

# *Equal at Work Project*

Building an Irish labour market based on equality and diversity



*A Dublin Employment Pact Initiative*  
Review 2005-2007



Hibernian Consulting

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promoting employability, the business  
spirit and equal opportunities and  
investing in human resources



Pictured: Philip O'Connor, Director, Dublin Employment Pact

# Foreword

*Equal at Work* was the largest single project implemented by Dublin Employment Pact (DEP) since it was founded in 1998 - over two rounds it attracted funding from the EU, national government and partner bodies of nearly €4m. It has also been one of the most successful DEP projects. The DEP aims to impact on the labour market across the Dublin Region and across all sectors, and the resources made available to it under EQUAL gave it the chance to make a major intervention on this scale for the first time.

The thinking behind DEP engagement with the EQUAL Programme was to exploit the conditions of the economic boom to try to rectify some imbalances in the Dublin labour market, and particularly to try to widen access to jobs and mobility in jobs for people with poor formal qualifications or who were otherwise disadvantaged in the labour market.

Over 50 organisations were involved in *Equal at Work*, from all sectors, notably the private sector, the health services, the local authorities, and the community sector. A unique partnership of interests from all of these sectors met regularly to discuss issues arising from the project. Through each sector there were also key "mainstreaming" organisations involved, who could take the learning from particular projects and actions and promote these across whole sectors. They included, in particular, the Health Service Executive (and HSE Employers Agency), the Local Government Management Services Board, the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development, trade union bodies (ICTU, SIPTU, IMPACT) and other key bodies. Through *Equal at Work* we also created new organisations, notably in the community sector, where the trade union organisation of that sector under the project and the establishment of the Community Sector Employers Forum will facilitate that sector finally being brought into the modern system of social partnership in Ireland.

Hibernian Consulting has accompanied the project from the start in a process of critical, formative evaluation. This interactive method of project evaluation enabled corrective measures to be taken during the project itself and greatly strengthened the process of learning and development. The *Equal at Work* team greatly appreciated the objective and positively critical role of Hibernian Consulting throughout the project and the learning which it has now extracted from that process for this final report. For that, and for the excellence of their work throughout, we heartily thank them, particularly Finbar McDonnell who led the evaluation team. On behalf of Dublin Employment Pact we would like to thank the many people who contributed to making *Equal at Work* an outstanding and successful project.



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David Connolly  
**Chair**  
*Equal at Work*  
Development Partnership



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Philip O'Connor  
**Director**  
Dublin Employment Pact



Pictured: Minister for Innovation Policy, Michael Ahern TD with Karen Reid and Caroline Byrne, Dublin Employment Pact.

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# Executive Summary

## *Context for Equal at Work*

The *Equal at Work* project was designed in early-2005, following a decade of strong Irish economic growth. With the economy moving towards full employment, labour shortages had emerged in some sectors and migrant workers had begun travelling to Ireland for the first time. As labour costs gradually increased, there was an increased need for the economy to re-position as a 'learning' or 'knowledge' economy, underpinned by best practice HR policies. The previous years had also seen the introduction of several new pieces of equality legislation.

In this context, a consultation process undertaken by the Dublin Employment Pact identified a desire by organisations in different sectors of the Dublin economy (private, public and community) to pilot actions in relation to equality and diversity. Private companies wanted to attract more workers and retain existing staff, public sector organisations needed to meet the requirements of the new legislation, and compete for staff in a tight labour market, and community organisations wanted to use the strong economy to build opportunities for groups that often faced labour market discrimination, and to improve conditions in the community sector itself.

Since 2005, a number of further Irish empirical studies have supported the case for equality and diversity in organisations. Studies by the ESRI and by Dublin City University show that equality and diversity policies reduce staff turnover, increase innovation and increase labour productivity. However, a 2007 survey by Chambers Ireland, in the context of the EU Year of Equal Opportunities for All, showed that only a minority of Irish organisations have as yet integrated a focus on equality and diversity into their HR and other policies.

### The *Equal at Work* Project

The Dublin Employment Pact identified almost 50 organisations as partners for the *Equal at Work* project, including two of the Dublin local authorities, five hospitals, and a range of large and small companies and community sector organisations.

*Equal at Work* operated under the EU EQUAL programme, which funded 22 projects in Ireland between 2005 and 2007. The programme was designed by the European Commission to be a 'learning platform' and a 'laboratory' in terms of tackling discrimination and inequality in relation to the labour market. Projects funded under EQUAL could not be implemented by a single organisation but required 'Development Partnerships' to come together for their implementation. Project actions had to be innovative and a transnational dimension was required.

*Equal at Work* received €1.4m in funding from the EQUAL programme to which was added, over its lifetime, a further approximately €1.1m in match funding from its partner organisations.

The project's Action Plan, prepared in the second quarter of 2005, stated that *Equal at Work* would not focus directly on supporting groups which experience labour market discrimination. Instead its primary focus was on changing and improving HR systems and processes within organisations, so as to effect longer-term change. In this way, the longer-term effect on the end target groups could be maximised.



## Key outcomes of *Equal at Work*

The work of the project took place through four 'clusters' and key outputs from the clusters are listed in the following paragraphs.

The **private sector cluster** saw the following pilot actions and outputs:

- Equality reviews were undertaken by three companies: Irish Life and Permanent, Meteor Mobile Communications and Jurys Inns Hotel Group. These involved audits of existing policies in relation to equality and diversity and both quantitative and qualitative research with workers in the companies. The reviews led to detailed action plans being prepared in each case which led, for example, to changes in the online application process in Irish Life and Permanent, to a revised policy on flexible working in Meteor and to revised job descriptions and a training module for managers in Jurys Inns. At the Jurys Inns Custom House, where the action was piloted, staff turnover fell sharply between 2006 and 2007, following the equality review;
- Disability training was delivered to the workers of the Educational Building Society, the company's training manual was updated as regards disability and work was undertaken to upgrade the accessibility of the EBS headquarters;
- A software tool ('Decisionpath') was developed by eircom to guide line managers in all parts of the company in making HR decisions for their staff. The aim was to ensure that managers took account of the nuances of the decision making process, making better decisions, while reducing the burden of decision making that falls on the central HR function. The tool, which was piloted in three divisions of the company in 2007, for eight HR policy areas, also provides an improved electronic record of HR decisions.

The following pilot actions were undertaken in the **health sector cluster**:

- An equality review was undertaken in the Adelaide & Meath Hospital, incorporating the National Children's Hospital, with a particular focus on older workers. This action led to the development and delivery of an 'Options for Me' programme in the hospital and was timely in that the HSE issued guidelines on the recruitment and retention of older workers in 2007;
- Equality reviews were undertaken in St. James's Hospital and in Stewarts Hospital. The former led to new staff training modules being developed in relation to equality, disability and multi-cultural work teams. In both of these hospitals, the reviews have led to competency-based recruitment;
- Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown and the HSE North East worked to promote excellence in the multi-cultural work teams which are becoming the norm in the Irish health sector. The work included actions in Local Health Offices and in a community unit for older persons in north County Dublin. The action led to new training modules being piloted in relation to intercultural working and diversity management. A new English language training module was piloted and a 'buddy system' for non-Irish workers was introduced on a pilot basis in three Local Health Offices;
- The Children's University Hospital, Temple Street reviewed how the concept of 'universal accessibility' would affect its building. This standard (that buildings should be accessible to everyone, regardless of ability) is higher than the standard in the current Irish building regulations. A universal accessibility audit was undertaken on the hospital, which identified a range of actions to be undertaken to reach the standard. Some of these were implemented in 2007 and the hospital also produced an access handbook for other health sector organisations, which it hopes will inform planning for the proposed new National Children's Hospital.

Two actions were undertaken in *Equal at Work's* **local authority cluster**:

- In the context of national efforts to promote the social inclusion of Travellers, South Dublin County Council undertook a number of actions relating to the training and employment of young Traveller men and women. Training programmes linked to the Council's Parks Department were implemented in Tallaght and Clondalkin and work placements were organised for Travellers wishing to work as Clerical Officers. By late-2007, eight Travellers were employed with South Dublin County Council on a permanent basis, another 15 were employed on a non-permanent basis (including in an anti-graffiti team) and 14 young people from the Traveller community had undertaken Summer work placements in 2007. The action also led to strengthened relationships with local secondary schools as regards Traveller education;
- Dublin City Council focused its action on outdoor workers with the Council. This cohort of workers had expressed an interest in applying for promotional opportunities, but many workers lacked the confidence to do so. Through engaging directly with the workers, the Council developed an accessible interview skills pack for outdoor workers. Some 2,000 copies of this pack were distributed to Council workers in 2007.

The **community sector cluster** of *Equal at Work* based its actions on evidence that the pay and conditions of workers in the community sector lagged well behind those in the private and public sectors of the economy. It undertook three actions to try to bring about longer-term change in this situation:

- The project engaged with the SIPTU and IMPACT trade unions to encourage them to increase their membership in the community sector. A joint trade union campaign in this regard was launched in Liberty Hall in November 2006 and led to several thousand new trade union members from the sector in the following year. Both unions made organisational changes in 2007 to cater for this growth and a joint e-bulletin was produced by the unions in mid-2007 to support the campaign, facilitated by *Equal at Work*;
- There has traditionally been no organisation which speaks for employers in the community sector and the project established a Community Sector Employers' Forum in 2007 to fill this gap. By late-2007, the body had been established on a legal basis and had over 80 members. It had begun a process of engagement with trade unions on issues of mutual concern;
- The fragmented nature of the community sector, and the small size of many organisations, means they do not have access to HR expertise. HR policies may not therefore represent best practice. To address this issue, *Equal at Work* established an Employer Resource Bureau website in 2007 ([www.erb.ie](http://www.erb.ie)) to provide a central point of information on HR good practice for the community sector. The site received over 7,000 visits in its first six months of operation and two electronic updates were sent (free of charge) in the second half of 2007 to organisations which subscribed to this service.

In total, 15 pilot actions were implemented across the four *Equal at Work* sectoral clusters. This means that the project successfully achieved its objectives as set out in its 2005 Action Plan.

## Project Organisation and Transnational Work

*Equal at Work* was overseen by a Management Committee and a full-time Project Manager. Actions were implemented through the four sectoral clusters. The 50 or so DP members were invited to participate in any cluster of their choice. This structure worked well as the clusters focused on implementing the actions and the Management Committee took responsibility for financial matters and overall mainstreaming work. The cluster structure maintained a high level of involvement from DP organisations over the 30-month lifespan of the project.

The project had transnational partners from Germany, Hungary, Poland and Spain, with the five partners known as the InterFAIR Network. The transnational work led to a report on approaches to the employment of older workers in the five countries as well as a structured exchange of learning in a number of further areas. In addition, *Equal at Work* facilitated contact between the Solidarity trade union and Irish trade unions as regards the situation of Polish workers in Ireland, and between projects in Dublin and Madrid as regards supporting women who have been victims of trafficking, for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

A good partnership also developed with the WINS EQUAL project in Belfast which led to a joint report on supports for women entering non-traditional occupations, and three joint seminars. Links were developed through the project between the local authorities, public transport companies and hospitals in Belfast and Dublin.

## Taking Forward the Learning from *Equal at Work*

*Equal at Work* successfully incorporated the principles of the EQUAL programme into its work: partnership, linkage with the European Employment Strategy, empowerment, innovation, dissemination and mainstreaming, and transnationality. In particular, the project worked well in identifying, and successfully implementing, a number of highly innovative actions.

Given the importance of dissemination and mainstreaming in EQUAL, the project completed much of its implementation work by early-2007, allowing for a good deal of work during 2007 to identify 'homes' for project learning. By late-2007, the Dublin Employment Pact had put in place a number of strategic relationships to carry the work of the project forward:

- It plans to work with the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development, and with business representative bodies, to take forward the private sector learning;
- It was sharing the learning arising from the six equality reviews, and from a comparative study of the reviews commissioned by the project, with the Equality Authority in late-2007 to inform future equality reviews in Ireland;
- It plans to maintain relations with the HSE National HR Directorate and the HSE Employers Agency to communicate the learning arising from the five health sector actions, and to extend this work to further hospitals and HSE areas;
- It will assist the Local Government Management Services Board in continuing to disseminate the outcomes of the local authority actions to further local authorities – a number have expressed an interest in replicating the model developed as regards Traveller employment;
- The SIPTU and IMPACT trade unions plan to continue their campaign to raise trade union membership in the community sector;
- The Dublin Employment Pact itself was reviewing options to see how it could continue to support the Community Sector Employers Forum and the Employer Resource Bureau, at least through 2008.

As such, there are solid plans to support the sustainability of key *Equal at Work* actions. However, there is also potential learning for other private, public and community sector organisations from the work of the project.

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An innovative aspect of the project was its process, facilitated by the Dublin Employment Pact, which brought together small and large organisations from different sectors of the Dublin regional economy: private companies, hospitals and other health sector organisations, local authorities, and community sector organisations. The project created a 'space' where organisations could work together to pursue innovative actions and where barriers between the different sectors were reduced. Such 'spaces', which facilitate structured cross-sectoral work and learning, are unusual in an Irish context.

EQUAL projects in Ireland end in December 2007. This review of one EQUAL project shows the value of specific EU and government funding for innovative projects, managed on a partnership basis, where there is a remit to document and disseminate learning arising. It shows that the European Commission's plan for EQUAL to be 'a laboratory' for new ideas in relation to the labour market was, at least in this instance, successful.

This summary has presented some key information on *Equal at Work*. As the project comes to an end, forecasts indicate that the strong Irish economic and employment growth of the past 12 or so years will slow in 2008-2010. Given the evidence that good equality and diversity policies reduce staff turnover, increase innovation and increase productivity, this reinforces the business case for Irish organisations, in all sectors, to adopt the learning arising from the *Equal at Work* project.

Further information on *Equal at Work* is contained in the full report. A range of project outputs is available from the Dublin Employment Pact website – at [www.dublinpact.ie](http://www.dublinpact.ie)

Chapter 1:

Introduction

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## 1.1 The *Equal at Work* Project

*Equal at Work* was an initiative of the Dublin Employment Pact. The Pact was established in 1998 and its main work is in the area of the labour market. The Dublin Employment Pact promotes ideas and actions to support employment, and better quality employment, and to combat labour market exclusion. It has a mandate to work across the Greater Dublin Area and acts as an umbrella organisation to bring together large and small organisations from the public, private and community sectors. As well as working with labour market issues, the Pact addresses related social issues such as urban disadvantage, early school leaving and social exclusion.

*Equal at Work* ran from mid-2005 to end-2007 and had a budget of €2.5m, of which 55% was supplied by the EU EQUAL Initiative and 45% constituted match funding. This programme operated two rounds of projects in all EU Member States, from 2002 to 2004 and then from 2005 to 2007. The EQUAL programme has been described as follows by the European Commission:<sup>1</sup>

“EQUAL forms part of the European Union strategy to create more and better jobs and to make sure that no one is denied access to these jobs. As the Community Initiative of the European Social Fund, EQUAL is the learning platform that finds new ways of achieving the policy objectives of the European Employment Strategy and Social Inclusion Process.

EQUAL differs from the mainstream European Social Fund programmes in that it is a laboratory to develop new ways of tackling discrimination and inequality in the labour market. EQUAL presents evidence of good practice for these innovative approaches ... thus ensuring that the most positive results are adopted and shared across Europe”.

EQUAL in Ireland had a budget of €47m for both rounds, of which €33.9m was contributed by the ESF, €11m by national public funding and €2.1m by the private sector. In total, 22 projects were approved for funding under EQUAL in Ireland for 2005-2007 by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

The above quotation from the European Commission talks about the EQUAL programme as a laboratory for new ideas. In this context, EQUAL projects were required to adhere to a number of principles:

- Emphasise local **partnership** through being organised as ‘Development Partnerships’ (‘DPs’), i.e. funding was not given to single organisations;
- Link to one ‘pillar’ of the **European Employment Strategy** – the pillars were employability; entrepreneurship; Adaptability: Equal Opportunities and Asylum Seekers;
- Support the **empowerment** and participation of all those involved in the project;
- Develop or pilot a new or **innovative** idea relating to issues of equality and discrimination in the labour market;
- Have a clear strategy for documenting, **disseminating and mainstreaming** the outputs of the project;
- Form links to, and work as part of, a **transnational** partnership.

This combination of characteristics means that EQUAL projects were different to other pilot actions or programmes.

*Equal at Work* was funded under the Adaptability pillar of the European Employment Strategy, and was therefore intended to focus on: “promoting lifelong learning and inclusive work practices which encourage the recruitment and retention of those suffering discrimination and inequality in connection with the labour market”.

