

Pre-Conference Highlights

Parallel Session: Skills of the Future

Moderator: Peter Cook, ENRD Contact Point

BACKGROUND

This workshop drew on examples from rural business, education and regional development, discussing what the changing skills needs are and how best to ensure a well-trained and flexible workforce with the right skills for the future in rural areas.

It is important to equip rural people with the necessary skills for dealing with social and technological change, the 'megatrends' that are shaping society. The [Cork 2.0 Declaration](#) argues that a "stronger policy focus on social innovation, learning, education, advice and vocational training is essential for developing the skills needed" and the OECD's [New Rural Policy 3.0](#) (NRP 3.0) insists that "building capacity underpins the implementation of rural policy".

There is a growing recognition of the need to systematically map the future skills needs of rural areas and to enhance the contribution of 'anchor' institutions such as universities, schools and vocational training institutions in rural society. The NRP 3.0 says that public policy has an important role to play in working together with employers, employees, jobseekers and training institutions to ensure access to high-quality and responsive training and skills upgrading that support life-long learning.

PANELIST PRESENTATIONS



[How rural skills are changing and the barriers to the supply of skilled people](#)

Wendy Pring
KCP, UK

KCP is the UK's leading expert in the provision of specialist maintenance and waste management services for the renewables, industrial, food & drink and farming sectors. It is intentionally based in a rural area, but the skills it requires are very specialist and not 'typical' rural skills.

KCP offers solutions to challenges such as energy production, food security, soil enhancement, tourism diversification, broadband and Brexit. For example, increasing the number of Anaerobic Digestion (AD) plants offers solutions for managing waste and providing energy, possibly through district heating schemes. Other solutions include collaboration, the use of shared working spaces,

cross-sectoral knowledge transfer, and creation of own markets. The skills KCP require to meet their clients' needs include social, interpersonal and communication skills, as well as strong negotiating skills. Core skills and adaptability are crucial. These skills and qualities are not commonly taught by colleges which often focus on the 'traditional' rural skills.

Barriers to the supply of skilled labour often include broader social issues such as transport, housing, as well as a cultural 'lack of value' sometimes placed on rural skills. Ultimately, KCP look for the 'right person' rather than a 'skill set' and invest in training and development to increase their workforce and develop the skills required now and in the future.

« We've decided that we want to hire kind, honest people; we can then train and develop these people to gain new skills to drive our business forward. »



Roles of different types of education provision

Dr Maura Farrell
National University of
Ireland Galway, Ireland

Educational establishments need to think in new ways and provide new skills and training through educational reform. Agriculture is becoming much more multi-functional and the skills needed to address this are changing. This necessitates change in education to provide people with the social, economic and cultural skills needed for the future. This applies not only to young people, but also to the wider community where there is a clear need to see learning as a life-long experience.

Rural areas are not homogenous and education provision needs to adapt in order to train and upskill people both in agriculture and broader rural business innovations. This should be done in collaboration between different types of providers and be driven by the needs of local people, businesses, networks and communities.

« Addressing change and multifunctional agriculture is essential but we must recognise that rural areas are not homogenous? »



Innovative solutions to education in Italian inner areas

Daniela Luisi
National Strategy for Inner
Areas, Italy

One of the key challenges in most Italian rural areas is educating young people. Small class sizes, high teacher turnover and skills shortage amongst teachers endanger the standards of education, creating inequality of opportunity for children in rural areas.

The Inner Areas Strategy is tackling this through ideas such as introducing new methods and approaches (also in multi-age classes), organisational change and teacher training. Students are involved in practical experiences, working and learning in the community. New methods enable the development of more cultural skills, building links between inner areas and educational quality centres. Schools are built with architectural innovations, creating spaces that encourage learning. The approach is participative, involving all levels of government and crucially the students have a voice and are empowered to make choices.

« We ask: How do you imagine your future in your area? »

MAIN OUTCOMES FROM THE DISCUSSIONS

- **Soft skills matter.** Change-coping skills – such as creativity / flexibility / adaptability / empathy / communication / collaboration – need to be valued and developed.
- **Education systems must become more flexible and adapted** to the diversity of specific needs of rural communities (demand and supply).
- **Improve the local skills match** with a view to meeting future needs. Timing is essential.
- **Lifelong learning is key.** Teaching people how to learn. Both academic and vocational education need to be valued. Rural stakeholders should be more involved.
- **Teaching teachers, training mentors and facilitators** is important – peer-to-peer learning is a good method.
- **Gender stereotypes** must be overcome.

More information at <https://enrd.ec.europa.eu> & <http://www.oecd.org/rural/rural-development-conference/>