



2013-2016

SUMMARY

Final evaluation report

www.ark.ac.uk/ageing

March 2017

Background

The ARK Ageing Programme was established within ARK (a joint initiative between Queen's University and Ulster University) as a resource to support engagement between the age sector and the academic sector. Funding totalled £1,656,995, and was obtained from Atlantic Philanthropies, with matched funding from Queen's University and Ulster University, to run from October 2013 to December 2016. The Programme is coordinated by Dr Paula Devine (Queen's) and Professor Gillian Robinson (Ulster).

This summary report presents an overall evaluation of the ARK Ageing Programme Evaluation carried out by Dr Yvonne McGivern, Independent Programme Evaluator. The evaluation was based on relevant material collected by the Programme team on its activities, on a short survey of those on the ARK Ageing Programme mailing list, and on an analysis of data collected from 15 interviews with people associated with the Programme.

The ARK Ageing Programme aims to achieve:

- A commitment to sustained work on the theme of ageing within both Northern Ireland Universities.
- A symbiotic partnership between the academic sector and the voluntary sector (facilitated by ARK) to provide an impetus for appropriate research projects.
- A reinvigorated voluntary sector better equipped with evidence relevant to the goals and aspirations of the Ageing Sector.
- A well-informed policy sector equipped with evidence relevant to policymakers in areas relevant to older people.
- A better life for future generations of older people in Northern Ireland.

It set out to do this by:

- Creating two lectureships, one in each university
- Identifying what new research is needed by the non-academic older people's sector
- Seeding research projects, researchers (including four PhD studentships provided by the universities) and collaborations across both universities
- Facilitating the mining of datasets (especially longitudinal datasets) that already exist
- Identifying and hosting visiting fellows
- Teaching and facilitating the teaching of specialist courses.

Findings

From all of the data collected it is clear that the ARK Ageing Programme has been a success. All six elements of the Programme are in place and/or achieved:

- 2 lecturers were appointed: Dr Gemma Carney (Social Policy, Queen's) and Dr Paula McClean (Stratified Medicine, Ulster University), and 3 PhD students are near completion.
- Team members are involved in inter and intra university research projects and networks, such as Northern Ireland Cohort on the Longitudinal Study of Ageing (NICOLA).
- Five Visiting Fellows from across the world have been hosted, and several are still involved with the universities or relevant NGOs.
- 25 diverse public engagement activities have included conferences, public seminars, 2 KESS seminars, masterclasses, exhibitions and one-to-one meetings. Many of these are in conjunction with third sector partners.
- Team members founded the Northern Ireland branch of the British Society of Gerontology.
- 7 public attitudes survey modules have been fielded (4 within NI Life and Times survey, 2 within Kids' Life and Times and 1 within Young Life and Times). From these, 3 teaching datasets were created. Survey data and teaching datasets are freely available via ARK, Detail Data and UK Data Service. A tutorial for Year 11 students has also been produced.

- Specialist courses on ageing and lifecourse have been devised and are being taught at both universities at undergraduate and post graduate level.
- The team are involved in major research grants, both within Queen's and Ulster, as well as with other universities.

Publications by the team include:

- 6 peer reviewed journal articles (with 3 others under review)
- 1 themed journal issue
- 1 edited book
- 1 commissioned report
- 14 Research Updates/Policy Briefs/Discussion papers
- 13 blog entries

Reasons for success

Analyses of the survey data and the interviews reveal four categories of reasons for success:

Setting, set up, and early work

- The setting of the Programme within ARK, a strong brand with a trusted reputation for a quality operation and a robust and reliable product
- A history with the funder, Atlantic Philanthropies, which engendered a level of trust in relation to the operation of the Programme and use of the budget
- The ease of implementation of the Programme as a result of existing strong relationships within the team and existing relationships between ARK and the universities
- The way in which the Programme was designed and managed: clear goals and desired outcomes and a workplan to achieve these
- The level of autonomy with which the Programme team were able to operate in relation to the funder and within the universities
- Commitment to work in the early groundwork or 'discovery' phase, in particular the extent of outreach, contact, and awareness raising needed for later success
- The level of buy-in from external partners and stakeholders for engagement with the Programme

Time frame and resources

- The original time frame of 39 months, sufficiently long to enable contacts to be made and for ideas and projects to come to fruition
- An ample and a flexible budget which meant it could be directed at what was working
- The fact that Dr Paula Devine's post as Programme Co-ordinator was 100% funded, which allowed time to be spent at the discovery/groundwork stage and ensured accessibility, responsiveness, and quick decisions, among other things, throughout the Programme
- The commitment from the universities with the appointment of two permanent lectureships and PhD studentships

Culture, leadership and skills

- Time taken and attention paid to team building and support within the team, in particular in relation to the new lecturers and PhD students who, as a result, were quickly and successfully integrated into ARK and the ARK Ageing Programme
- The success of appointments to the lectureships and PhD studentships, all of whom have made significant contributions to the Programme
- The use of a collaborative approach, both internally and with external partners and stakeholders, building on the ethos of the ARK project
- The accessibility and approachability of team members, in particular the two Programme principals, Dr Paula Devine and Professor Gillian Robinson, and Dr Gemma Carney
- The networking and relationship building skills of the Programme team

- The skills of the Programme team in knowing how to work with both the academic and the non academic sectors
- The degree of openness of the Programme team to new ideas and suggestions from stakeholders and partners
- The ability of the Programme team to translate ideas and requests into action
- The development of strong relationships between the Programme team and its partners and stakeholders
- Learning from what worked and what did not work and adapting accordingly

Outputs

- Outputs of quality relevant to the target audience
 - The design of events and publications for a range of audiences in the academic and non academic sectors
 - The design and implementation of the Visiting Fellows Scheme
 - The production of high quality robust data relevant to the age sector
 - The production of teaching datasets
 - The design and implementation of specialist courses within both universities.

Conclusion

The ARK Ageing Programme, despite operating in an environment of considerable change within the universities, has been a success and the reasons for this are clear.

With a strong and skilled team and a clear workplan the Programme has achieved a presence and made an impact within the universities. It has also made an impact within the voluntary and community sector, and developed strong and highly valued relationships with NGOs. It continues to collaborate with a wide range of organisations across the sectors. Many of the Programme's activities and achievements have a legacy element including the Visiting Fellows Scheme; the specialist courses; the teaching datasets; involvement with NICOLA; open access data; and the British Society of Gerontology network.

Given these successes, and the importance of the topic, ARK has committed to continued support for work on ageing until 2022.

For more information about the ARK Ageing Programme and its activities, visit
www.ark.ac.uk/ageing