The Dublin Employment Pact operated an EQUAL project under the 2002-04 and the 2005-07 rounds of the EQUAL programme. Information on the first project is provided on the website of the Dublin Employment Pact, at [www.dublinpact.ie](http://www.dublinpact.ie). This report refers to the second round project.

<sup>1</sup> Communication from the European Commission on Round 2 of EQUAL – 31/12/2003 – further information on EQUAL is available at [www.europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/equal](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal).



## 1.2 The Rationale for *Equal at Work*

### Rationale in 2005 Application for Funding

The commitment of the Dublin Employment Pact to equality and diversity in the labour market arose from its work since 1988 in relation to labour market inclusion. This rationale was reinforced by evidence that the adoption of policies to support equality and diversity makes for more effective organisations.

The 2005 application submitted by the Pact for EQUAL funding contained the following quotation from Kandola and Fullerton:<sup>2</sup>

“The basic concept of managing diversity accepts that the workplace consists of a diverse population of people. The diversity consists of visible and non-visible differences which will include factors such as sex, age, background, race, disability, personality and work style. It is founded on the premises that harnessing these differences will create a productive environment in which everybody feels valued, where talents are being fully utilised and in which organisational goals are met”.

The application cited five reasons why an EQUAL project should focus on equality and diversity in recruiting employees and in working with existing employees in organisations:

1. Ireland had historically low unemployment and some sectors were experiencing labour shortages.
2. There was an increasingly diverse labour force, e.g. in terms of gender or non-Irish employees.
3. There was an increasing emphasis being placed by companies on agendas linked to Corporate Social Responsibility.
4. Recent Irish equality legislation, including the 2004 Equality Act, had made it illegal to discriminate against employees or customers on a range of grounds.
5. There was a strong business case for equality and diversity policies.

The application went on to note positive changes occurring in relation to equality and diversity in the different sectors of the Dublin regional economy: the private sector; the public sector; the health sector; and the community sector. It also noted how equality and diversity fitted with the National Employment Action Plan.

### Evidence on Equality and Diversity since 2005

The five reasons given in the *Equal at Work* application for funding all remain valid at the end of 2007. In fact, new evidence serves to support the arguments further.

For example, a major 2005 report was produced on workplace equality policies, flexible working arrangements and the quality of work in Ireland. The report, prepared by the ESRI and sponsored by the Equality Authority, analysed data collected from over 5,000 Irish employees by the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCPP). It concluded:

“The pursuit of equality in the workplace and the implementation of flexible working arrangements are valuable in themselves in promoting equality objectives and in accommodating to diversity as well as in facilitating the achievement of work-life balance. This study shows that not only do equality policies entail benefits for employees, such as reduced work-related stress, they can also lead to increased job satisfaction and greater organisational commitment. To the extent that they have these effects, equality policies may also have a positive impact on organisational performance and hence be of benefit to employers.”

<sup>2</sup> R. Kandola and J. Fullerton (1995), *Managing the Mosaic: Diversity in Action* (London, The Institute of Personnel and Development), page 8.

The idea that equality and diversity policies are good for business is also supported by recent research undertaken by a team led by Professor Patrick Flood of Dublin City University, for the NCPP and the Equality Authority. This research has gathered data from 132 representative companies from the top 1,000 companies in Ireland, from the Irish and multi-national sectors.<sup>3</sup> The research asked two questions:

- Do very good HR systems ('High Performing Work Systems') improve company performance in three areas (reduced staff turnover, higher innovation and better labour productivity)?
- If companies with very good HR systems then add equality and diversity policies, is performance in each of these areas further affected?

The empirical answers to these questions are shown in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1.**  
**Benefits to Companies of Equality and Diversity Systems**

| Variable measured                                     | Change due to high performing work systems | Additional change due to equality & diversity systems |
|---|--|---|
| <b>Labour turnover</b><br>(% leaving voluntarily)     | - 5.6%                                     | - 2.3%  |
| <b>Innovation</b><br>(New product sales per employee) | + 3.1%                                     | + 3.2%  |
| <b>Labour productivity</b><br>(sales per employee)    | + 11.9%                                    | + 1.9%  |

Note: Figures refer to variance explained in OLS model. Further details in research paper.

Source: Data presented to an Equal at Work conference, October 2007. Further details on this study are available from the Dublin Employment Pact.

Table 1.1 indicates that adding good equality and diversity policies and practices to good HR practices adds value to companies in a measurable way. The effect is strongest in terms of product innovation, followed by the impact in reducing staff turnover and then the increase in productivity per employee.

To mark the EU Year of Equal Opportunities for All, Chambers Ireland, the largest business network in Ireland (60 member chambers representing 13,000 businesses) included a focus on equality in its 2007 labour force survey. The survey found that, despite the evidence base, cited above, for a strong business case, only a minority of companies have to date integrated a focus on equality and diversity in relation to customers (22% of companies) or employees (12% of companies). Moreover, 37% of companies did not feel that equality/diversity for employees required special attention.

Responding to the survey results, the President of Chambers Ireland stated: "Irish businesses need to adopt a wider and more open recruitment policy at all levels but particularly in relation to management". In relation to a finding that 17% of employees in the companies surveyed were non-Irish, he said: "It is crucial that we remove all impediments currently obstructing New Irish employees entering the top tiers of the business world both in the interest of equality and the longevity of the Irish economy".

The evidence underpinning an emphasis by Irish organisations on equality and diversity therefore appears to have strengthened between 2005 and 2007. While the Chambers Ireland survey suggests that equality and diversity policies are still implemented actively by less than one-quarter of Irish companies, the evidence is that those companies which do adopt such policies gain business benefits on several fronts.

<sup>3</sup> The research results were presented to an *Equal at Work* conference in October 2007.

### Link to wider changes in the Irish Economy

The arguments underpinning *Equal at Work* as to why Irish organisations should embrace equality and diversity, both in recruitment and for existing workers, exist in a wider context of the rapid changes to the Irish economy in the past 15 years.

While the wider economic changes are not rehearsed in this report, one key change has been the move to re-position the Irish economy as a 'learning' or 'knowledge' economy. As expressed in the Towards 2016 social partnership agreement of 2006: "The government and social partners agree to work together to deliver policies that are focussed on ensuring that Ireland has a fully-trained, well-educated workforce in order to achieve the vision of a socially cohesive, knowledge-based innovation-driven economy whilst significantly increasing the skills levels of those in employment and consequently reducing the number of low skilled in the workforce."

The focus in *Equal at Work* on improved inclusion of all groups in the workforce, and on equality and diversity policies for those in employment, therefore needed to take place in the context of a gradual upskilling of the wider Irish workforce, and the requirement for HR skills and systems to manage workers in a 'knowledge-based, innovation-driven economy'.

## 1.3 Organisation and Objectives of *Equal at Work*

### *Equal at Work* Development Partnership

Based on the project rationale described above, the Dublin Employment Pact consulted widely in late-2004 and early-2005 in putting together the *Equal at Work* project. Given the needs identified, and the broad benefits of equality and diversity policies, it was decided to include actions in the private, health, local authority and community sectors of the Dublin regional economy. This decision also reflected the broad remit of the Dublin Employment Pact.

Almost 50 organisations were recruited to the *Equal at Work* project, including some of the largest organisations in the region (see Annex 1). The consultation process identified somewhat different motivations from organisations in different sectors in terms of becoming involved in the project:

- In the private sector, companies start from a core objective of maximising returns for shareholders. In the context of low Irish unemployment and a tight labour market, an imperative was to improve HR policies to attract more workers and to retain existing workers. Companies were also looking to harness diversity to improve organisational performance;
- For the health and local authority sectors, a key driver was the requirement to ensure full compliance with an increasingly high standard of regulation and legislation. This was complemented by the need to compete for workers with other sectors in a tight labour market and to manage an increasingly diverse workforce;
- For the community sector, a key driver was the commitment of organisations in the sector to social inclusion and to the target groups with which they work, which are often victims of unequal and discriminatory practices.

There were therefore somewhat different, if linked, reasons driving organisations from different sectors to a common agenda over the 2005-07 period, namely an agenda of equality and diversity. This was an important reason why *Equal at Work* decided to organise its work through four 'clusters' of activity, one each for the private, health, local authority and community sectors.

### Objectives in the 2005 Project Plan

To create maximum long-term change, the Dublin Employment Pact decided to focus *Equal at Work* on strategic actions and on changing systems rather than on targeting specific people or groups experiencing inequality. This led to the following ambitious list of actions for *Equal at Work*:

1. Implementation of equality reviews, leading to detailed action plans relating to equality and diversity, in three major Irish companies: Irish Life & Permanent, Meteor Mobile Communications and Jurys Inns Hotel Group.
2. Actions to support the full inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace, undertaken by the Educational Building Society (EBS).
3. Development of a new software tool to empower frontline staff at eircom to make more HR-related decisions, taking equality and diversity issues into account.
4. Implementation of the first equality reviews in the Irish health sector, leading to detailed action plans relating to equality and diversity, in the Adelaide & Meath Hospital (Incorporating the National Children's Hospital), St. James's Hospital and Stewarts Hospital.
5. Development of training and support for multi-cultural work teams in Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown and in the HSE Dublin North East.
6. Undertaking of the first accessibility audit in the Irish health sector, as well as the preparation of a guidebook on using universal accessibility standards, by the Children's University Hospital (Temple Street).
7. Efforts to provide Traveller employment for the first time in South Dublin County Council.
8. Support for the career progression of outdoor staff in Dublin City Council, whose progression levels have traditionally been low.
9. Work to build trade union membership in the community sector, to support long-term improvements in pay and conditions.
10. Work to organise employers in the community sector to come together for the first time to address issues of mutual interest.
11. Development of a central resource to provide support to organisations in the community sector (many of which are small and have no such in-house expertise) as regards good HR practices and relevant legislation.

Given the relatively small project budget of some €2.5m, these were ambitious objectives. This work was to be supplemented by the project's work with transnational partners from four other EU Member States (Germany, Hungary, Poland and Spain) and by cooperation on a North-South basis, primarily with Belfast City Council.

### Equality Reviews as a Tool of *Equal at Work*

The first and fourth bullet points above refer to 'equality reviews' and six of the *Equal at Work* organisations built their actions around such reviews. Further information on equality reviews is provided in Box 1.1.

**Box 1.1:**  
**Equality Reviews as a Tool to Improve Equality and Diversity**

An Equality Review provides a comprehensive look at an organisation's HR policies from an equality perspective. The tool has been supported in Ireland by the Equality Authority since 2001 and the Authority put in place a panel of equality auditors, to undertake such reviews, in 2002. Before the *Equal at Work* project, approximately 15 equality reviews had been undertaken in Ireland.

Normally, the review involves a mix of methodologies, including a review of relevant documentation and policies, perhaps an in-depth review of particular HR processes (e.g. recent recruitment processes), interviews with key personnel, focus groups with selected kinds of staff member, and a quantitative survey of a wider group of staff.

Under *Equal at Work*, the equality review led to a detailed report for the organisations involved. This in turn was followed by development of an Action Plan for each organisation, with short-, medium- and longer-term actions set out.

## 1.4 Purpose of this Report

This report was prepared in November 2007 and reviews the activities of the *Equal at Work* project in relation to its objectives.<sup>4</sup>

Chapters 2-5 review the work of the project in relation to the objectives identified above, with the actions grouped according to their economic sector. In each case, a description of the work of the action is followed by a list of the outputs arising. Chapter 6 reviews other aspects of the project: its structures, its transnational partnership; and its North-South work. Chapter 7 draws some conclusions on the work of the project and brings together the learning arising.

Further information in relation to all aspects of *Equal at Work* can be obtained from the Dublin Employment Pact, with many of the outputs available from the Pact's website. A list of outputs and publications arising from the project is presented in Appendix 2.

<sup>4</sup> As Formative Evaluator of *Equal at Work* for the 2005-07 period, Hibernian Consulting would like to thank Philip O'Connor, Karen Reid and Caroline Byrne of the Pact for their assistance. We would also like to thank Gráinne Healy, Project Development Consultant, and all others who commented on the draft version of this report, for their assistance.



Pictured: David Goggin, Meteor, Caroline Casey, Aisling Foundation and Philip O'Connor DEP at the Recognising Diversity Conference, Oct 2007



Chapter 2:

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# Innovative Actions in the Private Sector

## 2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 noted that the tight Irish labour market in 2005-07 provided an extra incentive for companies to explore equality and diversity, as these provided potential advantages in recruiting and retaining good quality staff. In this context, five large Irish private sector companies undertook actions with *Equal at Work*, three of which used the equality review tool.

The *Equal at Work* private sector cluster supplemented these actions (described below) by commissioning a piece of research on labour market exclusion and the private sector. This research, undertaken by FGS Consulting, led to a 2006 document: Research Report into Improving Placement Rates for Disadvantaged Groups.

This research report brought together the findings of Irish research from 2000-06 as regards barriers encountered by those experiencing difficulty in accessing the labour market. It incorporated information gained from talking to *Equal at Work* partner organisations about their experience of labour market disadvantage and made recommendations for policy makers, local and national employment services, and the private sector. The report was presented at a North-South seminar organised by *Equal at Work* and is available from the Dublin Employment Pact website.

## 2.2 Equality Reviews in three large companies

# Irish Life and Permanent

The Irish Life and Permanent group is a leading provider of financial services in Ireland. Formed from a merger of Irish Life and Irish Permanent in 1999, the group includes Irish Life, Ireland's largest life assurance company and the market leader in the provision of life, pension and investment products, as well as Permanent TSB, a retail banking operation. Irish Life and Permanent has over 1m customers in Ireland and had a profit after tax in 2006 of €564m. The group employed 5,458 people at end-2006 and recruited 1,167 new employees in that year, based on 21,450 applications.

The company decided to focus the equality review on its recruitment and selection functions. The review was overseen by IL&P's Equality and Diversity Officer, who reported to a Steering Group made up of the General Manager for Group HR, the Head of Recruitment, the Training Manager and two external representatives, one from the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development and the other from a voluntary organisation.

### The research for the review included three broad elements:

- An audit of existing recruitment and selection policies, including a review of recruitment campaigns conducted during 2005;
- Qualitative research, involving in-depth interviews with key members of senior management and with two employees with disabilities, as well as three focus groups – one with female employees, one with male employees and one with non-Irish employees. These interviews and focus groups focused on experiences of, and views on, the IL&P recruitment processes;
- Quantitative research, through an online survey of people who had applied for positions with IL&P during 2005. Of the sample surveyed, 393 responses were received from those who subsequently joined the company (49% of sample) and 1,069 responses from those who did not subsequently join the company (11% of sample).

The IL&P Steering Group found the research results very useful with more detail being provided than they had expected. They also felt the focus groups provided new insights into the recruitment process, e.g. useful new feedback on the use by IL&P of sign language interpreters. The results of the research were shared with IL&P employees via a number of channels, including communication forums, e-mail bulletins and through the Corporate Responsibility report.

The quantitative research allowed a profile of the diversity of the IL&P 2005 recruits to be constructed. For example, these had 21 nationalities, 87% were Irish, 7% had a caring responsibility, 6% had a disability, 6% were aged over 45, and 2% were gay, lesbian or bisexual. (A subsequent tracking of the 2007 intake of recruits showed that the number of nationalities recruited had risen to 34. The company now intends to survey new recruits every two years.)

Positives from the review included the level of documentation in the recruitment process; the gender balance of successful candidates, the proactive nature of the recruitment of non-Irish candidates, and a positive underlying culture as regards equality issues.

In addition, a range of areas were identified where further improvements could occur, including responding fully to recent changes in Irish equality legislation, getting more input from minority ethnic groups in relation on the elements of the recruitment process, placing a greater relative emphasis on the use of application forms rather than CVs, and ensuring full accessibility of online recruitment systems.

Based on the review, the IL&P Steering Group drew up an action plan for the period January 2007 to June 2008.

By October 2007, a number of actions had already been implemented:

- Installation of loop systems in meeting areas to support people with a hearing impairment;
- A data collection process had taken place in regard to the updating of online aptitude tests, with this data being considered by IL&P management;
- The I-Grasp tool used by IL&P for online recruitment was being audited by the National Council for the Blind;
- Adoption through its procurement processes of a policy of favouring 'equality positive' companies, i.e. trying to exert a wider influence on its business partners.

In 2007, the company used the work it had undertaken in relation to *Equal at Work*, and under other corporate initiatives, to underpin an entry into the O2 Ability Awards (Irish Business Awards for best practice in the employment and inclusion of people with disabilities). The company won awards in five categories and one overall award.

The group has emphasised its Corporate Responsibility programme in recent years and produces an annual CR report, available on the internet. This report has been used to describe the work of the company in relation to *Equal at Work*.



