
Economic Wellbeing Pillar: Competiveness, Employment, Education & Skills (CEES)

Thematic Working Group (TWG): Workshop 1, 17 May 2016

Attendees: Joanne Wallace- **Wallace Consulting**, Kim Nesbitt- **ALMAC**, Averil Morrow- **AMMA Centre**, Eileen Stewart- **Armagh Business Centre**, Margaret Ellis- **Banbridge CAB**, Ciaran Cunningham- **Banbridge Enterprise Centre**, Jerome Burns- **Dept Agriculture**, Patricia Devine- **Invest NI**, Katherine Strain- **Moy Park**, Esther Baird- **Portadown 2000**, Emma McClimonds- **REED**, Raymond Sloan- **SRC**, David Vint- **SRC**, Carol Fitzsimons- **Young Enterprise**, Pamela Arthurs- **EBR**, Shirley Devlin- **Invest NI**, Ciara Kilpatrick- **Invest NI**, Arlene Mawhinney- **CIDO**,

ABC Council- Nicola Wilson, Sarah-Jane McDonald, Ciaran Tipping, Niall Drew, Elaine McAlinden, Natalie Ronaldson, Diane Stinson, Damian Mulligan, Lynn Morrow, Noreen O'Callaghan, Elaine Gillespie, Jennifer Doak, Catherine McNeill, Lisa Soye, Damien McEvoy, Catriona Regan, Cllr Margaret Tinsley, Alderman Arnold Hatch, Cllr Jonathan Buckley

Apologies: Michael Graham- **CCMS**, Elaine Cullen- **SOAR**, Shane Campbell- **ICBAN**, Rosemary Hughes- **ABC**, Paul Crooks- **EANI**, Simon Grattan- **Almac**, Ryan Gordon- **Gordons Chemist**, Paul Kavanagh- **ABC**

1. Welcome & Introduction

Elaine Gillespie, Head of Community Planning provided an overview of the Community Planning process. Patricia Devine, Invest NI was introduced as Chair of the CEES TWG. Nicola Wilson, Head of Economic Development, ABC Council will provide strategic direction to TWG during the process.

2. Baseline Statistics

Jennifer Doak, NISRA presented key statistics relevant to the TWG. A number of areas for exploration were suggested:

- GEM data – re: entrepreneurship;
- STEM take-up at A level – is it sufficient to meet the needs of local employers?;
- ABC Skills Barometer shows employer needs & deficits, use this to plan actions – are higher value vacancies being filled outside the Borough?

Outcome: TWG members agreed that the draft report reflected the current situation. Jennifer agreed to look at the availability of additional statistics at Borough level.

3. Identified Issues

Joanne Wallace, Wallace Consulting led a series of group discussion and feedback sessions. A number of problems, which hamper ABC's economic development were identified during group discussions. These have been thematically grouped as follows:

General

- Challenges of an ageing population & projected support needs – met by working population;
- Raised retirement age means that there will be less job availability for younger people;
- Poor connectivity between relevant agencies to help develop & support the economy (Cross-cutting theme).

Perceived Disconnect between Industry & Education System

- Low levels of academic achievement at A level – linked to intergenerational poverty of aspiration (Overlap with Social Wellbeing Pillar & Equality, TSN/PSI Cross-cutting Themes);
- Lack of clear career pathways post-16 years – need to encourage L4-8/HLA & not necessarily Higher Education;
- Perceived stigma surrounding non-academic routes; Perceived stigma surrounding non-academic routes;
- Lack of partnership working with schools in order to equip young people with employer needs (i.e. softer skills, qualifications, practical experience);
- Brain drain – Residents, particularly young people, aren't aware of the breadth of local opportunities, or place a low value on them. Micro-businesses aren't generally represented at careers fairs.

Skills Deficits

- Skills mismatch/under-employment - Employers seek out academic qualifications, rather than skills based recruitment procedures. Graduates may be “under-employed” and taking a vacancy that may otherwise have been filled by someone better fitted to the post;
- Skills shortages in specific sectors – possibility that higher value jobs are being filled by those outside the Borough;
- Lack of progression routes for existing employees – opportunities to skill-up workforce.

Entrepreneurship, Business Support & Growth

- Low wage economy, need higher value job creation;
- Dependence on a few business sectors for employment (e.g. agriculture, manufacturing). This may be a result of low academic achievement;
- Comparatively lower FDI, than other Council areas, particularly GB & USA;
- Low levels of entrepreneurship – although the baseline statistics suggest that ABC has higher levels than the NI average, there is a possibility that there is a discrepancy between definitions (REC: explore GEM data);
- Lack of support post-start-up;
- Poor broadband connectivity (overlap with Environmental Wellbeing Pillar);
- Lack of awareness of where to get funding & support for business growth;
- Poor business succession planning - Loss of skills and experience through retirement.

