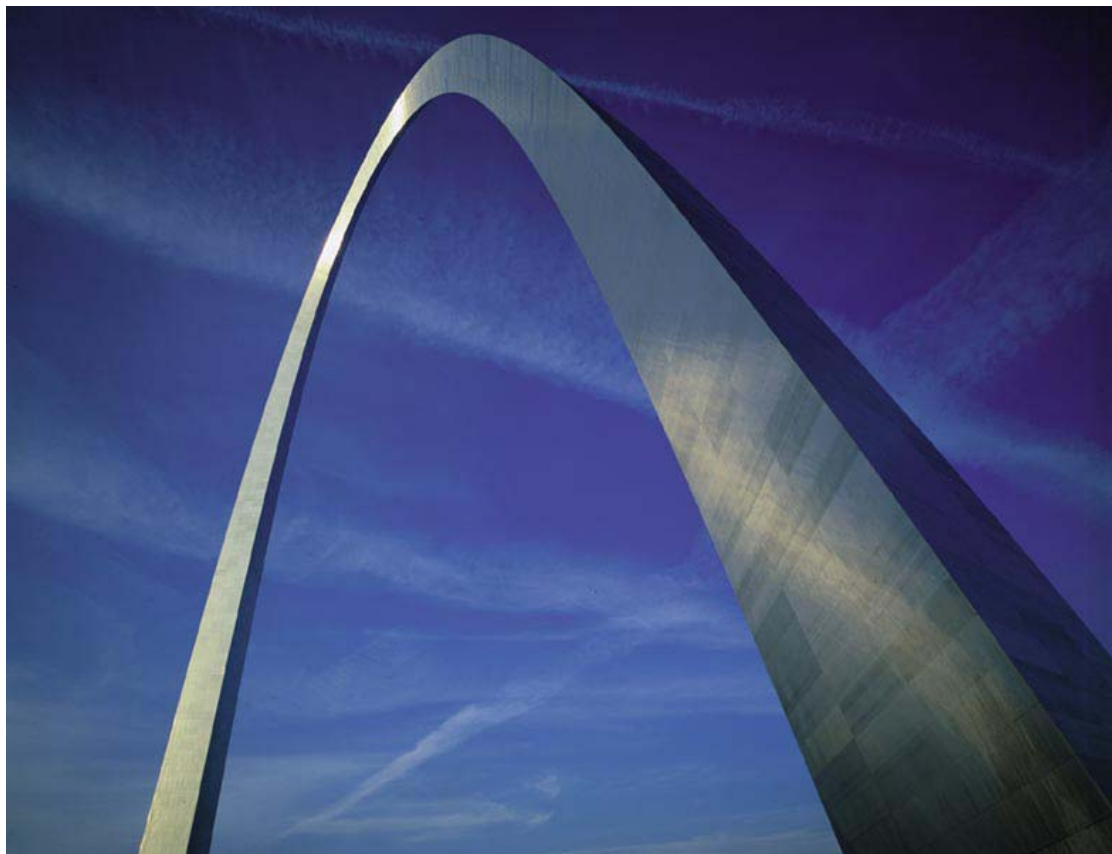


**Department for Employment and
Learning**

**Final Evaluation of EQUAL
Programme 2000-2006**

September 2005



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Executive Summary

Introduction

1. Following on from the Mid-term Evaluation (in Autumn 2003) and the Second Interim Evaluation (in December 2005) this report is the Final Evaluation of the EQUAL Community Initiative Programme (2000-2006). As such it presents a consolidated picture of the EQUAL Programme in NI since 2000. However, it is important to note, in the context of the term 'final evaluation report', that because many of the impacts of the programme are still emerging.
2. Framed within the four EES pillars, the EQUAL Programme offers a Europe wide focus for testing and promoting new means of combating all forms of discrimination and inequalities in the labour market, both for those in work and those seeking work. The EQUAL Programme does not aim to replicate existing labour market interventions, but to act as a kind of 'laboratory' for new and innovative ideas to emerge. As well as this commitment to innovation, EQUAL is based on a number of further principles:
 - Projects are implemented by 'Development Partnerships' (DPs), not individual organisations. A DP is expected to bring together relevant actors (e.g. by sector or by geographic area) to provide a multi-dimensional response to a labour market challenge;
 - DPs must agree to work transnationally with an EQUAL funded DP in a minimum of one other EU Member State;
 - DPs are expected to empower their target groups and include them in the core decision making of the project;
 - Projects should aim not only to be undertake their pilot actions but to transfer the learning arising from those actions, both to similar organisations and to mainstream policy organisations; and
 - As well as being a principal aim of EQUAL, Equal Opportunities is to be a cross-cutting feature of the programme.
3. In Northern Ireland, EQUAL was allocated a budget of €18.416 Meuro for 2000-06. It operates under two themes: Employability and Equal Opportunities, selected from a list of nine. In Northern Ireland, the call for projects was divided into two rounds. In Round 1, which commenced in November 2001 and is due to be completed by the end of September 2005, involved six DPs - five in Employability and one in Equal Opportunities. In Round 2 thirteen DPs were successful, eight under Employability and five under the Equal Opportunities. Round 2 commenced in November 2004 and is due to be completed by the end of December 2007.

Terms of reference and methodology

4. The final evaluation is required to focus on all actions under Round 1 and Action 1 under Round 2. This report, therefore, aims to present a consolidated assessment of the EQUAL programme in NI since 2000 and provide an update of the December 2004 Second Interim Report. More specifically, the terms of reference state that the report will examine the following elements:

- **The labour market context of EQUAL;**
 - **The implementation and delivery of EQUAL;**
 - **Achieving Objectives:** this will require an analysis of how well EQUAL has met the targets outlined in the Northern Ireland EQUAL Community Initiative Programme (CIP);
 - **Thematic Evaluation:** this must include an assessment of the effectiveness of the key principles of EQUAL; and
 - **Impact of EQUAL:** this must analyse what effect EQUAL had on national/regional/local/sectoral policy and what effect EQUAL had on individuals.
5. The methodological approach to the evaluation included the following elements:
- Discussions of progress to date with members of the EQUAL Evaluation Steering Group;
 - Review of the data relating to the changing labour market in Northern Ireland and a review of the changing policy context;
 - Review of relevant documentation, selection, communication and administration procedures;
 - Review of indicators. This involved an analysis of financial allocation and verified spend as well as progress reports and monitoring returns to examine project activity;
 - Review of project applications and partnership documentation;
 - Interviews with key informants relating to the programme;
 - Case studies of six DPs under Rounds 1 and 2. While only six DPs operated in Round 1, the case studies in Round 2 were selected on the basis of a number of key variables including EQUAL theme (Employability or Equal Opportunities), target group and geographical location. In each case, in-depth interviews were undertaken with the lead partner and then up to three representatives of other partners on the DPs.
 - DP survey with Round 1 DPs to supplement the previous case studies and to update on their progress to date; and
 - Beneficiary surveys with Round 1 projects to gauge the impact of the Round 1 projects at the individual level and the importance of soft outcomes.

The labour market and policy context of EQUAL

6. Overall, analysis suggests that the **fundamental issues facing the Northern Ireland labour market have not changed since the programme was initiated**. While there have been general improvements in terms of growing employment and falling unemployment, the need remains to facilitate access to employment for those who have difficulty in being integrated or re-integrated into the labour market. Indeed, as unemployment and economic inactivity are particularly high among certain 'harder to reach groups' (such as long term unemployed males, young people and those with disabilities) and in certain locations (the West of Northern Ireland), this has **reinforced the relevance of the EQUAL Programme over the period**.

7. Similarly, despite recent improvements in the number of women employed in the labour force and better educational performance by female school leavers, **the rationale for the Equal Opportunities theme in the programme still remains valid.** The analysis demonstrates that the labour market is still characterised by a significant gender gap with respect to full-time and self-employment, economic activity, progression and pay.
8. Over the course of the EQUAL Programme, a number of policy and legislative developments have taken place in the area of employability, social exclusion, discrimination and inequality. In the main, these initiatives have **complemented the development of the EQUAL Programme** by providing an overarching legal and policy framework that seeks to reduce social exclusion and promote equality in the labour market, and establish opportunities for the DPs to develop common linkages and partnership actions. On the other hand, these initiatives have placed challenges on the DPs to ensure that their projects are innovative and distinguishable from mainstream activity. The suspension has also reduced the attention that might be paid to policy submissions creating implications for vertical mainstreaming.

Implementation of EQUAL

9. Overall, the **implementation of the EQUAL Programme has progressed well since 2001** with the DPs in Round 1 in the process of finalising Action 3 (due for completion by the end of September 2005) and almost all the DPs in Round 2 finalising their DPAs and embarking on Action 2.
10. From 2001, expenditure and project activity in the EQUAL Programme has progressed but **considerable variation exists across the DPs in Round 1.** For instance, while the DPs established a strong level of activity in Round 1 (such as promoting education, training and learning for disadvantaged groups, providing support for particular target groups and challenging discrimination), the annual monitoring returns show that some DPs have been more active than others. This disparity in DP progress was evident in project indicators that monitored:
 - The number and breakdown of beneficiaries by background;
 - The number of people benefiting from the support measures; and
 - Partnership outputs.
11. The DPs in Round 2 commenced activity under Action 1 at the end of 2004 and in their partnership arrangements involve a range of stakeholders from government departments, statutory agencies, local government, Chambers of Commerce, the voluntary / community sector, Trade Unions and private business. In adopting the recommendations of the mid-term evaluation, Action 1 was extended to nine months (as opposed to six) in order to allow partners more time to develop partnership processes and establish the foundations for project development. Almost all DPs in Round 2 have now completed their DPAs and embarked on Action 2 activity.
12. In preparation of the call for projects under Rounds 1 and 2, the **Managing Authority and National Support Structure conducted extensive and comprehensive periods of promotion.** Learning lessons from Round 1, a number of important changes were also made to the second call application process. These included a short pre-selection application form, more emphasis on promoting and encouraging applications under the Equal Opportunities Theme, and facilitating the attendance of DPs at promotional road shows to present evidence of project practice and help guide the applicants. These amendments strengthened the promotion of Round 2 and the application process as a whole. For both rounds, the **selection process was found to be comprehensive, fair, rigorous and transparent** and the scoring criteria were consistently applied.

13. In seeking to implement the projects, a number of barriers and constraints to progress were identified. These included:

- **The administrative complexity of the EQUAL Programme:** this has increased pressures on both DPs and government representatives restricting opportunities to focus on project outcomes;
- **The level of detail required in the beneficiary forms:** this has created problems in encouraging participation on projects as many of the target groups are reluctant to divulge personal information; this mostly applied to beneficiaries between the ages of 16 and 25 years old.
- **Issues over financial payments:** In Round 1, DPs expressed difficulties in drawing down monies and indicated that this has slowed down progress. However, in light of these difficulties, DEL introduced a number of changes to the payments and administration process. First, in May 2003, DEL agreed a new method of processing claims which provided greater flexibility and allowed the financial payments to be administered to the DPs within a shorter timeframe. Secondly, the monitoring arrangements were streamlined for Round 2 which brought increased clarity to the administration of EQUAL and allowed DEL Case Officers to provide greater financial monitoring support. While the Round 2 DPs reported that payments remain slow, resulting in some cash flow difficulties, these problems have largely been due to difficulties in accessing the necessary information from DPs to complete the claims and the administrative process; and
- Linked to the complex administrative structures, **a degree of perceived overlap in programme responsibilities**, during the initial stages of Round 1, also hindered progress. In the implementation of Actions 1 and 2, however, both the Managing Authority and the National Support Structure became more established in their roles and provided more direct guidance and support to the DPs. Furthermore, the re-allocation of roles between the Managing Authority and the NSS with regard to financial and non-financial monitoring at the beginning of Round 1 of the second call, has helped to 'free up' the NSS to undertake developmental support role with projects which has been broadly welcomed. DPs, however, expressed the view that the NSS was becoming overstretched given the volume of activity in Rounds 1 and 2.

14. **Equal Opportunities** is also a key commitment in the management of the EQUAL Programme and has been built into a number of key stages. These include:

- the promotion of the programme;
- the application form;
- the project selection process;
- development of an Equal Opportunities Strategy; and
- monitoring and evaluation.

15. Overall, the realisation of Equal Opportunities as a cross-cutting principle in the programme and the implementation of the DP projects, has **contributed towards raising awareness of equality issues**. At the project level, the DPs have adopted a proactive approach to targeting and recruiting a range of beneficiaries by adjusting projects in accordance with the needs of different target groups. Indeed, six DPs have focused on the Equal Opportunities theme within the programme (one in Round 1 and five in Round 2) and the following areas in particular:

- promoting the integration of young women in the labour market;
- promoting employment opportunities for men and women in the health care sector;
- supporting women in rural areas to start and run their own businesses;
- supporting women in sectors traditionally denominated by men;

- supporting lone parents in entering the labour market; and
 - promoting efforts to overcome barriers to women's participation in construction trades.
16. As regards **North / South co-operation**, management structures have been put in place and events organised to support this dimension of the programme. However, while the cross-border events provided an opportunity to raise awareness of EQUAL and facilitate engagement between DPs, the level of **cross-border co-operation in Round 1 was disappointing and represented a missed opportunity for the programme**. In Round 1 the number of partners involved in Transnational Co-operation Agreements with DPs in Ireland was also low, and it was generally felt that North-South Steering Group had lost a degree of momentum.
17. In Round 2, however, the **level and quality of North/South Co-operation has increased** with DPs expressing the view that the North/South Steering Group has worked to facilitate networking between DPs, establish workshops and encourage learning across DPs, and provide an important forum for dissemination and mainstreaming.

Progress on key principles of EQUAL

18. The evaluation found that the principles of partnership, innovation and empowerment are working well across the programme (in Rounds 1 and 2) and being incorporated into project development. In Round 1 the outputs from transnationality were more mixed but important steps have been made in Round 2 to ensure the selection of appropriate transnational partners.
19. Across the programme, the **level of partnership achieved has been very high**. In fact, the development of engaged, co-operative and dynamic DPs can be regarded as one of the key outputs of the programme. In Round 1, each of the DPs found the partnership a fruitful mechanism for implementing their objectives as the process provided an opportunity for organisations to forge new relationships and access resources and expertise for the project. Producing outputs has caused partners to have more trust in the DP and subsequently to give it more energy, resources and credence. In some DPs, the partnership process also acted as a forum for capacity building and 'social learning'. Organisations with larger capacity and greater knowledge of EU programmes were able to transfer their experience to smaller partners and improve their level of engagement.
20. While still in the early stages of development, partnership processes have also been established in Round 2 and are providing an opportunity for innovation and social learning. In adopting one of the key lessons from Round 1, the DPs in Round 2 have achieved a greater degree of cross-sectoral involvement from key policy stakeholders and the private sector. In addition, in response to a recommendation in the mid-term evaluation, the Managing Authority and the NSS contracted the Workers Education Association (WEA) to work with the DPs and provide support to develop the partnership process skills. This has assisted some of the partners in Round 2 to establish decision making and co-ordination structures based on sub-groups or operational committees. Despite being widely available, it is understood that not all DPs to date have made use of this support and some have expressed the view that their partnership may be falling behind as a result. However, the Managing Authority and the NSS continue to make efforts to encourage uptake of the support on offer to DPs. As demonstrated in Round 1, however, opportunities for further consolidation will be presented in Action 2 when main project activity is conducted.
21. In overall terms, the transnational component of the programme has proved to be a positive experience. At the outset of Round 1, however, some DPs experienced difficulties in establishing transnational partnerships as the database used to locate and

develop partners was found to be difficult to access and use. These initial difficulties had implications for the success of some transnational arrangements.

22. Over the course of the programme, the DPs in Round 1 engaged in the transnational aspect sufficiently to benefit from the exchange of information and experience. All the DPs confirmed that the transnational component of their projects provided an important insight into the different cultural and administrative approaches to common social and labour market problems in other EU Member States. In regard to administration, several of the DPs reported that they had underestimated the amount of time that would be required to undertake transnational activity and some of the DPs found it difficult to manage all the dimensions of the programme effectively and to balance transnational co-operation with their own DP activity.
23. In contrast to Round 1, the selection of transnational partners by Round 2 DPs has been more structured and better organised. Round 2 showed an increase in pre-agreement contact and the DPs have been successful in finding partners that are more closely aligned with their objectives. While Round 2 is in the early stages of development, evidence from the TCAs demonstrates that the partnerships are also more ambitious in seeking to use transnational co-operation to develop integrated arrangements such as exporting or adopting new approaches, conducting joint developments and exchanging staff.
24. From examining the development of DPs in Round 1 and from assessing proposed project actions in Round 2, it is evident that **there are high levels of innovation within EQUAL, which fits with the nature of the programme as an experimental opportunity for challenging labour market issues**. Across the DPs, the projects identified a range of different types of innovation with a particular focus on process and goal orientated innovation.
25. With regard to **empowerment, all six DP project leaders in Round 1 worked to apply this concept to their project**. There is evidence that each DP did succeed in this aim to different degrees. Four of the DPs could be described as having integrated 'partial empowerment' into their programmes. In the implementation of projects this involves DPs consulting with representatives of the client group on decisions made within the DP, communicating directly with beneficiaries to get feedback and piloting aspects of the project with client groups to receive comments. One of the DPs can be described as succeeding in 'deeply empowering' the client group. This involved training 'guest facilitators' representing the different target groups who now have the capacity to go back into their communities and deliver the training themselves. At the most basic level, only one DP in Round 1 achieved 'minimal empowerment' as the project was unable to attract enough beneficiaries to be described as empowering a client group.
26. While the DPs in Round 2 have only embarked on Action 2 and have yet to attract beneficiaries, an analysis of the project proposals suggests that all **DPs are committed to applying the concept of empowerment**. In a similar pattern to Round 1, seven of the DPs are developing 'partial empowerment' with proposals to establish peer groups, beneficiary forums and focus groups. Three DPs have proposed approaches to implement deep empowerment (participation of beneficiaries on working groups, steering groups or partnership board) while three are based on approaches that will develop 'minimal empowerment'. Potentially more learning could be taken from the DPs in Round 1 or within Round 2 to advance the approaches in achieve more 'partial' or 'deeper' forms of empowerment.

Impact and mainstreaming of EQUAL

27. Although the full impacts may be not realised until after the EQUAL Programme has ended and given that Action 3 in Round 1 is just in the process of completion (end of September 2005), evidence suggests that **the programme has had some impact at the horizontal level and the individual / beneficiary level in particular, but less so at the vertical level**. To date, two DPs have achieved transferability at the vertical level but in general DPs in Round 1 have largely disseminated the outcomes from their projects. Overall, the programme has made progress towards meeting its key aim of testing and promoting new means of combating forms of discrimination and inequality in the labour market.

Impact at the individual level

28. Overall, the programme has made a **positive impact at the individual level by helping beneficiaries move along the pathway to training, education and employment**. These impacts can mainly be identified in terms of **soft outcomes** such as contributing towards increasing self-confidence and motivation, communication and teambuilding skills and an enhanced sense of personal responsibility. Projects in Round 1 have also developed **particular skills** in IT, cross-cultural dialogue and diversity issues or worked towards improving re-offending behaviour amongst those serving a custodial sentence.

29. In the Round 2 projects, Action 2 commenced in July 2005 and many of the DPs are currently working to establish the infrastructure for implementing their projects such as developing management processes, undertaking project promotion and hiring staff. As such, there are no discernable impacts at the level of individual beneficiaries at this stage but it is worth pointing out that DPs are seeking to target a range of beneficiaries including lone parents, underrepresented groups in the health care sector, disabled persons, long term unemployed and people with autism. With the adoption of the Rickter scale (in response to a recommendation in the mid-term evaluation) this will provide a common tool to assess 'soft outcomes' across the DPs in Round 2.

Impact at the horizontal level

30. In assessing the impact at the horizontal level, a **distinction** at this stage can be made between those DPs that contributed towards **transferring lessons** and approaches from their projects and those that **disseminated outcomes**.

31. In Round 1 **evidence of horizontal mainstreaming has emerged**, although the degree of impact varies from across the DPs. Digital Step and PPS have been successful in transferring outcomes from their projects to other partners and organisations within the sector. Digital Step, for example, has transferred their training method to organisations in the youth sector and the approach is also being piloted by one of their transnational partners. The joined up approach to the resettlement of offenders, promoted by the PPS project, is also due to be fully mainstreamed by the end of September 2005.

32. The other four projects have **worked to disseminate their outcomes, share lessons and experience, and create wider awareness** of their projects and the EQUAL Programme in general. Evidence of horizontal mainstreaming, however, has yet to emerge. While it is too early to comment on the potential for mainstreaming in Round 2, it is important to note that the many of the DPs have clear ideas of how the project outcomes are to be disseminated and which key stakeholders they need to target.

Impact at the vertical level

33. In a similar pattern to the horizontal level, a number of the impacts at the vertical level can be identified in Round 1 but the degree of impact varies. Again, the impact of the DPs can distinguish between transferability and dissemination.
34. Both PPS and Digital Step have been **successful in transferring outcomes from their projects**. The PPS project has impacted on the development of the Prison Service Resettlement Strategy and changed the process for engagement with employers. In addition, the training qualification developed in the Digital Step project has been adopted as a formal qualification in the schools and colleges that were involved in the pilot. It is unclear, however, whether this qualification will be rolled out further to other schools and colleges.
35. Outside these projects, the other DPs have had limited impact at the national policy level to date but have worked **to disseminate the outcomes and key lessons from their projects**. In this task, the DPs have conducted a range of activities including conferences, research papers, seminars and photographic and art exhibitions.
36. It is too early to assess the vertical impacts from Round 2 but important developments to encourage mainstreaming within the programme have taken place. Taking on board the lessons from Round 1, the NTN has facilitated networking between the DPs in Round 1 and 2 and has initiated early engagement with the DPs to discuss mainstreaming. This is an important step as it encourages DPs to be more proactive about mainstreaming at the early stages and seeks to take advantage of the greater number of DPs in Round 2 to develop networking and shared learning activities.

Barriers / constraints to mainstreaming

37. However, in seeking to mainstream project outcomes, ideas and methods at both the vertical and horizontal levels, there are a number of recognised barriers and constraints. These are relevant for both Round 1 and Round 2 DPs and include:
 - The suspension of the Assembly. This has distanced the DPs from opportunities to influence the core policy process;
 - The timetable for the mainstreaming process in the programme is ambitious. The three years allocated for Actions 2 and 3 places a demanding schedule on the DPs to produce project outcomes, develop relations with government departments and mainstream;
 - The proactive role of DEL in policy development. This has addressed some policy gaps in recent years which has restricted the scope for mainstreaming under EQUAL; and
 - More favourable labour market conditions. Improvements in the labour market in recent years have made it more challenging for the DPs to develop innovative approaches and access target groups. Marginalised groups are now more narrowly defined, difficult to locate and experience more complex socio-economic problems.

Mainstreaming structures

38. **In Round 1, it is broadly felt that the NTN played a limited role in the mainstreaming process**. Although the NTN did provide an important forum for different representatives to meet together and build relationships, raise issues of concern and discuss how to monitor emerging soft outcomes, the NTN lost a degree of momentum in the course of Actions 2 and 3. The interaction between the projects and the NTN was also weak with the DPs

noting that the network did not provide sufficient regular feedback or guidance to assist in the mainstreaming process.

39. **In Round 2, however, the role of the NTN has been reinvigorated.** The need for this was clearly highlighted as a recommendation in the second interim evaluation and it is evident that some progress has been made. The inclusion of representative from the private sector has increased the potential to gain feedback from employers' organisations, while the early engagement between the Rounds 1 and 2 DPs and the NTN has provided important learning and interaction opportunities.
40. While providing a further opportunity for DPs to learn from other experiences across Europe, there have been **few actual outcomes from the European Thematic Groups (ETGs)** with participants tending to iterate their activities at the national level rather than developing new international mechanisms to promote their outputs. It is understood, however, that their structures are under review at EU level.

First impacts of EQUAL on the European Employment Strategy

41. As Round 1 is in the process of completion and Round 2 is in the early stages of implementation, a complete assessment of the impacts of the EQUAL Programme in Northern Ireland on the European Employment Strategy (EES) would be premature. However, in drawing together evidence from this evaluation, a number of initial impacts have emerged.
42. Under the first theme of Employability, it is clear that **the programme has made a contribution towards facilitating access and return to the labour market** for those who have difficulty in being integrated or re-integrated. Overall, the projects in Round 1 have helped beneficiaries move along the pathway to training, education and employment. In particular, the programme has encouraged the development of systems for measuring soft outcomes such as increasing self-confidence and motivation, and communication, and teambuilding skills. Projects in Round 1 have also developed particular skills in IT and worked towards reducing re-offending behaviour amongst those serving a custodial sentence. In addition, the evaluation has shown that the programme has made progress towards promoting new means of combating forms of inequality in the labour market. In particular, two projects have piloted and transferred new approaches that will facilitate the engagement between ex-offenders and employers and help young people to increase their IT skills and to participate in education and training.
43. With regard to Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, the **programme has contributed towards raising awareness of equality issues** and ensured that the large number of stakeholders participating in the programme have knowledge of how to apply equal opportunities strategies in project development.

Community added value

44. Although the final outcomes of the EQUAL Programme have yet to be realised, the evaluation has identified a number of additional benefits outside of the key programme objectives. These include:
 - **The role of the DPs in reaching out to marginalised target groups (and in doing so contributing to social inclusion and community relations at local levels).** Previously, many of the beneficiary groups assisted by EQUAL would have expressed a reluctance to participate in government initiatives or the formal economy in general. The EQUAL Programme has successfully managed to engage a range of previously 'hard to reach' groups. While the full impact of this participation has yet to fully understood and documented, there is emerging evidence that the programme has

made an important contribution to developing different models and approaches. It has also promoted the adoption of an inclusive approach that can break down barriers and inhibitions between marginalised groups and society at large, and between the informal and formal economies, including government departments; and

- **Supporting partnership, networking and new ways of working together.** The creation of DPs has contributed towards promoting partnership development in Northern Ireland and encouraging different stakeholders from the public, private and voluntary / community sectors to work together. This has helped to develop networks and skills and to build organisational capacity particularly on a transnational basis, where previous experience of this form of partnership would have been less evident among the DP partners. These benefits of external networking and partnership development also extend to the beneficiary level, bringing a much wider perspective to marginalised groups and disadvantaged areas, contributing in turn to the potential for economic, social and cultural development within these constituencies.

Recommendations

45. Research for this latest phase of evaluation for this evaluation has highlighted a number of other recommendations for implementation over the remainder of the programme period. These include:

- The final evaluation has shown the importance of networking and sharing lessons between the DPs in Rounds 1 and 2 and within the DPs in Round 2. In particular, under the wider remit of the NTN, important lessons in mainstreaming have been identified from Action 3 in Round 1. This networking, sharing of experience and engagement between the NTN and the DPs needs to be maintained as Round 2 continues. In addition to mainstreaming, however, there is an on-going need to bring the learning from Round 1 into Round 2 particularly in relation to developing partnership processes, undertaking transnational co-operation and actions to empower beneficiaries. For example, learning could help to assist projects in Round 2 that are currently at 'minimal empowerment' level to achieve 'partial' or 'deep' empowerment. In addition, DPs could be given guidance on how to develop more integrated forms of transnational co-operation such as joint actions.

It is recommended that the Managing Authority and National Support Structure continue to ensure that the lessons from Round 1 are shared and transferred to the DPs in Round 2. This could be conducted through EQUAL workshops (focusing on particular issues such as partnership or innovation) or the publication of guidance leaflets.

- Although the level of monitoring information has broadly improved as the programme has progressed, it is still evident that DPs have been slow in returning monitoring forms. One way of exerting pressure would be to publish tables that rank the DPs according to their level of quarterly monitoring information and timing of submission. This would clearly highlight the performance across the DPs and place pressure on DPs to complete and return monitoring forms. In cases where compliance is continuously low, the NSS could then hold bilateral meetings with DPs to discuss how the level of monitoring could be improved.

It is recommended that the NSS publish tables that rank the DPs according to their level of quarterly monitoring information and timing of submission and distribute this table to all stakeholders across the programme. DEL should also consider punitive measures to deal with slow spending DPs such as decommitment of money for example.

- Although Round 2 is still in the early stages of development, it is evident that some DPs have made more progress than others in establishing partnership processes. It is understood, however, that not all DPs have made use of the support provided by WEA and some have expressed the view that their partnership may be falling behind as a result. While the DPs will have further opportunities in Action 2 to consolidate their partnerships, it is important that the DPs avail of this support.

It is recommended that the Managing Authority and National Support Structure monitor the development of the DPs in Action 2 and, if required, encourage the DPs to receive additional support and training.

- As the EQUAL Community Initiative will not be continued after 2006 there is a need to ensure that all the lessons from the programme are taken forward to provide an important information resource in the formulation and implementation in other EU or national government initiatives.

At the end of the EQUAL Programme, it is recommended that the Managing Authority, National Support Structure and DPs work together to publish a short document that identifies the key lessons from the programme.

I Background and terms of reference

Background

- 1.1 Over the last ten to fifteen years, European Union (EU) policy has played a key role in the development and implementation of employment programmes in Northern Ireland (NI). In December 1998, this role was firmly established with the endorsement of the European Employment Strategy (EES) during the European Summit in Luxembourg. The Luxembourg process requires the European Commission to adopt a set of guidelines each year for monitoring national employment policies. These guidelines are structured around the four pillars of Employability, Entrepreneurship, Adaptability and Equal Opportunities. The manner in which individual Member States intend to address the set of individual guidelines is encompassed each year in National Employment Action Plans. These are appraised by the Commission and their subsequent implementation is also monitored.
- 1.2 The 1999 Council Regulations, setting out the provisions on the Structural Funds for the 2000-06 period, emphasised the importance of the Structural Funds, and particularly the European Social Fund (ESF), as the principal financial instrument in support of the EES. One of four Structural Funds, the ESF supports measures to:
 - Prevent and combat unemployment;
 - Develop human resources; and
 - Promote Equal Opportunities for all in accessing the labour market.

The purpose and objectives of EQUAL

- 1.3 The EQUAL Community Initiative Programme is structured within this wider European context being funded through the ESF and framed within the four EES pillars. These pillars were later set within the Amsterdam Treaty and the EQUAL Programme also follows from Articles 13 and 137 of that Treaty, which provide a legal basis for combating discrimination based on gender, race, ethnic origin, religious or other beliefs, disability, age or sexual orientation.
- 1.4 In the light of this integrated strategy, the EQUAL Community Initiative Programme aims to test and promote new means of combating all forms of discrimination and inequalities in the labour market, both for those in work and those seeking work, through transnational co-operation.
- 1.5 As noted above, the four pillars of the European Employment Strategy provide a framework for the 'themes' under which EQUAL projects are funded across the EU. Eight themes fall under the pillars, and a ninth relates to the integration of asylum seekers (see Table 1.1).
- 1.6 Each Member State chooses a sub-set of these themes within which it wishes to explore new ways of tackling the problems relevant to discrimination and inequality in the national labour market, rather than focusing on a specific target group. This flexibility for Member States is designed to improve the chances of subsequent mainstreaming of policy outcomes.

Table 1.1: EU-wide themes for EQUAL

Employability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Theme A:</i> 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. • <i>Theme B:</i> Combating racism and xenophobia in relation to the labour market.
Entrepreneurship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Theme C:</i> Opening up the business creation process to all by providing the tools required for setting up in business and for the identification and exploitation of new possibilities for creating employment in urban and rural areas. • <i>Theme D:</i> Strengthening the social economy (the third sector), in particular the services of interest to the community, with a focus on improving the quality of jobs.
Adaptability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Theme E:</i> Promoting lifelong learning and inclusive work practices which encourage the recruitment and retention of those suffering discrimination and inequality in connection with the labour market. • <i>Theme F:</i> Supporting the adaptability of firms and employees to structural economic change and the use of information technology and other new technologies.
Equal Opportunities for Women and Men
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Theme G:</i> Reconciling family and professional life, as well as the reintegration of men and women who have left the labour market, by developing more flexible and effective forms of work organisation and support services. • <i>Theme H:</i> Reducing gender gaps and supporting job de-segregation.
Asylum Seekers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Theme I:</i> Helping the integration of asylum seekers (in relation to the world of work).

Source: European Commission Brochure on EQUAL¹

1.7 The EQUAL Programme, therefore, is **a testing ground for developing and disseminating new ways of delivering employment policies to combat discrimination and inequality** experienced by those seeking access to the labour market and those already within it. It employs a fresh approach to tackling those issues and incorporates six further key principles²:-

- **Partnership:** EQUAL operates by bringing together key players in a geographic area or sector into Development Partnerships (DPs). DPs may choose one of the themes available in their Member State and agree a strategy within which they try out new ways of dealing with problems of discrimination and inequality. Each DP must be linked with at least one DP from another Member State.
- **Innovation:** EQUAL tests and promotes new ways of combating all forms of discrimination and inequalities faced by those groups most disadvantaged in the labour market, both those in work and those seeking work, in particular, discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation and social exclusion. These groups include women, minority ethnic communities including Irish Travellers, people with disabilities, older workers, refugees, ex-prisoners, ex-offenders, drug and alcohol misusers;

¹ Available at www.europa.eu.int/comm/equal

² These are set out in the Communication from the European Commission to the Member States of 14th April 2000.

- **Equal Opportunities:** Equal Opportunities is a cross-cutting feature of the programme. EQUAL also includes action to help the social and vocational integration of asylum seekers;
- **Transnational Co-operation:** Transnational co-operation is a central feature of EQUAL and joint working with a transnational partner is a requirement for participation in the programme. The transnational dimension ensures that lessons are learned across Member States and examples of good practice are exchanged;
- **Mainstreaming:** EQUAL has been designed so that its actions inform policy developments and ensure that policy makers are made aware of lessons arising from its activities. This concept is known as mainstreaming; and
- **Empowerment:** In practice this principle means that those who are targeted for support also have an opportunity to influence the design and the evaluation of the proposed activities.

1.8 EQUAL project activity falls into three phases:

- Action 1: Setting up DPs and transnational co-operation;
- Action 2: Implementing the work programmes of the DPs; and
- Action 3: Thematic networking, dissemination of good practice and making an impact on national policy.

The EQUAL Community Initiative Programme in Northern Ireland

1.9 The EQUAL Community Initiative Programme is positioned within the wider labour market policy context of Northern Ireland (NI) and aims to ensure that:

- Employment opportunities are spread more equally;
- Concentrations of unemployment amongst certain groups in society are reduced;
- Long-term unemployment and inactivity are removed; and
- Welfare dependency is reduced.

1.10 The programme has adopted two of the nine-suggested EU-wide themes as being appropriate to the needs of the NI labour market. The aims of the two themes are as follows:

- *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;
- *Theme H:* Reducing gender gaps and supporting job de-segregation; and
- *Theme I:* The specific needs of asylum-seekers in Northern Ireland are being taken forward on a UK wide basis by the Great Britain EQUAL Programme.

Implementation structures

1.11 The **Northern Ireland EQUAL Monitoring Committee** oversees issues of strategy, policy, monitoring and evaluation in the programme. The Monitoring Committee meets on a biannual basis and is composed of representatives from the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL, the Managing Authority), PROTEUS (the National Support Structure), Office of the First and Deputy First Minister, Department of Enterprise Trade and Industry, Department for Social Development, Department of

Finance and Personnel, The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, Special European Union Programmes Body, and representatives from the voluntary sector, private business and Trade Unions.

- 1.12 The **European Unit of the Department for Employment and Learning** has the overall responsibility for the implementation and delivery of the EQUAL Programme in Northern Ireland (the Managing Authority).
- 1.13 **PROTEUS** is contracted as **National Support Structure (NSS)** to assist with the provision of some of the more specialist Development Partnership support roles. The NSS is contracted to monitor Development Partnership activity, assist with transnational co-operation and offer ongoing advice and guidance to Development Partnerships.
- 1.14 A **National Thematic Network (NTN)** has also been established. It includes representatives from the public, private, community and voluntary sectors and all DPs. The National Thematic Network has four key roles:
1. Adopting a strategic focus ensuring that EQUAL continues to target priority areas;
 2. Identifying, selecting and analysing good practice;
 3. Recommending projects for approval by the Northern Ireland EQUAL Monitoring Committee in Round 2 of EQUAL; and
 4. Developing and agreeing a dissemination strategy.
- 1.15 A **North/South Steering Group** has been set up to facilitate and promote cross-border co-operation between Northern Ireland the Republic of Ireland. Chaired by the Special European Union Programmes Body, the Steering Group involves the Managing Authorities and National Support Structures in both jurisdictions, as well as the Equality Commission for NI and the Equality Authority in the Republic of Ireland.
- 1.16 In addition, a **Joint Support Structure**, involving the Managing Authorities and the NSS from Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland, England and the Republic of Ireland, works to assist with the co-ordination and standardisation of processes and procedures for EQUAL.