Pictured: Irish Life & Permanent employees; Elaine McGauran, Therese Hannon, Deirdre Fay and Laura-Jane Dunne.

#### Outputs arising from *Equal at Work* Action in Irish Life & Permanent:

- Comprehensive review of recruitment and selection procedures from an equality perspective;
- New information to build a profile of the diversity of IL&P recruits;
- Some elements of the review led to immediate changes to processes;
- Action plan developed with short-, medium- and long-term actions;
- Progress in 2007 in implementing short-term and medium-term actions;
- Innovative changes introduced to company's procurement policy;
- Equality review underpinned a successful entry into the National Ability Awards.

# Meteor Mobile Communications

Meteor Mobile Communications was established in 2001 having being awarded Ireland's third mobile licence, and is a wholly owned subsidiary of eircom. By June 2007, Meteor had 875,000 customers, an 18.2% market share of the Irish mobile phone market and employed almost 1,000 people, with 39 nationalities.

The company has a young average age of staff and one of the three core values on its website states: "Key to our growth is the energy and enthusiasm of all of our staff. We encourage teamwork and openness in the workplace. We value being part of a team that is open to new ideas, is fast to make decisions and is daring in the choices that are made."

The company saw the motivation for undertaking an equality review as being to ensure it harnessed the diverse experiences, cultures and outlooks of its staff. A Steering Committee oversaw the review, and comprised a member of senior management, the HR Officer and seven members of staff from across the company, balanced by gender, nationality, grade, length of service and other characteristics. The Managing Director of Meteor, who chairs the company's Diversity Group, had a direct involvement in the project from the outset.

The review began in July 2006 and reviewed all Meteor HR policies, with nine specific areas of interest identified. These included working conditions (to include flexible working), performance management, respect and dignity at work, selecting people for positions, and equality and diversity policies. As a service business, the company was also conscious of the need to have an embracing of equality and diversity reflected in the attitudes of all front-line staff.

## The review involved three inter-related elements:

- A comprehensive review of documentation relating to HR policies, including the staff handbook, training materials, job descriptions, job advertisements, Meteor's competency framework etc.;
- Qualitative research, including in-depth interviews with seven employees with particular responsibilities in relation to HR or corporate strategy and five focus groups involving 63 employees. These meetings used the nine issues identified at the outset to structure the discussions;
- Quantitative research, involving an equality and diversity survey, which could be completed online by all employees. Pay data was also reviewed from a gender equality perspective.

The review concluded in the first quarter of 2007 and findings were shared with staff in a number of ways during the year. These included breakfast and lunch communication meetings and the commissioning of a piece of film which was placed on the company's intranet ('Planet Meteor TV'). Those directly involved in the review process said that one of its benefits had been the formal raising of issues for the attention of senior management, through the data arising from the review findings and via the subsequent action plan.

In preparing the action plan for Meteor Mobile Communications, the consultants who undertook the review set out a number of aspects to be addressed, including top management commitment; clear accountability; effective communication; coordination of activity, and monitoring and evaluation processes.

A key action in 2007, post-action plan, has been the integration of equality and diversity issues into the 'balanced scorecard' system used by Meteor to manage its overall business performance. Work also focused on revising the company's performance management system. These actions were completed in advance of the staff appraisals at the end of 2007.

Work also followed from the review in relation to the design of a respect and dignity at work campaign, supported by strong procedures. A separate working group was reviewing the issue of flexible hours in November 2007, with a particular focus on teleworking and on revising the company's 'time in lieu' policies.

A learning point from the review was the need to undertake such reviews quickly in businesses which are changing quickly. The normal processes of applying for funding for such a review, choosing a consultant, undertaking the research work etc. need to be telescoped into as tight a timeframe as possible, without loss of quality.

Meteor plans a follow-up review for July 2008, by which time it plans to have the actions identified in its 2007 action plan implemented.



Pictured: David Goggin, Meteor, Caroline Casey, Aisling Foundation and Philip O'Connor DEP at the Recognising Diversity Conference, Oct 2007

#### Outputs arising from *Equal at Work* action in Meteor Mobile Communications:

- Equality review undertaken between mid-2006 and early-2007 – extensive involvement of staff across the company;
- Subsequent Action Plan prepared with implementation starting in Q2 2007;
- Wide internal communication of review results;
- Integration of equality and diversity issues into the company's balanced scorecard measurement system;
- Changes in relation to flexible working hours, respect and dignity at work, time-in-lieu policies and the Meteor performance management system;
- Plans for a follow-up review in July 2008.



# Jurys Inns Hotel Group

By October 2007, there were 25 Jurys Inns hotels in Ireland and the UK, and this number was increasing with new hotels opening in Plymouth, Brighton, Liverpool and Sheffield during 2007 and 2008 and plans for up to 120 new hotels in central and eastern Europe in the next decade. The Jurys Inns brand is owned by Quinlan Private, an international real estate and investment advisory group. The size of the group, and the nature of the industry, means the workforce of Jurys Inns is very diverse in nature.

The Jurys Inns action with *Equal at Work* was based in one of its hotels – the Jurys Inn Custom House, located in the International Financial Services Centre in Dublin. The aim (see later) is to use the learning from the action to inform HR policies in other Jurys Inns hotels.

The Jurys Inn Custom House hotel employed 97 people at the time of the review, drawn from 21 countries. Like many establishments in the hotel and catering sector, it had a high level of staff turnover, at 71% in 2006, the year the review was undertaken.

The equality review in Jurys Inn Custom House reviewed all employment policies and procedures from an equality and diversity perspective, with a particular focus on recruitment, selection and retention. The review was overseen by a Steering Group, headed by the Training and Development Manager.

The review ran from May to August 2006 and, as with the previous two companies, had three elements:

- An audit of existing levels of diversity in the workforce and of HR policies, with a particular focus on recruitment and selection. A detailed analysis was undertaken of two recent recruitment and selection processes;
- Qualitative research, which involved eight in-depth one-to-one interviews with people from across the hotel functions, and four focus groups, with 29 staff members;
- A quantitative survey of all employees (79 responses) to elicit views in relation to company policies and practices in relation to equality and diversity.

A report arising from the review was submitted in September 2006 and an Action Plan was developed by December 2006, for implementation during 2007 and 2008.

Positive findings for Jurys Inns Custom House included conclusions that the company's recruitment system was fair, attracted a diverse group of applicants and that progression routes were open to people from diverse backgrounds, e.g. in terms of nationality or gender. Areas of possible improvement included practices in relation to workers with a disability, workers with outside caring responsibilities, provision of equality and diversity training for all staff, and creation of opportunities for people to work in other types of hotel work, to broaden their experience and increase the chance of progression.

Tasks identified in the Action Plan fell under five headings: Communication and Infrastructure; Manager Competency; Staff Awareness; Equality and Diversity Policies; and Recruitment and Retention Strategies. Within the plan, actions were identified on three time horizons: 6 months; 12 months; 24 months.

Management at Jurys Inn Custom House were very positive about the experience of the equality review and felt the process had deepened their understanding of how to respond to diversity in the hotel. It was “a positive journey”, one person commented.

Implementation of the Action Plan was well underway by October 2007. For example, at that point:

- The hotel was in the process of updating its Equal Opportunities policy;
- It had developed an Equality and Diversity training module for managers, which had been piloted twice;
- It had equality-proofed all job descriptions and removed unnecessary barriers to employment. For example, a requirement for a Leaving Certificate or equivalent for reception staff was removed and a requirement for good English language skills for workers in the accommodation area was removed;
- A module on equal opportunities was at an advanced stage of development for use in the induction process for new staff members;
- To encourage integration of all workers, the use of English by staff members in the workplace is now encouraged and supported;
- A calendar was created, listing key national days and religious feasts of all staff members. These days are celebrated in the staff canteen with themed meals and decorations.

In late-2007, the hotel was planning to share the learning that had arisen from its engagement with *Equal at Work* with the wider Jurys Inns group of hotels and was in discussion with HR Managers at a group level in this regard. Given that Jurys Inns have considerably more employees in the UK than in Ireland, this represents an example of an action under an Irish EQUAL project having a positive multiplier effect in another EU Member State. As the group plans to open hotels in other EU Member States also, the learning may transfer to further parts of the European Union over time. The company is actively planning for this by training people to management level in existing hotels and then offering them management jobs in their home countries.

Following the *Equal at Work* equality review, staff turnover at Jurys Inns Custom House fell from 71% in 2006 to 22% for the first nine months of 2007.

#### Outputs arising from *Equal at Work* Action in Jurys Inns Group:

- Completed equality review in Jurys Inns Custom House, with considerable data and feedback for the company;
- Preparation of two-year Action Plan for 2007 and 2008;
- Updating of equal opportunities policies;
- Revision of job descriptions to ensure these reflect the competencies required for the job and do not include unnecessary barriers;
- Development and piloting of an equality and diversity training module for all managers;
- Development of an equal opportunities module for staff induction process;
- Development of a staff calendar with linked activities to promote inclusion of staff of all nationalities.

## 2.3 Making EBS a Better Workplace for People with Disabilities

### EBS

Building on a disability audit undertaken by the company for the 2006 Ability Awards, EBS worked with an external training provider to design and deliver a number of Disability Awareness Training sessions. As well as delivering the stand alone training modules, this led to the inclusion of disability training into existing EBS training, both for the HR personnel and for other EBS employees. The action led to disability awareness being incorporated into EBS induction training for all new employees. A written version of the training module has been incorporated into the EBS training manual.

Linked to the above, the company used "Lunchbytes", a series of internal lunchtime seminars, to raise the issue of disability with all workers.

As mentioned, EBS had volunteered for a disability audit under the 2006 Ability Awards and this identified a number of actions which the company could take in relation to the physical layout of its headquarters building. Working through *Equal at Work*, EBS worked to address these issues during 2006...

EBS also used the *Equal at Work* project to review its recruitment and selection processes from the perspective of people with disabilities. This involved meetings with the Public Appointments Service and with the Electricity Supply Board (ESB, regarded as an exemplar in this regard) as regards the incorporation of best practice approaches. It also involved a commitment to move towards a competency based system of recruitment and selection.

#### Outputs Arising from *Equal at Work* Action in EBS:

- Delivery of disability training for EBS workers;
- Upgrading of EBS training manual and of induction training for new EBS workers;
- Improved accessibility of EBS headquarters building in Dublin;
- More disability-friendly system of recruitment and selection in EBS.

## 2.4 Enabling line managers to make tactical HR decisions in eircom

### eircom

A challenge for large organisations in relation to equality and diversity (and other HR areas) is that good policies need not just to be developed by a central HR department but to be implemented throughout the organisation. This requires that managers understand the nuances of making decisions in relation to HR issues, and make such decisions in an efficient and consistent manner.

To this end, eircom used its involvement with *Equal at Work* to develop an online HR resource called DecisionPath for use by managers and team leaders. This is a decision support tool which guides managers through the choices they have to make in handling issues relating to employees. In this action, eircom developed and piloted this tool for eight areas of HR policy: Workplace Charter – Anti-bullying and harassment policy; Disciplinary Procedure; Grievance Procedure; Sick absence Procedure; Parental leave; Maternity leave; Force Majeure leave; and the Health and Safety procedure for accidents on duty.

Development of the tool took place on a partnership basis in the company, with the trade unions participating in the process. Technical development was outsourced to a company called DecisionPath Ltd., a HR and IT consulting company.

The first phase of development work of the DecisionPath application involved a detailed mapping of the company's HR policies in eight areas. The company found this iterative process, undertaken during the second half of 2006, useful in itself, as it identified areas where HR policies could be simplified. The process was undertaken jointly by eircom and the consultants.

An issue that arose, and was dealt with, was the need to take into account issues of employee data protection in developing the software. A second issue dealt with was the 'fit' of the software with the wider eircom IT systems.

Once the software was developed, it was piloted in two phases, across the retail (three business areas), central services (three business areas) and wholesale/networks divisions of eircom:

- 'Usability' testing involved selected line managers using the tool to explore a range of different possible HR scenarios – the scenarios were indicative of the types of issues that could arise in the company and this testing took place pre-release;
- A real pilot implementation phase took place during August and September 2007 with a small number of selected eircom managers. The managers were provided with a short support document for this period as well as receiving training in the application beforehand.

Having undertaken these different steps, eircom prepared a detailed report on the different phases of the work. A summary of this report is available on the website of the Dublin Employment Pact.

In relation to the usability testing, the report showed that 96% of users found the tool easy to navigate and 88% said they were likely to use the tool if introduced. Some 80% of users had made the correct decision when using the tool (in these 'non-real' scenarios) compared to 82% who thought they had made the correct decisions. Only one in three users had read the additional back-up information provided on the application. Average time taken to make a decision using the tool was six minutes.

During the live pilot, 80% of those managers given access to the tool actually used it, the other 20% saying that they had not had occasion to do so. Feedback in relation to ease of navigation and content of the DecisionPath application was generally positive, as were comments in relation to the 'look' and design of the screen. Only one quarter of users had drawn on the user guide provided although those who had done so all found it very satisfactory. Overall, some 25% of managers involved in the live trial found the application 'very good', with the remaining 75% finding the application 'satisfactory'.

A gap in the testing was the absence of a function to allow the HR Department to have an oversight function, i.e. to verify how managers are using the application and to run overall reports on the types of policies for which the application is being used, the decisions being reached etc. This functionality was

to be added by Decision Path Ltd. following the trial, i.e. in October/November 2007. A spin-off benefit of this function will be that it generates data for the HR Department on the frequency with which HR issues arise in the company, and how they are dealt with by managers across the organisation.

The software can also be used as a training tool for managers as it shows the different steps to be taken in relation to addressing a particular HR issue. Another advantage is that it frees up the time of HR personnel as they need to respond to fewer queries from line managers. As such, they are more able to focus on more strategic aspects of their work.

Managers who were reluctant to use the tool generally used the existing intranet-based HR system and, as such, already had a system in place with which they were familiar. eircom recognised that, if the DecisionPath tool were to be introduced more widely, then after a period of transition, DecisionPath would probably have to become the only tool for managers to use, and the existing system would be phased out.

In late-2007, eircom was considering whether to roll out the application across the company or to engage in further pilot testing, on a wider basis, as an intermediary step in this regard.

#### Outputs arising from *Equal at Work* Action in eircom:

- Mapping of eircom HR policies in eight policy areas;
- Development of software application to enable line managers to take more HR decisions, and to support consistency in these decisions;
- Usability testing of application in selected parts of eircom;
- Live testing of application in selected parts of eircom;
- Report prepared by eircom in relation to benefits of application and findings from pilot;
- Generally positive feedback on the application, with a number of advantages identified in using the application.

## 2.5 Comment on Actions in the Private Sector

All five *Equal at Work* actions were implemented as per the project's 2005 Project Plan. Based on the views of the companies themselves, the actions have generated considerable learning for other Irish companies.

The use of equality reviews as a tool to identify and implement changes in relation to equality and diversity was viewed positively by the three companies involved: Irish Life and Permanent, Meteor Mobile Communications and Jurys Inns. This represents a very positive endorsement of the tool for other Irish companies. (See also the *Pioneers of Diversity* report on the Dublin Employment Pact website, a comparative analysis of the equality reviews undertaken by *Equal at Work*).

The work of the EBS as regards disability provides another case study of the benefits that arise from the full inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace. The DecisionPath software tool developed by eircom also appears to have wider application – the results of the pilot testing indicate the tool has worked well and can provide the basis for better and more consistent implementation by managers in large organisations of HR policies. However, given the relatively detailed process involved, it would be for other organisations to undertake their own cost-benefit analyses of the application's potential.

While the focus of this chapter has been on the work of the five large companies that directly implemented actions, the *Equal at Work* private sector cluster also had involvement from other organisations, including Ballyfermot LES, Ballymun Job Centre, Ballymun Partnership, FÁS, Finglas Cabra Partnership, Integrating Ireland, and the Dublin Employment Pact. In some cases, cluster representatives were involved in committees to oversee the work in individual companies (e.g. Integrating Ireland representative sat on the IL&P committee). In others, useful networking occurred through the project, leading to events outside of the project itself (e.g. Meteor supported a project in Ballymun as part of Intercultural and Anti-Racism Week 2007, including a presentation to local employers).

To disseminate the learning arising *Equal at Work*, a major conference was organised by the project in October 2007. As well as inviting HR personnel from the 55 partner organisations in *Equal at Work*, invitations were extended to members of the CIPD, to members of IBEC, to members of a network of the Irish Management Institute, and to others. The conference, chaired by Caroline Casey of the Aisling Foundation, was held in International Financial Services Centre, and involved a presentation of (at the time) new and unpublished data on the bottom-line benefits of equality and diversity policies for companies by Professor Patrick Flood of Dublin City University, the launch of the *Equal at Work* comparative review on its equality reviews (*Pioneers of Diversity*) and workshops organised by each of the actions in this cluster. The presentations from the conference are available from the Dublin Employment Pact website.

