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Glasgow City Region Policy Roundtable

Meeting Report

The YOUNG_ADULLLT Policy Roundtable with relevant stakeholders from Glasgow City Region (GCR) took place on 24th of May 2018 from 12pm-4pm at the Glasgow City Chambers East.

Fourteen 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 GCR.
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 CGR.

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 GCR.

To activate the discussion participants were asked to collectively rate the relevance of the findings 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.
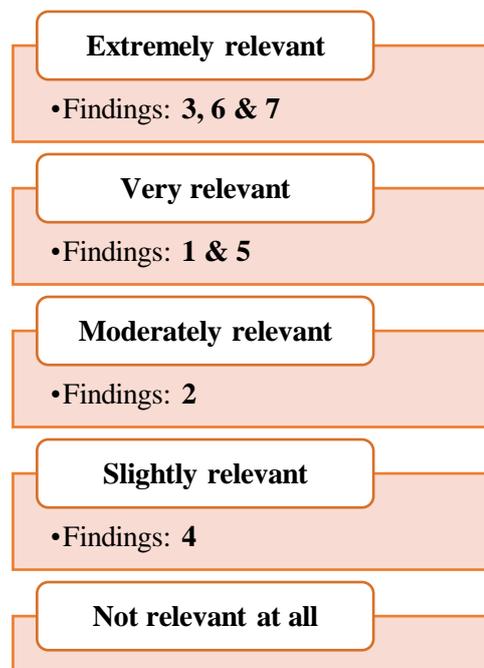
The main findings presented were:

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.** The finding was considered to be very relevant for the region. The region has focused on equipping the young generations with skills for work, but soft skills have become increasingly important for policy as well. Priorities have also shifted as economic conditions have changed, going towards soft skills and building young people's resilience.

2. **Issues with LLL policies attributing the causes of social problems to the affected individuals.** This was found to be a moderately relevant finding. The policies aim to address the individuals rather than the structural issues around them. There are other policies that address the structural causes that lead to people using LLL services.

Diagram 1 *Relevance of findings for GCR*

Extremely relevant

•Findings: **3, 6 & 7**

Very relevant

•Findings: **1 & 5**

Moderately relevant

•Findings: **2**

Slightly relevant

•Findings: **4**

Not relevant at all

3. **Problems of overlap and contradictions in LLL policies being due to issues of coordination at different levels of governance.** This finding was considered extremely relevant and was felt to be evident everywhere. While on a discursive level there is coordination, it does not manifest like that in practice. There are duplicate services and divided money pots with conditions that cause the overlap. Funding structures are viewed to be problematic.

4. **Discussion about the employers' engagement with vocational education and apprenticeship was found to be extremely relevant.** This was found to be slightly relevant as it was expressed to be less of an issue in Glasgow. There are a lot of employers who want to take part and engage, but there is space for improvement, especially in the industry-school links. Non-academic careers are often not as well represented in schools as the academic ones. Additionally, small businesses prove to be absent, as they are not included in the apprenticeship design. Therefore, they do not use them as much. It was deemed to be a challenging issue to be solved that requires more flexibility in the apprenticeship system.

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5. **The young people's voices are not being heard in the monitoring and evaluation processes of LLL policies.** This finding was considered very relevant for the region. The voices of young people are not included in the decision-making process and they often have different views from the policy-makers. However, the opinions of young people are thought to be more useful in the evaluation of services than in policy design, as they might not have the relevant information for the latter. There is also a general lack of adequate channels for individuals to influence policies and programmes rather than young people specifically lacking such pathway.

6. **The availability of data about the effectiveness of LLL policies to monitor and control resources.** This was considered to be an extremely relevant topic for the region. There is data for monitoring the effectiveness of policy on the large scales, but there is not much information on which pieces of the policies are most effective. Data about the logic of programme effectiveness would be required and is inexistent at the moment.

7. **LLL policies aim to reintegrate young people into standard life courses, instead of considering diverse educational and life trajectories.** This finding was found to be extremely relevant. The policies aim to channel young people into specific paths rather than offering different options. The labour landscape is changing and traditional employers might not be employing as many people in the future. Thus, there is a need to rethink the system.

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

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 GCR and feasibility of the policy recommendation (less/more) in GCR. The results are presented in Diagram 2 and Picture 2 below.