Programme schedule

- 1.17 The implementation of the EQUAL was divided into two rounds. The programme schedule is as follows:
- **In the first round of the EQUAL Programme**, Action 1 commenced on the 15th November 2001 and finished on 14th May 2002. During Action 1 Development Partnerships completed a Development Partnership Agreement, Transnational Co-operation Agreement and an Equal Opportunities Action Plan. Action 2 commenced on 15th May 2002 and extended for up to a maximum period of 36 months to enable the Development Partnerships to complete the work programmes agreed during Action 1. Action 3 could have commenced at any time after 15th May 2002, and will finish no later than 14th November 2005; and
 - **In the second round of the EQUAL Programme**, Action 1 commenced on the 11th October 2004 and finished on the 30th June 2005. Action 2 commenced on the 1st July 2005 and extends for up to a maximum period of 24 months to enable the Development Partnerships to complete the work programmes agreed during Action 1. Action 3 may commence at any point after 1st July 2005 and finish no later than 31st December 2007.
- 1.18 Under Round 1 of the EQUAL Programme, the first call for applications was launched on 5th July 2001 and closed on 31st August 2001. A total of 29 applications was

received and following an initial eligibility check, 26 were recommended for full assessment. Of those 26 eligible applications, 23 focused on tackling Employability issues and 3 on Equal Opportunities in the labour market. The total funding requested by the applicants was £11million and the programme budget available in this round was £3.5 million.

1.19 8 applications were successful, 6 under Employability and 2 under the Equal Opportunities. One of the 8 successful applicants withdrew prior to the start of Action 1. Another did not continue on to Action 2³. As a result, only 6 DPs were active in the first Call – 5 in Employability and 1 in Equal Opportunities. A brief description of the DPs in the first call of EQUAL in NI is outlined in Table 1.2(a).

Table 1.2(a): EQUAL projects in Northern Ireland - Round 1

DP Name	Brief Description of Objectives
Employability	
Accord	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To address needs at community level of the target group with specifically designed projects that will access the difficult to reach, economically inactive in deprived areas. To this end, the project aims to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Use innovative methods of introducing marginalized sections of society to training, education and the world of work; ➢ Involve the target groups in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the project, thereby promoting empowerment among target groups; ➢ Improve accessibility for marginalised groups by undertaking projects within their own community; and ➢ Pilot a new approach to attract and retain disadvantaged groups to enhance their basic skills.
Digital Step	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To use digital technologies and popular culture to engage young people in the learning process and focus on research and policy to develop new learning opportunities and models for learning, training and employment in the area of digital media.
Futures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To create a development pathway for 85 very long term unemployed (two years +) and their households in each year of Action 2. The development pathway identifies the barriers that prevent labour market reintegration of the group and works to overcome them. • In addition, the pathway involves an integrated programme of actions tailored to clients needs and designed to assist them toward available opportunities in mainstream and community based measures.
Diversity Matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To challenge barriers to labour market inclusion and develop a programme to unite travellers, women, disabled and minority ethnic groups in a common approach to labour market discrimination and under-representation. • Preparation and piloting of a cross-sectoral diversity programme for employers and those most marginalised in the workplace or gaining access to the workplace. • Establishment of a cross-party forum on diversity and preparation of a public awareness campaign on diversity.
Personal Progression System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To create pathways to employment for those who have served a custodial sentence. • To focus on engaging employer groups to visit institutions and see for

³ Work Life Balance did not transfer from Action 1 into Action 2 and the project ended in May 2002.

DP Name	Brief Description of Objectives
	<p>themselves the quality of the training being provided, and the recruitment potential among prisoners; and to establish networks which will help break down the barriers to inclusion of offenders in the workplace.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To increase understanding of the recruitment potential of offenders. • To support prisoners in planning for employment through provision of individual training programmes, during and after custody.
Equal Opportunities	
Young Women Making it Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure marginalised young women have access onto a pathway of further training, further education and employment. The purpose is to facilitate access and return to the labour market of young mothers, young women travellers, young disabled, minority ethnic and young lesbian women, especially from rural communities. • To equip young women with new skills, qualifications and experience to challenge barriers which hinder their employment prospects.

1.20 A total of 24 applications were received for Round 2 of EQUAL. Of these, 13 were successful, 5 under the Equal Opportunity theme and 8 under Employability. Funding totalling £5.16m has been allocated for Round 2. As noted above, Action 1 under Round 2 started at the beginning of October 2004. A brief description of the DPs in the second call of EQUAL in NI is outlined in Table 1.2(b).

Table 1.2(b): EQUAL projects in Northern Ireland - Round 2

DP Name	Brief Description of Objectives
Employability	
Key Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To assist integration into employment for those who are hard to employ. • To enhance the progression of individuals who are in low paid employment but lack the necessary skills to help them integrate and develop their potential. • To engage employers, who have the capacity to offer employment.
Diversity Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop a diversity management process that fits easily within existing local, national and European quality management excellence models. Within this there are 5 objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ To explore the use of diversity management processes in NI and to gather examples of good practice researching multiple identity, long term unemployment and their relationship with their needs of employers; ➢ Develop and pilot a diversity management process with an SME, statutory body and a community/ voluntary sector organisation ➢ Disseminate innovative practice, processes and programme outcomes; and ➢ Work with a transnational partnership on the usage of diversity management processes in Europe and their potential transferability.
Beyond Caring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To examine ways of facilitating access and overcoming barriers to employment for those who are homebound, in particular those with caring responsibilities and disabilities. To allow progression through support, guidance, training, work experience, and vocational qualifications into sustainable employment.

DP Name	Brief Description of Objectives
Reachout programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The aims of Reachout are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ To effect labour market entry of those with a history of custody; ➢ To impact on mainstream policy; ➢ To influence policy makers in the targeting of resources; and ➢ To build a 'second stage' employability model by constructing an interface between the employability measures pioneered by the PPS project currently mainstreamed by the NI Prison Service and the needs of employers with 'hard to fill' vacancies.
Supported Employment in Action (SEA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To address the barriers faced by people with disabilities accessing and staying in employment. The DP will bring together a partnership of key stakeholders and policy makers to strategically review the existing social and economic policies and practices relating to people with disabilities. The DP will test bed the model of Supported Employment as an alternative to traditional vocational training and employment for those with disabilities.
Employability Access Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To pilot and evaluate how human resource policy and practices in local health trusts and local government can be developed to increase access to jobs, within these sectors, for people who are furthest from the labour market.
Employment for Autism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The DP will bring together key stakeholders in the statutory and voluntary sector in the Greater Belfast Area to work alongside people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ADS) to develop a programme of support and training to enable people with ASD to tackle the specific barriers they face in accessing employment.
The Engage Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To examine how the employment needs of homeless people can be best addressed and to develop a sustainable model of best practice for promoting pathways to employment and social inclusion of homeless people.
Equal Opportunities	
Promoting Opportunities for Inclusion in Social Care (POISE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To explore staff recruitment and retention issues in the care sector in NI focusing initially in the North Down and Ards / North and West Belfast areas with a view to mainstreaming its findings throughout NI. • Objectives include the development of measures to combat attitudes that inhibit women's entry to and progression within the labour market. • Working with employers to adopt working practices that enable women to progress within employment. • Measures to encourage men and women to enter professions in which they are traditionally underrepresented. • Facilitation of unemployed people and school leavers to join the care workforce.
Women in Rural Areas and Investment in Self Employment (WRAISE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop an innovative methodology for supporting women in rural areas to start and run their own businesses successfully.
Women in Non-traditional Sectors (WINS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports women into employment who are currently excluded from the labour market as a result of occupational segregation and other barriers, including lack of childcare, low educational attainment, discrimination on the basis of race, disability or sexual orientation.
Possibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify the obstacles which inhibit lone parent entry into the labour

DP Name	Brief Description of Objectives
	<p>market and lead to economic inactivity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To review current interventions aimed at improving lone parents access to employment and enhancing employability. • To identify gaps in provision and make recommendations for the development of appropriate responses. • To demonstrate ways in which existing interventions can become more effective through additionality, mainstreaming and interagency work. • To highlight existing models of good practice and pilot an innovative model of community based intervention which can be replicated. • To disseminate and recommend the replication and mainstreaming of effective policy and practice domestically, transnationally and on a cross border basis.
Helios	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure that equal opportunities and empowerment are central planks of DP ethos, principle and practice for all partners and stakeholders. • To review, and develop enhanced appreciation of, policies and practice impacting on women's entry to training and employment in construction trades. • To review, and develop enhanced awareness of, barriers experienced by women attempting entry to training and employment in construction trades. • To provide a gender specific Equal Opportunities' awareness programme for tutors instructing women considering entry to training and eventual employment in construction trades. • To provide an innovative supported training programme for women considering further training and eventual employment in construction trades. • To develop practical lessons of what works and doesn't from experience of programme delivery, and disseminate learning to impact on policy and practice in favour of women considering entry to construction trades. • Based on programme experience and learning, develop and propose policy and practice improvements, where appropriate, in favour of women considering entry to construction trades. • To work with DEL and other related organisations to review, and where appropriate add value to, any government policies regarding modern apprenticeship/traineeship requirements and frameworks. • Seek to establish more effective pathways to reduce the existing barriers that women experience in attempting entry to 'non-traditional trades'.

Evaluation objectives

1.21 As requested in the terms of reference, this report will focus on the following elements discussed in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3: Required focus of the evaluation

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The labour market context of EQUAL, especially the inequality issues that EQUAL aims to address.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The implementation and delivery of EQUAL - this must include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Selection of DPs and what type of organisations took part; ➤ The setting up of DPs; ➤ The role of the NSS in monitoring and supporting DPs; ➤ Analysis of the dynamics of DPs; and ➤ The effectiveness of the monitoring system, including the extent to which the EQUAL Common Database has been used.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieving Objectives - this will require an analysis of how well EQUAL has met the targets outlined in the Northern Ireland EQUAL CIP. Monitoring indicators for EQUAL have been agreed and are laid out in the CIP. Monitoring data should be collated via application forms, although some should be collated as part of the evaluation and via routine monitoring visits made by the NSS.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thematic Evaluation - this must include an assessment of the effectiveness of the key principles of EQUAL: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Partnership; ➤ Innovation; ➤ Equal Opportunities; ➤ Transnationality; ➤ Mainstreaming; and ➤ Empowerment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of EQUAL - this must analyse: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What effect EQUAL had on national/regional/local/sectoral policy; and ➤ What effect EQUAL had on individuals.

Source: Terms of Reference for the Final Evaluation of the European Equal Community Initiative Programme for Northern Ireland, 2000-2006

1.22 The terms of reference issued by DEL stated that the evaluation was to encompass a second interim report and a final evaluation report. The second interim report, completed in December 2004, focused on Action 2 of the first round and progress towards Action 3 and the launch of the second round. This report represents the final evaluation report. It is important to note, however, that when this report was completed (September 2005), Round 1 was in the final month of completion and the DPs had just embarked in Action 2 in Round 2, the main period of implementation. This means that in September 2005, the full impacts from Round 1 were only emerging and that the impacts from Round 2 were not yet evident.

1.23 Accordingly, this report provides an update on the emerging Round 1 impacts (i.e. Action 2 and 3) and the initial work underway in Round 2 (i.e. Action 1 and plans for Action 2). In addition, where relevant, this report reflects back to the work of the previous evaluators of EQUAL in NI, who produced the mid-term evaluation report in December 2003⁴, largely focusing on the launch of EQUAL in NI and activity under Action 1 of Round 1. In effect, **this report aims to present a consolidated assessment of the EQUAL programme in NI since 2000 and provide** an update of the December 2004 Second Interim Report, completed by PricewaterhouseCoopers

⁴ TL Associates (2003) *Mid-Term Evaluation Report of the European EQUAL Community Initiative Programme for Northern Ireland 200-2006*, December 2003.

(PwC). This **consolidated and ‘longitudinal’ picture is also important in capturing the extent to which recommendations highlighted in previous reports, have been actioned.**

Evaluation methodology

1.24 Research for this Final Evaluation Report was undertaken between early June 2004 and early August 2005. Key elements of the research (and the previous Second Interim Report of December 2004) were:

- Discussions of progress to date with members of the **EQUAL Evaluation Steering Group**;
- Review of the data relating to the **changing labour market** in Northern Ireland and a review of the changing policy context (with a particular focus on updating trends since the time of the mid-term evaluation completed at the end of 2003);
- **Review of relevant documentation, selection, communication and administration procedures.** Documents reviewed included: Community Initiative Programme Document; the First Interim Evaluation Report; EQUAL Newsletters; Annual Implementation Reports; guidance documents published by PROTEUS; minutes of project selection process for Round 2; the EQUAL Communication Strategy; and, the EQUAL Publicity strategy;
- **Review of indicators.** This review involved an analysis of financial allocation and verified spend across Actions 1, 2 and 3 of Round 1 and Action 1 of Round 2. It also entailed an analysis of progress reports and monitoring returns to examine project activity in regard to issues such as the number of people benefiting, a breakdown of beneficiaries by type, nature of activities that were implemented and DP outputs;
- Review of **project applications and partnership documentation.** Documents reviewed included Development Partnership Agreements (Round 1 and Round 2), Transnational Co-operation Agreements (Round 1 and Round 2), Development Partnership applications for Action 3, the project level evaluations and the Development Partnership’s Equal Opportunity Strategies;
- Interviews with **key informants** relating to the programme, including representatives from the European Unit of the Department for Employment and Learning, PROTEUS, members of the National Thematic Network, members of the policy community in the Department for Employment and Learning; members of the Monitoring Committee; Development Partnership Managers, consultants responsible for undertaking evaluations of the individual Developmental Partnerships, and representatives of the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB);
- **Case studies** of each of the six Developmental Partnerships under Round 1⁵ and six Developmental Partnerships under Round 2. With regard to the case studies for Round 2, these were selected on the basis of a number of key variables to ensure broad representation across the programme as outlined in Table 1.4.

⁵ The case studies included in the December 2004 report were updated for the purposes of this Final Evaluation Report.

Table 1.4: Selection of Round 2 case studies against key variables

Name of DP	Employability Theme A	Equal Opportunities Theme H	Target group	Geographical location
Possibilities		✓	Lone parents	Across Northern Ireland
Women in Rural Areas and Investment in Self Employment (WRAISE)		✓	Women	Rural areas
Helios		✓	Women	The North West of Northern Ireland
Supported Employment in Action (SEA)	✓		Disabilities	Across Northern Ireland
The Engage Programme	✓		Homeless	Belfast and Bangor
Employment for Autism	✓		Individuals with Autistic Spectrum Disorder	Across Northern Ireland

- In each case, in-depth interviews were undertaken with the lead partner and then up to three representatives of partners on the DPs. The interviewees were selected using ‘non-probability sampling’ to ensure a broad representation of informants across various sectors including the public and community/voluntary sector, interest organisations (i.e. travellers’ and women’s groups) and private business where relevant. The case studies for Round 1 are included in Annex A and the case studies for Round 2 in Annex B.
- **DP survey** with Round 1 DPs to supplement the case studies of Round 1 projects and to update on their progress to date; and
- **Beneficiary surveys** with Round 1 projects to gauge the impact of the Round 1 projects at the individual level and the importance of soft outcomes. To do this, the evaluation team worked through the DPs to circulate beneficiary surveys for return to PwC. These surveys provide important qualitative evidence for this evaluation report, but could not be considered to be robustly representative in statistical terms.

Report structure

1.25 The structure of the evaluation report follows closely the focus of the evaluation as required by the terms of reference (as set out previously in Table 1.3). The paragraphs below present an overview of the content of each chapter.

- **Chapter 2: Labour market context of EQUAL.** This chapter examines the relevance of the thematic priorities identified for Northern Ireland under the EQUAL

Programme. The chapter draws on the labour market context for the entire period of the implementation of EQUAL in NI. The chapter analyses key labour market metrics and demographic and inequality issues and assesses the legislative and policy context.

- **Chapter 3: Implementation of EQUAL.** This chapter reviews the implementation and delivery of EQUAL from 2001 to August 2005. On the basis of financial monitoring and project level indicators, it reviews the implementation of Actions 1, 2 and 3 of Round 1 and Action 1 of Round 2. This chapter also considers the level of North-South co-operation in the programme and how the Equal Opportunities principle has been addressed.
- **Chapter 4: Progress on key principles of EQUAL.** This chapter examines how four of the six key principles of EQUAL have been evident in the implementation of the programme to date. It examines the four principles of partnership, transnationality, innovation and empowerment.
- **Chapter 5: Impact and mainstreaming of EQUAL.** This chapter analyses the impact that the EQUAL Programme has had on the targeted groups. Additionally, it examines how mainstreaming (horizontal and vertical) has been co-ordinated in the Programme overall, drawing on evidence from within each individual Development Partnership. The emphasis within this Final Evaluation Report in this chapter is mostly on Round 1 impacts, and emerging/ potential impacts in terms of Round 2, given the stage of implementation of Round 2.
- **Chapter 6: Conclusions and recommendations.** This chapter summarises the main findings that have emerged from the evaluation. It also reflects back on recommendations previously made (in the two earlier evaluation reports) and how these have been progressed and in turn the impact of this on the EQUAL programme. Finally, in light of the findings of this latest phase of research, the chapter sets out key recommendations for the remainder of the delivery period of EQUAL in NI.

II Labour market context of EQUAL

Introduction

- 2.1 This chapter examines the relevance of the thematic priorities identified for Northern Ireland under the EQUAL Programme. The chapter draws on the labour market context for the entire period of the implementation of EQUAL in NI. The chapter analyses key labour market metrics and demographic and inequality issues and assesses the legislative and policy context. Then, by comparing recent developments in policy and the labour market with the environment as it existed when the EQUAL initiative was prepared, the chapter examines the ongoing relevance of EQUAL, the impact of any contextual changes and how the programme fits with existing policies on employment and social inclusion.
- 2.2 The remainder of the chapter is structured as follows:
- **Labour market**
 - Employability; and
 - Equal Opportunities for women and men.
 - **Policy environment**
 - Employability; and
 - Equal Opportunities for women and men.

Labour market and employability

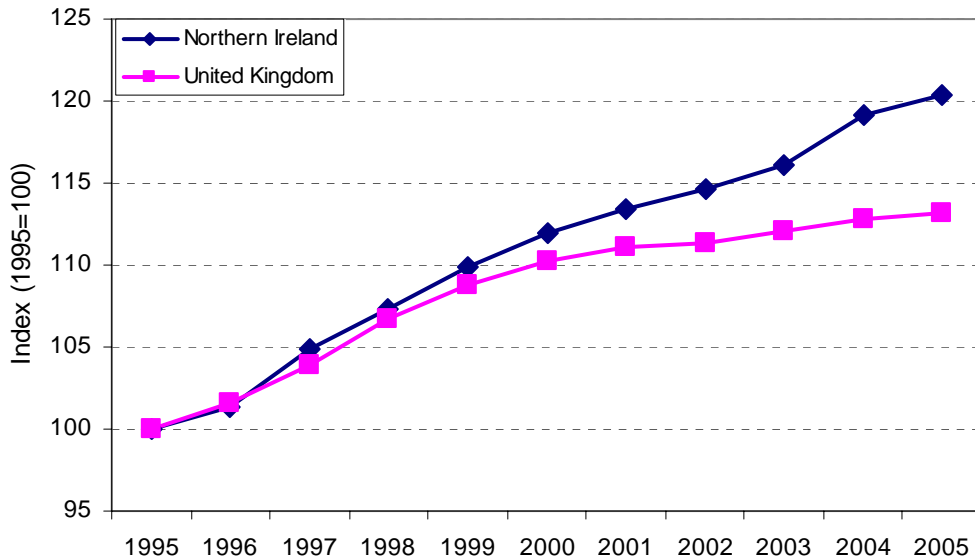
Introduction

- 2.3 Theme A seeks to promote the employability of the working age population by facilitating access and return to the labour market for those who have difficulty in being integrated or re-integrated into the labour market. However, **despite significant improvements in the labour market in headline terms (rising employment and falling unemployment), a number of structural weaknesses remain.** Consequently, the labour market remains characterised by a **number of marginalised groups** such as **the long-term male unemployed, youth unemployed and 'Status 0' individuals.**

Employment

- 2.4 Since the 1990s, NI has experienced a sustained period of growth in terms of employee jobs, as shown in Figure 2.1. Indeed, from 2000 to 2005, the total number of employee jobs has increased by 48,000, an increase of approximately 7.5% over the period. This rate of growth is almost three times that experienced in the UK (2.6%) as a whole.

Figure 2.1: Employee jobs 1995-2005: NI and UK



Source: Office for National Statistics

2.5 An examination of the composition of the overall increase in the level of employment, between 2000 and 2005, reveals a number of significant structural changes. The overall increase is dominated by a number of key trends:

- A significant rise (15%) in part-time jobs especially of women in low value added sectors such as wholesale and retail trade (15%);
- Health and social work was the single largest contributor to the growth with an increase of 17,000 employee jobs. However, on a more negative note, this significant rise was offset by a similar number of job losses in the manufacturing sector;
- Real estate, renting and business activities was the largest growing sector increasing by 29% over the period. The increase was marked by the employment of twice as many males (9,500) as females (4,750); and
- The public sector made up 40% of all service sector growth (69,500) over the period.

Unemployment

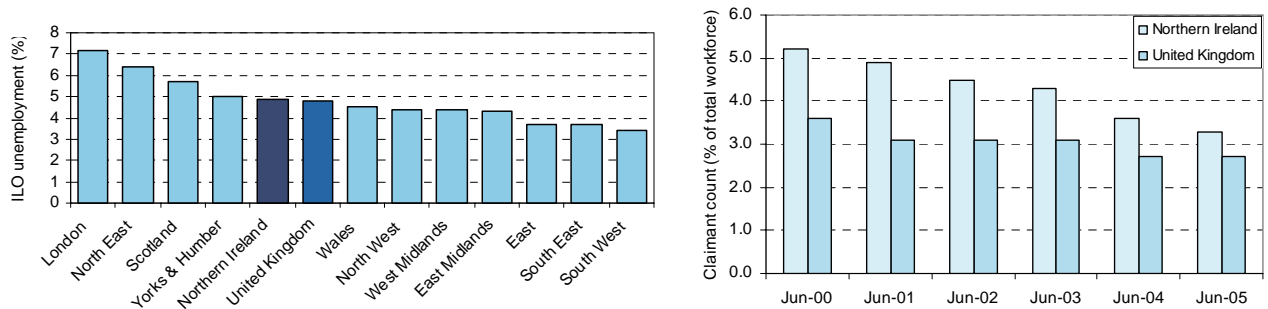
2.6 Accompanying the rise in employee jobs, NI has experienced a marked fall in unemployment. Analysis suggests that unemployment has fallen by approximately 30% to 36,000 (as per the ILO measure⁶) and 31% to 28,000 (as per the claimant measure⁷) over in the last five years. This has meant that unemployment levels in Northern Ireland

⁶ International Labour Organisation (ILO) measure of unemployment relates to people without a job who are available to start work within two weeks and either looked for work in the previous four weeks or were waiting to start a job they had already obtained. The ILO unemployment rate is the number of ILO unemployed divided by the economically active population.

⁷ The claimant count measure of unemployment is the number of people in receipt of unemployment benefit at Employment Service local offices.

are now very close to the UK average, particularly in relation to ILO figures, as detailed in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: ILO and claimant unemployment 2004: NI and UK

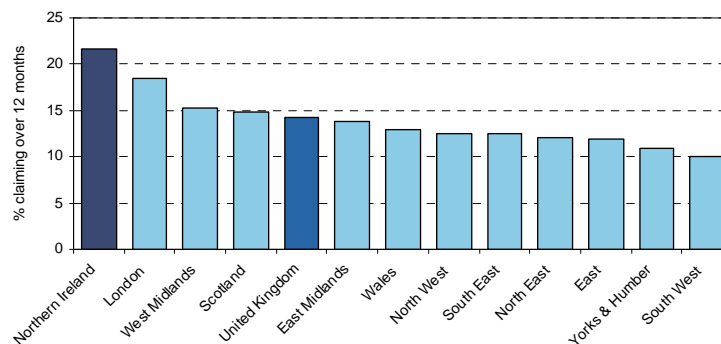


Source: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

2.7 However, in spite of the improvements made in terms of employment growth and the fall in unemployment over the last five years, **NI continues to face major structural weaknesses** in the labour market. These are examined below.

2.8 In NI, long-term unemployment as a percentage of total unemployment, for instance, is extremely high. Official labour market data for mid-2005 shows that approximately 1 in 5 (22%) of all claimants have been unemployed for 12 months or more. While NI long-term unemployment has fallen significantly in recent years (falling by 7 percentage points since 2000), it remains higher than all the Great Britain (GB) Government Office Regions and significantly higher (by approximately 7 percentage points) than the UK average rate.

Figure 2.3: Regional long-term unemployment



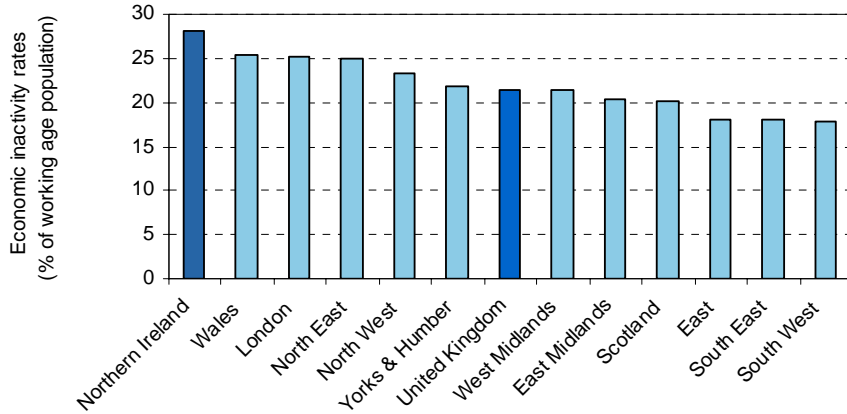
Source: Office for National Statistics

Economic inactivity

2.9 While the trend in unemployment is largely positive, the same cannot be said for economic inactivity. The most recent (March-May 2005) economic inactivity statistics reveals that there are 530,000 economically inactive persons⁸ of working age, or 27.7%, in Northern Ireland. This is significantly higher than the UK average (21.4%) and **places NI at the top of the regional economic inactivity table**, as shown in Figure 2.4.

⁸ An economically inactive person is someone of working age (for males this is aged 16-64 and for females this is 16-59), neither in unemployment nor employed according to the ILO definition.

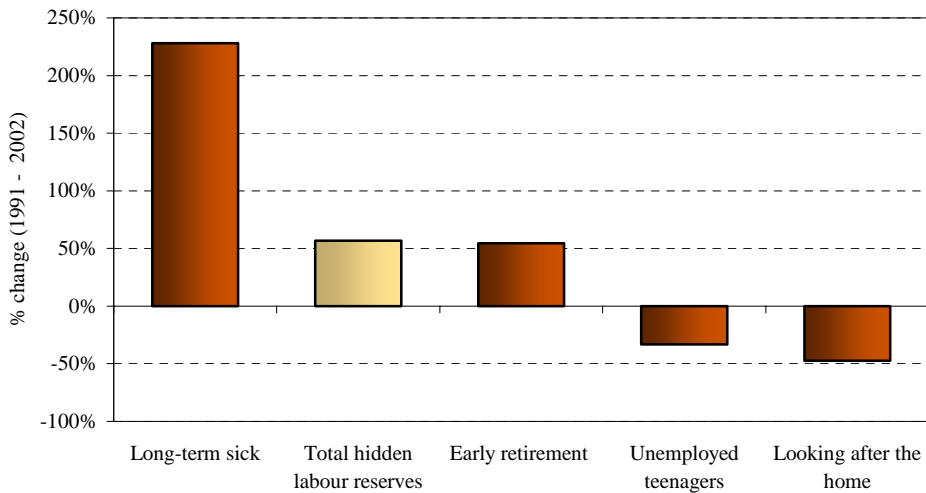
Figure 2.4: Regional economic inactivity rates



Source: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

2.10 Work recently undertaken by PwC for the Department for Employment and Learning on levels of economic inactivity in NI reveals that in 2002, individuals who were registered as long-term sick or disabled made up approximately 68% of the all the economically inactive groups examined, those looking after the home made up 17% and those retiring early from the workforce made up 14%. The remaining 1% consisted of unemployed teenagers regarded as “Status 0”. Figure 2.5 shows how these respective groups have changed since 1991.

Figure 2.5: Change in hidden labour reserves in NI between 1991 and 2002



Source: PricewaterhouseCoopers

2.11 Further analysis of the data suggests that **the problem of unemployment and inactivity continues to affect disproportionately certain groups and geographical regions** within Northern Ireland.

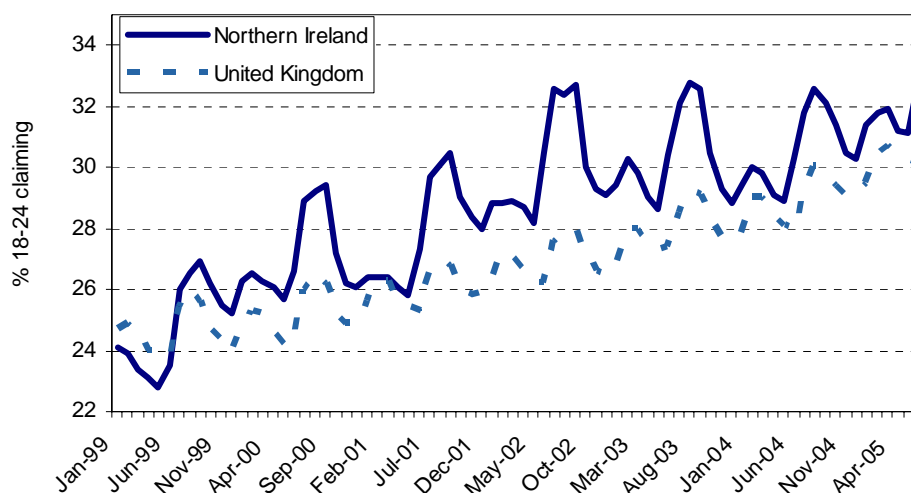
Male long-term unemployment

2.12 In particular, long-term unemployment continues to affect men. Most recent data (June 2005) shows that of 6,055 individuals who were long-term unemployed, 4,975 (or 82%) of them were male. Indeed, approximately 23% of all unemployed males in NI have been unemployed for 12 months or more.

Youth unemployment

2.13 Similarly, the statistics show that youth unemployment continues to exceed the UK average and is now 4.9 percentage points higher than five years ago. 33% (10,000) of the total number unemployed are less than 24 years old, as shown in Figure 2.6.

Figure 2.6: Youth unemployment: NI and UK (% of total unemployed)



Source: Office for National Statistics

“Status 0” young people

2.14 In addition to the youth unemployment cohort, recent work undertaken by PwC for the Department for Employment and Learning shows that there were around 1,500 young people aged 16 and 17 (66% of whom were male) who were not involved in employment, education or training. Often referred to as “Status 0” or more recently as NEET (Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training), research on this group suggests that young people who are economically inactive in the transition between school and employment, become both discouraged about their chances of employment and at the same time, become less attractive to potential employers. While the size of this group represents only 3% of their respective population cohort, the “Status 0” group are a growing concern as these individuals are more likely to experience spells of long-term unemployment or inactivity as adults.

Community variations

2.15 Analysis of key socio-economic LFS⁹ data also suggests marked differences between the employability of the two main religious communities in Northern Ireland. For example, in 2003, of the total number in employment (aged 16+), approximately 56% were Protestant and the remaining 44% were Roman Catholic. Unsurprisingly, an

⁹ See 2003 Labour Force Survey: Religion Report Update for further details

examination of the religious composition of the unemployed (aged 16+) reveals that Roman Catholics make up almost 55% of the total, while Protestant make up the remaining 45%. Despite the sharp fall in the overall level of unemployment in NI in recent years, unemployment rates (16+) for Catholics (7.2%) are 2.4 percentage points higher than their Protestant (4.8%) counterparts.

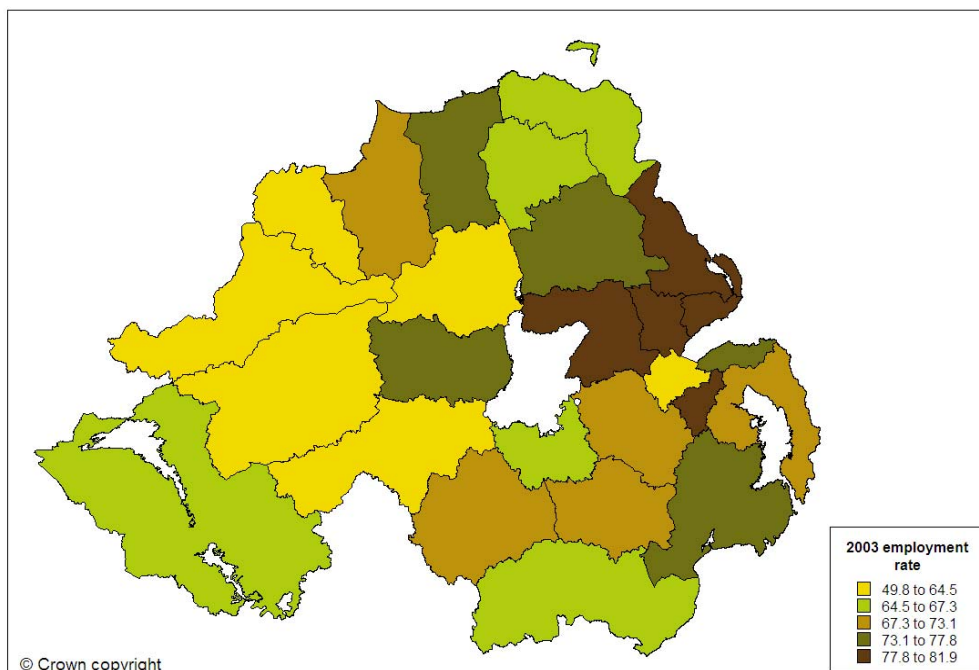
Disabled people

- 2.16 The most recent Labour force Survey (Spring 2005) shows that there were 213,000 individuals of working age with long-term disabilities, with an equal split between males and females. Of the total number disabled, 35% (74,500) were in employment, 62% (132,000) were economically inactive and the remaining 3% were unemployed (6,500).
- 2.17 Individuals with a disability are less well qualified than non-disabled persons. In particular, 12% of disabled persons held higher qualifications compared with 26% of non-disabled persons. Just under half (47%) of disabled persons had no qualifications, over twice the proportion of non-disabled persons (19%).

Sub-regional spatial variations

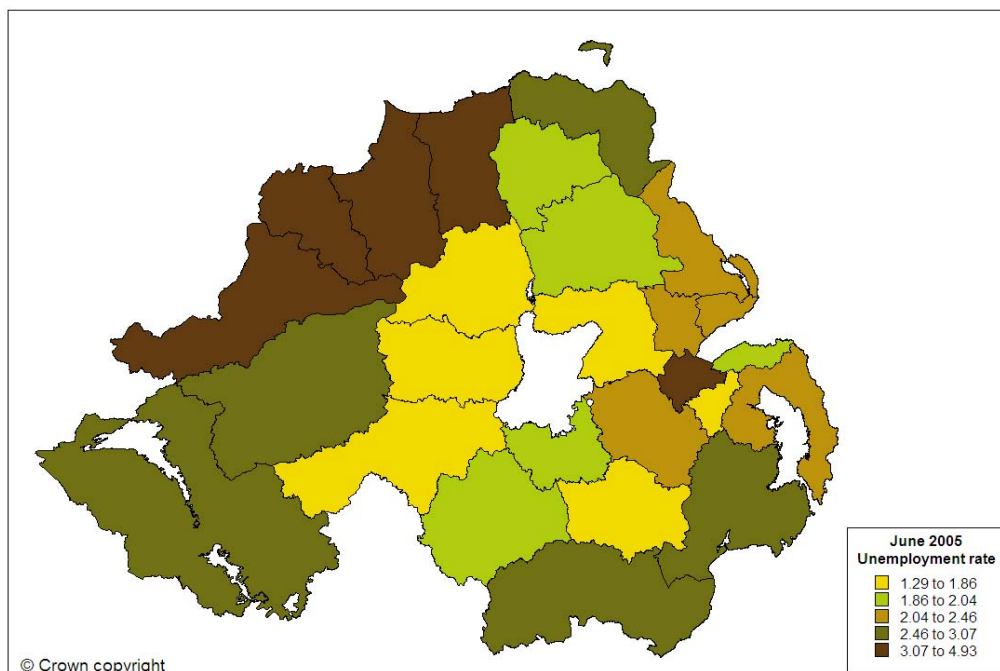
- 2.18 Analysis of sub-regional labour market data reveals significant differences in employment, unemployment and activity rates (see Figures 2.7 and 2.8). For example, employment rates range from 81% (Newtownabbey) to 50% (Derry) and are, in general, higher in the East of NI. Similarly, claimant unemployment ranges from 4.9% (Derry) to 1.3% (Banbridge) and is lower in the East of NI.
- 2.19 Lower employment rates and higher unemployment rates in **district councils** in the West of NI can be explained by the fact that these areas tend to be characterised by their rural location and have a high dependence on a declining agriculture sector. Lower unemployment rates in the district councils in the East of NI can be explained by the high degree of commuting to major places of work such as Belfast and, to a lesser extent, Derry.

