# ASPIRE Evaluation – preliminary comments

The purpose of the external evaluation of the ASPIRE Project is to examine how far the project achieved its objectives, and what lessons might be learned from the experience.

This short paper suggests some broad conclusions, and some issues worth considering in the final report. It has been prepared following the project workshop held in Brussels on 9th April. It is being circulated for comment to those who attended that meeting. The second and third sections reflect what was said in the Brussels workshop and my reading of the documentation rpduced during the project.

The evaluation will comment on the questions listed below. Each item is numbered to make it easy to refer to specific points. Please feel free to add any other comments you wish.

I will be following this up with individual phone interviews with each of the national coordinators.

Please send comments to me (Stephen McNair) at age@stephenmcnair.uk

## Contract compliance questions

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Did the individual partners do what was agreed? If it was varied, how and why? –
 | Yes |
| 1. Did the project overall do what was agreed?
 | Yes |
| 1. carry out the national research studies,
 | Yes |
| 1. develop the planned training resources
 | Yes |
| 1. create a social network for practitioners? ?
 | ? |
| 1. What was not achieved and why?
 |  |
| 1. Was the budget appropriately spent on the agreed activities?
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| 1. What was most successful?
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| 1. What was most difficult?
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| 1. What was most surprising?
 |  |
| 1. How useful were the research reports and training resources? What evidence is there of this?
 |  |

## What ASPIRE has contributed to our knowledge

Better understanding of:

1. the diversity of industrial relations contexts, especially in countries which have not been leaders in European age policy developments
2. the diversity of labour market contexts
3. the limitations of change models based on social partnership, which means very different things in different countries
4. National differences in terms of top down and bottom up industrial relations strategies
5. Limitations of European level intervention, especially the low awareness of European policies like the Framework agreement
6. That “age policy/strategy” is not widely recognised as an issue or a priority, and “age management startegies” are not widespread. However, the issues which an ageing society raises are more widely acknowledged, but they are not framed as “age policy” or enshrined in formal strategies.
7. The diversity of drivers for change – demography, business case, equality – and the different impact each has in each country
8. The tensions between conflicting policies, at European, national and sub national levels
9. That “social partnership” is not universally recognised as a concept, and is not always seen as relevant to the age agenda
10. That although there is a clear trend towards later retirement, and in three of the countries this is reflected in law (retirement ages, pension ages etc) in many places there remains an early retirement culture which sets expectations and affects behaviour.
11. The “productivity paradox” remains a concern. How far are older people less productive?
12. There is a recognition that lifelong learning is important to enabling people to stay longer in work, but provision to support this is limited (non-existent?)

## What have we learned about change?

1. Influence and communication – many of the people and organisations who are key to behaviour change are difficult to contact, and the roles and location of key players are very different in different countries.
2. Formal policy papers have limited impact on the ground.
3. Projects can be successful in terms of their formal indicators, without necessarily producing change (publishing a report does not, in itself, produce change in behaviour)
4. The language of “successful ageing”, etc is not always helpful in fostering understanding or encouraging implementation
5. Legislation can be effective in producing change in some contexts, sometimes through formal enforcement, at other times through cultural impact.

## Gaps and Next Steps?

In your country, do you expect anything to change as a result of the project in relation to any of these issues:

1. Recognition of ageing as an issue
2. The balance of power in industrial relations – shrinking workforce etc..
3. Lifelong learning
4. Behaviour of small firms
5. Behaviour of particular sectors
6. Inequality and discrimination
7. Migration
8. Career review/advice
9. Sharing good practice in age management
10. Legal frameworks
11. Who pays for change
12. The future of work