAIR OF FALNI



A PICTURE OF PROVISION

- Any picture is partial – there is no collation of stats across funders or providers
- Stats are available for provision funded by Dept for the Economy
- However adult learning is funded under many other depts also – e.g. Communities, Health and the Executive Office
- In addition adult learning is supported through our local authorities and a plethora of funding bodies, such as the Big Lottery Fund
- Provision stretches across statutory, private and community/voluntary sectors
- Is the adult learner being well served?

SOME STATS

- In 2016/17 c63,000 NI students enrolled in UK HEIs
- In 2017/18 (prov) 124,556 students enrolled in FE – a drop of c10% since 2014/15
- c80% of students are studying part-time
- 11% of enrolment is non-regulated – in 2014/15 some colleges enrolled c25% of their students in non-regulated courses and there is still significant geographical variance
- 84% of regulated enrolment is L2 and above –indeed 48% is at L2 – this is in line with FE Means Success
- 21% of students are over 25 yrs of age (no further breakdown available)

SOME STATS

Essentials Skills

- There is a downward trend in enrolments since a peak in 2010/11 – some of this is accounted for by Apprenticeships moving to GCSE provision
- Recent falls (e.g. between 2015/16 and 2016/17 qualifications gained fell by 27%) are due to the introduction of Refreshed ES with revised L1 & L2 core literacy and numeracy and introduction of external assessment and final exams
- There is some evidence of revival

BARRIERS

Barriers to participation and progress in Education – Sept 2018

- *Those facing barriers to participation and progression through education and into the labour market are not a homogeneous group by any means. In order to further encourage participation, a flexible and multi-faceted policy response is required.*
- *It is important that policy responses are developed in partnership with relevant public, private and community and voluntary sector stakeholders and that employers are encouraged to collaborate with the public sector to improve outcomes*

BARRIERS

Removing the Barriers to Learning: Exploring Adult Perceptions and Attitudes to Participation in Further Education (DEL 2012) cited the main barriers to learning for adult learners in Northern Ireland, and who were interested in learning related to: timing, work, family commitments and the cost of courses. The research also identified the potential of non-vocational learning to act as a stepping stone for some adult learners to progress into vocational learning.

IMPACT

- Stats, important as they are, do not give us the picture of impact
- While progress is being made to shift measurement from outputs to outcomes, much more investment is needed to fully assess and recognise the impact adult learning has across our society
- Forum members and the case studies we have compiled evidence how provision is positively impacting not just on employability and career progression, but health and wellbeing, inclusion and cohesion – this evidence deserves fuller recognition and resourcing. Delighted to have contributed to Healthy, Wealthy & Wise report,

THE POLITICAL PICTURE

- We are without a Government
- Draft PfG was generally welcomed by the Forum, in particular its shift to outcomes-based delivery and cross-dept collaboration which fits adult learning so much better
- RaISe undertaking reports on links between draft PfG and HWW report
- Council Community Plans – some explicitly citing lifelong learning and all with potential engagement opportunities for adult learning providers
- Belfast is now a UNESCO Learning City and Derry City & Strabane Council is aiming to apply shortly

CHALLENGES

- No Government
- Need wider recognition of the role of adult learning
- No comprehensive data collection – including impact
- Rapid technological and demographic changes – are we ready?
- Non-employment related learning is under valued/resourced
- Silo thinking/functioning
- Short-term funding threatens sustainability of providers and innovative provision

VISION

- Northern Ireland – a learning society
- Develop a Lifelong Learning Strategy
- A comprehensive survey of provision
- Adopt evaluation by impact indicators
- Mainstream successful innovation
- Build collaboration across sectors and disciplines
- A sustainable voice for adult learning and adult learners