Figure 2.7: District Council employment



Source: PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP

Figure 2.8: District Council unemployment



Source: PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP

2.20 Similarly, there are spatial variations in respect of economic inactivity. Work undertaken by PwC suggests that levels of inactivity of the 16+ population ranged from 12.3% (Strabane) of the 16+ population to 7.2% (Castlereagh) in 2002.

Labour market and equal opportunities for women and men

Introduction

2.21 Theme H seeks to promote Equal Opportunities for both women and men. In doing so, the programme aims to reduce gender gaps and support job desegregation. However, as the preceding chapter illustrates, the NI labour market is still characterised by a significant gender gap with respect to full-time employment and self-employment, economic activity, progression and pay. These gender differentials are despite the background of better educational performance by female school leavers and higher female participation in further and higher education.

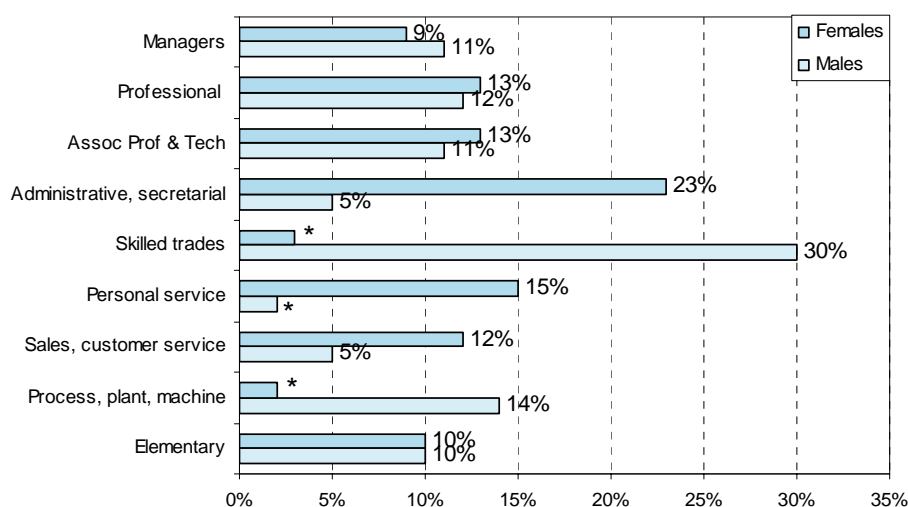
Employment

2.22 Despite recent improvements in total employment, disaggregating the headline figures suggests **the continuation of a segregated labour market in which women tend to work part-time, have lower status and are in lower value-added jobs.**

2.23 In March 2005, 49% of all female employees worked part-time compared with 18% of male employees. Furthermore, 74% of all part-time employees were women. These statistics are significant. Women are clearly an underemployed group who could be more fully utilised as a labour resource. For example, in Summer 2005, 8% of economically inactive women stated that they wanted to work but had not sought work in the previous 4 weeks or were unable to start work.

- 2.24 An examination of the industrial breakdown of employment reveals that both men and women are strongly represented in the service sector. Most recent data shows that the service sector accounts for 65% of all male employees and 93% of all female employees. In contrast with men, lower proportions of women work in other sectors: only 6% of total female employee jobs are in the manufacturing sector compared to 20% of males. More females work in the health and social services sector (26%) than any other sector. This compares with 6% of males.
- 2.25 Analysis of employees by occupation reveals a similar gender gap, as presented in Figure 2.9.

Figure 2.9: Employment by occupation males and females, Summer 2005



Source: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

- 2.26 Spring 2005 data shows that only 9% of working women are managers and/or senior officials, compared with 11% of men. Furthermore, of the total number of managers in NI, women make up only 40%. Similarly, while approximately the same proportions of males and females who are in employment (12% and 13% respectively) are in occupations deemed 'professional', males continue to make up a slightly higher proportion (53%) of the total number of professional positions than females (47%). 23% of all female jobs are concentrated in administrative / secretarial occupations compared to only 5% of male jobs.
- 2.27 Of the 116,000 people self-employed in NI, females make up only 15% of the total compared to males (85%). Whilst accounting for one-quarter (25%) of the total number of male jobs, self-employment makes up around 5% of female employment.

Unemployment and economic inactivity

- 2.28 Both the ILO and claimant unemployment rate for women is comparatively low. Most recent labour market data suggests that in terms of ILO unemployment only 3.6% of women are unemployed compared to 5.9% for men. Similarly, claimant count statistics suggest that only 1.8% of women are unemployed compared to 4.7% for men. In addition, females tend to be unemployed for shorter periods of time. Only 16% of all those females who are currently unemployed have been out of employment for 12 months or more. This compares favourably with their male counterparts, where the figure is 7 percentage points higher (at 23%).

2.29 While official statistics¹⁰ clearly indicate that women are less likely to be unemployed than males, **their labour market participation has been hampered by traditionally high levels of economic inactivity.** Of the 295,000 people currently economically inactive (of working age), 58% were female whilst only 42% were male.

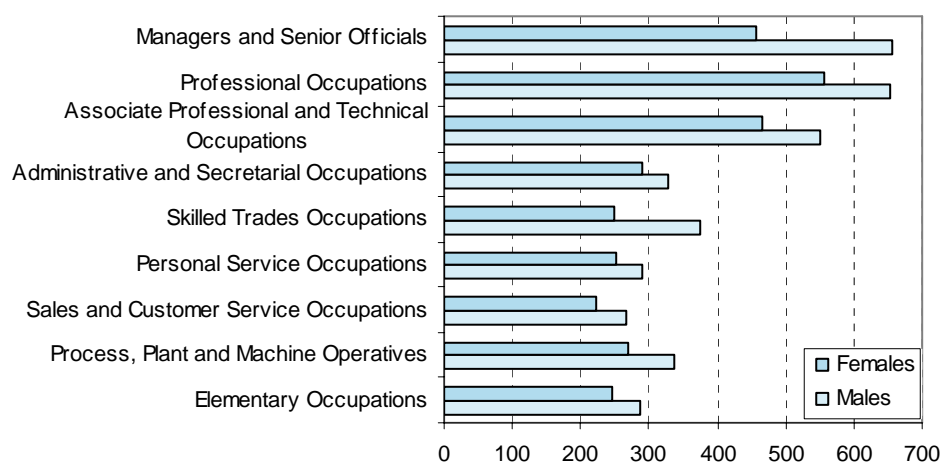
2.30 Recent work undertaken by PwC suggests that the main reason for inactivity amongst women of working age was due to a large number undertaking the task of 'looking after the home'. This finding is also suggested by the latest statistics on economic activity amongst women, which shows that activity rates were affected by the presence of dependent children. Latest data suggests that, for those with dependent children under the age of 16, the rate was 58% compared with 67% for those without any such dependent children. Similarly, women with three dependent children had a lower economic activity rate (56%) than those with one or two dependent children (61%).

Earnings

2.31 The average full-time gross weekly wage for females in April 2004 was £382, 17.7% lower than the average male rate (£464)¹¹. While these figures represent a narrowing in the gender pay gap since 2003 (when the difference was approximately 20%) the difference remains high relative to UK Government Office Regions. The continued presence of a gender pay gap may partly reflect the introduction of the National Minimum Wage, which has had a greater effect on female average earnings than on male earnings since more women than men were earning below the threshold when the minimum wage was introduced in April 1999.

2.32 An examination of occupational pay differentials reveals that estimates for all persons shows that, overall, 'professionals' were the highest paid occupational group (£606) in April 2004. For males, 'Managers and senior officials' (£656) was the highest paid group, with 'elementary occupations' (£286) being the lowest paid. For females, the highest paid major group was 'professionals' (£558). The 'Sales, customer service' occupational group was the lowest paid category (£224) for women (see Figure 2.10).

Figure 2.10: Average gross weekly earning by major occupation group and gender April 2004



Source: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

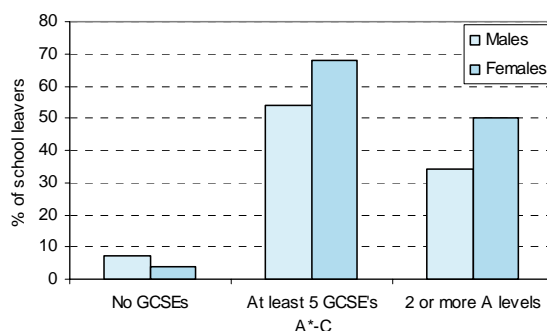
¹⁰ Labour Force Survey, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

¹¹ See Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (2004), Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Education and attainment

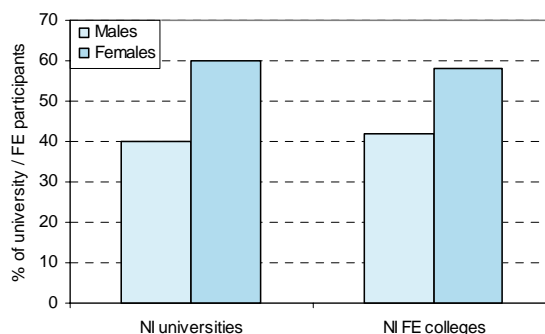
- 2.33 The **gender differentials in terms of labour market participation and earnings**, outlined above, are somewhat surprising given the fact that **females leaving school tend to be better qualified than males and are more likely to progress to higher education.**
- 2.34 Most recent data on the qualifications and destinations of schools leavers (2003/04) shows that 52% of girls left school with at least one A-level and 50% with two or more A-levels, compared with 36% and 34% of boys. Similarly, 68% of girls left school with at least 5 GCSE grades A*-C compared with 54% of boys. Only 4% of girls left school with no GCSE qualifications compared with 7% of boys (see Figures 2.11 and 2.12).

Figure 2.11: Qualifications on leaving school 2003/04



Source: Department of Education (NI)

Figure 2.12: Participation in NI universities and FE colleges 2003/04



Source: Department of Education (NI)

- 2.35 After leaving school (2003/04) 72% of girls progressed to further or higher education compared to 53% of boys. In 2003/04, 60% of all students enrolled at the NI universities are women. Similarly, of all enrolments at NI Further Education Colleges, 58% were female.
- 2.36 Analysis of subject choices in higher education (2003/04) reveals that while only 37% of undergraduates who enrolled on the first year of science courses were female, they made up 84% of full-time undergraduates in the first year of medicine, dentistry and subjects allied to medicine.

Policy and legislative developments

2.37 There have been a number of policy developments since the consultation and policy review process for the EQUAL Programme for Northern Ireland took place in 2000. These are outlined and discussed below.

- **Suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly.** Established as part of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement (1998), the NI Assembly met for the first time in July 1998 with the Executive being formed in late 1999. The two main suspensions of the Assembly occurred from 11th February 2000 to 29th May 2000 and then again at midnight on the 14th October 2002. The Assembly has remained in suspension with responsibility transferring to four caretaker Ministers under direct rule.
- **The Task Force for Employability and Long Term Unemployment.** Established as part of the Programme for Government, the aim of the Task Force is to prepare an action plan which integrates actions across government departments and agencies to address problems of employability. The strategy for employability for Northern Ireland was launched in December 2002. Following on from this, additional local Task Forces have been established to address high levels of unemployment in Belfast and the North West. They include the West Belfast and Greater Shankill Task Forces which submitted recommendations for approaches to tackle unemployment in these localities. These are now being taken forward by DEL as part of its **Targeted Initiatives Programme** which is taking place in each Task Force area. The Targeted Initiatives Programme will work closely with the community and voluntary sectors to customise approaches to the particular needs to each local area. The programme will examine new approaches and services such as **Job Assist Centres** hosted by a consortium of community based organisations, and help with product development.
- **DEL's, Public Service Agreement (2004-2007).** This Agreement establishes two joint targets with the Social Security Agency:
 - Target one aims to 'promote economic, social and personal development through high quality learning, research and skills training' and has a budget of £574 million; and
 - Target two aims to 'help people into employment and promote good working practices' and has a budget of £106 million.

2.38 As well as the policy developments, a number of legislative changes have also taken place within the themes of discrimination and inequality in the labour market. The main elements of the legislation are outlined in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Key legislative initiatives relevant to EQUAL

Description of key elements	
EU-Level	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The EU issued two Directives to be implemented by November 2003, which broaden the notion of equality from the original, narrower concept of gender only. • The European Union designated 2003 as European Year of People with Disabilities. • The theme adopted for the year by the UK was 'Promoting Rights and Participation'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Race Directive aims to ensure that racial discrimination <i>is</i> outlawed at the European level specifically with regard to employment but also with respect to training and the provision of goods and services within the EU. • The Employment Directive requires member states to introduce measures to combat unfair discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, religion or belief; disability and age in the areas of employment and training.
Northern Ireland Level	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From 1 October 2004, for the first time the DDA will cover small employers - those with fewer than 15 staff and will extend the scope to previously excluded sectors such as partners in firms. ALL employers will have to ensure that they do not discriminate against disabled employees or job applicants because of their disability. In addition, service providers will have to consider making changes to the physical features which make it unreasonably difficult for disabled people to use their services.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2003 came into force on 2 December 2003. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is now unlawful for employers and others to discriminate on grounds of sexual orientation in the areas of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Employment; and ➢ Vocational training, including further and higher education. • These Regulations apply only to employment and training and do not extend to goods, facilities and services.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amendment to The Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (FETO) in December 2003 to meet the requirements of the EU Employment Framework Directive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This makes it unlawful to discriminate against anyone on the ground of religious belief or political opinion. This includes a person's supposed religious belief or political opinion and the absence of any religious belief or political opinion. The 1998 Order was amended in December 2003 to meet the requirements of the EU Employment Framework Directive.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2004) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commonly known as the 'Hate Crimes' legislation, this order protects individuals from 'hate crimes' which it defines as 'crimes where an offence involves hostility based on religion, race, disability or sexual orientation'.

Implications for the EQUAL Programme

- 2.39 This chapter has illustrated that **the EQUAL Programme**, and more specifically **the thematic areas** of Employability (Theme A) and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (Theme B), **remain relevant to addressing the needs of the NI labour market.**
- 2.40 In terms of employability, while improvements have been made in headline terms (rising employment and falling unemployment), structural weaknesses remain given the continued presence of marginalised groups such as long-term male unemployed, youth unemployed, 'Status 0' individuals and disabled persons.
- 2.41 Similarly, despite recent improvements in the numbers of women employed in the labour force and the relatively fewer number unemployed, women remain much more likely to be economically inactive, to work part-time and be concentrated within particular sectors of the economy. **This chapter has verified the rationale presented in the NI EQUAL Community Initiative Programme**, that the NI labour market continues to be characterised by a significant gender gap in respect of full-time and self-employment, economic activity, progression and earnings.
- 2.42 In terms of the legal and policy developments to address these themes, it is clear that a number of positive steps has been taken. As **these initiatives will take time to bear fruit, the EQUAL Programme still appears to be relevant.** In promoting labour market initiatives, the policy developments complement the EQUAL Programme and provide the opportunity to create synergies while the legislative changes will raise the importance of, and provide an overarching legal framework for, inequality and discrimination issues, which are the heart of the EQUAL programme. On the other hand, these initiatives have placed challenges on the DPs to ensure that their projects are innovative and distinguishable from mainstream activity. In addition, the suspension of the NI Assembly and the transfer of responsibility to four Ministers each covering three departments could lessen the attention that might be paid to policy submissions. This has implications for vertical mainstreaming within the EQUAL Programme.

III Implementation of EQUAL

Introduction

- 3.1 This chapter reviews the implementation of the EQUAL Community Initiative from 2001 to mid 2005. It captures all activity¹² within the EQUAL programme to date in NI (i.e. Actions 1, 2 and 3 under Round 1 and progress to date under Round 2 - Action 1 and the early phases/ planning of Action 2).
- 3.2 Then, having reviewed overall progress under Rounds 1 and 2, the chapter comments on the role of the NSS in supporting and monitoring DPs, the effectiveness of the monitoring systems in place and the North / South dimension of the programme. In addition, the chapter considers how the Equal Opportunities principle of EQUAL has been addressed.

Round 1

Overview

- 3.3 The promotion and selection process for Round 1 was reviewed in detail in the mid-term evaluation conducted by TL Associates¹³. It is evident from this that widespread promotional activity was conducted in 2001, with over 200 people attending road show events and a further 100 registering interest in EQUAL. This activity resulted in 29 applications of which 6 were ultimately successful (as detailed in Chapter 1). These 6 projects were deemed to have covered most of the target groups specified within the EQUAL CIP and application guidelines.
- 3.4 There was however an under-representation of applications under Equal Opportunities with only 1 of the 6 projects funded within Round 1 under this theme. Accordingly, it was recommended in the mid-term evaluation report that **more should be done to encourage applications to the Equal Opportunities**. It is evident from both the promotional activities and the projects funded within Round 2 (where there is a greater proportion of projects under this pillar), that **this recommendation was actively addressed**. Finally, it was the overall view of the evaluators that the **selection process under Round 1 was both fair and effective**.
- 3.5 A range of other issues was also highlighted in the mid-term evaluation report in relation to the implementation of Action 1 of Round 1, which each of the DPs embarked upon in November 2001. Recommendations specific to the key principles of EQUAL are referenced where relevant in the next chapter and those pertinent to the administration/ general implementation of EQUAL are detailed below.
- 3.6 In particular, it was emphasised that the role of PROTEUS (the NSS) needed to evolve beyond that of quantitative monitoring and into more of a development support role. This recommendation was addressed by January 2005 by a change in the respective roles of DEL (as the Managing Authority) and PROTEUS (as the National Support Structure - NSS). The Managing Authority under Round 2 is taking responsibility for financial monitoring and payments allowing the NSS to focus on project implementation

¹² With a particular focus on the work conducted by PwC from 2004 onwards. Prior to this TL Associates were the appointed evaluators for EQUAL in NI, and completed a mid-term evaluation exercise, mostly centred on the early phases of Round 1 – that is Action 1 and the early stages/ planning of Action 2.

¹³ TL Associates (2003) *Mid-Term Evaluation Report of the European EQUAL Community Initiative Programme for Northern Ireland 2000-2006*, December 2003.

and providing support and guidance to the DPs. It is evident from the research, conducted with DPs for the final evaluation report, that these arrangements have improved the implementation of EQUAL, as detailed later in this chapter.

- 3.7 Furthermore, the mid-term evaluation report highlighted the need for Action 1 to be lengthened under Round 2 to allow time for interventions to support partnership formation, development of systems for measuring soft outcomes and to mainstream applications for Action 3. This recommendation was implemented and has assisted in the implementation of EQUAL as all of the Round 2 DPs have completed their DPA's and have embarked on Action 2.
- 3.8 By mid 2003, Action 2 was firmly established with each of Round 1 DPs working to manage their partnerships, engage with DPs in other Member States and implement pilot projects. 6 DPs were active under Round 1 with 5 incorporated under Employability (Theme A) and 1 under Equal Opportunities (Theme H)¹⁴.
- 3.9 The following table (Table 3.1) illustrates the original financial allocations for the projects under Round 1. Action 2, the implementation phase, overlaps with Action 3 which deals with the work of the DPs in relation to thematic networking, dissemination of good practice and making an impact on policy at the local, national or EU level.

Financial and physical progress

- 3.10 While the EQUAL Programme is centred on piloting and testing innovative ways of delivering employment policies and is not predicated on the number of beneficiaries, financial and physical indicators still remain important to this evaluation by providing one means of reviewing activity across the programme.
- 3.11 With regard to financial progress under Round 1, **the DPs implemented Action 2 from late 2002 and despite a longer than expected transition from Action 1, expenditure progressed well throughout the period from 2003 to mid 2005.** Overall, expenditure in terms of ESF allocation¹⁵ is 96% for Action 1, 72% for Action 2 and 4% for Action 3, but there have been significant variations **between DPs** as shown in Table 3.1.

¹⁴ Seven DPs were successful in being awarded Round 1 contracts. However, The Work Life Balance project did not transfer from Action 1 into Action 2 and the project ended in May 2002.

¹⁵ The % of ESF Allocation that has been claimed by DEL from the Commission.

Table 3.1: EQUAL Programme (Round 1) – allocations

DP Title	ESF Total	EPF Total	Match Funding Total	Total Allocation
ACCORD	481,986	211,747	47,881	741,614
Digital Step	284,455	134,687	18,545	437,687
Diversity Matters	424,982	228,896	0	653,878
Futures	472,534	179,692	74,860	727,086
Personal Progression System	616,839	298,617	33,620	949,076
Young Women Making It Work	252,701	98,888	37,182	388,771
Sub Total	2,533,497	1,152,527	212,088	3,898,112
Work-Life Balance ¹⁶	30,368	16,352	0	46,720
Total	2,563,865	1,168,879	212,088	3,944,832

3.12 As well as spend, **project activity under Action 2 progressed well** with the DPs working at regional / sub-regional, national and transnational levels. Across both programme themes the activities were mainly centred on four broad areas:

- Developing education, training and learning materials, activities and resources that would help disadvantaged people develop the skills and confidence to move into mainstream options;
- Developing local and regionally based initiatives to support disadvantaged groups;
- Developing education, training and learning materials, activities and resources that would help equal opportunities groups develop skills and confidence to challenge discrimination; and
- Support for particular groups (ex-offenders, long-term unemployed, young people etc).

3.13 The DPs developed support measures and activities and worked with a range of beneficiaries including ex-offenders, lone parents and those from disadvantaged areas. Table 3.2, shows aggregate information for the EQUAL programme under Round 1 and **clearly highlights the number and range of beneficiaries that the DPs** under Round 1 have worked with between 2002 and 2004¹⁷.

¹⁶ As noted earlier the DP Work Life Balance was only funded under Action 1 and did not transfer into Action 2. The project ended in May 2000

¹⁷ In completing this information DPs are permitted to make more than one entry per beneficiary.

Table 3.2: The number and breakdown of beneficiaries across the EQUAL Programme 2002-2004

Disadvantage	Male	Female
Ex-offenders	84	0
Homeless people	9	9
Refugees	1	0
Drug and alcohol misusers	123	6
People returning to the labour market	6	190
People with literacy and numeracy deficiencies	68	157
13-17 year olds in danger of being excluded from school	24	12
Irish travellers	0	14
People aged over 50	14	17
Those from disadvantaged areas	217	280
Jobseekers with low basic skills	138	155
Lone parents / people with caring responsibilities	34	170
Prison leavers and those with statutory supervision	115	1
Others	50	45

3.14 Beyond the aggregate programme level, however, there has been **considerable variation between DPs in regard to the number of beneficiaries that they have worked with.**

3.15 In working with different beneficiaries, the DPs have **conducted a significant body of work**, implemented a range of actions and **established a strong level of project activity.** However, analysis of the monitoring returns shows that **DP activity has been mixed, in terms of the level of activity implemented and numbers of beneficiaries engaged with.** In essence, the DPs can be broken into four groups that include:

- DPs that have demonstrated constant activity between 2002 and 2004 (Accord and Digital Step);
- DPs that have made progress since 2003 (Young Women Making it Work);
- DPs that have made progress since 2004 (PPS and Diversity Matters); and
- The Futures DP conducted little activity over the period (the DP experienced difficulties in encouraging beneficiaries to participate and entered into a period of review in 2004, this is discussed in Chapter V).

3.16 Tables 3.3 – 3.8 clearly detail the level of project activity by each DP under Round 1, as per the annual monitoring returns for 2002, 2003 and 2004.

Table 3.3: Number of people benefiting from the Accord support measures 2002-2004

Actions to assist individuals	Number of people who benefited from these actions		
	2002	2003	2004
Work Advice, guidance and counselling	45	75	59
Training	45	103	59
Pre-vocation training	45	23	0
Basic skills support	45	103	59
Key skills support	45	103	59
Basic vocational training	45	30	0
Assessing the needs of individuals	45	103	59
Individual action plans	45	62	59
Motivation / orientation	45	63	59
Job search assistance	45	52	59
Help into lifelong learning	45	0	59
IT Training / support	45	58	59
Promoting the use of ICT	45	93	59
Life enhancement	0	7	4

Table 3.4: Number of people benefiting from the Digital Step support measures 2002-2004

Actions to assist individuals	Number of people who benefited from these actions		
	2002	2003	2004
Work Advice, guidance and counselling	0	0	99
Training	35	27	99
Pre-vocation training	0	0	99
Basic skills support	35	27	0
Key skills support	35	27	0
Training in the workplace	0	0	7
Assessing the needs of individuals	35	27	99
Individual action plans	35	27	7
Motivation / orientation	35	27	99
IT Training / support	35	27	99
Promoting the use of ICT	35	27	99
Work Experience / Trials	0	0	7

Table 3.5: Number of people benefiting from the Young Women Making it Work support measures 2002-2004

Actions to assist individuals	Number of people who benefited from the these actions		
	2002	2003	2004
Work Advice, guidance and counselling	25	37	0
Training	25	37	0
Pre-vocation training	0	30	0
Basic skills support	7	16	0
Basic vocational training	0	23	32
Intermediate vocational training	0	0	21
Training in the workplace	0	23	10
Work placements	0	23	0
Assessing the needs of individuals	25	37	81
Individual action plans	0	23	32
Motivation / orientation	25	37	81
Job search assistance	0	30	68
Help into self-employment	0	1	0
Help into lifelong learning	0	37	29
IT Training / support	15	25	8
Promoting the use of ICT	0	25	19
Work Experience / Trials	0	0	16

Table 3.6: Number of people benefiting from the Diversity Matters support measures 2002-2004

Actions to assist individuals	Number of people who benefited from the these actions		
	2002	2003	2004
Work advice, guidance and counselling	0	0	0
Training	0	41	112
Individual action plans	0	25	0
Motivation / orientation	0	16	54
Other*	0	0	84
*Awareness raising on issues relating to diversity in Northern Ireland			

Table 3.7: Number of people benefiting from the Personal Progression System support measures 2002-2004

Actions to assist individuals	Number of people who benefited from these actions		
	2002	2003	2004
Work Advice, guidance and counselling	35	0	112
Training	0	0	27
Pre-vocational training	0	0	59
Basic skills support	0	0	18
Key skills support	0	0	14
Basic vocational training	0	0	14
Intermediate vocational training	0	0	5
Higher vocational training	0	0	4
Assessing the needs of individuals	35	0	112
Individual action plans	0	0	112
Motivation / orientation	0	0	112
Job search assistance	0	0	34
Help into self-employment	0	0	5
Help into lifelong learning	0	0	14
IT Training / support	0	0	9

Table 3.8: Number of people benefiting from the Futures support measures 2002-2004

Actions to assist individuals	Number of people who benefited from these actions	
	2002	2003
Work Advice, guidance and counselling	0	2

3.17 Reflecting on the level of reporting across each of the DPs, the tables also show that in 2004 the level of monitoring has improved as the programme has progressed. Completion of the monitoring returns, however, has been slow and it is disappointing that no monitoring information is yet available for 2005. As outlined in the second interim report, the difficulty remains in imposing decommitments on those who do not comply within the appropriate timescale.

Action 3

3.18 Expenditure under Action 3 commenced in early December 2004 and the Round 1 DPs have either completed Action 3 or will do so by the end of September 2005.

3.19 In line with the Northern Ireland Mainstreaming Strategy¹⁸, the actions supported within Action 3 were centred on dissemination and transfer at both the horizontal and vertical levels. The activities implemented by the DPs for mainstreaming are broadly similar and can be grouped into the following categories:

- Meetings and discussion forums with leading government departments and agencies and stakeholders (including the private sector);
- Partnership, co-operation and involvement with relevant key organisations / stakeholders;
- Promotion of issues, DP projects and best practice with the publication of research reports and policy papers, development of information databases, participation at conferences and workshops, hosting of conferences and seminars, use of media, presentations to strategic bodies and peer advocacy;
- Development of an exit strategy;
- Partnership models to promote empowerment and involvement of beneficiaries to ensure continuous learning;
- Liaison and engagement with other EQUAL projects and DPs to facilitate continuous trans-national learning and transfer;
- Theatre piece by project beneficiaries to highlight lessons learned and issues for mainstreaming;
- Public / visual exhibitions showcasing and disseminating the work of the DP project; and
- Cross-testing in which each DP partner agrees to test in practice learning from the other partners.

3.20 The impact and mainstreaming of EQUAL and role of the DPs in this regard under Round 1 is examined in more detail in Chapter V.

3.21 With regard to **partnership outputs the EQUAL Programme has experienced a strong level of activity** with the DPs identifying a range of achievements. The data shows that DP outputs are mainly focused on the development of new information and guidance services, new learning and training programmes or materials, creating networks, job creation and establishing new employment / capacity building methodologies. Under Round 1, the following outputs were recorded for the period from 2002 to 2004.

- New promotional methodologies (individuals and employers): 3
- New empowerment / capacity building methodologies (individuals and organisations): 27
- New equal opportunity or positive action measures (individuals and organisations): 1
- New information and guidance services: 49
- New learning / training / materials and/or toolkits: 16
- New learning / training programmes and curricula: 32
- New qualifications: 3
- New quality assurance methodologies: standard setting / accrediting / auditing: 3
- New databases: 7

¹⁸ Northern Ireland EQUAL Programme Mainstreaming Strategy.

- New IT/ICT/multimedia application: 1
- New networks created: 34
- New studies / policy / research reports: 9
- New jobs created: 17

3.22 Similarly, aggregate progress for the EQUAL Programme highlights strong activity and although significant progress was made in 2004, variations exist across the DPs at the project level. **Overall, therefore, the review of the financial and physical indicators has highlighted mixed levels of activity and pointed to areas of slower progress in some DPs.**

Barriers/constraints to progress

3.23 In seeking to implement projects during Round 1, a number of barriers and constraints were identified through discussion with the DPs. Many of these remain relevant to the implementation of Round 2 including:

- **The administrative complexity of the EQUAL Programme** increased pressures on both DPs and government officials, thus restricting opportunities to focus on project outcomes. The administrative load and the level of paperwork associated with EQUAL is still reported to be particularly challenging for the less experienced and smaller organisations participating in projects;
- At the DP level, the **detail required in the beneficiary monitoring forms created difficulties**. Many of the target groups are reluctant to divulge personal information to the DP. This mostly applied to beneficiaries between the ages 16-25;
- In addition, during Action 2 of Round 1, DPs **expressed difficulties in drawing down monies and indicated that this had slowed down progress**. In light of this, the DPs reported that smaller organisations would face difficulties implementing projects under these conditions. Research with the Managing Authority and NSS, however, suggests that there are a number of possible explanations for this:
 - DEL requested that the NSS undertake 100% vouching on all DP claims; and
 - DPs were slow in submitting claims to the NSS during Round 1. In fact, over the course of Actions 1 and 2, DPs received repeated reminders that their claims were overdue.
- In light of these difficulties, and in an effort to minimise cash flow problems for the DPs, DEL introduced a number of changes to the payments and administration process:
 - First, in May 2003, DEL agreed a new method of processing claims. This new method involved processing all eligible and vouched expenditure and withholding any items on which there were queries. In the following quarter, pending satisfactory vouching evidence being provided by the DP. These outstanding items were then processed. This has provided greater flexibility and allowed payments to be made to the DPs within a shorter timeframe.
 - Secondly, the monitoring arrangements have also streamlined for Round 2. In light of the greater number of DPs and in order to minimise confusion about the respective roles of DEL and PROTEUS, all financial monitoring under Round 2 has and will be undertaken by Case Officers from DEL and all non-financial monitoring will be the responsibility of PROTEUS. This new arrangement was implemented in January 2005 and by defining roles and responsibilities and re-allocating resources accordingly, it was hoped that this will contribute towards improving the administrative process.

- Linked to the complex administrative structures, **a degree of perceived overlap in programme responsibilities**, during the initial stages of Round 1, also hindered progress. At the outset of the programme, DPs reported that they did not understand the particular roles and responsibilities of DEL and PROTEUS and this created uncertainties as the partnerships were unsure of which body to contact. During the implementation of Round 1, however, it was evident that both the Managing Authority and the National Support Structure became more established in their roles and provided more direct guidance and support to the DPs. Furthermore, the re-allocation of roles between the Managing Authority and the NSS, as detailed above, was intended to bring greater clarity to the administration of EQUAL and allow the NSS to focus on project implementation and providing support and guidance to the DPs. This division of responsibilities was communicated and explained to the Round 2 DPs during a two residential in Limavady in November 2004.

3.24 Overall, it is evident from research with DPs in both Round 1 and 2, conducted as part of this final evaluation report, that **the new arrangements have brought increased clarity to the administration of EQUAL**. The event in Limavady was highlighted as being particularly useful in this regard, but it was evident that ongoing communication of respective roles is required particularly as new staff recruited to Round 2 DP's as the projects get up and running, will need similar explanations. The 'hands-on' help from DEL Case Workers in supporting financial monitoring and re-profiling of budgets is valued. While it was widely reported by DPs that payments remain slow, resulting in some cash flow difficulties, these problems have largely been due to difficulties in accessing the necessary information from DPs to complete the claims and the administrative process. It was further evident that the change of roles had effectively 'freed up' the NSS / PROTEUS staff to undertake a development support role with projects, again which was highly rated. However, with supporting the volume of activity within Rounds 1 and 2, many of the DP's expressed a perception that the NSS / PROTEUS was 'overstretched'.

Progress to date under Round 2

Promotion and publicity for the second call

3.25 As set out in Chapter I, the EQUAL Programme is composed of two rounds in which applications were invited. In preparation for Round 2, the call for applications was initiated in February 2004 with a series of roadshows followed by a launch event and publication of the application pack. Widespread awareness of EQUAL is an important factor given the demand-led nature of the programme and thus an Information and Communications Strategy and Workplan was developed for 2004 that contained the following objectives¹⁹:

- To communicate information on the EQUAL programme as widely as possible to ensure a wider spread of applications, both geographically and sectorally and a better standard of applications;
- To make guidance material available on the internet, as well as via conventional means;
- To ensure that all such materials are clearly written;

¹⁹ PROTEUS (2004) *Information and Communication Strategy and Workplan*, January 2004-December 2004, EQUAL, Northern Ireland.

- To make approved DPs aware of other EQUAL funded DPs to facilitate better local co-ordination;
- To present positive images which illustrate the success of EQUAL;
- To develop an effective dissemination strategy to take forward good practice and the results of EQUAL evaluation activity; and
- To try to build on Northern Ireland's past success in European level thematic work by becoming involved the European Thematic Groups, the Mainstreaming Working Group, the Information and Communication Group and in work with the new Member States.

3.26 In response to the strategy, the Department for Employment and Learning and PROTEUS engaged in an extensive period of promotion. Indeed, between February and the end of May 2004 when the call for applications was closed, the following promotional activities had been undertaken:

- To begin, a series of road shows across Northern Ireland was held and a total of 118 individuals and organisations attended at the following locations:
 - Dungannon (21)
 - Enniskillen (12)
 - Newry (13)
 - Derry (25)
 - Belfast (36)
 - Ballymena (11)
- Canvassing and sending mail shots to stakeholders and organisations that would be potential applications. These totalled 1,775 organisations.
 - Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action: 200
 - Concordia (representatives of social partners): 650
 - Social Economy Network: 200
 - Intermediary Funding Bodies²⁰: 550
 - Disability Action: 175

3.27 In addition to the promotion of the second call, various guidance forms and handbooks were published and made available in print form or via the website²¹. This helped potential applicants understand the programme and complete the application forms. The publications included:

- EQUAL ESF Promoters Operating Manual;
- Guidance on completing Development Partnership Agreements;
- The Community Initiative Plan for EQUAL 2000-2006;
- EQUAL Programme Complement;
- EQUAL Second Call Information Leaflet;
- EQUAL Handbook;
- EQUAL Guidance notes for applicants;
- Other documents detailing the aims of the different themes of Employability and Equal Opportunities.

²⁰ These included the Rural Community Network (RCN), Rural Development Council (RDC) and the Training for Women Network (TWN).

²¹ www.proteus-ni.org

- 3.28 Furthermore, to assist applicants, a clinic was held at the beginning of May 2004 to discuss difficulties and issues arising with the forms and the general application process.
- 3.29 **In learning from the experience of Round 1** and taking on board **recommendations from the mid-term evaluation in December 2003²², a number of changes were made** in the second call for applications. First, as the application form in Round 1 was long and burdensome, **a shorter Part A application form was adopted** that allowed applicants to register interest first and examine whether their project was applicable. Secondly, by working closely with the Equality Commission in the lead up to the second call and during the promotional campaign, **more emphasis was placed on promoting and encouraging applications under the Equal Opportunities Theme**. Under the previous round, only one Equal Opportunities project was successful but five were successful in Round 2 which is evidence of the success of this promotional activity. And thirdly, **existing DPs under Round 1 were also invited to attend each road show** to present their achievements and provide examples of innovation and project activity. This helped to communicate the objectives of EQUAL and **'bring the programme to life'** for potential applicants by presenting evidence of DP practice.

