

Encouraging and understanding diversity

Situated in West Yorkshire, Kirklees is the seventh largest metropolitan district in the United Kingdom. The availability of work in the 1950s and 1960s attracted many immigrant workers and today 14% of the population is from a minority ethnic background – well above the UK average of 9%. However, wage levels are below the national average, with 25% of local jobs in manufacturing.

This EQUAL Development Partnership (DP) has established "Common Ground" with employers, promoting the principle that diversity pays and that by identifying and building on the latent skills of the population, it is possible to move towards a more productive local economy and a more inclusive society.

A laboratory for new approaches

Common Ground has had a significant impact at local level. Nearly 900 individuals and over 100 businesses have benefited from the wide range of support available through the DP and over 60 people gained employment, while 85 jobs were safeguarded. In effect, Common Ground has been a vast laboratory in which a host of different approaches to labour market integration have been tried and tested.

The EQUAL project was created after a process of widespread consultation that resulted in 21 organisations signing up to become members. They include voluntary organisations, community groups, the public employment service, the Learning and Skills Council and the local Chamber of Commerce.

To manage the diverse partners and approaches, the DP set up two overarching frameworks for its activities. The first, a Mentoring Network, ensures that the coaching and

support offered to all target groups is of a similar standard and that lessons learned with each group are disseminated and built into future approaches and procedures. The Network includes six pilot projects with a mentoring dimension.

Career support and coaching

Mehnaz Dad has been working with the Mentoring Network for six months and has been trained to provide support, guidance and assistance to mentees in their search for further training or employment. *"The training I have received has made a big impact on my life. Mentoring has given me the confidence to approach people and use my listening skills to help them. It has also helped me to progress further in my career, into another field of employment, with the Community Mental Health Team."*

The second DP network was built on an earlier employers' network and has led to the creation of the "Equality at Work" Award. The target group is smaller businesses,



"The Common Ground Development Partnership was especially interested in working with employers to break down stereotypes and preconceptions and to promote processes and structures to support diversity in the workplace," says Jennifer Reeves of Business Link West Yorkshire, one of the strategic partners in project. "It took a lot of hard work but Common Ground has really succeeded in harnessing the hidden potential of our people in Kirklees."

which are often confused about equality-related employment legislation and lack dedicated human resource or equality specialists. The award challenges the views of some employers that equality-related measures can act as a burden.

Andy Aldridge is the Managing Director of one of the 30 small businesses to have received the award: *"The biggest business benefit has been the improved image of our organisation. We are now much more reflective of our local society and potential customer base. As a result, it has helped us develop new markets and business opportunities and enabled us to recruit from groups who may not previously have joined our company."*

Promoting equality policies at work

The Partnership has also produced a variety of user-friendly products and toolkits for employers including a Disability Discrimination Toolkit, a Work-Life Balance Toolkit, a Mentor Training Pack and an Employment Good Practice Guide specifically designed for voluntary sector employers.

A new EQUAL project is now coming on stream called "Common Ground – Breaking New Ground". Through her experience of managing the first EQUAL DP and providing the secretariat for the transnational partnership "Diverse Reflections", Heather Waddington emphasises the added value of working across borders: *"transnational activities will bring novel ideas and innovative approaches to help us break new ground in Kirklees. We are excited about working with this next set of European partners and hope that our cooperation will be as productive and enjoyable as it has been in Diverse Reflections."*

A more detailed version and other EQUAL success stories can be found at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/activities/search_en.cfm



One of the DP's 12 innovations – the Equaliser project connecting with "hard to reach" young people

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Innovation

Mainstreaming

Transnationality

Empowerment

Partnership