Discussion paper
Intergenerational mentoring, educational attainment and community planning

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Introduction

This paper is based on a workshop held on 5 June 2018 in Londonderry Park, Newtownards. Organised by Linking GenerationsNI (http://linkinggenerationsni.com/) and the ARK Ageing Programme (www.ark.ac.uk/ageing). The aim of this event was to explore the potential of intergenerational approaches to educational attainment, and in particular, the benefits for community planning. The event will also highlight the University of Strathclyde's model of intergenerational mentoring.

The keynote speakers at the event were Alastair Wilson and Katie Hunter from the Intergenerational Mentoring Network based at the University of Strathclyde. Alastair and Katie were hosted by the ARK Ageing Programme.

25 people attended the event, from a wide range of organisations, including district councils, government departments, voluntary organisations, and political representatives. Several participants represented organisations based in the Republic of Ireland.

The event comprised several presentations, followed by group discussions and feedback. The presentations were:

- Community planning: Patricia Mackey (Community Planning Manager, Ards and North Down Borough Council)
- What is intergenerational practice: Vicki Titterington (Linking Generations NI)
- Intergenerational mentoring: Alastair Wilson and Katie Hunter (Intergenerational Mentoring Network)

What is community planning?

Since 2015, the eleven local councils in Northern Ireland have been responsible for leading on community planning, which was introduced as part of the Review of Public Administration via the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014. This role includes managing the production of the plan, setting up a strategic community planning partnerships, ensuring that the needs of citizens and community organisations are understood and fed into the plan, and work to integrate the work into the functions of its own remit (DoE, 2015).

Community Planning had previously been implemented in Scotland, England, Wales and the Republic of Ireland, although the definition and type of planning varies in each region. However, the model for community planning in Northern Ireland is based on Scotland (Cave, 2013).

The Department for Communities website states that
Community Planning aims to improve the connection between all the tiers of Government and wider society work through partnership working to jointly deliver better outcomes for everyone. Community plans identify long-term priorities for improving the social, economic and environmental well-being of districts and the people who live there.
(https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/community-planning).

In each district council area, Community Planning Partnerships are established, and bring together the council with statutory, voluntary and community organisations. These partnerships develop and implement a plan for promoting the well-being of an area, improving community cohesion and the quality of life for all citizens. The statutory partners involved in Community Planning Partnerships are:
- The Education and Library Boards
- The Health and Social Care Trusts
- Public Health Agency
- Health and Social Care Board
- Police Service of Northern Ireland
- Northern Ireland Housing Executive
- Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service
- Invest Northern Ireland
- Northern Ireland Tourist Board
- Sports Council for Northern Ireland (SportNI)
- Libraries NI
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools

There are eleven community plans in Northern Ireland, with each one relating to the local areas. Nevertheless, the high level outcomes of each plan are similar. For example, the outcomes of the Ards and North Down Borough Council's *Big Plan* (https://www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/downloads/The_Big_Plan_Second_Edt_d2.pdf) include a focus on lifelong potential; health and wellbeing; community cohesion/safety; a prosperous economy, and the environment. All of these outcomes are relevant to people of all ages and the overarching plan gives a framework for community/voluntary partners to work together to deliver programmes and activities that support the delivery of these outcomes. Intergenerational approaches fit well with community planning as they cross cut many of the themes and also depend on collaborative approaches for successful delivery.

At the event on 5 June 2018, there was a discussion about the applicability of an intergenerational approach/solution to the common regional community planning theme of educational attainment. In the Ards and North Down *Big Plan,* improving educational attainment is an action within Outcome 1 (Fulfil their lifelong potential).

Linking Generations NI (LGNI) promote the utilisation of resources that generations have to offer one another and see intergenerational mentoring as a viable and collaborative approach to improving the educational attainment of children and young people. This intergenerational solution can also achieve many unintended outcomes, such as contributing to Outcome 2 (Health and wellbeing) and Outcome 3 (Community cohesion and safety), as well as to the Ards and North Down Age Friendly plan. The opportunity of large and wide ranging impact from intergenerational approaches, the ability to promote sustainability in these approaches and to save money in the long term is very appealing.

In terms of direct reference to intergenerational practice, a third of councils have made reference to this in the published community plans. A (different) third have Age Friendly planning on the 'radar' and are beginning to start conversations with local stakeholders about building Age Friendly plans and activities. LGNI will continue to be involved in this in Community and Age Friendly planning conversations to ensure that intergenerational opportunities and solutions like those highlighted above are identified to facilitate collaboration, larger impact, multiple outcomes and a better use of resources.

