Economic Recovery Group

> CASE STUDY: FORTH VALLEY

ERG PROGRAMME – PHASE 1

Piloting the role of Forth Valley College being at the heart of planning and driving regional economic development.

Partners

- Forth Valley College

- Clackmannanshire Council, Falkirk Council, Stirling Council

- ADL, Codebase, Diageo, Forth Ports, Grahams the Family Dairy and Ineos

- Forth Valley for Net Zero, Forth Environment Link

- Scottish Enterprise, NatureScot and SEPA

Note: the College already had long established links with many of these partners and the ERG discussions were reflective of its wider collaborative work led by the Chair and the Principal

Focus

The ERG Programme emerged from the pilot work undertaken by Forth Valley College within its regional economy and helped to set it in the context of the emerging national picture across other regions.

The ERG conversations took place against the backdrop of the College's central role in the design, development and delivery of the landmark event *"Revitalising the Forth Valley Regional Economy"*, the first ever event of this nature across this particular functional economic geography – you can view it here;

Part 1 – https://vimeo.com/688006264
Part 2 – https://vimeo.com/688053005

This work helped to form the bedrock of the ERG approach, acting as a test bed for a college's engagement in its regional economy, it's positioning with partner anchor institutions, local organisations and national agencies alike.

It's also worth noting that given the relationship of the Chair and Principal of the College in Forth Valley, in a similar way to that which existed in Ayrshire, and working with the SMT, much of the internal preparation work for the ERG's four stages of engagement was already well under way.

The advanced stage of development of the regional economic agenda in Forth Valley College enabled the ERG programme team and the senior leadership team (SLT) to move straight to exploring the tertiary sector's contribution to regional economic renewal.

Success Factors

1. Supporting Forth Valley College to assess its work at the heart of the regional economy within the national context and as a benchmark of what other colleges are doing in this area.

2. Understanding the mechanisms for strengthening relationships with a range of other key stakeholders in the Forth Valley regional economy, drawn from across the private, public and social sectors.

3. Helping to position Forth Valley College and its work in the regional economy and at the heart of the ERG programme to be at the leading edge of the sector's efforts to deliver the aims of the National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET).

Brief Description

The ERG programme team worked with the College to deepen the appreciation and understanding of its significant contribution to the priorities of the Enterprise and Skills Review, including the drive for national economic coherence and the enabling of robust regional economic diversity. In doing so the ERG programme team worked with the College to reflect and assess the varying roles it now needs to play in delivering on these key themes as reaffirmed by the Scottish Government's National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET)

The ERG work with Forth Valley College to date has principally been driven through the strategic partnership of the Chair and the Principal, offering the opportunity for an open and honest reflective conversation about progress, particularly relative to other colleges and how they are now working within and across their respective regional economies.

Challenges and Solutions

Given that the College has been at the forefront of regional economic development across the Forth Valley for many years helping to support national agencies, other regional anchor institutions and local organisations to play their part, there is inevitably a continuing challenge to maintaining momentum, particularly when key personnel change.

There is a quiet expectation that the College as a regional anchor institution with a solid footprint in each of the three local authority areas, can continue to offer a 'neutral and safe' space to help curate collaborations across the functional economic geography.

The College's recognised convening power also plays vertically, as well as horizontally, through the regional economic ecosystem, e.g. in the form of its very well integrated links with schools and universities, often the start and end point of a young person's first route along their Learner Journey through primary, secondary and tertiary education.

For example, with some 1200 school pupils, drawn from all 3 local authorities within the Forth Valley region, attending the College at any given time, and a growing number of students participating in the college-university "2 + 2s", there is a real sense of this integrated approach to learning, teaching and training becoming an integral part of the functional economic geography.

The development and nurture of apprenticeships, along with the 2 + 2 curricular model for degrees is beginning to reflect other economies and their twin track approach to vocational and academic options, with an increasingly flexible approach to cross-curricular activity, e.g. sports students supporting construction colleagues with fitness routines to start the day on site.

"The ERG project has helped align our strategic objective for regional economic recovery alongside a more coherent national context and has supported our industrial stakeholders to better understand our role as an anchor institution and catalyst for economic and environmental sustainability."

Professor Ken Thomson OBE, Principal, Forth Valley College.

Also, given the dynamic nature of the College's relationship with its industrial partners, the active role of the College in policy development and formulation has been welcomed through innovative programmes such as *Fuel Change*. This has developed into the national low carbon challenge series supported directly by the Scottish Government and engaged by companies, large and small, from all across Scotland's economy.

Given the scale of the apprenticeship offering at Forth Valley, driven by the development of relationships with the regional economic base, e.g. the industrial complex at Grangemouth, it could be said that Forth Valley College is positioning itself as the 'national centre of expertise' in industrial partnerships for apprentices.

Impact

The college leadership has ensured that regional economic development is central to their newly published strategy.

The information provided through the work with the ERG Programme has strengthened the context for its engagement in helping to develop the Regional Economic Strategy. This work has also contributed to a better understanding by a range of stakeholders of the role of the college in regional economic development.

The creation of a regional economic development role, due in no small part to the development of this agenda, has generated significant interest.

Moving Forward/Next Steps

The College will continue to develop its role, relationships and impact across the regional economy of the Forth Valley, leading on the development of key elements of what is likely to become the Regional Economic Strategy.

The College will also seek to play a key role in the development of the Regional Economic Partnership, building upon the many excellent relationships it has created and curated across the private, public and social sectors.

The College is likely to host (physically and virtually, as opposed to wholly digitally) the annual 'state of the regional economy' event, which it so successfully curated earlier this year.

The College noted that hosting the event would maintain its position as a leader in the regional economy and as an anchor institution. They recognised the importance of the event in providing stakeholders and participants with a comprehensive understanding of the individual contribution which the college has created in delivering for the economic ecosystem of Forth Valley.

Contacts and links

For further information on the ERG Programme please contact Paul Smart at:
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The ERG website can be viewed at:
www.cdn.ac.uk/economic-recovery-group

cdn
College Development Network

www.cdn.ac.uk