

NEWSLETTER 2

Interview with [Jim Soulsby](#) (University of Leicester, UK), ForAge Network Facilitator



Anna: Jim, what was the genesis of ForAge?

Jim: I have worked in this area for over 25 years and in that time I have observed so many wonderful, inventive and fascinating learning programmes involving older people. It is impossible to keep them all in your head! I believed that other people should know about the work being undertaken, how it happened, what were the difficulties and successes, and how older people were involved in making it all happen. Obviously over the years things repeated themselves and I always thought it a shame that there was no way of gathering together all these experiences so we could use them to help with future developments, not only in anticipating or overcoming difficulties, but in utilising all that expertise to assist. I have always believed that we would be more successful and able to sustain what we do if we could collaborate better with others.

Whilst I was at the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) in England working on “Older and Bolder” I tried to develop a database of (good) practice to better record all that I and my colleagues observed or had brought to our attention. I attempted to launch this database across the membership of the European Age Platform. My participation in numerous European programmes, conferences and exchanges had brought to my attention lots of educational activities right across Europe. In recent years, through seeking the advice of all those European partners and collaborating with others in a Grundtvig training programme, I came to realise that there was an opportunity to try to bring together all of

this magnificent work over recent years. Thus, ForAge was born.

Anna: What do you want ForAge to achieve during the project lifetime?

Jim: My main dream is that ForAge will continue after three years, that we will have created an Internet-based facility for sharing information that is accessible to all and is dependable – a sort of Google for later-life learning in Europe. So over the next three years we have to make ourselves known, and we have to increase the number of countries engaged. We need to see how we can sustain the work and obviously deliver on all the things we said we would do.

Anna: Where would you like ForAge to be in three years’ time?

Jim: I think I may have already answered that, but in three years’ time we need to show the number of countries we work with as associate partners, the range of partners, the very varied enquiries we deal with, the debates we have created and the results of issues we have pursued. Our achievements will not only be numerical – they will be quantitative but also qualitative. That will include being able to prove our influence – our role must be more than reactive but proactive – anticipating issues, creating debate, asking questions, encouraging research, seeking data and relevant statistics.

Anna: How should our network perform in order to make us more visible and more efficient?

Jim: We are unique, and we must remain unique. We have to show that we wish to share and collaborate. We must show other networks, partnerships and projects that we are not competition but that we wish to assist in dissemination and in making an impact. We must be seen as complementary and also as an agency that can bring people, projects, sectors, disciplines and countries together. And of course we must appear essential – that the world cannot do without us!

Our main tool will be the website but we will also need to draw in our own networks, contacts, policy makers, funders, educators and relevant others. We must think of ForAge in all our work, and not just when we feel we need to promote the project or to undertake our various tasks in the work packages.

Anna: Thank you very much Jim.

The project ForAge has been funded with support from the European Commission.

This publication reflects the views only of the authors and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

August 2012