

Northern Ireland Brexit Hackathon



Introduction

“At the PPMA Annual Conference in 2017 we asked our membership which areas that they would like us to focus on in a new Research Programme. Unsurprisingly Brexit was a key topic. As we discussed with Board members, key sponsors and other stakeholders, we realised that most of the research was focused on telling us what we already knew. And most of what we already knew, was that we didn’t know that much!

As we mulled on the topic, we realised that we had a real opportunity to give our members and friends in the HR & OD community working across the Irish Border a real opportunity to contribute.

Democracy is a messy, noisy and increasingly unpredictable business with life impacting consequences. None more so for this wonderful part of the world. Whilst the rest of the UK has a whole range of considerations, the particular political sensitivities in relation to the border are undoubtedly deserving of extra consideration.

PPMA works closely with the Local Government Staff Commission and we have a thriving community of HR & OD professionals here. We were delighted when both parties agreed to support our work. Additionally, and because it is important to get a range of inputs, we invited practitioners from the Healthcare, Higher Education and Housing Association sectors.

We wanted to conduct research that was practical, action oriented and which identified outcomes that we could commit to measure over the short and the longer term. And so in early October we travelled to Craigavon with our research sponsor Matrix SCM to undertake our first research Hackathon.

We are delighted with our initial output – our Craigavon Compact. It sets out 6 actions, that as a group, we will continue to work on together. Whilst these outcomes are important, what we do not underestimate are the other benefits from the day. New relationships, new perspectives, sharing and learning our own unique and common challenges.

We are grateful for the hospitality shown to us by Craigavon Civic Centre, our existing friends at LGSC and the new friends we made that day. Brexit will be a part of our collective professional lives for some time to come and we are proud of the work we have started together.

We will return to Northern Ireland in April 2019 to assess what progress we have been able to make.”

— **Karen Grave**, President of the PPMA and **Chris Grimes**, Sales Director, Matrix SCM



Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Lorna Parsons and Lisa O’Neill from the Local Government Staff Commission for Northern Ireland for hosting this Hackathon.

Additionally, we would like to thank the Staff at Craigavon Civil Centre for their hospitality.

Finally, we want to thank our fantastic research participants. Each and every one of them participated in an event that was not only new to PPMA, but new to them. The credit for this work sits with them and we are committed to ensuring we follow up on a regular basis to see what progress we are making on our commitments.

Our participants are:

- Lorna Parsons, Local Government Staff Commission for Northern Ireland
- Lisa O’Neill, Local Government Staff Commission for Northern Ireland
- Ann Newland, Ulster University
- Claire Nevin, Ulster University
- Paul Davidson, Ulster University
- Thelma Browne, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
- Alison McCullagh, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
- Heather Currie, Housing Executive
- Ray McEvoy, Queen’s University of Belfast
- Geraldine Dyson, Mid Ulster District Council
- Bobby Moseley, Matrix SCM
- Leatham Green, Interim Executive Director at the PPMA (*facilitating our event*)



The Craigavon Compact

We provide more detail of how we conducted the research later in this report. Our initial starting question was What are the workforce opportunities created by Brexit for organisations working alongside the Irish Border?

After lively debate, we developed six recommendations that will be shared with relevant authorities and stakeholders. It is our intention to proactively champion these requirements throughout the Brexit negotiation period and beyond, in order that the voice of the HR & OD community is heard in remaining debates.

We do not expect that this will be a short-term process. Rather, we anticipate that the long term impacts of Brexit will take time to manifest. HR & OD colleagues have an enormous contribution to make in discussions around the impact this will have on our workforces. Our six recommendations are as follows.



Facilitating Organisational Resilience

Brexit provides an opportunity to enable the workforce in Northern Ireland do more than 'survive'. Conditions could be introduced that would enable the workforce to thrive and flourish through the introduction of Apprenticeships (as exists in the rest of the UK); incentives and scholarships to target skills gaps and hard to recruit to professions; positive work placements; and formalise flexible working.



