3rd National Advisory Board Meeting Report

The 3rd YOUNG_ADULLLT National Advisory Board meeting between members of the board and the research team took place on 21st of February 2019 from 10am-12:30pm at the University of Glasgow main building.

Five people from the National Advisory Board (NAB) and seven people from the research team were present in the meeting, which was organised by the YOUNG_ADULLLT research team based at the School of Education in University of Glasgow.

The purposes of the meeting were:

A. Review and discuss the findings from the YOUNG_ADULLLT research project with the NAB members, with a focus on the findings about Scotland as reported in the Scotland Dissemination Paper.

B. Review and discuss the policy recommendations from the YOUNG_ADULLLT research project with the NAB members, with a focus on the recommendations for Scotland as reported on the Scotland Dissemination paper.

A. The structure of the project, its methodological approach, weaknesses of the approach, and ten main YOUNG_ADULLLT project findings were presented to the participants in the meeting. The presented findings are specifically about Scotland rather than the whole European project's findings, and they are meant for an audience beyond academic circles. The findings were divided into three categories; Policy agendas, Young people's experiences, and Governance.

The presented findings were:

Policy agendas

1. There has been a shift in policy orientation from lifelong learning to skills for work
2. LLL (Lifelong learning) policies have mainly prioritised a narrow age range of young adults
3. The skills agenda has emphasised economic growth over equity

Young people's experiences

4. There is a lack of information about vocational routes available to young people

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5. Families play a key role in influencing and supporting young people's decision-making and transitions
6. There are insufficient meaningful LLL opportunities available to young people not in higher education or apprenticeships
7. Young people who are able to successfully engage with LLL policies report positive experiences

Governance

8. The Scottish Government is consistently providing strategic coordination to the skills system
9. There is a recognised need to increase employers' engagement in coordination and collaboration mechanisms
10. Centralised accountability mechanisms are limiting regional autonomy and adaptation

The questions posed to the board members for purposes of guiding the discussion were the following:

- Do the findings resonate with your experiences as a policymaker/practitioner?
- Are there any findings that you do not consider relevant of reflective of your experience?
- Are there any key points that you feel are missing from our findings?
- Are there any findings which you find new or surprising?

The discussions were not conducted in a point-by-point format, instead the board members were invited to discuss any issues or topics that they deemed pertinent. Summary of the main discussion points as follows:

- The findings, while well-received by NAB members, would benefit from **further international comparisons** to better frame Scotland's position and the challenges it faces. This point was raised by several people during the discussions.
- **The definition of LLL policies is challenging** and it is not always obvious what the term encompasses. Does it include higher liberal education or is it confined to skills? Additionally, what skills are included in this? Should specific skills or metaskills be prioritised? This is an important area of debate. Additionally, the decline of part-time education and training in colleges for example has been replaced with increased focus on full-time work-based learning, but the system needs more flexibility than part-time and short courses could offer.

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- A question about **where does full-time vocational education and training in colleges feature** in the research project? It was felt that this component was not captured sufficiently despite it being a big part of the VET offering.
- **Issues raised about the narrowly defined target group for the policies resonated** with many during the discussion. However, it was highlighted that current Scottish policies, such as the Learner Journey Review, have broadened the age range and thus the issue has been recognised to some degree. It was also suggested that age might not be a helpful way to define the target groups for the policies, and that it might be more helpful to target those who are in a transitional phase after school or work.
- **Economic growth has been prioritised over equity** in LLL policies as the policies were made in the context of high youth unemployment. **This is a challenge** and it might be beneficial to include something about the challenges of discussing the equity issues in LLL for policy actors.
- **Careers advice and influences affecting young people's choices are important factors**. The choices faced by young people are complex and the current system does not serve vulnerable groups well at the moment. Need to recognise that informing young people is not sufficient as families are an important influence for post-compulsory education choices.
- **The division of post-compulsory education into silos is a part of the problem.** Barriers between the paths need to be broken down for the cooperation between the different parts of the skills system to function properly. The way funding of the different parts of the skills system operates currently is not encouraging flexibility or cooperation. Example of schools being funded through number of full-time students given, which does not encourage smooth and gradual transitions to college.
- **Governance of skills and lifelong learning policies is a complex and important aspect of the issue**. National targets for skills are not always helpful for the regions as they can restrict cooperation between local organisations. Some more regional flexibility is needed to make the policies more effective. However, central strategy is important for equity issues despite the regionalisation of the implementation.