What is intergenerational mentoring?

The Intergenerational Mentoring Network (IMN) at Strathclyde University is a research and development project that has produced a research-informed model of mentoring capable of being replicated in other schools and across the UK. Young people are offered the opportunity to engage in weekly one-to-one mentoring from a volunteer mentor as they prepare for their higher examinations and plan their future careers. In this way, the students receive academic, social and personal support. A key dimension of the project has been to draw on the experience and knowledge of older adults. The majority of volunteers are retirees.

Context
School leavers in Scotland shows considerable inequality in access to university higher education. For example, less than one in seven students (13%) at the four ancient universities in Scotland are from working-class backgrounds and only 3% have parents in routine occupations (Wilson, Hunter and McArthur, 2018). In contrast, 86% of Scottish medical students have parents from the highest-ranked professions, the highest proportion of all four UK nations. Thus, Scotland now lags behind the rest of the UK in terms of social mobility and access to higher education.

Whilst there have been many interventions to help address these issues, most have focused on 'poverty of aspiration' among young people and their families, and have not been informed by research. However, out-of-school factors are important in explaining educational attainment; these include understanding of professions, access to social networks, lack of suitable work experience, and limited knowledge of higher education and relevant application processes (Wilson, Hunter and McArthur, 2018). Research by Mike Savage and colleagues (2015) indicate that people establish connections largely within their own social class. This means that social mobility is very hard to achieve. Whilst young people from working class backgrounds have limited opportunity to access professional networks, these are the ones that can support entry and progress into higher education and professional occupations. Intergenerational Mentoring (IMN) has the potential to address these issues.

How does Intergenerational Mentoring work?
Wilson, Hunter and McArthur (2018) provide the following model of an IMN scheme:
- At the end of the S4 year in secondary-level school (equivalent to Year 10), school staff identify a group of pupils who have the ability and motivation to progress to higher education.
- The IMN project team match each pupil with an appropriate volunteer mentor as they begin S5. This is often a retired professional from a subject area the pupils are interested in studying.
- The mentor and mentee meet weekly and establish a relationship that extends into the pupil's S6 year (equivalent to Year 12) and beyond. Mentors are supported in this process and there are regular sessions for them to discuss progress with each other and programme staff.
- For those pupils thinking about university for the first time, mentors provide an essential source of academic support, guidance and encouragement through the application process.

What do we know about mentoring?

Wilson, Hunter and McArthur (2018) highlight key characteristics of mentoring:

- Mentoring is a complex intervention, although they indicate positive impact on young people
- Some forms of mentoring are particularly challenging to deliver
- Mentoring is complex
- There is a need for research-informed, differentiated and locally-based mentoring initiatives
- Mentoring widens young people's networks and understanding of higher education and the professions

IMN's work focuses on supporting first-generational higher education applicants, as evidence suggests that this is more likely to have a significant impact than for other groups. This project is now established in three communities in Glasgow, and a further project is beginning a second year in Fife. In addition, IMN approaches are being used to support literacy development in primary schools. IMN currently supports around 80 mentors and have worked with over 600 young people since it began in 2011.

IMN became a social enterprise (Community Interest Company) in 2018. Drawing on funding from the Big Lottery, local authority and independent charities (approximately £500k) IMN has, over the past five years been able to develop a computer platform providing a project infrastructure that can support the marketing, development and day-to-day running of new projects and can work closely with volunteer coordinators.

In their presentation, Alastair Wilson and Katie Hunter outlined that the key drivers of development and innovation for an IM programme are:

- Developing processes and obtaining funding for iterative research and development
- Going beyond a simple discourse of 'model' development 'immediate impact' and 'scaling up'
- Developing a more complex development of theory than currently offered (raising aspirations) to one that focusing on increasing social and cultural capital
- Acknowledging that local community needs/circumstances are different

In summary, IM interventions are complex, require effort, funding, partnership and leadership. However, IMN has developed an infrastructure and processes that can now be used to nurture new projects.

For more information on The Intergenerational Mentoring Network see
https://intergenerationalmentoring.com

What is Intergenerational Practice?

Since 2008, Linking Generations NI have pursued a vision of a Northern Ireland where all generations are respected, understood, connected and engaged in their communities. As the development body for intergenerational practice (IP), LGNI work to promote the concept across all sectors. This includes advocating for intergenerational approaches; offering advice and expertise; facilitating learning about its application; and running demonstration projects to help establish awareness, learning and skills.

