



EQUAL Operational Programme



Update (Final)
Evaluation

Final
Report



October 2005

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND.....	1
1.1	THE EQUAL COMMUNITY INITIATIVE PROGRAMME.....	1
1.2	EQUAL IN IRELAND.....	2
1.3	EVALUATION OBJECTIVES	9
1.4	EVALUATION METHOD	11
1.5	STRUCTURE OF REPORT	11
2.	SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLICY CONTEXT	13
2.1	INTRODUCTION	13
2.2	SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS	13
2.3	POLICY DEVELOPMENTS	17
3.	IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MID-TERM EVALUATION.....	23
3.1	INTRODUCTION	23
3.2	PROGRESS SINCE THE MID-TERM EVALUATION	23
4.	EFFECTIVENESS & PROGRESS TO DATE	30
4.1	INTRODUCTION	30
4.2	REVIEW OF FINANCIAL PROGRESS	30
4.3	REVIEW OF PHYSICAL PROGRESS.....	34
4.4	CONSTRAINTS ON PROGRESS	36
4.5	OUTPUTS, RESULTS AND IMPACTS.....	37
4.6	PROGRESS UNDER ROUND 2	41
5.	PROGRAMME IMPACT	44
5.1	INTRODUCTION	44
5.2	OVERVIEW	44
5.3	PROGRAMME IMPACT WITH REGARD TO OBJECTIVES	45
6.	EQUAL SPECIFIC ISSUES	52
6.1	INTRODUCTION	52
6.2	MAINSTREAMING.....	52
6.3	INNOVATION.....	56
6.4	EQUALITY.....	56
6.5	OTHER PRINCIPLES	57
7.	CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS	61
7.1	CONCLUSIONS.....	61
7.2	RECOMMENDATIONS.....	62

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 The EQUAL Community Initiative Programme

The EQUAL Community Initiative aims *"to promote new means of combating all forms of discrimination and inequalities in connection with the labour market, through transnational cooperation"*, with a further goal to "take due account of the social and vocational integration of asylum-seekers".

Co-funded by the ESF, EQUAL builds on work undertaken under the 1994-99 EMPLOYMENT and ADAPT Initiatives and continues to keep central their concepts of innovation, mainstreaming and transnationality. It places a strong emphasis on equality and on the empowerment of all stakeholders involved in EQUAL actions. An important development with EQUAL is its emphasis on partnership via implementation of projects by Development Partnerships (DPs) that bring together public, private and other participants in a particular thematic area.

EQUAL operates under the framework of the four pillars of the European Employment Strategy: Employability; Entrepreneurship; Adaptability; and Equal Opportunities. Nine themes are also specified to further focus programme activity, two relating to each pillar, and a ninth concerning the integration of asylum seekers. Member States are given flexibility in developing a subset of the themes to guide national activity, in order to improve potential for subsequent mainstreaming of policy outcomes

In addition, five key principles underpin the EQUAL Community Initiative Programme as follows:

- **Equality:** The promotion of equality between women and men and gender mainstreaming should be an integral part of all pillars as well as being targeted through specific actions in the fourth pillar. The effects on the respective situations of men and women should actively be taken into account at planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages. Wider equality actions aimed at specific target groups are also a fundamental element of the Initiative. In this context, the EQUAL programme in Ireland promotes the embracing of equality and diversity in the labour market across the nine grounds covered by the equality legislation.
- **Partnership:** The national EQUAL programmes are implemented by partnerships established at geographical or sectoral level, called Development Partnerships (DPs).
- **Empowerment:** In each DP, all players involved in the implementation of activities should be (i) assisted in capacity building, (ii) given the opportunity to participate in learning processes, and (iii) to take part in the decision-making.

- **Transnational cooperation (TNC):** Previous Community Initiatives have shown that transnationality is a dimension which can bring significant added value to project operators working in similar situations and that considerable policy innovations can be achieved. An integral element of the programme is that DPs co-operate with EQUAL DPs in other EU Member States to share and exchange experiences as part of a transnational work programme.
- **Innovation:** This can involve completely new solutions, combinations of existing ones or transfer of elements from elsewhere, which are expected to improve the policy delivered. The EQUAL Communication distinguishes between three types of innovations: process-oriented, goal-oriented and context-oriented. The way the Development Partnership is formed and works together may also be innovative.
- **Mainstreaming:** EQUAL is a testing ground for mainstreaming new policies and practice and should therefore analyse the causes of discrimination and inequality in relation to the world of work and propose new ways of tackling them. It should test and validate new solutions to integrate these activities into policies and practice.

In Round 1, EQUAL funded a total of 1,399 DPs across all member states exploring and testing new ideas relevant to discrimination and inequality in a national labour market context. In Round 2, a further 2,022 DPs are currently being supported¹.

1.2 EQUAL in Ireland

1.2.1 Implementation Structures

The EQUAL Community Initiative Programme for Ireland has a budget for 2000-07 of €47mn, including ESF and matching funding. It operates under four themes relating to the four pillars of the Employment Action Plan, with a further measure focusing on asylum seekers. Work under all three EQUAL actions is being overseen and supported by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (as national Managing Authority for EQUAL), a National Support Structure (NSS) and a national EQUAL Monitoring Committee. Work Research Co-operative, Social and Economic Consultants Ltd are contracted to perform this NSS role. A National Mainstreaming Policy Group is also in operation, co-chaired by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Equality Authority, with a remit to:

- Identify best practice and lessons learned within the pilot and experimental activities of EQUAL Development Partnerships and associated national thematic networks.
- Support their integration into local, regional, national and European employment and human resources development policies and practices in the context of achieving a labour market open to all.
- Support a capacity within relevant organisations to incorporate such good practice.

In addition, the Special EU Programmes Body has a specific role in promoting cross-border co-operation with regard to the implementation of EQUAL in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

1.2.2 Nature of Projects Supported

In the first (2001-04) round of EQUAL in Ireland, 21 projects were approved for funding. These projects are now completed or near completion, with each DP having undertaken the three actions required under each EQUAL project: Action 1 concerns the setting up of the DPs and establishing transnational co-operation; Action 2 entails the implementation of the agreed work programme; while Action 3 involves thematic networking, dissemination and mainstreaming. Further to the funding provided under Round 1 for each of these actions, one DP, Blanchardstown EQUAL, was also granted an extension of assistance in order to generate further mainstreaming benefits, while two DPs, Westmeath EQUAL and TRED, received additional mainstreaming funding following deliberations by the Mainstreaming Policy Group.

The DPs supported under Round 1 are distributed across each pillar and theme as shown in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1.1: PILLARS & THEMES OF EQUAL IN IRELAND; PROJECTS IN ROUND ONE		
PILLAR	THEME	No. of Projects
Employability	Theme A: Facilitating access and return to the labour market for those who have difficulty in being integrated or re-integrated into a labour market which must be open to all.	10
Entrepreneurship	Theme C: Opening up the business creation process to all by providing the tools required for setting up in business and for identification and exploitation of new possibilities for creating employment in urban and rural areas.	5
Adaptability	Theme E: Promoting lifelong learning and inclusive work practices that encourage the recruitment and retention of those suffering discrimination and inequality in connection with the labour market.	3
Equal Opps.	Theme G: Reconciling family and professional life, as well as the re-integration of men and women who have left the labour market, by developing more flexible and effective forms of work organisation and support services.	2
Asylum Seekers	Supporting asylum seekers in relation to labour market integration, in ways consistent with Government policy.	1

A second round of applications took place in late 2004 and 22 projects received approval. Three of the successful applicants were DPs funded under the first round, with the remainder based on new or revised partnerships. Projects being assisted under Round 2 are distributed across the themes as shown in Table 1.2.

¹ Source: European Commission. Round 2 figures correct as at 25th August 2005.

TABLE 1.2: PILLARS & THEMES OF EQUAL IN IRELAND; PROJECTS IN ROUND TWO		
THEME	Objective	No. of Projects
Employability	Theme A: Facilitating access and return to the labour market for those who have difficulty in being integrated or re-integrated into a labour market which must be open to all.	9
Entrepreneurship	Theme C: Opening up the business creation process to all by providing the tools required for setting up in business and for identification and exploitation of new possibilities for creating employment in urban and rural areas.	3
Adaptability	Theme E: Promoting lifelong learning and inclusive work practices that encourage the recruitment and retention of those suffering discrimination and inequality in connection with the labour market.	5
	Theme F: Supporting the adaptability of firms and employees to structural economic change and the use of information technologies and other technologies.	1
Equal Opps.	Theme G: Reconciling family and professional life, as well as the re-integration of men and women who have left the labour market, by developing more flexible and effective forms of work organisation and support services.	2
Asylum Seekers	Supporting asylum seekers in relation to labour market integration, in ways consistent with Government policy.	2

1.2.3 Round 1 EQUAL Projects in Ireland

As noted in Table 1.1, 21 projects were funded by EQUAL in Ireland in the first round. A brief summary of each of these projects, detailing the project title, development partnership and the main objectives, is provided in Table 1.3.

TABLE 1.3: PROJECTS FUNDED UNDER ROUND 1 OF EQUAL IN IRELAND		
DP Name	Project Title	Brief Description of Objectives
Employability		
Access Ability	Access Ability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of recruitment processes that will be more inclusive for people with disabilities Work with HR sector and people with disabilities to ensure successful dissemination of such processes
Blanchardstown EQUAL DP	Blanchardstown EQUAL Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with six marginalised groups in Blanchardstown to move them towards the labour market Develop new systems in health service organisations to improve co-ordination of services to drug users in rehabilitation Work with employers in Blanchardstown to improve practices as regards equality and diversity
North East Training Initiative	EQUAL North East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with long-term unemployed men and women to develop flexible, intensive models for reintegration to the work force Develop accreditation for training, working with training institutes Ensure employers have flexibility and knowledge to respond to the needs of disadvantaged groups

TABLE 1.3: PROJECTS FUNDED UNDER ROUND 1 OF EQUAL IN IRELAND

DP Name	Project Title	Brief Description of Objectives
Work Integration Network (WIN)	Work and Income through Development and Partnership (WIDE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of training modules for a range of long-term unemployed groups, including ex-prisoners, refugees, drug abusers and others in Dublin's inner city
Kildare Wicklow EQUAL	Kildare Wicklow EQUAL Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with young people and women in urban areas, and farming families in rural areas, to support labour market integration Use Community IT Centres in Wicklow to disseminate training information Work with employers on equality/diversity training and job placements
Laois Rural Employment Partnership	Laois Rural Employment Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with low-income farm families to identify other sources of employment and income
Roscommon Partnership Development Company	ROS EQUAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with employers to raise awareness of this target group Work with employers and agencies concerned with disability to improve awareness of, and services to, people with disabilities as regards the labour market Establish a community radio station to support the above aims
North Cork/ South East Limerick DP	Rural Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empowerment of those furthest from the labour market in terms of seeking work Work with employers and agencies to address structural barriers
Clare Equality Partnership	Trasna	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design and deliver life-long learning training modules for six identified target groups Develop an equality network for County Clare
Westmeath EQUAL DP	Employment Bridging Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with employers, agencies and people outside the workforce to develop pathways to employment Facilitation of self-advocacy for groups outside the workforce
Entrepreneurship		
Traveller Economy Sectoral Partnership	Pavee Feens Hawken (Traveller Men Working)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pilot projects in four areas, working with Traveller men Raise awareness among the target group of the value of participation in the labour market Work with mainstream agencies to ensure enterprise supports are inclusive of the Travelling community
Longford Women in Enterprise	Supporting Women Entrepreneurs in Longford (SWELL)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and overcome reasons for low entrepreneurship among women in Longford Develop a web of supports for women starting a business Provide "Start Your Own Business" and other relevant training to participants
Leitrim Partnership for Arts and Craft Employment	CASE (Craft as a Source of Employment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To promote self-employment in arts and crafts as legitimate, valuable and feasible career option for socio-economically disadvantaged residents in Co Leitrim Monitor and improve project delivery and disseminate info regarding existence of CASE Provide necessary and relevant training in group situations and on individual basis Increase craftsmanship, both technical and artistic, of participants to a level where they can operate their own business Identify specific areas of market opportunity of art or craft producers
Adaptability		
Diversity at Work Network (DAWN)	Promoting Racism Awareness, Inter-Culturalism and Diversity in the Workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a network including employers, employees and voluntary groups working with ethnic workers Work with employers to develop appropriate workplace structures and policies Deliver a training of trainers course to businesses
EQUAL Ireland	EQUAL Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joint social partner approach to upskill those in low-paid employment and support those outside the workforce Specific tasks include a workplace Foundation Access Programme, a Job Rotation programme, a system of

TABLE 1.3: PROJECTS FUNDED UNDER ROUND 1 OF EQUAL IN IRELAND

Accreditation of Prior Learning (APEL) and development of outreach centres		
DP Name	Project Title	Brief Description of Objectives
Dublin Employment Pact	Equal at Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work in public, private and community/voluntary sectors to change HR policies and practices to promote inclusiveness and equality Re-engineering of recruitment processes in two local authorities to move to a competence-based recruitment system Piloting of a Job Rotation model with private companies Development of good practice model of HR for community and voluntary sector
INTERACT	Managing Diversity in a Multi-Cultural Work Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on food processing, hotel, catering and health care sectors Survey of organisations in these sectors Development of training programmes to support good integration, targeted both at organisations and ethnic workers
Trainers Network	Training Responses to address Equality and Diversity (TRED)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of a training module relating to equality and diversity, with associated accreditation Pilot the training module Develop workplace tools to analyse equality and diversity practices
Equal Opportunities		
National Flexi-Work Partnership	Promoting Work-Life Balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National survey of 1,000 people on work-life balance issues Development of innovative family-friendly policies Particular focus on older people and people with learning disabilities
Work-Life Balance Network (WLBN)	Promoting Work-Life Balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with a number of large companies (e.g. An Post, Eircom) undergoing change to develop awareness of Work-Life Balance issues and to implement new structures and processes in this regard
Asylum Seekers		
SONAS Ireland	SONAS EQUAL Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information for asylum seekers on asylum determination process Support target group in interfacing with the process, and with local communities Provide psychological and cultural support Identify good practice in other countries relevant to Ireland

SOURCE: EQUAL PROJECT DIRECTORY²

1.2.4 Round 2 EQUAL Projects in Ireland

In Round 2, a total of 22 projects are being funded under EQUAL. A summary of the each individual project's title, its overall aim, and main objectives is provided in Table 1.4.

TABLE 1.4: PROJECTS FUNDED UNDER ROUND 2 OF EQUAL IN IRELAND

Project Title	Project Aim	Brief Description of Objectives
Employability		
DP9 - Westmeath	To design and pilot a frontline referral and guidance system, with the DS&FA, target groups and other agencies, in the Midlands region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The provision of advice and training Incorporate these tools and practices within working practices of member organisations of DP An integrated psychometric test package with a specific section for use in first line guidance

² Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (2002), EQUAL Project Directory

TABLE 1.4: PROJECTS FUNDED UNDER ROUND 2 OF EQUAL IN IRELAND

Project Title		Project Aim	Brief Description of Objectives
Tallaght Assists	Equal	To raise the status of 'caring' as a career option by providing access to accredited training, with progression opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To raise awareness of the career opportunities for young people, members of ethnic groups, volunteers and those involved in non-formal caring arrangements
LEAP		To develop access routes into legal training that will result in more representation of non-typical communities in the legal profession.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure equality of access to legal training Change perception of relevance of the law Ensure quality legal advice and rep is available within target Ensure legal developments are influenced by diverse interests in Irish society Develop innovative approach to equality of access to higher education
KWCD Employer Exchange		To encourage employers to look critically at their own practices thereby examining disadvantages and inequalities in the local labour market, what prevents them from employing Long Term Unemployed jobseekers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a support network for employers from agencies outside the private sector in taking on a jobseeker in either a job or work placement. Network of employers who have had positive experiences and models of good practice in broadening diversity of their workforce
You're Equal		To maximise employment opportunity for prisoners and ex-prisoners through development and mainstreaming of integrated, appropriate training, mentoring and guidance services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research programme within the project that identifies best practice. Influence and inform policy and practice developments within prison sector Integrated individual career plans including structured training, work experience and job placement programmes Info packs to assist prisoner and ex-prisoners in transition to employment
Education Employment	4	To increase the employability of people from marginalized groups through upskilling participants to work as Tech Support officers in ICT and AT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The provision of foundation courses at rehab centres and progression to colleges of further education Provide internships and work experience placements through partnership with industry
Carlow Employment Partnership	Equal	To combat discriminatory practices and inequalities facing older people wishing to avail of training and employment opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotion of Equality Legislation by creating awareness of the rights and entitlements of older workers Ensure target groups are not automatically geared towards low-pay non-progressive employment options To facilitate and up-skill older people wishing to return to the work force To consult with employers to ensure appropriate skill development and to promote a positive WLB
WAM		Develop a new & innovative mechanism in the form of structured mentoring supports that will accelerate the no of graduates with disabilities getting into the workplace & securing employment opportunities appropriate to their level of qualification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action Group of employers and GWD to inform discuss and share experiences and expertise Design, develop and deliver Creative Work and Personal Skills Module for GWD and a mentoring training programme for employers Create guidelines and materials that can be used in variety of environments