The project selection process

- 3.30 The promotional work did create awareness of the programme and it was widely viewed that the **Managing Authority and National Support Structure conducted an extensive and comprehensive publicity campaign**. Forty-two Part A application forms were completed showing a high level of initial interest. Twenty-four Part B forms were finally submitted and these were distributed by pillar into 15 Employability and 9 Equal Opportunities projects.
- 3.31 With regard to project selection, the process involved a number of steps. First, trained assessors conducted an initial eligibility check on the applications. Following that, the selection panel was convened and it scored the applications against set programme eligibility criteria. The criteria used were strongly linked to the themes of EQUAL and included issues such as:
- Expected mainstreaming impact;
 - How the DP aimed to incorporate the key principals of EQUAL;
 - Equal Opportunities strategy;
 - The impact of the project on target groups;
 - The rationale for the project;
 - The proposed value of transnational co-operation;
 - Actions and activities envisaged under Actions 1, 2 and 3.
- 3.32 Applicants not meeting the required threshold were deemed unsuccessful, whereas those reaching the threshold received letters requesting more detail on a number of areas including:
- How beneficiaries would be involved in the project design, implementation and evaluation;
 - How transnationality would be integrated into the domestic work of the project;
 - How the DP would be strengthened and how the potential partners would complement each other;
 - How would the DP would demonstrate added value and not duplicate existing provision;

²² TL Associates (2003) *Mid-Term Evaluation Report of the European EQUAL Community Initiative Programme for Northern Ireland 200-2006*, December 2003.

- Clarification of budgets.
- 3.33 The panel then met a second time to decide if the conditions were satisfied and to finally accept or reject the applications.
- 3.34 Having reviewed a sample of the technical assessments (relating to both successful and unsuccessful applications), **it is our overall conclusion that the selection process for Round 2 appears to have been comprehensive, fair, rigorous and transparent.** The scoring criteria were consistently applied across the applications. Furthermore, having discussed the overall selection process with a number of stakeholders involved in the process, including applicants, the process was deemed both rigorous and transparent. Written responses detailing reasons for failure of the application were also provided. Unsuccessful applications were offered a de-brief with the NSS and advised of the appeal procedure. Of the 7 rejected at stage one, 5 attended a de-brief. All 4 of those unsuccessful at stage two requested a de-brief with 2 subsequently launching an appeal. The appeals were considered by a review panel on the 2nd of December. The appeals were not successful.

Progress under Action 1

- 3.35 Of the 24 applicants who did complete and submit the Part B form 13 **were ultimately successful, 8 under Employability and 5 under the Equal Opportunities Theme.** As well as containing a mix of DPs under both themes, there is also a variety of projects in Round 2 including, *inter alia*, those seeking to²³:
- address barriers faced by people with disabilities;
 - improve the labour market entry of those with a history of custody;
 - evaluate human resource policy in the public sector;
 - develop a programme of support to tackle barriers to employment faced by those with Autistic Spectrum Disorder;
 - examine the employment needs of homeless people; develop an innovative methodology to support entrepreneurship among women in rural areas; and
 - examine barriers women face entering 'non-traditional trades'.
- 3.36 In addition, a wide range of DP partners are involved in the Round 2 projects from government departments, statutory agencies, local government, chambers of commerce, private organisations, Trade Unions and the voluntary / community sector. The breakdown of partners involved in the Round 2 projects is as follows:-
- Public authority (national, regional, local): 23
 - Employers' organisations: 3
 - Trade Unions: 2
 - Chamber of commerce / industry / crafts: 1
 - Organisation providing support and guidance for disadvantaged groups: 9
 - Education / training organisation: 3
 - Financial institution: 1
 - Social economy enterprise: 1
 - Others (wider voluntary / community stakeholders): 7

²³ See Table 1.2 b in Chapter 1 which outlines the successful projects under the second call and gives a brief description of their objectives.

- 3.37 The successful DPs under Round 2 received their letters of offer at the end of December 2004.
- 3.38 In adopting the recommendations of the mid-term evaluation report, **Action 1 under Round 2 was extended from 6 to 9 months**. This was intended to allow the DPs more opportunity to engage with their partners, develop a partnership process and establish the foundations for project development. As a result, it was intended that **the DPs would be better prepared to implement Action 2 as opposed to experiencing the delay and overstretch that characterised Action 1 in Round 1**. In broad terms, this has been achieved under Round 2, with almost all Round 2 DPs having progressed to complete their DPAs and embarked on Action 2 activity. In effect the longer period did enable a greater degree of time for partnership development and planning for Round 2.
- 3.39 **The timetable in Northern Ireland still contrasts favourably with the rest of the EU** with most Member States not commencing Action 1 of Round 2 until January 2005.

Equal opportunities

- 3.40 Equal Opportunities is one of six principles in the EQUAL Programme. Four of the principles (partnership, transnational co-operation, innovation and empowerment) are discussed in Chapter IV and mainstreaming is examined in Chapter V.
- 3.41 While the principal aim of EQUAL is to promote innovative ways for delivering employment policies to combat discrimination and inequality, Equal Opportunities has also been established as a cross-cutting principle in the programme and built into a number of key stages.
- 3.42 As noted above, Equal Opportunities featured strongly during the promotional campaign for Round 2. As only one Equal Opportunities project was successful under the previous round, both the NSS and the Managing Authority worked closely with the Equality Commission to place greater emphasis on encouraging applications under this theme. While the programme is dependant on the demand of potential applicants, the promotional campaign did create greater awareness of the need for Equal Opportunities projects in the programme. In Round 2, 9 Part B applications were submitted under the Equal Opportunities Theme and 5 were ultimately successful.
- 3.43 As well as being emphasised in the promotional campaign, Equal Opportunities issues made up a significant element of the application form. For instance, in terms of eligibility, the applicants were required to state whether their lead organisation had a written Equal Opportunities policy and whether DP activities would be restricted to a particular group. Following this, applicants were required to outline how their DP activities would impact upon, support and promote Equal Opportunities and provide detail on the anticipated impact on all socially excluded groups that are subject to the main forms of discrimination. In addition, in the project selection process, Equal Opportunities carried significant weight in the scoring scheme.
- 3.44 In Action 1, all DPs are required to outline their Equal Opportunities Strategy. To assist the DPs in this task, the NSS, under Rounds 1 and 2, provided guidance documents setting out what each strategy should contain, how Equal Opportunities should be embedded in the management and organisation of each DP, and how equality of opportunity can be monitored and evaluated²⁴. Guidance documents on relevant

²⁴ EQUAL 2001, Guidance on Completing your Development Partnership Agreement. www.proteus-ni.org

equality legislation in Northern Ireland and equality mainstreaming were also provided to the DPs²⁵.

- 3.45 Each of the DPs had developed Equal Opportunities strategies by the end of Action 1 (Round 1 and 2) which addressed the main elements outlined in the guidance documents. In addition, the DPs under Round 1 have adopted a proactive approach to targeting and recruiting a range of beneficiaries by adjusting projects in accordance with the needs of different target groups. The Accord DP, for example, tailored the time and nature of their training programmes for each of the different target groups (i.e. in relation to women, religion, ethnicity and age) and also used different community organisations and venues to ensure that both main political / religious communities felt comfortable and willing to participate in the programmes.
- 3.46 Overall, the realisation of Equal Opportunities as a cross-cutting principle in the programme and the implementation of the DPs, has contributed towards raising awareness of equality issues. This is highlighted under Round 1 by the Diversity Matters DP which piloted a cross-sectoral diversity training programme for employers and is now seeking to conduct a public awareness campaign on diversity issues in Northern Ireland. This project and the impact of the DPs on beneficiaries are discussed further in Chapter V.

North – South co-operation

- 3.47 The EQUAL CIP contains a section on 'Co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland' that includes arrangements for co-operation on common policy areas at DP level and at operational level between Managing Authorities. In particular, it states that:
- The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), one of the North/South bodies under the Belfast Agreement, will have a role in supporting cross-border aspects of EQUAL;
 - The SEUPB will sit on the Monitoring Committees in Northern Ireland and in the Republic;
 - There will be a cross-border dimension to mainstreaming with the proposal of an all-Ireland mainstreaming strategy; and
 - The Managing Authority in Northern Ireland, in co-operation with the SEUPB and the Managing Authority in the Republic of Ireland, will endeavour to maximise the scope for North/South co-operation in the Development Partnership process and within priorities and measures to be implemented under the CIP.
- 3.48 Since the initiation of the programme, a number of actions have taken place with regard to North-South co-operation:
- The Managing Authorities (the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in the Republic and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland) have taken observer status on each other's Monitoring Committees;
 - North/South co-operation has been placed as a standing agenda item for meetings of both Monitoring Committees and is to be addressed in each EQUAL annual report North and South;

²⁵ EQUAL 2001, Guidance on Completing your Development Partnership Agreement. www.proteus-ni.org; Department of Finance and Personnel, Equality Guide, Equality Mainstreaming in European Union Structural Funds.

- A North/South Steering Committee has been established to enhance both formal and informal co-operation and collaboration at all levels (programme, thematic, project) under EQUAL. The Committee includes the two Managing Authorities, the two Equality bodies and the two National Support Structures. It is chaired by the SEUPB. It agreed a mandate 'to support, co-ordinate and advise on mainstreaming and other opportunities for co-operation under the EQUAL Community Initiative on a North/South basis';
- Under the framework for co-operation established by the Steering Committee it was also agreed that the two Support Structures, PROTEUS in the North and WRC in the South, will encourage formal and informal contact between DPs and that the structures will:
 - Extend invitations to all DPs to attend relevant Thematic and other events;
 - Make DPs from the alternate jurisdiction aware of publications and other material that may be useful; and
 - Share experience and resources via the joint forum involving the GB, Welsh and Scottish authorities.
- A one-day conference for the DPs in the Republic and Northern Ireland was held in Carrick-on-Shannon in May 2002. This allowed for initial links to be made between the DPs and for the common context for the Initiative on both sides of the border to be set out;
- The Equality Authority and the Equality Commission have met bilaterally on a number of occasions to discuss their roles in regard to EQUAL;
- A second North-South conference and Mainstreaming Event was held in Newcastle in Northern Ireland in November 2003 to identify areas of commonality under the banner, 'Accommodating Diversity in Employment and Provision'. The event was chaired by the SEUPB and it focused on project level activities, good practice, lessons and outcomes and the relevance of same for policy and practice. The outcomes arising from this event were captured in a publication and presented at the showcase event detailed below; and
- A two-day showcase event for EQUAL was held in Dublin on the 6th and 7th May 2004. This involved a conference and mainstreaming showcase and EQUAL projects both North and South used the opportunity to exhibit their work. Over 350 representatives from EQUAL DPs, government departments, employer organisations, Trade Unions and the community / voluntary sector attended the event.

3.49 The showcase event and North/South conferences under Round 1 provided a good **opportunity to raise awareness of EQUAL and facilitate engagement between DPs on a cross-border basis**. This encouraged dissemination and learning and allowed DPs, Managing Authorities and Support Structures to assess good practice, draw out the programme distinctions and examine the potential for transferability. In addition, as a result of increased engagement, DPs were more aware of key stakeholders operating in both jurisdictions and a number of **spin-off partnership arrangements emerged**.

3.50 Under Round 1, however, **the number of partners involved in the Transnational Co-operation Agreements from the South of Ireland was low**. In fact, only two partners from the South were linked to DPs in Northern Ireland representing just 8% of the transnational partnerships. Given the opportunities for partnership between North and South and the importance placed on such engagement, the December 2004 second interim report commented that **the level of cross-border co-operation under Round 1 had been disappointing**.

- 3.51 Research with SEUPB, DPs and a number of members of the NTN, conducted for the second interim evaluation report, indicated that the **North-South events had been not been followed through and that the North / South Steering Group has lost a degree of momentum.** In addition, the level of knowledge regarding the role and contribution of the SEUPB in the development of cross-border co-operation amongst DPs and wider government stakeholders was fairly low. Accordingly, it was highlighted that **the North / South Steering Group had to provide a greater focus for co-operation.** Discussions with SEUPB indicated that this was planned for the future and that their competing priorities, had constrained the available time for follow up activity. In addition, it is highlighted that with 23 projects selected in Round 2 in the South and 13 projects in the North that **there should be increased scope for North/South co-operation and partnerships.**
- 3.52 From research with DPs in both Round 1 and 2, conducted for this final evaluation report, **the level and quality of North/South co-operation has increased since Round 1.** A meeting of the North/South Steering Committee was held on the 9th June and following this, the Round 1 and 2 DPs in Northern Ireland the Republic of Ireland were invited to attend a facilitation event. From some of the views expressed to PwC (and detailed in Figure 3.1), particularly those organisations active in both rounds, it is evident that this early engagement between the DPs, facilitated by the North / South Steering Committee, has improved the level of co-operation.

Figure 3.1 – North/South Co-operation

'The North/ South Steering Group was very encouraging, much better than Round 1, workshops were good and relevant'

'From initial interaction with the North/ South Steering Group, I think it will be good in terms of assisting with mainstreaming and disseminating. At minimum it is great for networking and exchange of experience'

'Although there is no project in the South similar to ours I can see that it (the North/ South Steering Group) could be used for dissemination and mainstreaming within EQUAL'

- 3.53 Overall, these early facilitation events and greater promotion of North-South co-operation by the Managing Authority and the NSS, has helped to stimulate more cross-border activity which has led to more formal partnership in the TCAs. In fact, in Northern Ireland, 4 Round 2 DPs have transnational partners in the Republic of Ireland.

IV Progress on key principles of EQUAL

Introduction

- 4.1 The EQUAL Community Initiative is founded on six principles; **partnership, transnational co-operation, innovation, empowerment, equal opportunity and mainstreaming**. A key aspect of this evaluation report is to review how these principles are evident in the delivery of the programme thus far. While the previous chapter examined equal opportunities, this chapter covers the four principles of partnership, transnational co-operation, innovation and empowerment. The following chapter (Chapter V) examines the principle of mainstreaming.
- 4.2 The content of this chapter is based primarily on the DP surveys, in-depth interviews conducted with wider stakeholders and case studies of DPs in Round 1 and Round 2.

Partnership

- 4.3 The European Commission has defined the concept of partnership within the EQUAL Programme as follows:-
- The objective of partnership in EQUAL is to bring together actors who co-operate in a Development Partnership to develop an integrated approach to the multi dimensional problems of discrimination by pooling their efforts and resources in pursuit of innovative solutions to jointly defined problems and common goals.²⁶
- 4.4 This section aims to assess the degree to which the six DPs in Round 1 and the thirteen DPs in Round 2 in Northern Ireland have fulfilled or progressed towards the Commission's definition, as outlined above. Firstly, it gives an overview of the composition of the six DPs from Round 1 established between 2002-2005 and the 13 DPs under Round 2 established between the end of 2004 and 2005. Secondly, it examines the nature and quality of partnership achieved. Thirdly, it looks at decision-making and co-ordination within partnerships. Finally, the key findings on partnership are presented.

Composition of Northern Ireland Equal Programme's DPs, 2002-2005

- 4.5 On average, the Round 1 DPs within the NI EQUAL Programme are the same size as the average DP throughout the EU. Partnership membership in NI averages out at 8.6, which is slightly smaller than the EU average of 8.7. However this average figure masks significant disparity, with half of Northern Ireland DPs being smaller than the EU average and the other half being larger than the EU average.
- 4.6 In Round 2, partnership membership in NI averages out at 8.7, which is slightly higher than the EU average of 7.2. This figure represents less disparity with the number of partners per DP ranging from 4 - 15 in Round 1 as opposed to 3 – 18 in Round 2.

²⁶ Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Establishing the Guidelines for the Second Round of the Community Initiative EQUAL Concerning Transnational Co-operation to Promote New Means of Combating all Forms of Discrimination and Inequalities in Connection with the Labour Market. COM(2003) 840 final. Commission of the European Communities: Luxembourg.

Table 4.1: Number of partners in Northern Ireland EQUAL DPs

Round 1		Round 2	
Name of DP	Number of Partners	Name of DP	Number of Partners
Accord	18	POISE	4
Digital Steps	7 originally, later reduced to 5	WRAISE	6
Diversity Matters	9	WINS	13
Futures	11	Possibilities	4
PPS	3	Helios	15
Young Women Making It Work	6	Key Project	13
		Diversity Works	10
		Beyond Caring	11
		Reachout Programme	4
		The SEA	4
		Employability Access Project	11
		Employability for Autism	9
		The Engage Programme	9
Northern Ireland Average	8.6	Northern Ireland Average	8.7
EU Average	8.7	EU Average	7.2

4.7 The number of partners within DPs is an important issue because it gets to the heart of the dilemma every partnership faces. This dilemma entails, on the one hand, the desire to involve an inclusive ‘critical mass’ in the DP to ensure it has the resource capacity and cross-sectoral support necessary to achieve its objectives. On the other hand, it is important that multiple partners do not create obstacles to progress by slowing down planning and decision-making within DPs. The issue of DP membership and size is discussed in more length later in this sub-section under ‘*Decision-making and Co-ordination within Partnerships*’. However, within Round 1, those DPs that were larger than the EU average of 8.7 indicated that a large membership could jeopardise the governance processes within the DP. While being conscious of this, they defended their size arguing that all the partners involved contributed to the collective capacity necessary to implement the project effectively.

4.8 Much debate exists over how beneficial the partnership model is to labour market initiatives. It is uncertain whether it the most appropriate tool for addressing labour market developments in which changes are relatively fast²⁷. In effect the partnership model, particularly when it is based on a large number of members, may not have sufficient flexibility to respond quickly to the dynamics of labour market developments.

²⁷ R. O'Donnell and P. Teague (2000) *Partnership at Work in Ireland: An Evaluation of Partnership under Progress 2000*. Dublin: Department of An Taoiseach.

That said, survey analysis conducted for this report found that 94% of respondents felt that a DP was an appropriate mechanism for delivering the EQUAL Programme. Qualitative comments from the survey suggested that the partnership approach was valuable for involving a wide range of knowledge and expertise and facilitating community participation.

- 4.9 Recent case study analysis from Round 2 also supports this view. Although the second round is in the early stages of Action 2, evidence suggests that the partnership model has provided an important mechanism for pooling organisational resources and facilitating access to wider networks. In the Women in Non-traditional Sectors DP, for instance, the composition of the partnership is based on a three stranded approach to ensure that the main project areas of employers, policy and training all have organisational representation.

Nature and quality of partnerships

Round 1

- 4.10 Overall, the level of partnership achieved in Round 1 has been high across the six DPs. Indeed, the development and maintenance of engaged, co-operative, and dynamic DPs can be regarded as one of the key successes of the NI EQUAL programme to date. It is possible to divide the six DPs into three groups in terms of the nature of their partnerships:
- **Natural partners:** These were organisations with long established working relationships from past experience. Examples here include the Futures DP in which all eleven members were also members of the Health Action Zone North and West Belfast. It was found that these strong pre-existing working relationships provided an important foundation on which to establish the DP. It ensured that the DP got off to a 'smooth start' and that little time was wasted at the embryonic stage in the DP process;
 - **Moving beyond 'bi-lateral partnering':** DPs in which different partners in the group had worked together previously on different projects, but in which all the partners had never worked together on a collective basis before. Thus the DP provided the first opportunity for all the partners to work together and as such it developed new synergies between old partners that had previously worked together on a one-to-one or bi-lateral basis. A key example here is the PPS project, where NIACRO, the Prison Service and the Probation Board, had all worked together on a bi-lateral basis, but where EQUAL afforded an opportunity for a much broader tri-partite partnership. This, in turn, has enabled a seamless system of support, training and education both within and beyond the 'prison gate' for the offender community (as their target group). In fact, previous partnership relations were a common feature as the survey, conducted by PwC with DP organisations under Round 1, found that 47% of respondents had worked with two or more partners before the EQUAL project; and
 - **Novices:** Those who established partnerships involving members who had no pre-existing working relationships. Examples here include Digital Step and Young Women Making it Work. Arrangements such as these illustrate the potential for added value within EQUAL, as in the absence of EQUAL it is unlikely that such linkages or partnerships would have been formed.
- 4.11 It was found that while the natural partnership model can provide a smooth start to the DPs, pre-established partnerships can be problematic as they may lack the critical contribution which other less obvious potential partners may provide. In the case of Futures, the DP lacked the membership and support of community representatives,

which might have produced the client take-up which was missing from the project. In this case 're-packaging' existing relationships into a DP arrangement for EQUAL, without consideration of broader representation, was a key failing.

- 4.12 The 'novice' model also presents pros and cons. On the one hand, such partnerships offer scope for high levels of value-added as the partners work to develop new, energetic and dynamic DPs. On the other hand, there is a key risk in the case of new relationships and partnerships that particular members do not fully appreciate the commitment they are making, as they have no experience from which to judge their position. This was evident in the case of Digital Step where two partners had to withdraw from the DP at the early stages due to a lack of resources.
- 4.13 Overall, the model based on moving beyond bi-lateral partnerships appears to be the most successful approach within NI's EQUAL programme in Round 1. It provides well-established partners with the opportunity to 'stretch' their network, expertise and resources with the inclusion of other perhaps less familiar, but critical groups. In the case of Diversity Matters, this synthesis of old and new enabled less established, more marginal groups such as the Coalition on Sexual Orientation (CoSO), which lacked the financial infrastructure to participate in EU programmes, the opportunity to avail of EU funding and to feed into policy mainstreaming initiatives. Similarly within the PPS project, EQUAL has provided an opportunity for the three key partners to look beyond their pre-existing bi-lateral relationships, into a much broader co-operative partnership, which has enabled better co-ordination of their support to offenders and of their input in a strategic policy context (i.e. vertical mainstreaming).

Round 2

- 4.14 In the second call of EQUAL, similar types of partnerships (Natural partners, Moving Beyond bi-lateral partnering and Novices) have also been established. However, in Round 2, a new partnership dynamic has emerged. This involves partners, who had worked together under Round 1, developing another project and being successful in an application for Round 2. Three DPs in Round 2 can be located within this category:
- **Diversity Works:** this DP includes seven partners who had previously worked together on the Diversity Matters DP in Round 1;
 - **Key Project:** this DP includes eleven partners who had previously worked together on the Accord DP in Round 1; and
 - **Reachout:** this DP includes three partners who had previously worked together on the PPS DP in Round 1.
- 4.15 Having past experience of working together and knowledge of partner strengths and expertise, these partnerships have been able to 'hit the ground running'. More importantly, however, the partners have been able to learn the lessons from the first round and transfer this experience. Each of the DPs, for instance, has acknowledged that the Round 2 partnership required a greater level of involvement from policy makers and the private sector. Reachout, for example, has included Business in the Community with a view to engaging more closely with employers while the Key Project has involved the Social Security Agency (as an important policy stakeholder) and the local Chambers of Commerce.
- 4.16 Overall, it is evident that **some of the lessons of wider cross-sectoral involvement from Round 1 have been transferred to Round 2**. In Round 2, for instance, there is a greater level of private sector involvement in the partnerships as the partners understand the need to engage with employers. The Orchardville Society DP, for

example, has included representatives from the hospitality industry on their board as this sector is considered an area of future growth and one in which their target group could be employed. In addition, although the DPAs have been signed, the DPs are still consolidating and seeking further involvement from the private sector. The Beyond Caring DP, for instance, plans to set up a steering group to include more employers and have a wider variety of work placements on offer for their beneficiaries.

- 4.17 Not all DPs though have been successful in attracting their preferred partners. One DP, for example, expressed disappointment that the local Chambers of Commerce declined membership of their DP due to other work commitments while another felt unsure of how to contact key policy stakeholders. This shows the need for the DPs to continue to interact and share their lessons and experiences, particularly from the partners that were involved in Round 1.

Decision-making and co-ordination within partnerships

Round 1

- 4.18 It was evident from the research that each **DP in Round 1 has managed to sustain regular meetings** (largely every four to six weeks). All DPs reported that decision-making was conducted on the principle of consensus, meaning that all decisions were made through discussion and negotiation in which each partner had a voice. However, it is clear in most cases that the lead partner in each DP played a central role in driving the projects and keeping the original targets and objectives on track. This is also supported by survey findings in which 94% of respondents commented that, in practice, one or a small number of partners take the lead in implementing the project. However 94% of DP members, also stated that a mechanism was established to keep all partners informed of ongoing progress. Qualitative comments highlighted that this mechanism generally involved meetings with the wider DP board on a monthly or quarterly basis or when necessary, sending emails or circulating minutes.
- 4.19 The DPs were conscious that the partnership model, while comprising a crucial component of the EQUAL Programme, could prove to be a slow and cumbersome mechanism of governance. This is particularly the case with larger DPs, such as Accord, which reported particular difficulties in engaging their multiple partners, informing them of planned developments, gaining their feedback and achieving consensus on future actions. It was evident that **each DP had to spend a great deal more time than was anticipated co-ordinating these tasks**. The DPs addressed this difficulty by a number of means including:-
- Every DP established sub-committees each of which was responsible for achieving objectives;
 - Diversity Matters got around the time-consuming aspect of partnership by drafting a formal 'process agreement' on how people would participate in decisions. According to this agreement, for example, it was recognised by each member of the partnership, that if, after a period of three weeks, a partner failed to respond to a draft document, it was assumed that they agreed with the contents and were prepared to stand by the initiative or document;
 - Other DPs tended to by-pass the time-consuming aspect of partnership arrangements by co-ordinating the entire project through sub-committees. Those who participated in Young Women Making it Work felt that the heart of the DP was at the sub-committee level and that the steering group meetings had become less relevant; and

- Some DPs included as many stakeholders as possible and simultaneously managed to keep the partnership tightly co-ordinated. Diversity Matters, for example, did this by having a core group of partners, which covered nine organisations. However, they had a looser relationship with five other bodies which they called 'reference points'. These groups commented on their briefing papers, provided a contact person for advice and helped to disseminate information and research gathered.

Round 2

- 4.20 Although the partnerships are still in their early stages of development and are just beginning to undertake their main activities under Action 2, evidence suggests that the DPs have established similar decision making and co-ordination structures and are generally working well. Across the DPs, the most common approach has been to set up sub groups or operational committees in which a number of relevant partners would focus on particular areas of interest and report back to the larger partnership board or strategic committee. Indeed, following difficulties in managing the large Accord DP membership in the previous round, the Key Project (which includes eleven former Accord partners) has established strategic and operational committees for Round 2. Again, this demonstrates the importance of transferring knowledge and experience from Round 1.
- 4.21 In learning from the experience of the first call projects, the mid-term evaluation in December 2003, recommended that the DPs needed support in partnership skills. As a result, the Managing Authority and the NSS contracted the Workers Education Association (WEA) to work with the DPs to develop the partnership process in Round 2. An introductory session on partnership building was delivered during the two-day induction residential for the DPs in November 2004 and further partnership building intervention has taken place or is planned within the coming months. For example, another residential induction session is being held in November 2005 for new staff employed by the DPs at the beginning of Action 2 and three partnership training courses are scheduled for October, November and December 2005. Generally, evidence suggests that the DPs have taken forward the lessons from Round 1 and the involvement of WEA has assisted some of the DPs to consolidate their partnerships and establish decision making structures based on sub-groups or operational committees. However, although the services of the WEA are widely available, to date not all DPs have availed of this support.
- 4.22 During Action 1, a number of DPs have also faced difficulties in consolidating the partnership due to changes in personnel and the demands placed on some partners. One DP, for example, explained that, due to staff changes, it has taken longer for the partnership to gel. Another DP member commented that the attendance of different organisational representatives or the low attendance from some partners, has restricted the opportunities to develop partnership relations. Furthermore, a number of DPs expressed disappointment over the lack of innovation from some partners. These were represented as being more re-active/responsive to ideas, rather than putting forward any innovative ideas of their own.
- 4.23 Therefore, although the partnerships are generally working well, have included a range of key stakeholders, established decision making structures and are working towards completing their DPAs, a process of further consolidation is still required in a small number of DPs. These partnerships could possibly benefit from support (provided by WEA) and the inclusion of other partners that could provide further innovation and assistance with the mainstreaming process.

Key findings on partnership

Round 1

- 4.24 Overall, a number of DPs did experience difficulties in the early stages of the programme. **The partnership process, however, appears to have acted as an important mechanism through which some of these difficulties were addressed.** Most of the partnerships experienced a scenario whereby the relationships within the DPs evolved as outputs were delivered. This is evident in Round 1 DPs; Round 2 DPs are as yet at too early a stage to tell. Success in producing outputs caused partners to have more trust in the DP and subsequently to give it more energy, resources and credence. For example, a partner in the Diversity Matters DP explained that they were very sceptical when they were first invited onto the project. However, as the DP began to operate, and a sense of momentum in terms of activity and outputs was achieved, the partner became convinced of its potential.
- 4.25 Most DPs found that the partnership relationship commenced on a broad 'networking' level. However, as individuals invested in their relationships they began to engage more in the DPs. Incrementally, it was found that the 'networking' relationships developed into deeper, substantive working partnerships.
- 4.26 Examples of the evolution of partnerships are reflected in the following cases:
- During the initial stages when the Accord DP was established, tensions existed between community organisations representing different political traditions. However, through the partnership process, barriers were broken down and a degree of trust was established which allowed a working relationship to develop;
 - The Digital Step DP was hindered initially as two key partners withdrew due to resourcing difficulties. The remaining partners worked hard to identify and attract other partners who contributed successfully to the project; and
 - One of the DPs, Futures, decided to move into a 'review mode' as it was apparent that, for a number of reasons, its objectives were not being achieved. However, the partnership itself may be regarded as a key output. It was a forum which achieved broad learning on the subject of the North/West Belfast labour market. While the DP failed to deliver on its project objectives, it was relentlessly self-critical about this failure and was driven to understand the reasons for it. This drive provided the DP with an opportunity to explore in more detail the barriers which prevented the client group from engaging in their project. Furthermore, the DP now has a deeper understanding of the client group's nature and size, and the range of factors which act as disincentives to potential clients. Finally, the DP experimented in some depth with the potential means of attracting the client group. This learning curve has been an important contribution to understanding how to address pockets of long term unemployed in North/West Belfast. A more detailed discussion of the Futures DP is included in Chapter V and in the case studies in Appendix A which provide the reasons why the DP went into review mode and why it was agreed that Futures would not progress on to Action 3.
- 4.27 *Capacity building and 'social learning'*: In some DPs, the **partnership process acted as a forum for capacity building and 'social learning'**. For example, the Accord DP had 18 members, which included a broad diversity of expertise. It was found that the partners with the greater knowledge of EU programmes and larger capacity were able to transfer their experience to smaller organisations and improve their level of engagement within the programme. For instance, at the outset, one partner found it difficult to engage with the DP and the EQUAL Programme as a whole, but through

learning from the partnership process, this organisation was up-skilled to the extent that they were successful themselves in becoming a lead partner under Round 2.

- 4.28 *Cross sectoral involvement:* As mentioned above, it is helpful, at the embryonic stage of the partnership, to have ‘natural partners’ or bodies involved who have worked closely together in the past. However, it may be useful for DPs to include other parties in the project with whom they may not have established relationships, but who may provide access to crucial resources or client groups. It is desirable that DPs have broad **cross-sectoral representation**, either in the core membership or through mechanisms such as associate partners or reference points (detailed above). In particular, it is evident that some of the DPs suffered from insufficient private and/or community sector representation.
- 4.29 Drawing on discussions with wider stakeholders as well as the research with DPs it is clear that failure to engage private sector organisations was a missed opportunity for individual projects and the programme as a whole. At the project level this was evident in the Digital Step DP, where private sector employers played a very marginal role in the project, which weakened the DP considerably. The digital technology industry employers were not represented on the DP. The involvement of the private sector in this project could have assisted in bringing momentum to the efforts to mainstream activity.
- 4.30 Figure 4.1 illustrates various dimensions of the partnership process in action within EQUAL to date.

Figure 4.1: Comments on the effectiveness of partnership in the EQUAL Programme (Round 1)

‘It was a very good partnership. There was a great degree of integrity and honesty, especially when we saw the problems it would have been easy to walk away. This was because the partnership was set in the bigger partnership of the Health Action Zone.’

‘The process has suffered due to a change of personnel in the DP organisations, hindering progress and making it difficult to make decisions. The DP has faced difficulties organising meetings between all the representatives and gaining consensus which has also slowed down decision making.’

‘The relationship began at the networking level and has become deeper since then. Diversity Matters had 6 working groups. It was the working groups who were responsible for the outcomes. As they achieved their outcomes people got on better. As you invest more in a relationship you engage in it more.’

‘The partners with the greater knowledge of EU Programmes and larger capacity have been able to transfer their experience to smaller organisations and improve their level of engagement within the programme.’

Source: Extracts from a selection of interviews undertaken with members of the DPs and with the wider circle of stakeholder organisations in Round 1

Round 2

- 4.31 During the course of Action I, the DPs completed a significant body of work by engaging with a range of partners, developing and refining their project objectives, establishing partnership processes and formulating their DPAs. On this basis, **the required ‘partnership infrastructure’ for Round 2 of the programme has broadly been**

established. Although still in the early stages of development, it is felt that these partnerships are also providing a forum for innovation and social learning on which the different partners can share experience and the different range of skills and expertise can be utilised.

- 4.32 In adopting one of the main lessons from Round 1, the DPs in the second call have achieved a greater degree of wider cross-sectoral involvement from key policy stakeholders and the private sector. Not all DPs, however, have been able to include their preferred partners. Similarly, while the DPs have worked broadly to adopt particular decision-making structures and establish partnership processes, a small number have experienced particular problems such as changes in personnel and patchy attendance.
- 4.33 At this stage, however, it is important to note that the partnerships are still in their early stages of development and are only now starting to conduct their main project activity. As identified from the previous round, partnership processes take time to become established and develop incrementally as main outputs begin to emerge. It is at this stage that the gelling process is more firmly cemented. The partnerships in Round 2, therefore, still have an opportunity for further consolidation at the beginning of Action 2 to embed the process and include additional partners. As the DPs progress further with Action 2, some DPs may require additional developmental support.

Figure 4.2: Comments on the effectiveness of partnership in the EQUAL Programme (Round 2)

'It was important that the partners chosen were representative of the needs and objectives of the project and reflected its broad geographical remit. With inclusion of the training providers, the colleges and the Chamber of Commerce we have a group that can work well together and maximise support for the target group.'

'To date, the DP has achieved each of their Action 1 objectives but in terms of partnership working, they feel that they have fallen behind'.

'It is crucial to know who to approach. There needs to be an onus on policy makers to get involved, there needs to be equal expectations for participation.'

'It has been great to get partner organisations working together who had never done so before, this has created synergies and added real value to the project.'

'In selecting the partnership members it was important to have a spread of key stakeholders from government departments and the business community. The importance of these partners is expected to be particularly recognised during the mainstreaming stage.'

'To date the partnership has not encountered any serious problems however, the participation of some members is constrained by the amount of time that they can dedicate to the project.'

'There are a large number of partners involved in the DP and it is hoped that the coming together of so many organisations will give the project considerable weight and a deep pool of experience from which to recover expertise.'

Source: Extracts from a selection of interviews undertaken with members of the DPs in Round 2

Transnational Co-operation

4.34 The EU Commission document entitled '*Guidelines for Systems of Monitoring and Evaluation for the Human Resources Initiative EQUAL in the Period 2000-2006*' defines an evaluation of 'transnationality' in the following terms:-

- How has the transnational co-operation at the DP level and through the networking at national and EU level contributed to the emergence of innovation, a better diffusion of best practice, a better design of policies?

4.35 This section aims to examine these issues drawing on surveys and interviews with wider stakeholders and case studies from Round 1 and 2. Firstly, it examines the effectiveness of the process to establish transnational partners in Rounds 1 and 2, then progresses to examine the forms of transnational co-operation that were established in Round 1 and proposed in Round 2, and finally summarises the key findings on the transnational dimension of EQUAL.

Establishing Transnational Partners

Round 1

4.36 In overall terms, the case study analysis of the DPs in Round 1 found the **transnational experience of the programme to be a positive one**. This is also supported by the survey which highlighted that 76% of DP members agreed that transnational co-operation brought additional contributions to the project. Qualitative comments broadly showed a consensus that transnationality was an excellent opportunity to share best practice, learn from other cultures and break down barriers.

4.37 That said, to varying degrees, the DPs in Round 1 experienced some difficulty in establishing transnational partnerships in the first instance. The **database** used to locate and develop transnational partnerships was found, at times, to be **difficult to access and use**, and for the future it was recommended that efforts could be made to ensure it was more 'user-friendly' and easily navigated²⁸. In addition, it was reported that the information provided on the potential partners throughout the EU from the database was limited and unhelpful. In particular it was highlighted that some of the information was 'flat and two-dimensional'. It was also the view of some of the DPs that the experience of establishing transnational partnerships was described as 'a scramble' with a 'sense of desperation' about it.

