

European Agenda for Adult Learning: England Impact Forum**21 June 2018 | City Literary Institute | London**

Attendees: Joyce Black (L&W, UK National Coordinator); Jacqueline Bradley (Thurrock Adult Community College); Chris Butcher (Workers Educational Association); Dave Eva (Unionlearn); Cath Harcula (NFLF); Vera Hutchinson (UCL Institute of Education); Joanne Keatley (City of Wolverhampton Council); Chris Minter (Greater London Authority); Wendy Moss (City Literary Institute); Dr Helen Plant (EAAL Team); Mark Ravenhall (Independent Chair); Dr Kathryn Ray (L&W, strand lead). Sue Charlish (L&W, note-taker)

Apologies: Simon Beer (Haringey AES); Christine Bertram (EPALE UK); Helen Chicot (Rochdale MBC); Martin Doel (FETL IoE Prof of FE Leadership); Dr Vicky Duckworth (Edge Hill University); Susan Easton (L&W, strand lead); Dr Colin Forrest (Sherwood Ed./ Leeds Trinity University); Lynsi Hayward-Smith (LEAFEA); Corrina Hickman (EPALE UK); Prof John Holford (Nottingham University/Scrutrea); Mel Lenehan (Fircroft College); Dragana Ramsden (Morley College); Kay Sidebottom (Leeds University); Dr Rob Smith (Birmingham University); Richard Thickpenny (Ashley Community Housing); Prof Olga Tregaskis (UEA); Dr Cheryl Turner (VCSE Forum); Jill Westerman (Northern College); Tom Wilson (GTA England).

Minutes**1. Welcome and introductions**

The aim of the meeting was to provide opportunities to discuss and share ideas around the impact of adult learning. Impact Forums are also held in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. To enable future planning of forum meetings across the UK colleagues were urged to complete the participant feedback form in their packs.

2. Updates on European programmes and policies

Joyce Black updated members on recent consultations on European structural funding, across Europe:

- The Erasmus+ budget has been doubled. However, the adult learning element has remained unchanged at 1.9% of the budget.
- EAEA and other colleagues are lobbying for a bigger percentage of the budget to be allocated to adult learning.
- There has been a budgetary increase for vocational education and training (VET) but arguments are continuing to be made that investment is needed in the pathways to employability.

Joyce concluded that, whilst this outcome is positive for organisations such as Unionlearn, it is disappointing for colleagues working in general adult education. Lobbying will continue but this is difficult when the responses received are in relation to the budget having been doubled.

From a UK perspective, further to the Brexit vote that took place in Parliament on 20th June, our continued participation in programmes such as Erasmus+ is unknown. We are receiving positive messages from Commission officials and from organisations working on Erasmus+ programmes that they want our involvement as UK partners to continue but that does present difficulties around match funding. We are continuing to work on the basis that “until we are out, we are in.”

As the government representative at the ET 2020 Adult Learning Working Group we attended the final meeting of working group members in May 2018. At this meeting members agreed the final outputs which will be disseminated in late Summer 2018. One outcome will be a mapping of country wide activities taking place in workplace basic skills and learning. A final report with case study examples will be made available on the Commission website, EPALÉ’s website and it will be signposted to from the EAAL work on Learning and Work Institute’s website. The included resources will be of particular interest to stakeholders who are working with decision makers.

Action: Circulate the link to the final report and resources. (JB)

The ET 2020 Adult Learning Working Group has established a community of practice to enable colleagues from member states, that are interested in this area of work, to continue to communicate and share practice. It is a closed group but, when possible, updates and key messages from this group will be shared with members of the forum.

The mandate for the new group is expected to be issued in June 2018. The group will have a broader remit focussing on increasing participation by all adults, not focussing purely on basic skills.