The companies involved in the private sector cluster work are all members of Irish HR networks and planned to continue the dissemination of learning arising from their actions using these networks in 2008.



Chapter 3:

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# Innovative Actions in the Health Sector



### 3.1 Introduction

The HSE is the largest employer in the state, with 101,978 whole-time equivalent employees in December 2005. More than 67,000 or over 66% of these were direct employees, the remainder being employed by non-statutory hospitals and voluntary sector agencies providing services for people with intellectual disabilities. As such, promoting equality and diversity in the health sector directly affects the work environment of a large number of Irish workers. It also impacts on the general population, given that all citizens come into contact with the health services during their lives.

There have been a number of developments and publications in relation to equality and diversity in the health service in recent years. For example:

- Establishment of an Equal Opportunities/Diversity Working Group led by the HSE Employers Agency (previously referred to as the HSEA) and representing the spectrum of health sector providers;
- Development by the HSE Employers Agency of an Equal Opportunities/ Diversity Policy & Strategic Objectives for the Health Service;
- Development of a joint union/management Dignity at Work Policy for the Health Service, led by the HSE Employers Agency;
- Publication in 2007 by the HSE Employers Agency of Guidelines for the Recruitment and Retention of Older Workers;
- Establishment of a Social Inclusion Directorate in the new HSE;
- As part of the new social inclusion programme, establishment of an Ethnic Minorities/Traveller Health Working Group, development of a National Intercultural Healthcare Strategy and implementation of a National Intercultural Healthcare Project.



Pictured: Members of the Health Sector Cluster (L-R); Rosemary Orr, Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown; Michelle Cotter, CUH Temple Street; Gerry Mulholland, Stewarts Hospital; Michele Guerin, HSE Dublin North East; Bridie Horan, AMNCH Tallaght; Dr Alan Bruce, Aileen O'Meara, Stefania Minervino, St. James's Hospital; Bridget McGuane, HSE Co-Ordinator for the Project; Gillian Ledwidge, Stewarts Hospital; Philip O'Connor, DEP; Mona Baker, HSE; Grainne Healy, *Equal at Work* pictured at 'Diversity Matters' May 2007.

These developments in the health sector were underpinned by ongoing legislative change in Ireland, including enactment of: the Disability Act of 2005; the Public Service Superannuation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act in 2004, which removed the compulsory retirement age for new entrant public servants and raised the standard minimum retirement age from 60 to 65 years; and the Equality Act of 2004

This wider context means that the five health sector actions in the *Equal at Work* project occurred in a changing, and supportive, environment. It also influenced how the lessons arising from the project could be mainstreamed. In relation to the pre-2005 initiatives, the *Equal at Work* actions to some extent represented a progression from training and awareness raising work, which was partly driven by a requirement to comply with legislation, to a proactive approach, with equality promoted as a central principle of good people management.

The actions also took place in a context of wider change within the Irish health sector, and indeed in the country. At an *Equal at Work* conference in May 2007, the National HR Director of the HSE informed attendees that there were people of 117 nationalities now working in the HSE, with workers "from Albania to Zimbabwe" on the payroll. The top five non-Irish countries represented in order of numbers were: India, the Philippines, United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, Nigeria and Pakistan.

**Of the five *Equal at Work* health sector actions, three chose to use an equality review as a tool for their activity. The actions were as follows:**

1. Equality review in the Adelaide & Meath Hospital, Incorporating the National Children's Hospital ('Tallaght Hospital'), which had a specific focus on older workers;
2. Equality review in St. James's Hospital, which focused on issues relating to recruitment, disability and minority ethnic communities;
3. Equality review in Stewarts Hospital;
4. Supporting multi-cultural work teams in Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown and in the HSE Dublin North East;
5. Improving disability access, and promoting universal access, in the Children's University Hospital (Temple Street).



Pictured: Members of AMNCH steering group involved in the development of the hospital's "Promoting Equal Opportunities for Older Workers in the Health Services" project as well as representatives from the HSE and Dublin Employment Pact.

The organisations involved represent both the statutory and voluntary parts of the health sector and were co-ordinated and chaired by the new HSE HR Directorate in liaison with the HSE Employers Agency. Participating agencies represented the spectrum of health sector providers - statutory and non-statutory settings, acute services, community services, paediatric services and services for people with disabilities. This diversity of organisations and services was the result of planning both by *Equal at Work* (and the Dublin Employment Pact) and by the HSE. The actions also emerged from discussions between the lead organisations (mentioned in the bullet points above), the National Disability Authority and EVE Holdings, which works with people with intellectual disabilities, i.e. other members of the wider *Equal at Work* health sector cluster.

### 3.2 Equality Reviews in three Dublin hospitals

# Adelaide & Meath Hospital, Incorporating the National Children's Hospital

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The 2004 legislative changes in relation to the age of retirement, mentioned above, has implications for both employers and workers and provided the context for the equality review in Tallaght Hospital which, in 2005, employed almost 3,000 people.

The action was overseen by a Steering Committee which contained representatives of a number of HR areas: Recruitment and Selection; Training and Development; Human Resources; Occupational Health; Superannuation. There were also representatives of the Nursing area, a member of the hospital's partnership committee and representatives of the IMPACT and SIPTU trade unions. A partnership approach underpinned the implementation of all parts of the action within the hospital.

#### The review involved three main elements:

- Quantitative research, via an equality evaluation survey, which asked staff about different aspects of their working lives. Some 900 questionnaires were distributed and 278 completed questionnaires were received;
- Qualitative research, via six focus groups, each comprising a particular type of staff member: people aged under 30; people aged over 50; people with over eight years service; people in mid-career; retired staff; people who had taken career breaks. Issues relating to older workers were the focus of the group discussions. The groups were supplemented by 13 telephone interviews;
- Review of HR policies and practices, including a review of 350 recruitment competition files.

The subsequent 97-page report contained many positive findings in relation to older workers at the Adelaide & Meath Hospital, Incorporating the National Children's Hospital. For example, it found the recruitment and selection system to be comprehensive and well structured; there were high levels of satisfaction with Departmental induction training; and the existing pre-retirement training was found to be helpful and beneficial. However, the review also found that:

- Staff aged over 50 were less positive about promotion procedures and often felt they did not have the opportunity for career progression;
- Older workers, especially those aged over 60, did not tend to avail of flexible work arrangements, partly because the impact that this could have on their subsequent pension payments (traditionally calculated based on income in the last years of working);
- Staff felt that the pre-retirement training was not sufficiently promoted or encouraged.

On the basis of these and other findings, the hospital developed a new programme in 2007: *Options for Me – Career Opportunities for Older Workers*. This was designed to fit with the hospital's existing three-year HR strategy.

**Options for Me** is targeted at workers in the hospital aged 50 or over. The pilot programme (September 2007) had five components:

1. **Pensions Options**, where advice was provided to workers on their entitlements and how they can influence their pension in their remaining working life.
2. **Career Pathways**, where progression options, online application processes, interview skills etc. were discussed and people were encouraged to go forward for promotion or progression if interested in doing so.
3. **Work Life Balance**, where information on hospital policies and schemes in relation to flexi-time, job-sharing, study leave, unpaid leave etc. was presented.
4. **Health and Lifestyle**, where information was presented on topics such as stress in the workplace.
5. **Training and Development**, where information on the different training courses on offer was presented, and where people were encouraged to go forward for courses.

There was strong demand for this pilot programme. Over 100 workers aged 50 or over applied to attend the series of seminars – while places were limited to 25, the intention is to repeat the programme. The numbers applying for the course suggests a pent-up demand from older workers for information on these topics. An evaluation report on the September 2007 programme was produced in October 2007.

The equality review also identified a number of further issues to be addressed by the hospital, including the following (with planned implementation dates):

- Employee Assistance Service to be developed to provide supports to staff in life coaching/career planning and planning for retirement (December 2007);
- Mentoring programme as part of the succession planning process for older workers to share their knowledge (started in Autumn 2007, to continue into 2008);
- Occupational health/ergonomic programme to create a safe and healthy environment for older workers (no date set);

- Training programme for older workers to support them in managing change (first quarter of 2008);
- Create a bank of people who have retired who are willing to work on a temporary basis, starting with people at clerical/administration grades (no date but links being explored with proposed national Nurse bank).

The *Options for Me* programme was launched by Mary O'Rourke TD in September 2007 at an event attended by many senior managers from the hospital. This demonstrated buy-in from senior management in relation to taking forward the issues arising from the review in relation to the recruitment and retention of older workers. It also fits with the publication in 2007 by the HSE of guidelines entitled: 'Recruitment and Retention of Older Workers'. These guidelines state: "Line managers must ensure that older workers are afforded equal treatment in relation to all aspects of their employment and are provided with a working environment which respects their dignity and values their contribution. It is important not to make assumptions about the capability or suitability of older workers or deprive them of opportunities to develop their career."

This *Equal at Work* action means that the Adelaide & Meath Hospital, incorporating the National Children's Hospital, has moved ahead of most Irish organisations in addressing the needs of older workers. However, the action also shows that re-organising workplaces to cater for older workers will represent a work agenda for some years to come.

#### Outputs Arising from the *Equal at Work* Action in The Adelaide & Meath Hospital, incorporating the National Children's Hospital:

- Comprehensive equality review, providing information to the hospital on many aspects of its HR policies;
- Options for Me programme developed and piloted, with five modules targeted at older workers;
- Start of process to develop Employee Assistance Service and a Succession Planning Programme;
- Leaflet developed and circulated to older workers in the hospital;
- Further actions planned for 2008 and 2009.

# St. James's Hospital

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St. James's Hospital is a large acute teaching hospital in Dublin 8, and employs over 4,000 staff. Established in the 1970s, it operates a wide range of diagnostic and treatment services. In 2004, the hospital appointed the health sector's first Cultural Diversity Officer, funded under a local partnership agreement, with a brief to promote equality of opportunity and cultural diversity in the hospital, with a focus on ethnicity.

The impetus for the equality review came from the Cultural Diversity Officer, who was already involved in a number of wider HSE activities in relation to minority ethnic groups. The review was undertaken under the auspices of the hospital's Equal Opportunities Committee. It was decided that a particular focus of the review should be on recruitment and selection.

## As with Tallaght Hospital, there were three strands to the work of the review:

- Quantitative research, involving a survey of 700 members of staff, with 208 completed questionnaires. Some 41% of respondents were non-Irish. A focus of the survey was on the experience of recruitment and selection;
- Qualitative research, involving three focus groups: one made up of male staff members, one of female staff members and one of HR managers responsible for recruitment and selection. The focus groups were supplemented by structured face-to-face interviews with five Area Managers and four HR Managers;
- Review of recruitment and selection policies and practices, including a review of 118 recruitment competitions from 2005.

The review noted efforts in recent years to maximise consistency in recruitment and selection and found that most staff experienced the processes to be fair and satisfactory. The report identified several areas of potential further improvement, including the development of a competency-based approach to selection. The review also said that greater transparency was possible in the process, as was positive action to support particular target groups.

## Arising from the review, St. James's Hospital took a number of actions:

- It updated certain aspects of its Recruitment and Selection policy, and its Equal Opportunities policy;
- It decided to introduce a system of competency based interviewing and the groundwork in this regard began during 2007;
- It moved to implement positive actions in relation to people with disabilities and people from minority ethnic communities.

Introduction of the competency based interviewing system is being overseen by a project group consisting of managers from the different disciplines ('job families') and HR specialists. The system was being piloted in four disciplines in the second half of 2007 (including nursing and clerical/administrative jobs) with training for interviewers also being provided. It was planned that the pilot phase would run to end-2007 with a review at that point and wider implementation in 2008.

Specific practical actions arising from the equality review were implemented in 2007 in relation to disability (e.g. protocol/policy on accommodation of staff with disabilities at recruitment and retention level, and Disability Awareness training sessions with key areas). Specific actions also arose in relation to minority ethnic communities, e.g. a revised induction programme for all staff, and pilot training on equal opportunities and managing multi-cultural teams, were being put in place for nurse managers by December 2007.





Outputs Arising from the *Equal at Work* Action in St. James's Hospital:

- Full equality review with considerable amount of information generated on the hospital's HR policies;
- Beginning of process of putting in place a competency based recruitment and selection process;
- Staff training module in relation to disability;
- Staff training module in relation to equal opportunities and managing multi-cultural work teams;
- Action Plan developed with further outputs planned for 2008 and 2009.

Pictured: Bridget McGuane, Philip O'Connor and Stefania Minervino at 'Diversity Matters' May 2007.

# Stewarts Hospital

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Stewarts Hospital is a charitable foundation, with a long tradition in providing care for both children and adults with learning disabilities. Stewarts operates from two main sites in West Dublin, with several satellite residential and service centres. It employs around 900 people.

At a May 2007 *Equal at Work* conference, the hospital's Staffing Executive Director noted: "Stewarts Hospital has been around since 1869 and this has been the first time the hospital has opened up its HR practices to an outsider".

In fact, even before *Equal at Work*, management at Stewarts Hospital had discussed the possibility of an equality review with the Equality Authority. When the *Equal at Work* equality review got underway, a Steering Committee was established, chaired by a Director of the hospital and including Directors, managers, HR personnel, other senior team members and trade union representatives. The review was supported by the hospital's Equality Project Manager, appointed in September 2006. The process was also backed by the Chief Executive Officer of Stewarts Hospital, who spoke at length about the importance of the project on a 2007 DVD produced by *Equal at Work*.

The review process included a survey during January and February 2007 of 962 employees, with a response rate of 36%. This was supplemented by a series of focus groups and by a review of the organisation's HR policies. Implementation of the research was partly undertaken by staff of the hospital, meaning that a transfer of learning occurred from the consultants to the staff involved.

The review showed that people of 27 different nationalities were employed by Stewarts Hospital in 2007, with 11% of employees being non-Irish. Some two-thirds of employees were women and 5.5% of workers reported having a disability, which was higher than the hospital had expected to find.

Positive findings for the hospital arising from the review included findings that workers found their jobs interesting and rewarding and reported high levels of job satisfaction. Some 77% of employees said that they supported the current flexible working arrangements and 87% said these arrangements suited their own circumstances. Also, the highly female nature of the workforce in the hospital was found to be reflected in the hospital's management structures.

## A number of areas identified for improvement were as follows:

- Many staff members said that they were not comfortable working with members of the Traveller community;
- Some 29% of workers said they had either personally experienced, or knew of, an incident of bullying in relation to staff at the hospital;
- Some 59% of staff did not believe that the system for handling grievances worked well;
- The availability of dignity at work training was considered poor by almost half of the survey respondents.

In relation to recruitment and selection, the review found that the hospital's practices included several elements of best practice, including an online application form which met best practice standards from an equality perspective.

An Interim Report arising from the review was presented in July 2007 and was followed by an Action Planning Day. A final version of the review and an agreed Action Plan were submitted to Stewarts Hospital in October 2007.





Pictured: Evelyn Egan, Mary Burke and Josephine Dunne, members of Stewarts Hospital staff.

#### Outputs Arising from the *Equal at Work* Action in Stewarts Hospital:

- Comprehensive review of equality across all aspects of the hospital's HR policies, with data and other findings for the hospital;
- Development and roll-out of an intensive training programme in relation to dignity at work;
- Accompanying leaflet circulated to all staff;
- Beginning of process of developing a system of competency based recruitment and selection process (to continue through 2008).

### 3.3 Supporting Multi-Cultural Work Teams

## Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown HSE Dublin North East

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The HSE Dublin North East project focused on supporting multi-cultural teams in the workplace and incorporated Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown, the Local Health Offices in Dublin North, Dublin North Central and Dublin North West, and Lusk Community Unit for Older Persons.

Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown is an acute teaching hospital based in the North-West of Dublin, and its catchment area extends into West Dublin and into counties Meath and Kildare. The Local Health Offices and Lusk Community Unit for Older Persons are engaged in the provision of primary, community and health care services in North Dublin and the Fingal local authority area.

Given the rapid increase in the number of employees from different cultural backgrounds in the Irish health services, multi-cultural work teams are becoming the norm and this project sought to support such teams in achieving high performance.

This action arose in the context of evolving strategies in the broader health sector - in relation to multi-culturalism (see Section 3.1), and in particular from the research and report that informed the National Intercultural Healthcare Project (NICHCP). A 2005 report (entitled: Learning, training and development needs of health services staff in delivering services to minority ethnic communities) identified a need for a more in-depth focus on intercultural working as part of the overall framework of initiatives that could be implemented to support intercultural health services. The issue has also arisen in other countries and Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown planned to share learning arising from its involvement as the pilot hospital for Ireland in the European Task Force on Migrant Friendly Hospitals.