4.38 The difficulties experienced at the outset shaped, in some cases, the form the transnational partnerships took and had implications for their success. By way of example, the Diversity Matters DP expressed the view that a member of their transnational partnership was a 'mis-match' in that this partner had the transnational project as its main objective. This resulted in some tension as the other partners had multiple objectives and could not provide the level of input required to match this partner's objective. This suggested a degree of imbalance in the structuring of the arrangements for the transnational co-operation agreement.

4.39 Overall, the experience of the Round 1 DPs outlined a **need for the process to identify transnational partners to be more intensive affording a greater level of 'depth' of engagement and research**.

²⁸ However, as it is an EU wide database this issue is not within the control of the NI EQUAL Programme. Nevertheless these views could be 'fed into' the programme at the EU level.

Round 2

4.40 Although some of the DPs in Round 2 opted initially to search for potential transnational partners by utilising their own networks, in general, it was found to be 'more practical' to use the EQUAL database as it only listed those groups as eligible partners. In learning from the previous round, it is evident that the **search for transnational partners by DPs in Round 2 was more structured and better organised**. The DPs adopted a number of methodological approaches for choosing partners that included the following:

- **Partner criteria:** some DPs detailed a set of criteria that a prospective transnational partner must have in order to be considered. Promoting Opportunities for Inclusion in Social Care (POISE) and Reachout are examples of projects that demonstrated this. POISE outlined criteria for potential partners that included a requirement to be: English speaking; working in the care sector; and, dealing with gender issues. Reachout DPs specified that their transnational partners should be a new member state and that they should be able to make useful comparisons on development progress with them. These criteria ensured that the Project Managers had definitive guidance to assist them in the transnational partner selection process;
- **Pre-agreement meetings:** many of the partnerships opted to meet with organisations prior to agreeing to partner. For example, having identified potential partners on the database, the Heilos DPs decided to meet with two DPs in Holland to discuss project issues and gain more understanding of the objectives of the partnerships. Following the meeting, one of the DPs was selected as a partner; and
- **Networking from Round 1:** this involved DPs in Round 2 identifying transnational partners that had worked with DPs in Round 1. Possibilities DP, for example, identified their transnational partner following a networking meeting with the Accord DP which had worked with the partner in Round 1.

4.41 Although, the DPs in Round 2 have adopted a more proactive approach to identifying transnational partners, a number of the DPs did experience some difficulties. These included:

- **New Member State involvement:** many of the DPs in Round 2 that aimed to develop linkages with a DP from a new Member State found it difficult to identify appropriate partners that shared the same objectives. In addition, in many cases, the new Member State had not allocated sufficient funding to its transnational element. This made it costly for their DPs to contact prospective partners. Despite these problems, however, most of the DPs that aimed to partner with new Member States did locate a partner;
- **Size of cohort:** a number of the DPs noted that they had a small group from which to choose transnational partners. Reachout, for example, focuses on integrating ex-offenders into the labour market and the small number of DPs working with this target group created a limited pool of potential partners.

4.42 In summary, Round 2 DPs have been successful in finding transnational partners who are closely aligned with their objectives. There has been an increase in pre-agreement contact and a more structured approach has been taken by DPs to focus on the transnational side of their project than was evident in the Round 1 projects. Amendments to the EQUAL database and guidance provided by the NSS, in view of the lessons from Round 1, also assisted the process. **This is a positive move and also shows greater calculation and determination amongst DP members to attain results from the transnational working.**

Forms of Transnational Partnerships

- 4.43 The European Commission has produced guidelines for the monitoring and evaluation of EQUAL, which provides a **typology of transnational co-operation for projects**. This typology includes five categories, and provides a continuum of four progressively deeper levels of co-operation from the simple 'exchange of information and experience' to the more complex relationship of 'division of tasks with a common objective'. The fifth category provides a parallel mode of co-operation involving, 'exchange of trainees/trainers/staff'. Table 4.2 summarises the main forms of transnational co-operation and locates the DPs in Round 1 and 2 according to their relevant typology. In the table it is important to note that DPs can either simultaneously demonstrate more than one typology at a time or can progress along the continuum.

**Table 4.2: Types of transnational co-operation under EQUAL
(and categorisation of NI EQUAL projects)**

Projects	Round 1	Round 2	Total
Exchange of Information and Experience ("Getting to know each other")			
This model usually represents the starting point for transnational co-operation and it is also the common denominator for all the following models. Partners exchange information about their projects and the background to their activities. Partners have not explicitly defined joint concrete objectives of their co-operation at this stage.	6	13	19
Parallel development of Innovative Approaches			
In this model, partners share and pursue a common concrete objective, yet work relatively independently of, but parallel to, each other, on the more practical realisation of their common goals. The exchange of experience is less general and more systematically goal-related than in the first model above. It is a systematic attempt to secure support in the development of innovation from partners with comparable interests.	5	8	13
Import, Export or Adoption of New Approaches and their Adaptation to Own Situation			
This model is usually a variant or continuation of the "parallel development" model above, coming into play when it becomes apparent in the course of transnational co-operation that the project partner already has a largely "complete" solution for its own problem. In that case, transnationality makes it possible for certain partners to have access to insights which the other partner already possesses.	3	9	12
Joint Development - Division of Tasks with a Common Objective			
This model often results from partnerships that have been in existence for some time. It implies a common perception of the problem and an intention to find a joint solution to it, making conscious use of individual strengths. The steps required to solve the problem are defined and the resulting tasks divided up among the partner projects.	0	1	1

Projects	Round 1	Round 2	Total
Sub-model/Additional Activity: Exchange of Trainees/Trainers/Staff			
The exchange of trainees, trainers or staff between the transnational partners is an additional activity or a sub-model which usually occurs in parallel with one of the four main models. But these activities need to go beyond study visits (otherwise they would belong to the first model of co-operation above). There has to be a precise definition of the specific objectives of the exchange in relation to the further development and progress towards the common project objective.	0	4	4

Source: European Commission (2000), Guidelines for the Monitoring and Evaluation of EQUAL

- 4.44 With regard to Round 1, Table 4.2 indicates that all six DPs fulfilled the lowest model of transnational co-operation partnership set out by the European Commission. In effect **all DPs engaged in the transnational aspect of the programme sufficiently to benefit from the exchange of information and experience**. All the DPs were positive that the transnational component of their projects provided an important insight into the different, cultural and administrative approaches to common social and labour market problems throughout the EU Member States. While the transnational component was **universally regarded as being time consuming and fairly difficult** by the DPs, nevertheless, **they all regarded it as a worthwhile** and important part of the EQUAL programme because of the exchange of information and experience which it embodied.
- 4.45 With regard to Round 2, Table 4.2 charts the level of co-operation envisaged by the DP members and the TCAs **as the DPs have only recently embarked on Action 2**. The following paragraphs discuss examples of the nature of transnational partnerships the DPs have proposed, drawing on the typologies presented in Table 4.2. For Round 1, the outcomes of the transnational partnerships in Round 1 are examined while the Round 2 **assesses the proposed level of transnational partnership**.

Exchange of Information and Experience

Round 1

- 4.46 Young Women Making it Work regarded the exchange of information and experience as the main basis of transnational activity. The DP found that the transnational partnership provided useful information on politics and ideology as they operate in the social systems of Member States with which they were partnered. Over time, a common purpose was developed between the partners. A final publication on the programme was printed in Spanish, German and English.

Round 2

- 4.47 Beyond Caring considers the exchange of expertise and experience to be the main level of activity in the transnational co-operation. Each of their four transnational partners has similar project aims and objectives, based on adopting a common methodology to target and address the needs of individuals who face barriers to participation in learning and employment. In this case, the sharing of experience and expertise will be one of the main expected benefits from the partnership.

Parallel development of innovative approaches

Round 1

- 4.48 The **majority of the DPs** (with the exception of Young Women Making it Work) demonstrate some **progress towards the second typology of transnational co-operation**, which embodies the identification of a common goal, and exchange of experience centred around this goal.
- 4.49 For Futures, the transnational level was the one which bore the most fruit in terms of outputs. Work at this level resulted in three concrete outputs:
- Tailor-made technical supports for clients called 'e-coaching';
 - Research covering baseline data on health, education and employment throughout the partners' national context; and
 - Innovative diagnostics on effective ways of working with partners or beneficiaries in active labour market programmes.
- 4.50 Representatives from the **Futures DP** believe that the project would have been unable to develop such outputs had they not engaged with the transnational partners. The Future's DP played a key role in driving the transnational partnership. It became a central component of the programme, however, they were disappointed by the failure of the other transnational partners to fulfil their roles in the project.
- 4.51 For **Diversity Matters** the transnational project had three components. One study looked at the experience of African migrants across the four countries within the partnership. The second entailed a joint protocol agreement on long term unemployment and social welfare provisions throughout the EU. This was an extensive document to which each of the partners contributed. The third project looked at the validation and transfer of experience and qualifications of migrant workers from outside of the EU. This is important because migrants have often been forced to flee a country before obtaining their full qualifications, despite often having gained extensive experience in their various fields of expertise. This project mostly involved sharing experience of how the issue is handled in different Member States.

Round 2

- 4.52 Just **over half of the DPs hope to progress towards the second typology of transnational co-operation**, which embodies the identification of a common goal, and exchange of experience centred on this goal.
- 4.53 For **Supporting Employment in Action (SEA)** the transnational element of the project is centred on 5 key actions. Each of the partners aim to take the lead on at least one of these common objectives. As each of the partners come from a different background (i.e. one is looking at drug users as their target group and another is looking at children in care homes) the partnership offers opportunities to share experience and expertise. From this they seek to develop a 'tool kit' which would compare the experience and best practice across the partnership.
- 4.54 The **Key Project** aims to develop a handbook of best practice as an outcome from the transnational element of their project. They are working with three transnational partners which were specifically chosen to help the DP meet their employer exchange and training objectives. It is in these areas that they hope to create examples of innovation and best practice.

Import, Export or Adoption of New Approaches and their Adaptation to Own Situation

Round 1

- 4.55 **Three of the DPs** (PPS, Digital Steps, Accord) **demonstrate some progress towards the third typology**, whereby transnationality has made it possible for certain partners to have access to insights, normally involving complete solutions, which other partners already possess.
- 4.56 The PPS project has produced two multi-lingual DVDs, which will enable all transnational partners to have insights into the complete solution that PPS embodies in terms of support for offenders right through committal, release and re-integration into society. One DVD is aimed at the target audience (i.e. the offender community and those who work with them) and the other at the employer community to encourage them to look beyond offending behaviour and at the skills, attitude and commitment of ex-offenders. The latter is key to future efforts for mainstreaming, at the vertical level, and can support transnational partners in similar efforts in their respective jurisdictions.
- 4.57 The experience of Digital Step illustrates that transnational partnerships can advance and become more integrated as partnership develops. One of the partners is now seeking to pilot the Digital Step approach to training in their own projects and to lobby educational authorities in Germany to award the training the same accreditation that the project has achieved in Northern Ireland. In turn, Digital Step have adopted training methods from their partners in Sweden. Ultimately the project aims to get a standard qualification for youth achievement that is transferable and recognised across Europe.
- 4.58 Accord provides another example of a DP which demonstrates aspects of the third typology. Through the Transnational Co-operation Agreement, Accord has been able share experiences and lessons with other DPs and gain an understanding of cultural differences between the partners. Accord has also found transnationality rewarding as it has provided an insight into the operational environments of other DPs and how they progressed and addressed issues such as bureaucracy. As a result of the partnership Accord is currently piloting two innovative models or approaches:-
- A tracking system that examines the progress of beneficiaries who leave the training programmes; and
 - An interactive CD that assists beneficiaries to compose and complete their own CV.
- 4.59 In both cases these solutions were imported by Accord from transnational partners and adapted for the specific circumstances of the NI labour market.

Round 2

- 4.60 Around **two thirds of the DPs** in Round 2 hope to **progress towards the third typology**.
- 4.61 The **Helios** DP, for example, plans to provide a learning report at the end of their project to document all the areas of best practice they have encountered. They also hope to exchange information with their transnational partners and to create a website to show how the projects are progressing.
- 4.62 The Women in Rural Areas and Investment in Self Employment (WRAISE) DP aims to work with their transnational partners to design a methodology for peer groups to learn and support each other in business start-up activity. They are working with two

transnational partners and hope to provide guidance on gender specific training, non-financial service training and the evaluation of transnational activity.

Joint Development – Division of Tasks with a Common Objective

Round 2

- 4.63 There was **one transnational partnership that hopes to progress toward the fourth model of typology of transnational co-operation**. This involves aiming to find a joint solution to a common problem.
- 4.64 The **Helios** DP has selected to work with only one transnational partner, which is conducting a similar project in the construction sector. Both partners identified the problem of the lack of women in construction industry occupations, seek to highlight the key barriers to employment, and provide training for women and gender specific awareness programmes for trainers. Both DPs also plan to provide a learning report to outline best practice and create a joint website to showcase the progress of both projects.

Sub model/Additional Activity: Exchange of Trainees/Trainers/Staff

- 4.65 There are **four transnational partnerships in Round 2 that hope to progress toward the fifth model of typology of transnational co-operation**. This includes the exchange of trainers, trainees or staff between the transnational partners that are working towards a common objective.
- 4.66 A key example of this model of transnational co-operation can be seen in the **Employment Access Project**. The DP has hired a **European Officer** to deal solely with the transnational affairs which are an integral part of this project.

Key Findings on Transnational Activity

Round 1

- 4.67 Some of the DPs found it difficult to juggle all the dimensions of the EQUAL programme effectively and to **balance activity within their own DP against the transnational activity**. Different approaches were evident across the six DPs in this regard:-
- Some, such as Diversity Matters, made the transnational project's outputs one of the DP's five key objectives. By doing this, the transnational project was less 'compartmentalised' and became integrated into the body of the DP; and
 - Others, such as Futures and PPS, took a different approach. They gave one or two key individuals responsibility for the transnational activity. In the case of the Futures project, while this approach ensured that the transnational aspect was effectively conducted, the 'trade-off' was that other members of the DP were less engaged in learning from the transnational activity.
- 4.68 Several of the DPs also reported that they had **underestimated the amount of time which would be required to undertake the transnational activity**. Members of the Accord DP have had experience of projects of this nature and were therefore aware of the demands which the transnational component entailed. Consequently, Accord addressed this pressure by establishing a secretariat responsible for the transnational work.

Round 2

- 4.69 Many of the DPs in Round 2 have **currently limited experience of transnational working** in the context of EQUAL having just completed Action 1. **They have, however, put in place various methods of managing the different aspects of the programme** such as designated working groups/sub groups for the transnational element. Two DPs also have the services of an individual dedicated to managing transnational affairs.
- 4.70 Figure 4.3 illustrates various dimensions of the transnational co-operation within EQUAL to date.

Figure 4.3: Key quotes on transnational co-operation

<p>Round 1</p> <p><i>'Yes, there were difficulties with the transnational database. As the group focused on diversity, they didn't slot easily into any one group. The information provided was not sufficient. It was difficult to tell what the Transnational groups really did on the ground.'</i></p> <p><i>'The whole process was a bit of a scramble'</i></p> <p><i>'The transnational relationships are not intense. That said, we have had regular meetings and robust discussions about shared policy issues'</i></p> <p><i>'The transnational partnership brought additional information on politics and ideology. It was felt that they could help form or shape new ideas or our policy.'</i></p> <p><i>'The transnational work was mostly based on visits in which we were shown the local project and how it works. There was opportunity to share experience and lessons but unfortunately that was all one way. Our project didn't have much to learn from the transnationality aspect of the project.'</i></p> <p>Round 2</p> <p><i>'they were cautious that their Transnational partners were reliable and judged this on their speed of response to emails etc'</i></p> <p><i>'The beneficiaries will not be taking part in the transnational element of the programme as this was not budgeted for. They will however be involved in steering groups and workshops'</i></p> <p><i>'The partnership felt that it was important to include a new member state in their transnational partnership so that they could pass on their experience where it would most of use.'</i></p> <p><i>'The Republic of Ireland partner is involved in another TCA and as such has yet to input significantly into the transnational partnership.'</i></p> <p><i>'Beneficiaries will not be involved in the transnational element of the project due to the nature of the target group.'</i></p> <p><i>'It was hoped that the beneficiaries would be involved in the transnational element of the project. However considering the target group and the detrimental effect that travelling out of the country would have on their financial support and benefits that they receive from the government this is being reconsidered.'</i></p>
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Source: Extracts from a selection of interviews undertaken with members of the DP for Round 1 and Round 2

Innovation

- 4.71 The European Commission guidelines on the monitoring and evaluation of EQUAL identified three categories of innovation, which were discussed and explored with the DPs and wider stakeholders under Round 1 and Round 2 during the PwC evaluation process. These categories are: process-oriented, goal-orientated and context-oriented innovations (as detailed in Table 4.3). Again, there is scope for projects to demonstrate more than one category of innovation simultaneously.

Table 4.3: Categories of innovation

Categories of Innovation
<p>Process-oriented innovations focus on the process of reaching the objectives, through the development of new methods/approaches or the improvement/adaptation of existing ones;</p> <p>Goal-oriented innovations centre around the formulation of new objectives, new subject areas, new uses or new target groups, thus mainly focusing on the objectives and results of the activities; <i>and</i></p> <p>Context-oriented innovations refer to the political and institutional structures within which the activities take place and the objectives are pursued and aim to improve the frame conditions or re-organise the existing settings, e.g. by developing or adapting networking practices.</p>

Process orientated innovation (Round 1)

4.72 All **six DP** under Round 1 **can be described as having demonstrated ‘process-oriented innovation’**. For instance:-

- The PPS project brought together three organisations that had worked together in bi-lateral partnerships into a wider tri-partite arrangement which impacted on the way that the organisations worked together. It brought about a more co-ordinated process into the delivery of support for offenders and input into policy for same; and
- The concept of process development proposed by the Futures DP was very innovative. Futures aimed to synthesize the resources and expertise available within a host of statutory agencies and community-based organisations to implement tailored developmental pathways for households which experienced long-term unemployment. However, due to the low uptake of this project from the beneficiaries and the difficulties in engaging community representatives, the opportunities provided to develop and roll-out these innovative processes were very limited.

Goal orientated innovation (Round 1)

4.73 Some of the DPs under Round 1 demonstrated evidence of ‘goal-orientated’ innovation. Key examples were Digital Step DP and Young Women Making It Work:-

- Digital Step exhibited goal-orientated innovation by using digital technologies to develop employment opportunities for marginalised young people through the acquisition of key skills. This training project aimed to ensure that the young people obtained access to the primary labour market, rather than the low-paid secondary labour market which the majority of active labour market policies feed into. This DP found new uses for current developments in technology which is a key feature of goal-orientated innovation; and
- Young Women Making it Work focused on a target group which is largely under-represented in conventional active labour market policies (i.e. young women in difficult-to-access categories such as the travellers’ community, women from minority ethnic communities, young women with disabilities and young lesbians). While many labour market initiatives aimed to address women before, the innovation within this project was that it attempted to address collectively the difficulties of these very disparate sub-groups within the female labour market.

Context orientated innovation (Round 1)

4.74 One of the DPs under Round 1 (Diversity Matters) exhibited features of ‘context oriented innovation’. One of Diversity Matters’ five key objectives was to establish a

cross party forum on diversity. As a result of the Northern Ireland Assembly having been suspended, this objective was confined to providing information on diversity to Northern Ireland's main political parties. Another key objective was a public awareness campaign on diversity. The aim was to challenge the commonly held perspective in Northern Ireland that the province has only two communities. Diversity Matters sought to achieve systemic change in Northern Ireland by promoting the idea that a host of 'communities of interest' exist.

Summary of key Findings on innovation (Round 1)

4.75 Figure 4.4 provides a broad indication of the type of innovative actions with which the DPs were experimenting under Round 1. Overall, drawing on Figure 4.4 and the typology analysis above, it is evident that there were **high levels of innovation within EQUAL under Round 1**, which fits with the nature of the programme as an experimental opportunity for challenging labour market issues.

Figure 4.4: Examples of innovative actions under Round 1

- Aim to target households which have experienced long-term unemployment rather than individuals;
- Aim to synthesise the resources and expertise of statutory agencies and community-based organisations to promote individually tailored developmental pathways for the long-term unemployed;
- Use of new technology as an informal method to engage young people in training and IT skills;
- Working with industry and community piloting demand-led, customised learning models;
- Focusing on young women from difficult to access communities within society, such as the travellers' community, women with disabilities, lesbians and women from minority ethnic communities;
- Bottom-up approach to training whereby the unemployed themselves tailor the training packs;
- Aim to integrate multiple identities with a shared, common identity;
- Use of peripheral-style partners called 'reference points' outside the core DP group; and
- Training up 'Guest Facilitators' or people from groups who are traditionally marginal to the labour force to enable them to run courses on diversity within companies.

4.76 Figure 4.5 illustrates various dimensions of innovation within EQUAL under Round 1:

Figure 4.5: Views on innovation under Round 1

'The notion of innovation and experimentation which is at the heart of the programme should be celebrated. It has produced some good results. Having the time and the money to deliver the programme is precious'

'The project did provide new fresh thinking to engage young people and the young people did enjoy doing the work. However, it is not clear whether the benefits derived by the young people can actually be attributed to the programme as it was only one part of an alternative strategy. It was just one afternoon per week and the young people were also being trained or taught in basic skills, literacy and numeracy, leisure activities and personal health'

Source: Extracts from a selection of interviews undertaken with members of the DPs

4.77 Indeed, the finding that the EQUAL projects achieved a high level of innovation is supported by survey evidence, conducted for this evaluation report, which found that, on a level of innovation where 1 is low and 4 is high:

- 53% of respondents recorded a score of 3,
 - 29% a score of 4; and,
 - 18% a score of 2.5.
- 4.78 Interestingly, the survey analysis also shows that 88% of respondents noted that other partners in the DP were central to the development of project innovation while 47% agreed that the transnational partners also played an important role in innovation. This highlights that key principles of EQUAL do not operate in isolation but that principles such as partnership and transnational activity can also add value to innovation.

Innovation under Round 2

- 4.79 It should be noted that the DPs under Round 2 are still in the early stages of development having just recently started Action 2 activity in July 2005. As a result, the findings and commentary which follows is based on in-depth interviews conducted with **DPs in relation to their intended activities rather than actual evidence of innovation.**

Process orientated innovation (Round 2)

- 4.80 **A number of projects** under Round 2 **can be described as demonstrating ‘process-oriented innovations’**. For instance:-
- Key Project (building on the previous experiences of Accord under Round 1) focuses on effective strategies to facilitate the achievement of self-reliance through labour market participation among hard to employ groups, as well the progression of individuals in low paid employment through development of the necessary skills to aid career progression. To this end, the DP adapted and implemented the Strive workshop programme which is an empowerment programme originally developed in the United States and subsequently piloted in London by a similar organisation (LEAP);
 - WRAISE aims to develop an innovative methodology for supporting women in rural areas to start and run their own businesses successfully. In particular, the proposed methodology incorporates plans for the establishment of five peer groups and the subsequent support of the peer groups through business start-up over the two year period of Action 2; and
 - Reachout seeks to promote entry to the labour market for ex-prisoners by addressing their specialist needs and barriers to labour market entry. It also aims to impact on mainstream policy with regard to this group and to influence the targeting of resources by relevant policy makers, including those with responsibility for employment programmes and crime reduction. Specifically, in terms of process innovation, the project will seek to develop, test and evaluate a model for employment placement for ex-prisoners, building on the experiences to date from other sectors (e.g. disability organisations such as CEDAR) in terms of developing work placements for disadvantaged groups that can be adapted to suit this target group.
 - SEA aims to promote an innovative approach by identifying barriers faced by people with disabilities in the labour market and seeking ways to remove them through testing the model of Supported Employment. The model aims to assist people with disabilities to access and stay in employment by providing a person centred approach and providing ongoing employment support.

Goal orientated innovation (Round 2)

4.81 Some of the DPs under Round 2 demonstrate evidence of 'goal-orientated' innovation:-

- Women into Non-Traditional Sectors is innovative through its focus on redressing the existing gender balance in terms of the employment of women in non-traditional sectors, such as skilled trade occupations and process, plant and machine operatives. This project aims to use a mentoring approach to address the needs of the target group with a view to building confidence and skill sets via pre-employment training, which will then be further consolidated through peer and mentoring support during a period of work experience;
- Beyond Caring aims to research and pilot training methodologies and content, particularly the use of ICT that will enable the target group (i.e. those who face barriers to participation in learning and progression into employment due to their disabilities or caring responsibilities) to access learning programmes to enhance their employability skills. The project also aims to develop ICT-based diagnostic tools. For example, it is anticipated that a 'route planning tool' will allow beneficiaries to map a route through learning into employment. Participants will be able to set their own target goals and objectives, thus taking ownership of their development, helping to increase their confidence and resulting in the development of personal learning plans;
- Possibilities seeks to develop an Employment Support Network (ESN) to bring together key stakeholders via a model of community support, to promote joint working and to focus on a common goal, namely the creation of equality of opportunity for lone parents entering the labour market in Northern Ireland. It was indicated that the ESN will be piloted in South Belfast and will aim to target approximately 60 lone parents and will include employability training of community members via work placements; and
- Employment for Autism plans to deliver services for adults with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), for which there is no existing service provision in Northern Ireland. The DP plans to develop models of intervention towards supported employment for adults with ASD to secure their participation within the labour market.

4.82 For the DPs under Round 2, it is considered that the projects have mainly focused on testing new models or methods (process-orientated innovation) or implementing new programmes or initiatives for particular target groups (goal-orientated innovation), rather than seeking to change wider contextual conditions such as political structures (context orientated innovation).

Summary of key findings on innovation (Round 2)

4.83 Figure 4.6 provides a broad indication of the types of innovative actions which the DPs aim to implement in Round 2. Overall, it is evident that the **high levels of innovation within the EQUAL Programme have continued under Round 2 thus far.**

Figure 4.6: Examples of innovative actions under Round 2

- Encouraging the participation of women in the construction trade by identifying barriers, conducting training in construction skills and promoting equality/ awareness within the sector;
- Promoting a multiple identity approach which understands that individuals may have a range of identities such as disability, age, gender and race which could create cumulative barriers to employment;
- Delivering services for persons with ASD;
- Promoting self learning approaches that encourage entry into the labour market for individuals that have disabilities or have caring responsibilities;
- Conducting training and adopting a mentoring approach to encourage women to gain employment in non-traditional sectors;
- Promoting equality of opportunity in employment in the care sector by reviewing recruitment and organisational approaches and providing progression programmes to assist existing employees in earning promotion;
- Testing a model of Supported Employment that aims to provide a way of encouraging entry into the labour market for socially disadvantaged groups and persons with disabilities; and
- Piloting a 'peer mentor' approach that involves beneficiaries from Round 1 in the EQUAL Programme, mentoring and providing advice to beneficiaries in Round 2.

4.84 Although Action 2 has only been operational since June 2005, Figure 4.7 illustrates various dimensions of the innovation within EQUAL under Round 2 :

Figure 4.7: Views on innovation under Round 2

'The project is innovative as it seeks to include linkages with the business community to understand the needs of employers and link employability initiatives (developed in Round 1) with employment vacancies (in Round 2). The project also seeks to understand and draw lessons on how other organisations develop work placements for disadvantaged groups that can then be adapted to suit the target group (ex-offenders).'

'The training for lone parents will be piloted through the Employment Support Network which is a collaboration of local community groups in the area. This is a new approach as it seeks to bring together all local resources to work towards one common goal instead of organisations and groups competing against each other and / or acting alone.'

Source: Extracts from a selection of interviews undertaken with members of the DPs

Empowerment

4.85 The European Commission's April 2000 Communication to the Member States on EQUAL discusses the notion of empowerment and aims to define it. It provides a good starting point for this section of the chapter. It states: *"The principle of empowerment will be central to EQUAL. In practice, this will mean that those involved in the implementation of activities should also take part in the decision-making."*

4.86 Survey analysis, undertaken for this final evaluation report, suggests that the **DPs have worked to address empowerment and that the level of involvement of beneficiaries in steering the projects has been fairly high.** 41% of respondents, for instance, commented that the target groups have been centrally involved in all discussions in steering the project while 41% felt that beneficiaries had an important role to play. By contrast, just 6% considered that the target groups had a limited role in steering the project while 12% felt that they had no role in steering the project but did receive benefits from the project.

4.87 However, in order to examine the survey findings more closely and degree to which empowerment was being taken into account by the DPs, the research examined how client groups were engaged in the design and implementation of the respective projects. For the purposes of analysing empowerment, the following categorisation was devised:-

- **Minimal empowerment:** This category entails locating client groups and beneficiaries who are under-addressed by mainstream programmes. It involves accessing these groups and encouraging them to participate in projects. Minimal empowerment is the ability to maintain client groups' interest in the project and raise their self esteem and self worth so their sense of their own employability increases;
- **Partial empowerment:** A DP which creates partial empowerment for the beneficiary group achieves all the outcomes under the category 'minimal empowerment'. In addition, it includes consulting with representatives of the client group on decisions made within the DP, communicating directly with as many beneficiaries as possible to get their feedback on developments within the DP and piloting aspects of the objectives on client groups to receive their comments; and
- **Deep empowerment:** A DP which creates deep empowerment for its client group could have client representatives sitting directly on the DP steering group, enabling client group representatives to have a say in decision-making within the DP and providing an opportunity for representatives of client groups to become involved in rolling out aspects of the key objectives (e.g. representing the DP at transnational meetings). It is important to recognise that the category 'deep empowerment' is difficult to achieve considering the client group are individuals who, on the whole, are more marginal in society. They are not usually entrusted with the opportunities to make decisions on behalf of large groups of people, neither do they generally hold power and positions of responsibility.

Empowerment (Round 1)

4.88 Table 4.4 shows the number of DPs under Round 1 falling under the categories of empowerment.

Table 4.4: Level of involvement of client groups in design and implementation of projects under Round 1

Level of client group involvement	Number of DPs
Minimal empowerment	1
Partial empowerment	4
Deep empowerment	1

4.89 All six DP project leaders under Round 1 commented that they tried to apply the concept of empowerment to their project. There is evidence that each DP did succeed in this aim to different degrees.

4.90 It is noteworthy that Futures, the only DP under Round 1 which was regarded as having applied 'minimal empowerment', was placed in this category because the project was unable to attract enough clients to be realistically described as empowering a client group. This project did have a number of mechanisms in place by which to empower the client group had the programme been successful. It was planned that clients would sit on the board representing beneficiary groups, but this did not come to fruition.

- 4.91 Four of the DPs under Round 1 could have been described as having had integrated 'partial empowerment' into their projects. This was evidenced where the main body of the project was conceived entirely of a statutory or community / voluntary sector group, who then rolled it out to their respective beneficiaries.
- 4.92 A key example here includes the Young Women Making it Work DP. While this project was created by a voluntary sector group, it appeared to have been implemented in a 'top-down' style. The client groups were located and did engage in the project, but there was little evidence that they helped *shape* the training programmes, or had much voice in governing the DP. This may be explained by the 'marginal' nature of the client groups i.e. young women from very diverse backgrounds who were likely to have multiple pressing responsibilities and who were difficult to attract onto a project such as this.
- 4.93 Digital Step provided another example of a DP under Round 1 which engendered partial empowerment in its client group. The young clients involved in the training were consulted when the programme plan was being drafted at the outset. They were asked what discipline they would like to develop and use (e.g. such as music, film etc). Furthermore the methods involved in the training were piloted using a group of young people, while successful completion of the training resulted in individuals being accredited with the Digital Media Youth Achievement Award. This helped to build the young beneficiaries' self-confidence and self-esteem.
- 4.94 **One of the DPs under Round 1 may be described as having succeeded in 'deeply empowering' the client group.** This example is the Diversity Matters DP, which had a training initiative as one of its five key objects. Diversity Matters developed a programme on managing diversity in the workplace entitled '*Take the Challenge - Make the Change*'. The training programme was designed using the feedback which they received from employer focus groups. This programme was piloted twice. Diversity Matters trained up six 'lead facilitators' to deliver the whole of the programme and they trained nine invited 'guest facilitators' who co-facilitated modules of the programme. The 'guest facilitators' represented different 'communities of interest'. They underwent three days of training and are now equipped to implement the training programme in workplaces. Through Diversity Matters, these nine people have increased their capacity and skills and it was anticipated that they would go back into their communities and utilise these skills to promote the concept of diversity.

Key findings on empowerment under Round 1

- 4.95 The evaluation highlighted that many aspects of the projects under Round 1 engendered empowerment. These included the ability of beneficiaries to present DP progress reports to the EQUAL Monitoring Committee through to training up beneficiaries as 'guest facilitators' with an expertise in promoting diversity. From the case study analysis, Figure 4.8 includes a list of examples of the features of DPs under Round 1 which encouraged the empowerment of client groups.

Figure 4.8: Examples of activities through which DPs may empower client groups under Round 1

- Representing the client groups on the DP monthly steering group meetings;
- Providing focus groups for beneficiaries to air their perspectives;
- Involving target groups in design of training programmes;
- Consulting with client groups over the training plan;
- Training clients as trainers;
- Providing information to target groups;
- Providing a voice for target groups; and
- Having weekly counselling meetings with participants to map their progress.

4.96 Figure 4.9 illustrates various dimensions of empowerment within EQUAL under Round 1:

Figure 4.9: Key quotes on empowerment under Round 1

'Yes, they were involved and subsequently empowered. They were sitting at the table; five partners representing the community groups, the eight focus groups involved in the training, the reference points.'

'This meant that on the one hand the young people were empowered in defining what methods best suited them and then, the methods were tested in advance with the young people and tweaked before they were rolled out in the project proper.'

'The project is based on increasing confidence and self esteem of beneficiaries and ensuring greater commitment of beneficiaries to the training.'

Source: Extracts from a selection of interviews undertaken with members of the DPs

Empowerment (Round 2)

4.97 Table 4.5 shows the number of DPs under Round 2 falling under the various categories of empowerment as defined previously.

Table 4.5: Level of involvement of client groups in design and implementation of projects under Round 2

Level of client group involvement	Number of DPs
Minimal empowerment	3
Partial empowerment	7
Deep empowerment	3

4.98 Similarly to DPs under Round 1, all **13 DP's under Round 2 commented that they intend to apply the concept of empowerment to their project.** Across the DPs, however, the degree of empowerment proposed varies.

4.99 Under Round 2, three of the DPs could be described as having applied 'minimal empowerment' into their project design as detailed below:

- Key Project: the implementation of the Strive workshop programme will constitute an empowerment tool. The objective of the workshop programme will be to increase the confidence, develop the skills of participants and ultimately assist them beneficiaries achieve self-reliance through labour market participation;
- Possibilities: plans to provide direct training for lone parents to help promote the employability and equality of opportunity amongst this group, thus increasing their labour market participation in Northern Ireland; and
- POISE: aims to address equality of employment issues in the care sector in Northern Ireland to enhance staff recruitment (through the promotion of job opportunities) and retention for individuals from under-represented groups. In addition, the project will seek to build confidence among female care workers to encourage them to apply for promotion opportunities within the sector.

4.100 Seven of the DPs under Round 2 aim to work towards 'partial empowerment' . Examples are detailed below:

- WRAISE aim to design a methodology for peer groups to learn and support each other through business start-up over the two-year period of Action 2. It is anticipated participation in peer groups will provide a forum to develop needs analysis for training, advice services, mentoring and finance;
- Reachout plans to pilot an adult mentoring project as part of the DP project, whereby beneficiaries from the Round 1 will mentor the Round 2 beneficiaries, thus testing peer mentoring;
- Helios plan to incorporate a face-to-face forum within their project which will meet quarterly with a view to monitoring progress, shaping future actions and raising the confidence/abilities of the project participants;
- Employment for Autism intends to establish an ASD forum whereby beneficiaries can provide feedback on the project facilitated by peers and staff. Ultimately, it was indicated that the project aspires to have beneficiaries in attendance at board meetings; and
- Diversity Works plans to hold focus groups with members of five community groups to identify research opportunities, for which the respective groups will be afforded the opportunity to present their research findings at a later date. It was also anticipated that the DP would undertake capacity building with community groups as a reciprocal benefit for the research conducted.

4.101 Three of the DPs under Round 2 have proposed approaches that seek to 'deeply empower' the client group as follows:

- SEA plans to empower beneficiaries through their participation in a working group which will consist of ten of the twenty beneficiaries with a focus on discussing the issues faced by service users. In addition, the DP indicated that a number of beneficiaries participating in the working group will have representation on the DP board;
- Beyond Caring indicated an intention of including beneficiaries (i.e. individuals with disabilities and those with caring responsibilities) within the steering group for the project. In addition, the DP were in the process of establishing three working groups within the local area to provide a forum through which issues could be raised for the attention of the project steering group; and
- The Engage Programme DP plans to facilitate wider decision making and include representative of the beneficiaries on the DP board, as well as providing a forum whereby the decisions made by the DP could be challenged by beneficiaries.