The European Basic Skills Network (EBSN) general assembly and conference took place recently in Berlin and Joyce and Alex Stevenson, Head of English, Maths and ESOL, Learning and Work Institute, attended. The focus of both events was on access to basic skills and Learning and Work Institute co-presented in collaboration with the German Education Ministry who were celebrating the National Decade for Literacy and Basic Education. Notably, DG Employment attended, and took part in an expert panel session.

It was reported that Germany, as they have federal states, has an interesting version of devolution. Joyce and Alex will maintain contact with colleagues in Berlin to share good practice on how they set up commissioning which will feed into our own work around devolution.

Action: Circulate the link to the film of the EBSN Conference. (JB)

In her role as National Coordinator Joyce sits on the Eurydice Advisory Group. This group conducts European research for the UK. Attendees at the last meeting included representatives from the Department, Welsh Assembly Government and from Scotland and Northern Ireland education departments.

Eurydice conducts life wide research on education, focussing on school and higher education. A thematic report will be commissioned in Autumn 2019 and that will focus on adult education. A question was asked about what definition of adult education will be used prompting a discussion about formal and informal learning.

Action: Colleagues are invited to submit items to include in the report. (ALL)

Advisory group members received a demonstration of the Eurydice National Education Systems database which Joyce recommended to members of this forum as a good reference point. Colleagues were asked to be mindful that some of the information might not be completely up-to-date. The key features of a country's education system can be searched by category, i.e. early childhood, secondary education, adult education and training etc. The database is useful for colleagues wanting to compare an area of their work against activities in other countries.

Action: Circulate the link to the Eurydice National Education Systems database. (JB)

Action: Inform Joyce of any inaccuracies on the database. (ALL)

EAEA is hosting their general assembly and annual conference in Estonia on 27th and 28th June 2018. Joyce will Chair the general assembly and Alex will deliver a presentation on partnership working.

3. Developing an outcome-based approach to Adult Education funding.

Chris Minter, Senior Policy Officer, Greater London Authority

Two major documents have recently been launched one of which is the Mayor's *Skills for Londoners* Strategy and in July the implementation framework which will include a chapter on outcomes, will be published. The purpose of this presentation was to share with colleagues GLA's initial thinking which will be out for consultation.

The GLA is working towards an outcome-based approach and to fund what works. Job outcomes are important, and it is recognised that there is a need for people to gain skills and be in work but there are additional important outcomes in relation to health and wellbeing and social, civic and community life. However, past experiences have shown that it is difficult to implement 'joined-up' working at national level across the different government departments. Therefore, a collective approach might be more beneficial, continuing to work with government departments alongside private institutions and employers. The GLA believes that it is possible to use this approach across some of their strategies.

At City level it is possible to launch thematic strategies and bring new partners in to problem-solve

- Economic Development Strategy
- Skills for Londoners
- Tackling Health Inequalities
- Social Integration Strategy



It is evident that adult learning, particularly family learning, has a contribution to make and there is an opportunity for adult learning to be involved and engaged across overarching strategies. Outside of London, colleagues were told that there will be points of opportunity across England and across local authorities as they produce their own strategies.

The *Smart London* plan involves the city looking at ways in which technology can enable the sharing of data in a way to help with problem solving. There is a debate about whether technology can be used to obtain data from learners in a more cost-effective way than by paper-based surveys and about digital badges, how outcomes could be measured and whether some of the soft skills can be captured.

Digital Badges offer more flexibility to measure outcomes that qualifications can fail to capture



A national approach has resulted in some excellent short-term projects, bringing providers together, with measured outcomes. Lessons have been learned from what has taken place nationally whilst at the same time trying to understand what is happening at 'ground' level and colleagues were asked "could we bring this together in an action plan at city level with sub-regional provider champions?" Initially, the focus was on data collection, but it's now apparent that if outcomes are improved changes need to be made within the culture of adult education.

This is more than just collecting better data

What more do we need to do at London or sub-regional level to ensure better outcomes for learners are embedded in our culture?