Synergies arose in that this *Equal at Work* action was being piloted in Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown, where the HSE nationally was also piloting its National Intercultural Healthcare Project. This allowed for cooperation and cross-learning on the ground.

#### The work under this action involved:

1. Sourcing and delivering training programmes in intercultural working for managers and staff members, to be delivered on a pilot basis and evaluated thereafter.
2. Review of recruitment processes relating to international staff.
3. Review of content of existing induction programmes leading to development and delivery of intercultural working module for national induction programme.
4. Ongoing development and support for international staff.

One element of the action involved research with staff in both Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown and in the wider HSE Dublin North East. This led to a report in December 2006 which identified priorities for action for both the hospital and for HSE Dublin North East.

In Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown, the project focused on five wards and was multi-disciplinary. Focus groups were undertaken in May/June 2006 and involved diverse staff professions and nationalities. Research took place in the hospital and with three Local Health Offices in HSE Dublin North East, including Lusk Community Unit for Older Persons.

By late-2007, the following work had been undertaken under this action:

- Intercultural training had been provided to both managers and staff.
- In partnership with the HSE nationally, and with national Training, Development and Equality staff, a new induction component had been developed and introduced for HSE staff nationwide. This national development was implemented and monitored at local level.
- An English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) communication skills course was implemented in Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown between September and December 2007, in association with the local Vocational Education Committee, with plans to evaluate the course thereafter.
- A review of support systems for staff had taken place in Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown.
- A 'buddy system' for international staff which had been implemented in one Local Health Office was to be rolled out to other locations.

The project also supported actions that took place outside the context of EQUAL e.g. updating of the 'Living and Working in HSE Dublin North East' publication.

At end-2007, the two organisations involved in this action were planning on how to build on the *Equal at Work* outcomes through reviewing and prioritising actions beyond the pilot sites.

The report produced by this *Equal at Work* action in December 2006 identified challenges beyond the scope of the pilot project, such as:

- Establishing intercultural diversity as an organisational aim for the HSE;
- Linking the work of the project to other (existing) HSE partnership structures;
- Improving communication structures and the gathering of culturally-sensitive information within the HSE;
- Enabling a 'whole organisation' approach to be taken to intercultural matters.

As with the action of Tallaght Hospital in relation to older workers, this action means both that the organisations directly involved have moved ahead of other organisations in the health sector on a specific area (in this case, of multi-cultural work teams), while at the same time becoming aware that a longer-term agenda is needed. For example, members of the project team visited the Bradford Teaching Hospital Trust in the UK as part of their work and noted that its systems for integration of different cultural practices, in relation both to staff and to patients, were ahead of the approaches in Ireland.

#### Outputs Arising from the *Equal at Work* Action in the Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown and with the HSE Dublin North East:

- Development and piloting of intercultural working and diversity management modules;
- English language training module piloted and evaluated;
- Review of support systems in Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown;
- New 'buddy system' for non-Irish workers, piloted in three Local Health Offices.

### 3.4 Accessibility at the Children's University Hospital, Temple Street

## Temple Street

The fifth *Equal at Work* action in relation to the health sector focused on accessibility in relation to buildings. This is an issue not only in relation to people with disabilities but in relation to many other users of the health service, such as parents with buggies, older people, or people recovering from illnesses. The action was led by the Children's University Hospital, Temple Street, which provides services to people in North Dublin and in the north inner-city of Dublin, as well as specific services to children from all over Ireland.

The action arose in the context of the comprehensive 2002 Building for Everyone guidelines produced by the National Disability Authority (NDA). These, and other NDA templates, go beyond current standards in Ireland's building regulations (Part M) in relation to accessibility for buildings. The action was also influenced by the Disability Act of 2005. Its aims were to examine the implications of the higher standards of accessibility in relation to:

- The current Temple Street Hospital site;
- The proposed new National Paediatric Hospital.

The action involved the concept of 'universal accessibility', some of the key features of which are described in Box 3.1. The Disability Act of 2005 states: "Universal design refers to the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people, regardless of their age, size or disability."

#### Box 3.1:

#### Section from NDA Website on Universal Accessibility

"Universal accessibility is a key concept that states that all environments should be accessible by everyone, regardless of ability (University of Ulster, 2003). Everybody is different and there is no 'average' person. As a result universal accessibility will benefit all, because people with disabilities, people of small or tall stature, parents with buggies, delivery persons and so forth will have greater access to the built and external environments.

"To ensure accessibility of the built environment is of the highest standard there are a number of essential criteria that need to be met. These are highlighted below with a brief description of some of their influencing factors:

- Management - Access handbook, access and safety, responsibilities and commitment
- Transport - Getting to the building, location, set down areas
- External Environment - car parking, routes, ramps, steps and doors
- Vertical and Horizontal Circulation - steps and stairs, lifts, corridors and internal doors
- Facilities - reception, toilets, seating areas, changing rooms, restaurants and refreshments
- Interior Design - lighting, colour and contrast, fixtures
- Evacuation - emergency equipment, alarms, signage, evacuation equipment, plans
- Communication Facilities - signage, telephones, tactile features, acoustics."

The action links to a wider debate in Ireland about universal accessibility. In late-2006, the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland adopted a new policy on accessibility to provide architects with a framework to design and create accessible buildings. Its President stated: "As international standards in building design increase, Ireland should be positioning itself at the forefront of implementing these standards, not be content with simply carrying out the minimum necessary". A Centre of Excellence for Universal Design (CEUD) was established by the NDA in 2007.

Due to delays in choosing a site for, and building, the new National Paediatric Hospital, the project was unable to proof the plans for the new hospital before end-2007. However, improvements were identified and undertaken in relation to the existing Temple Street hospital site and an access handbook was developed which will provide a resource in relation to the design of the new hospital. The action was overseen by the hospital's Diversity Committee.

The audit of the existing Temple Street Hospital site was the first universal access audit of a building in the Irish health sector. The audit ran from June to September 2006 and was undertaken by an external expert, who worked in association with the NDA. Following receipt of the audit report, its findings were reviewed and prioritised by the project's local steering group before being passed to the hospital executive.

**In relation to improvements in the current hospital building, a number of actions had been taken by late-2007:**

- Disability awareness training was delivered to staff (including management).
- The upgrading of the visual contrast on stairs areas had begun, was highly visible, and was widely commented upon in the hospital.
- Changes to the height of counters in the check-in areas.
- A new policy in relation to paint colours and contrasts had been adopted. As well as the benefits to users, this also provides clearer guidance to the hospital's maintenance section.
- Costing was being obtained for improved access doors and improved check-in areas as part of the development of the outpatients department (linking to two new floors planned for the hospital).

In relation to the development of an Access Handbook, the hospital obtained an equivalent UK handbook but legislative and other differences meant that an Irish handbook was required. This publication, essentially a step-by-step approach to implementing universal access, was being finalised in November 2007.

Contact was made with the HSE at national level in Autumn 2007 and the project presented its outcomes and their implications for the wider health sector.

A challenge identified by the action in relation to accessibility in health care settings is the tendency, despite the Disability Act of 2005, to see accessibility as an 'extra' rather than as a core part of design or build work. As a member of the Temple Street project team commented in 2007: "Access must become a way of thinking rather than something to think about". This suggests the importance of influencing senior management in health institutions to ensure accessibility considerations are taken into account from the start of a project.

A further challenge identified is the need to have 'champions' to support accessibility. Progress was being made in this regard in 2007 with a plan to engage with a new 'Universal Access Officer' who was due to be appointed within the Disability Directorate of HSE Corporate.

#### Outputs Arising from the *Equal at Work* Action in the Children's University Hospital, Temple Street:

- First universal accessibility audit of a building in the Irish health sector;
- Development and implementation of disability training module for hospital staff;
- Number of changes made, or planned, to make Temple Street hospital building more accessible to all users;
- Access Handbook developed in relation to universal accessibility in Ireland – to be used as part of the process of designing the new National Paediatric Hospital.

### 3.5 Comment on Actions in the Health Sector

The above pages indicate that very good progress was made in relation to all five *Equal at Work* health sector actions. In all cases, the original objectives of the actions were achieved, with practical outputs being produced in all cases. This occurred against a backdrop of change in the health sector, which might have proved a distraction to the focus on equality and diversity. In fact, with all organisations involved participating actively in the *Equal at Work* health sector cluster, and with a cluster chairperson providing good coordination, the wider change was, if anything, used to progress the actions.

The cluster organised a major mainstreaming event in May 2007, which was held at the Royal Hospital in Kilmainham. This event involved senior speakers from the HSE with delegates travelling from all parts of the country. A DVD was produced for the conference which showcased the work of the five actions. This DVD is available via the Dublin Employment Pact and further information on the actions in the cluster is available from the Pact's website.

The above pages show that, by November 2007, implementation work was well underway in relation to actions identified under *Equal at Work*, with work-plans generally running through 2008 and 2008. In terms of dissemination of the project learning outside the institutions directly involved, a strategy had been developed by the *Equal at Work* health cluster, partly following from discussions with the HSE Employers Agency (HSEEA) – see Table 3.1.

The above pages show that, by November 2007, implementation work was well underway in relation to actions identified under *Equal at Work*, with work-plans generally running through 2008 and 2008. In terms of dissemination of the project learning outside the institutions directly involved, a strategy had been developed by the representatives of the National HR Directorate and the HSE Employers Agency in liaison with the six health sector agencies participating in *Equal at Work*. As part of this strategy, alliances have been created with senior HR and Social Inclusion Personnel in HSE Corporate and in the HSE Employers Agency, as shown below.

To facilitate the above actions, the health sector cluster of *Equal at Work* developed a short report, and accompanying high quality presentation, in late-2007. It was also planned to use the DVD produced for the May 2007 conference as a mainstreaming tool. As well as sharing the direct learning from the actions, a focus of the dissemination work was to raise awareness of the importance of getting high-level buy-in to an equality agenda in an institution, so that 'whole organisation approaches', rather than piecemeal changes, are the norm.

*Equal at Work* provided a space for a range of organisations from both the statutory and voluntary parts of the health sector to come together to work on common actions and to share learning. The project shows the value of creating such spaces.

**Table 3.1:**

**Steps planned for first quarter of 2008 to communicate the learning arising from the health cluster of the *Equal at Work* Project**

**Avenues for taking initiatives forward**

- Taking the learning to the HSE Employers Agency-led Equal Opportunities/Diversity Working Group (a key group where all health sector providers are represented);
- Influencing the Equality Strategy and Action Plan of this Working Group;
- Influencing the specifics of the implementation of the 2007 Guidelines for Recruitment and Retention of Older Workers;
- Working with the new Universal Access Officer being appointed by the HSE.

**Awareness raising sessions**

- HSE HR Senior Managers (National Director and Assistant National Directors);
- Corporate Learning and Development Managers Group;
- Employee Relation Managers;
- Disability Section in the HSE;
- Dublin Academic Teaching Hospitals HR Group;
- Voluntary Hospitals HR Managers Group;
- Intellectual Disability Sector HR Group.





Chapter 4:

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# Innovative Actions in Local Authorities

## 4.1 Introduction

Two of the four local authorities in the greater Dublin area led actions under the *Equal at Work* project. These actions were coordinated by the Local Government Management Services Board, which also provided a focus for the dissemination and mainstreaming of the learning arising from the actions.

## 4.2 Traveller Recruitment in South Dublin County Council

### Context for Action in South Dublin County Council

This project implemented by South Dublin County Council commenced in Spring 2005 and piloted two programmes. Both were designed to open sustainable paths to employment for Traveller men and women. Key partners in its development and delivery were FÁS, the Tallaght Local Employment Service, St Basil's Traveller Training Centre, Tallaght and the Tallaght Travellers Development Group.

South Dublin County Council is one of two local authorities represented on the High Level Group on Traveller Issues<sup>5</sup> and is represented by its County Manager. The idea for this project originated with the Council's involvement with this Group. In addition, of 23,681 members of the Traveller community in Ireland, 1,824 (7.7%) live in South Dublin County. This is the third highest Traveller population by local authority area, after Dublin and Galway City Councils.

Despite efforts to ensure that its recruitment processes are open and fair, no member of the Traveller community had been employed by the Council before this initiative. The project was discussed with elected councillors; regularly mentioned at management briefings, and supported in the budgetary process. It was viewed as a strategic initiative to recruit Travellers to the Council's staff thereby contributing to meeting a priority objective – to be “an equitable and inclusive county”.<sup>6</sup>

This leadership created the opportunity for a senior HR Manager to dedicate time working directly with the project – especially in its early stages.

### Training and Employment Programme for General Operatives

This programme aimed to recruit and train 8-10 General Operatives (GOs) for work in the Parks Department. The project involved six months during which participants trained for three days a week with FÁS and worked two days a week as part of teams in the Council's Parks Department.

#### Recruitment of people to the programme involved a number of steps:

- Co-operation with local Traveller groups in identifying potentially suitable participants in the 17-19 year old age group;
- Informal interviews to establish level of capabilities and interest;
- Offer of full pay (at General Operative entry level grade) during the six months;
- Promise of a job if the training was successfully completed.

Following the selection process, 12 young Traveller men from Tallaght were selected for the programme. The FÁS element of the programme was delivered by an instructor with previous experience of working with the Traveller community. For the work part of the programme, the men were allocated to different teams within the Department. Diversity training was provided to Parks Department employees in advance of the project and the process was supported by the SDCC trades unions.

Eight participants successfully completed the six month programme, which was accredited by FETAC. They received certificates from Minister Frank Fahey TD at a graduation ceremony in South Dublin County Council. Seven of these eight men completed their standard work probationary periods with the Council in early-2006 and six moved into full-time employment. One year later, in March 2007, three of the men

<sup>5</sup> This group was established by the Government in December 2003 to give impetus to the implementation of the recommendations of the 1995 Task Force on the Travelling Community. It is chaired by the Dept. of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and reports to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion.

<sup>6</sup> This also applies in other areas, e.g. the Council won an Ability Award in 2007 for its work in relation to disability.

were still working with the Council (two of the others had left the area). SDCC reported being very pleased with how the GO programme had worked. It believed the focus on 17-19 year olds; the offer of full pay during the training period; the availability of permanent jobs thereafter; and the ongoing involvement of a senior HR manager, were important success factors. Other stakeholders involved in the action agreed that the Programme worked well and thought it could potentially be replicated with older Traveller workers, if appropriate supports were in place. The participants said they could easily find other young Traveller men to participate future projects.

SDCC began the programme with 10 further young Traveller men, in the Clondalkin area, in May 2007, and this programme was completed in October 2007.

### **Training and Employment Programme for Clerical Officers**

The second part of the work by South Dublin County Council did not have a formal training course but involved hiring people with good literacy skills, some computer skills and (generally) some work experience to work on temporary contracts or work experience, with a view to preparing them for Clerical Officer competitions. This format meant that people could be selected one-by-one, on a rolling basis.

The young people entering the CO Programme were identified in association with local organisations working with the Traveller community and by the local Traveller school liaison teacher. Participants were paid at the entry rate on the Clerical Officer pay-scale. By early 2006, two young women had successfully moved into full-time permanent positions and a further two women and one man were in full-time temporary positions, with the Council optimistic that they would become permanent after the next Clerical Officer competition. One year later, in March 2007, these five people (four women and one man) were still working with the Council. Four were successful in 2007 at both the interview and competition parts of the process to become a Clerical Officer and were placed on a CO panel. Young people who had

been hired but who did not have a Leaving Certificate qualification had found the work harder and had not continued in the employment.

As with the GO Programme, the CO participants said there would be no problem getting more people from the Traveller community for this Programme.

The Council continued the Programme in 2006 and moved to use the clerical work placements as an incentive for young Travellers to stay in school to sit their Leaving Certificate exams. Young people who do so are offered work as Temporary Clerical Officers and 14 young people availed of this offer in Summer 2007.

## Conclusions and Next Steps

Both elements of the SDCC/*Equal at Work* pilot project in relation to Traveller employment worked well. By March 2007, SDCC was employing nine members of the Traveller community and planned to continue with both parts of the pilot project. The Council had added two further elements to its work with Travellers – a Graffiti Removal Initiative (with six people employed) and a Summer Placements Initiative.

While modest in itself, if the project was replicated by other local authorities, it has the potential to make a good contribution to tackling the chronic unemployment situation in the Traveller community. This would fit with the increased emphasis of many local authorities on promoting social inclusion. Adoption of the action could also greatly improve relations between local authorities and Travellers.