TABLE 1.4: PROJECTS FUNDED UNDER ROUND 2 OF EQUAL IN IRELAND

Project Title	Project Aim	Brief Description of Objectives
EQUAL Youth	To develop an effective model of inter agency practice to address deficiencies in current provision which discriminate against early school leavers between the ages of 16 and 21 years progressing into employment and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop protocols and procedures for interagency working relations around issues such as info sharing, shared actions, progression and referral pathways To analysis the specific blocks being experienced by young people with respect to their labour market access and retention Map current provision in terms of practice, protocols, and policy frames being addressed by services Develop and implement 6 innovative activities that will utilise the interagency model to address the blocks in current provision
Entrepreneurship		
EMERGE	To assist Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurs in overcoming business obstacles and regulation constraints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve support infrastructure for EMEs in pilot areas Develop a strategy for integrating EMEs into mainstream business networks Raise awareness of the barriers faced by EMEs among mainstream support services and agencies Inform policy in this area and contribute to achieving national and EU targets as set out in various agendas
Longford Equal DP	To bring about a radical improvement in the sustainability and development of women-led businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop new approaches defined by client need, thereby improve environment for target group To articulate and enhance understanding of complex but vital lessons learned from practice thereby impact on policy formulation
Point 2 Enterprise	To bring groups most excluded from mainstream economy into economic activity via self-employment, micro-enterprise creation and or social enterprise development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Map routes to enterprise for clients. Build networks to create a supportive environment and promote sustainability of enterprise Experiment with new methods of support and access for a difficult target group with a view to mainstreaming best practice
Adaptability		
E-quality through E-work	Address the economic exclusion of disadvantaged but able individuals for whom working from home is a realistic and/or preferable form of employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To pilot a model of employment to work with and progress up to 60 individuals over a 2 year period Use model to prove to employers that e-work is a cost effective and practical way of achieving work outcomes Adapt e-work training modules to prepare participants in all aspects of e-work
Equal Ireland, Life Learning Workplace and Community Project	To increase the competency, knowledge and skill levels of the target group, and provide them with new pathways of progression,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop APEL system Engage with FETAC, HETAC and relevant bodies with awarding authority To deliver two years of the programme up to National Higher Cert level
MITE Meath Investment in Training and Employment	To create a new dynamic and innovative partnership that will initiate new structures or processes for promoting lifelong learning and inclusive work practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine solutions currently in practice or under trial, introducing new more inclusive structures Introduce preventative measures and actions designed to avert inequalities Examine and bring forward proposals to close gap between Gov funded policies and initiatives
EQUAL At Work	To support labour market adaptability through the development of inclusive employment and open human resource practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support recruitment, progression & promotion of a diverse workforce in the Dublin region Health sector To support adaptability of the C&V sector To improve the adaptability of 6 Dublin based large private sector companies Support Public Sector to create a more equal workforce and to provide quality public services

TABLE 1.4: PROJECTS FUNDED UNDER ROUND 2 OF EQUAL IN IRELAND

Project Title	Project Aim	Brief Description of Objectives
Clare Life Long Learning Network	To develop an innovative lifelong learning system through the establishment of a formal structure of promoter collaboration and the use of ICT to develop alternative modes of programme delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish 5 area Learning Networks as well as a countywide lifelong learning forum Develop an appropriate curriculum for Lifelong learning relevant to needs of target groups Develop and deliver a Countywide ICT strategy which provides alternate modes of access for learners
Senior Select Retain Retrain	To establish a pilot programme to assist in the development, recruitment, and retention of older workers and workers in mid-life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate existing difficulties in both recruiting and retaining older workers and to pilot the implementation of creative responses Devise equitable, attractive and flexible arrangements for the re-entry of older workers to the labour force Influence retention of older workers for both economic and life-work balance reasons Identify appropriate lobbying strategies
Equal Opportunities		
North West Alliance for the Improvement of Working Lives	To pilot and mainstream key actions to advance WLB and improve the working lives of women and men in the North West Region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the quality of working life for women and men, creating the conditions at work to promote attendance Support and retain people at work using innovative organisational work based supports
Leadership Initiative Females in Trade Unions (LIFT)	Organisational change and development of skills targeted towards addressing the under-representation of women at leadership level in the trade union movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess the strategic importance, of deeper involvement of women in the Trade Union organisation Reflect on the approach adopted in previous and current initiatives ICTU and individual unions to achieve greater female participation Identify critical activities which would stimulate the involvement of women in or towards leadership roles in unions
Asylum Seekers		
Transition Support Project	To enable separated children seeking asylum and young asylum seeking adults to participate in education, both formal and informal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide educational, social and recreational activities for SCSA Identify, train and support young adult asylum seekers as peer mentors to SCSA Deliver nationally accredited programmes to mentors, focused on leadership, youth work skills, communication and capacity building Promote, enable integrated service planning for this client group
Roma Cultural Mediation Project	To improve the interface between health and other social service providers in Ireland and the Roma population currently seeking asylum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design and delivery of a 'learning by doing' training in Cultural mediation skills Disseminating this customized training package as a transferable tool / output of the project Enabling members of the Roma community to work as Cultural Mediators and act as link workers between their own communities and Irish society
SOURCE: SYNOPSIS OF PROJECT INFORMATION ON EQUAL IRISH WEBSITE		

1.3 Evaluation Objectives

The Mid-Term Evaluation of the EQUAL Community Initiative Programme was produced by Fitzpatrick Associates on behalf of the Managing Authority in September 2003. Under Article 42(4) of the general EU Structural Fund regulation (EC No. 1260/99) an update of the Mid-Term Evaluation is now required. Guidelines have been issued by the European Commission on the

undertaking of the updates³, emphasising their role as an input to post-2006 planning, while building on rather than repeating the work of the Mid-Term Evaluations, and allowing flexibility depending on Member State priorities. The guidelines also set out the core requirements that are reflected in the Terms of Reference.

The general purpose of the evaluation, as defined in the Request for Tenders, is to:

- Provide an analysis of physical and financial progress under the programme to date.
- Assess the likely impact of the programme.
- Identify lessons/issues for the next round of Structural Fund programming which runs from 2007-2013 and provide an important source of information for the ex-post evaluation to be completed by the end of 2009.

The Terms of Reference set out the key analytical tasks that should be undertaken by the evaluator. The evaluation has performed each of these tasks in a comprehensive manner, and this final report is structured around the outputs from such tasks.

SUMMARY OF KEY ANALYTICAL TASKS REQUIRED BY THE EVALUATION

Task 1 – Review Developments since the Mid-term Evaluation:

- to provide a review of developments since the Mid-term evaluation in 2003 and to assess the extent to which the key findings, conclusions and recommendations were implemented in the Mid-term Review or subsequently;
- to comment on any significant external socio-economic or policy developments at EU or national level that have influenced the implementation of the Programme since the Mid-term review.

Task 2 – Effectiveness /Progress to Date:

- to review financial progress at Priority and CIP level;
- to assess the physical progress of the CIP;
- to identify any constraints-internal or external – which may have affected progress over the last couple of years;
- review, in the light of the assessment of financial and physical progress above, programme outputs, results and impacts (data permitting), including any unintended consequences which can be discerned.

Task 3 – Programme Impact:

- to assess the impact of the programme as a whole to date and to express an opinion of the likely final impact of the programme as it relates to the objectives of the programme;
- to identify actions within the programme that are linked to the European Employment Strategy (EES) or other national labour market policies.

Task 4 – EQUAL Specific Issues

- to address the six EQUAL principles, paying particular attention to reviewing and commenting on performance in terms of mainstreaming, innovation and equality;
- to build on the mid-term evaluation and assess performance with regard to transnational cooperation, empowerment, and the development partnership approach.

Task 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations

- to draw appropriate conclusions in relation to tasks 1, 2, 3 and 4;
- to provide views on the lessons learned in the context of the post 2006 Programme period.

³ EU Commission Directorate – General Regional Policy, Methodology Working Papers, No. 9, The Update of the Mid-Term Evaluation of Structural Funds.

1.4 Evaluation Method

A detailed methodology was adopted for the undertaking of this evaluation, focused on meeting each of the specific requirements set down in the Terms of Reference. A series of discrete tasks have been completed during the course of the project, summarised in the order in which they were undertaken, as follows:

- An inception phase involving a meeting with the Managing Authority and with the National Support Structure in order to discuss the requirements of the Terms of Reference, agree a final work programme, arrange access to key material, and identify critical themes upon which the evaluation should focus.
- A series of consultations with key stakeholders, including members of the Monitoring Committee, the Mainstreaming Policy Group, appropriate representatives from the European Commission, the Managing Authority and the National Support Structure.
- A review of all relevant programme material regarding EQUAL, including Monitoring Committee and Mainstreaming Policy Group documentation, the EQUAL CIP Ireland, Annual Implementation Reports, the Mid-Term Evaluation, the EQUAL project planning and operations manual, project summaries and a substantial base of other EU and national level reports. The European Commission and national EQUAL websites were also thoroughly examined for appropriate information and data.
- Three case studies of projects that involved an examination of individual project files held by the National Support Structure, consultation with representatives of the respective Development Partnerships, and a review of any outputs produced by the projects.
- A workshop to which all Development Partnerships funded under Round 1 of EQUAL were invited.
- The gathering together of all the research undertaken above in order to produce a comprehensive final report in which conclusions are drawn and recommendations made with regard to the post 2007 period.

1.5 Structure of Report

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 looks at any relevant socio-economic changes and policy developments that have occurred since the production of the Mid-Term Evaluation in September 2003.
- Section 3 reviews the implementation of the recommendations proposed in the Mid-Term Evaluation, charting developments since that time.

- Section 4 examines the effectiveness and progress of EQUAL in Ireland to date, identifying both financial and physical progress, constraints on progress, and outputs results and impacts that have resulted thus far.
- Section 5 focuses on programme impact, firstly with regard to its individual objectives, and secondly to its links with the EES and other national labour market policy.
- Section 6 discusses EQUAL specific issues, concentrating primarily on mainstreaming, innovation and equality, but also noting performance in terms of transnational cooperation, empowerment and the development partnerships.
- Section 7 sets out the conclusions of the update to the mid-term evaluation of EQUAL, providing recommendations for development in the post-2006 period.

2. Socio-Economic and Policy Context

2.1 Introduction

The Terms of Reference require the consultants to comment on any significant external socio-economic or policy developments at EU or national level that have influenced or affected the implementation of the programme since the mid-term evaluation. There are some notable differences in the socio-economic outlook now in comparison with the time of this evaluation, and a number of relevant policy decisions have been made that are highly relevant to the work of EQUAL in the intervening period. In this section these developments are discussed, with their relationship to, and influence on, the operation of EQUAL in Ireland subsequently identified.

2.2 Socio-Economic Developments

2.2.1 Socio-Economic Analysis in the Mid-Term Evaluation

The mid-term evaluation identified a number of key socio-economic developments that were of relevance to the way in which EQUAL was operating and to the planning of its future development. It noted that in the two-year period leading up to its production in September 2003, the economy in Ireland had slowed down significantly. The trends of high employment and labour force growth, and of substantial decline in unemployment and long-term unemployment, sustained over a period since the mid-1990s, were no longer apparent. At a time of a global economic downturn, a socio-economic analysis over the previous 24 month period revealed that:

- Employment was increasing, but unemployment was also increasing simultaneously.
- There was an increase in female labour force participation.
- The unemployment and long-term unemployment rates were both increasing.
- There was a larger percentage increase in the general unemployment rate for males than for females.

This worrying analysis was compounded by a consideration of short-term labour market forecasts. The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) predicted that the Irish labour market would slow down in the second half of 2003 and into 2004. It anticipated a rise in the level of employment by 1% in 2004 to 1.8mn, with the unemployment rate increasing to 5.7%, representing 108,000 people. The evaluation noted that this would be a higher rate than had been the case when the EQUAL CIP was prepared.

In its longer-term outlook, the mid-term evaluation drew on the ESRI Medium Term Review to note that unemployment was expected to begin to fall again after reaching a peak in 2005, in response to a recovery of domestic and international economies. This reduction was forecast to take place in tandem with a significant expansion in employment of 263,000 between 2003 and 2010. Market services were attributed as the main future source of the expected growth, particularly via employment in high skilled areas, including professional services and the health and education sectors. It was concluded that such activities are human capital intensive and require a skilled labour force. In contrast, a decline in the numbers employed in the agriculture, building and traditional manufacturing industries was also pinpointed. It was further acknowledged that Ireland's workforce is beginning to age and with fewer young people entering the labour force each year, emerging skills needs would have to be met through continuing rather than initial training.

Along with continuing training, bringing additional people into the labour market is the only alternative solution to meeting future skills needs. Four primary sources of future labour were cited: unemployed people; economically inactive people who are not classed as unemployed; older employed people who are likely to leave the workforce; and immigrants. The slow down of structural changes in the light of the downturn in the national economy was expected to continue in the short-term. Therefore, using the available pool of unemployed people and attracting older workers to remain or re-enter the labour force, represented the most important logical priorities for the immediate future. Consequently the training of workers in low-skilled occupations was critical in the medium-term and the attraction of skilled immigrants became a longer-term goal.

The uncertainty caused by the economic slowdown, with a lack of clarity surrounding just when unemployment would begin to decline again, was cited by the mid-term evaluation as potentially affecting the 'atmosphere' of EQUAL in 2004. One possible outcome in this regard was identified as a reduced enthusiasm for mainstreaming among the key stakeholders. It noted that "as EQUAL is focused on piloting projects that can bring about longer-term changes in the labour market, the challenge will be to continue to focus on the longer-term issues even during the period of the downturn."

2.2.2 Current Socio-Economic Trends

Current socio-economic trends highlight the fact that the economic downturn identified in the mid-term evaluation was relatively short-lived, representing merely a blip before the Irish economy continued to generate positive socio-economic indicators once more. Table 2.1 considers labour force trends in this regard, highlighting developments prior to, at the time of, and in the intervening period since, the previous evaluation, based on comparison of third quarter statistics, reflecting the time of year when the evaluation was produced.

TABLE 2.1: LABOUR FORCE STATISTICS 1998 TO 2005

	Labour Force Levels			Trends		Labour Force Participation		
Period	Employed (000)	Unemp (000)	Labour Force (000)	Emp. Change (000)	Unemp Rate (%)	Male	Female	Total
Q3-1998	1,560.2	128.9	1,689.1	-	7.6	70.2	44.5	57.1
Q3-1999	1,665.8	100.4	1,766.1	29.1	5.7	71.4	46.9	58.9
Q3-2000	1,736.1	77.1	1,813.5	16.9	4.3	71.7	47.9	59.6
Q3-2001	1,788.9	78.5	1,867.4	20.5	4.2	72.0	48.7	60.1
Q3-2002	1,808.4	86.2	1,894.6	-0.3	4.6	71.0	48.9	59.7
Q3-2003	1,836.3	98.8	1,935.3	-0.6	5.1	70.9	49.5	60.0
Q3-2004	1,893.6	93.9	1,987.5	18.3	4.7	71.6	50.0	60.7
Q2-2005*	1,929.9	85.6	2,014.8	20.2	4.2	71.8	51.4	61.5
* Latest published figures available								
SOURCE: CSO (2005). QUARTERLY NATIONAL HOUSEHOLD SURVEY								

The analysis above highlights that the time the mid-term evaluation was produced, the third quarter of 2003, coincided with the greatest level of unemployment, and indeed the highest unemployment rate, experienced since 1999. Unemployment began to fall from that point onwards, and now stands at its lowest level for almost three years, while employment has grown at a much faster pace than anticipated. By the end of 2004, the number employed was nearly 100,000 more than the 1.8mn anticipated, while unemployment, standing at 86,800 was some 20,000 less than expected. As envisaged in 2003, the female labour force participation rate has continued to increase, although the male participation rate has also risen, albeit at a slower rate.

In terms of sectoral employment, the recent growth experienced has largely been driven by a strong expansion of employment in the construction and financial and other business services sectors. Construction employment has grown by 17.6% between the second quarter of 2004 and the second quarter of 2005 while employment in financial and other business services has increased by 8.5% over the same period. In contrast, the labour force involved in other production industries and agriculture, forestry and fishing has declined over the year, by 2.1% and 2.9% respectively.

With the labour force now over 2mn for the first time, the socio-economic outlook in Ireland is much more positive. This is reinforced by recent population and labour force estimates produced by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) for the period from 2006 to 2016 in December 2004. The CSO projected a decade of continual labour force growth from 2006 onwards in each of the three migration scenarios it considered: one assumed that net migration would continue at the current rate of 30,000 persons per annum, another assumed more modest growth of 17,500 per annum, while the third scenario assumed zero migration over the period. The findings are shown in Table 2.2.

TABLE 2.2: PROJECTED LABOUR FORCE GROWTH 2004-2016				
Period	Scenario	Average annual net migration	Average annual change in the labour force	Average annual change in the labour force
		Thousands	Thousands	Percentage
Actual 1991/2004		16.7	43.5	2.7
Projected 2004/2016	M1	30.0	37.8	1.8
	M2	17.5	29.2	1.4
	M0	0.0	16.9	0.8
SOURCE: CSO POPULATION AND LABOUR FORCE PROJECTIONS 2006-2036				

The forecasts indicate that there will be a consistent expansion in the Irish labour force over the next decade, regardless of the scale of immigration in the period leading up to 2016. Even assuming zero immigration, average annual labour force growth is predicted to be 0.8%, while a net inflow of 30,000 people is anticipated to lead to average growth of 1.8% per annum.