- Planning
- Delivery
- Evaluation
- Data collection
- Staff training

Chris raised the following questions for discussion:

- Where are the points of opportunity? Is devolution the catalyst or are there others?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of the new technologies? Should this be a national pilot?
- How important should educational progression be within an outcomes-based approach? Internally and to HE?
- What changes do providers need to make to improve outcomes for learners – teaching and learning?

4. Discussion

In the context of this discussion, adult education referred to post-19 education, excluding traineeships and apprenticeships, that is publicly funded. Currently, the adult education budget stands at £300,000,000 of which approximately £40,000,000 is spent on 'community learning' and most is spent on outputs (qualifications) of which about half are low level units, i.e. below level 2, with reduced spending on level 2 and level 3.

To clarify what is meant by 'new emerging technologies' Chris informed colleagues that it is very broad, but one train of thought is whether apps can be used to get direct data from learners thereby precluding the need to do numerous surveys. Colleagues learned that Unionlearn are looking into the automation of data but there is a potential danger that data is automated in different ways and as a result it becomes fragmented. The collection of data raised several points around the GDPR legislation and colleagues learnt that a specific problem for Unionlearn is that they act as a broker between a learner and provider and providers don't want to share learner data with them. The RSA's report [Cities of Learning in the UK Prospectus](#) raised some interesting potential models that could link with outcome based approaches.

In London, through the *Smart London* plan, the sharing of data has had a real beneficial effect. Whilst there are caveats to how the data is used, it can be used to help people make better decisions.

There has been further discussion in London around a 'suite of outcomes'. Potentially, from this, providers could choose which were the most appropriate for their type of provision. The outcomes on which other devolved areas (outside of London) are focused are around jobs and profitability. Health is often not seen as a relevant outcome, even when there might be a high percentage of the population in their area on long term sick.

Colleagues discussed the difficulties of measuring outcomes and the fact that they are often thought about at the end of a course when, to have an impact, it might be beneficial to consider what a desired outcome might be at the start, and then plan what the curriculum should be to achieve those outcomes. This argument is backed up by conversations the GLA have had with big providers, that it's the outcomes that should drive the next set of planning activities. Having decided on the desired outcomes at the start, it's those specific outcomes that should be measured.

It was agreed that making use of local surveys in the planning stages and taking the opportunity to look at the data in more detail is important. For example, in relation to health, a provider could look at which courses have worked for these outcomes, making it a more responsive process to the planning. This was considered to potentially be a big win for the GLA and for providers.

Unionlearn have seen a decline in informal adult learning sponsored by unions. It was acknowledged that there is less opportunity for this, but the 25% decline is also because the unions have focused on achieving the outcomes that benefit them financially. The concentration has been on getting people into work and obtaining qualifications. Colleagues discussed the dangers of focusing solely on job outcomes and the importance of being able to measure employability. A comment was made about the importance of participation and participation in learning being an outcome. There is a lot of evidence internationally that any participation in learning activities increases the likelihood of better health and that individuals are more likely to be in employment.

On this point, colleagues learned that in the West Midlands providers and the local authority have had a dialogue around outcomes. It has been acknowledged that identifying outcomes for FE colleges and skills doesn't pose a problem, but it was less easy for community learning. The Adult and Community Learning Alliance (ACLA), which represents several adult education providers, were consulted on what outcomes they would want to propose for community learning. An outcome put forward was in relation to participation and engaging learners. In this region they are working towards new engagement in learning being one of their outcomes, possibly focused in a geographic area where participation in learning is low and where there is high unemployment and poor health. To avoid the pitfall of simply chasing a target number of participants and participation par se concentrating on priority groups and subjects in the curriculum, both of which would be agreed locally, was thought to be beneficial.