B. Second half of the discussions focused on the recommendations made by the YOUNG_ADULLLT research team based on the findings of the project. The recommendations presented in the dissemination paper were the following:

Policy Agendas

1. Incorporate the lifelong perspective and a more holistic development of the individual beyond employability aims into policies targeting vulnerable young people.
2. Expand the target of LLL and skills for work policies beyond a narrow age range centred on school-to-work transitions to ensure that certain vulnerable young adults are not excluded from the benefits of policies.
3. Ensure that the social justice goals of LLL policies are enacted as consistently as those addressing economic growth. Strong discursive commitment should be reinforced with tangible plans to tackle the structural causes of disadvantage among young people.

Young people's views and trajectories

4. Continue ongoing work to improve the quality and availability of information about vocational pathways. This should be understood in terms of social justice promotion, mitigating the influence of unequal social resources available to young people.
5. Take into consideration young people's voices and views when designing and evaluating LLL policies. In particular, insights from young people with different levels of engagement with policies are likely to improve others' experiences. The Learner Journey Ambassadors' group coordinated by Young Scot is a positive example of engagement of this kind.
6. Design flexible alternatives to traditional training and employment routes, informed by young adults' motivations and personal decisions. Theses should include comprehensive and high-quality alternatives to apprenticeships and higher education.

Governance of skills systems

7. Evaluate the effectiveness of LLL policies and move beyond the monitoring of descriptive targets against KPIs. This includes considering qualitative feedback from local and regional LLL policy actors, which should be used to evaluate and further improve the regional governance of LLL policies.
8. Allow for local and regional variation in the accountability, monitoring targets and evaluation of local and regional partnerships responsible for the implementation of LLL policies. This is likely to improve fidelity to nationally-devised policies and promote local actor engagement.

The guiding questions for the discussion were as follows:

- Are the recommendations relevant to your professional activities?
- Do the recommendations appear feasible?
- Which recommendations appear most pressing or necessary?
- Are there are recommendations you consider to be irrelevant or unsuitable?
- Would you suggest any changes to the detail of the recommendations?

The discussions about research recommendations followed the same format as the earlier findings discussion. Summary of the main points of the recommendations discussion is presented below:

- **Funding mechanisms are a hurdle in making training and employment routes more flexible**. The funding in colleges for example is tied to their teaching activities even though they are asked to do more with the funding than just teach their classes.
- **Engagement with young people has been improving** and groups like Young Scot are an encouraging development. However, the relationship between learning institutions and young people should be made more structured and institutions should hear from young people earlier in the process of service delivery.
- **More efforts need to be done to reach those who influence young people**, such as their parents. This is difficult at the moment as avenues to reach parents are limited.
- **The policy landscape is changing**. A more holistic approach to LLL is slowly being addressed and the age range covered by the policies is growing, so progress on the recommendations is happening already.
- **More evidence-based policy making is needed in Scotland**, but it is acknowledged that capacity building of policy research in Scotland is required to create the environment for it.
- **Collaboration between universities**, possibly building from the currently existing collaboration in doctoral programs, **is needed** and England offers a good example of research clusters where people move and collaborate between universities. However, the way funding of research is currently managed needs to be changed to achieve more collaboration.
- **Parity of esteem between universities and other pathways is currently a problem** and something that cannot be achieved through widening access to university. Emphasis on the value of all of the pathways requires efforts beyond the widening of access to HE.
- **The current system uses measures of success that emphasise the academic pathway to university**, such as rates of Highers achieved in a school. This would have to change for the parity of esteem problem to be addressed.

- **Some suggestions about how to improve communication of the research recommendations**. First is the wording "beyond employability", which is considered somewhat problematic expression as it could be understood as a message to reduce the importance of employment rather than the intended message of adding more to LLL than employment.
- Second suggested change from the board is to **adjust the headings of the recommendations** as the division is somewhat arbitrary and some recommendations would fall under multiple headings.
- The recommendations are thought to flow well from the findings, at least among this audience. However, it is suggested that **boxes of information could be used to bolster the presentation of the international comparative evidence**.