Definition of Intergenerational Practice
Intergenerational practice aims to bring people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and contributes to building more cohesive communities. Intergenerational practice is inclusive and builds on the positive resources that the young and old have to offer each other and those around them. Thus, we have to work collaboratively in order to deliver our outcomes and utilise the resources that generations have to offer one another.

Core Principles of Intergenerational Practice
As outlined by Almeida Pinto and colleagues (2009), there are eight core principles of IP:

- *Mutual and reciprocal benefit:* Intergenerational Practice is based on the principle of all participating generations gaining benefit.
- *Participatory:* Successful IP is based on the aspirations of the generations participating, and managing their expectations of the activities.
- *Asset based:* Traditionally, the most common approach to social policy and practice is to identify a problem and then to try to remove these circumstances or behaviours. In contrast, IP is assets based. It works with the generations to help them to discover their strengths and then builds on these assets to build success, understanding and mutual respect.
- *Well planned:* IP is not intended to replace natural connections; rather, it reflects a conscious attempt to create positive changes in addition to naturally-occurring processes. It is based on structured programmes or projects, and the evidence is that the principles of good programme design are just as essential to successful IP as any other project.
- *Culturally grounded:* Cultural diversity means that there cannot be common programmes that will work in all settings. Whilst the principles behind the approach may be the same, the needs, context and attitudes of people may differ widely.
- *Strengthens community bonds:* IP promotes the engagement of people from across the generations with each other and those around them. Its emphasis on positive connection, recognising and building on people's strengths, is a highly effective way of building stronger, better connected communities with increased social capital and citizens who are more engaged in local democracy and social concerns.
- *Challenges ageism:* The young and old are the victims of ageist attitudes to varying degrees. IP provides a mechanism for the generations to meet each other, to work and explore together and from this rediscover the reality of who they really are and what they have to gain from being more involved with the other generations.
- *Cross-disciplinary:* IP provides a vehicle and an opportunity to broaden the experience of professionals of working in a more inclusive way and to become involved in cross-training with other groups to enable them to think much more broadly about how they undertake their work.

Issues arising from discussion

At the event on 5 June, participants were asked to discuss three questions in small groups, which focused on the potential, level of interest, and next steps in developing a pilot intergenerational mentoring programme:

- From what you have heard today do you think this is a viable approach? Discuss the challenges and opportunities of implementing this in Northern Ireland
- What partners would LGNI need to bring together to develop and implement this approach and what would their roles be?
- Discuss ideas to fund this approach in Northern Ireland as a pilot and potential funding streams/opportunities.

1. From what you have heard today do you think this is a viable approach? Discuss the challenges and opportunities of implementing this in Northern Ireland

Participants recognised the potential of intergenerational mentoring (IM) work, albeit requires much *hard work*. Such projects are relevant to the Programme for Government, especially in tackling deprivation. IM projects are also relevant to the local economic and community plans being prepared by local councils in the Republic of Ireland. IM projects would provide vital sources of information and support for young people, given the poor careers information available in schools and Job and Benefits offices. Participants also highlighted the social value of mentoring schemes, and that mentoring is about *life choices* – not just about going to university.

Participants highlighted that a successful scheme depends on the right mix of people and organisations in a local area. Thus, identifying the *appropriate partners* was key. Such partnerships require a *coordinator*, although it was unclear who would *take the lead* in taking this work forward - district councils, schools, voluntary organisations, government departments etc. Another issue raised was the *pressure on schools* and other organisations, which restricts access to schools.

Mentors need *specific skills* (especially 'people' skills), and they need to recognise the issues that young people face. There was a fear that the wrong mentor could do more harm than good.

The *age* of participating children and young people was highlighted, and some participants felt that it is important to involved children at a young age in order to maximise their potential.

2. What partners would LGNI need to bring together to develop and implement this approach and what would their roles be?

Participants at the workshop identified partners across different sectors:

- Local councils community planning, cross-border councils
- Education providers: universities (eg alumni bodies), schools,U3A,
- Education policy makers: Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), Department of Education (DE), Education Authority (EA), Learning Partnerships, South East Regional College (SERC)

- Funders: ICFF after trialling (Common Funding formulae), and others
- Civic society organisations: U3A, churches, creative arts
- Employers: employers, Chambers of Commerce, professional organisations (eg Law Society), Access to Work (NI)
- Elected and community leaders: councillors, MLAs, community leaders

Some participants commented that it would be useful to focus on the skill sets that already exist, whilst others felt that the approach could be adapted to be relevant to community planning partners. One concern related to the choice of students being supported. If only borderline students were mentored, then this widens the gap in educational attainment. Thus, those students left at the bottom should also obtain opportunities of mentoring.