The labour force trends and forecasts considered, particularly in light of the outlook at the time of the mid-term evaluation, raise a number of issues of relevance with regard to the operation of EQUAL in Ireland:

- Confidence in Ireland's economic prospects has been restored and the potential danger identified of reluctance among policy-makers to mainstream due to an uncertain economic environment should no longer be as valid. Indeed the more positive outlook should encourage more enthusiasm for the testing of new labour market interventions and in order to meet more pressing skills gaps.
- Maximising participation in the labour force by those currently outside it is critical given the significant growth in employment and further expansion anticipated – there is an insufficient base of unemployed people to meet demand, and therefore participation by groups such as older workers and people with disabilities will be essential
- Even if participation in this regard increases, employment needs, even in the short-term, can not be met simply via this source, and attention must shift immediately to training the existing workforce to ensure that they can adapt to the changing skills needs of the economy, and that new sources of labour can be found to meet demand.
- The critical source of new labour will be from immigration, and it is essential that sufficient policy focus is given to ensuring that an adequate number of immigrants can be attracted into the country, that they receive the support required to be effectively integrated into the economy, that they have access to the same opportunities as all other residents, and that they are equipped with the necessary skills to obtain the high skilled jobs that will characterise future employment growth.

The socio-economic developments therefore have some key implications for wider labour market

policy focus. However it is not clear to what extent they have actually influenced the operation of the EQUAL programme. There is certainly evidence that developments over the life of the programme have generated more effective responses to meeting the changing socio-economic circumstances, such as the redirecting of resources towards the adaptability pillar under Round 2, providing greater focus on continuing training for the existing workforce and on lifelong learning and work-life balance initiatives. Increasing participation in the labour force has of course been a central objective of a number of projects funded by EQUAL across both rounds 1 and 2. However individual projects in the latter round specifically target groups such as early school leavers, travellers, older workers and those with disabilities, while in the initial round this was less prevalent, with a greater number of projects concentrating on wider long-term unemployment or social exclusion issues covering a cross-section of target groups. A number of projects have also undertaken important work with regard to working with immigrants, both from the perspective of providing individuals with the support and training they need to enter and sustain themselves in the workforce, and also in assisting employers to manage diversity in the workforce, and some notable success has been generated in this regard.

Things have taken place over the course of the EQUAL programme, therefore, that respond to wider socio-economic developments in Ireland. The changes in the operation of EQUAL have also taken place in tandem with a number of wider national labour market policy developments, also reflecting the wider socio-economic environment, and it is perhaps these that influence the nature of EQUAL interventions rather than the socio-economic factors directly. In the next section a number of recent policy developments are examined that are of relevance to EQUAL and may have helped to influence its progress.

2.3 Policy Developments

2.3.1 Developments relating to EES, NAPs and NAPSincl

When the European Employment Strategy was launched in 1997 it established a four-pillar structure for the planning of future labour market interventions. When the EQUAL Community Initiative Programme was subsequently drawn up, it was therefore based around the four pillars within this structure: employability, adaptability, entrepreneurship and equal opportunities. The EES was based around annual cycles within which annual Employment Guidelines would be issued by the European Commission to the member states, with National Action Programmes on employment then drawn up to implement the guidelines.

A review of the EES five years after it was initiated in July 2002 found that it was working well, but identified three main challenges to be addressed in the future:

- To raise employment and participation rates in accordance with the Lisbon and Stockholm targets.
- To improve quality at work and promote productive jobs.
- To promote an inclusive labour market.

The Commission also concluded that the existing Employment Guidelines were complex, with 18 specific actions divided into a number of sub-headings and the inclusion of six horizontal objectives. It was noted that this complexity can blur the priorities contained in the Guidelines and proposed that they be simplified by concentrating on priorities, on the results to be achieved and implementation. It identified ten key priorities for action in this regard:

1. help unemployed and inactive to find a job, prevent long-term unemployment
2. encourage entrepreneurship and improve climate for business start-ups
3. promote adaptability of workers and firms to change
4. provide more and better investment in human capital
5. increase labour supply and promote active ageing
6. promote gender equality in employment and pay
7. combat discrimination against disadvantaged groups
8. improve financial incentives to make work pay
9. reduce undeclared work substantially
10. promote occupational and geographical mobility

Alongside these ten priorities, employment recommendations have been issued to member states across a range of policy issues, with each member state receiving a minimum of three per annum. Predominant issues to be addressed across most of the EU include labour supply and active ageing; gender equality; lifelong learning; and unemployment prevention and activation, including development and modernisation of employment services.

A clear link is evident between the priorities that have been identified in this way and the EQUAL programme. A number of issues that feature in the guidelines are also cross-cutting themes in the EQUAL European Thematic Groups, including the following:

- Engaging employers.
- Older workers.
- Migrants.
- Gender mainstreaming.
- Skills, competencies and non-formal qualifications.

However, there are some differences in emphasis between the guidelines and EQUAL given the remit of EQUAL in targeting the needs of those who are most disadvantaged in the labour market. This has led, for example, to more explicit focus on the needs of ethnic minorities within EQUAL than in the guidelines. Asylum seekers are also included as a target group under EQUAL with the

intention of developing good practice relating to their social and vocational integration. Since the EQUAL programme was established, there have been a number of significant changes in this area, with an EC Directive on common minimum conditions for reception of asylum seekers adopted in January 2003, including principles that relate to access to employment and training. Later in this report specific mainstreaming impacts are identified arising from EQUAL funded activity in Round 1 of the programme that focus on improving reception conditions for asylum seekers, in line with this EU policy development.

The EES is implemented at national level by the National Employment Action Plan 2003-2005, launched in October 2003. It details planned activity over a three year period across each of the ten employment priorities or guidelines noted above. The seventh of these priorities focuses on combating discrimination against disadvantaged groups and hence is of direct relevance to EQUAL. This is reflected within the action plan itself where the EQUAL programme is identified as a key component in addressing this issue. The establishment of the EQUAL mainstreaming policy group in particular is cited as important in ensuring that future policy actions are influenced by the learning from the programme “in a systematic and strategic way”.

The National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Inclusion (NAPSincl) 2003-2005 also defines policy developments that are of direct relevance to the implementation of the EQUAL programme. It emphasises the importance of equality as a key goal that must underpin activity in all policy areas to ensure a fair and inclusive society with equal opportunity. Central to this goal is the facilitation of participation in employment, particularly with regard to improving participation levels and job progression rates among women and other marginalized groups. The EQUAL Community Initiative is listed as one of the key labour market programmes designed to facilitate participation in employment, and further details are provided of its progress in an annex.

2.3.2 Other National Policy Developments

It is important when evaluating the success of EQUAL and establishing lessons that can be learned in the future, that developments in policy are considered. This was considered in the mid-term evaluation, and it is the role of this update to consider any major policy interventions that have taken place since that time.

Perhaps the most relevant policy development with regard to EQUAL since the mid-term evaluation is the commitment made by the government to implementation of the Enterprise Action Plan in February 2005. Building on the findings of the Enterprise Strategy Group⁴ in their report, ‘Ahead of the Curve’, the plan, developed by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, set down

⁴ The Enterprise Strategy Group is a body with membership comprising business, academic, public sector and trade union representatives, requested under its Terms of Reference to develop a medium-term enterprise strategy and propose and prioritise national policy responses.

a number of policy actions, to which responsibility for delivery was allocated to individual government departments. Under the heading 'Labour Force Development, the following interventions were prioritised:

- Progress on recommendations of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning to be overseen by an Inter Departmental Committee.
- Increased FÁS investment in this area by almost €48 million in 2005. Most of the additional funds will be directed to in-company training.
- Setting up a Workplace Education Fund with a budget of €2 million.
- Updating of the apprenticeship system for existing trades by the NCCA.
- Development of policy in consultation with FÁS, Forfás, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs and other national stakeholders on a strategic skills-based immigration policy.
- Provision of additional funding of €12 million in 2005 to expand FÁS's existing Competency Development Programme, aimed at those in employment, with a further €15 million for new in company training initiatives to be delivered by FÁS and others.
- Following a review of employment schemes and in consultation with the social partners, 25,000 places to be provided in the Community Employment, Job Initiative and Social Economy Programmes, with changes in the operation of these schemes to be introduced.
- Development of policies by the National Framework Committee with regard to Work/Life Balance.

The most notable feature of these developments is the focus on adaptability-type measures. Central issues include the promotion of work-life balance, of lifelong learning, and of continuing training for those already in employment. The establishment of the Workplace Education Fund is particularly interesting with regard to improving access to opportunities in the labour market, with policy development discussions scheduled between FÁS, the National Adult Literacy Agency and other agencies on the most appropriate interventions to increase basic skills in the workforce. This will target employees with the lowest skills levels and particularly those with difficulties with literacy and numeracy. The nature of these new policy interventions show a high level of synergy with the development of EQUAL in Ireland, given the redirecting of resources towards the adaptability pillar, and funding of projects targeted at issues like improving basic skills in the workforce and stimulating lifelong learning.

Immigration is also identified as an area requiring targeted attention, with a mechanism being put in place to develop a skills-based immigration policy. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment has commenced work in partnership with FÁS, Forfás, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs and other national stakeholders on drafting new policy options targeting the meeting of Ireland's future labour force needs via proactive immigration policy interventions. It has been announced that a policy statement on this matter is expected to be issued before the end of 2005. This highlights the importance of developing effective policy interventions in the future to ensure that

new immigrants can be effectively integrated into the labour market. EQUAL has already developed and tested innovative interventions in this regard, with, for example, the development of self-assessment diagnostic tools for employers and targeted training programmes for new immigrants. The programme is also expected to have a key role in developing appropriate new interventions in this regard in the future.

The review of employment schemes noted in the Enterprise Action Plan also heralds a shift in policy with regard to tackling issues of unemployment, and particularly long-term unemployment. The government has given a commitment to the FÁS Employment Programme in ensuring that the combined participation levels of 25,000 on the three key employment programmes - Community Employment, Job Initiative and Social Economy Programmes - are sustained at existing levels. This represents a reaffirmation of its wider social objectives. However changes are being made to these three initiatives, targeted at increasing participation in the labour force, with a refocusing of resources away from the Job Initiative scheme. This signals a shift away from programmes targeting long-term unemployment to targeting the needs of individuals who are long-term unemployed as part of wider community initiatives or more specific target group focused initiatives.

Another relevant recent development outside of the Enterprise Action Plan interventions involves the introduction of a new Full Time Employment Support Scheme which is being introduced on a three year pilot basis, aimed at increasing the numbers of people with disabilities in full-time employment in the open labour market.

Consideration of these recent policy developments therefore appear to suggest a number of general trends in national labour market policy:

- The up-skilling of the initial workforce and promotion of lifelong learning and work-life balance initiatives;
- A focus on development of a skills-based immigration policy to meet the labour force needs of the growing economy.
- The continuation of efforts to increase participation in the labour force, but perhaps with a focus on specific target groups rather than on general long-term unemployment initiatives.

As noted in section 2.2.2, EQUAL has developed in a number of ways that reinforce the above policy developments. There has been an increasing focus on lifelong learning and work-life balance via a rebalancing of funding towards the adaptability pillar. A number of projects have focused on providing equal opportunities for ethnic minorities and managing diversity in the workplace, critical types of interventions in the future as skills needs are met by a significant in-flow of migrants. There has also been an increase in dedicated projects to meet the needs of specific target groups, moving away from more general projects looking at long-term unemployment or social inclusion issues in

general. In this way then, it can be said that EQUAL has been reinforcing national policy and responding to developments over the course of its operation. Its role in stimulating innovative labour market policies to address issues of diversity and equality should mean that its development is closely related to changes in national policy. In order to facilitate the filtering of new ideas into mainstream programming it must continue to reflect such changes as it progresses in the future, or if a similar programme of this nature is introduced.

3. Implementation of the Mid-Term Evaluation

3.1 Introduction

The Terms of Reference request the evaluator to review the key findings, conclusions and recommendations of the mid-term evaluation and assess the extent to which these were taken on board in programme implementation. Throughout the consultation process changes have been identified in the operation of EQUAL since the time of the mid-term evaluation and in general over the life of the programme in order to gain both a national stakeholder and project-level perspective of improvements that have been made. These were then related to the findings and recommendations contained in the mid-term evaluation in order to establish linkages between improvements and the proposals in this report. Finally detailed discussions with the NSS were also held to discuss each of the recommendations in turn and establish responses that had been made with regard to the implementation of these since that time.

3.2 Progress Since the Mid-Term Evaluation

In general the majority of the recommendations in the mid-term evaluation were acted upon, generating important changes in the operation of the programme that have subsequently improved its effectiveness. Among the key developments that have taken place over the last two years of EQUAL are the following notable steps:

- The reallocation of funding from Round 1 to Round 2 away from the employability theme to the adaptability theme.
- The allocation of a fixed budget for all actions of a project at its commencement instead of a phased approach.
- The requirement for development partnerships to have formal written mainstreaming strategies in place from the outset.
- The improvement of the capacity of the development partnerships to develop project-level indicators that can be tracked in addition to the standard monitoring indicators.

A number of other recommendations became obsolete as a result of other developments which had taken place. For the remaining recommendations relevant issues were addressed via different types of intervention from those that were originally proposed in the mid-term evaluation. In the following pages each of the recommendations is considered in turn, with an assessment of whether it has been: fully progressed, significantly progressed, partly progressed, progressed little, not been progressed at all, or is no longer relevant given other changes that have been made to the EQUAL programme. A description of the activity that has occurred in relation to the recommendation is also provided.

FIGURE 3.1: PROGRESS OF RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE MID-TERM EVALUATION










Recommendation	Progress Since Mid-Term Evaluation	
R1: For Round 2, the proportion of funding across the pillars should be rebalanced. Specifically, the proportion for the Adaptability pillar should be increased from 20% to 35%, to underpin a drive to innovation around life-long learning and general up-skilling in the economy. To facilitate this increase, funding for the Employability pillar should be reduced from 45% to 30%. This would better reflect the likely balance of needs of the Irish labour market in the medium-term.	This recommendation was acted upon in Round 2, and the allocation of funding targeted at the adaptability pillar was increased from 20% to 35%. In tandem with this development, the allocation for the employability pillar was reduced from 45% to 30%. This move has, as anticipated in the mid-term evaluation, been consistent with a national labour market policy focus to develop the skills of the existing workforce and stimulate initiatives promoting lifelong learning and flexibility of the skills base	
R2: While the economic downturn may still be continuing in mid-2004 (when Round 2 is launched), the programme should continue to focus on the longer-term factors that underpin inequality and discrimination in relation to the world of work.	The programme has maintained its focus throughout its lifetime, and Round 2 continues to target the longer-term factors that underpin Equality and discrimination. Indeed if anything, the projects in Round 2 are more focused on specific long-term issues than their Round 1 counterparts, where a number of projects were more general in nature and perhaps over-ambitious in terms of the number of areas that could be targeted. As noted in Section 2, the economic downturn was short-lived and the economy and labour market continue to grow at a rapid pace.	
R3: In this context, the list of potential areas for innovation under EQUAL, as presented in the CIP, should be reviewed and updated for Round 2. This should take account of recent developments in the labour market, policy developments since 2000 and new research on the specific barriers facing a number of target groups (e.g. potential older workers, Travellers) in Ireland. Areas such as lifelong learning (particularly the upskilling of those already in employment), work-life balance, flexible work practices, providing in-company supports (especially for SMEs) and accommodating diversity continue to be important. The same holds true for a number of the groups mentioned in the original CIP, including older workers, ethnic minorities (including Travellers), early school leavers, women returners and groups covered under the equality legislation.	Although the EQUAL Community Initiative Programme document itself remained the same and was not formally updated in this respect, a number of initiatives were undertaken to ensure that Round 2 projects reflected the issues raised in the mid-term evaluation. Prior to the application process for Round 2, the NSS and the Managing Authority prepared policy and issues papers for the Selection Committee that supported the recommendation proposed by the mid-term evaluation. Revised guidelines were put together on the types of projects being sought and these were placed together with all other relevant information on the website for potential applicants. The policy developments, specific barriers facing a number of target groups, areas of continued importance, and key target groups requiring further intervention were all taken into consideration in the Technical Assessments of project applications under Round 2. This is reflected by an examination of the Round 2 projects that were subsequently approved, with initiatives specifically focused at older people, ethnic minority groups, those with disabilities, early school leavers, travelers, women and asylum seekers across all five themes. The promotion of lifelong learning, work-life balance and development of in-company reports were highly prevalent within projects funded under the adaptability theme.	
R4: In the context of the research undertaken (or commissioned) by the Equality Authority since 2001 on a number of groups experiencing labour market discrimination, the views of the Authority should be obtained in preparing a clear focus for Round 2	The Equality Authority was proactively involved in the decisions regarding the appropriate focus of Round 2 activity, and drew on research it had commissioned in bring its expertise in equality issues to the process. The organization co-chairs the Mainstreaming Policy Group, is a member of the Monitoring Committee and also provides support for individual projects. There is a recognition from within the organization that there is scope to develop their role while Round 2 progresses, particularly with regard to building the capacity of potential mainstreaming organisations to develop appropriate policies for groups experiencing labour market discrimination.	
 Fully progressed  Significantly progressed  Partly progressed  Little progress  No progress NR No longer relevant		

FIGURE 3.1: PROGRESS OF RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE MID-TERM EVALUATION