A Positive Migration System

There are around 30,000 workers who flex between north and south of the boarder everyday for work. No other part of the UK experiences this migration of EU workers and it is an essential part of the local economy. Pragmatism and creativity therefore needs to prevail and tailor a solution that is relevant for the local people rather than distant politicians. Arrangements could be facilitated to enable the local economy to retain EU workers in special skills and hard-to-fill professions.



Enhance Tourism - Maximising Employment and Investment Opportunities

One of the major changes that Northern Ireland has experienced over the past 20 years is the growth of tourism which has brought wealth and employment opportunities benefiting local communities. The ease of flow between North and South has generated a flux of international tourists which needs to be maintained. Lobbying is required for greater investment in public transport and the associated infrastructure that would maintain this momentum. There is a real opportunity to highlight Northern Ireland as a destination of choice for both local and international tourists.



Special Status for Northern Ireland relating to Employment and Investment

The region has experienced some of the highest levels of unemployment and social deprivation in the past and it is something that cannot result again post Brexit. It is suggested that Northern Ireland be established as a region of 'special status' attracting investment, targeted incentives for organisations/businesses to remain in the North.



Positively Address Skills Shortage

The key consideration is to maintain the free movement of people in the region and open up the opportunity for EU workers to address the skills gap through flexibility in professional visas. An agreed and fluid Occupational Shortage List could be developed and long term strategies developed to enable the region to be self-sufficient.



Develop a Northern Ireland Lobbying Task Force

The Task Force – essential given the absence of the Northern Ireland Assembly would be charged with positively lobbying for funding for the region to replace the resources that are currently provided by the EU and would positively support the implementation of the above Themes. For example Northern Ireland does not benefit from the Apprenticeship levy – one simple example of an immediate change that can be made to create a positive outcome.

This Compact, agreed by all delegates is an effective contribution for those directly involved in Brexit negotiations and developing and implementing the UK transition plan.

The Why, What and Hopes of a Hackathon

When we discussed the potential options for this piece of research with our partner Matrix, we considered what method of research would deliver the most effective result. That decision ultimately was driven through our initial engagement with LGSC colleagues.

Hackathons first became evident in the computing industry and were creative problem-solving events. Over time, the approach has been adopted for business situations to encourage collaborative working, with a key focus on delivering outcomes over a short period of time whilst allowing participants to think freely, without constraints. So, from a business perspective, Hackathons offer an alternative to the traditional approach of conducting research.

This, together with the desire to give voice to professionals who will be dealing with the workforce implications of Brexit for year to come and a desire to propose practical solutions meant that the Hackathon approach was easily the right approach for us.

Before we embarked on the 'formal' Hackathon, we explored our participants 'hopes' post Brexit. The included practical issues such as clarity about life beyond March 2019; a sense of purpose and optimism; that the current ease of movement is not diminished; politicians deliver against their promises which are clear and positive.

Hopes also extended through to the idea that everyone north and south of the border had an Irish passport; there is no escalation of nationalism; a recession is not a by-product; job opportunities continue to grow and the atmosphere of acceptance and tolerance that has emerged over the past 20 years continues to grow and flourish.

In order to establish the conditions to generate the momentum required to deliver against these hopes it was strongly felt that the re-establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly was imperative – its absence is in substantial part responsible for the lack of opportunities for local communities to express their hopes for a post Brexit outcome that will fulfil the hopes identified.

The Hackathon itself followed a 5-step process:

- Step 1 - Setting the question
- Step 2 - Identifying ideas
- Step 3 - Refining the proposition
- Step 4 - Presenting the solution
- Step 5 - Committing to the outcome

In addition to our recommendations we saw a number of additional themes emerging.

Additional Findings

There are some additional points we want to note.