Successful implementation of the SDCC project involved a range of factors, which included the following:

- Leadership from the County Manager and from elected members;
- Good management – building on the leadership provided to run the project in a competent way, with an attention to detail;
- Existence of a 'champion' for the project within the HR Department, who helped maintain the momentum of the project;
- Good relations with local Traveller organisations and organisations working with Travellers (important in sourcing suitable candidates for the Programmes);
- Appropriate, informal processes to select individuals with the relevant competencies for the positions;
- The ability of the Council to offer full-time jobs at the end of the process if the training outcomes were successful, reinforced by the Council paying full-time wage levels while participants were training;
- Early responses to problems and issues arising by a senior HR manager;
- The welcoming and co-operative attitudes of existing employees - supported by the Council's diversity training programme and by the trades unions;

- Co-operation from other agencies, including FÁS, and provision of a FETAC accredited course by an experienced instructor;
- Flexibility to respond to issues and challenges that are bound to arise.

Given this list, replication of the project in other local authorities, or elsewhere, requires good local planning, and adjustment to local circumstances. The SDCC pilot project shows, however, that obstacles arising can be overcome and good new employees can be sourced from the Traveller community.

### Outputs Arising from *Equal at Work* Action in South Dublin County Council:

- Two years after starting employment, eight members of the Traveller community still working with the Council on a full-time basis, seven with permanent jobs;
- Six members of the Traveller community employed on a graffiti programme;
- Further people provided with comprehensive training, with the possibility of future employment, including ten Travellers in Clondalkin;
- Summer work placement programme developed: 14 young people provided with placements in 2007;
- Detailed report prepared by *Equal at Work* on the operation of this action – available from the Dublin Employment Pact;
- New model of training/employment developed for Travellers, both in relation to outdoor work and for clerical work;
- New initiatives in relation to liaison with local schools.

### 4.3 Progression of Outdoor Staff in Dublin City Council

This action arose directly from the findings of the 2004 Workplace Review undertaken by Dublin City Council (supported by an external consultant). The survey showed that, while 71% of the employees of the Council were interested in promotion, many lacked the confidence to apply to progress within the organisation.

Outdoor employees work in areas such as parks, drainage, water, roads, housing and waste management. These employees are mainly men, and many would have left school without completing the second-level cycle.

**As the Council had recently reviewed and redesigned their recruitment processes to ensure a high level of equality for all applicants, it was decided to respond to the 2004 survey results through two elements of work:**

1. Design and Piloting of a Training Course for people planning to undertake interviews to progress within the Council;
2. Preparation of an Interview Skills Pack.

The project was overseen within the Council by a five-person team, including Maire Twomey, Training Manager; Liz McHenry, Equality Officer; Anna Gibney, Recruitment Manager; Dymphna Farrell, Recruitment; and Mary Mac Sweeney, Partnership Coordinator. The work was undertaken in the context of the Council's partnership structures, with involvement of employee representatives at all stages, and with consultation and agreement as core principles of the work.

In relation to the training course element of the work, four focus groups were held in February 2006 with 20 employees, working as general operatives or craft workers at a level below the Inspector Grade, with ten each from the Council's Water and Drainage divisions.

The focus group facilitators asked questions such as:

- What support would you like before attending an interview?
- What would be helpful in preparing for a promotion interview?
- Do you receive support from your managers or colleagues when preparing for an interview?
- What are the difficulties in completing the application form?
- What has your experience been of interviews?
- What reasons tend to encourage you not to apply for promotion?
- What would encourage you to go for promotion?

The focus groups identified issues that people had with the process, and 'knowledge gaps' where training/support was needed. For example, people asked questions about the logic of the interview process, why particular questions were asked, what competency based interviewing meant etc.

The discussions provided the basis for a training module to support outdoor workers in relation to interviews. This module was piloted twice during May 2006, being delivered by an external training agency, and modified before being finalised.

The focus groups also allowed the HR Department within the Council to prepare an Interview Skills Pack for workers. A draft version of the pack was given to NALA, the National Adult Literacy Agency, to proof from a 'plain English' perspective, before it was finalised. Given that some of the target workers involved would have issues with literacy skills, the Council found this feedback very useful. The Council also said that the stigma that formerly existed in relation to literacy issues has been reduced in recent years, partly due to its ongoing Return to Learning programme. Workers from the Water and Drainage divisions, and the Council's partnership committee, also commented on a draft version of the pack.

The Interview Skills Pack was launched by Equal in March 2007 and contains:

- A blank application form for internal progression with Dublin City Council;
- A sample of a completed version of the above form;
- A two-sided sheet giving advice on completion of the application form;
- A one-page 'application form checklist';
- A two-sided sheet explaining competency based interviews;
- One-page sheets on 'Preparing for Your Interview', 'Interview Technique' and 'After Your Interview'.

The Interview Skills Pack was launched within Dublin City Council in May 2007 by the City Manager, the Equality Officer and the Deputy City Engineer of the Drainage Division. The launch was attended by managers and trade union representatives and by the general operative and craft workers who participated in the focus groups and the interview skills training.

Some 2,000 copies of the pack, which has an introduction by the City Manager, were printed and distributed to outdoor workers with the Council. Packs, were left in the different outdoor depots and are given to outdoor staff members who apply to progress in their jobs. In his introduction to the pack, the City Manager states: "If you are a General Operative or Craft employee who is interested in being promoted, this guide is for you". A telephone number is provided for managers who wish to arrange Interview Skills Training for their staff.

#### Outputs Arising from *Equal at Work* Action in Dublin City Council:

- Training course providing interview skills for outdoor workers in the Council developed, piloted and implemented by the Council;
- Training made available to managers who wish to provide it for their staff;
- Training provided to additional staff outside this project;
- Interview Skills Pack developed and distributed to relevant Council workers;
- Focus groups and launch of Pack supported the idea of progression being possible for all Council workers;
- Other local authorities have expressed an interest in this project and are considering implementing a similar initiative for their outdoor employees.





Pictured: Battie White, Deputy City Engineer; John Tierney, City Manager; Liz McHenry, Equality Officer; Frank Kelly, Human Resource Manager; Karen Reid, and Philip O'Connor, DEP at the launch of the Dublin City Council Interview Skills Pack.

#### 4.4 Comment on Actions in Local Authorities

Both local authority actions were implemented in full as per the 2005 *Equal at Work* project plan and both have led to practical outputs.

The Local Government Management Services Board organised two seminars (one in 2006 and one in 2007) to share the learning arising from the two actions. In each case, representatives of some 15-20 other local authorities attended the seminars and, in particular, these led to, or supported existing moves by, a number of other local authorities in relation to the employment of Travellers. By mid-2007, work in this regard was being undertaken by local authorities in Clare, Cork County, Galway County, Waterford and Kerry, with an examination of the issue taking place with local authorities in Fingal, Wicklow, Kildare and Kilkenny.

Learning from the initiative was adopted by Pobal and shared with the Partnership Companies implementing the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme.

Both actions promote greater equality in local authority workplaces, with the South Dublin County Council initiative with Travellers being of particular strategic importance given the high level of difficulty experienced nationally by members of the Traveller community in accessing employment.

Pictured: David Connolly, Dublin Inner City Partnership;  
Joanna McMinn, National Womens Council and David Begg,  
Irish Congress of Trade Unions.



Chapter 5:

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# Innovative Actions in the Community Sector

## 5.1 Introduction

The actions of *Equal at Work* in relation to the promotion of workplace equality in the community sector built on the outcomes of research undertaken by the Dublin Employment Pact in 2002-04. This showed that community sector organisations often have poor HR practices, pay and conditions. For example:

- 47% of organisations did not have a written policy statement on issues such as equal opportunities, work-life balance, staff recruitment, promoting equality and diversity or staff training;
- 35% of organisations said that no opportunities existed for staff promotion;
- 40% of organisations did not provide annual increments to pay and 60% did not make a contribution to the pension provision of their workers.

Despite wishing to provide better pay, conditions and HR policies for their staff, many community sector organisations felt constrained in doing so due to their small size and a general lack of resources. Following consultation between the Dublin Employment Pact and DP members from the community sector, it was decided that these findings required strategic, long-term responses. While it is difficult to put in place such responses in the timeframe of an EQUAL project (a 30-month period), it was decided to attempt to develop such responses and to establish the resulting outcomes on a lasting basis before the project ended. Smaller, piecemeal responses were not perceived to be what was required.

Three separate but mutually reinforcing *Equal at Work* actions were identified:

1. Work with trade unions to organise a campaign to increase union membership in the sector, as a way to leverage improved pay and conditions over time.
2. Work to organise employers in the sector to come together to campaign on issues of mutual interest, including good HR policies and practices.
3. Establish a central resource for the sector to provide information in relation to good HR practices.

The second and third actions were linked in the *Equal at Work* Action Plan of 2005 but, as the work involved in implementing them was largely separated, they are described separately in this report.

To underpin these actions, the *Equal at Work* Community Sector cluster commissioned two pieces of research during its lifetime:<sup>7</sup>

- A May 2006 report, *Note on the Community Sector in Ireland*, reviewed definitions of the community sector and estimated the size of the sector in Ireland, and in Dublin. It estimated that the sector had an economic value in 2004 of approximately €3 billion, equivalent to half of the government's current spend on education in that year. Focusing specifically on those parts of the community sector that address social inclusion issues, the report estimated that over 50,000 people were working in organisations in these areas in 2006, equivalent to 43% of those working in agriculture, forestry and fishing, or 10% of all of those working in industry in Ireland;
- A June 2007 report, *Pay, Conditions and HR Practices under Different Government Programmes in the Community Sector*, began by noting the commitments of the government in its 2000 White Paper on supporting community sector organisations in good HR practices through appropriate funding. However, the research findings showed that pay and conditions across six government programmes remain uneven, with the provision of wage increases

<sup>7</sup> These two research reports, prepared by Hibernian Consulting, are available from the website of the Dublin Employment Pact.

under social partnership agreements, pension contributions, and specific funding for good HR training being patchy. Reporting requirements also remain complicated and differ from programme to programme.

The first of the above pieces of research showed the range of tasks which the community sector is required to undertake in Ireland, and the important areas of social policy left to the sector. The latter piece of research showed the continuing need for the actions undertaken by *Equal at Work* in relation to this sector.

## 5.2 Increasing Trade Union Membership in the Community Sector

Increasing trade union membership was seen, not as an end in itself, but as a way that *Equal at Work* could support longer-term improvements in the pay and conditions of workers in the community sector. During 2006, the project spoke to community sector organisations about this idea, researched the policies of trade unions in the UK to the sector, and talked to the larger Irish trade unions.

This work led to a campaign being launched at a November 2006 conference held at Liberty Hall in Dublin. Chaired by Gráinne Healy, Project Consultant with *Equal at Work* and with considerable experience in the sector, speakers included David Begg (General Secretary, ICTU), Jack O'Connor (General Secretary, SIPTU) and Shay Cody (Deputy General Secretary, IMPACT). The conference received considerable national media publicity, which boosted the launch of the trade union membership campaign.

After this conference, *Equal at Work* contributed to the campaign on an ongoing basis via a Community Sector/Trade Union campaign group, which met regularly during 2007. The project's community sector cluster also received regular updates directly from the trade unions.

After November 2006, much of the day-to-day work in relation to this action was taken on by SIPTU and IMPACT. Both unions moved to re-organise their approach to the community sector and their branch structures evolved during 2007 to reflect this commitment. The unions also established dedicated parts of their websites for workers in the sector. The application of the resources and expertise of the trade unions in this regard meant that this project action was to some extent 'mainstreamed' from late-2006/early-2007.

In Summer 2007, facilitated by *Equal at Work*, an 'e-bulletin' in relation to the campaign was produced jointly by SIPTU and IMPACT. The bulletin introduced the campaign to increase trade union membership in the community sector, discussed current issues under discussion between the trade unions and the government in relation to community sector pay and conditions, and set out the case for workers to join a union. The bulletin represented a manifestation of the cooperation between the two unions that occurred in relation to this action.

By October 2007, both unions reported a considerable increase in membership from the community sector in the first ten months of the membership campaign. For example, SIPTU reported that the membership of its community sector branch in Dublin had risen by 110%, it had run 149 'organising meetings' in the six months to end-September 2007 and a further 46 such meetings were planned for October 2007. Similar growth was reported by IMPACT, and both unions had seen this growth not just in Dublin but in all parts of the country.

A November 2007 conference brought together activists from both SIPTU and IMPACT to discuss the next steps, both in terms of further growing the levels of membership from the community sector and in setting an agenda to support the workers who had already joined trade unions. While *Equal at Work* finishes at end-2007, there is a desire to maintain a wider 'campaign group' to include both trade unions, and perhaps others, to ensure the focus on the particular requirements of community sector workers remain, e.g. for the next round of social partnership discussions.



#### Outputs Arising from *Equal at Work* Action in relation to Trade Union Membership in the Community Sector:

- High profile national campaign launched to increase trade union membership in the sector;
- Structural changes made by trade unions to improve their organisation for the community sector and their services for community sector workers;
- Launch of campaign e-bulletin on a joint-union basis, with a commitment to further such bulletin;
- Several thousand new trade union members signed up between December 2006 and October 2007;
- Structure put in place to allow trade union membership campaign to continue into 2008 and beyond.

### 5.3 Supporting the Organising of Employers in the Community Sector

A gap identified in the community sector was the absence of an employer voice. For example, during the life of *Equal at Work*, discussions took place between trade unions and government. However, there was no employer voice at the table. A vacuum existed, and had existed traditionally, in that government departments did not see themselves as (and were not) the employers yet often set down conditions which effectively constrained or influenced community organisations, with nobody putting across the point of the view of the organisations themselves. The absence of an employer organisation also meant a vacuum in relation to the agreement of sector-wide employer/trade union grievance procedures etc.

In early-2006, *Equal at Work* made inputs to the national social partnership discussions, via meetings with the trade unions, to support the idea of a tripartite mechanism to discuss issues relating to the

community sector, i.e. involving government, employers and trade unions. The trade union talks with the Department of Finance, referred to above, took place following this input.

The Towards 2016 agreement, which was influenced by many organisations and projects other than the Dublin Employment Pact, stated [Section 34.1]: "The Government recognises that the community and voluntary sector forms the very core of a vibrant and inclusive society... While the Government should not seek to control and be involved in every aspect of voluntary activity, it does have a responsibility to provide an enabling framework to help the sector."

In seeking a model for the establishment of an organisation to represent community sector organisations, *Equal at Work* explored the possibility of linking to an existing structure. In this regard, discussions were held with organisations including IBEC, the SFA, the Wheel and the Community Platform. However, it was decided that the distinct character of the community sector, and the distinct nature of the issues its employers wish to address, meant it was best, at least initially, to establish an independent voice.

The inaugural meeting of the Community Sector Employers' Forum was held in Wynn's Hotel in Dublin in June 2007 and was attended by 36 people from a range of community sector organisations. The idea that the Forum would provide a place for community sector employers to develop a common approach to collective problems was agreed, and the task of engaging with trade unions on sectoral issues was identified. An interim Steering Group was appointed, with the short-term objectives of developing a work plan and examining issues relating to the establishment of the Forum on a firm legal basis for the longer term.

The interim Steering Group provided an update report back to members in October 2007. Its work up to this point had included developing its membership, preparing for incorporation, meetings with different parts of the Labour Relations Commission and a first set of talks with the trade unions representing workers in the sector. It had also begun a

process of thinking about its approach to the next round of social partnership discussions.

In September 2007, a campaign began to broaden further the membership of the Forum through the design and circulation of a leaflet – ‘An Invitation to Join the Community Sector Employers’ Forum’. Membership rose to over 60 organisations in October 2007 and to over 80 organisations further following a public event in November 2007. Members were drawn from across the community sector and included national representative groups, Area Partnerships, local enterprise groups, Community Development Projects, Family Resource Centres, women’s groups, youth groups, groups representing ethnic minority groups etc.

This campaign was underpinned by the development within Equal at Work of a database of organisations in the community sector. This brought information together from several other databases, as well as new information, and comprised over 1,600 organisations when complete.

#### Outputs Arising from *Equal at Work* Action in Supporting Community Sector Employers to Organise in a more structured way:

- Input into *Towards 2016* social partnership discussions, which led to an agreement with specific commitments for the community sector;
- Research papers on the scope of the community sector in Ireland and on issues facing the sector in relation to pay, conditions and HR practices;
- Establishment of a Community Sector Employers’ Forum;
- Legal structure and work-plan for Forum, as well as membership of over 80 organisations by November 2007;
- Initial round of publicity in Autumn 2007 to boost Forum membership;
- Start made to structured dialogue between employers and trade unions in the community sector;
- Compilation of database of 1,600 community sector organisations, especially in Dublin region.