Recommendation	Progress Since Mid-Term Evaluation	
R5: This list of potential areas for innovation should be part of the literature circulated to potential applicants for Round 2 funding. While the Managing Authority cannot force organisations to submit proposals in any area, and innovative ideas may emerge in unexpected areas, it seems sensible to share the suggestions for areas of potential innovation that have emerged nationally as widely as possible.	As noted under the assessment of progress under Recommendation 3, possible areas of innovation were highlighted to potential applicants prior to Round 2 via the EQUAL website.	
R6: The project selection process should take into account the identified potential areas for innovation, which should form one element of the wider Technical Assessment of all applications by the National Support Structure.	The technical assessments of all applications for Round 2 funding took account of the identified potential areas of innovation. Innovation was a key part of the criteria for project selection by the Sub-Committee of the Monitoring Committee. There are indications that projects in general in Round 2 are more focused on the development of specific final outcomes and products, and this should assist the development of innovative thinking within the DPs.	
R7: Budgets for Action 2 and Action 3 should be agreed with projects (subject to a small margin for change) at the beginning, rather than at the end, of Action 1. This will prevent DPs from preparing detailed action plans based on funding that does not subsequently materialise. It will also save time at the start of Action 2 (when many DP plans had to be revised during Round 1 of EQUAL).	This recommendation was implemented in full, and an agreed budget is now allocated to each individual project for actions 1, 2 and 3 at the outset. Feedback from the DPs consulted as part of this evaluation has suggested that this development has had a positive effect in helping to plan the projects effectively.	
R8: DPs should be given greater guidance on the development of project-level indicators during Action 1. This is separate to the process of gathering information for monitoring purposes and, in particular, projects should be encouraged to develop result and impact indicators, if possible.	The NSS has devoted attention to encouraging projects to develop result and impact indicators over and above information required for general monitoring purposes. It provided support and templates towards the identification and articulation of appropriate indicators and subsequent action planning by the DPs reflects this. A workshop with DPs is also being planned on the nature of appropriate indicators and project cycle management in order to try to focus thinking on a more linear basis and stimulate examination of the cause and effect of the proposed interventions in each project. This is due to take place before the end of the year and will upskill project coordinators and others in these areas. The aim is to get projects to focus on definite products or outcomes that will generate impacts of the nature sought by EQUAL. DPs are now being asked to think about potential impacts at the start of projects rather than recording such occurrences after the fact, thereby giving greater focus to the generation of these impacts.	
R9: The timeframe for the closure of Action 1 should be reduced.	This recommendation in the mid-term evaluation was a product of the uncertainty over funding for each individual project prior to completion of Action 1 and the need to establish a firmer timescale for access to finance. However the allocation of funding for Actions 1, 2 and 3 of a project on commencement renders this proposal irrelevant.	NR
 Fully progressed  Significantly progressed  Partly progressed  Little progress  No progress NR No longer relevant		

FIGURE 3.1: PROGRESS OF RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE MID-TERM EVALUATION










Recommendation	Progress Since Mid-Term Evaluation	
R10: The first task for most DPs at the start of Action 2 is the recruitment of a Project Co-ordinator. The evidence from Round 1 is that this decision is perhaps the most important of the entire project. The importance of the decision, and the consequent importance of having a clear job description, defined recruitment criteria and a professional recruitment process should be emphasised to all DPs.	The importance of the project co-ordinator role was emphasized to the DPs and the recruitment of a suitably skilled person in this role actively encouraged. Having a good project coordinator was cited by the DPs consulted as a major advantage in progressing projects effectively, and those that did not create such a role noted that in retrospect this would have been beneficial. It was also indicated that in the Round 2 projects there is more focus on the project coordinator role as a provider of leadership and driver of activity within the DP.	
R11: All DPs should be strongly encouraged to have a dedicated person (on a part-time basis) managing the financial aspects of the project. The experience of Round 1 has been that this greatly reduces the time needed for this dimension of the project.	In response to this recommendation, the recruitment of a dedicated person to deal with financial management aspects of the project was encouraged and a number of DPs subsequently took this step. Where this occurred it significantly improved the efficiency of project operation, reducing the time that the project coordinator or other personnel from the development partners had to devote to these tasks, and increasing focus on moving the project forward and achieving greater outcomes. A further development that helped in this regard was the recruitment of a Financial Resource Officer by the NSS in order to provide practical advice and support to DPs in meeting the financial reporting requirements of the programme	
R12: (As recommended by the Commission Auditors) If Action 2 and Action 3 budgets are to be revised after Round 1, there needs to be a formal process to approve the revised budgets.	The decision to allocate a single budget to the DPs for Actions 1, 2 and 3 makes this recommendation obsolete.	NR
R13: An ad hoc group should be established at end-2003/early-2004 to discuss the development of indicators for EQUAL in Ireland. This should contain the main stakeholders in EQUAL, including the Managing Authority, the National Support Structure and the Equality Authority, and other relevant expertise. Issues for the group would include the appropriate role of indicators for EQUAL, the appropriate level for these indicators to be developed (the thematic networks?) and ensuring a process is in place to develop the indicators.	Although no formal group was established, discussions were held between the main stakeholders with regard to the development of indicators for EQUAL in Ireland. Templates were developed for examining impacts at project level, relating project aims and objectives to eventual outcomes. The need for capacity building within DPs with regard to development of appropriate indicators was also identified, and this prompted the planning of the workshop exercise discussed under Recommendation 8 scheduled to take place later this year.	
R14: The North/South Steering Committee for EQUAL in Ireland should prepare a draft workplan for submission to the Summer 2004 Monitoring Committee meeting, setting out its plans for Round 2 of EQUAL, and ideas on how to better facilitate this dimension of EQUAL. These could include greater encouragement of inclusion of DPs from North and South in the formal transnational co-operation agreements, facilitated by work from the two National Support Structures.	The Steering Committee produced a framework for enhanced North/South Engagement under EQUAL from Autumn 2003 to Summer 2004 and this was submitted to the Monitoring Committee. Progress has been made with regard to the development of the North-South dimension of EQUAL. Under Round 1, there was very little cross-border activity and none of the DPs had a transnational partner located in Northern Ireland. However 4 projects involve such a partnership in Round 2. The Steering Committee continues to report to the Monitoring Committee and a further framework for North/South cooperation was submitted to the last Monitoring Committee meeting in May of this year. A successful North-South event was held in Belfast in July at which many DPs from the North and South attended and discussed matters of interest and possible avenues for North-South collaboration in the future. A follow-up event to build on these discussions is planned for later this year	
 Fully progressed  Significantly progressed  Partly progressed  Little progress  No progress NR No longer relevant		

FIGURE 3.1: PROGRESS OF RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE MID-TERM EVALUATION











Recommendation	Progress Since Mid-Term Evaluation	
R15: All of the key principles of EQUAL (partnership, transnational co-operation, innovation, empowerment and mainstreaming) should be maintained as core aspects of the programme.	These key principles remained as core aspects of the programme. Particular focus has been given to maximizing the mainstreaming impact of the projects funded by EQUAL as it nears completion, in order to ensure that the significant learning potential that has developed from the interventions is not lost following its period of operation.	
R16: To support the building of DPs, projects should be encouraged to undertake formal team-building exercises during Action 1, or early in Action 2.	It was noted that many DPs involve the coming together of organizations that have no previous working relationships with each other, or even experience of working with similar organizations. Team building is crucial in developing relationships and the NSS has been proactive in trying to encourage mechanisms for developing such relationships. It has supported the development and consolidation of partnerships and plans to work with project staff and others to further bolster practice and understanding in this regard with a particular emphasis on the involvement of partners in mainstreaming.	
R17: Before their first transnational exchange visits, DPs should be encouraged to put in place a systematic process to ensure the full potential of the transnational dimension is realised. This might include pre-trip meetings where desired outputs are defined and communicated to the overseas DP hosting the visit, forms to record learning during the trip and a “de-briefing” session after the trip.	Progress has been made since the mid-term evaluation with regard to improving the effectiveness of the transnational dimension of EQUAL. The NSS established a dedicated resource to coordinate transnational partnerships, and have used experience of the problems that arose during the transnational partnership formulation process in Round 1 to avoid many of the potential pitfalls during Round 2. The ECDB has improved the efficiency of the partner-finding process, while a clearing house event in Prague in April was a useful exercise in ensuring that all DPs had secured appropriate transnational partners.	
R18: While the process of establishing transnational partnerships worked well for Round 1, it may be possible to improve it further by tighter co-ordination of EQUAL between Member States. For example, timeframes and rules on eligible activity vary somewhat and Member States treat Action 1 quite differently (e.g. unlike Ireland, some cut back considerably on the number of projects at the end of Action 1, meaning Irish DPs “lost” partners they had chosen at this point).	While differences in the way in which some member states operate EQUAL continue to impede the development of effective transnational partnerships, the learning from Round 1 means that such problems can be anticipated and as a result to a large extent avoided. Good relationships have developed between the NSSs and the Managing Authorities in member states with similar means of operating the programme to assist in maximizing the effectiveness of the transnational dimension. It was noted in particular that links between Ireland and the UK in this regard had helped to improve partnership facilitation considerably.	
R19: If possible, each DP’s Action 1 plan should be reviewed by all local and transnational partners as the evidence suggests that partners can be a major source of innovation at this point.	The proactive involvement of partners at both DP and transnational level is certainly important to innovation, and the full involvement of all such partners in the production of the Action 1 plan has been encouraged. However, control over this involvement is limited to the fact that all partners must sign off on the plan, and logistically there is little scope to undertake further checks on levels of proactivity across the partnerships. In this regard therefore the team building activity undertaken will be especially important in achieving the ‘buy in’ required from all partners.	
 Fully progressed  Significantly progressed  Partly progressed  Little progress  No Progress NR No longer relevant		

FIGURE 3.1: PROGRESS OF RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE MID-TERM EVALUATION


















Recommendation	Progress Since Mid-Term Evaluation	
R20: Efforts should be made to strengthen the understanding by DPs, and the incorporation into their projects, of the empowerment principle in Round 2. In particular, DPs should be challenged during Action 1 and early in Action 2 to increase empowerment around core project areas, project management and decision making.	DPs continue to be challenged on the statements made regarding empowerment in order to ensure that they are justified and that the exact meaning of the empowerment principle is understood. Consultation with projects revealed that while empowerment activity with regard to target groups has been successful, within some development partnerships power is less equitably distributed than in others. This has been attributed to factors including the initial lead taken by one of the partners, differing expectations from the project and varying contributions to its implementation.	
R21: All Round 1 DPs should develop short written mainstreaming strategies, covering both their proposed approaches to horizontal and vertical mainstreaming. (In many projects, these already exist.) These should be reviewed by the NSS and discussed at thematic network meetings.	This has been an important development since the mid-term evaluation. Mainstreaming strategies were required to be submitted by all Round 2 DPs, and their plans to generate such impacts placed under close scrutiny. It was indicated that there is a closer understanding of the type of mainstreaming impacts that might be generated by specific projects among the DPs, and although some remain skeptical of the benefits in trying to predict mainstreaming effects from the outset, on the whole the insistence on provision of such strategies has proved beneficial.	
R22: Links should be fostered between the DPs' horizontal mainstreaming strategies and the national Mainstreaming Policy Group (i.e. the members of the latter should provide routes to accelerate the implementation of the former). To this end, DP mainstreaming strategies should be more finely focused on specific policies and/or practices within Departments and agencies, or practices in the private sector. The guidance for Round 2 of EQUAL should provide specific criteria in this regard in terms of the selection process.	As noted above, a workshop has been held with DPs in order to improve understanding of the potential mainstreaming outcomes that might result from projects. Some Round 1 projects, where potential has been identified for mainstreaming if further work is undertaken, have also been awarded extensions of funding in order to facilitate the realization of such effects. All DPs in Round 1 were also invited to attend the meetings of the Mainstreaming Policy Group on at least one occasion.	
R23: The formal meetings of the Mainstreaming Policy Group (while likely to be very useful) should act as simply a starting point for EQUAL to engage with a range of policy makers. Further meetings will be needed on a one-to-one basis with members to introduce, and present, particular innovative ideas of relevance to the policy makers. This deeper level of engagement will be important if the learning arising from EQUAL is to transfer successfully to the mainstream. The ongoing work under the capacity strand of the mainstreaming strategy will also be important in terms of supporting policy makers in this area.	The DPs from Round 1 were all invited to present proposals with regard to mainstreaming to the mainstreaming policy group. In addition to this, a mainstreaming event was held in March 2004 to bring DPs and policy makers together to identify potential actions with regard to mainstreaming. Despite these initiatives there still appears to be inconsistency in terms of mainstreaming impacts generated via the Mainstreaming Policy Group across the organizations involved. In some cases members are proving to be effective conduits for mainstreaming ideas within their organizations, however in others such effects are not apparent. This has been attributed to insufficiently senior representatives from some organizations attending meetings and therefore limiting the extent to which they can subsequently influence policy and practice within their organization. The high turnover of representatives from some member organizations was also cited as a factor.	
 Fully progressed  Significantly progressed  Partly progressed  Little progress  No progress NR No longer relevant		

FIGURE 3.1: PROGRESS OF RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE MID-TERM EVALUATION

Recommendation	Progress Since Mid-Term Evaluation
R24: A mechanism is needed to capture learning arising from the EU Thematic Groups of interest to labour market policy makers in Ireland.	<p>The EU Thematic Groups are being restructured, having been perceived as too unwieldy given their focus on entire themes such as Adaptability and Entrepreneurship, limiting the extent to which significant learning could develop. New, more focused, issue based structures are being developed, and a mechanism should be found to ensure that learning from such new sources is disseminated to all relevant stakeholders.</p> 
R25: The Managing Authority should ensure that the application, selection and Action 1 phases of Round 2 which will occur between mid-2004 and mid-2005) do not interfere with the important work of mainstreaming the learning arising from Round 1, much of which will need to take place at the same time.	<p>There would not appear to be any interference in this regard, with additional time and funding awarded to projects where there exists potential to realize mainstreaming impacts with further concentrated activity. Other initiatives have also been progressed by the Managing Authority in order to ensure that the learning from Round 1 is not lost, with the NSS requested to produce a Mainstreaming Compendium of all such impacts arising from the Round 1 projects, a task that is now almost complete. The Managing Authority also hosted an EU Learning Seminar on Mainstreaming in Malahide in April 2005, attended by all member states and the Commission. At this seminar an EQUAL Guide for Mainstreaming was finalized and has subsequently been produced.</p> 
 Fully progressed  Significantly progressed  Partly progressed  Little progress  No progress  NR No longer relevant	

4. Effectiveness & Progress to Date

4.1 Introduction

This section documents the progress of the EQUAL Community Initiative Programme since it was launched in 2000 in terms of the financial resources deployed and the physical progress made in terms of available performance indicators. The constraints that have been identified as affecting progress since the mid-term evaluation are also discussed. Finally in light of the assessment of financial and physical progress above, programme outputs, results and impacts are, wherever possible, highlighted, with further consideration of any unintended consequences that have occurred.

4.2 Review of Financial Progress

At the outset of EQUAL, the CIP detailed a financial plan that allocated funding to each year from 2001 to 2006 across each individual pillar. This is shown in Table 4.1.

TABLE 4.1: FINANCIAL PLAN FOR EQUAL CIO BY THEME AND BY YEAR							
Theme	Total Eligible Cost						Total
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	
Employability	3.12000	3.44160	3.41760	3.42720	3.47040	3.46320	20.340
Entrepreneurship	0.69333	0.76480	0.75947	0.76160	0.77120	0.76960	4.520
Adaptability	1.38667	1.52960	1.51893	1.52320	1.54240	1.53920	9.040
Equal Opportunities	0.83200	0.91776	0.91136	0.91392	0.92544	0.92352	5.424
Asylum Seekers	0.34667	0.38240	0.37974	0.38080	0.38560	0.38480	2.260
Total	6.37867	7.03616	6.98710	7.00672	7.09504	7.08032	41.580
SOURCE: EQUAL COMMUNITY INITIATIVE PROGRAMME							

The Equal Financial Plan was produced across all Member States for the period 2000-2006, based on a flat budgetary perspective. The financial plan set a total eligible cost of €41.58mn over the programme, involving an ESF contribution of €31.185mn, with the remaining 20% provided by central government and 5% from private contributions. It allocated funding across each pillar, with Employability due to receive 48.9%, Entrepreneurship 10.9%, Adaptability 21.8%, Equal Opportunities 13% and Asylum Seekers 5.4%. This of course does not take into account the changes that took place in Ireland during Round 2, when the proportion of funding designated for the employability pillar was reduced to 30%, and the proportion for the adaptability pillar increased to 35%.

The plan envisaged immediate establishment of the Development Partnerships and quick progression of implementation of the projects, and allocations were relatively evenly divided between each year, an unrealistic scenario given the differing nature of activity (and therefore costs) in Actions 1, 2 and 3 of the projects. Indeed, across all member states the programme did not commence until 15th November 2001 when the Action 1 developmental phase was introduced. This Phase was completed on 15th May 2002 when project activity under Action 2 began. The late start of the programme, and the developmental nature of Action 1, therefore meant that there exists a dysfunction between the original financial perspectives and actuality in terms of programme activity and expenditure. The annual implementation reports therefore acknowledge that it is not wholly realistic to compare forecast expenditure with actual levels. Total expenditure returned to the end of 2004 represents 72% of the total eligible cost proposed in the Financial Plan for the same period.

