

Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Region Policy Roundtable

Meeting Report

The YOUNG_ADULLLT Policy Roundtable involving relevant stakeholders from Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Region (ACAR) took place on 17th May 2018 from 12pm-4pm at the Skills Development Scotland (SDS) Aberdeen City Careers Centre.

Twelve people from organisations involved in Lifelong Learning (LLL) policies for young people in the region — which were studied in the YOUNG_ADULLLT project — attended the meeting, organised by the YOUNG_ADULLLT research team based at the School of Education at the University of Glasgow.

The purposes of the meeting were:

- A.** Present and discuss with the participants the main findings and policy recommendations from the European YOUNG_ADULLLT research project and its relevance for ACAR.
- B.** Present and discuss with the participants the main policy recommendations from the European YOUNG_ADULLLT research project and its degree of priority and feasibility for ACAR.

A. Seven main findings from the YOUNG_ADULLLT project were presented to the participants in the meeting. After the explanation of each finding the participants in the meeting had a discussion about the relevance of the finding for ACAR.

To activate the discussion participants were asked to collectively rate the relevance of the finding on a 5-point scale, ranging from “extremely relevant” to “not very relevant” for the region. This was done using cards as shown in Picture 1 below. The card placements are shown in Diagram 1 below.

The main findings presented were:

- 1.** The main objective of LLL policies has been to equip young people with skills for the world of work;
- 2.** LLL policies targeting young people tend to individualise social problems instead of addressing their structural causes;
- 3.** The overlaps and contradictions between LLL policies are explained by their spread in different government departments/agencies and the lack of spaces and mechanisms of coordination at regional level;
- 4.** The degree of employers’ engagement in vocational education and apprenticeship training is insufficient;
- 5.** The voice/opinion of young people is not heard in the monitoring and evaluation of LLL policies;

6. The use of data serves the purpose of monitoring and controlling the management of resources, but there is no data available on the effectiveness of LLL policies;
7. LLL policies are mainly developed to reintegrate young people into ‘standard’ and ‘normal’ life courses instead of considering diverse educational and life trajectories.

A summary of the main discussion and the agreed relevance of the findings for ACAR follow:

1. The focus of LLL policies on employability skills.

This was found to be a moderately relevant finding for the region. It was suggested that the emphasis on employability skills has been more prominent in the past, but now the aim is to provide a broader range of skills through lifelong learning, including life management skills.

2. Issues with LLL policies attributing the causes of social problems to the affected individuals.

There was an agreement that this was an extremely relevant finding, as it was felt that young people and those with low income were often blamed for their troubles rather than their circumstances.

3. Problems of overlap and contradictions in LLL policies being due to issues of coordination at different levels of governance.

The finding was agreed to be extremely relevant. The different sources of funding tackling overlapping issues and producing duplication is an issue in the region. However, it was pointed out during the discussion that the situation is getting better, as cooperation between different organisations has been improved.

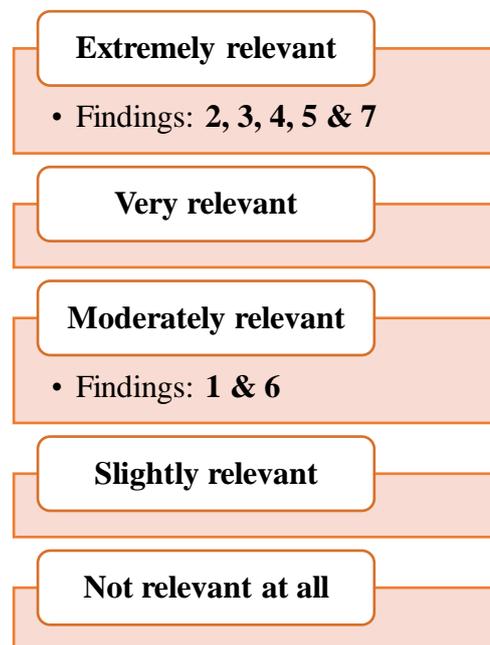
4. Discussion about the employers’ engagement with vocational education and apprenticeship was found to be extremely relevant.

There was an agreement that there were some issues with employer engagement in the region. The challenges highlighted in the discussion were the value of vocational education and the time and availability that SMEs can devote to training young people. It was suggested that this has improved recently, especially in certain sectors.

5. The young people’s voices are not being heard in the monitoring and evaluation processes of LLL policies.

This was found to be an extremely relevant issue in the region. While there were some ways young people could get their voices out — including youth forums and youth parliament — it was recognised that these capture

Diagram 1: Relevance of findings for ACAR



the voice of a specific part of the youth population. In many cases the people that the policies target are not being heard.

6. **The availability of data about the effectiveness of LLL policies to monitor and control resources.** This was found to be a moderately relevant issue. The difficulties of gathering relevant data were raised and it was suggested that there is data about the policies, but some questions were raised about the accuracy of the data collected. Generally, it was perceived that the local level organisations were more receptive towards data about the experiences of using the LLL policy services, compared to national organisations.
7. **LLL policies aim to reintegrate young people into standard life courses, instead of considering diverse educational and life trajectories.** This was found to be an extremely relevant finding for the region. There was an agreement that there was not enough flexibility in the system and if a person did not fit into the standard life course, the policies aimed to ‘fix’ that. Discussions about young people’s expectations of work and new types of jobs and careers were part of the discussion.

