



SUMMARY  
Mid Term Review Report

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## Executive summary

This is a report of a mid-term review which set out to determine if the ARK Ageing Programme ([www.ark.ac.uk/ageing](http://www.ark.ac.uk/ageing)) is working effectively and efficiently towards its objectives, or whether the objectives need to be realigned.

The review is based on the monitoring documentation gathered by the Programme team and a series of interviews with key people involved in or associated with the Programme.

The ARK Ageing Programme aims to achieve the following:

- 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 has 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.

Work has been done on each of the six elements of the Programme listed above. Two lectureships were created at the beginning of the Programme with funding from each university. This was a significant and noteworthy achievement on the part of the Programme team, and it represents a major commitment on the part of both universities. Work is on-going to identify new research needed; research projects, researchers and collaborations have been seeded across the universities; visiting fellows have been identified and hosted; and the teaching of specialist courses is underway. Work has also been done in relation to facilitating the mining of existing datasets. However, demand for this aspect of the Programme's 'offer' has been slack. More work may be needed here to encourage the use of this very rich resource and this may require a slight realignment away from facilitating this work directly and towards building the skills necessary for others to undertake the work themselves. This could involve further work under the element 'teaching and facilitating the teaching of specialist courses' and could also include the development of new teaching datasets, perhaps in collaboration with QStep at Queen's University.

Some work is also required to ensure the development of modules on undergraduate courses and the development of modules on Master's level courses, and to establish another cohort of PhD students within each university. This must be achieved within a changing university environment where competition for ever more limited resources is intense. However, it is likely that the theme of Ageing may figure more prominently within the research agenda of both universities, although not as a standalone theme, and the Programme is well placed to take advantage of this and to take on a visible leadership role on ageing and age-related issues within the university.

The Programme has been particularly successful in facilitating symbiotic partnerships between the academic sector and the voluntary and community sector. For example, the relationship that has developed between the Programme and the organization Linking Generations Northern Ireland. It is recommended that this should be written up as case study to illustrate the mechanisms by which it came about and the value of the partnership. It should be considered for development as an impact case study in relation to the Research Excellence Framework.

The Programme's Visiting Fellows initiative is an innovative approach to linking an academic with a voluntary and community sector organization and it has made a significant contribution to partnership building. The Programme team should be encouraged to prepare a case study to illustrate the benefits of this initiative, and to 'sell it on' further afield.

While useful partnerships have been developed, and are continuing to develop, these have not yet resulted in many research projects. It is, however, relatively early in the life of the Programme to assess this. The economic environment and the availability of funding for new research are also constraining factors here.

There are two findings that fall under the heading 'lessons learned': the lack of a full time Programme post at Ulster; and the lack of allocated time for Programme lecturers to participate in the Programme. Both have had an impact on the early 'groundwork' of the Programme, in particular at Ulster University.

The Programme has succeeded in developing from a more or less single phase of activity, identifying and making contact with relevant organizations, to a multiple phase in which new contacts are still being made but existing contacts are developing into productive working relationships. That first phase – the groundwork phase - was extensive and is now paying dividends. There is clear evidence of useful, effective and potentially long-lasting working relationships between the Programme and voluntary and community organizations.

Overall, the Programme is working effectively and efficiently towards its objectives. The core Programme staff and in particular its co-ordinator, Dr Paula Devine, are very highly regarded in terms of knowledge and understanding of the university and the voluntary and community sectors and in their approach to building contacts and developing relationships. While further work is needed on some aspects of the Programme, it is clear that it is on course to achieve its objectives.

**For more information on the ARK Ageing Programme, see [www.ark.ac.uk/ageing](http://www.ark.ac.uk/ageing)**