Key findings on empowerment under Round 2

4.102 Although Round 2 is still in the early stages of development and Action 2 only commenced in June 2005, the research has highlighted the different ways in which the projects plan to empower beneficiaries. These include providing support, training and assistance that will improve the confidence and ability of beneficiaries (minimal empowerment) to allowing beneficiaries a role in the decision making process of the DP (deep empowerment). In a similar pattern to Round 1 however, most projects have proposed an approach that seeks to achieve partial empowerment and is 'mid-way' between the minimal and deep models. This involves DPs consulting with beneficiaries and gaining feedback on project activity. From the case study analysis, Figure 4.10

includes a list of examples of the features of DPs under Round 2 which seek to encourage the empowerment of client groups.

Figure 4.10: Examples of activities through which DPs seek to empower client groups under Round 2

- Working with peer groups to develop needs analysis for training, advice, services, mentoring and finance;
- Participation on working groups that will provide assistance in the management of the project;
- Inviting beneficiaries to feedback thoughts on the delivery and outcomes of the project;
- Establishing beneficiaries as mentors in the project;
- Direct training to help improve equality of opportunity among target groups;
- Inclusion of beneficiaries / representative beneficiary organisations on the DP board;
- Establishing a face-to-face forum that allows beneficiaries to comment on the progress of the project;
- Setting up a diary room that enables participants to voice their opinions on the project;
- Keeping beneficiaries informed on-going project development by hosting an information day, administering questionnaires to gather their views and publishing leaflets; and
- Giving beneficiaries the opportunity to present research findings to the DP and wider public, private and voluntary / community stakeholders during the dissemination process.

4.103 Figure 4.11 illustrates various dimensions of the proposed empowerment methods within EQUAL under Round 2:

Figure 4.11 Key quotes on empowerment under Round 2

'The partnership has decided to stagger the intake of the forty beneficiaries in either two stages of twenty or four intakes of ten. This will allow the partnership to adopt a peer group approach in which the first beneficiaries can pass their learning and experience onto others'.

'The project seeks to empower women living in rural areas by encouraging them to start their own businesses'.

The project aims to achieve complete inclusion of the beneficiaries in all areas - from involvement in the actual programme through to representation on the working groups that feed into the management of the DP'.

Source: Extracts from a selection of interviews undertaken with members of the DPs

V Impact and mainstreaming of EQUAL

Introduction

5.1 This chapter assesses the impact and mainstreaming of the EQUAL Programme. In particular the chapter focuses on the impacts from the end of Round 1 and also examines the initial steps made towards mainstreaming in Round 2. The section is structured as follows:

- **Impact at the individual level:** this examines impact at the individual or beneficiary level under Round 1 and the reflects on the aims of the DPs to target specific beneficiaries in Round 2;
- **Impact at the horizontal level:** this examines impact at the project level under Round 1 and the initial steps made by DPs in Round 2 towards horizontal mainstreaming;
- **Impact at the vertical level:** this examines impact at the national policy level under Round 1 and the initial steps made by DPs in Round 2 towards vertical mainstreaming;
- **Barriers to mainstreaming:** this assesses the constraints to mainstreaming at the horizontal and vertical levels, drawing on research with DPs;
- **Organisational mainstreaming structures:** this discusses the roles of the National Thematic Network and the European Thematic Networks in supporting mainstreaming under both Round 1 and Round 2.

Impact at the individual level

Round 1

5.2 Overall, the evidence²⁹ suggests that the programme has made a positive impact at the individual level by helping beneficiaries move along the pathway to training, education and employment. These impacts can mainly be identified in terms of soft outcomes. Drawing on the research conducted by PwC with beneficiaries of Round 1 DPs it is evident that although the programme did not intend to improve formal skills such as literacy and numeracy, all **beneficiaries agreed that participation in EQUAL contributed towards increasing their self-confidence and motivation, communication and teambuilding skills and in addition enhanced their sense of personal responsibility.** Figure 5.1 provides an illustration of some of the main beneficiary responses when asked what abilities participation on the project helped to develop.

²⁹ From DP project evaluation reports, quantitative research with DPs and qualitative research with beneficiaries conducted by PwC, working through DP contacts.

Figure 5.1: Abilities developed from participation on the EQUAL Projects³⁰

"I learned how to plan and prepare evidence for my qualifications"

"I improved my awareness of where to put certain information and why you should keep a neat PC"

"I learned diary and time management"

"I can now plan and manage work more efficiently"

"I learned to work with different people who I would have never worked with before"

"I developed more confidence in stating my opinions and, in some cases, sticking to them in spite of opposition"

- 5.3 However, while the EQUAL programme has broadly helped to develop soft outcomes and help beneficiaries move along the development pathway, across the **DPs the level of outreach to target groups and the degree of beneficiary progress has been mixed.**
- 5.4 During the implementation of Action 2, for instance, two DPs (namely Young Women Making it Work and Futures) experienced particular problems in accessing their target groups and ensuring their continued participation. The Young Women Making it Work project encountered difficulties in recruiting their specific target groups (lesbians, young mothers, Irish Travellers and minority ethnic communities). Problems included:
- Identifying young lesbians in the predominately male 'Gay Scene' in Northern Ireland;
 - Maintaining the commitment young women Irish Travellers due to their frequent relocation, domestic duties and low literacy and numeracy levels;
 - Securing a neutral venue (for example, the Sikh community could not use a community centre belonging to the Indian Community); and
 - Finding appropriate times as many young women from minority ethnic backgrounds work unsocial hours.
- 5.5 Similarly, the Futures project experienced difficulties reaching out to beneficiaries. With a view to creating a development pathway for the long term unemployed, the Futures project aimed to gather information from around 80 households a year on the barriers to labour market reintegration and then design an integrated programme of actions tailored to client needs. However, after attempting various methods of accessing the target group, only 9 households participated, which did not provide a sufficient and reliable information base to advance the project. In discussing the difficulties in recruiting households to the project, the DP identified the following problems:
- Despite assurances of confidentiality, potential participants were concerned that information provided to the project would be used by government departments and agencies to reassess their levels of social benefits;
 - Partners involved in the Futures project pointed out that a number of other larger bodies funded under government programmes (i.e. Employers Forum, Job Assist Centres and West Belfast Shankill Task Force) had developed similar projects causing competition in the recruitment for beneficiaries. However, after closer analysis, it is evident that this had only marginal influence on the recruitment of

³⁰ PwC survey, July 2005.

beneficiaries as during Actions 1 and 2 of the Futures DP, the government programmes were only in pilot or 'concept' stage of development; and

- The particular social and mental barriers that affect labour market participation in Belfast. The project documented that amongst a section of the unemployed, a certain salary threshold needs to be reached before paid employment is considered viable. This is based on the existing level of welfare benefit and the ability to gain income and buy goods in the informal or 'grey' economy.
- 5.6 However, notwithstanding the problems encountered recruiting target groups for the Young Women Making it Work and Futures projects, both DPs have made some impact on beneficiaries. To compensate for the difficulties in accessing beneficiaries, Young Women Making it Work recruited an extra young mothers group and employed a different recruitment strategy by using peer support workers from minority ethnic communities. Working with participants from the target groups (young mothers, travellers, lesbians and minority ethnic communities) the DP implemented the 'Moving On' programme that focused on employment skills and personal development. Soft outcomes such as confidence, self-esteem, assertiveness, communication skills and working with others were measured through tutor observations and included in portfolios for accreditation for Youth Achievement Awards. These awards have provided a framework for the trainees and provided recognition for the 'soft outcomes'.
- 5.7 In addition, the project completed a training programme (Principles and Practices of Working with Young Women) for youth and community workers involved with young women. 21 trainees participated in this project and 15 (3 above the target) completed their portfolios which will be submitted towards Northern Ireland Open College Network (NIOCN) level three awards. The successful participants on this programme then held training initiatives themselves with groups of young women on issues such as young mothers and sexual health which provides evidence of learning.
- 5.8 To illustrate the impact on beneficiaries in the Young Women Making it Work project, Figure 5.2 **provides positive qualitative evidence** from one of the pilot programmes that focused on young lesbian women³¹:

Figure 5.2: Qualitative impacts of Young Women Making it Work at the beneficiary level

"I like being part of the group – I feel that we are able to talk about our feelings and experiences without being judged which is what normally happens".

"I feel like I am understood in the group".

"I am happy and feel privileged to be part of this group. I feel excited about what we can achieve".

"I enjoy meeting new people who are just like me".

"The group gives us the opportunity to meet other lesbians outside the usual nightclub scene. There should be more opportunities for other young lesbians".

- 5.9 While the Futures DP did not meet the intended aims and objectives of the project, research based on focus groups with the long term unemployed was undertaken to provide lessons for future employment programmes. Although not directly providing

³¹ Youth Action Northern Ireland (2004) *Out and About, Young Lesbian Project, A Model of Effective Practice*, Youth Action Northern Ireland, the Gender Equality Unit.

outcomes at the beneficiary level, the research has examined a range of relevant issues that relate to the labour market and employment in the project area including³²:

- The barriers that prevented the client group from engaging in the programme;
- The client groups nature and size and means to attract / recruit the client group;
- The changes which the North / West Belfast labour market has undergone in recent years; and
- The range of factors which act as disincentives to potential clients.

5.10 While experiencing initial difficulties in recruiting young people aged 16-25, Digital Step DP was able to utilise the networks of their youth organisation partners to engage beneficiaries in a learning process. Evidence from beneficiary surveys³³ and the project evaluation suggests that the students in the Digital Step programme gained valuable experience and IT skills, which have had a positive impact on their confidence levels. As the programme was delivered by an organisation from outside the formal education sector, the students were treated as adult learners in an informal situation which also brought positive benefits in terms of motivation, participation and learning. In the programmes, participants have gained from the following:

- **Increased self-confidence:** each of the participants had to define the actual content and aims of the training programme which then had to be collectively agreed by young people, artists and leaders. This process both empowered the young people and offered them a real sense of involvement and ownership of the programme;
- **Increased self esteem:** participants increased their self esteem as they had the opportunity to develop a high quality product which they could present to their peers, family and community;
- **Team and group skills:** the participants had to come to a consensus about their thematic approach and had to put in a lot of effort and teamwork into understanding the complicated software packages. In addition, they had an individual and collective responsibility for the care of the equipment used during the pilots; and
- **Creative IT skills:** as well as improving soft outcomes, participants gained creative IT skills through the use of different software packages. This impact from the project was clearly highlighted in the survey, in which beneficiaries frequently stated that participation on the project helped them improve or refresh their IT skills and knowledge of different types of packages such as DJ, turntable and media software.

5.11 As further illustration of the impact on the beneficiaries, Figure 5.3 details the outcomes that resulted from one of the pilot programmes in one learning institution³⁴:

³² Morrissey, M., McRea, R. and Lynas, M. (2005) *Evaluation of the Futures Project: Summary Evaluation Report*, January 2005.

³³ Designed by PwC and circulated to Digital Step participants through DP/ delivery contacts.

³⁴ Paul Steel Management Consultants (2003) *Digital Step Programme, Evaluation Interim Report*.

Figure 5.3: Illustrations of the impact on the beneficiaries from one pilot programme (Digital Step)

Staff feel that students involved in the programme have gained valuable experience and IT skills, which as a result, has had a positive impact on their confidence levels. According to the teacher, the majority of the children in year 13 were not particularly academic in the conventional sense, yet despite this there was full attendance at the Digital Step classes (which were not compulsory). This rate of attendance would appear to indicate the level of enthusiasm amongst the pupils. Overall, the teacher felt that the programme was successful in engaging the target group and helping them to overcome their natural reticence of embracing learning. In addition, staff state that the participants became very pro-active in deciding and taking control of their own learning needs.

5.12 In addition, the Diversity Matters DP has worked to pilot a cross sectoral capacity building programme entitled '*Take the Challenge – Make the Change*'. This pilot was centred on the most marginalised in the workplace or those trying to access the workplace and a framework for measuring 'soft indicators' was developed using three methods. First, participants completed a pre- and post-pilot training questionnaire which gauged changes in understanding and attitude. Following that, the beneficiaries were required to complete evaluation forms on each day of the programme and on completion of the training. The beneficiaries were also interviewed by external project evaluators. Illustrations of the outcomes from the evaluation of two pilot training programmes are outlined in Figures 5.4 and 5.5³⁵:

Figure 5.4: Illustrations of outcomes from the evaluation of pilot training programme - number 1 (Diversity Matters)

Overall, the participants felt that they had benefited from the pilot diversity-training programme. Each of the days brought new information and awareness of the minority groups and the issues of multiple identities. A number of participants commented that the third day with the information on the legislation was very valuable as they were able to realise the areas that the legislation covers and the level of protection. There are a number of ways that the participants believed that they had benefited including:

- Allowing time to think about important issues;
- Information that the course provided;
- Raising awareness of gaps or weaknesses in knowledge;
- Networking with other participants;
- Helping participants to realise the importance of diversity in society;
- Raising awareness of the issues relating to diversity;
- Respecting other; and
- Seeking more information on diversity.

³⁵ Locus Evaluation Services (2003) *Diversity Matters, Interim Report*, June 2004.

Figure 5.5: Illustrations of outcomes from the evaluation of pilot training programme - number 2 (Diversity Matters)

In a similar pattern to pilot 1, all participants felt that they had benefited from the pilot diversity-training programme. There are a number of ways that the participants believed that they had benefited including:

- Brought underlying prejudices to the fore- presented me with an opportunity to understand how they have evolved;
- I've learnt about the issues that affect different minorities;
- Increases awareness of a broad range of diversity / equality issues;
- More information that will be of use in my day to day work;
- The experience of the course;
- Being a member of a group of diverse people working together; *and*
- The information provided on issues such as diversity, discrimination etc.

Comments from beneficiaries in regard to the training included:

- *"Really brought issues home"*
- *"Giving a more in depth view of each issue"*
- *"It was good to get different points of view – a definite plus"*
- *"I feel after taking the course that I want to do more of this kind of work"*

5.13 As an integral part of the programme, Diversity Matters trained 6 lead facilitators and a further 9 'guest' facilitators who represented the different communities of interest. In the training plan, Diversity Matters developed specific assessment criteria for the facilitators to ensure consistency of approach and the maintenance of high quality delivery. Having completed the programme, the 'guest' facilitators are now skilled to co-ordinate and lead a session on specific diversity issues, which provides evidence of increased learning and training skills.

5.14 The Personal Progression System (PPS) project can demonstrate clear progress towards specified objectives and impact on target groups (i.e. those serving a custodial sentence). At the heart of the project is the fact that the partnership of resources of the three organisations is channelled, in a co-ordinated way, to offer a seamless system of support, training, and education both within and beyond 'the prison gate' (i.e. post-release). It is geared at providing a customised programme of support and development for each individual, which encompasses a range of areas often not covered in employability programmes (e.g. relationships, accommodation and substance abuse). The key tenet is that this support will improve both employment opportunity and re-offending behaviour amongst the target group.

5.15 In Action 2, the PPS project has successfully recruited 370³⁶ individuals from the target group, for whom conventional labour market policies have often proved ineffective. While the full outcomes in terms of employability and re-offending are not yet evident, emerging outcomes point towards positive outcomes in quantitative and qualitative terms. Evidence from internal monitoring and evaluation activity³⁷ suggests that the target group exhibited many key employability deficits (e.g. lack of stable relationships, evidence of serial offending behaviour, lack of qualifications or limited qualifications beyond GCSE, lack of a driving licence and the predominance of unemployment before conviction). **The support from PPS has however resulted in measurable employability outputs**, evidenced by the fact that initial statistics suggest that

³⁶ Which is in excess of the targets originally set for the project

³⁷ Based on a pool of 212 individuals within PPS (completers and non-completers).

completers of PPS were much more likely (in a ratio of 1:6³⁸) to secure employment than non-completers of PPS. Similarly, over half of the remaining completers went on to an education programme post-release whereas practically no non-completers did. The net result evident in the analysis was that 76 completers went into employment or education post-release, versus 7 non-completers.

- 5.16 The impact on re-offending within the target group is not yet fully evident, as this will only be measurable over a more extended period. That said, there is no evidence of the re-arrest of completers of PPS to date. **Overall, it is reasonable to conclude that there is clear evidence of the emerging positive impacts of PPS on the employability of the target group and tentative evidence of positive impacts on re-offending.** In qualitative terms, Figure 5.6 provides some illustrations of the benefits evident at individual participant level – in effect of the ‘soft outcomes’ on participants³⁹.

Figure 5.6: Qualitative impacts of PSS at the beneficiary level

“It (having a criminal record) is always going to be a disadvantage. However it is important not to give up on yourself and to keep on trying. The support helped me through the first few weeks and prepare from the outset for employment. I am now employed, I have a sense of self-respect and a more settled/secure outlook on life. My job keeps me away from the company I used to keep”

“When you are convicted you have two choices, you can respond positively or you can let the situation bring you down. Just because you are in a prison cell, your life is not of less value. You need to use the experience to prepare for employment through education and skill development. The programme helped me look beyond the now and prepare for employment. My job has helped me in terms of self-esteem”

- 5.17 Focusing on addressing needs at community level, Accord DP aimed to develop specifically designed projects to access the difficult to reach, marginalised and economically inactive in deprived areas. On this basis, the project developed community projects focusing on a range of issues including:

- Essential skills;
- Introduction to computing;
- Introduction to music production;
- Personal development;
- Teambuilding;
- Driving lessons;
- Motor mechanics;
- Health and water safety;
- Citizenship and life skills; and
- Environmental awareness.

- 5.18 Working from this package of modules, the DP tailored individual training programmes to particular target groups such as ‘Status 0’ young people, women returning to education / employment, long term unemployed, young single mothers and the hidden unemployed. Accord received an extension under Action 2 (January-April 2005) and rolled out training programmes to both new and existing beneficiaries. In this way, the project increased its outreach among the marginalised and economically inactive but also provided further upskilling to existing beneficiaries. From all the projects funded by

³⁸ Sourced from an interim report, as yet unpublished, from the PPS evaluator, Mike Morrissey

³⁹ This information was gathered from DVDs produced by the DP entitled ‘Working with Conviction’ and ‘Your Future...What’s Next?’, which included detailed interviews with beneficiaries.

the DP, the Table 5.1 provides details of the beneficiary outcomes in terms of qualifications and employment outcomes⁴⁰:

Table 5.1: Qualifications and employment outcomes of beneficiaries participating in the projects led by Accord DP

Commenced project	156
Completed project	80
Achieved Essential Skills qualification	66
Achieved miscellaneous qualifications	100
Left project to commence employment	16
Enrolled for further study / training	12
Commenced volunteering	3

5.19 As well as providing qualifications, the project has also contributed towards developing softer outcomes. The project level evaluation of the training programmes has demonstrated impact among beneficiaries by improving their self-confidence, team working skills and encouraging a commitment to engaging in training. Figure 5.7 provides illustrations of qualitative impacts at the beneficiary level⁴¹:

Figure 5.7: Qualitative impacts of Accord at the beneficiary level

There has been significant growth in all personal development areas with the participants stating that the project:

- *Was a break from a boring routine and that they looked forward to the sessions every week;*
- *Increased their network; and*
- *Helped them gain confidence in different areas.*

And that the project participants:

- *Felt change in themselves in a good way;*
- *Liked the maths and were surprised at that;*
- *Enjoyed the practical work i.e. making the video and researching local history;*
- *Felt much clearer about setting goals and confident about how to achieve them;*
- *Discovered that employment was not the only route to development;*
- *Could express themselves better, communicate with others and take responsibility for my actions; and*
- *Felt more positive about getting a job, I have more self confidence can work as part of a team.*

5.20 Further research conducted by the project evaluator has also found that beneficiaries who participated in projects promoted by Accord DP, experienced improvement in a

⁴⁰ Cresco Trust (2005) *Mapping New Pathways to Employment, Lessons from the EQUAL Accord Project.*

⁴¹ Schlindwein, H. (2003) *Accord – EQUAL Programme Evaluation*, September 2003. Also drawing on beneficiary surveys circulated by PwC to Accord participants.

range of individual skills and qualities such as communication and listening skills, concentration, confidence, dependability and punctuality⁴².

Round 2

- 5.21 The Round 2 DPs are seeking to include a range of beneficiaries including lone parents, underrepresented groups in the health care sector, disabled persons, long term unemployed and people with autism. Action 2, however, only commenced in July 2005 and many of the DPs are currently working to establish the infrastructure for implementing their projects such as developing management processes, undertaking project promotion and hiring staff. As such there are no discernable impacts at the level of individual beneficiaries yet.
- 5.22 However, while each of the DPs in Round 1 employed different methods for assessing 'soft outcomes' in their project evaluations, a common methodology known as the Rickter Scale⁴³ has been adopted for Round 2. This was introduced as a response to a recommendation for a common methodological tool to examine soft outcomes set out in the mid-term evaluation report. During a two-day induction residential programme held in November 2004, the DPs were introduced to the Rickter Scale. Training on the methodology was delivered to an initial group of DPs in August 2005 and a further session is scheduled for the end of September 2005. The research with the Round 2 DPs indicates a willingness to adopt the Rickter scale and an appreciation of the fact that there is a standardised tool and related guidance to monitor impact.

Impact at the horizontal level

Round 1

- 5.23 Under the EQUAL Programme DP partners are required to disseminate and transfer innovative ideas and methods to organisations operating in the same or a similar field. With the completion of Actions 2 and 3 by June 2005, evidence suggests that the **DPs have worked to disseminate the lessons at the horizontal level and that a number of impacts have emerged, although the level varies across the projects**. The survey findings⁴⁴, for example, highlight that while 82% of DP members state that they have a strategy for disseminating the results of their project, only 47% agreed that their DP had already initiated any transfers at the horizontal level.
- 5.24 One project that has made a clear impact at the horizontal level is Digital Step. Working closely with youth organisations including Youth Action Northern Ireland, **the training programme on digital media, designed by Digital Step, has received accreditation** under the Youth Achievement Awards scheme. Overall, the Youth Achievement Awards aim to provide young people, who have few or no qualifications with an opportunity to develop their full potential. The Digital Media Youth Achievement Awards offer new skills in creative arts and IT and help young people face the challenges arising from the rapid pace of technological change⁴⁵.
- 5.25 Building on this development, the youth organisations in the DP (Bytes Project and Wheelworks) have adopted the training method into their own programmes. In applying

⁴²Schlindwein, H. (2005) *Accord – EQUAL Programme Evaluation*, February and April 2005.

⁴³ www.rickterscale.com - The Rickter Scale is a hands-on assessment and evaluation tool that will be used to measure 'distance travelled', that is the soft outcomes that beneficiaries achieve. For example, dealing with barriers to employment, training or education by overcoming limiting beliefs and gaining confidence and self-esteem.

⁴⁴ Survey of Round 1 DP members conducted for the final evaluation report, July 2005.

⁴⁵ To date, out of a total of 150 participants, 122 have received accreditation under the project.

the new digital technology training, the DP has broadened the operational scope of the youth organisations and increased their skills base. However, given the costs involved in implementing the technology training, transferability across other organisations in the youth sector is heavily dependent on the availability of further funding and suitability trained staff post EQUAL.

- 5.26 In addition, the Digital Step training method has been identified as best practice by Community Evaluation Northern Ireland⁴⁶ and the transnational partner in Berlin is also piloting the training approach. Although the results of the transnational pilot are still not known, this level of transfer does provide some evidence of horizontal mainstreaming in the programme.
- 5.27 Another project that has made significant impact at the horizontal level is PPS. In disseminating the findings of the project, two DVDs (one focused at the offender population and the other focused at employers) were produced in multi-lingual formats (reflecting the trans-national dimension of the project). The former is a practically orientated guide, complete with case studies of PPS participants. The latter is designed to encourage employers to look beyond offending behaviour and at the skills, attitude and motivation of ex-offenders emerging from PPS.
- 5.28 The project partners within PPS had a clearly defined strategy for horizontal mainstreaming, (with an 80% orientation towards the Prison Service and a 20% orientation towards DEL). Accordingly, there has been a focus from the outset of Action 2 on building relationships with all of the resettlement team / employability advisors within the Prison Service. The seniority of the board members in PPS has been important in this regard. The strategy for mainstreaming (planned from the outset and largely implemented within Action 3) has followed the same holistic approach as that within the PPS project (i.e. of a joined up approach between committal, release and resettlement of offenders). At this stage, **the pilot project is scheduled to be fully mainstreamed by September 2005.**
- 5.29 At present, the **main outcomes of the Diversity Matters DP can mainly be located in the area of dissemination as opposed to transferability.** With regard to the private sector, the DP has sought to identify a number of businesses to pilot the cross-sectoral diversity training programme for employers but so far there is limited evidence of uptake. As an alternative, the DP produced a briefing paper on diversity that was launched at an event attended by some private sector representatives and held a seminar for employers that are registered on the Business Support Scheme - a network managed by the DP lead partner, Disability Action. This seminar was attended by over 100 employers and provided advice in relation to new legislation and good practice in terms of diversity. It is envisaged that this seminar will help to build linkages with employers in the Business Support Team that could lead to the roll out of diversity training programmes in the future.
- 5.30 As well as seeking to focus on the private sector, at the outset, the project also intended to establish a Cross-Party Diversity Forum in which Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) would be engaged. With the suspension of the Assembly, however, implementation of the forum was not been possible and instead, the DP focused on raising awareness of diversity issues among political parties. The DP, for instance, launched four briefing papers on diversity⁴⁷ and met with all political parties in early 2005 before the Westminster elections and met with each of the spokespersons on

⁴⁶ <http://www.ceni.org> - Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI) provides a range of services in monitoring and evaluation to the voluntary, community and statutory sectors. The services include: information and advice; evaluation consultancy; training and support; and, research and development.

⁴⁷ The four briefing papers are entitled 'Who Lives in a Place Like This?', 'Mind Your Language', 'The Story So Far' and 'Hate Crimes'.

employment to discuss diversity management. This has been an important aspect of the dissemination process for the DP and assisted in raising awareness of the project and the EQUAL Programme as a whole. In addition, Diversity Matters sought to provide an information service to political parties on diversity issues in Northern Ireland but this achieved limited success with only the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) requesting information.

- 5.31 With regard to the horizontal impacts of the transnational co-operation, a study was conducted that looked at the experience of African migrants across the partner countries. This study compared the cultural problems and gatekeepers the migrants faced in each country and how the different authorities handled their migrant communities. The results from the study were shared among each of the DPs but any mainstreaming outcomes have yet to emerge. Again, this shows that while the DP has worked to raise awareness of diversity, mainstreaming the outcomes has proved more difficult.
- 5.32 In providing a range of training programmes, **Young Women Making it Work ensured greater awareness of Section 75 and gender issues among project partners.** In particular, the DP made an important contribution to raising awareness and understanding of the issues facing young lesbians in Northern Ireland. Through a policy submission, the DP also contributed to the draft Northern Ireland Youth Work Strategy 2005-2008. In addition, from learning gained from the EQUAL Programme, the lead partner in the DP managed research on a number of issues regarding the employability of young people, including sexual diversity and disabilities. From this work, seminars have been held involving individuals from the relevant target group and stakeholders within the youth sector that have helped to raise awareness but evidence of horizontal mainstreaming has yet to emerge.
- 5.33 In the development of the Accord project, the partners engaged with wider stakeholders outside the DP to share lessons and transfer training methods. Social workers and Parole Officers, for example, attended training sessions to understand the methods and approaches that the DP has employed with different target groups. **These linkages have helped to share lessons and experience of the DP but horizontal mainstreaming or the transferability of approaches has yet to take place.**
- 5.34 With the information on long-term unemployment gathered from the households they managed to engage on the programme, the Futures DP sought to test and potentially alter the services provided on the ground to address the barriers to employment. However, given the problems in recruiting households to participate in the project, this dynamic has not occurred.

Round 2

- 5.35 While Action 2 only commenced in July 2005, a number of the DPs have clear ideas of how the project outcomes are to be disseminated and have identified the key stakeholders for potential mainstreaming at the horizontal level. Beyond Caring DP, for example, aims to conduct dissemination through mailing list databases and targeting organisations through networks of umbrella organisations such as the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action. In addition, the SEA DP plans to establish a strategy group to oversee the dissemination of the project outcomes. It is envisaged that dissemination will be undertaken through conferences and seminars, radio broadcasts and newsletters and the publication of the project evaluation. The Key DP also aims to recruit a Research and Policy Officer to assist with the dissemination process.

Impact at the vertical level

Round 1

- 5.36 Vertical mainstreaming aims to influence the policy level to lead to changes in the content, the mode of implementation or the incentives linked with labour market policy. However, with a number of DPs receiving an extension to their projects and Action 3 in Round 1 due to be completed at the end of September 2005, the full impact at the vertical level still has to be realised. However, it is possible to examine the main outcomes of the projects and assess the likelihood of achieving vertical mainstreaming.
- 5.37 Overall, survey evidence suggests that the **DPs in Round 1 have adopted a range of methods to encourage vertical mainstreaming** including keeping government departments informed of progress, lobbying statutory agencies and conducting consultations. **Vertical mainstreaming, however, has proved difficult to achieve with the level of impact variable across the DPs.** The survey analysis, for example, highlights that only 53% of DP partners felt that the DP had a clear strategy for influencing national policy and just 18% agreed that the DP had already achieved any transfer at the national level. On the basis of case study research, the following paragraphs examine the progress and different levels of impact for each of the DPs.
- 5.38 One DP that has achieved impact at the vertical level is Digital Step. The Digital Step DP designed a new qualification in Digital Technology, which is one of eleven elements that make up the Occupational Studies Qualification for Key Stage 4. **The qualification is now part of the national qualifications framework and was approved by the Department of Education for piloting** in schools and Further Educational Colleges from September 2003⁴⁸. This was an important step for the project as it allowed Digital Step to test and promote the training methodology in formal learning environments. During the implementation of the pilot schemes, however, the project faced a number of problems that inhibited the potential for vertical mainstreaming. These included:
- **Limited engagement with the digital media industry:** committed engagement from this sector could have provided vital input into the DP by adapting the project to suit the needs of industry, assisting in mainstreaming and providing additional credibility. From the outset, it was important that employers valued the qualifications. In the absence of engagement by the private sector, the project found it difficult to establish industrial placements in digital technology businesses. This meant that only a small number of students in the pilot programmes managed to get placed which created initial credibility problems for the courses. This also clearly highlights the important role that the private sector or employers organisations can play in the DPs and the EQUAL Programme in general;
 - **Limited sectoral involvement in the DP from the vocational training sector:** this meant that the key institutions responsible for the assessing qualifications and adopting them were not involved in the development of the project. At the beginning a user group of partners from government agencies was established to discuss mainstreaming but it was unfocussed and lost momentum. This represented a missed opportunity for the DP as the sector could have worked to monitor and assess the project and provide feedback on the ultimate mainstreaming relevance of the projects. In the implementation of the projects, vocational training organisations expressed concern that the assessment tools developed by the DP were not of a sufficient standard, creating difficulties for mainstreaming among the education authorities.

⁴⁸ Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (2003) Level 1 and 2 and Entry Level in Occupational Studies Digital Technology Specification, Pilot Version.

- 5.39 Notwithstanding these problems, the DP promoted the new training courses in schools and Further Educational (FE) colleges during Action 3 and held a conference which brought together youth organisations, educational organisations and DEL to disseminate the outcomes of the project and share lessons and experience. Following the completion of the pilot schemes, the Digital Technology course is now being adopted as a formal qualification for Entry Levels 1 and 2 in Occupational Studies. At this stage, however, **it is unclear whether the qualification will be rolled out to other schools and FE Colleges that did not participate in the pilot initiatives or how many students will be taking the course.**
- 5.40 The PPS project has also made progress in the context of vertical mainstreaming. The core partnership of NIACRO, the Prison Service and the Probation Board enabled all parties to start work on a concerted front to lobby for policy and legislative change of relevance to the target group. The project has had a **significant influence on the shape of the Prison Service Resettlement Strategy**, building on the lessons learned to date from the wide-ranging support embodied within PPS. It also **changed the processes for engagement with employers** (which is central to achieving future support for vertical mainstreaming activity). Finally, it has helped the partners to work together to respond to other policy issues of relevance to their target group (e.g. such as the Single Equality Bill).
- 5.41 Apart from Digital Step and PPS, **the other DPs have had limited impact at the national policy level to date but have worked to disseminate the outcomes and key lessons from their projects.** Young Women Making it Work, for instance, has completed an extensive dissemination programme that involved conferences, seminars, workshops and art and drama displays. These events were attended by policy makers in the area of education, mental health and employment and helped to raise awareness of particular issues facing young women such as sexuality and marginalisation.
- 5.42 In a similar pattern to Young Women Making it Work, Diversity Matters has undertaken dissemination activity but has yet to effect change at the national level. During Action 3, the DP published research papers and is holding a photo exhibition (during August and September 2005) that presents the outcomes from the project and showcases the diversity training pack which has been produced in hard copy and CD-Rom format. It is envisaged that the new EQUAL DP, Diversity Works, will be able to continue the promotion of the exhibition and encourage its display in public, private and voluntary / community sector workplaces.
- 5.43 A research study was also commissioned by the transnational partners to examine the validation of qualifications held by migrants seeking work in the EU. As part of this work, Diversity Matters conducted research which highlighted the official recognition that has been granted for some qualifications by accreditation bodies in the UK and the Republic of Ireland. The other transnational partners are now seeking to bring these findings to the attention of accreditation bodies within their countries, transfer the lessons and replicate the progress that has been made.
- 5.44 At present, the main impacts at the national level from the Accord DP can also be identified in terms of raising awareness of the project and outlining key lessons rather than mainstreaming or influencing policy. To assist the dissemination process, the Accord DP has recruited a Research and Policy Officer who has helped to produce briefing papers on key findings emerging from the project that confirm or provide further detail on issues arising:
- The level of 'burnout' experienced by programme managers or facilitators who deal with marginalised target groups. Addressing issues such as sexual abuse, alcoholism, domestic violence and mental illness can place an emotional strain on

programme managers. This can become an important staffing issue for organisations;

- The disparity in the levels of engagement and capacity between communities representing the different political traditions in Northern Ireland, particularly in the City of Derry. The current work conducted by the Research and Policy Officer highlights the differences in community infrastructure and notes the importance of adopting different policy or programme responses; and
 - The empowerment of women and the positive and negative implications for family life.
- 5.45 In continuing the promotion of this research, the DP organised a workshop that examined the differences in the levels of community engagement between public and community representatives and held a conference that highlighted the lessons learned from the Accord project⁴⁹.
- 5.46 The main impact from the Futures DP to date has been from the research commissioned by the project. In taking forward the learning, the DP partners now have greater understanding of how to address pockets of long-term unemployment and how to develop tailor-made support packages for people who wish to participate in the labour market. In addition, through promotional activities undertaken as part of the project, an electronic database comprising key information on current statutory, community and voluntary sector services in the target area has been established. This database will form part of a wider resource pack which is designed as a reference tool to help new employability projects develop and deliver their services and develop linkages with other relevant organisations. Whether this resource base and the learning from the Futures project will be utilised and incorporated into new practices within agencies responsible for employment support is unclear at this stage.

Round 2

- 5.47 Although the DPs in Round 2 are still in the early stages of development and have just recently started Action 2, the NTN has facilitated initial contacts with the DPs to discuss mainstreaming and learn from the experiences from Round 1. At the NTN meetings, Round 1 DPs have outlined their approaches to mainstreaming and the difficulties they faced, which has provided valuable advice and learning for the DPs in Round 2. In taking on board this learning, DPs in Round 2 have acknowledged that they need to identify a number of key stakeholders in the early stages of the project and target dissemination activity.
- 5.48 Related to this approach, one DP, Women into Non-Traditional Sectors, has developed a mainstreaming approach focused on the lead partner, Belfast City Council. It is envisaged that the outcomes from this project will emerge at an important time of strategic change within the council, which should provide an opportunity for influence. Following on from this, it is proposed that approaches adopted by Belfast City Council can then be cascaded or mainstreamed across the remaining local authorities.
- 5.49 Round 2 DPs engaging with the NTN and sharing in the lessons from Round 1 is a positive development in the EQUAL Programme. One of the important findings from the Second Interim Report completed by PwC was that DPs missed an opportunity for mainstreaming by only concentrating their dissemination activities and efforts to develop vertical linkages in the final stage, Action 3. The report suggested that there

⁴⁹ Cresco Trust (2005) *Mapping New Pathways to Employment, Lessons from the EQUAL Accord Project*.

was a need for more contact between departments and the NTN during the initial stages of the programme (Actions 1 and 2) and greater interaction between the DPs. Therefore, while Action 2 in Round 2 is only beginning, early engagement is a development that needs to be maintained as early engagement with the NTN can help to facilitate liaison between DPs and departments, raise the profile of projects, and provide feedback on the potential for transferability from the outset. Developing embryonic mainstreaming strategies early in Action 2 that could be 'quality proofed' by the NTN would also be helpful in this regard.