As noted in the mid-term evaluation, the closing date for applications was not until September 2001, with the 21 successful projects subsequently selected in November of that year, in line with the timescale of implementation across the member states. Action 1 then ran from mid-November 2001 to mid-May 2002. Action 2 began formally in May 2002, although the mid-term evaluation reported that progress in the second half of 2002 was mixed, with several projects experiencing significant delays in getting underway. Constraints in this regard are further considered in section 4.4. As a consequence spend in 2001 and 2002 was substantially below that envisaged in the original plan, and it was only by 2003 that the bulk of the finance for Round 1 projects began to be drawn down. Table 4.2 details the ESF expenditure per annum across each theme to the end of 2004.

TABLE 4.2: ESF EXPENDITURE YEAR ON YEAR BY PILLAR				
Pillar	2001	2002	2003	2004
Employability	406,762	837,959.67	2,391,958.95	2,885,060.98
Entrepreneurship	76,916	242,893.93	561,909.29	247,505.21
Adaptability	180,785	442,797.93	1,234,448.80	1,531,819.12
Equal Opportunities	91,627	133,853.93	503,420.84	1,021,848.28
Asylum Seekers	45,195	115,976.83	297,259.78	255,036.47
Total	801,285.00	1,773,482.29	4,988,977.66	5,941,270.06
	0	9	6	
SOURCE: ANNUAL IMPLEMENTATION REPORTS				

Table 4.2 highlights the lower levels of spend in 2001 and 2002 as a result of the timescale for implementation noted above and the delays encountered in progressing projects in the initial stages. Indeed the years 2001 and 2002 accounted for only 5.9% and 13.1% of total expenditure over the first four years of the programme, with over 80% spent in the last two years.

By the end of 2004, the majority of Round 1 projects were complete or nearing completion, and the majority of funding for this Round had been taken up. At this stage, total expenditure returned represented 72% of the total eligible cost proposed in the financial plan for the same period. Table 4.3 looks at cumulative funding to date, allowing a comparison of funding allocations to each of the individual pillars given that the first round of projects had been significantly progressed.

TABLE 4.3: ESF EXPENDITURE CUMULATIVE BY PILLAR				
Pillar	2001	2002	2003	2004
Employability	406,762	1,244,721.6	3,636,680.6	6,521,741.60
		7	2	
Entrepreneurship	76,916	319,809.93	881,719.22	1,129,224.43
Adaptability	180,785	623,582.93	1,858,031.7	3,389,850.85
			3	
Equal Opportunities	91,627	225,480.93	728,901.77	1,750,750.05
Asylum Seekers	45,195	161,171.83	458,431.61	713,468.08
Total	801,285.0	2,574,767.2	7,563,764.9	13,505,035.0
	0	9	5	1
SOURCE: ANNUAL IMPLEMENTATION REPORTS				

By the end of 2004, ESF expenditure of €13,5mn had been drawn down for the operation of EQUAL in Ireland. Some 48.3% of this funding was under the employability theme, 8.4% under the entrepreneurship theme, 25.1% under the adaptability theme, 13.0% under equal opportunities, and 5.3% under asylum seekers. Therefore although the progress with regard to expenditure did not occur at the pace originally envisaged by the financial plan for the reasons cited above, the actual allocations largely mirrored those planned. There was a small shortfall in entrepreneurship funding envisaged countered by a greater share for adaptability activity.

Finally, it is worthwhile examining the allocation of funding to individual projects under Round 1 of the programme. Table 4.4 over the page details the ESF expenditure for each DP over the period 2001-2003. No information on the 2004 allocations was included in the 2004 Annual Implementation Report.

The table shows that ESF funding 2001-2003 per DP project ranged between €13,287 (2001) and €318,749.00 (2003) with an average expenditure of €360,179.28. The Dublin Employment Pact Development Partnership received the highest amount of ESF funding between 2001-2003 of €545,874.32 and The Longford Women in Enterprise received the least amount at €209,223.83. Technical Assistance allocation between 2001-2004 amounted to a total of €1,576,475.79. Over 42% (€664,048.01) of this was allocated in 2003.

TABLE 4.4: ESF DECLARED EXPENDITURE 2001-2003*

	2001	2002	2003	TOTAL
Employability	406,762.00	837,959.67	2,391,958.95	3,636,680.62
Westmeath Equal Development Partnership	45,898.00	66,801.42	223,876.50	336,575.92
Laois Rural Employment Partnership	23,331.00	76,361.12	199,055.72	298,747.84
Clare Equality Partnership	27,934.00	37,332.38	240,508.41	305,774.79
The Blanchardstown Equal development Group	40,504.00	81,271.00	256,947.00	378,722.00
Kildare and Wicklow Equal	45,898.00	24,583.95	202,231.06	272,713.01
North East Training Initiative	45,898.00	133,825.00	230,437.33	410,160.33
Roscommon Equal Partnership	40,269.00	61,191.31	282,637.36	384,097.67
WIN – Work Integration Network	45,898.00	124,264.00	214,251.00	384,413.00
North Cork/South East Limerick Development Partnership	45,898.00	149,159.44	314,769.76	509,827.20
Access Ability	45,234.00	83,170.05	227,244.81	355,648.86
Entrepreneurship	76,916.00	242,893.93	561,909.29	881,719.22
Longford Women in Enterprise	17,731.00	54,293.56	137,199.27	209,223.83
Leitrim Partnership for Arts & Craft Employment	13,287.00	94,423.00	226,335.16	334,045.16
The Traveller Economy Sectoral Partnership	45,898.00	94,177.37	198,374.86	338,450.23
Adaptability	180,785.00	442,797.93	1,234,448.80	1,858,031.73
Diversity at Work Partnership	36,157.00	36,157.00	198,818.04	271,132.04
The Equal-Ireland Development Partnership	36,157.00	36,157.00	262,075.11	334,389.11
Interact II	36,157.00	93,203.91	253,426.53	382,787.44
TRED – Training Response to Equality and Diversity	36,157.00	86,311.70	201,380.12	323,848.82
Dublin Employment Pact Development Partnership	36,157.00	190,968.32	318,749.00	545,874.32
Equal Opportunities	91,627.00	133,853.93	503,420.84	728,901.77
Work Life Balance Networks	45,729.00	87,955.93	198,842.65	332,527.58
The National Flexi-Work Partnership	45,898.00	45,898.00	304,578.19	458,431.61
Asylum Seekers	45,195.00	115,976.83	297,259.78	396,374.19
SONAS (Ireland)	45,195.00	115,976.83	297,259.78	396,374.19
AVERAGE	38,156.43	84,451.54	237,571.32	€360,179.28
*NOTE: 2004 figures unavailable				
SOURCE: Annual Implementation Reports				

4.3 Review of Physical Progress

Some data has also been produced with regard to the physical progress of the EQUAL Community Initiative Programme in Ireland. The numbers of participants on each project have been recorded, and Table 4.5 highlights these statistics across each theme. Due to the timeframe for implementation of Round 1 noted in section 4.2, there were no project participants until Action 2 was underway in 2002.

TABLE 4.5: NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS BY PILLAR 2002-2004

Pillar	May – Dec 30 th 2002	Jan – Dec 2003	Jan – Dec 2004	% May – Dec 2002	% Jan – Dec 2003	% Jan – Dec 2004
Employability	119	524	436	80.4%	82.6%	98.9%
Entrepreneurship	29	65	5	19.6%	10.3%	1.1%
Adaptability	-	45	-	-	7.1%	0%
Equal Opportunities	-	-	-	-	-	-
Asylum Seekers	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	119	634	441	100%	100%	100%

SOURCE: ANNUAL IMPLEMENTATION REPORTS

The employability theme accounted for the significant majority of participants in EQUAL projects between 2002 and 2004, with 1,079 individuals taking part in this regard. This is indicative of the more participant-intensive nature of activities funded under this theme, with a focus on increasing participation in the labour force. The other theme that is particularly focused on providing support to individuals is under entrepreneurship, and this accounts for most of the remainder. No participants have been recorded under the equal opportunities or asylum seekers theme.

The data on participants is also recorded in terms of broad age band and gender. Table 4.6 notes the nature of projects in terms of male and female participation where this has been recorded, and where the participants are aged either under 50 or over 50 years old.

TABLE 4.6: NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS BY AGE AND GENDER 2002-2004

	2002		2003		2004		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Under 50	50	88	215	250	136	183	401	521
Over 50	6	4	19	35	26	40	51	79
Total	56	92	234	285	162	223	452	600

SOURCE: ANNUAL IMPLEMENTATION REPORTS

The table reveals that there has been a higher level of participation by females than males on EQUAL funded projects between 2002 and 2004, accounting for 57% of all participants. The analysis also confirms that there is a significant level of representation of older people aged over 50 among those participating on the project, indicating that older workers and individuals excluded from the labour force are receiving targeted interventions as part of the EQUAL programme. People aged 50 years and over represent 14.1% of the total participants in projects where levels of participation have been recorded.

4.4 Constraints on Progress

The mid-term evaluation identified a number of factors that had hindered progress of projects at that date. Among the particular issues cited were:

- The complexity of the programme
- Gaining real buy-in from partners who are asked to commit match funding going forward, particularly in DPs with local development organisations being funded under the Employability pillar.
- Staff changes or a lack of qualified staff.

While these issues were clearly impediments to the progress of projects, it would appear that they were, to a large extent, overcome over time. A closer understanding of the intricacies of the EQUAL programme undoubtedly developed within the DPs over their lifetime as they became accustomed to the specific requirements and had more interaction with the NSS. The complexity of the reporting requirements however remain a primary concern, and these will be discussed in greater detail below.

Achieving ‘buy-in’ from partners was again an issue that was resolved in most cases as the programme progressed. There were variations in the level of proactive involvement between different partners and instances did develop where a number of organisations became almost ‘silent’ partners with minimal roles in decision-making and delivery. However, consultations with representatives from DPs indicated that focus and commitment improved as Action 2 progressed. This was attributed to there being more tangible tasks and outcomes at this stage upon which individual partners could focus. To some extent it was felt that it was unavoidable that achieving ‘buy-in’ was difficult to obtain from some partners, as not all perceived that there were specific activities within the project that they were suited to undertake. In general, the projects that worked well were those where partners were designated specific remits and programmes of work to perform. Often these projects involved a small number of partners, and it does appear to have been more difficult to secure ‘buy-in’ in larger DPs. Obviously there are exceptions to this, most notably the Dublin Employment Pact project, that has operated successfully with 48 separate partners, but in other projects small focused partnerships were more effective.

The problem of staff changes or a lack of qualified staff did continue to blight some of the projects as the programme progressed. However, the situation did improve from the time of the mid-term evaluation as appropriately skilled individuals were recruited over time. The nature of EQUAL in funding projects for a fixed time period only means that high levels of staff turnover will always be an issue, as skilled staff will always be tempted by longer-term employment options. The projects that

lacked a dedicated project coordinator struggled to show the same level of focus on outputs and progress than those with someone in this role. The recruitment of a dedicated person to deal with the financial management aspects of the programme also proved highly beneficial to those projects that took this step, as this role requires specialist skills in order to avoid inefficiencies. Both of these positions were highlighted as critical in the mid-term review, and the NSS encouraged DPs to deploy project resources in this manner.

The fact that the issues discussed in the mid-term evaluation were, to a significant extent, addressed as time went on, raises the issue of the appropriateness of the time period given to EQUAL projects to achieve desired outcomes. This was a constraint cited by DPs consulted for this update evaluation, who felt that the two year time period from commencement of Action 2 was insufficient to realise the full potential of the partnerships. A significant amount of time is required to develop effective working partnerships, recruit appropriate staff, agree a relevant work programme and allocate responsibilities for its delivery this is added to the fact that there is a steep learning curve when the work programme actually begins. This suggests that it would be worthwhile considering an extension of the project timescales if another equivalent programme operates in the future.

As alluded to above, the key constraint on progress identified by projects was the reporting requirements as a condition of EQUAL funding. This was continually cited by DPs as having limited the extent to which time could be spent on achieving project outcomes. The appropriateness of such requirements was called into question given the need for a programme focused on innovation and the testing of new ideas to be flexible and capable of responding to learning within projects. To do this consideration should be given to allowing scope for the adjusting of funding and the purpose for which it was originally directed. Greater flexibility and less rigid control procedures in this regard may free-up DPs to focus more effectively on the generation of impacts and outcomes.

4.5 Outputs, Results and Impacts

Without a detailed survey of all the DPs, it is difficult to make definitive statements on the outputs, results and impacts generated from Round 1 at an aggregate level. The fact that these projects have only just reached completion also means that longer-term impacts are not yet apparent. From consideration of the experience of a number of Round 1 projects, it was noted that the most successful outputs and results in the short-term occurred where a tangible product had been developed by the DP. This product could either be adopted directly by organisations, amended to suit its individual circumstances, or facilitate the taking on board of learning, and in doing so change the way in which an organisation responded to issues of equality and diversity.

A number of tangible outputs have been generated from projects in this regard. By drawing on information supplied by the NSS, together with desk research on all of the 21 Round 1 projects as well as consultation with a number of DPs via case study and workshop exercises, a summary of performance across all the projects has been put together.

A total of 55 physical outputs were produced by the DPs. These outputs varied widely in nature, ranging from published reports, transnational products, web-based or online tools and audio film clips or DVDs. Some examples of the types of products produced within these categories are given below.

EXAMPLES OF TANGIBLE PRODUCTS PRODUCED BY THE ROUND 1 DPs

Transnational Products:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employer handbooks - Coaching handbooks - A report on training for unemployed women
Web-based/Online tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diagnostic diversity review tools - Intercultural work place language and communication solutions - Diagnostic tool kits - Equality and diversity training guides
Audio film/DVDs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employer DVDs - DVDs about project interventions
Reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brochures - Mentoring guides - Training modules - HR strategy guides to support equality in organisations - Service information leaflets - Survey findings

From the textbox above, it is apparent that a number of products resulted from Round 1 projects that would be potentially useful from a long-term impact and mainstreaming perspective. The development of diagnostic toolkits and training guides and modules can have direct impacts if adopted by organisations, while the published material may play its part in helping to stimulate cultural change in organisations and improved understanding of issues of equality and diversity.

Some DPs were very product focused, with for example EQUAL at Work generating 12 distinct outputs in this regard over its lifetime, and Interact and RosEQUAL producing six each. However the ability of a DP to generate such outputs should not solely taken as the only indicator of their effectiveness. Other less tangible results can develop from the EQUAL programme, and one important benefit, to be discussed more fully in section 6.4.3, is the role that the working partnerships developed within the DP themselves have had in raising awareness of specific issues. The knowledge and synergy created by differently focused organisations joining together to progress projects has resulted in such outcomes as encouraging cultural change within organisations in the treatment of specific target groups, and changing practice and to some extent policy with regard to recruitment, access to opportunity, training, employee rights and many other

aspects of an organisation. Nevertheless products can be important, as they provide something tangible that can be used to share learning, particularly with those not directly involved in the project.

The activity undertaken with regard to product development can be broken down into broad subject areas as follows:

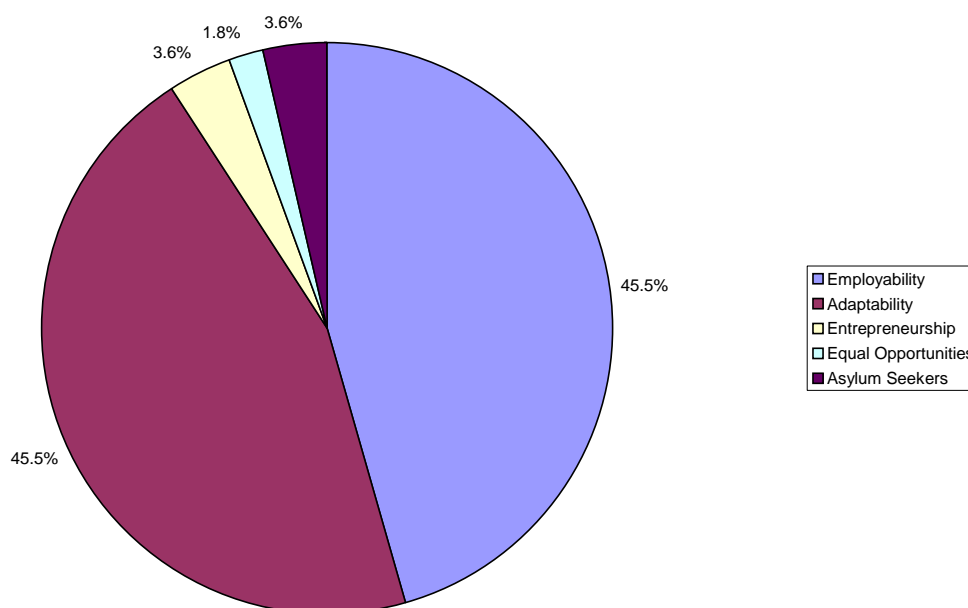
- Developing an equality perspective
- Equality diversity policy / practice in-work
- People with disabilities
- Migrant workers/families
- Dissemination of service provision
- Interagency working
- In-work HR practice
- Employability / progression interventions
- Young people
- Young people
- Travellers
- Women & employment / Entrepreneurship
- Ex-offenders
- Transnational
- Life-long learning
- Work-life balance
- Innovation within the community sector

It is worth examining how all of the outputs generated were distributed across a number of EQUAL themes, and Table 4.7 provides analysis in this respect. The multi-thematic nature of some of the products means, in some cases, that a single output can address a number of different themes.