## 5.4 The Employer Resource Bureau

The concept of an Employer Resource Bureau (ERB) arose from:

- The fact that many community sector organisations do not follow best practice in relation to their HR policies (as established by the 2002-04 Dublin Employment Pact research);
- The small scale and limited resources of many community sector organisations, which limits both their HR expertise and their time to address these issues;
- The almost universal access to the internet and to broadband which now exists, which allowed for the possibility of a web-based resource to support community sector organisations.

A feasibility study into the establishment of an ERB was undertaken by an independent consultant who reported in February 2006. Her research identified demand for such a resource, with 58% of 63 community groups contacted saying they were interested and a further 20% saying that they wanted to be kept informed of developments. The feasibility study set out a number of practical steps to lead to the establishment of the ERB. It also recommended that the ERB have both web-based and telephone-based elements, although it was decided for resource reasons to proceed with the web-based part of the resource in the first instance.

Following a phase of developing and piloting the Employer Resource Bureau, the ERB was launched as a web-based resource (at [www.erb.ie](http://www.erb.ie)) in April 2007. Its aim is to provide community sector employers with an overview of their responsibilities, as laid down in Irish employment law. The ultimate aim is to improve HR practices so as to benefit employees and to boost the long-term performance of the organisations themselves. The ERB was supported from its launch by the Labour Relations Commission, whose Chief Executive described it as “a very useful resource... a welcome addition to our collective information base on employer responsibilities in the workplace”.



The content on the site ranges from information on specific Acts to guidance on how to develop and implement specific employment policies and procedures. It includes a 'best practice' guide to successful recruitment and selection. It explains the importance of equality legislation and the need for a comprehensive policy and procedure to deal with bullying and harassment. The site presents a number of templates (e.g. sample contract of employment), noting that these are specimen documents with organisations advised to seek advice in relation to their own circumstances. The content of the site was designed to address gaps identified by the 2002-04 Dublin Employment Pact research.

In its first months of operation, the ERB site received the following number of visits: April 2007 – 625; May 2007 – 1,045; June 2007 – 1,315; July 2007 – 1,618; August 2007 – 1,428; September 2007 – 1,097. Cumulatively, these add to over 7,100 hits in the first six months of operation and demonstrate a high level of demand for the resource within the community sector. For example, the number of visits during the Summer period of June-August 2007 averaged between 45 and 50 per day. The ERB was publicised during its first six months via articles in various newsletters and at a number of conferences targeting the community sector.

In July 2007, a first update e-newsletter was distributed to people who had registered on the site for updates on ongoing changes in the sector. A second update was distributed in October 2007. The second update, for example, contained information on a recent labour court ruling in relation to alcoholism in the workplace; on the Annual Reports of the Equality Tribunal and the Labour Court, and on other issues.

In late-2007, *Equal at Work* was in discussion as to how funding could be obtained to underpin the ERB in 2007. The possibility of linking the website more closely to the work of the Community Sector Employers' Forum was being actively explored. It was also planned to receive structured feedback from users at end-2007/start-2008.



Pictured: Jean Somers, DEP; Assumpta McGill, Labour Court and Noreen Byrne, Doras Bui at the launch of the ERB website.

#### Outputs Arising from *Equal at Work* Action in Establishing an Employer Resource Bureau:

- Feasibility study for the establishment of a central point of information in relation to good HR practices for the community sector;
- Preparation of considerable amount of information and best practice material for up-loading onto the ERB website;
- Launch of a web-based Employer Resource Bureau, with associated publicity;
- Production of a publicity leaflet for the ERB;
- Achievement of over 7,100 visits in first six months of ERB operation;
- Establishment of a free 'update' service, by way of e-newsletter, to users of the ERB who register for this service.

## 5.5 Comment on Actions in the Community Sector

The Dublin Employment Pact has implemented projects under the EQUAL programme in both 2002-04 and for 2005-07. Both of these projects focused, in part, on the community sector. To a large extent, the outputs achieved through *Equal at Work* represent the outputs of the Dublin Employment Pact, and a specific group of organisations and people, over a five year period.

The work described above shows that all three of the objectives set out in relation to the community sector have been achieved by *Equal at Work*. Indeed, in all three cases, the actions were largely achieved by the first half of 2007, meaning that there was a period of time during which the project could monitor, and continue to influence, the actions. Thus, the trade union campaign to raise membership in the community sector gained momentum during 2007; the Community Sector Employers' Forum consolidated its longer-term future in the latter part of 2007, and the ERB had a chance to monitor the demand for its services and to circulate its first two e-newsletter updates.

*Equal at Work* actions in relation to the community sector were more strategic, and to some extent more abstract, than actions in the other economic sectors. In practical terms, this meant that achievement of the actions was dependent on an able, active Steering Group for the cluster, and on focused work by the relevant project staff members, both of which were in place during 2006 and 2007. The strategic nature of the approach was also seen in the way that the three actions were mutually reinforcing. The increased trade union involvement in the sector was a factor in generating talks with the Department of Finance in early-2007, which led to the identification of the need for a strong employer voice. Both of these actions were in turn reinforced by the work of the Employer Resource Bureau.

The *Equal at Work* community sector cluster provided logistical support for a November 2007 conference which brought together the three actions. The conference, organised jointly by the Community Sector Employers' Forum and the Community Sector/Trade Union campaign group, involved presentations on the three *Equal at Work* actions, with a particular focus on next steps for the Employers' Forum and for the campaign as regards trade union membership. The conference, held at the Royal Hospital in Kilmainham, was attended by over 250 people, primarily community sector employers and workers from the sector who were trade union members.

The strategic nature of the actions in this sector means the longer-term success of the actions will be crucially dependent on their momentum being maintained and increased in the coming years. The November 2007 conference provided good grounds for optimism that the progress from 2006 and 2007 can be built upon.



Chapter 6:

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# DP Organisation and Transnational Work

## 6.1 Organisation of the DP and the Project Work Project Structures

Chapter 1 noted that the Development Partnership for *Equal at Work* comprised almost 50 organisations, and some of these were represented through multiple people or departments. A full list of the partners is contained in Annex 1.

Putting together a DP of this size was itself a complicated and skilled process and demanded a considerable amount of work by the Dublin Employment Pact in 2004 and 2005. While the Pact also managed a project in Round 1 of EQUAL, its project application under Round 2 saw a number of new features, including an increased emphasis on equality reviews and the involvement of the health sector cluster. These changes were made based on needs identified during the consultation process.

Overseeing all aspects of the project were a Project Manager and an *Equal at Work* Management Committee. The latter comprised the Chairs of the four sectoral clusters and a number of other selected individuals. The committee met approximately every six weeks during the life of the project and received detailed reports from the Project Manager on project activity and the project budget in advance of each of its meetings. The Management Committee took a lead in 2007 in work to ensure the dissemination and mainstreaming of the *Equal at Work* actions.

The size of the DP, and the identification of 15 distinct project actions, meant that project implementation was organised through four clusters, relating to the four areas described in Chapters 2-5. Each cluster contained the lead organisations for delivery of the specific actions. Other DP members were invited to become involved in clusters they perceived to be of relevance to them. The cluster structure proved to be a good mechanism for delivery of the actions as it brought together relevant organisations, without implementation becoming unwieldy.

While this review has focused on the lead organisations in relation to the *Equal at Work* actions, an important factor in the success of the project was the continuing involvement of other organisations. For example, while South Dublin County Council led implementation in relation to the action on Traveller employment, this work received important inputs from Pavee Point, St. Basil's Traveller Training Centre, the Tallaght Traveller Development Group, FÁS and the Local Government Management Services Board, who had been brought together by *Equal at Work* in the local authority cluster. Likewise, implementation of the community sector actions depended on the sustained involvement of people from Dublin Inner-City Partnership, the KWCD Partnership, trade unions and several other community sector organisations. These examples make the general point that the outputs of the project arise from the combined efforts of the 50 or so partner organisations.

An important factor in the project's success in achieving its original goals was a high level of continuity in terms of personnel. Where the person involved changed, there was always a risk of discontinuity but this occurred in a minority of actions and, even then, the cluster structure was able to provide the continuity required.

The project was also supported by a project development consultant (Gráinne Healy), who had been involved in the previous (Round 1) EQUAL project and in the phase of consultations which preceded this Round 2 project – this added to the sense of continuity in the project.

Given the cluster structure, where most of the implementation occurred, the DP as a whole did not need to meet regularly. In fact, it met on three occasions: in mid-2005, at a kick-off event; at close to the mid-way point, in June 2006; and at a closing event in November 2007. Between these formal meetings, all partners were invited to events organised by each of the four clusters, e.g. the health sector conference in May 2007, the private sector conference in October 2007 etc. Outputs from the clusters were also posted on the website of the Dublin Employment Pact as they emerged.





Pictured: Some members of the Project Management Committee; Mona Baker, Finbar McDonnell, Philip O'Connor, David Goggin, Noel Dowling, Karen Reid, Bridget McGuane, David Connolly & Grainne Healy.

A further dimension to the organisation of the project was the importance of social partnership in delivering many of the project actions. The social partnership process was itself the focus of actions for the community sector (through the involvement of the trade unions and the creation of an employer forum) and actions in the other three sectors were delivered via social partnership mechanisms. For example, trade unions in Dublin City Council reviewed the training pack for outdoor workers and the Council's Partnership Coordinator was directly involved in the project. In South Dublin County Council, the trade unions were important players in agreeing that the Traveller employees would be employed at standard pay-rates. Their further involvement, e.g. in the projects in Tallaght Hospital or in Irish Life & Permanent, means that these actions are more likely to be sustainable.

### Project Finances

The research for this review did not include research on the finances of the project. However, information supplied to Hibernian Consulting by the project in November 2007 showed that the project expected to have a total expenditure of €2.53m over its lifetime (from mid-2005 to end-2007).

The figure of €2.53m was expected to break into €1.4m (55%) of funding from the EU EQUAL Initiative and €1.13m (45%) in match funding. The latter figure was higher than expected at the project outset and reflects a higher than expected work contribution by the project partners. In particular, it reflected much greater activity than had been forecast in relation to South Dublin County Council's work in relation to Traveller employment, and the associated participant costs.

By November 2007, the project was projecting that it would use 100% of this budget by the end of its work, including all of its EQUAL funding allocation. Given that there was a certain amount of slippage in the timeframe for some actions, this represented in itself a project management achievement.

### Organisation of Dissemination and Mainstreaming Work

Core to the idea of EQUAL is that not only are pilot actions implemented but the outcomes and learning arising from these actions are shared. Much of the work of the project in relation to dissemination and mainstreaming was organised via the four sectoral clusters and these actions have been described in Chapters 2-5. However, a number of further actions took place across the project as a whole:

- Attendance at EU Employment Week in Brussels in 2006 and 2007 to share learning arising from all project actions;
- Supplements in The Irish Times on 24th May 2007 (four pages) and on 20th November 2007 (one page);
- Attendance by the Project Manager (and/or other project staff) at various events organised through EQUAL, such as a conference organised by an EQUAL project in the North West in September 2007 (where the Project Manager presented emerging learning from *Equal at Work*) and a national mainstreaming event in October 2007 (where an *Equal at Work* stand was organised);
- Participation with six other Irish EQUAL projects in a thematic cluster which led to the publication of *Delivering a More Inclusive Workplace: Innovations from EQUAL*, together with a DVD containing employer and participant comments on the seven projects;<sup>8</sup>
- Ongoing highlighting of the work of *Equal at Work* through the wider work of the Dublin Employment Pact, e.g. through the Pact's website, through its e-newsletter, through its annual reports etc.

Dissemination and mainstreaming activities were overseen by the project's Management Committee, the aim being to combine targeted dissemination work in the four sectors with wider awareness-raising of project activities.

## 6.2 The InterFAIR Transnational Partnership

### Transnational Cooperation under EQUAL

At the outset of the EQUAL Programme in 2000, a European Commission brochure<sup>9</sup> explained the transnational dimension of EQUAL as follows:

"Transnational co-operation is not an 'added extra' in EQUAL. Working with other countries is crucial to the Initiative's success. It helps partnerships to look beyond national boundaries for inspiration and to learn from experience in other European countries rather than reinventing the wheel. Not only can partnerships learn from different ways of doing things, but transnational co-operation can also provide a source of encouragement when trying out something for the first time."

#### *Equal at Work* had four transnational partners:

- The '**Welcoming Budapest**' project aimed to make workplaces in Budapest more welcoming to a number of groups that experience labour market exclusion. The project's Designate Partner was the city's public employment service. A key partner was a specialist organisation that supports people in labour market integration and the project had major employers as partners – Budapest's public transport company; a large hospital and the city zoo – with the project also supported by the Municipality of Budapest and five trade unions;
- **Project 'Sur de Madrid'** (South of Madrid project) brought together eight partners. The Designate Partner was the Employment Department of the Regional Government of Madrid and other partners included a trade union, an organisation working with women engaged in prostitution, a foundation that facilitates access to the labour market for people at risk of exclusion, and an association of self-employed women;

<sup>8</sup> Available via the website for EQUAL in Ireland: [www.equal-ci.ie](http://www.equal-ci.ie).

<sup>9</sup> European Commission (2000), DG Employment and Social Affairs, EQUAL – New Ways of Tackling Discrimination and Inequality in the Field of Employment.



- The **'FAIR Plus' project** was a learning and innovation network based in the Nuremberg region of Germany. It involved five core partners from the public and private sectors, 28 political partners and 60 companies. The Office for Economic Development of the City of Nuremberg was the Designate Partner. Other partners included the local authorities of three neighbouring towns; employers and employer organisations; trade unions; the Nuremberg labour agency and two universities;
- The **'Equal Chances for All' project** was based in the Warminko-Mazurski region in the north-east of Poland. Led by the Solidarity trade union, its DP included two major regional training organisations. The main work of the Equal Chances for All project was to develop an 'early warning' system for SMEs in the region which were facing restructuring or closure.

All five DPs in the InterFAIR Network worked to support the labour market integration of vulnerable groups, with some variations as to which groups were targeted. All five included major employers, trade unions and public training or labour market agencies. All five represented city-regions across Europe.

## Work of the InterFAIR Network

The work of the Network occurred under several headings:

1. Six exchange visits were held during the lifetime of the network (two hosted by Dublin and one by each of the other partners). These included presentations on the labour markets in each partner region and a plenary session to discuss progress on the five partner projects.
2. As part of the exchange visits, site visits were organised to see examples of best practice in relation to equality, HR and labour market inclusion. These examples were chosen to demonstrate issues of interest to the visiting partners. Over 20 such visits took place over the lifetime of the InterFAIR Network.
3. Four Special Interest Groups (SIGs) were established by the Network to allow for focused work on: Inclusive HR Practices; Older Workers; Lifelong Learning; and Work Placements. The first two of these groups produced publications at the end of their work and all four facilitated the exchange of good practice between the five partners.
4. Arising from the multi-lateral exchange visits, a number of bilateral exchange visits were organised. For example, the Polish partner came to Dublin to discuss trade union cooperation in relation to migrant Polish workers in Ireland. Also, *Equal at Work* organised a trip to the Madrid project to explore ideas on how to support women who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation and to move them towards education and training options.

A review of the work of the InterFAIR Network was prepared in November 2007 and showed that all partners considered the Network to have been a very useful part of their EQUAL projects, and to have generated new ideas and learning. The partners felt the transnational dimension of EQUAL had been very valuable and were planning to extend their cooperation past the end of the programme.

### 6.3 Co-operation Dublin-Belfast

**A request was made by the National Support Structure for EQUAL in Ireland that projects should make efforts to develop links with EQUAL projects in Northern Ireland.**

To this end, the Dublin Employment Pact decided to develop a relationship with the Belfast-based Women Into Non-traditional Sectors (WINS) project. Reasons for choosing the WINS project were:

- Its designate partner was Belfast City Council, a city-wide organisation like the Dublin Employment Pact, and with which the Pact had previously worked;
- The project had a number of major organisations as partners, including the rail company Translink, the Housing Executive and the Construction Industry Training Board;
- Its core focus on equality reflected the focus of *Equal at Work*.

There was ongoing contact with the WINS project during the life of *Equal at Work*, and the partners attended several events organised by each other.

In addition, a first joint seminar was organised in November 2005 in Belfast, where the focus was on Active Labour Market Programmes north and south, with the question posed: "Does an equality focus lead to equality outcomes?" The seminar included a presentation of the research on active labour market policies commissioned by the private sector cluster of *Equal at Work*

A seminar on the theme of managing diversity in the workforce was organised jointly by the *Equal at Work* and WINS projects in September 2006 in Dublin. The seminar included speakers from the HSE, Belfast City Council, the Dublin Employment Pact, the Royal Victoria Hospital and Dublin Bus.