Picture 1: Collective exercise on the relevance of research findings for ACAR



B. A similar exercise was performed with regards to the policy recommendations, as each one of them was presented and discussed with the participants. However, in this case the participants had to collectively agree on assigning to each policy recommendation the degree of priority (low- / high-) for ACAR and feasibility of the policy recommendation (less/more) in ACAR. The results are presented in Diagram 2 and Picture 2 below.

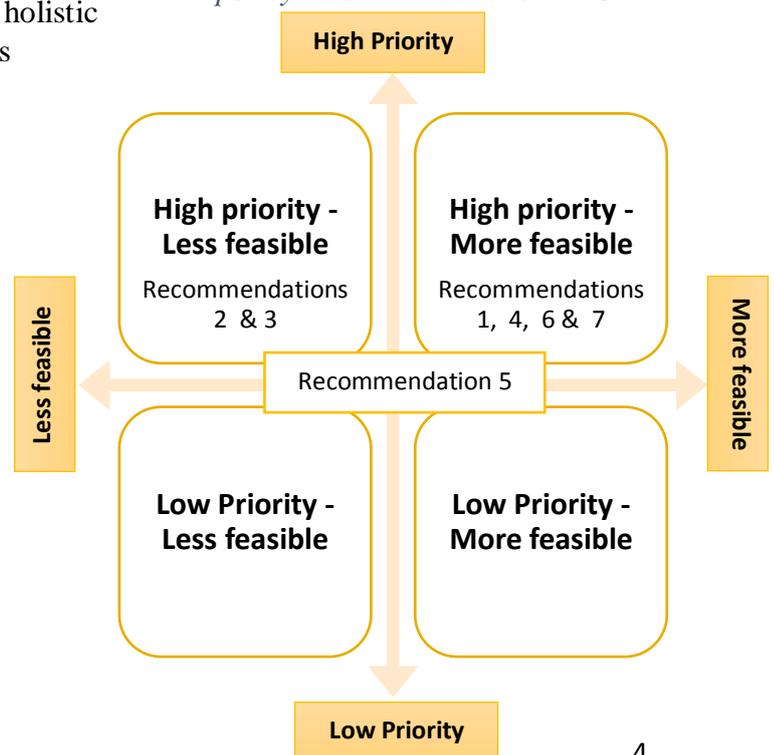
The main policy recommendations presented were:

1. Beyond the economic and employment focus, LLL policies should consider a more comprehensive and holistic development of young people;
2. LLL policies should be accompanied by an ambitious program of reforms to promote decent working conditions for young people;
3. National LLL policies should give more autonomy for regions to define their own objectives and targets;
4. LLL policies should accommodate the needs of young people with diverse social profiles and in different life circumstances instead of defining very specific target groups;
5. LLL policies should pay less attention to employers' demands and more to the voice and the experiences of young people;
6. LLL policies should incorporate mechanisms of bottom-up accountability and create spaces for the systematic collection of qualitative feedback from stakeholders;
7. LLL policies should pay more attention to the inequalities of access and the quality of the learning in apprenticeships.

A summary of the discussion of the policy recommendations follows:

1. It was agreed that LLL policies should consider a more comprehensive and holistic development of young people. It was suggested that this development is now more feasible than before and that it is a high priority to broaden the policies beyond economic and employment focus.
2. Second recommendation suggested that LLL policies should be accompanied by an ambitious program of reforms that promote decent working conditions for young people. This was rated as a high priority for the region, but it was perceived to be a less feasible recommendation to carry out.
3. Third recommendation stated that national LLL policies should give

Diagram 2: Prioritisation and feasibility of policy recommendations in ACAR



regions more autonomy to define their targets and objectives. This was rated as high priority for the region and moderately feasible. This development was viewed to be more feasible than before, but not expected to happen soon.

4. Fourth recommendation suggested that the policies should accommodate the diverse needs and circumstances of young people instead of targeting very specific groups. The recommendation was rated as high priority and more feasible than ever before. The discussions considered the central role of organisational partnerships in providing such services and how such partnerships have been fostered in the region.
5. The fifth recommendation suggested that LLL policies should pay less attention to employers' demands and more to the voice of young people. It was suggested during the discussion that a balance needs to be found between the two sides, and that employers' demands should not be ignored. The issue of balancing the two needs was rated as a moderate priority with moderate feasibility.
6. Sixth recommendation called for incorporating mechanisms of bottom-up accountability in LLL policies and the creation of systematic collection of qualitative feedback from stakeholders. This was viewed as a high priority and more feasible than before. It was agreed that qualitative data is important and can be a powerful form of evidence about a programme's effectiveness and sustainability.
7. Final recommendation stated that LLL policies should pay more attention to inequalities of access and to the quality of learning in apprenticeships. This was rated as high priority and as a more feasible recommendation. It was suggested during the discussion that the Scottish government level policies are increasingly paying attention to how the inequalities are being addressed. The parity in prestige between apprenticeships and the vocational pathway versus the academic pathway was also discussed.

Picture 2: Collective exercise on the relevance of policy recommendations for ACAR



Additional discussions

- There is an appropriate time which opens an opportunity window to move onward in understanding the LLL agenda from a holistic perspective and to argue for the recommendations.
- General agreement about the findings and recommendations of the research. There was a clear consensus of the way forward to improve LLL policies for all, not just for young people.
- Discussions about the importance of addressing the gender disparities in the different economic sectors.
- The participants agreed in finding the workshop useful and were willing to participate in further activities organised by the research team.
- It was suggested to mobilise the findings in social media.