TABLE 4.7: NATURE OF PRODUCTS DEVELOPED BY DPS IN ROUND 1 AND PILLAR FROM WHICH IT WAS FUNDED						
Theme	Employ-ability	Adapt-ability	Entrepre-neurship	Equal Opp'ties	Asylum Seekers	TOTAL
Developing an equality perspective	6	11	0	8	1	26
Equality diversity policy/practice in-work	5	11	0	8	0	24
PWD	4	0	0	0	1	5
Migrant workers/families	2	5	0	0	1	8
Dissemination of service provision	2	3	0	0	0	5
Interagency working	3	0	0	0	0	3
In-work HR practice	2	7	0	8	0	17
Employability / progression interventions	2	1	0	0	0	3
Young People	1	0	1	0	0	1
Travellers	0	0	3	0	0	3
Women and employment / entrepreneurship	2	0	1	0	0	3
Ex-offenders	1	0	0	0	0	1
Transnational	7	1	1		1	10
Life long learning	2	4	1	1	0	8
Work life balance	0	0	1	8	0	9
Innovation in the community sector	1	3	0	0	0	4
TOTAL	38	46	7	33	4	130
SOURCE: NSS DATABASE						

The table above illustrates that developing an equality perspective and equality diversity policy/ and practice in the workplace were the most prominent themes of the DP outputs and feature in 21 of the products. Themes incorporating young people and ex-offenders are the least represented in the DP products. The pie chart in Figure 4.1 illustrates the division of themes according to pillar.

FIGURE 4.1: PRODUCTS DEVELOPED BY DPs BY PILLAR



SOURCE: NSS

Figure 4.1 indicates that, in relative terms the most ‘product-focused’ pillar of the EQUAL programme under Round 1 was Adaptability, with 45.5% of outputs generated by DPs funded under it. The nature of activities funded under adaptability includes the production of products relating to lifelong learning and work-life balance, and relates to issues where perhaps there is a wider level of interest from a variety of organisations, facilitating the development of physical resources to help spread learning with regard to the subject matter. Although the employability pillar is responsible for the same proportion of products the generation of these products has been stimulated by a much higher funding allocation, although this can be attributed to its participant-focus.

4.6 Progress Under Round 2

This evaluation has also considered the progress made thus far with regard to Round 2 of the Programme. The examination of the implementation of mid-term evaluation recommendations in Section 3.2 noted a number of developments that have been successfully brought forward under the second round of the Programme. These have included:

- The rebalancing of funding allocations from the employability to the adaptability pillar.
- The allocation of an agreed budget to each individual project for actions 1, 2 and 3 at the outset.

- The promotion of North/South engagement under EQUAL with 4 projects in the second round involving a transnational partner in Northern Ireland against none in the first round.
- The requirement for all Round 2 DPs to submit mainstreaming strategies under Action 1.

Round 2 of EQUAL was launched on 7th May 2004 at an event in Dublin attended by prospective applicants for funding, Government Departments and Agencies, NGOs and social partners. The public call for proposals at this event was preceded by a showcase of the experiences of different projects funded under the first round, and a panel debate on the subject 'Towards a More Equal Labour Market'. A deadline for applications was also stipulated as 30th June 2004.

In response to this call for proposals, 59 applications were received. The NSS prepared assessments of each application and categorised them as either Class 1, 2 or 3. Class 1 applications were those demonstrating strong adherence to the primary criteria of innovation; mainstreaming impact; clear objectives within the chosen Theme; impact on target groups; and empowerment.

The selection of projects was made by a Selection Committee including relevant Government Departments, State Agencies and social partner representatives. Although guided by the shortlist of applications placed within the Class 1 category, each member was entitled to bring forward other applications for consideration. A preliminary meeting was held on 17th November 2004 with the formal selection meeting taking place on 1st December 2004. Geographic and thematic spread played a part in the deliberations of the Selection Committee, and a number of general principles were agreed to prioritise applications for funding as follows:

- Applicants should have new and innovative ideas in terms of delivery, goal or context.
- The application should be focused and should be differentiated from mainstream activity already taking place.
- The potential for mainstreaming should be strong and therefore the relevant and appropriate actors should form the core of the DP and the intended strategic impact(s) of the project should be apparent.
- The added value of transnational activity should be described and potential outputs identified.
- Rationale for the DP activities should be clearly evidenced and relate to the chosen Theme and the aims of EQUAL.

The central emphasis of the selection process was in ensuring that successful projects targeted those who are discriminated against in the labour market and remain excluded, vulnerable and marginalised in that regard. With this in mind, 22 applications for funding were approved by the Selection Committee, with the successful projects detailed in Section 1.2.4.

To assist in the successful progression through Action 1 of the Programme, all selected DPs attended a DP induction seminar in February 2005. Financial workshops were also held within both the Border Midland and Western, and Southern and Eastern regions of the country. Each Round 2 DP received exchequer funding of €8,000 in order to facilitate the effective completion of the Action 1 phase. To date, 21 of these DPs have proceeded to Action 2 of the Programme (activity phase), having established a transnational cooperation agreement and a Development Partnership Agreement under Action 1. There has been an ongoing problem with the progression of one DP, Senior Select, where CCI is the promoting partner. Time delays have resulted from internal disagreements between the partners about respective roles and responsibilities as the project moves forward. The Managing Authority and the NSS are endeavouring to sort out these difficulties and facilitate progression into Action 2 in the near future.

Although the projects remain at a relatively early stage of development, it would appear from the evidence gathered that the vast majority of DPs have progressed efficiently through Action 1 and that the foundations exist to generate significant impacts in the future. There are also indications that projects funded under Round 2 are more focused on the development of final outcomes and products, and this should assist the development of innovation within the DPs.

5. Programme Impact

5.1 Introduction

The Terms of Reference ask the evaluator to assess the impact of the programme as a whole to date and express a view as to the likely final impact of the programme. By building on the mid-term evaluation with the research undertaken as part of this update study, an assessment in this regard has, as far as possible, been provided. The timescale for completion of the update of the mid-term evaluation of EQUAL prevented the use of a survey of all DPs in order to build up a comprehensive assessment of programme impact. Therefore our analysis relies on information collected during the course of the programme. Impact can only be ascertained via information provided by the DPs themselves, and from more general perceptions from key national stakeholders. Therefore the assessment of impact is based on qualitative feedback obtained from case study visits to a selected number of projects, the holding of a workshop to which all Round 1 DPs were invited, and consultations with a number of these key national stakeholders. In this way we relate the impact of the programme to specific project experience, firstly in terms of the programme objectives, and secondly in terms of linkages between programme activity and the European Employment Strategy and other national labour market policies.

5.2 Overview

Having taken all the evidence on board gathered from desk research, consultations at both project-level and policy-level and the material produced for the mid-term evaluation, it is apparent that notable successes have been achieved with regard to the generation of impacts. The structure of the EQUAL programme means that such impacts have been quite sporadic in nature, resulting from the activity of a number of key projects. However, given the innovative focus of the initiative, it is natural that impact is generated in this way. By considering all of the research together and taking a broad overview of impact at programme level, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- The programme has helped to stimulate cultural change in policy-making organisations and increase awareness of issues of discrimination and inequality.
- National and local training programmes have been developed, and additional funding has been levered, as a result of project activity.
- Successful products have been developed that are being used by both public and private sector organisations to improve their effectiveness in dealing with equality issues.
- There have been some encouraging impacts on private sector policy and practice, particularly with regard to managing diversity in the workplace and ensuring equal opportunities for people with disabilities.

- There is some evidence, with further potential also existing, of the development of links with financial institutions in order to secure more accessible finance for individuals from key target groups in order to stimulate entrepreneurial activity.
- At a local level, important impacts have been generated in stimulating participation in the labour market by a number of key target groups.

The impacts above are extremely positive, and they suggest that EQUAL is having an impact in terms of more subtle changes in the culture of policy-making organisations, in raising awareness of issues of discrimination and equality, and in changing policy and practice at local level. However it is not clear that lessons learnt from individual DPs or groups of DPs are, to any great extent, feeding into the actual policy process at national and European level, a key objective of the programme. With projects having only just been completed and some receiving extended funding to attempt to realise greater mainstreaming potential, it may be that there will be some long-term impact on national policy in the future, but it is likely that any effect of this kind will be a product of the work of EQUAL reinforcing other labour market developments, rather than being a primary cause of significant policy shifts.

As shown in Section 2, EQUAL responds to changes in labour market policies and socio-economic developments and its role is most effective in developing innovative solutions that help to deliver this policy, leading to the introduction of new programmes, learning products, training modules or policies and strategies within specific organisations, both in the public sector and private sector. Given the level of funding allocated to projects, the short timescale for implementation, the local nature of the majority of initiatives, success in stimulating impacts on practice and horizontal mainstreaming effects are most realistic barometers when judging the effectiveness of the programme. In this respect, the EQUAL programme in Ireland has proved to be very successful.

5.3 Programme Impact with Regard to Objectives

5.3.1 *Disadvantage and Inequality*

A primary objective of EQUAL was the tackling of disadvantage and equality in connection with the labour market. Addressing inequality is a key principle throughout most of the first and second round projects funded under EQUAL, although as yet the impacts that have resulted from these projects mainly focus on direct benefits experienced by participants of the project. Wider, more national level impacts as a consequence of learning from the projects being rolled-out into mainstream practice of delivery organisations have been less apparent, although with projects only having just reached completion, there may be potential for such impacts in the future. However an example of a project that has generated impacts at both local beneficiary level, and in changing the practices of key delivery organisations and developing new accredited training modules being used in this regard is considered below.

The EQUAL Community Initiative Programme was adapted to include the asylum seekers theme, and one Development Partnership, **Sonas Ireland**, was funded to address issues faced by this particular target group under Round 1. The project recognised the constraints faced by asylum seekers in terms of securing work and other support services, and reviewed the existence of existing arrangements to assist them, including reception centres, accommodation centres and NGOs. In doing so it sought to find gaps in the support systems and to fill these gaps and gain the trust of asylum seekers. Barriers were identified including a basic mistrust of authority and literacy and language difficulties. Sonas provided five outreach workers in Dublin (2), Wexford, Cork and Limerick to make contact with, gain the trust of, and assist asylum seekers at an early stage. NGOs provided some of these services but not on an outreach basis. Outputs include the successful testing of outreach services and help to the asylum seekers assisted. A training course for outreach workers was also established and certified by Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. Impacts include a re-evaluation of Reception Centres, currently underway, and a pilot Comhairle outreach project that is underway in Cork. Comhairle has also put in place a training course for information providers.

5.3.2 Mobilising Sources of Labour

A number of Employability projects funded under Round 1 of the EQUAL programme addressed, in some respect, the mobilisation of potential sources of labour. Among the diverse target groups upon which projects have focused are ex-offenders, those with drug addiction problems, people with disabilities, and low-income farming families. The impacts arising from a number of these projects have been largely positive, although any knock-on impacts from a roll-out or mainstreaming of the ideas behind initiatives have yet to materialise. However important work in this regard is being undertaken by one particular project, and it has been granted an extension of funding to develop its potential to generate future mainstreaming impacts. The project is considered below. It should also be noted that from our consideration of the nature of projects in both Round 1 and Round 2 of EQUAL there is a bigger base of projects focused on dedicated responses to one particular target group, while in Round 1 a number of projects were more general in nature and attempted to cover several target groups with the same interventions. This move should facilitate greater mobilisation of labour within specific groups as responses are being developed to meet unique needs.

The **Blanchardstown EQUAL Project** was a wide-ranging initiative that delivered nine different actions focused on increasing participation of key target groups in the local labour market. The groups for which responses were developed included ex-offenders, early school leavers, young people in low-skilled jobs, immigrants, travellers, people with disabilities and drug users. Work was also undertaken with employers to make them aware of requirements under current and upcoming equality legislation. While some interventions proved more successful than others, the most positive results occurred in providing innovative training and supports for people with disabilities and drug users. Responses targeted at the former group involved significant private sector involvement, with

IBM a keen participant, together with the Chamber of Commerce and a number of SMEs. This work focused on the idea that in integrating groups at risk of exclusion into the labour force, attention needs to be given not only to support for the individual, but also to assistance for the employer.

With regard to drug users, a syllabus for a six-month training programme to support entry or re-entry into mainstreaming training or employment was developed, the subsequent training programme piloted, additional funding secured for its operation from the Back to Education Initiative, and accredited FETAC qualifications secured by its participants. Already this has generated employment and training impacts, with one person now working, 2 on Community Employment schemes, and a further individual in full-time training. Aside from the direct beneficiary benefits, the Blanchardstown EQUAL project also achieved particular success with regard to developing a new model of cooperative working between eight local agencies working with drug users. Agreement, on an inter-agency basis, was secured on a protocol of lead agency working, a confidentiality policy, inter-agency release of information, referral forms and referral criteria, and finally guidelines for multi-agency meetings and individual care plans. The potential to develop this concept with a view to mainstreaming this approach into national policy was identified, and funding was extended for the project from its original completion date to 31st August 2006.

5.3.3 Promoting Social Inclusion and Equality of Opportunity

Promoting social inclusion and equality of opportunity is another objective of equal that acts as a foundation across most of the projects in Round 1 and Round 2. Within the employability pillar this is focused on bringing social excluded individuals into the labour market, while under entrepreneurship access has been provided to self-employment opportunities and training and finance to support such initiatives. The equal opportunities pillar is by definition heavily focused on this objective, and a number of initiatives have been developed focusing on managing diversity in the workplace a number between women and men. Adaptability projects also had a strong focus on equality issues, and perhaps the most successful example within EQUAL of the promotion of social inclusion in this regard is the work undertaken by the Dublin Employment Pact on the project EQUAL at Work.

EQUAL At Work was a large adaptability project involving 48 partners that aimed to change human resources policy and practice in a number of large organisations in the Dublin labour market to improve equality and access e.g. to open up recruitment and progression for people with low skills/formal education. Because of its size it was split into four groups each with different actions aimed at three sectors – public, private and community. The project managed to commence in a timely manner and was completed in September 2004. It had success in the public sector with involvement/support of county managers and key trade union officials. Impacts included removal of the Leaving Certificate as a minimum recruitment requirement for clerical officer grade in local authorities and its replacement with a competency test a step that required Ministerial approval. Training was also provided for 40 low skilled staff in local authorities. A course for 30 people from

the voluntary sector to train as medical secretaries was also put in place in Tallaght Hospital and this is now also happening in other hospitals. In the private sector it introduced a pilot job rotation scheme (35 participants) under which employees with low skills were given training and during their period of training were replaced by unemployed people leading to improved employment prospects for both groups. In the community sector, recruitment practices were reviewed and found to lack structure. A structure was designed and implemented. A committee of senior executives, chaired by the Equality Authority monitored progress and this helped the success of the project. Constraints included overcoming resistance from existing policies of bodies in implementation of pilot schemes and mainstreaming.

5.3.4 Methodologies, Structures & Mechanisms to Counter Inequality

There has been some success with regard to the development of new and durable methodologies, structures and mechanisms to counter all forms of inequality at all levels of the labour market and workplace. Where diagnostic tools have been developed to allow organisations to assess their own performance with regard to equality issues, and establish whether or not they are meeting their obligations in this regard, there have been high levels of take-up of these tools. The Employment Bridging Network and Interact have been the two most effective projects in this regard, with both having developed these types of mechanisms.

The **Interact** project was the subject of a case study as part of this evaluation. Interact sought to address some of the barriers at enterprise level that will ensure the establishment of effective supports for both the employers of migrants and the migrant workers themselves and consequently develop the conditions that will enable the Irish labour market to support a multi-cultural workforce. The Development Partnership involved IBEC, ICTU, FÁS and Integrate Ireland Language and Training, a private sector training provider. Initially the project provided important English language training for migrant workers in order to ensure that they could have access to the same opportunities as all other workers and communicate effectively with their employers. The employers were very supportive of the initiative as it allowed them to ensure that they were meeting their own obligations with regard to their employees, with health and safety regulations a particular concern in workplaces where workers did not speak English. A website was developed as a comprehensive information tool for both immigrant workers and employers where detailers were provided on issues such as employee rights, work permits and migration in general.

The website also contains an innovative interactive review tool developed by the DP that can be used by employers. The Review Tool is a self-assessment diagnostic package to enable businesses to review their compliance with good practice in relation to the employment of non Irish nationals in their workforce. It covers issues including recruitment and selection; induction and orientation; rights and entitlements; policy and procedures; union; training and progression; interculturalism; and language and communications. A series of questions are asked under each of these categories, and

based on the employer's responses, a development plan tailored to the needs of the organisation is produced automatically. There has been significant interest in the mainstreaming of this resource, with the Irish Hotels Federation interested in adapting it for an assessment mechanism across their industry to ensure that equality obligations are being met. The Equality Authority also examined the possibility of mainstreaming the resource. The project was due to be extended in order to fully realise its mainstreaming potential but unfortunately this extension did not materialise due to the loss of key players within the DP who were acting as the driving force behind the initiative,. Nevertheless the website still receives 100-200 hits per week and enquiries are regularly received about the review tool.