A discussion took place about the benefits to society that adult learning brings but the point was made that it still needs to be linked to the learning process. Colleagues were asked if it would be possible to use similar processes to the RARPA system to consider the wider outcomes that learners think about when they are achieving the course. In relation to learner surveys a point was made about the possible need to link a professional analysis of learner outcomes and a professional analysis of wider outcomes.

It was agreed that although every course has learning outcomes and that learning can contribute to social improvement in an area it is difficult to measure, especially the longer-term benefits that participation in learning may have. A balance between measuring every learner and the current situation of not holding sufficient data was suggested and adopting a joined-up approach might make it possible to track the difference adult learning has made to someone's life. However, this model would be dependent on people in an area wanting to work together to which colleagues raised the problem of different departments and organisations not always reaching agreement with each other.

Reference was made to a piece of work undertaken by the Institute of Education which has explored the theories around a 'learning ecology' approach, bringing in different services in a local area to include employers and a range of providers. A presentation on this would be welcomed by colleagues at a future meeting, giving colleagues the opportunity to compare this ecological approach with the model used in Rochdale which we understand is being adopted as a possible model in Greater Manchester.

As Chris's presentation outlines the initial thinking of the GLA it was confirmed that it could be circulated to all members of the forum for reference.

Action: Circulate the presentation given on behalf of the GLA. (SC)

5. Learner surveys and impact: to highlight approaches in two organisations

- **Unionlearn, Dave Eva**

Dave provided colleagues with background information to the organisation, advising them that their current sponsor is the Department for Education and that the current value of the union learning fund is £10 million per year. It was clarified at a later that this sum is for England only. That sum of money is distributed and the organisation's direct costs are in addition to this. Approximately 150,000 learners per year are funded on courses that range from short courses and informal learning through to longer programmes of qualifications such as apprenticeships.

In previous years funding has been for participation and for engagement in learning by people who hadn't done learning before but now it is far more target driven. The unions are now obliged to track their learners and payment by results came into force 2 years ago and Unionlearn negotiates any changes to the agreed system with the Department each year. It was important that the Department understood the

brokerage service that Unionlearn provide and that their outcomes framework reflected this. It has resulted in three main outcomes:

- **Priority learning outcomes** - these tend to reflect the Departments focus in relation to qualifications but outcomes that Unionlearn feel strongly about have been included.
- **Non-priority learning outcomes** – for example, an individual completing an initial assessment or undertaking non-accredited informal adult & community learning.
- **Other outcomes** – these identify what the unions have been asked to record which in turn will evidence where Unionlearn has added value, for example, how many learning representatives have been trained, or has a learning committee been set up in the workplace.

Where payments by results is concerned it's only the priority outcomes and non-priority outcomes that are relevant, but there is a cap on non-priority learning. This has created a challenge because the unions concentrate on the priority outcomes to qualify for their funding.

In addition, there were some challenges around the learner survey with respect to methodology and deciding what would be measured but a survey structure has been agreed with the Department. Having raised the problem they were experiencing in obtaining learner data, the Department issued a letter that was sent to providers stating that data specific to SFA funded programmes should be shared. This had a positive effect until GDPR legislation came into force.

The findings of last years' survey are illustrated on the following slides.



Survey in 2017/8

- 2459 responses received
- 64% more than one episode of learning/33% in four or more
- 83% participated within 12 months of survey
- 63% gained a Qualification/part Qualification
- 52% had undertaken some form of on-line learning
- 86% between 25-64
- 67% permanent contract 15% agency

Some Patterns

- More women undertaking short courses that do not lead to qualification
- Older workers, people with higher qualifications and with disability more multiple episodes
- Older workers – more for interest - Younger for career progression
- BME more likely to do ESOL and functional skills
- Over 90% respondents claimed at least one skill improved

Outcomes

- 90% report at least one skill gain, 37% do job better, 35% more confident in progressing and 68% in own abilities, 46% say quality of life improved.
- Multiple episodes closely linked to gaining new job/progression/pay rise
- 70% would not have done learning without union support (79% of those without previous Quals and result even higher in disadvantaged groups)
- 28% became union reps after learning (39% more union active)

Financial Impact

- Estimate of total benefit = £1,650 million p.a.
- Net benefit to employers £650 million p.a.
- Adjusted for delivery costs etc this equates in 2017/18 to:
 - £12.24 return for every £1 ULF
 - £7.20 to employee and £5.00 to employer
- Fiscal return to the Exchequer is £3.40 for every £1 ULF.