The *Equal at Work* and WINS projects decided in early 2006 to commission research on mechanisms, north and south, to support women in entering non-traditional employment. Two reports were commissioned, one undertaken by the University of Ulster and one by the Women's Education Research and Resource Centre (WEERC) in University College Dublin. The studies were brought together, with a common introduction, and launched as a single report in Belfast in November 2006.

The focus in 2007 was on sharing the learning arising from both projects and ongoing contact was maintained in this regard, up to November 2007, when the WINS Project Coordinator attended the closing event in Dublin for *Equal at Work*.

Chapter 7:

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Conclusions and  
learning arising

## 7.1 *Equal at Work* as an EQUAL Project

Chapter 1 noted that the EQUAL programme expected projects to incorporate a number of characteristics or principles in their work: partnership, link to the European Employment Strategy, empowerment, innovation, dissemination and mainstreaming of outcomes, and transnationality.

As regards **partnership**, *Equal at Work* had a large Development Partnership with some 50 organisations involved. Due to the structures put in place to organise the project, and the commitment of DP members, there was a high level of ongoing commitment by these partners during the life of the project. This was facilitated by the 'cluster' structure, with between six and ten DP members being directly involved in each of the four clusters on an ongoing basis.

While the 15 actions each had an individual lead implementing organisation, the work of many actions was enhanced by the other partner organisations in the relevant cluster. For example, the South Dublin County Council action in relation to Traveller employment relied crucially on local Traveller organisations for outreach work and on FÁS for training inputs; several health sector actions relied on input from the HSE National HR Directorate and the HSE Employers Agency; efforts by trade unions to increase membership in the community sector were assisted by community sector organisations in *Equal at Work* etc.

There was also evidence by the end of the project that partnership facilitated by *Equal at Work* had begun to lead to relationships developing outside the structures of the project. For example, Ballymun Partnership was involved in the private sector cluster. Based on its contacts with Meteor Mobile Communications through this cluster, Meteor became involved in Ballymun Anti-Racism week in 2007, including making a presentation to local employers.

*Equal at Work* was funded under the Adaptability pillar of the **European Employment Strategy**, to focus on: "promoting lifelong learning and inclusive work practices which encourage the recruitment and retention of those suffering discrimination and inequality in connection with the labour market". The review of the work of the project in Chapters 2-5 shows that this aim has been achieved in multiple ways. For example, the equality reviews promoted inclusive work practices in three large companies and in three hospitals; the work in the Children's University Hospital, Temple Street and in EBS promoted inclusion for staff (and customers) with disabilities; the work of Irish Life & Permanent on its website promoted inclusion at recruitment stage; and the Interview Pack prepared by Dublin City Council for outdoor workers supported the retention of these workers.

**Empowerment** is defined in the context of EQUAL projects as meaning that all stakeholders in the project, including participants, should be consulted as regards the work of the project. The focus of *Equal at Work* on changing systems and processes meant that some of its actions did not directly have end-participants. In these cases, empowerment was seen through the discussions of the *Equal at Work* partners at cluster meetings and by a commitment to working through social partnership mechanisms. The equality reviews included surveys where the views of staff members and managers in the different organisations could be obtained, usually supplemented by focus groups to obtain the views of groups of workers. The two local authority actions had direct participants. Both worked through social partnership structures at organisation level and both directly consulted with participants. Dublin City Council organised focus groups with outdoor workers to obtain ideas for its Interview Pack and also discussed a draft version of the pack with workers. In South Dublin County Council, there was close ongoing liaison between the relevant Council manager responsible for the action and the young Traveller participants.

The European Commission described the EQUAL programme as “a laboratory to develop new ways of tackling discrimination and inequality in the labour market” and this links to **innovation**. To some extent, all 15 actions described in Chapters 2-5 were innovative, either in the context of the organisations concerned or on a wider policy basis. The following are some of the major innovations arising:

- Up to mid-2005, there had been in total in the region of 15 equality reviews undertaken in Ireland. The fact that *Equal at Work* was responsible for six further reviews is potentially a major step forward for the use of this equality tool. The reviews in large private sector organisations provide good exemplars for all private sector companies. The reviews in the hospitals were the first such reviews in Ireland and represent a breakthrough in this regard;
- Unemployment for the Traveller community in Ireland has traditionally been very high and this is one part of a wider cycle of social exclusion. By late-2007, eight Travellers were employed with South Dublin County Council on a permanent basis, another 15 or so were employed on a non-permanent basis (including in the anti-graffiti team and in the Clondalkin outdoor workers team) and a further 14 young people from the Traveller community undertook Summer work placements in 2007. If this scheme could be replicated in other local authorities, and by other organisations, it would make a major indent into Traveller unemployment, and would promote wider social inclusion;
- The work of the Children’s University Hospital in Temple Street in relation to universal accessibility represents the first time that this approach has been taken in an Irish healthcare context and has potentially major long-term implications, including for the proposed new National Children’s Hospital;
- The work of Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown and the HSE North East in relation to multi-cultural work teams is the beginning of an engagement by Irish organisations with a topic that will become central for all public service organisations (and other organisations) in the coming decade;

- The community sector actions, taken together, represent a significant strategic effort to upgrade pay, conditions and HR practices in the community sector in Ireland. This sector undertakes a range of important social policy tasks in Ireland and the outcomes of *Equal at Work* could underpin the long-term recruitment and retention of staff in the sector.

Efforts to share learning arising from the work of the project were noted in Chapters 2-5 and, on a project-wide basis, in Chapter 6.

**Dissemination and mainstreaming** were facilitated by a decision by the project in 2005 to make a major push on the implementation of project actions during 2006 and in early-2007. The fact that many of the actions were largely completed by Spring 2007 created time and space to focus on the learning arising, and to organise a number of events to share this learning during the second half 2007.

**Transnationality** arose for *Equal at Work* through the InterFAIR Network, with four overseas partners, and through the WINS project in Belfast. As well as facilitating an exchange of experience in a number of areas, one of the outputs from InterFAIR was the production of a guide to the employment of older workers in the five partner countries. It also led to bilateral contacts, e.g. between the Solidarity trade union and Irish trade unions in relation to the employment of Polish workers in Ireland, and in relation to learning for Dublin from a project in Madrid working with trafficked women. A review of the work of the InterFAIR Network showed that all partners felt that benefits had arisen to them from their involvement.

The interaction with the WINS EQUAL project in Belfast also led to an exchange of information and a building of contacts, in particular between hospitals and public transport companies in the two cities. This partnership led to the production of a report on work in both parts of the island in relation to supports for women into non-traditional occupations.

*Equal at Work* therefore made considerable efforts to incorporate the six principles of the EQUAL Initiative into its work.

## 7.2 Equality Reviews as a HR tool

Six of the organisations involved in the *Equal at Work* project (three large private sector companies and three hospitals) undertook equality reviews. This tool is relatively new in Ireland and the Equality Authority has been attempting to promote its use in recent years. The equality reviews identified actions to be undertaken by the six organisations to improve their policies in relation to equality and diversity, and led to action plans for each organisation in this regard.

To review how the tool had worked, *Equal at Work* commissioned a specific study of its operation in five of the six organisations. This study,<sup>10</sup> *Pioneers of Diversity*, was launched in October 2007 and concluded:

“The investment made by the organisations has been repaid by the range and value of the corporate benefits that either have been delivered or are expected to be delivered over coming months and years.

“All five organisations considered that they had gained significant insights into their operations through the review and, importantly, had discovered ways of addressing equality and diversity issues that would not have been possible by any other means. Based on their collective experiences, the organisations would encourage others to follow their lead.

“In a number of cases, there was also the potential for a strong ‘lever’ effect, with learning from the review in one location being transferred to others (e.g. within the sector or across a group of companies).”

In the context of these very positive findings, the comparative review noted that some organisations will need to engage in capacity building in advance of a review to ensure they are in a ‘state of readiness’. The review also noted the importance of an inclusive approach in terms of stakeholder consultations as part of an equality review process.

Equality reviews were a core tool of *Equal at Work*. Evidence from the six reviews undertaken suggests that equality reviews are useful tools for organisations in the health and private sectors. An organised, inclusive research process, overseen by a committed organisation and leading to an action plan which is then implemented, can generate benefits under multiple headings.

In late-2007, Dublin Employment Pact was discussing the detailed outcomes of the equality reviews with the Equality Authority, to ensure all of the learning from the six reviews was passed to the Authority, and could be used to inform future equality reviews in Ireland.

## 7.3 Learning arising from *Equal at Work*

Besides learning for the Equality Authority in relation to equality reviews, the innovation of the *Equal at Work* actions means there is also potential learning arising for a range of other organisations.

The project’s **private sector cluster** involved three equality reviews (in Irish Life and Permanent, in Meteor Mobile Communications and in Jurys Inns Hotel Group), work in relation to people with disabilities (with EBS) and development of a HR software tool (in eircom). The private sector conference held by the project in October 2007 shared the learning from these actions with a range of private sector companies. However, there is further mainstreaming potential from these actions for Irish companies, for the HR sections of their representative organisations and for third level colleges teaching HR subjects. The actions may also be useful for organisations outside of the private sector, e.g. the eircom software tool could be used in any large organisation. In late-2007, the Dublin Employment Pact was working with the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development to explore how the process of disseminating this learning to HR practitioners could continue in 2008.

<sup>10</sup> The study was undertaken by the Belfast-based Social Research Centre, in partnership with Kremer Consultancy Services Ltd.

The **health sector cluster** of *Equal at Work* involved three equality reviews (in the Adelaide and Meath Hospital, incorporating the National Children's Hospital, with a focus on older workers; in St. James's Hospital and in Stewarts Hospital), support for multi-cultural work teams (Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown and HSE North East) and pioneering work on accessibility (Children's University Hospital, Temple Street). Work to mainstream the health cluster learning was already underway in late-2007, driven by the HSE National HR Directorate and the HSE Employers' Agency. A number of avenues were being explored to take forward the initiatives, including meeting with the HSE Employers Agency-led Equal Opportunities/Diversity Working Group. The action in Tallaght Hospital fits with a wider national policy review as regards older workers, signalled in July 2007 by the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, and the health cluster of *Equal at Work* was hoping to influence the specifics of the implementation of the 2007 Guidelines for Recruitment and Retention of Older Workers. There were also plans to meet the new Universal Access Officer appointed by the HSE and perhaps to use the project outcomes to influence the design of the planned new National Children's Hospital. The Dublin Employment Pact was planning to maintain its working relationship with the HSE as regards these actions.

The equality reviews in the hospitals, and the work on multi-cultural work teams and on universal accessibility, may also be of interest outside of the health sector.

The Local Government Management Services Board (LGMSB) had already undertaken considerable work in 2007 as regards disseminating information on the **local authority cluster** actions in Dublin City Council and South Dublin County Council. By late-2007, a number of further local authorities were exploring the idea of launching a Traveller employment initiative similar to that in the South Dublin area. The LGMSB and the Pact were cooperating in this regard. Potential also exists for other public sector organisations, e.g. health organisations, government departments, government agencies etc. to adopt learning as regards an initiative in Traveller employment. Any organisations with

outdoor or other low-skilled workers may be interested in the pack prepared by Dublin City Council.

In the **community sector cluster**, the campaign to raise trade union membership was becoming stronger in late-2007 and the evidence was that this campaign had gained sufficient momentum to continue after the project. The fact that some 80 organisations had signed up as members of the Community Sector Employers Forum suggested that this Forum was also likely to be sustainable, although the Forum will require a certain amount of ongoing funding to sustain its work. The same holds for the Employer Resource Bureau. The proven interest from the community sector in these *Equal at Work* actions demonstrates that there is a long-term demand for them. At end-2007, the Dublin Employment Pact was in discussions as to how these actions could be continued into 2008.



## 7.4 Concluding remarks

This report has reviewed the *Equal at Work* project, which operated under the EU EQUAL Initiative in Ireland over the period mid-2005 to end-2007.

The report shows that the project fulfilled all of its obligations in terms of the EQUAL programme, and also delivered on its different project objectives as set out in 2005.

Given the project budget of €2.5m, the level of innovation of the project and the range of outputs arising are considerable.

The successful project outcome, and the success of the previous (Round 1) project reflects well on the Dublin Employment Pact and on the 50 or so members of the Development Partnership of *Equal at Work*. The organisations that implemented actions in some cases opened their internal HR and other processes to a wider audience, and took a risk that their action might be less than 100% successful. This attitude showed a self confidence in their work and their pioneering attitude may pave the way for other Irish organisations to follow in the coming years.

*Equal at Work* also shows the benefit of bringing together organisations from different sectors of the Dublin economy and labour market. The Dublin Employment Pact provided a neutral space in which innovation was encouraged and learning could be shared between sectors, with barriers broken down. The different drivers, and constraints, which operate in the different sectors, and between large and small organisations, became more understood. The project indicates that such 'spaces', where different kinds of organisations can come together to pilot actions and share learning, are extremely valuable.

# Annex 1:

## Partners in *Equal at Work*

### Dublin Employment Pact (Designate Partner)

Adelaide and Meath Hospital, Incorporating the National Children's Hospital  
Ballymun Job Centre  
Ballyfermot National Learning Network  
Ballyfermot Partnership LES Network  
Ballymun Partnership  
Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development  
Children's University Hospital  
Combat Poverty Agency  
Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown  
Dublin City Childcare Committee  
Dublin City Council  
Dublin Inner City Partnership  
Eastern Vocational Enterprises  
EBS Building Society  
eircom  
Exchange House Travellers' Service  
FÁS Ballyfermot  
Finglas Cabra Partnership  
Gandon Enterprises  
Health Services Executive, Eastern Region  
HSE Employers Representative Division  
HSE Northern Area  
Irish Congress of Trade Unions  
Immigrant Council of Ireland  
IMPACT

Inclusive Recruitment  
Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed  
Integrating Ireland  
Irish Life and Permanent  
Jurys Doyle Hotel Group  
KWCD Area Partnership  
Local Government Management Services Board  
Mater Hospital  
Meteor Mobile Communications  
National College of Ireland  
National Disability Authority  
National Learning Network  
National Women's Council of Ireland  
Northside Partnership  
Pavee Point  
SIPTU  
South Dublin County Council  
St. James's Hospital  
Stewarts Hospital  
Tallaght LES  
Tallaght Partnership  
Work 4 You  
Work Research Centre

Some of these organisations were involved through multiple people or departments.

## Annex 2:

# Outputs available from *Equal at Work*

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### Overall *Equal at Work* Project

- *Equal at Work* Project, Building an Irish labour market based on equality and diversity (Hibernian Consulting);
- *Pioneers of Diversity, A Comparative Analysis of Equality Reviews* carried out under the Dublin Employment Pact *Equal at Work* Project (Social Research Centre in partnership with Kremer Consultancy Services);
- *Women into Non-Traditional Employment: Lessons from North and South*. Two studies commissioned by the WINS/*Equal at Work* project partnership (Ursula Barry and Michael Potter, with Foreword by Gráinne Healy);
- *Report on the Work of the InterFAIR Transnational Network* (Hibernian Consulting);
- *Special Report on the *Equal at Work* project* (Irish Times, May 24th 2007);
- *Special Report on the *Equal at Work* project* (Irish Times, November 20th 2007).

### Private Sector Cluster

- *Research Report into Improving Labour Market Placement Rates for Disadvantaged Groups* (FGS Consulting);
- *DecisionPath User Guide* (eircom);
- *Presentations made at the private sector cluster conference* in October 2007.

### Health Sector Cluster

- *DVD on the work of the five actions in the health cluster of *Equal at Work**, available on request from the Dublin Employment Pact;
- *Presentations from the health sector cluster conference* at the Royal Hospital Kilmainham in May 2007;
- *Outputs from individual health actions* available on request from the Dublin Employment Pact.

### Local Authority Cluster

- *Opening Pathways to Employment for Travellers in South Dublin County Council* (Hibernian Consulting);
- *Interview Skills Pack* (Dublin City Council).

### Community Sector Cluster

- *Feasibility Study into the Establishment of an Employment Resource Bureau for the Community and Voluntary Sector in the Dublin Region* (Lynda Gaynor, Sapitwa Consulting);
- *Note on the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland* (Hibernian Consulting);
- *Report on conference organised to launch trade union membership campaign, at Liberty Hall, in November 2006*;
- *Pay, Conditions and HR Practices under Different Government Programmes in the Community Sector* (Hibernian Consulting);
- *Report on the community sector cluster conference held at the Royal Hospital Kilmainham in November 2007*.

Information is also available on the work of the previous *Equal at Work* project (2002-04) undertaken by the Dublin Employment Pact. Most of the outputs listed are available from the website of the Pact, i.e. [www.dublinpact.ie](http://www.dublinpact.ie) – others can be obtained by contacting the Pact.



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