5.3.5 Flexible & Client-Centred Policies, Practices and Systems

The EQUAL CIP recognised the need to foster the development of more flexible and client-centred employment and training policies, practices and systems to ensure greater adaptability and responsiveness to structural changes in the workplace and the need for innovative family friendly policies. Interventions generated via the programme, mostly funded under the employability theme, have deployed innovative approaches in involving key target groups in the developments of policies practices and systems to meet their needs. There are however two DPs within the Entrepreneurship pillar that have helped to stimulate notable impacts with regard to client-centred practices, the first being the Traveller Economy Sectoral Partnership and the second, Longford Women in Enterprise.

The **Traveller Economy Sectoral Partnership** aimed to help the traveller economy (where key activities included self-employed gardening, recycling, carpets and antiques trading) and to encourage traveller men to participate in these activities. Three pilot schemes were run in Pavee Point (Dublin), Clondalkin and Galway. Approximately 30 men participated, 20 completed the two year course and two or three of those who left did so to take up employment (Safe Pass) or to start small businesses. The 20 who completed the course mainly moved into employment in local traveller community groups. The outputs included a DVD made by the participants and partial mainstreaming by FÁS who have allocated €500,000 in 2005 for four pilots in Dublin, Cork, Clare and Galway. Impacts included an appreciation (which did not exist before) of the marketable value of formal training among traveller men e.g. literacy, gardening (FETAC), computers and Safe Pass. A number of enquiries were received regarding further training when the course concluded.

The **Longford Women in Enterprise** DP developed the project SWELL (Supporting Women Entrepreneurs Locally in Longford). The overall aim of the project was to address the structural and attitudinal causes that are responsible for a very low proportion of women being self-employed in Longford, with a focus on the needs of those women who experience multiple forms of inequality. The partnership involved the Longford County Development Board, the Longford County Enterprise Board, County Longford VEC and Longford Community Resources Ltd. The EQUAL project involved the provision of a 'Start your own Business Module', the delivery of basic computer training,

mentoring support to participants post-training through to business start-up and post set-up, and the establishment of a Longford Women in Enterprise forum that linked existing entrepreneurs with those who wished to start a new business. The DP also developed a Mentoring Guide that attracted interest from academic institutions in Germany and Belgium. All of this activity stimulated significantly more entrepreneurial activity in the Longford area, engaging with key target groups such as traveller women, rural women and lone parents. A further potential impact lies in the discussions that are taking place between the DP and lending institutions about access to finance for project participants for the purpose of starting a business, and a package is in the process of being developed. One bank is also considering rolling-out such a package to be available to particular target groups on a nationwide basis. The work under Round 1 led to the development of a further project that concentrated on improving the survival rates of new businesses.

5.3.6 Supporting Lifelong Learning/Work-based Learning Projects

In Section 2 it was noted how socio-economic changes in Ireland had prompted national labour market policy to increasingly focus on building the capacity of the existing workforce to adapt to emerging skills needs and ensure that competitiveness is sustained into the future. A number of EQUAL projects actively support this policy shift, particularly in Round 2 when the proportion of funding allocated to the adaptability themes was increased from 20% to 35%, with the effect that a series of responses have been developed to support lifelong learning and work-based learning projects focused on the most vulnerable within the workplace.

However Round 1 had already stimulated activity with regard to this important EQUAL principle, and a number of impacts have been identified from consideration of the individual projects funded. For example, the **National Flexi-work Partnership** aims at equality through helping groups to achieve work life balance, targeting parents or carers of children, older people and people with mental health problems. The project, under the Centre for Gender and Women's Studies of TCD, generated pilot projects including ones focusing on flexi working and childcare training for men. However, its real and potentially lasting impact would appear to lie in the significant research generated that is informing learning on a national level with regard to work-life balance. This included a nationwide study of work life balance, a survey of people with mental health problems and research on men in childcare. Perhaps the most practical tool developed, that is considered to be generating a direct impact on the way in which organisations operate with regard to those with physical or mental disabilities, has been the production of 'An Employers Guide to the Employment of Older Workers'. This product was prepared by IBEC in association with the National Flexi-Work Partnership and published in 2003. Cooperation among the partners of the DP (including TCD, IBEC, ICTU, FÁS, Age Action Ireland and Aware) was very successful and led to synergies, awareness raising and mainstreaming through the participation of DP members at a senior level. Pilot projects were also undertaken in the areas of flexible working and men in childcare, which were evaluated through qualitative and quantitative research. Four output reports are now being finalised and will be

published, with several launch events planned in tandem with the IBEC Roundtable on Work-Life Balance, the 2nd Annual Conference on Men in Childcare, a Final Conference at TCD, Age Action Ireland's Positive Aging Week and Aware's Depression Awareness Week. This will maximise awareness of project activity and increase the potential for learning to be taken on board by organisations outside the DP.

5.3.7 Responding to Needs of Changing Employment Patterns

From consideration of the Round 1 projects, little activity was directed towards specifically supporting further practical actions in response to the development needs arising from new jobs and from radically changing existing jobs areas. Lifelong learning initiatives as discussed in 5.3.6 play a part in ensuring that the existing workforce are sufficiently adaptable to respond to local changes in the nature of employment, but there have been no direct initiatives thus far that pinpoint new job areas and develop skills training for target groups to meet this demand. It may be that the need to involve employers in these types of partnerships, and convince them of the value of retraining staff to meet opportunities outside their current employment restricts activity of this nature.

5.3.8 Best Practice in Managing Diversity in the Workplace

Developing best practice in relation to the management of diversity in the workplace has characterised a number of Round 1 projects, including Interact, where the generation of resultant impacts was discussed under 5.3.4. However another important project in this regard was developed by the Trainers Network DP entitled TRED.

TRED stands for **Training Resources to Address Equality and Diversity**. Initial focus groups identified a need for accredited training for trainers and tools to deliver equality and diversity in the work place. A Foundation Diploma was established and accredited by NUIG and 125 trainers have been trained including 10 freelance trainers who subsequently worked on a mentor panel for the Small Firms Association assisting SMEs on equality issues and who also work on a consultancy basis for the Equality Authority. The project finished in June and is now in the dissemination phase with a conference to be held in October. The impact of the project has been significant on the companies and public bodies involved e.g. Dublin City Council where one senior official from each department participated and a signature was obtained in advance from the manager committing the department to implementing the training. An Employers Guide to Resources on Managing Equality and Diversity in the Workplace identifying best practice and other tools has been produced. Although the project did therefore generate successful outcomes, it was cited that its effectiveness was constrained by difficulties in maintaining consistent levels of commitment from all of the partners involved in the DP.

6. EQUAL Specific Issues

6.1 Introduction

It was noted in the Request for Tenders that the updated evaluation will play a role in the ex-ante evaluation of future human resources development/employment programmes for Ireland in the next Structural Fund programming period (2007-2013). It will also feed into an updated evaluation of EQUAL at EU level and to an ex-post evaluation of the programme in 2008/09. In this context, the evaluation is required to consider issues with regard to the six specific EQUAL principles. In this section each of the principles is examined in turn, with mainstreaming, innovation and equality considered in particular depth. This is followed by a broader discussion about transnational cooperation, empowerment, and the development partnerships.

6.2 Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming is a central component of the EQUAL programme, with the money directed towards projects not intended to solve problems with regard to discrimination and inequality in the labour market, but rather to find new means of potentially addressing these issues and testing effectiveness with a view to potential roll-out. This report has identified a series of impacts that have been generated under Round 1 of EQUAL and highlighted some of the learning that has developed from the work of DPs. It is important that such learning is not lost as projects are completed, and that mechanisms exist to ensure that good ideas can be mainstreamed into local, national and European policy and practice.

It was noted in Section 5 that there has been evidence of such mainstreaming effects in Ireland, albeit in terms of shaping the practice of local and national organisations, with new programmes funded and products produced that are being adopted for use in helping to address equality. EQUAL has played a role in reinforcing national policy by developing and testing new ideas that can be mainstreamed to delivery organisations in support of this policy. Achieving vertical mainstreaming via significant national policy shifts is unrealistic at present, particularly given the short time that the programme has been in existence, but EQUAL nevertheless provides value-for-money in terms of the horizontal mainstreaming it has helped to develop. A selection of the mainstreaming benefits identified by the Managing Authority in this regard is provided over the page.

EQUAL Round 1: Mainstreaming Examples

Equal at work- The DP promoter is Dublin Employment Pact and it contains 48 partners. Through piloting a successful competency-base rather than just qualifications based recruitment programmes in Dublin County and City Councils, the rules on recruitment for clerical positions in those councils have formally been changed. This has opened up those positions to potentially thousands of previously disadvantaged groups and therefore created new opportunities for employment growth.

Equal Ireland – The DP is operating in the Border, Midlands, Western Region (BMW) and has instituted in collaboration with a Third level network (Lionra) and Galway University a third level access course to be delivered in a flexible way in centres throughout the BMW area. Accreditation has been agreed by each of the Network Member Organisations and will be applied to those completing the Programme. Discussions are ongoing as to the possibilities of mainstreaming the Programme.

Work Life Balance Network - This DP has developed a toolkit for firms to address information deficits/awareness of Work Life Balance and to assist organisations to adapt policies and adopt new approaches. The tool has been piloted in some semi-state companies which are part of the DP. The National Framework Committee on work life balance established under the Programme for government has also disseminated the tool.

Westmeath Equal – The DP has developed as mainstreaming product an equality and diversity action planning tool (“Equality and Diversity Healthcheck”) to be used by organisations of all sizes. This would provide a comprehensive mechanism for organisations to check where they stand in relation to an assessment of strengths and needs in relation to compliance with equality legislation and where they are in relation to equality and diversity issues as they affect recruitment, selection, promotion, training, conditions etc. Discussions are ongoing as to how to further develop the pilot and to disseminate and mainstream the product.

Equal North-East – The DP has adopted a multi-agency approach to engagement with its client group (mainly older long term unemployed and the “hidden” unemployed) that has the flexibility to respond more efficiently and cost effectively than current provision. The DP, whose partners include FÁS, the LES and Department of Social and Family Affairs), has developed draft protocols with other service providers resulting in a joint interview process and a coordinated strategy in addressing clients multi-faceted problems. The DP has demonstrated greater success in placement rates than under current provision. Discussions are ongoing to further develop the pilot as a mainstreaming project that would seek to replicate this model within FÁS.

Traveller Economy Sectoral Development Partnership – This DP is managed by Pavee Point and is encouraging the creation of more and better jobs by fostering entrepreneurship amongst travellers. Through outreach work in local pilots, 29 traveller men are participating in pilots in Galway, Clondalkin and at Pavee Point in Dublin. Actions include trying to ensure that supports to enterprise are inclusive of the traveller economy and that mainstream agencies proof their actions with respect to members of the travelling community.

Blanchardstown EQUAL DP – The Blanchardstown EQUAL Initiative has developed a model of interagency co-operation designed to bring together agencies (voluntary and state alike) together in order to establish a co-ordinated approach to providing quality supports and services for former/current drug users. The rationale behind this model was to bring all agencies that work with former/current drug users together in order to establish clear inter-agency protocols as well as “joined up” working relationships. The action has had considerable success in generating increased co-operation between eight service delivery organisations in Blanchardstown working with current/former drug users.

TRED DP – The TRED DP is providing training responses to addressing equality and diversity to support change in the workplace. The DP has delivered accredited training for trainers, managers and supervisors across public and private sector and is accredited by National University of Ireland – Galway.

Feedback from the DP workshop held during the course of this evaluation study also highlighted some of the more successful examples of mainstreaming:

- Allocation by FÁS of €500,000 in 2005 for training of Traveller men. However this has an employment rather than as enterprise bias
- Change in Leaving Certificate recruitment requirement for Clerical Officers in Local Authorities
- Training courses for community sector workers as medical secretaries in Tallaght and other hospitals
- Pilot outreach scheme in place by Comhairle for support for asylum seekers in Cork may lead to mainstreaming
- Re-evaluation of Reception Centres for Asylum Seekers
- Certification of outreach training course by Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.
- Foundation Diploma for training of trainers established and accredited by NUIG and worked on a mentor panel for the Small Firms Association assisting SMEs on equality issues and who also work on a consultancy basis for the Equality Authority.

There is therefore substantial evidence of mainstreaming resulting from EQUAL projects, and it is important to ascertain the critical success factors that are generating such success. Having considered the projects in Round 1 that have proved most successful in this regard, a number of these critical success factors have been identified.

1. A focus on the development of a physical product.
2. A generally small DP where a good working partnership has developed with appropriately senior representatives from all the partners playing a proactive role in the development and delivery of the project.
3. Sufficient capacity within the potential mainstreaming policy organisations to take part in project development phases and facilitate the mainstreaming of an idea or product.
4. A number of key, committed individuals driving the project.
5. A high level of promotion of the initial project at both local and national level.
6. The understanding of potential mainstreaming impacts at the outset of the project, in order that activity can be focused throughout on achieving those impacts.

The existing mechanisms in place to facilitate mainstreaming are having some positive influence. Two thematic networks were established in Ireland focused on the Employability and Adaptability pillars. Thematic networks provide a co-ordinated framework for projects within a given thematic field to work on a strategic basis to impact on policy and practice. Events have been held since 2002 bringing similar DPs together to share learning from their projects. Although these exercises were considered by DPs to be useful in terms of allowing them to discuss common issues with their counterparts, there was little evidence of any significant mainstreaming impact resulting from the thematic networks within the small sample of DPs consulted for this evaluation.

The Mainstreaming Policy Group has also provided a useful resource for raising awareness of mainstreaming potential within key policy-making organisations. Consultations with key stakeholders has confirmed that the group has played an important part in building relationships between organisations and partnership work to mainstream ideas originating from the EQUAL programme has been stimulated outside of the group.

There was some concern that the group was unwieldy to some extent and that it involved too many organisations. It is difficult to see how this could be avoided given that all of the organisations represented on the group have a valid stake in the mainstreaming of labour market policy and practice from the EQUAL programme. It was noted that perhaps the focus of the group could be improved by developing themed sub-groups. This would involve a small number of key stakeholders who would work together to examine potential mainstreaming with regard to particular issues, and this development could be worthy of further consideration.

The transfer of ownership was cited as one stumbling block that potentially inhibits the extent to which mainstreaming from EQUAL takes place. It was noted that where organisations that are prime targets for mainstreaming are not directly involved in a project at developmental stage, difficulties arose for them in accepting a finished product which could be taken into the organisation. Another impediment discussed related to concerns and difficulties in ceding new products and/or processes by the DPs to other mainstream organisations as ownership rights and other intellectual property issues arose. The introduction of an additional phase, where mainstreaming potential of projects is independently assessed, and then if approved, comes before the Mainstreaming Policy Group in order that a development plan can be formulated for this process could be one potential solution.

The final impediment to mainstreaming cited is the lack of capacity within potential organisations themselves to devote to the examination of its potential where such a process might prove effective. The representatives who attend the Mainstreaming Policy Group have many other responsibilities, and it was noted that some lack the time to sit down and think about how a policy or practice might be mainstreamed with their colleagues. Some means of resourcing policy organisations in order that they can devote sufficient attention to the potential mainstreaming of EQUAL learning and innovation from other pilot programmes and initiatives also merits consideration.

By and large though, the Mainstreaming Policy Group plays a valuable role and provides a resource that can be approached by a DP if it believes that significant mainstreaming potential is emerging from its activities. The Group can then make decisions on the allocation of funding for this purpose. If the appropriate individuals can serve effectively as members and act as conduits into their respective organisations for the stimulation of mainstreaming activity, more significant impacts will become apparent over time.

6.3 Innovation

Innovation is defined in the EQUAL Communication as comprising process-oriented, goal-oriented and context-oriented innovation. All of these occur in relation to the existing mainstream policy and practice in a country, i.e. innovation is measured relative to what already exists. The extent to which innovation has been prevalent within the projects in Ireland was found to vary considerably. DPs put forward a number of innovative proposals, ranging from means of engaging with key target groups to the development of diagnostic tools.

From consideration of the operation of the projects, it was considered that innovation was most likely to occur where a tangible product was being developed by the DP. This stimulated innovative thinking among the partners and the fact that there was a physical output allowed partners to focus on the unique changes that could be made in order to make it best fit its purpose. Indeed the critical success factors in stimulating innovation are similar to those cited above that help to generate mainstreaming effects.

This report has noted a number of examples where innovative products were developed. Common themes arising in the DPs that achieved success in this regard were; a close understanding of the target group, the involvement of the target group in the development of the product, and the ability of the partners to provide differing and complementary skills to add value to the development process. There was a direct link between the generation of mainstreaming impacts and the extent to which a project was of an innovative nature. Indeed the mainstreaming examples in section 6.2 also serve as a guide to the innovation that has characterised some projects.

One issue arising from the consideration of innovation in EQUAL is the fact that the most innovative projects often find it more problematic to secure mainstream commitment, as there is a reluctance to try out something completely new, with a preference for something that builds on existing provision. This problem was cited by a small number of stakeholders who felt that perhaps innovative thinking was being stifled by the lack of an obvious outlet via which it could then be mainstreamed. Again this could be helped by the introduction of an interim phase whereby the case of mainstreaming is assessed before entering into a development plan process with the relevant organisation.

6.4 Equality

The EQUAL Community Initiative aims “to promote new means of combating all forms of discrimination and inequalities in the labour market”. It seeks to identify and address fundamental forms of discrimination and inequality in the labour market through the development of new and innovative policies and practices initiated by EQUAL Development Partnerships.

