

## First Event for Northern Ireland's New Public Policy Think Tank 30 September 2019

Pivotal – Northern Ireland's new public policy think tank – held its first event in Belfast today (Monday 30th September).

The newly established organisation was welcomed at an event at Queen's University Belfast, which was attended by representatives from both the public and private sectors as well as politicians, academics, educationalists and students, and featured the unveiling of new research by Professor Tony Gallagher entitled 'Education, Equality and the Economy'.

Pivotal is a new venture created to provide Northern Ireland with an independent policy forum dedicated to developing long-term evidence-based thinking, contributing substantially to public debate and developing new policy networks to meet Northern Ireland's needs.

Directed by Ann Watt, formerly Head of the Electoral Commission in Northern Ireland, Pivotal is supported by a broad coalition of interests, and has an academic partnership with both Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University.

Ann Watt said, "Think tanks are commonplace in other parts of the UK and they play a fundamental role in shaping and informing policy. Pivotal now occupies an important space – one which was much needed in Northern Ireland.

Ms Watt added, "Pivotal is independent and non-political. It is focussed on developing evidence-based ideas and policies to improve our society, economy and public services, and in involving a wider range of people in policy debate. We are grateful to the many individuals and partners, including both Queen's and Ulster University, which support Pivotal and I hope that our work will benefit public life in Northern Ireland."

Professor Ian Greer, President and Vice-Chancellor of Queen's University Belfast, said, "At Queen's we are committed to world-class research in both global and local contexts. In a Northern Ireland context, our academics endeavour to find research-rich, evidence-based answers to local questions. Pivotal's purpose resonates deeply with us at Queen's and that is why we are pleased to support this new public policy forum in terms of funding as well as academic input."

Professor Paddy Nixon, Vice-Chancellor and President of Ulster University said: "Providing independent research to support evidence based policy is a critical part of the work of universities. For Ulster University, this is our civic responsibility and our work with Pivotal will ensure that Northern Ireland benefits from public policy that is informed by the world leading research being carried out by our staff on a daily basis."

### **New research launched – 'Education, Equality and the Economy' by Professor Tony Gallagher**

<http://www.qub.ac.uk/public-engagement/pivotal/>

The event included the launch of new independent research by Tony Gallagher, Professor of Education at Queen's University Belfast, which highlighted the limitations of education strategy during the period of devolved government.

Professor Gallagher is considered one of the world's leading academic experts on the role of education in divided societies.

Professor Gallagher's research examined recent trends, including changes in enrolment patterns and achievement gaps. He highlighted the important role of education in contributing to the skills base of society and hence the economy, and individual opportunity and mobility. But he also argued that education needs to give higher priority to social and community divisions.

Professor Gallagher said that "responsibility for education is split across two government departments, and a host of 'arms-length' bodies and interest groups, but there is a lack of joined-up thinking and joined-up action to tackle persistent challenges". As part of his latest research, he suggested potential solutions:

"We need a grander vision of what we want all our young people to gain from the years they spend in education and to recognise that this requires a more joined-up approach by government and other stakeholders.

"We need better data in order to understand the routes young people take through education and provide better advice on opportunities and outcomes.

"We need a commitment to refocus attention on the shocking inequalities arising from social background that are a persistent feature of our education system."

### **Ends**

## **Media contacts**

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