

INVESTING IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES FOR A BETTER FUTURE

London's thriving economy is leading to large-scale development across the City. A fifth terminal at Heathrow airport is under construction, as is a new stadium for one of London's best-known football teams, Arsenal. Commercial and housing development remains strong with further growth planned. The buoyancy of the construction economy is placing pressures on the industry's employers, 98% of whom face difficulties in recruiting skilled staff to fill vacancies. Research by a leading industry body, Construction Skills, has forecast continued growth and demand for skilled workers, and has also called for more promotion of the types of jobs available within construction to attract new types of people.

A growing number of development and regeneration sites springing up across the capital are often in areas of deprivation and high unemployment. Many people living in these areas, particularly those from ethnic minority and other disadvantaged groups, experience difficulties in finding and sustaining employment.

The Building London – Creating Futures partnership, led by the London Borough of Southwark, was established to support hard to reach groups who have been traditionally under represented in the industry, such as women and black and ethnic minority communities, whilst at the same time ensuring that job seekers are suitably qualified and experienced to meet the skills needs of the employers. It aims to tackle local unemployment issues by matching local people to local jobs where possible.

As Councillor Nick Stanton, Leader of Southwark Council, and lead DP partner said, "*Southwark is a London borough of extremes. In parts, unemployment is four times the national average, yet in others developers have struggled to deliver major construction projects because of severe skills shortages. Building London Creating Futures is bridging this gap*".

PARTNERSHIP WITH A LOCAL FOCUS

Building London Creating Futures is a partnership of construction employers, local authorities, regeneration partnerships, training providers and community organisations. Together, partners have developed a sustainable model of cooperation and coordination to ensure that capital investment in an area benefits local people. After a small scale pilot funded through the London Development Agency, the partnership's innovative model of 'intermediary support' has been rolled out across London under EQUAL.

"Building London Creating Futures is a unique employment partnership for the construction industry. Investing in local communities in this way is crucial if the construction industry is to resolve its skills issues."(Bob White, Chairman of MACE Ltd.)



Workers in the construction industry have benefited from the Building London partnership

HANDS ON HELP THAT WORKS

The partnership's activity centres on the work of 'workplace coordinators'. Their role is to help employers meet their recruiting needs, while providing personalised support for local people, particularly the long-term unemployed, to find work in the construction industry. It is the 'hands-on' role played by workplace coordinators that most people involved in the scheme have found invaluable, as Sharon, one of the scheme's first participants explained: "*The workplace coordinator was great. She helped me sort out my CV and arranged my interview with the*

employer. I see her on a regular basis and know she will always help out with things like childcare costs for my son during school holidays”.



Support to women and other underrepresented groups was an important aim of Building London

In addition to their mentoring and coaching role, coordinators also organise formal training towards qualifications and industry standard requirements, such as the Construction Standards Certification Scheme (CSCS). As Jeff, another of the scheme’s participants explained, *“I have had lots of experience but had no certificates to prove what I could do and no one was willing to give me a chance. I felt more confident after the training and it was good to know that employers involved in the scheme would recognise the training I had received.”*

Since the scheme became fully operational in July 2003, over 250 people have found jobs, while around 850 people have completed valuable construction qualifications. EQUAL has funded six workplace coordinators to work with private developers, local authorities and a housing association on six development sites across London. In commenting on the

scheme’s success, Lisa-Marie Bowles, European Manager at Southwark Council said: *“A unique role is played by the workplace coordinators who are acting as change agents for the industry. They provide an interface between the employer and the job seeker which is the vital ingredient for success. Most workplace coordinators are employed by the private developers who are partnership members. This enables the coordinators to directly influence the sub-contractors who are responsible for employment. Coordinators network with each other to find people work on sites covered by the scheme in order to achieve sustainable employment. Many people have kept in touch with their coordinator long after their involvement with the scheme has ended. The ESF EQUAL funding has enabled us to experiment with the delivery of this model because it is not only output driven, but also addresses the quality of provision and emphasises the importance of learning and disseminating lessons learned”.*

IT’S GOOD FOR BUSINESS – SUSTAINING AND MAINSTREAMING THE APPROACH

A key success of the scheme has been the high level of private sector buy-in. Three major developers that are partners have chosen to retain and fund workplace coordinators on their sites now that EQUAL funding has ended. David Rowbotham of MACE Ltd explained what makes the scheme so unique: *“It’s a good idea that is being effectively delivered in partnership with the private sector. It’s not seen as a government-led initiative which is a refreshing change for us and because workplace coordinators are part of our organisation, the scheme is taken seriously... it’s our reputation on the line”.*

The partnership was successful in making a strong business case from the outset by positioning the workplace coordinator approach in line with the corporate social responsibility agenda. As David Rowbotham illustrated, *“Not only does it provide good PR, it’s a cost effective way of recruiting and provides the means for us to recruit the local labour that local authorities require in order for us to gain planning permission”.*



Unemployment was tackled by matching local people to local jobs

The popularity and effectiveness of the approach has also seen the partnership win significant public sector backing. At least one London borough has firm plans in place to allocate ‘Section 106’ monies raised from private developers through planning approvals towards supporting the scheme’s continuance. Furthermore over €435,000 of co-financing funding from the London Development Agency (LDA) and the European Social Fund has already been secured for unemployed jobseekers registered with the Government’s Jobcentre Plus agency to receive

training through the programme. As Maxine Jones, Director of Employment and Skills at the LDA said, "This is a very important scheme since the capital [London] desperately needs more builders. We are supporting it since it will help a range of jobless workers including women, people from ethnic minorities and the long-term unemployed. It is designed to give trainees skills that are tailored to the needs of the modern construction industry. This will allow local people to work on flagship projects such as Heathrow Terminal Five and the new Arsenal football stadium."

Development Partnership: [UKgb-11 Building London Creating Futures](#)

National partners: London Borough of Southwark; London Borough of Camden, London Borough of Islington; London Borough of Lambeth; London Borough of Wandsworth; Corporation of London; Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea; Cross River Partnership; BOVIS Lend Lease, MACE; Construction Skills (CITB); Channel Tunnel Rail Link; St. George South London; Lambeth College; London Development Agency; London Central Learning and Skills Council; Jobcentre Plus; Metropolitan Housing Trust; Mulalley Construction; Union of Construction Allied Trades and Technicians; Business Link for London; Central London Partnership.

Transnational partnership: TCA 297 *WISER Worker integration through skill development and experience recognition*

Contact: Lisa-Marie Bowles

Tel: + 4420 7525 5486

E-mail: Lisa-Marie.Bowles@southwark.gov.uk

Website: <http://www.buildinglondon.co.uk>



A short version of this "Success story" and other "Success stories" are available on the [EQUAL website](#)