We were surprised by how little engagement there had been with public service employers in Northern Ireland. The overwhelming view of our participants laid the reason for this at the door of the collapse of the devolved Northern Ireland Assembly in 2017. Almost 2 years later, the Assembly is still unable to function and make the full range of devolved decisions. The consensus of our participants is that this has substantially hampered the ability of public service organisations to play a meaningful role in the negotiating process.

Given that this has been highlighted as one of the major stumbling blocks on Brexit negotiations this is clearly counter intuitive. Given that our profession recognises the substantial impact effective employee engagement has on workforce outcomes, it's entirely logical to assume that the same principal applies to political engagement.

For all of our attendees, the Hackathon had been the only opportunity that had been offered for them to express any opinion about the impact of Brexit; let alone put forward ideas about how we could look for the opportunities Brexit may offer. That left us feeling profoundly frustrated at a professional level, but also sad on a human level.

The other strong message that emerged related to the joy that local communities have come to experience since the Peace agreement which essentially saw the abandonment of a hard border. The 300 plus miles of border between

Northern and Southern Ireland is not linear. Participants described the normal reality that travelling from home to work for many people means crossing two different countries. Imagine the chaos and uproar if for example, residents of Suffolk and Norfolk or Surrey and Hampshire had to navigate border control?

Whilst not a participant in the day, one of our taxi drivers for the day shared with us that his children who are 20 and 21 have never known a 'troubled Ireland' but just the joy of travelling freely between connected communities. That this freedom could well be impacted by the Brexit negotiations was a matter of real anxiety for all of our colleagues. It left a number of people feeling that national and internal politics was essentially playing a game with people.

Perhaps the most pleasing outcome from the day is the new relationships that the Hackathon had enabled. Public service is a huge sector and it is sometimes the case that cross sector relationships are difficult and time consuming to establish and maintain. We have no doubt that our event was an opportunity on a small scale to develop relationships that will build bridges, develop shared understanding and encourage a collaborative approach to solving future workforce challenges.



Matrix SCM's software CR.Net automates the end-to-end process of procuring agency staffing services, from requesting a worker through to supplier payment. We provide our customers with a more streamlined ordering process; giving a more controlled, transparent and compliant way to engage agency staff.

Neutral Vendor Managed Service

Matrix SCM is a genuine neutral vendor provider. This means that we do not supply temporary workers directly, and therefore do not compete with other recruitment agencies; providing customers with the most competitive and robust supply chain possible.

Our neutral vendor model enables our customers to achieve significant savings, greater control and achieve 100% compliance across their agency staffing spend.

Blended 'Hybrid' Managed Service

Our blended hybrid approach allows customers to further tailor our approach to cater for requirements across 'Generic', 'Specialist' and 'Interim' job categories. Matrix SCM's hybrid model is built around your organisation's exact recruitment needs meaning no one solution looks the same.

We provide a specific 'Recruitment Pathway' according to the exact needs of each hiring manager – assisting our customers in finding best fit candidates in a manner that best suits their way of working.


Software as a Service (SaaS)


CR.Net is Matrix SCM's proprietary web-based technology application that automates the end-to-end process of procuring temporary, interim and permanent staff. CR.Net enables our customers to order and review candidates, manage timesheets and supplier payment, receive management information, and effectively manage the supply chain.

Customers who partner with Matrix under a SaaS model, simply pay an annual licence fee for the software and can then decide which if any professional services they wish to purchase from Matrix. Our SaaS customers retain a direct contractual relationship with their suppliers and have the ability to run a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS).


Measures of Success


 **Increased Candidate Choice**
We supply at least 3 candidates for each role

 **100% Compliance**
All agency workers engaged through us are pre-employment checked before a placement begins

 **Fulfilment**
All candidates must meet quality standards as defined by Hiring Managers

 **Increased Candidate Quality**
All candidates must meet quality standards as defined by Hiring Managers

 **Cost Savings**
We guarantee to deliver our customers cashable savings on agency spend

 **Customer Process**
A faster, more efficient end-to-end recruitment process



Scan Here



**The Local Government Staff
Commission for Northern Ireland**