Survey results have been consistent over a four-year period and this evidence has enabled Unionlearn to secure multi-year funding. However, unions are continuing to offer the same programmes albeit to new people, so it has been agreed that some of the funding will be used for innovation and new initiatives which won't be tied purely to outcomes.

Going forward, the Union Learning Fund learner survey won't be done annually and there will be a move towards targeted impact studies based on what the projects want to do. For example, the shop workers union might work with part-time women workers who don't have any qualifications to help them gain skills and progress in work. After which there would be a targeted survey asking what has happened to those individuals. This year, there will be 23 projects of which 12 will have a targeted impact study. The remaining 11 will most likely conduct some studies. The learner tracking system has been developed in such a way that it will enable queries to be run, providing factual results, and it will be able to generate a cohort to be surveyed.

Unionlearn will present two reports to their Board on 28th July. One will be an infographic report and one will be on the learner survey. After this date they will be shared with members of the forum.

- **Chris Butcher, WEA**

Chris presented colleagues with some background on the impact survey that WEA conduct annually, including the methodology used and results. Slides 3, 4 and 5 on the accompanying presentation provide more detail.

It is an online survey and it is entirely voluntary, on both sides, as it isn't driven by funding. The survey serves to improve practice and the WEA's understanding of what the students get out of their courses. The survey's findings were published in the WEA's [How adult learning transforms lives and communities report](#)

WEA is currently analysing the 2018 survey data and they hope to publish their findings early in 2019. Looking towards 2019, colleagues at WEA would welcome any suggested changes which may result in them providing a joined-up evidence base.

WEA feels there are considerable advantages in conducting the survey whilst at the same time they recognise that it does have limitations, as illustrated below:

Limitations

Still more we'd like to do.....

- Only captures students who are able and willing to respond
- Doesn't reach those who haven't provided an email address
- Haven't yet collected data over sufficient time to determine trends
- Self reported rather than verified by third party
- Relatively short term effects – doesn't look at impacts further down the line
- Should it have a role in more formal reporting?
- How comparable with impact surveys elsewhere?

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Discussion:

- Unionlearn has agreed a framework of outcomes and evidence with the Department and, for example, if a learner achieves a qualification, whether it be at level 1, 2 or 3, that would be classed as an outcome and it would be termed as an episode of learning.
- Tracking by Unionlearn is done through the Union Learning Fund and although there are 57 unions in the TUC only 23 are accessing the fund. Whilst other unions are encouraged to access the fund some may feel precluded due to what the Department is willing to fund and payment by results has also had a negative effect. Unfortunately, colleagues learned that none of the health unions are currently accessing the fund whilst it is acknowledged this is a key target group for upskilling the workforce.
- As of 2011 the Department ceased funding regional activity which means survey results aren't readily available by region. However, this could be done by using Unionlearn's tracking system, identifying responses by postcode.
- Considering the balance between the needs of an employer and upskilling their workforce and the needs of an individual to progress either in the same workplace or elsewhere, Dave was asked how this is translated when unions bid to the fund. In answer, the prospectus identifies priorities to be considered whether they be the needs of the sector, local economy needs and/or the needs of individual employers and individuals. Submissions differ, some proposals are for projects that cover all of these aspects, but some are more targeted. The success experienced by one of the retail-focused projects called Checkout Learn has been used to secure some employer contributing programmes which have involved organisations such as Sainsburys and Tesco. These programmes have provided Unionlearn with some excellent

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case studies on how, through the unions, they can evidence that the investment of employers in individuals does reap benefits.