5.50 Furthermore, in Round 2, the Managing Authority and the NSS organised a two day induction residential in November 2004 for the successful DPs. This provided a forum for the DPs to come together, establish relationships and develop foundations for further collaboration. Indeed, with a larger number of DPs in Round 2, greater opportunity for networking now exists as well as the potential to develop linkages on a sub-regional basis. Outside of the events organised by the Managing Authority and the NSS, there is a need for the DPs to maintain the level of interaction (between Round 2 DPs and with Round 1 DPs) on a more informal basis. This helps to facilitate collaborative initiatives to raise the profile of DPs, establish key EQUAL messages that can be presented to government departments and assist the mainstreaming process. Related to this, there is also a need to maintain internal dissemination processes within DEL and across government departments to promote the EQUAL Programme and DP activity.

Barriers to mainstreaming

5.51 In seeking to mainstream project outcomes, ideas and methods at both the vertical and horizontal levels, there are a number of recognised barriers and constraints that can be identified. These are relevant for both Round 1 and Round 2 DPs and include:

- Proposing that projects developed by the DPs would be mainstreamed in government departments is an ambitious task. For much government activity in Northern Ireland, policy is devised in London distancing the DPs from opportunities to influence the core policy process. The narrow scope of local government responsibility and the suspension of the Assembly have also created further barriers to vertical mainstreaming;
- The timetable for the mainstreaming process in the programme is also ambitious. The three years allocated for Actions 2 and 3 is a demanding schedule during which DPs have to produce project outcomes, develop relations with government departments and mainstream;
- By being proactive in the policy field DEL has addressed some policy gaps in recent years which has restricted the scope for mainstreaming under EQUAL. For example, at the beginning of the programme DPs identified that gaps existed in terms of 'essential skills' but DEL has recently introduced an initiative focusing on this issue. This makes it difficult to determine the level of impact or contribution to policy development that the DP has made at the vertical level; and
- Furthermore, improvements in the labour market in recent years have made it more challenging for the DPs to develop innovative approaches and access target groups. Marginalised groups are now more narrowly defined, difficult to locate and experience more complex socio-economic problems.

Organisational mainstreaming structures

5.52 Within the EQUAL Programme there are two structures that aim to promote mainstreaming - the National Thematic Network and the European Thematic Groups. The contribution of these organisations to mainstreaming is examined below:

National Thematic Network

5.53 To assist in the mainstreaming process, a National Thematic Network (NTN) has been established composed of representatives from the public, private, community and voluntary sector and each DP. The key tasks of the network are to:

- Ensure the strategic fit of the EQUAL programme;
- Identify, select and analyse good practice;
- Develop an effective dissemination strategy;
- Enable effective dialogue between those delivering the study and those developing the policy;
- Enable effective mainstreaming; and
- Provide a link with the European Thematic Groups (ETGs).

5.54 In these tasks it was proposed that the NTN would meet at least twice a year to ensure that there is direct communication between DPs and policy makers and that the DPs are in line with the strategic aims of the programme. In addition, the NTN was required to agree the dissemination and transfer activities to be funded through Action 3. The decision was based on:

- Dissemination being targeted and appropriate (e.g. to impact on local/ regional/ national policy development); and
- The need to ensure maximum impact with available resources.

5.55 **In Round 1, the NTN had a limited role in the mainstreaming process.** While the NTN was devised with clear terms of reference, it was set up early in the programme before project actions emerged and before the NTN could exercise its function of analysing good practice and focusing on mainstreaming. This created uncertainty over the role and responsibility of the NTN making it difficult to sustain the interest and engagement of representatives. From the initial stages of the programme, the NTN lost a degree of momentum as representatives expressed the need to have a better understanding of why the NTN meets and how to channel their expertise into the programme.

5.56 During Round 1, the degree of contact between the DPs and the NTN was also generally low with DPs in many instances opting to make direct contact with departments instead. Discussions with DP members indicated that the NTN **did not provide regular feedback to inform the partnerships of the value of their project ideas.** In addition, it was felt that the NTN did not provide sufficient steer for the DPs in regard to identifying policy gaps that the projects could exploit. That said, it was evident that the NTN in Round 1 **did provide an important forum for different representatives to meet together and build relationships,** raise issues of concern and discuss how to monitor emerging soft outcomes.

5.57 In Round 2 **it appears from research with the DP's that the role of the NTN has been reinvigorated.** The need for this was clearly highlighted as a recommendation in the second interim evaluation completed by PwC in December 2004, and it is evident that some progress has been made. As a first step, a number of members of the NTN from government departments were represented on the project selection panel that assessed the applications for the second call. The inclusion of a representative from the private sector has also increased networking opportunities and the potential to gain feedback from employers' organisations. Again this links back to a recommendation made in the second interim evaluation report about the need for greater levels of involvement with the private sector in the EQUAL programme. In addition, the early engagement between the Round 2 DP and NTN, where the mainstreaming challenges and outcomes from Round 1 were presented, has provided important learning and interaction opportunities. It is essential, that this feedback and guidance role is maintained during the remainder of the programme.

European Thematic Groups

5.58 As well as the NTN, European Thematic Groups (ETGs) were established to facilitate interaction and learning between programme stakeholders on the overarching EU themes for EQUAL (Themes A and H in Northern Ireland). While providing a further opportunity for DPs to learn from other experiences across Europe, **there have been few actual outcomes from the ETGs in Round 1** with participants tending to iterate their activities at the national level rather than developing new international mechanisms to promote their outputs. Further problems identified in Round 1 also included a general lack of awareness and ambiguity regarding the role and function of the ETGs, and the cumbersome administrative detail which has discouraged stakeholders from participation or further engagement. Indeed, **problems of awareness have remained in Round 2 as a number of DPs expressed the view that they were unsure of how they could become involved in European Thematic work.** At the wider European level the role of the ETGs has also been hindered by problems of overlap but it is understood that the future format of the networks is undergoing revision at present.

VI Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

6.1 This chapter summarises the main findings that have emerged from the evaluation of the EQUAL Programme in Northern Ireland. The chapter also reflects on the progress towards implementing the recommendations set out in the mid-term and second interim evaluations and examines their impact on the EQUAL Programme. Finally, in light of the findings from this latest phase of evaluation, the chapter outlines key recommendations for the remainder of the delivery period of EQUAL in NI.

The labour market and policy context of EQUAL

6.2 Overall, analysis in Chapter II suggests that the **fundamental issues facing the Northern Ireland labour market have not changed since the programme was initiated**. While there have been general improvements in terms of growing employment and falling unemployment, the need remains to facilitate access to employment for those who have difficulty in being integrated or re-integrated into the labour market. Indeed, as unemployment and economic inactivity are particularly high among certain 'harder to reach groups' (such as long term unemployed males, young people and those with disabilities) and in certain locations (the West of Northern Ireland), this has reinforced the relevance of the EQUAL Programme over the period (paragraphs 2.3 - 2.20).

6.3 Similarly, despite recent improvements in the number of women employed in the labour force and better educational performance by female school leavers, the rationale for the Equal Opportunities theme in the programme still remains valid. The analysis demonstrates that the labour market is still characterised by a significant gender gap with respect to full-time and self-employment, economic activity, progression and pay (paragraphs 2.21 - 2.36).

6.4 Over the course of the EQUAL Programme a number of policy and legislative developments have taken place in the area of employability, social exclusion, discrimination and inequality. In the main, these initiatives have **complemented the development of the EQUAL Programme** by providing an overarching legal and policy framework that seeks to reduce social exclusion and promote equality in the labour market, and establish opportunities for the DPs to develop common linkages and partnership actions. On the other hand, these initiatives have placed challenges on the DPs to ensure that their projects are innovative and distinguishable from mainstream activity. The suspension has also reduced the attention that might be paid to policy submissions creating implications for vertical mainstreaming (paragraphs 2.37 - 2.38).

Implementation of EQUAL

6.5 Overall, **the implementation of the EQUAL Programme has progressed well since 2001** with the DPs in Round 1 in the process of completing Action 3 and almost all the DPs in Round 2 finalising their DPAs and embarking on Action 2.

6.6 While the EQUAL Programme is centred on piloting and testing innovative ways of delivering employment policies and is not predicated on the number of beneficiaries, analysis in Chapter III shows that expenditure and project activity has progressed but with considerable variation across the DPs in Round 1 (paragraphs 3.10 – 3.11).

- 6.7 In Round 1, the DPs established a strong level of activity in Action 2 that was mainly centred on promoting education, training and learning for disadvantaged groups, providing support for particular target groups and challenging discrimination. In these tasks the DPs progressed well between 2002 and 2004 (data for 2005 however, is not available at present). The annual monitoring returns, however, show that some DPs have been more active than others. This disparity in DP progress was evident in project indicators that monitored (paragraphs 3.12 - 3.17):
- The number and breakdown of beneficiaries by background;
 - The number of people benefiting from the support measures;
 - Partnership outputs.
- 6.8 In Round 1, the DPs commenced Action 3 at different periods with some starting at the end of 2004 or the beginning of 2005. Action 3 also experienced a strong level of project activity with the DPs implementing a range of actions such as meetings and discussion forums, co-operation with relevant key organisations / stakeholders and promotion of best practice (paragraphs 3.18 - 3.22).
- 6.9 The DPs in Round 2 commenced activity under Action 1 at the end of 2004 and in their partnership arrangements involve a range of stakeholders from government departments, statutory agencies, local government, Chambers of Commerce, the voluntary / community sector, Trade Unions and private business. In adopting the recommendations of the mid-term evaluation, Action 1 was extended to nine months (as opposed to six) in order to allow partners more time to develop partnership processes and establish the foundations for project development. Almost all DPs in Round 2 have now completed their DPAs and embarked on Action 2 activity (paragraphs 3.25 and 3.35-3.39).
- 6.10 In preparation of the call for projects under Rounds 1 and 2, the **Managing Authority and National Support Structure conducted extensive and comprehensive periods of promotion**. Learning lessons from Round 1, a number of important changes were also made to the second call application process. These included a short pre-selection application form, more emphasis on promoting and encouraging applications under the Equal Opportunities Theme, and facilitating the attendance of DPs at promotional road shows to present evidence of project practice and help guide the applicants. These amendments strengthened the promotion of Round 2 and the application process as a whole. For both rounds, the **selection process was found to be comprehensive, fair, rigorous and transparent** and the scoring criteria were consistently applied (paragraphs 3.26 - 3.34).
- 6.11 In seeking to implement the projects, a number of barriers and constraints to progress were identified (paragraphs 3.23-3.24). These included:
- **The administrative complexity of the EQUAL Programme:** this has increased pressures on both DPs and government representatives restricting opportunities to focus on project outcomes;
 - **The level of detail required in the beneficiary forms:** this has created problems in encouraging participation on projects as many of the target groups are reluctant to divulge personal information;
 - **Issues over financial payments:** In Round 1, DPs expressed difficulties in drawing down monies and indicated that this has slowed down progress. However, in light of these difficulties, DEL introduced a number of changes to the payments and administration process. First, in May 2003, DEL agreed a new method of processing claims which provided greater flexibility and allowed the financial payments to be

administered to the DPs within a shorter timeframe. Secondly, the monitoring arrangements were streamlined for Round 2 which brought increased clarity to the administration of EQUAL and allowed DEL Case Officers to provide greater financial monitoring support. While the Round 2 DPs reported that payments remain slow, resulting in some cash flow difficulties, these problems have largely been due to difficulties in accessing the necessary information from DPs to complete the claims and the administrative process;

- Linked to the complex administrative structures, **a degree of perceived overlap in programme responsibilities**, during the initial stages of Round 1, also hindered progress. In the implementation of Actions 1 and 2, however, both the Managing Authority and the National Support Structure became more established in their roles and provided more direct guidance and support to the DPs. Furthermore, the re-allocation of roles between the Managing Authority and the NSS with regard to financial and non-financial monitoring at the beginning of Round 1 of the second call, has helped to 'free up' the NSS to undertake developmental support role with projects which has been broadly welcomed. DPs, however, expressed the view that the NSS was becoming overstretched given the volume of activity in Rounds 1 and 2.

6.12 Equal Opportunities is also a key commitment in the management of the EQUAL Programme and has been built into a number of key stages (paragraphs 3.40-3.46). These include:

- the promotion of the programme;
- the application form
- the project selection process;
- development of an Equal Opportunities Strategy;
- monitoring and evaluation.

6.13 Overall, the realisation of Equal Opportunities as a cross-cutting principle in the programme and the implementation of the DP projects, has **contributed towards raising awareness of equality issues**. At the project level, the DPs have adopted a proactive approach to targeting and recruiting a range of beneficiaries by adjusting projects in accordance with the needs of different target groups. Indeed, six DPs have focused on the Equal Opportunities theme within the programme (one in Round 1 and five in Round 2) and the following areas in particular:

- promoting the integration of young women in the labour market;
- promoting employment opportunities for men and women in the health care sector;
- supporting women in rural areas to start and run their own businesses;
- supporting women in sectors traditionally denominated by men;
- supporting lone parents in entering the labour market;
- promoting efforts to overcome barriers to women's participation in construction trades.

6.14 As regards **North / South co-operation**, management structures have been put in place and events organised to support this dimension of the programme. However, while the cross-border events provided an opportunity to raise awareness of EQUAL and facilitate engagement between DPs, the level of cross-border co-operation in Round 1 was disappointing and represented a missed opportunity for the programme. In Round 1 the number of partners involved in Transnational Co-operation Agreements with DPs in Ireland was also low, and it was generally felt that North-South Steering Group had lost a degree of momentum (paragraphs 3.47-3.50).

- 6.15 In Round 2, however, the level and quality of North/South Co-operation has increased with DPs expressing the view that the North/South Steering Group has worked to facilitate networking between DPs, establish workshops and encourage learning across DPs, and provide an important forum for dissemination and mainstreaming (paragraphs 3.51 - 3.53).

Progress on key principles of EQUAL

- 6.16 In Chapter IV, the evaluation found that the principles of partnership, innovation and empowerment are working well across the programme (in Rounds 1 and 2) and being incorporated into project development. In Round 1 the outputs from transnationality were more mixed but important steps have been made in Round 2 to ensure the selection of appropriate transnational partners.
- 6.17 Across the programme, the **level of partnership achieved has been very high**. In fact, the development of engaged, co-operative and dynamic DPs can be regarded as one of the key outputs of the programme. In Round 1, each of the DPs found the partnership a fruitful mechanism for implementing their objectives as the process provided an opportunity for organisations to forge new relationships and access resources and expertise for the project. Producing outputs has caused partners to have more trust in the DP and subsequently to give it more energy, resources and credence. In some DPs, the partnership process also acted as a forum for capacity building and 'social learning'. Organisations with larger capacity and greater knowledge of EU programmes were able to transfer their experience to smaller partners and improve their level of engagement (paragraphs 4.3 – 4.33).
- 6.18 While still in the early stages of development, partnership processes have also been established in Round 2 and are providing an opportunity for innovation and social learning. In adopting one of the key lessons from Round 1, the DPs in Round 2 have achieved a greater degree of cross-sectoral involvement from key policy stakeholders and the private sector. Indeed, this learning has been particularly transferred from Round 1 to Round 2 by stakeholders that were involved in DPs in both rounds. To date, however, some DPs in Round 2 have made more progress in establishing partnership processes than others but as the development of Round 1 demonstrated, opportunities for further consolidation are presented in Action 2 when main project activity is conducted. The process of partnership development is being pro-actively assisted by the WEA (Workers Education Association), an organisation contracted by the Managing Authority and NSS to facilitate partnership building among DPs (paragraphs 4.3 – 4.33).
- 6.19 In overall terms, **the transnational component of the programme has proved to be a positive experience**. At the outset of Round 1, however, some DPs experienced difficulties in establishing transnational partnerships as the database used to locate and develop partners was found to be difficult to access and use. These initial difficulties had implications for the success of some transnational arrangements (paragraphs 4.36 – 4.37).
- 6.20 Over the course of the programme, the DPs in Round 1 engaged in the transnational aspect sufficiently to benefit from the exchange of information and experience. All the DPs confirmed that the transnational component of their projects provided an important insight into the different cultural and administrative approaches to common social and labour market problems in other EU Member States. Moving towards more integrated arrangements, three DPs worked to export or adopt new approaches. One of the transnational partners, for example, is piloting an approach to training in their own project that was developed by a DP in Northern Ireland and another project is piloting a tracking system from a transnational partner that examines the progress of beneficiaries. In regard to administration, several of the DPs reported that they had

underestimated the amount of time that would be required to undertake transnational activity and some of the DPs found it difficult to manage all the dimensions of the programme effectively and to balance transnational co-operation with their own DP activity (paragraphs 4.43 – 4.70).

- 6.21 In contrast to Round 1, the selection of transnational partners by Round 2 DPs has been more structured and better organised. Round 2 showed an increase in pre-agreement contact between prospective partners and the DPs have been successful in finding partners that are more closely aligned with their objectives. While Round 2 is in the early stages of development, evidence from the TCAs demonstrates that the partnerships are also more ambitious in seeking to use transnational co-operation to develop integrated arrangements such as exporting or adopting new approaches, conducting joint developments and exchanging staff (paragraphs 4.40 – 4.70).
- 6.22 From examining the development of DPs in Round 1 and from assessing proposed project actions in Round 2, it is evident that there are **high levels of innovation within EQUAL, which fits with the nature of the programme as an experimental opportunity for challenging labour market issues**. Across the DPs, the projects identified a range of different types of innovation with a particular focus on process and goal orientated innovation (paragraphs 4.70 – 4.84).
- 6.23 With regard to **empowerment, all six DP project leaders in Round 1 worked to apply this concept to their project**. There is evidence that each DP did succeed in this aim to different degrees. Four of the DPs could be described as having integrated 'partial empowerment' into their programmes. In the implementation of projects this involves DPs consulting with representatives of the client group on decisions made within the DP, communicating directly with beneficiaries to get feedback and piloting aspects of the project with client groups to receive comments. One of the DPs can be described as succeeding in 'deeply empowering' the client group. This involved training 'guest facilitators' representing the different target groups who now have the capacity to go back into their communities and deliver the training themselves. At the most basic level, only one DP in Round 1 achieved 'minimal empowerment' as the project was unable to attract enough beneficiaries to be described as empowering a client group (paragraphs 4.85 – 4.96).
- 6.24 While the DPs in Round 2 have only embarked on Action 2 and have yet to attract beneficiaries, an analysis of the project proposals suggests that all DPs are committed to applying the concept of empowerment. In a similar pattern to Round 1, seven of the DPs are developing 'partial empowerment' with proposals to establish peer groups, beneficiary forums and focus groups. Three DPs have proposed approaches to implement deep empowerment (participation of beneficiaries on working groups, steering groups or partnership board) while three are based on approaches that will develop 'minimal empowerment'. Potentially more learning could be taken from the DPs in Round 1 or within Round 2 to advance the approaches in achieve more 'partial' or 'deeper' forms of empowerment (paragraphs 4.97– 4.103).

Impact and mainstreaming of EQUAL

- 6.25 Although the full impacts may be not realised until after the EQUAL Programme has ended and given that Action 3 in Round 1 is just in the process of completion (end of September 2005), evidence from Chapter V suggests that the **programme has had some impact at the horizontal level and the individual / beneficiary level in particular, but less so at the vertical level**. To date, two DPs have achieved transferability at the vertical level but in general DPs in Round 1 have largely disseminated the outcomes from their projects. Overall, the programme has made

progress towards meeting its key aim of testing and promoting new means of combating forms of discrimination and inequality in the labour market.

Impact at the individual level

- 6.26 Overall, the programme has made a positive impact at the individual level by helping beneficiaries move along the pathway to training, education and employment. These impacts can mainly be identified in terms of **soft outcomes** such as contributing towards increasing self-confidence and motivation, communication and teambuilding skills and an enhanced sense of personal responsibility. Projects in Round 1 have also developed **particular skills** in IT, cross-cultural dialogue and diversity issues or worked towards improving re-offending behaviour amongst those serving a custodial sentence (paragraphs 5.2 - 5.20).
- 6.27 In the Round 2 projects, Action 2 commenced in July 2005 and many of the DPs are currently working to establish the infrastructure for implementing their projects such as developing management processes, undertaking project promotion and hiring staff. As such, there are no discernable impacts at the level of individual beneficiaries at this stage but it is worth pointing out that DPs are seeking to target a range of beneficiaries including lone parents, underrepresented groups in the health care sector, disabled persons, long term unemployed and people with autism. With the adoption of the Rickter scale in Round 2, this will provide DPs with an important common tool to assess 'soft outcomes' and 'distance travelled' by individual beneficiaries (paragraphs 5.21 - 5.22).

Impact at the horizontal level

- 6.28 In assessing the impact at the horizontal level, a distinction at this stage can be made between those DPs that contributed towards transferring lessons and approaches from their projects and those that disseminated outcomes (paragraphs 5.23 - 5.35).

Transferability

- 6.29 In Round 1 evidence of horizontal mainstreaming has emerged, although the degree of impact varies from across the DPs. Digital Step and PPS have been successful in transferring outcomes from their projects to other partners and organisations within the sector. Digital Step, for example, has transferred their training method to organisations in the youth sector and the approach is also being piloted by one of their transnational partners. The joined up approach to the resettlement of offenders, promoted by the PPS project, is also due to be fully mainstreamed by the end of September 2005.

Dissemination

- 6.30 The other four projects have worked to disseminate their outcomes, share lessons and experience, and create wider awareness of their projects and the EQUAL Programme in general. Evidence of horizontal mainstreaming, however, has yet to emerge. While it is too early to comment on the potential for mainstreaming in Round 2, it is important to note that the many of the DPs have clear ideas of how the project outcomes are to be disseminated and which key stakeholders they need to target.

Impact at the vertical level

- 6.31 In a similar pattern to the horizontal level, a number of the impacts at the vertical level can be identified in Round 1 but the degree of impact varies. Again, the impact of the DPs can distinguish between transferability and dissemination (paragraphs 5.36 - 5.50).

Transferability

6.32 Both PPS and Digital Step have been successful in transferring outcomes from their projects. The PPS project has impacted on the development of the Prison Service Resettlement Strategy and changed the process for engagement with employers. In addition, the training qualification developed in the Digital Step project has been adopted as a formal qualification in the schools and colleges that were involved in the pilot. It is unclear, however, whether this qualification will be rolled out further to other schools and colleges.

Dissemination

6.33 Outside these projects, the other DPs have had limited impact at the national policy level to date but have worked to disseminate the outcomes and key lessons from their projects. In this task, the DPs have conducted a range of activities including conferences, research papers, seminars and photographic and art exhibitions.

6.34 It is too early to assess the vertical impacts from Round 2 but important developments to encourage mainstreaming within the programme have taken place. Taking on board the lessons from Round 1, the NTN has facilitated networking between the DPs in Round 1 and 2 and has initiated early engagement with the DPs to discuss mainstreaming. This is an important step as it encourages DPs to be more proactive about mainstreaming at the early stages and seeks to take advantage of the greater number of DPs in Round 2 to develop networking and shared learning activities.

Barriers / constraints to mainstreaming

6.35 However, in seeking to mainstream project outcomes, ideas and methods at both the vertical and horizontal levels, there are a number of recognised barriers and constraints (paragraph 5.51). These are relevant for both Round 1 and Round 2 DPs and include:

- The suspension of the Assembly. This has distanced the DPs from opportunities to influence the core policy process;
- The timetable for the mainstreaming process in the programme is ambitious. The three years allocated for Actions 2 and 3 places a demanding schedule on the DPs to produce project outcomes, develop relations with government departments and mainstream;
- The proactive role of DEL in policy development. This has addressed some policy gaps in recent years which has restricted the scope for mainstreaming under EQUAL;
- More favourable labour market conditions. Improvements in the labour market in recent years have made it more challenging for the DPs to develop innovative approaches and access target groups. Marginalised groups are now more narrowly defined, difficult to locate and experience more complex socio-economic problems.

Mainstreaming structures

6.36 In Round 1, it is broadly felt that **the NTN played a limited role in the mainstreaming process**. Although the NTN did provide an important forum for different representatives to meet together and build relationships, raise issues of concern and discuss how to monitor emerging soft outcomes, the NTN lost a **degree of momentum** in the course of Actions 2 and 3. **The interaction between the projects and the NTN was also weak**

with the DPs noting that the network did not provide sufficient regular feedback or guidance to assist in the mainstreaming process (paragraphs 5.52 - 5.56).

- 6.37 In Round 2, however, **the role of the NTN has been reinvigorated**. The need for this was clearly highlighted as a recommendation in the second interim evaluation and it is evident that some progress has been made. The inclusion of representative from the private sector has increased the potential to gain feedback from employers' organisations, while the early engagement between the Rounds 1 and 2 DPs and the NTN has provided important learning and interaction opportunities (paragraph 5.57).
- 6.38 While providing a further opportunity for DPs to learn from other experiences across Europe, **there have been few actual outcomes from the European Thematic Groups (ETGs)** with participants tending to iterate their activities at the national level rather than developing new international mechanisms to promote their outputs. The administrative detail involved with the Thematic Groups is also cumbersome which has discouraged stakeholders from participation or further engagement. It is understood, however, that their structures are under review at EU level (paragraph 5.58).

First impacts of EQUAL on the European Employment Strategy

- 6.39 As Round 1 is in the process of completion and Round 2 is in the early stages of implementation, an assessment of the impacts of the EQUAL Programme in Northern Ireland on the European Employment Strategy (EES) would be premature. However, in drawing together evidence from this evaluation, a number of initial impacts have emerged.
- 6.40 Under the first theme of Employability, it is clear that the programme has made a contribution towards facilitating access and return to the labour market for those who have difficulty in being integrated or re-integrated. Overall, the projects in Round 1 have helped beneficiaries move along the pathway to training, education and employment. In particular, the programme has encouraged the development of systems for measuring soft outcomes such as increasing self-confidence and motivation, and communication, and teambuilding skills. Projects in Round 1 have also developed particular skills in IT and worked towards reducing re-offending behaviour amongst those serving a custodial sentence. In addition, the evaluation has shown that the programme has made progress towards promoting new means of combating forms of inequality in the labour market. In particular, two projects have piloted and transferred new approaches that will facilitate the engagement between ex-offenders and employers and help young people to increase their IT skills and to participate in education and training.
- 6.41 With regard to Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, the programme has contributed towards raising awareness of equality issues and ensured that the large number of stakeholders participating in the programme have knowledge of how to apply equal opportunities strategies in project development.

Community added value

- 6.42 Although the final outcomes of the EQUAL Programme have yet to be realised, the evaluation has identified a number of additional benefits outside of the key programme objectives. These include:
- **The role of the DPs in reaching out to marginalised target groups (and in doing so contributing to social inclusion and community relations at local levels).** Previously, many of the beneficiary groups assisted by EQUAL would have expressed a reluctance to participate in government initiatives or the formal economy in general. The EQUAL Programme has successfully managed to engage

a range of previously 'hard to reach' groups. While the full impact of this participation has yet to be fully understood and documented, there is emerging evidence that the programme has made an important contribution to developing different models and approaches. It has also promoted the adoption of an inclusive approach that can break down barriers and inhibitions between marginalised groups and society at large, and between the informal and formal economies, including government departments;

- **Supporting partnership, networking and new ways of working together.** The creation of DPs has contributed towards promoting partnership development in Northern Ireland and encouraging different stakeholders from the public, private and voluntary / community sectors to work together. This has helped to develop networks and skills and to build organisational capacity particularly on a transnational basis, where previous experience of this form of partnership would have been less evident among the DP partners. These benefits of external networking and partnership development also extend to the beneficiary level, bringing a much wider perspective to marginalised groups and disadvantaged areas, contributing in turn to the potential for economic, social and cultural development within these constituencies.

Addressing evaluation recommendations

6.43 From examining the development of the EQUAL Programme, it is evident that the programme has transferred lessons from Rounds 1 and 2 and changed in the light of recommendations previously proposed in the mid-term and second interim evaluations. The following tables provide a summary of the key recommendations in each of these reports, progress towards their implementation and an assessment of their impact on the programme.

Table 6.1: Recommendations, implementation actions and impact to date, mid-term evaluation report

Recommendation	Action taken and impact on the programme to date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The inclusion of one or more rurally-based DP should be considered as an objective of the promotion exercise in the next call. 	<p>Action: Extensive period of promotion conducted in advance of the second call</p> <p>While understanding that the EQUAL Programme is a demand led project based initiative, an extensive period of promotion was conducted in advance of the second call to encourage applications. In Round 2, a number of applicants focusing on rural issues were submitted and one was successful.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that the assessment panel included rural policy expertise. 	<p>Action: The panel was chosen on the basis of the experience of its diverse membership, and did not focus on one particular sector over another. Rural proofing was not a programme requirement, though the rural aspect was one which was addressed in the publicity and roadshows for the second call, both in terms of encouragement and also in the locations of roadshows and clinics</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More promotion is required to encourage applications under the equal opportunities pillar. 	<p>Action: Closer working relationships between the NSS and the Managing Authority and an extensive period of promotion conducted in advance of the second call. In addition, the NSS and the chair of the NTN met with women's umbrella groups to introduce them to EQUAL and to ask them to cascade information on the programme to their sector</p> <p>This ensured that more emphasis was placed on promoting and encouraging applications under the Equal Opportunities theme. Five projects under this theme were successful in Round 2.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The size and complexity of the initial application should be reduced. 	<p>Action: Adoption of shorter Part A application form</p> <p>This reduced the complexity of the application process and allowed applicants to register first and examine whether the project was applicable. In the intervening period between the deadlines for submitted the Part A and Part B application forms, the NSS also organised a clinic inviting all those applicants who had completed Part As to come along and discuss any issues they might have had. This allowed some groups to decide whether the EQUAL Programme was the appropriate vehicle for the development of their project.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples should be provided during promotion road shows of innovation drawn from previous programmes. 	<p>Action: Existing DPs under Round 1 were invited to attend the road shows as part of the promotion for the second call</p> <p>In the road shows, DPs presented their achievements and provided examples of innovation and project activity. This helped to communicate the objectives of EQUAL and bring the 'programme to life' for potential applicants.</p>

Recommendation	Action taken and impact on the programme to date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidance and examples on the value and scope of partnership and transnational working should be provided in the application guidelines and during Action 1. 	<p>Action: Guidance issued by NSS in preparation of second call</p> <p>A number of guidance notes were issued by the NSS (e.g. EQUAL Handbook, second call information leaflet and guidance notes for applicants) that provided detail on partnership and transnational working to inform potential applicants.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rather than as DP members, the involvement of the private sector might be alternatively assessed as part of the DPA targets and monitoring returns. Measures to increase the participation of social partners in EQUAL DPs for the second call should be explored, for example, targeted promotional material and presentations to key forums in Northern Ireland such as Concordia. 	<p>Action: Extensive period of targeted promotion conducted in advance of the second call and development of working linkages with umbrella organisations</p> <p>As well as conducting an extensive promotional campaign, the Managing Authority and NSS enlisted the help of a number of organisations including Concordia, Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA), Training for Women Network (TWN), Rural Development Council (RDC), Rural Community Network (RCN), Social Economy Agency, Disability Action, Equality Commission, Employers' Forum on Disability, EGSA and Youthnet. The databases held by these organisations were used for further promotion.</p> <p>In Round 2, DPs have achieved a greater degree of cross-sectoral involvement from key policy stakeholders and the private sector in particular.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Given the importance placed in EQUAL on mainstreaming as an indicator of success, we would suggest that applicants for the second call are guided towards securing representation at a senior level from partner organisations. 	<p>Action: Guidance provided by Managing Authority and NSS</p> <p>DPs in Round 2 have sought to include partners from key policy stakeholders. Some DPs, however, have been more successful in this task than others.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interventions are provided as required during Action 1 to support DPs to develop effective partnership process skills Role Clarity should be clear at least in theory in Action 1. It should then be regularly reviewed and developed throughout Action 2 as a key focus of the EQUAL programme and its potential outcomes. Highlight the value and potential of partnership working during Action 1, perhaps drawing on examples from the current round. 	<p>Action: The Managing Authority and the NSS contracted the Workers Education Association (WEA) to work with the DPs to develop the partnership process in Round 2 and assist in role clarity</p> <p>Generally, evidence suggests that the involvement of WEA has assisted some of the partners in Round 2 to consolidate their partnerships and establish decision making and co-ordination structures based on sub-groups or operational committees. To date, however, it is understood that not all DPs have made use of this support and some have expressed the view that their partnership may be falling behind as a result.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor and where necessary provide additional support to DPs to develop effective partnership process skills. 	<p>Action: The Managing Authority and the NSS contracted the Workers Education Association (WEA)</p> <p>While the Managing Authority and the NSS contracted the Workers Education Association (WEA) this support was applied to the DPs in Round 2 only.</p>

Recommendation	Action taken and impact on the programme to date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current DPs need input and facilitation in the development of appropriate systems of monitoring 'soft' outcomes. • An action plan and programme of training and development events should be implemented. • A process of providing DPs with input and support to develop monitoring systems for 'soft outcomes' should be introduced during Action 1. 	<p>Action: Introduction of Rickter scale as a methodological tool to assess soft outcomes</p> <p>This tool has been adopted for the DPs in Round 2. Training on the approach was held in August 2005 and is also scheduled for September 2005. The research with the Round 2 DPs indicates a willingness to adopt the Rickter scale.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DPs should be encouraged to continue to develop and take forward the involvement of beneficiaries, by sharing practice and where necessary being given specialist support. • Beneficiary involvement should be included as part of the action plan to develop approaches to monitoring and evaluation 	<p>Action: Guidance provided by the NSS</p> <p>Other than one DP (Futures) each of the DPs in Round 1 worked to encourage the involvement of beneficiaries. It was found that five DPs achieved either 'partial' or 'minimal' empowerment.</p> <p>In each of the five DPs, beneficiaries were also involved in monitoring and evaluation conducted by the DPs themselves or the project evaluator.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanisms being developed by some DPs to disseminate findings into policy and practice should be reviewed and shared to enable individual DPs to enhance capacity, particularly in communicating process learning. This might usefully be linked to the outputs of the DP working group examining Monitoring and Evaluation approaches. 	<p>Action: Involvement of the NTN in Action 3</p> <p>While the NTN provided a useful forum for networking, in Round 1, it was generally felt that the NTN lost a degree of momentum and did not provide sufficient feedback and guidance to DPs.</p> <p>In Round 2, the early engagement between the NTN and the DPs has encouraged a more proactive approach to mainstreaming.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DPs should be encouraged to maximise the involvement of all DP members in considering findings and the approach to mainstreaming to build on their individual networks. 	<p>Action: Guidance provided by the NSS</p> <p>The DPs in Round 1 conducted a range of actions utilising their DP members and existing networks to disseminate their project outcomes.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress in recruiting beneficiaries is cause for careful monitoring. However, to recognise some of the groundwork undertaken by DPs, information on difficulties and barriers in reaching and recruiting beneficiaries onto DP projects should also be recorded and discussed as a means to inform practice, even where beneficiary numbers has been lower than planned. 	<p>Action: Project and programme evaluations</p> <p>Both project and programme evaluations in the EQUAL Programme have worked to outline and record the difficulties in reaching and recruiting beneficiaries. This was particularly true for the Futures and Young Women Making it Work projects.</p>

Recommendation	Action taken and impact on the programme to date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advise DPs that the expectations of TCA objectives need to be realistic. • The good practice of devising a 'transnational technical glossary of terms' needs to be disseminated to all DPs in the next call. 	<p>Action: Publication of guidance notes</p> <p>The NSS published a series of guidance notes in preparation of the second call which outlined the challenges and benefits of transnational co-operation and provided information to explain the processes and terminology involved.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal events should be held to facilitate DPs to share best practice and distil the common factors across social groups. 	<p>Action: Networking, conferences dissemination events conducted by the North-South Steering Group.</p> <p>These events have helped to facilitate networking but evidence from Round 1 suggested that they were not followed through.</p> <p>For the DPs in Round 2, further networking events and conferences have been held and it is broadly felt that these events are being followed up by the Managing Authority, NSS, NTN and North-South Steering Group. After the initial formal event, however, much onus to follow up and maintain networking contacts rests with the DPs.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action 1 be lengthened to allow for the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Modulated interventions to support DP formation and effective working; ➢ Support in the development of systems for measuring soft outcomes; and ➢ Mainstreaming application for Action 3. 	<p>Action: Action 1 in Round 2 was extended from six to nine months.</p> <p>This extension has allowed the DPs more time to develop partnership processes and formulate their DPAs. At the end of Action 1 in Round 2, the DPs have completed their DPAs or were in the process of doing so.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An appraisal of the support structure role against the needs of DPs to refine the NSS role for the second call (i.e. the balance between monitoring role and development support role). 	<p>Action: Monitoring arrangements (financial and non-financial information) were streamlined for Round 2 between the Managing Authority and the NSS</p> <p>This reallocation of roles has effectively 'freed up' NSS staff to undertake a development support role with projects which has been highly rated by the DPs.</p>