Equal opportunities for men and women is a core principle of the EQUAL Initiative and there is a requirement to gender mainstream activity under the programme. In the Irish context the principle of equal opportunities is given a wider interpretation and is defined as including the nine grounds covered by equality legislation: gender; marital status; family status; religion; disability; race; age; sexual orientation and membership of the travelling community. As such the EQUAL Initiative encourages a focus on accommodating diversity across all project activity, including projects targeted at specific groups such as older people or women in addition to projects with a broader focus on groups such as the long-term unemployed.

The Equality Authority is given a distinct role in supporting the mainstreaming strategy for EQUAL. The Equality Authority co-chairs the Mainstreaming Policy Group with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, the Managing Authority. It has supported a capacity for equality mainstreaming within key policy making institutions and provided supports to DPs on equality issues.

This report notes that in Round 1 a number of DPs had dedicated projects to meet the specific needs of groups experiencing inequality such as women entrepreneurs, minority ethnic groups and travellers. This highlights the continuing need to provide targeted programmes to address the particular needs of groups experiencing inequality in order to improve their labour market situation.

EQUAL Round 1 projects also highlighted the need to build an equality dimension into mainstream policies, programmes and institutions so that they can accommodate diversity across groups experiencing inequality. As noted earlier in the report, developing an equality perspective and developing equality or diversity policy and practice in the workplace were the most prominent themes of the DP outputs in Round 1. The EQUAL Initiative has produced many successful products that are being used by both the public and private sectors to improve their effectiveness in dealing with equality issues.

A final lesson from EQUAL Round 1 would highlight the importance of practical developmental supports to organisations providing labour market measures to encourage and further develop their capacity to prevent discrimination, accommodate diversity and promote equality to maximum effect.

6.5 Other Principles

6.5.1 *Transnational Cooperation*

Transnational Co-operation has always been an element of Community Initiatives but its status as a guiding principle under EQUAL is intended to ensure that it generates “qualitative” impacts in terms of shaping and informing the work of DPs and mainstreaming benefits on policy and practice. In order to meet these objectives EQUAL provides a range of supports and mechanisms aimed at

facilitating their achievement. These include the European Common Database (ECDB), the Guide to Transnationality, the Transnational Co-operation Agreement (TCA) and the on-line validation system for transnational agreements, ETCIM.

The research conducted during the evaluation found that in a number of cases the transnational experience was very successful with productive meetings leading to exchange of ideas, experiences and cultures for both members of the DP and participants. In one case involving three countries a three language work guide on Working with Diversity was produced and launched. Longford Women in Enterprise DP worked very successfully with its transnational partners in order to produce two products that have attracted significant interest from external sources both in Ireland and overseas, a Mentoring Guide for Female Entrepreneurs, and a work-life balance initiative entitled 'Balancing Work and Family Commitments; A Training Module'. Guidelines were also produced on how to approach consultation with vulnerable client groups i.e. drug users (Blanchardstown EQUAL), and on standardised research methodologies (NFWP). Other less tangible benefits of the transnational partnership process included capacity building for project participants themselves, and teambuilding within the DP during the trips to meet their transnational counterparts.

While there were success stories with regard to transnational cooperation for a number of DPs as listed above, in others there was a mismatch between transnational partners and the experience was not successful. Some stakeholders felt that the process added little value to the EQUAL project in terms of impact generation. A number of areas were identified by representatives from DPs that required further attention in future in order to maximise the effectiveness of the transnational process, and these can be summarised as follows:

- The initial selection of transnational partners.
- The budgets allocated for the transnational aspects of the project (typically 5-7% of the total) and lack of flexibility regarding reallocation to other budget headings.
- The amount of time allocated to informal learning in the transnational process with less focus on Work Packages.
- Difficulties were encountered with different start/finish dates for transnational partners which inhibited co-operation.

The NSS has also undertaken research into transnational cooperation within EQUAL, and it is also important to take these findings into account. Among the beneficial aspects of transnationality noted was the opportunity to learn about different approaches to common problems, a broader understanding of mainstreaming, and the potential to transfer new ways of doing things and adapt practice at a domestic level. However, the most significant benefit identified by DPs was the impact in terms of relationship-building within the national partnership itself, resulting in increased commitment from individual partners to the national project. This reinforces one of the findings from our own consultations as noted above. On the negative side, there were difficulties relating to

operation and logistical matters, including, for example, changes to personnel, differences in project timescales, language, varying sizes in transnational budgets. As the evaluation research found, the NSS identified the existence of DPs where there was felt to be little impact on domestic activity from transnational cooperation.

Overall then, while the transnational component has proved effective in generating capacity building benefits for individual DPs, evidence of impact in terms of shaping policy and practice across member states is inconsistent throughout different projects. The research undertaken as part of this evaluation and for the NSS study drew on consultation with a small number of DPs, and it is therefore impossible to make definitive judgements on the value of transnational cooperation from such a small sample of experiences. As EQUAL is a transnational programme, there would seem to be value in undertaking a more comprehensive exercise to determine its impact and improve its effectiveness in the future.

6.5.2 Empowerment

Empowerment is defined in EQUAL as containing three elements. "All players in the implementation of activities should be (i) assisted in capacity building, (ii) given the opportunity to participate in learning processes and (iii) to take part in the decision making". Empowerment was certainly apparent in terms of the project participants, with steps taken in many projects to involve key target groups in the decision-making processes. This helped to make sure that interventions met their individual needs, and achieved 'buy-in' at an early stage, helping to encourage continued participation in the project. Blanchardstown EQUAL DP successfully empowered drug users in the development of a training programme to meet their needs, while the Longford Women in Enterprise DP engaged with traveller women to find the most appropriate way to support them in entrepreneurial activity.

While successes were evident in terms of participant empowerment, empowerment of all development partners seemed to receive less attention. As noted earlier in the report, the level of active engagement of different partners across all the DPs varied considerably, and in some instances organisations were allowed to become effectively silent partners. DPs will only be able to generate the mainstreaming impacts sought if all partners are equally committed to a project, and all have a role in decision-making and delivery.

6.5.3 Development Partnerships

Partnership as a concept in EQUAL can help projects to face issues that would otherwise have to be faced later as learning is mainstreamed. By involving a range of partners, their different perspectives can be incorporated (or challenged) at an earlier point and this should improve project outputs.

In general, the development partnerships worked well. Some partners were more active than others and some partners dropped out or became less involved as their circumstances changed e.g. firms were taken over or experienced financial difficulties. The importance of careful initial selection of partners was emphasised. The projects where successful working partnerships had been developed appeared to be characterised by the designation of specific tasks for delivery to all partners, meaning that they had a responsibility that they were required to fulfil. Where partners did not have such a role, it was noted that they would tend to disappear entirely from the DP process.

A number of techniques were adopted to ensure involvement of partners and implementation of actions agreed by the DPs. These included:

- establishing a limited company with all partners nominating a director who had written authority from the partner to implement decisions of the DP in their companies/bodies,
- banning of substitutes at meetings,
- dividing up a large partnership into groups responsible for separate projects with an overall small central group (referred to as politburo) responsible for the project at the centre,
- obtaining a written commitment from the chief executives of bodies involved that decisions brought back by representatives on DPs would be implemented and
- getting the most senior people in partners involved in DPs.

7. Conclusions & Recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

In general, the Update (Final) Evaluation of the EQUAL Community Initiative Programme can conclude that the programme has operated effectively over its life to date. In this report it has been highlighted how EQUAL has appeared to respond to national labour market policy developments and socio-economic changes in Ireland. In this way it provides a potentially important resource for developing innovative interventions to reinforce policy and drive it forward.

A number of positive changes to the programme have been implemented since the mid-term evaluation. The fixed budget allocation on commencement of a project, work on developing project-level indicators, the redirection of resources from the employability to the adaptability pillar, and the insistence that DPs provide formal, written mainstreaming strategies were all identified as developments that will help to increase the eventual overall impact of the programme.

The analysis of financial and physical progress was constrained to some extent by the availability of data but it did indicate that significant outputs were being generated at local level, particularly in the employability pillar. Meanwhile projects funded under adaptability appeared to be more successful in generating tangible products from their development partnerships, increasing the potential for future mainstreaming. The NSS has played an important role in facilitating the progression of projects, and most DPs cite it as a valuable resource, particularly with regard to meeting the stringent reporting requirements of the programme, a component that is perceived by them to inhibit overall project progress.

By considering the outcomes to date of specific projects funded under Round 1, the report demonstrated how substantial impacts were being generated across most of the individual objectives of EQUAL. There are many successful examples of projects that have been identified, and attention must now switch to ensuring that the learning developed by their DPs is not lost now that their projects have reached completion.

EQUAL might not be generating the significant vertical mainstreaming impacts in terms of stimulating significant policy change, but the projects progressed have played important contributory roles to reinforcing national policy development and testing innovative ideas with regard to processes and mechanisms that will maximise the effective delivery of such policy. There is significant qualitative evidence that, despite the short timescales that characterise EQUAL projects, learning is spreading gradually within major national policy-making organisations. This learning would appear to be contributing to a long-term cultural change in such organisations in the way in which they perceive issues such as equality, diversity and adaptability of the workforce.

Furthermore, specific cases have been identified where private sector companies have altered policies with regard to recruitment, in-company training, and work-life balance as learning from the projects helps them to see the benefits of such changes. The impact at local level should not be discounted, with key target groups in specific areas obtaining invaluable assistance in terms of capacity building, skills, employment and self-employment. There is significantly more potential for impacts to be generated over time. It was considered to be extremely important by most stakeholders consulted that the EQUAL principles continue to guide future programming of labour market initiatives and that, in particular, the mainstreaming potential of innovative projects be developed.

7.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1 – Programme implementers should consider how the ongoing learning from EQUAL and the EQUAL principles can be incorporated into the programme structure of any new labour market initiatives particularly in the context of the new round of structural funding.

Regardless of EU funding, there is a need for formal mechanisms in Ireland to facilitate innovative labour market thinking and the testing of new ideas to improve employability and adaptability of the labour force, to promote enterprise, and ensure an inclusive labour market in that regard.

Recommendation 2 – The funding of innovative labour market interventions should be considered on a more focused, themed basis in order to improve potential for future mainstreaming.

There is a perception that EQUAL as it stands attempts to cover too much in its five pillar approach. In each round there exists a multiplicity of very different projects, and this makes learning across projects very limited, and also makes mainstreaming more problematic, with organisations perhaps interested in only one or two relevant projects faced with interacting with a programme that covers issues of little relevance. One suggestion is that innovative labour market interventions are funded in future on a dedicated themed basis, meaning that a significant base of projects are funded concurrently focusing on a specific labour market issue, for example the promotion of lifelong learning, of self-employment opportunities for disadvantaged target groups, or for managing diversity in the workplace. In this way learning can be developed across projects, sub-groups of the Mainstreaming Policy Group can be developed that would reflect organisations with policies of relevance to the theme, and formal interaction processes can be developed throughout the project development and operation phases.

Recommendation 3 – Within development partnerships, there is a need to ensure that all partners take on a proactive role in the development of the project. The programme should focus on developing manageable, focused partnerships with clearly designated responsibilities and consider the introduction of controls to maximise levels of participation.

The development partnership model has facilitated good working relationships between very different organisations and in doing so generated practical solutions to overcoming barriers to labour market entry for key target groups, managing diversity in the workplace, encouraging enterprise, and promoting initiatives such as lifelong learning. There is however a need to ensure that all development partners take on a proactive role in the development of each project. It was found that smaller partnerships were most effective in this regard, with specific roles and responsibilities designated to each individual partner. Controls that could be put in place in order to ensure a greater level of participation by all partners within DPs have also been highlighted and their introduction might also be considered in the future.

Recommendation 4 – Consideration should be given by the EQUAL Evaluation Steering Committee to conducting specific analytical research on the real added value and impact of transnationality.

The transnational element of EQUAL has, in some cases, proved important in terms of capacity building for project participants, team building among development partnerships, and information sharing. However there was limited evidence of any real mainstreaming learning resulting for this process, or that it added any significant value in terms of the impact of individual projects or of the programme as a whole. It must be acknowledged, however, that this update evaluation consulted only a proportion of the DPs involved in the programme, and that therefore definitive statements about the value of transnational cooperation are not possible at this stage. Important work is also being undertaken at EU level in order to develop a more collaborative approach between member states and facilitate more effective transnational cooperation between projects in the future. The findings would suggest that the added value of transnationality should be assessed at some point. One possible means of achieving this would be a specific, dedicated research study, having regard to the extent of outcomes achieved and ongoing impacts, particularly in the context of post-2006 ESF priorities and programmes.

Recommendation 5 – Projects where mainstreaming potential has been identified by DPs should be independently assessed and, if it is judged that such potential exists a development process should begin in order to progress the practical implementation of the idea.

If innovative ideas are to be effectively mainstreamed and fully taken on board by key national policy mainstreaming. At present, mainstreaming can only occur, either naturally as a product of the development partnership or if the DP can 'sell' their idea to key policy makers at the Mainstreaming Policy Group. Many of the relevant organisations or policymakers who might have the opportunity to mainstream learning are not directly involved in DP project work. They are therefore being asked to make judgements 'cold' based on projects within which they have had little direct input. As a development of the Mainstreaming Policy Group process, the independent assessment of projects in order to establish mainstreaming potential, followed by a formal process that engages the mainstreaming organisation with the development partners, would be an important addition to the Programme.

Recommendation 6 – Some form of technical support resource to focus on engaging potential mainstreaming organisations in mainstreaming innovative labour market policy approaches should be considered.

It has been noted that while it is important that capacity is built up at development partnership level to engage organisations in innovative labour market thinking, similar capacity building exercises are required in national policy organisations with regard to their ability to mainstream ideas and understand issues of equality. It would help in this regard if a dedicated technical support resource was in place to work directly with these organisations to identify potential mainstreaming opportunities and spend time with key individuals within the organisations in order to develop ideas in line with their unique needs. The resource would therefore help to take the learning from EQUAL and tailor it to meet the complex requirements of individual policy-making organisations. It is also considered that the Equality Authority might have an important role in helping to develop capacity in organisations in this regard.

Recommendation 7 – Policy making organisations should allocate responsibility to key individuals for mainstreaming innovative ideas into their policies and practices and ensure that sufficient resources are set aside for this purpose.

The potential to mainstream innovative ideas to combat labour market discrimination will only be fully realised however if policy-making organisations themselves dedicate sufficient time and resources to examining such opportunities. It was emphasised that, while the Mainstreaming Policy

Group was a useful mechanism for developing relationships, it represented just one small part of each individual member's time and resources, and that often they lacked the resources required to examine potential mainstreaming from EQUAL that might result or effectively take on board any learning from the initiative. The designation of responsibility and appropriate resources within each policy organisation for mainstreaming innovative ideas into its policy and practice is a critical step if more effective means of combating discrimination within labour market are to be found in the future. Such resources should ensure that a formal mechanism exists for reviewing, analysing and incorporating innovation into organisations from programmes and initiatives such as EQUAL.

Recommendation 8 – It should be a requirement that project-level impact indicators are established by the DP at the outset of each project, and that monitoring mechanisms are put in place to ensure that DPs are pursuing their realisation.

The work that has been undertaken to date with regard to identifying impact indicators and potential mainstreaming outcomes by the NSS with regard to projects should continue, and formal monitoring mechanisms should be put in place in order to ensure that DPs are pursuing the achievement of these targets and mainstreaming of project learning. The indicators must be achievable and related to target organisations with regard to where learning can be mainstreamed into policy and practice.

Recommendation 9 – There is a need for more programme-wide promotion of EQUAL in order to heighten awareness of its potential mainstreaming benefits.

There may be a need for more programme wide promotion of EQUAL or any equivalent programme in order to raise its awareness among wider society. While those who are directly involved in EQUAL have a close understanding of its objectives, there is perhaps a general lack of awareness of the programme in key national organisations, which perhaps limits the extent to which mainstreaming can occur. Examination of specific projects has revealed a number of positive outcomes and potential outcomes and more should be done to promote the success of the initiative as a whole. The Managing Authority should liaise with the NDP/CSF Information and Publicity Unit in order to consider developing a special initiative marketing the positive outcomes of the EQUAL Community Initiative.

Recommendation 10 – Consideration should be given to ongoing monitoring of the impact of the administrative burden on DPs and exploring of methods to reduce that burden.

The most common constraint on progress of the projects cited by the DPs was the significant administrative burden placed on them by the requirements of the EQUAL programme. There is a perception that this limits the time that can be spent of developing the project. Innovative labour market interventions by nature require some degree of flexibility in terms of planning, operation and budgets and greater recognition should be given to this when funding such interventions in the future. Control of finance is important but should not place an overly restrictive burden on operators of such projects in order to inhibit the impact that can be achieved.

Recommendation 11 – All DPs should be required to have a dedicated project coordinator and financial administrator for their projects.

The importance of having a dedicated project coordinator and financial administrator for each DP was highlighted in this report. While this has been encouraged in the past, it should now be made a formal requirement and incorporated into project budgets. The technical support role provided by the NSS in the current programme is also an invaluable resource that should be maintained.

Recommendation 12 – Consideration should be given to extending the timeframe available for the implementation of projects, in particular the mainstreaming phase.

Finally, it was noted that the length of time required to develop good working partnerships within the DPs, allocate responsibilities to individual partners, and learn effectively as implementation progressed, meant that the existing timeframe for project delivery was insufficient to generate and pursue the mainstreaming impacts sought.