

New Dynamics of Learning and Ageing: Research, Policy and Practice, March 2012

Report by Jo Walker



Maynooth College

AEA was delighted to work with partners in UK and Ireland to put on another successful international conference in its triennial series. It took place in the inspirational setting of the National University of Ireland's campus at Maynooth, in the historic St Patrick's College (founded in 1795). Overseas delegates travelled via Dublin and a strong contingent from the North came from Belfast and Derry. The event demonstrated again AEA's central belief that academics, practitioners and older adults talking together is a powerful activity and well worth the effort it takes to engineer.

In addition to UK (including Scotland and N. Ireland) and Ireland, delegates and presenters came from Belgium, Estonia, Netherlands, Malta and Portugal. Plenary inputs came from gerontologists, adult educationists, European policy makers and a historian. Shorter papers and presentations offered by delegates were programmed in parallel, enabling the opportunity to follow particular themes or strands. The topics on offer included: learning for the life-course,

learning through arts and creativity, learning about (and through) ICT, learning through social engagement and participation in arts.

These sessions enabled practical projects and learning programmes to showcase their achievements and reflect on how their work was of benefit. In several sessions, older people involved projects and activities attended and demonstrated their learning through performance. Memorably, the Big Telly Theatre Company from Derry told us about a number of intergenerational projects they are involved with, including their Spring Chickens programme, which aims to better connect older people to their communities and build confidence and skills. It also develops a pool of artists with knowledge and experience of working with older people.



The Big Telly Theatre Company entertaining conference delegates over dinner

Existing institutions, such as universities (London, Strathclyde, Hanze) and museum services (Northern Ireland), also illustrated imaginative programmes targeted at older learners; innovative third sector organisations (Beth Johnson Foundation, First Taste) discussed ongoing programmes with older people that focused on learning and on training of others to work older clients. An ongoing theme of the plenary papers was the need for greater inclusion of older adults in learning and, even within such provision, the awareness of those who were least likely to be reached.

A link to extracts of papers is available on the previous page. If you attended, do let us know your highlights and what you took away for further thought / practice. If you're reading the papers online, let us know what you find most interesting.

Many thanks once again to our partners: Age Action Ireland and Workers Educational Association Northern Ireland, who helped us plan the event. We were also grateful for the support of the New Dynamics of Ageing UK Research Programme; and to the Irish Tourist Board for sponsoring the reception.