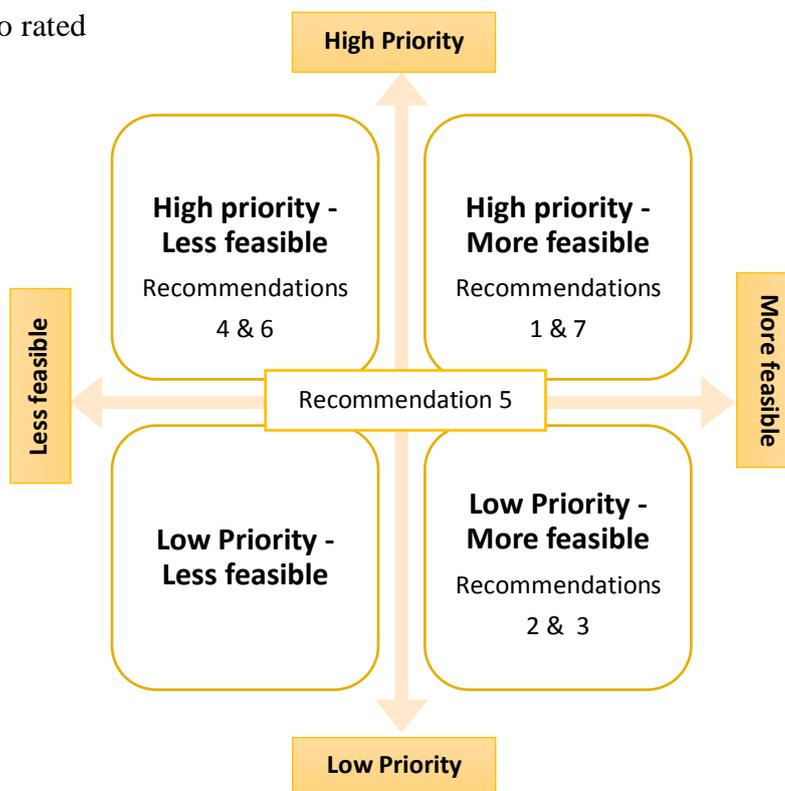The main policy recommendations presented were:

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. This was rated as a high priority and more feasible recommendation, and at the moment there is a desire to see this happening. Fostering resilience and confidence in young people is important, especially among young women, as there is a confidence gap. There is a consensus in moving towards accepting the holistic approach.
2. Accompanying LLL policies with an ambitious program of reforms to promote decent working conditions for young people was rated as a low priority and high feasibility. This does not mean that this is an unimportant issue, but it is being addressed by several other policies. The participants considered that the working conditions are generally speaking good in Scotland in terms of everyday welfare. There is also a need for young people to accept the realities of the world of work and understand that nobody starts from the top.

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3. A higher degree of autonomy for regions to define their own objectives and targets was also rated as low priority and very feasible. The participants agreed that the regions already have this autonomy. Colleges are autonomous, and they are the largest LLL service providers. The disparity is between local and regional levels, not between national and regional. Regional actors should listen more to communities. Actually, regions have so much autonomy that it is challenging to meet national goals and targets.

Diagram 2: *Prioritisation and feasibility of policy recommendations in GCR*

High Priority

High priority - Less feasible
Recommendations 4 & 6

High priority - More feasible
Recommendations 1 & 7

Less feasible

Recommendation 5

More feasible

Low Priority - Less feasible

Low Priority - More feasible
Recommendations 2 & 3

Low Priority

4. The participants agreed that LLL policies should accommodate the needs of young people with diverse social profiles in different life circumstances instead of defining very specific target groups. It was viewed to be a high priority, but less feasible. Barriers for coordination between organisations that could enable this include restrictions for information sharing. This results into an incomplete profile of potential service users and, as a result, it is difficult to provide the support they need. Young people with learning difficulties have an information package about their condition that helps provide support services. Maybe similar systems could be implemented where young people provide the information about their needs and then signpost them to the right services, rather than services looking for users.

5. The participants agreed that there needs to be a balance between employers' and youth's demands. This was ultimately put in the middle of the axes. On the one hand, young people need to be resilient enough to survive in the reality of work instead of work being catered for their needs. On the other hand, there is a need to listen more to young people, as sometimes employers might have a stronger voice. When phrased as balancing the voices of young people and employers, this was viewed as more desirable.

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6. The need to incorporate mechanisms of bottom-up accountability and create spaces for systematic collection of qualitative feedback from stakeholders was rated as high priority, but low feasibility. Qualitative feedback about services is missing. There are case studies, but they tend to be about the successful cases rather than failures. Thus, there is a knowledge gap about the causes of failure. There is a need for more systematic collection of feedback about why something worked or did not work.

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

7. A policy focus on inequalities in access and the quality of learning in apprenticeships was rated as a middle priority and more feasible one. There is an existing equality agenda that aims to address the inequalities of access. However, there are several existing inequalities that need to be tackled, as young people from minority background or those with disabilities are underrepresented in apprenticeships. The quality of apprenticeships is deemed to be good, but the offering needs to be widened to other sectors that are currently not included. VET pathways other than apprenticeships need to be considered as well.

Additional discussions

- The target groups for communicating the findings of the YOUNG_ADULLLT research project should include several organisations, such as networks of training providers, colleges, key schools, chambers of commerce, advisory boards, and so on, instead of just targeting the top decision makers.
- The participants enjoyed discussing about LLL for young people and understood that this was the focus of the project, but suggested to have a broader look to the adult population.
- Young people involved in LLL policies have a voice and opinion, but the system is failing to listen to them.
- The participants agreed in finding the workshop useful and were willing to participate in further activities organised by the research team.