One participant highlighted the need for adequate funding. One district council has already initiated a mentoring scheme (funded by Department for Communities), but only employs one educational mentor.

3. Discuss ideas to fund this approach in Northern Ireland as a pilot and potential funding streams/opportunities.

The sustainability and capacity of IM approaches were discussed, and one suggestion is the better use of funding resources that already exist. The role of employers was highlighted, for example, as part of their corporate social responsibility, or a link with Business in the Community. Another suggestion is for Human Resources departments to include IM opportunities as part of retirement planning or voluntary exist schemes.

Possible funding schemes include:
- Funding of one post that influences PPL to work differently
- Transformational project (confidence and supply)
- Shared education (capital only)
- Neighbourhood renewal (e.g. currently fund reading partnerships)
- Outreach (also providing students to support mentoring)
- Councils
- Big Lottery
- Community Planning Partnerships i.e. Education Authority should be contributing

Next steps

Responses on the evaluation form were very positive. Of those who completed the evaluation form, most had some involvement in intergenerational practice. Nevertheless, most felt that the event had increased their awareness of intergenerational practice, that they had developed a better understanding of intergenerational practice and its applicability to community planning, and that they will get involved in intergenerational practice in the future. Five respondents indicated that they would be interested in being part of a steering group or forum to implement intergenerational approaches to educational attainment.

From LGNI's perspective, intergenerational approaches within schools present a massive opportunity to build on existing work and interest. Importantly, they also provide the opportunity to develop new models and areas of focus. They also provide viable and collaborative solutions to achieving high level outcomes for community plans and Age Friendly programmes.

LGNI plan to progress this work incrementally over the next 12 months with the aim of facilitating an Age Friendly schools programme incorporating intergenerational mentoring approaches. This will involve
  ➢ Working externally, to building connections with community planning community/voluntary partners that are interested in adding value to their work via an intergenerational approach and to pitch these ideas to statutory partners for funding.
  ➢ Working internally, to realign LGNI's schools work so that it provides a range of foci and outcomes under the umbrella of intergenerational approach. This has already been discussed with community planning groupings in four council areas in Northern Ireland.

In particular, the suggested Age Friendly schools programme would work with schools and community partners over a school term to identify opportunities and resources that can be utilised to deliver smaller projects within the one school. From LGNI's experience, the themes and activities that are particularly relevant to a mutually beneficial intergenerational approach in schools are:
  • Educational attainment
  • Digital inclusion
  • Volunteering
  • Community Safety
  • Good relations
  • The arts

LGNI will aim to act as a coordinator and connector to support schools to develop intergenerational approaches to their own unique issues. By aligning this work with community planning and Age Friendly programmes, and linking these to the relevant outcomes, there is an opportunity for sustained intergenerational work through the embedding of it into local council plans and policies.

References

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About Linking Generations

Linking Generations NI (LGNI) specialise in the promotion of intergenerational practice. Intergenerational practice provides structured opportunities to link generations, improving understanding and increasing mutual support. This contributes to the building of age-friendly communities where we respect each other, have a voice and get to play our part.We create opportunities in all sorts of places and for all sorts of reasons for different generations to learn from, support, meet and enjoy each other. Since 2009, LGNI have been supporting lots of amazing people all across NI to bring generations together in the places where they live and work.

For more information, see http://linkinggenerationsni.com/

About the ARK Ageing Programme

The ARK Ageing Programme is a resource within ARK to support engagement between the age and academic sectors. We do this by encouraging and facilitating the production of research that will support lobbying and advocacy, and the sophisticated use of information and evidence by the age sector. In addition, we aim to embed ageing research within Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University. This programme of work will transfer existing knowledge between the academic, policy and voluntary and community sectors, as well as identify and fill key research and information gaps. These activities will be wide ranging, such as recording public attitudes to ageing issues, undertaking secondary analysis of key datasets, holding research seminars and policy round tables on key issues identified by the age sector, and running research workshops for the voluntary and community sectors. This work is core funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies (2013-2016), as well as Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University.

For more information, see www.ark.ac.uk/ageing