4. Shared Priorities

There was a high degree of consensus regarding the types of issues that needed to be prioritised and would benefit from a collaborative approach under community planning. The following agreed priorities are inter-linked:

Tackling the Skills Deficit

- Identify, understand & address skills gaps;
- Work with employers on appropriate recruitment processes;
- Promote higher level apprenticeships & vocational pathways amongst employees.

Promoting & Supporting Entrepreneurship

- Develop & promote ABC as an Entrepreneurial Hub of Excellence;
- Link with improving skills levels, to include apprenticeships;
- Put systems & supports in place to achieve this;
- Link with business start-up support & growth (to include micro-business);
- Develop mentors from success stories;
- Improve Broadband connectivity;
- Support activity in growth sectors such as digital/services;
- Support business rebirth & build entrepreneurial confidence.

Building Career Pathways

- Develop a strong partnership approach, to include the private sector & education providers;
- Include practical employability and transferable skills;
- Develop a culture of entrepreneurship from primary school onwards;
- Raise awareness of career pathways & opportunities within Borough.

Outcome: TWG members agreed Skills Deficit, Entrepreneurship and Career Pathways as shared priorities.

5. Long-term Outcomes

Based upon the agreed priorities, TWG members discussed long-term goals (10-15 years) for the community plan. These have been developed as follows for discussion at Workshop 2 (see Table overleaf).

Outcome: TWG members to discuss & agree LT outcomes at Workshop 2. Joanne Wallace to draft Short- & Medium-Term outcomes based on existing information for discussion at Workshop 2.

Need	Priority	Long-term Outcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills mismatch/under-employment - Employers seek academic qualifications, rather than skills based recruitment procedures. Graduates may be “under-employed” and taking a vacancy that may otherwise have been filled by someone better fitted to the post; • Skills shortages in specific sectors – higher value jobs may be filled by those outside the Borough; • Lack of progression routes for existing employees 	Tackle the Skills Deficit	The skills of the resident workforce are aligned to current and projected business need
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low wage economy, need higher value job creation; • Dependence on a few business sectors for employment (e.g. agriculture, manufacturing). This may be a result of low academic achievement; • Comparatively lower FDI, than other Council areas, particularly GB & USA; • Low levels of entrepreneurship – although the baseline statistics suggest that ABC has higher levels than the NI average, there is a possibility that there is a discrepancy between definitions (REC: explore GEM data); • Lack of support post-start-up; • Poor broadband connectivity (overlap with Environmental Wellbeing Pillar); • Lack of awareness of where to get funding & support for business growth; • Poor business succession planning - Loss of skills and experience through retirement. 	Promote & Support Entrepreneurship	ABC is recognised as a Centre of Excellence for Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Investment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low levels of academic achievement at A level – linked to intergenerational poverty of aspiration (Overlap with Social Wellbeing Pillar & Equality, TSN/PSI Cross-cutting Themes); • Lack of clear career pathways post-16 years – need to encourage L4-8/HLA & not necessarily Higher Education; • Perceived stigma surrounding non-academic routes; • Lack of partnership working with schools in order to equip young people with employer needs (i.e. softer skills, qualifications, practical experience); • Brain drain – Residents, particularly young people, aren’t aware of the breadth of local opportunities, or place a low value on them. Micro-businesses aren’t generally represented at careers fairs. 	Build Career Pathways	The potential workforce can identify valued pathways to employment which reflect their own interests and skills, as well as the needs of the local economy.

6. Thematic Vision

TWG members developed their long-term vision, to be achieved under the Economic Wellbeing Pillar. These suggestions have been integrated into the following statement, for discussion at Workshop 2:

“We have a thriving and prosperous economy, underpinned by the skills of our people and our dynamic industries which attract investment and opportunities for growth:

ABC is the Borough that’s open, ready and equipped for business.”

Outcome: TWG members to discuss & agree Thematic Vision at Workshop 2.

7. Parked Issues

These were raised as important and will be explored in subsequent TWG sessions and/or discussed under the Environmental and Social Wellbeing Pillars.

- Unemployed graduates may be potential workforce;
- Breakdown of migrant employment in the Borough – recognition as potential skilled workforce;
- Reason behind business deaths;
- Lack of broadband connectivity;
- Poor public transport to support job mobility;
- Academic underachievement & economic inactivity – need to understand why & create innovative routes to employment (links to community organisations & support mechanisms);
- Ageing population is a resource (e.g. volunteering, business mentoring, intergenerational contact, community development).

8. Next Steps

The remaining Workshops are scheduled as follows:

- The 2nd Workshop will be on Friday 10 June, 2016: 10:30-4:30pm (venue Marketplace Theatre, Armagh)
- The 3rd Workshop will be on Thursday 4 August, 2016: 9:30-1pm (venue TBC)

Workshop 2 will focus on:

- Revisions to draft Outcomes & Vision;
- Developing Short- and Medium-term outcomes;
- Identifying strengths/weaknesses;
- Actions & targeting.