- Learner surveys capture learners' perceptions of the impact the learning has had on them and needs triangulating with other data. Unionlearn has an evaluation process which includes an employer survey. This enables a comparison to be made between the perceptions of the learners and the employer findings.
- WEA takes a learner centred approach. The learner responses to the survey, together with the fact that the organisation has been doing this for a long period of time and with sufficient numbers, provides them with a case to present.
- Ultimately the aim is to have better outcomes and the importance of having a measure from the beginning to the end. By including the tutors, there is a better understanding of the outcomes that are being collected. Whilst the survey findings provide a strong voice externally the data should also be used to drive the organisation forward.
- It was acknowledged that whilst the survey has provided a good foundation the WEA is on the cusp of moving towards a change, whether that be outcome based, funded by results or anything else, and that going forward their approach would need to be more rigorous.
- The use of social metrics was discussed at the recent LEAFEA meeting together with a survey model that enables a learner to be plotted against a range of indicators at different stages of a course. This type of survey would provide an actual measure of a learner's progression as opposed to the learners' perception of what they have achieved. At the same meeting, members gave some support to the idea of national benchmarking but there was concern about the amount of time this would take and the fact that the work needs to start now.

6. Next Steps

Members felt that future agendas should include the following:

- A presentation from the What Works Wellbeing Centre, Norwich Business School, UEA on the research they have conducted on the types of learning that have most impact on wellbeing, both formal and informal.
- Community Learning Mental Health Pilots
- Eco systems and place
- Family Learning Outcomes Framework
- Results of the annual participation survey from Learning and Work Institute

7. AOB

7.1 As the NHS is celebrating its 70th birthday this year, Learning and Work Institute is holding an expert panel and roundtable event in Manchester. The content of the day will follow closely on from the recently published *Healthy, Wealthy and Wise* report. The event will focus on the importance of learning and work in health, discussing what the health service was originally set up to do and how it needs to change and presenting the findings of fieldwork carried out by Kantar during which 3000 people in England have been asked whether they feel better

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supported and better educated around health and how they can improve their own health. Members of this forum will receive an invitation to attend.

7.2 The civil service in Northern Ireland have analysed the *Healthy, Wealthy and Wise* report against the programme for Government outcomes-based approach. Similar work will take place in Scotland and Wales as well.

Subsequent information received from WEA:

Is there a core set of questions in the impact survey every year which never change? If so, do these allow any trends to be identified?

Many questions which never change some of the core ones are as follows:

- Students reporting at least one health and wellbeing improvement after WEA course
- Unemployed students getting the confidence and skills to find work
- Students gaining skills or knowledge that they can use in developing their careers
- Having skills and confidence to help children with reading, writing and maths
- Students became more active and engaged in their communities

WEA has been tracking results over the past few years and can conclude more students are reporting improvements/sustaining outcomes year on year with the exception of the health outcome which saw a slight dip last year. Iram Naz, WEA Research Manager, is currently working on an outcome measurement tool which tracks trends over the years, provides a narrative to explain results and which WEA can ultimately use as a tool to set targets for the following year.

Has WEA ever looked at STEM subjects in the Impact Survey data?

WEA can do analysis by STEM subjects, but it hasn't been something that has been requested to date.

Has WEA gone back to students from the previous year if we wanted to?

Yes, we have done that in the past with longitudinal research. But not always that effective to do in a survey format, a more qualitative approach is suited to this kind of longitudinal research in my opinion.

How does WEA use the impact data to really inform provision?

Impact data is used for wide ranging purposes, the data is used by various teams including the quality team, marketing team and business development teams and is more outward facing. Generally, the questions focus on wider benefits of learning than specific teaching and learning related questions. For quality improvement, evaluation and satisfaction and assessing need we do more specific/targeted research within the WEA.