Recommendation	Action taken and impact on the programme to date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The process of the NTN needs to allow for facilitated debate and exchange of practice rather than formal presentations only, with specific action agreed on. 	<p>Action: Encouragement of participation and debate in the NTN by the Managing Authority and the NSS</p> <p>While the NTN provided a useful forum for networking, in Round 1, it was generally felt that the NTN lost a degree of momentum and did not provide sufficient debate and exchange of practice</p> <p>In Round 2, the early engagement between the NTN and the DPs has encouraged a more interactive approach.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The outreach process for the second call should include a strategy for encouraging applications with a high percentage of female beneficiaries. 	<p>Action: Extensive period of promotion conducted in advance of the second call and closer working relationships between the NSS and the Managing Authority.</p> <p>While understanding that the EQUAL Programme is a demand led project based initiative, an extensive period of promotion ensured that more emphasis was placed on promoting and encouraging applications under the Equal Opportunities theme. Five projects under this theme were successful in Round 2. Three of these projects specifically aim to target female beneficiaries.</p>

Table 6.2: Recommendations, implementation actions and impact to date, second interim report

Recommendation	Action taken and impact on the programme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Greater pressure needs to be placed on DPs to complete their monitoring return indicator information. 	<p>Action: Increased calls for the completion of monitoring forms by the NSS and Managing Authority</p> <p>Monitoring information has been made available for 2004 but not for 2005. There is a need to place additional pressure on DPs to return their indicator information within the set timeframe.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The North/South Steering Committee for EQUAL should prepare a draft workplan for submission to the Monitoring Committee, setting out its plans for Round Two and ideas on how to strengthen this dimension of the programme. 	<p>Action: Meeting of North/South Steering Group on 9th June 2005 and networking event involving DPs on 5th July 2005</p> <p>Evidence suggests that in Round 2, the North/South Steering Group has worked to facilitate networking between DPs, through workshops which encourage learning across DPs, and provide an important forum for dissemination and mainstreaming.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is a need to encourage greater cross-sectoral involvement in the composition of the DPs 	<p>Action: Guidance provided by NSS and Managing Authority in sharing the lessons from Round 1</p> <p>DPs in Round 2 have achieved a greater degree of cross-sectoral involvement from key policy stakeholders and the private sector in particular.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is a need to improve the selection process for transnational partners in Round 2. 	<p>Action: Guidance provided by NSS and technical amendments to EQUAL Database</p> <p>The transnational selection process for Round 2 has improved with DPs adopting a range of methods for choosing partners. Pre-agreement contact between prospective partners has increased and the DPs in Round 2 have been more successful in finding partners that are more closely aligned with their own objectives.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is a need for greater interaction between the DPs. 	<p>Action: Early networking event between NTN and DPs in Rounds 1 and 2</p> <p>Networking events have encouraged interaction between DPs in Round 1 and 2 and within the DPs in Round 2. In particular, this has helped to transfer the lessons on mainstreaming identified from Action 3 in Round 1.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DPs should develop embryonic written mainstreaming strategies (covering both horizontal and vertical elements) by the end of Action 1. 	<p>Action: Early networking event between NTN and DPs in Rounds 1 and 2</p> <p>Early engagement between the DPs in Round 1 and the NTN has provided important learning and interaction opportunities.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To ensure the efficient payment of monies between actions, there is a need for the Managing Authority to establish time based targets 	<p>Action: After review it was decided that time-based targets would not yield greater efficiency as the cause of delays was frequently outside immediate control of the Managing Authority. A new system for monitoring payments was introduced to ensure that payments are efficiently processed.</p> <p>This system has also allowed DEL Case Officers to provide greater financial monitoring support</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A draft workplan for the NTN should be submitted for agreement by the Monitoring Committee. 	<p>Action: Networking event between NTN and DPs in Rounds 1 and 2</p> <p>Networking events have encouraged interaction between DPs in Round 1 and 2 and the NTN which has provided important learning and interaction opportunities. This has enabled the NTN and the DPs to examine and discuss mainstreaming at the early stages of Round 1.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Outside of the full meetings of the NTN, further meetings should be held with a smaller number of network members, DPs and policy makers to examine mainstreaming. 	<p>Action: Given the difficulty in organising the attendance of non DP members at NTN meetings (their time is given voluntarily and they all have full-time jobs), and given that the function of the NTN in its entirety is to do what is recommended here, it was felt that organising smaller meetings would be counter-productive.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More emphasis needs to be placed on encouraging greater private sector involvement on the NTN. 	<p>Action: Inclusion of a representative from the private sector</p> <p>This has increased the potential to gain feedback from employer's organisations</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More dissemination activity should be undertaken within the Managing Authority at the national level. 	<p>Action: The Managing Authority has promoted EQUAL through national and international dissemination events/ exhibitions, including a national launch Conference for the Second Round of EQUAL and participation in European Employment Week exhibition. Future dissemination events are also planned at national and international level, and further initiatives are planned to facilitate greater participation by DPs in national and international dissemination events</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is a need for the Department for Employment and Learning to review programme activity and communicate this to the DPs. 	<p>Action: Networking and interaction and involvement on DP boards</p> <p>Networking and interaction between the Managing Authority and the DPs and the inclusion of staff from the Department for Employment and Learning on some DP boards, has helped to ensure that DPs are familiar with current policy developments</p>

Recommendations

6.44 While the programme has adopted recommendations from the mid-term and second interim evaluations, research for this latest phase of evaluation for this evaluation has highlighted a number of other recommendations for implementation over the remainder of the programme period. These include:

- The final evaluation has shown the importance of networking and sharing lessons between the DPs in Rounds 1 and 2 and within the DPs in Round 2. In particular, under the wider remit of the NTN, important lessons in mainstreaming have been identified from Action 3 in Round 1. This networking, sharing of experience and engagement between the NTN and the DPs needs to be maintained as Round 2 continues. In addition to mainstreaming, however, there is an on-going need to bring the learning from Round 1 into Round 2 particularly in relation to developing partnership processes, undertaking transnational co-operation and actions to empower beneficiaries. For example, learning could help to assist projects in Round 2 that are currently at 'minimal empowerment' level to achieve 'partial' or 'deep' empowerment. In addition, DPs could be given guidance on how to develop more integrated forms of transnational co-operation such as joint actions.

It is recommended that the Managing Authority and National Support Structure continue to ensure that the lessons from Round 1 are shared and transferred to the DPs in Round 2. This could be conducted through EQUAL workshops (focusing on particular issues such as partnership or innovation) or the publication of guidance leaflets.

- Although the level of monitoring information has broadly improved as the programme has progressed, it is still evident that DPs have been slow in returning monitoring forms one way of exerting pressure would be to publish tables that rank the DPs according to their level of quarterly monitoring information and timing of submission. This would clearly highlight the performance across the DPs and place pressure on DPs to complete and return monitoring forms. In cases where compliance is continuously low, the NSS could then hold bilateral meetings with DPs to discuss how the level of monitoring could be improved.

It is recommended that the NSS publish tables that rank the DPs according to their level of quarterly monitoring information and timing of submission and distribute this table to all stakeholders across the programme. DEL should also consider punitive measures to deal with slow spending DPs such as decommitment of money for example.

- Although Round 2 is still in the early stages of development, it is evident that some DPs have made more progress than others in establishing partnership processes. It is understood, however, that not all DPs have made use of the support provided by WEA and some have expressed the view that their partnership may be falling behind as a result. While the DPs will have further opportunities in Action 2 to consolidate their partnerships, it is important that the DPs avail of this support.

It is recommended that the Managing Authority and National Support Structure monitor the development of the DPs in Action 2 and, if required, encourage the DPs to receive additional support and training.

- As the EQUAL Community Initiative will not be continued after 2006 there is a need to ensure that all the lessons from the programme are taken forward to provide an important information resource in the formulation and implementation in other EU or national government initiatives.

At the end of the EQUAL Programme, it is recommended that the Managing Authority, National Support Structure and DPs work together to publish a short document that identifies the key lessons from the programme.

Annex A - Case studies, Round 1

Name of DP: Accord

EQUAL Theme: Employability – re-integration of the labour market

DP Lead Partner: The Cresco Trust Ltd (originally Waterside Development Trust)

DP Partners: Bogside and Brandywell Initiative, Creggan Neighbourhood Partnership, Department for Employment and Learning, Derry City Council, Enterprise Ulster, Greater Shantallow Area Partnership, Local Strategy Partnership Derry City Council Area, Newbuildings Community and Environmental Association, North West Institute of Further and Higher Education, Springhill Park Community Development Association, Strabane and Derry New Deal Consortium, Strabane and District Community Network, Strabane Community Education Forum, Strabane District Council, Tullyally District Development Group Ltd, Waterside Development Trust and Women in Enterprise.

Transnational Partners: Sistema Territoriale per le pari opportunità Eniteto (Italy) Integrationsinfoservice von MigrantInnen für MigrantInnen (Austria) Innovative Integration benachteiligter Zielgruppen in den Arbeitsmarkt (Germany) and IGUAL.A (Spain).

Aims and objectives of DP project

The project aims to address the needs of its target groups with specifically designed local projects that will access difficult-to-reach, economically inactive people in deprived areas. The DP seeks to provide a direct response to those gaps in policy which continue to prevent access to meaningful employment to those marginalised. The project focuses on beneficiaries who are not registered on mainstream training and employment programmes. The target groups for the DP include: Status 0 young people; women returning to education / employment; long term unemployed; young single mothers; and, hidden unemployed.

The specific objectives of the Accord Development Partnership are as follows:

- To establish seven Community Hubs to pilot 'bespoke' training projects to integrate the target groups over a two year period;
- To provide two hundred beneficiaries with basic and key skills and introductory vocational skills, with a particular focus on literacy and numeracy;
- To identify and communicate policy gaps to the National Thematic Network;
- To construct a long term partnership capable of surviving the life of the project for use as a model of best practice.

Progress on key principles of EQUAL

Partnership

- With a view to encouraging a bottom up approach and stimulating grassroots involvement, the lead partner invited stakeholder organisations to propose project ideas and to participate in the partnership. The partnership started with a core group of organisations that had worked together before but then invited involvement from stakeholders who had a strategic interest in the project. During the initial stages, there were over 25 stakeholder organisations involved in the partnership which facilitated a forum for innovative project development to adopt different approaches to address the needs of each target group. In recognising that the management of a large number of stakeholders could prove unwieldy, during Action 1, the partnership evolved into a more streamlined structure of 18.
- To manage implementation among 18 stakeholders during Action 2, the DP established a Strategic Committee of representatives from partner organisations. While this Committee took a long time to become established, its role and function was an important one. The Committee provided overarching direction for the DP, a forum for interaction between the different partners, and a mechanism in which issues – such as those relating to financed

and training - could be addressed. While the community organisations conducted the main implementation of the programme at the local level, other organisations were able to contribute through the Strategic Committee. For example, the North West Institute provided tutors for the essential skills modules. Gathering inputs from each of the organisations, the Committee was able to formulate a wider DP perspective and thus act as a link between the micro level (the projects on the ground) and the macro (to liaise with DEL and PROTEUS).

- During the course of the project, the organisations established good working relations and a sense of trust has emerged in the DP providing a foundation for project implementation. Central to this process has been the understanding that each partner has a voice. Decisions are taken by consensus during monthly meetings. This has enabled each of the partners to make a contribution, share experiences and learn lessons from other organisations. Indeed, the partners with the greater knowledge of EU Programmes and larger capacity have transferred their experience to smaller organisations and improved their level of engagement within the programme. For instance, one stakeholder at the outset found it difficult to engage within the DP. However, through learning from the partnership process, this organisation has been upskilled to the extent that they were successful themselves in becoming a lead partner under Round 2. Furthermore, during the initial stages, tensions existed between community organisations representing different political traditions. Through the partnership process, however, barriers have been broken down and a degree of trust established.
- While providing an important forum to engage different stakeholders, co-ordinate actions and propose innovative project approaches, the partnership process has taken a long time to evolve. Indeed, the foundations of partnership were still being built during the initial stages of Action 2. In addition, while it is important for all the partners to have a voice, reaching agreement with a range of stakeholders is a difficult task which slowed down the decision making process. For example, in developing their Equal Opportunities Policy, the DP had to spend a great deal more time than anticipated gaining consensus among the different organisations.

Transnational Co-operation

- During the initial stages, Accord contacted a Spanish partner they were familiar with from the YouthStart Programme. Following that, other partners identified and contacted Accord as a potential partner.
- Through the Transnational Co-operation Agreement, Accord has shared experiences and lessons with other DPs and gained an understanding of cultural differences between the partners. Accord has also found transnationality rewarding as it provides an insight into the operational environments of other DPs and how they progressed and addressed issues such as bureaucracy. In fact, Accord has piloted two models that were developed by transnational partners. These include:
 - A tracking system that examines the progress of beneficiaries that leave the training programmes
 - An interactive CD that assists beneficiaries to compose and complete their own CV.
- From experience of transnational programmes, Accord also ensured that the partnership was managed by a secretariat. This helped to address the administrative detail, co-ordinate and provide a focus or direction for the partners. Without the secretariat it was felt there was a danger that the partnership might dissipate as the members would find it difficult to provide the necessary administrative energy and drive.
- The partnership has also encouraged other DP partners to participate in the transnational meetings to develop an inclusive approach and increase engagement. This has created a greater ownership of transnationality.

Innovation

- Moving away from a prescriptive and formulaic approach to training for marginalised target groups, the project adopted an innovative approach by establishing a bottom up approach, stimulating grassroots involvement and tailoring the training to the needs of different target groups. In this way, a more flexible approach provided the target groups and beneficiaries an opportunity to input into the project and ensured that the training is aligned closely with their needs and capabilities.

Empowerment

- As noted above, the main aim of the project is to develop a flexible and bottom up approach to training by ensuring that the approach is aligned closely with beneficiary needs and capabilities. Therefore, from the outset, and at regular intervals thereafter, the target groups were consulted over the training plan. This established a degree of ownership among the beneficiaries and built empowerment into the project. In addition, the training plan has adapted and evolved as the beneficiaries developed and learned from the experience. The beneficiaries also gave presentations to the partners on the Strategic Committee of the DP to outline strengths and weaknesses of the project approaches and raise any issues of concern.

Impact and mainstreaming of EQUAL*Impact at the individual level - soft outcomes*

- Focusing on addressing needs at community level, the Accord DP developed specifically designed projects that accessed the difficult to reach, marginalised and economically inactive in deprived areas. The project developed community projects focusing on a range of issues including:
 - essential skills;
 - introduction to computing;
 - introduction to music production;
 - personal development;
 - teambuilding;
 - driving lessons;
 - motor mechanics;
 - health and water safety;
 - citizenship and life skills; and,
 - environmental awareness.
- Working from this package of modules, the DP tailored individual training programmes to particular target groups such as 'Status 0' young people, women returning to education / employment, long term unemployed, young single mothers and the hidden unemployed. The project level evaluation of the training programmes demonstrates impact by improving their self-confidence, team working skills and encouraging a commitment to engaging in training. Evidence from interviews and questionnaires from the project evaluation provides illustrations of qualitative impacts at the beneficiary level in the text box below⁵⁰:

⁵⁰ Schlindwein, H. (2003) *Accord – EQUAL Programme Evaluation*, September 2003.

Qualitative Impacts of Accord at the Beneficiary Level

There has been significant growth in all personal development areas with the participants stating that the project:

- *Was a break from a boring routine and they looked forward to the sessions every week;*
- *Increased their network;*
- *Helped them gain confidence in a whole lots of areas;*

And that from the project participants:

- *Felt change in themselves in a good way;*
- *Liked the maths and were surprised at that;*
- *Enjoyed the practical work i.e. making the video and researching local history;*
- *Personal development opened up interesting questions and the confidentiality helped everyone open out;*
- *They feel much clearer about setting goals and confident about how to achieve them;*
- *They discovered that employment was not the only route to development.*

- Further research conducted by the project evaluator has also found that beneficiaries who participated in projects promoted by Accord DP, experienced improvement in a range of individual skills and qualities such as communication and listening skills, concentration, confidence, dependability and punctuality⁵¹.
- The DP has played an important role reaching out and seeking to empower marginalised target groups. The project evaluation found that the DP has made a contribution towards preparing the beneficiaries and laying the groundwork for participation and development on other mainstream training and employment programmes. The project however, does not have targets which makes it difficult to monitor and evaluate progress.

Horizontal mainstreaming at DP level

- As well as transferring knowledge and experience between partners, outside the DP other stakeholders have sought to engage with the project. Social Workers and Parole Officers, for example, attended training sessions to understand the different methods and approaches that the DP has employed with different target groups. These linkages have helped to share lessons and experience but horizontal mainstreaming has yet to take place.
- At the transnational level, Accord has piloted training and evaluation methods proposed by their transnational partners. In a similar process to that which existed within their own DP, Accord has been able to impact on the transnational partners by sharing their knowledge of EU Programmes and capacity building. Overall, this has improved the level of engagement and interaction within the partnership.

Vertical mainstreaming at DP level

- The main impacts at the vertical level can be identified in terms of raising awareness and outlining key lessons learned rather than mainstreaming or influencing policy. To assist the dissemination process, the DP recruited a Research and Policy Officer who has helped to produce briefing papers on key findings emerging from the project that confirm or provide further detail on issues that include:
 - The level of 'burnout' experienced by programme managers or facilitators who deal with marginalised target groups. Addressing issues such as sexual abuse, alcoholism, domestic violence and mental illness can place an emotional strain on programme managers;

⁵¹Schlindwein, H. (2005) *Accord – EQUAL Programme Evaluation*, February and April 2005.

- The disparity in the levels of engagement and capacity between communities representing the different political traditions in Northern Ireland, particularly in the City of Derry. The current work conducted by the Research Officer highlights the differences in community infrastructure and notes the importance of adopting different policy or programme responses;
- The empowerment of women and the positive and negative implications for family life.
- In continuing the promotion of this research, the DP organised a workshop that examined the differences in the levels of community engagement between public and community representatives and held a conference that highlighted the lessons learned from the Accord project⁵².

⁵² Cresco Trust (2005) Mapping New Pathways to Employment, Lessons from the EQUAL Accord Project.

Name of DP: Digital Step

EQUAL Theme: Employability – re-integration of the labour market

DP Lead Partner: Dream Ireland

Other DP Partners: Belfast Education and Library Board, Cinemagic Ltd, Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), Police Service of Northern Ireland (Community Involvement Branch), The Bytes Project and Wheelworks

Transnational Partners: Access DP (Sweden) Milos DP (Germany)

Aims and objectives of DP project

The project aims to use digital technologies and popular culture to engage young people in the learning process and focus on research and policy to develop new learning opportunities and models for learning, training and employment in the area of digital media. Digital Step is not simply a training initiative. Rather, the focus is upon the method, which aims to facilitate access to and participation in the labour market for socially disadvantaged young people aged 16-25 who are facing a multitude of barriers to their integration.

Progress on key principles of EQUAL

Partnership

- The DP is led by Dream Ireland which conducted initial research on existing provision and the need for the project. Following a successful application process, Dream then undertook further research on potential DP partners.
- In the initial stages, a number of the DP partners (Cinemagic and the Police Service of Northern Ireland) opted out of the partnership mainly due to resource issues but the Education and Training Inspectorate helped the DP find other partners that could expand the project. From the outset, the DP struggled to involve employers or education and training providers in the DPs who could then adopt the training method.
- Notwithstanding these difficulties, the DP managed to establish an important mix of partners that had an input to policy, access to the target group, experience of delivering innovative training initiatives and links to industry. The youth organisations were selected as they had experience of working with and accessing young people, whereas the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) were able to inform on policy issues and provide access to the main education providers. The ETI provided valuable advice on what schools, colleges and organisations were best placed or suited for the DP to approach to provide the training and how existing provision could be complemented.
- The partnership process has been valuable as it brings together expertise from different sectors and facilitates the sharing of information and experiences. Each partner played an important role in the decision making process and was provided with the opportunity for direct involvement in all aspects of the DP. Delivery agents were given a primary role in defining the type and nature of the programmes based on their knowledge and experience of working with specific target groups.
- In addition, the partnership allowed a degree of flexibility to make modifications to existing teaching plans and styles. For example, although participating in preliminary training courses, the Bytes staff faced problems in delivering the training through media and IT as they were not experienced in the technology. Outside of the project, the Bytes staff did not have the time to follow through and develop their skills, which created delivery problems. Through partnership discussions it was decided to hire facilitators to assist in the training project alongside Bytes staff and this improved project delivery.

- The partnership process, however, has suffered due to a change of personnel in the DP organisations that hindered progress and made it difficult to make decisions. The DP faced difficulties organising meetings between all the representatives and gaining consensus which also slowed down decision making.

Transnational Co-operation

- Digital Step participated in the R.E.A.L. Transnational Co-operation Agreement (TCA). The transnational partners were selected from the European database of partners. From previous experience gained under the ADAPT programme, Dream Ireland felt it was important that the partners were carefully selected and had similar project aims to them. This meant that they could add real value and expertise to the project and make the transnational partnership worthwhile. Selecting the right partners required research investment.
- Transnational co-operation is largely based on the parallel development of innovative approaches. Young People from the partner countries have visited Northern Ireland to participate in the training process. However, while transnationality has provided an opportunity to share experience and lessons, a number of partners in Digital Step felt that this information flow was largely directed towards the other partners.
- In terms of the beneficiaries, liaison trips allowed young people to meet with those from other cultures and understand that others also face similar problems. This transnational element of the project has been conducted through holding meetings and events and organising liaison trips.
- More recently, transnational co-operation has become more integrated. One of the German partners is now piloting Digital Step's training methodology in its own project and intends to lobby educational authorities to award the training the same accreditation that the project has achieved in Northern Ireland. In turn, Dream Ireland adopted training methods from their partners in Sweden.

Innovation

- As 'Status O' young people are often disillusioned with the formal education and training process, the project is innovative as it uses new technology as an informal method to engage young people in training and IT skills.
- Digital Step exhibits goal-orientated innovation by using digital technologies to develop employment opportunities for marginalised young people through the acquisition of key skills. This training project aimed to ensure that the young people obtained access to the primary labour market, rather than the low-paid secondary labour market, which the majority of active labour market policies feed into. The DP found new uses for current developments in technology, which is a key feature of goal-orientated innovation.

Empowerment

- In developing the project, Digital Step sought to engage fully with young people to give them responsibility for their learning activities. The DP first asked the project participants (young people on the programme) what disciplines they would like to use such as music or film. Following that, Dream and the other partners piloted a number of the methods to test the approach and examine the responses from the young people. This identified a new learning and development pathway and meant that the young people were empowered in defining what methods best suited their needs. These methods were tested in advance and adapted before they were rolled out.
- Accreditation through the Digital Media Youth Achievement Awards also empowered and provided wider benefits to young people by engaging them in the learning process and building their capacity. In addition, the project involves young people in programme

planning and delivery to ensure that the learning is best suited and adapted to their needs.

- From the transnational partnership, young people were able to liaise with similar groups with which they are on a par, learn from their experiences and demonstrate that they are not 'on their own' (i.e. other people face similar problems).

Impact and mainstreaming of EQUAL

Impact at the individual level - soft outcomes

- Overall, the project has succeeded in providing a tool or method to deliver education and training by using the capacity of technology as a hook to engage young people. From reviewing the project evaluation⁵³, conducting a beneficiary survey and undertaking interviews with representatives of DP partners, the evidence suggests that the students in the Digital Step programme gained valuable experience and IT skills that have had a positive impact on their confidence levels. As the programme was delivered by a company from outside the education sector, the students were treated as adult learners in an informal situation which also brought positive benefits in terms of motivation, participation and learning. In the programmes, participants have gained from the following:
 - *Increased self-confidence*: each of the participants had to define the actual content and aims of the training programme which then had to be collectively agreed by young people, artists and leaders. This process both empowered the young people and offered them a real sense of involvement and ownership of the programme;
 - *Increased self esteem*: participants increased their self esteem as they had the opportunity to develop a high quality product which they could present to their peers, family and community;
 - *Creative IT skills*: participants gained creative IT skills through the use of different software packages. These new skills created feelings of self-empowerment and confidence amongst participants;
 - *Team and Group skills*: the participants had to come to a consensus about their thematic approach and had to put in a lot of effort and teamwork into understanding the complicated software packages. In addition, they had an individual and collective responsibility for the care of the equipment used during the pilots.
- As further illustration of the impact on the beneficiaries, the text box below (Figure 1) details the outcomes that resulted from one of the pilot programmes in one learning institution:

Figure 1: Illustrations of the impact on the beneficiaries from one pilot programme

Staff feel that students involved in the programme have gained valuable experience and IT skills, which as a result, has had a positive impact on their confidence levels. According to the teacher, the majority of the children in year 13 were not particularly academic in the conventional sense, yet despite this there was full attendance at the Digital Step classes (which were not compulsory). This rate of attendance would appear to indicate the level of enthusiasm amongst the pupils. Overall, the teacher felt that the programme was successful in engaging the target group and helping them to overcome their natural reticence of embracing learning. In addition, staff state that the participants became very pro-active in deciding and taking control of their own learning needs.

⁵³ Paul Steel Management Consultants (2003) Digital Step Programme, Evaluation Interim Report.

Horizontal mainstreaming at DP level

- Working closely with youth organisations including Youth Action Northern Ireland, Digital Step designed a training programme on digital media that is now accredited under the Youth Achievement Awards. Overall, the Youth Achievement Awards aim to provide young people who have few or no qualifications with an opportunity to develop their full potential. The Digital Media Youth Achievement Awards offer new skills in creative arts and IT and help young people face the challenges arising from the rapid pace of technological change.
- Building on this development, the youth organisations in the DP (Bytes Project and Wheelworks) aim to adopt the training method to their own organisations. In applying the new digital technology training, the DP has broadened the operational scope of the youth organisations and increased their skills base. However, given the costs involved in implementing the technology training, transferring the training method to the youth sector is heavily dependent on the availability of sufficient resources post EQUAL.
- Furthermore, Digital Step is working closely with its transnational partner in Berlin which is piloting the training approach in its own EQUAL project. Although the results of the pilots are still not known at this stage, this level of transfer does provide some evidence of emerging horizontal mainstreaming in the programme.

Vertical mainstreaming at DP level

- With a view to making an impact at the policy level, the Digital Step DP has designed a new qualification in Digital Technology, which is one of eleven elements that make up the Occupational Studies Qualification for Key Stage 4. The qualification is now part of the National Qualifications Framework and was approved by the Department of Education for piloting in schools and Further Educational Colleges from September 2003⁵⁴. This was an important step for the project as it allowed Digital Step to test and promote the training methodology in formal learning environments.
- Under Action 3, the DP promoted the new training courses in schools and FE colleges and held a conference which brought together youth organisations, educational organisations and DEL to disseminate the outcomes of the project and share lessons and experience. Following the completion of the pilot schemes, the Digital Technology course is now being adopted as a formal qualification for Entry Levels 1 and 2 in Occupational Studies. At this stage, however, it is unclear whether the qualification will be rolled out to other schools and Further Educational Colleges that did not participate in the pilot initiatives or how many students will be taking the course.

⁵⁴ Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment. Level 1 and 2 and Entry Level in Occupational Studies Digital Technology Specification. Pilot Version.

Name of DP: Diversity Matters

EQUAL Theme: Employability - re-integration to the labour market.

DP Lead Partner: Disability Action

Other DP Partners: Carers Northern Ireland, Coalition on Sexual Orientation, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, Equality Forum NI, Irish Congress of Trade Unions, North West Forum of People with Disabilities, Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities, and the Office of the Minister and Deputy First Minister.

In addition, Diversity Matters has set up relations with five organisations which they refer to as 'Reference Points'. These organisations provide advice on particular subjects and include: the East Belfast Community Development Agency, the Northern Ireland Interfaith Forum, The Men's Project, the Women's Support Network and Youth Action.

Transnational Partners: TESI (Italy), Iftiin (Sweden), Win (Ireland), Goal (Italy) and Tete per L'Adozione Professionale Degli Immigrati (Italy).

Aims and objectives of DP project:

Diversity Matters argue that workplace issues such as prejudice, stereotyping and employment inequality have been dealt with in isolation for too long. Diversity Matters plans a programme to develop a common approach to labour market discrimination and under-representation. The project has five key objectives:

- Preparation and piloting of a cross-sectoral capacity building programme for those most marginalised in the workplace or in gaining access to the workplace.
- Preparation and piloting of a cross-sectoral diversity training programme for employers
- Establishment of a cross-party forum on diversity
- Preparation of a public awareness campaign on diversity
- Delivery of a programme of transnational activities.

Progress on key principles of EQUAL

Partnership

- The basic principle which underpinned the partnership was the notion that various 'communities of interest' exist in NI and that there is a need to recognise that identity is a complex and fluid issue. For example, people move in and out of different identities (i.e. from young to old) and can have more than one identity.
- The partnership relationship within the DP began at the networking level and has become deeper since it was initiated with the partners now co-operating in working groups. The partners reported that as the working groups made progress, the partnership process got stronger. Many members of the Diversity Matters DP had developed professional relationships with each other before the DP was established.
- Decisions are made within the partnership by consensus with much of the work of the project being conducted through smaller working groups. However, when the partnership was working on the briefing paper 'Mind Your Language', it was apparent that decision-making was very slow and cumbersome. To address this issue, Diversity Matters drafted a formal process agreement that assumed agreement on proposals if no responses were submitted by partners after three weeks. This established a more effective decision-making process. Maintaining the partnership, however, has proved to be more difficult given the frequent change of personnel in the Office of the Minister and Deputy First Minister.

Transnational Co-operation

- The transnational project comprised one of the DP's five key objectives. This objective had three components. One study looked at the experience of African migrants across the

four countries within the TCA. The second entailed a joint protocol agreement on long term unemployment and social welfare provisions throughout the EU. This was an extensive document to which each of the partners contributed. The third project looked at the validation and transfer of experience and qualifications of migrant workers from outside the EU. This is important because migrants have often been forced to flee a country before obtaining their full qualifications, despite often having gained extensive experience in their various fields of expertise. This project mostly involved sharing experience of how the issue is handled in different member states.

- Overall, it was felt that the transnational aspect of the project contributed to the partnership by, for example, encouraging Diversity Matters to make strong links with the minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland.
- However, the transnational component of the work had a number of drawbacks. Firstly, it proved difficult to find other DPs throughout Europe which 'fitted' Diversity Matters' project objectives. Secondly, it was difficult to juggle all the partnership the levels effectively – the local, the transnational and the EU Thematic work. Thirdly, the transnational aspect of the project was time consuming. Fourthly, for Diversity Matters, the transnational action was only one out of the five objectives (as noted above). However, for the Swedish and Italian partners, the transnational aspect comprised 100% of the programme. This made it difficult to reach a balance with different organisations having different expectations from the partnership.

Innovation

- Diversity Matters exhibits features of 'context oriented innovation'. One of Diversity Matters' five key objectives was to establish a cross-party forum on diversity. Because the Northern Ireland Assembly was suspended, this objective was confined to providing information on diversity to Northern Ireland's main political parties. Another key objective was a public awareness campaign on diversity. The aim was to challenge the commonly held perspective in Northern Ireland that the province has only two communities. Diversity Matters has sought to achieve systemic change in Northern Ireland by promoting the idea that a host of 'communities of interest' exist.

Empowerment

- Diversity Matters developed a programme on managing diversity in the work place entitled '*Take the Challenge - Make the Change*'. The training programme was designed using the feedback they received from employer focus groups. This programme was piloted twice. Diversity Matters trained 6 'lead facilitators' to deliver the programme and they also trained 9 'guest facilitators' who delivered modules of the programme. The 'guest facilitators' represented different 'communities of interest'. They underwent three days of training and are now equipped to implement the training programme in the workplaces. Through Diversity Matters these 9 people have increased their capacity and skills. The expectation is that they will go back into their communities and utilise these skills to promote the concept of diversity.

Impact and mainstreaming of EQUAL

Impact at the Individual level – soft outcomes

- The Diversity Matters DP has worked to pilot a cross-sectoral capacity building programme entitled '*Take the Challenge – Make the Change*'. This pilot was centred on the most marginalised people in the workplace or those seeking to gain access to the workplace. A framework for measuring 'soft indicators' was developed using three methods. First, participants completed a pre and post-pilot training questionnaire which gauged changes in understanding and attitude. Following that, the beneficiaries were required to complete evaluation forms on each day of the programme and on completion of the training. The beneficiaries were also interviewed by external project evaluators.

Illustrations of the outcomes from the evaluation of two pilot training programmes are outlined in the text boxes below⁵⁵:

Figure 1: Illustrations of outcomes from the evaluation of pilot training programme - number 1

Overall, the participants felt that they had benefited from the pilot diversity-training programme. Each of the days brought new information and awareness of the minority groups and the issues of multiple identities. A number of participants commented that the third day with the information on the legislation was very valuable as they were able to realise the areas that the legislation covers and the level of protection. There are a number of ways that the participants believed that they had benefited including:

- Allowing time to think about important issues;
- Information that the course provided;
- Raising awareness of gaps or weaknesses in knowledge;
- Networking with other participants;
- Realising the importance of diversity in society;
- Awareness of the issues relating to diversity;
- Respecting others;
- Seeking more information on diversity.

Figure 2: Illustrations of outcomes from the evaluation of pilot training programme - number 2 (Diversity Matters)

In a similar pattern to pilot 1, all participants felt that they had benefited from the pilot diversity-training programme. There are a number of ways that the participants believed that they had benefited from the training. Beneficiaries held that the project:

- *“Really brought issues home”*
- *“Giving a more in depth view of each issue”*
- *“It was good to get different points of view – a definite plus”*
- *“I feel after taking the course that I want to do more of this kind of work”*

- As an integral part of the programme, Diversity Matters trained 6 lead facilitators and a further 9 ‘guest’ facilitators who represented the different communities of interest. In the training plan, Diversity Matters developed specific assessment criteria for the facilitators to ensure consistency of approach and the maintenance of high quality delivery. Having completed the programme, the ‘guest’ facilitators are now skilled to co-ordinate and lead a session on specific diversity issues and have the opportunity to transfer these skills within their communities. While Diversity Matters have yet to conduct a follow up study to examine if the ‘guest’ facilitators have utilised their skills, it is understood that this issue will be examined in their forthcoming project evaluation.
- Building on this capacity building programme for the marginalised, Diversity Matters also piloted a cross-sectoral training programme for employers. This programme focused on the public sector with the Department for Social Development being the main recipient. This training entailed information gathering on the diverse nature of employees with the Department and advice on how to promote the different sectoral groups.

Horizontal mainstreaming at DP level

- With regard to the private sector, the DP has sought to identify a number of businesses to pilot the cross-sectoral diversity training programme for employers but so far there is limited evidence of uptake. As an alternative, the DP produced a briefing paper on diversity that was launched at an event attended by some private sector representatives and held a seminar for employers that are registered on the Business Support Scheme -

⁵⁵ Locus Evaluation Services (2003) *Diversity Matters, Interim Report*. June 2004

a network managed by the DP lead partner, Disability Action. This seminar was attended by over 100 employers and provided advice in relation to new legislation and good practice in terms of diversity. It is envisaged that this seminar will help to build linkages with employers in the Business Support Team that could lead to the roll out of diversity training programmes in the future. At present, the main outcomes of the Diversity Matters DP can mainly be located in the area of dissemination as opposed to transferability.

- As well as seeking to focus on the private sector, at the outset, the project also intended to establish a Cross-Party Diversity Forum in which Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) would be engaged. With the suspension of the Assembly, however, implementation of the forum was not been possible and instead, the DP focused on raising awareness of diversity issues among political parties. The DP, for instance, launched four briefing papers on diversity⁵⁶ and met with all political parties in early 2005 before the Westminster elections and met with each of the spokespersons on employment to discuss diversity management. This has been an important aspect of the dissemination process for the DP and assisted in raising awareness of the project and the EQUAL Programme as a whole. In addition, Diversity Matters sought to provide an information service to political parties on diversity issues in Northern Ireland but this achieved limited success with only the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) requesting information.
- With regard to the horizontal impacts of the transnational co-operation, a study was conducted that looked at the experience of African migrants across the partner countries. This study compared the cultural problems and gatekeepers the migrants faced in each country and how the different authorities handled their migrant communities. The results from the study were shared among each of the DPs but any mainstreaming outcomes have yet to emerge. Again, this shows that while the DP has worked to raise awareness of diversity, mainstreaming the outcomes has proved more difficult.

Vertical mainstreaming at DP level

- Diversity Matters has undertaken dissemination activity but has yet to effect change at the national level. During Action 3, the DP published research papers and during August and September 2005 is holding a photo exhibition that presents the outcomes from the project and showcases the diversity training pack which has been produced in hard copy and CD-Rom format. It is envisaged that the new EQUAL DP, Diversity Works, will be able to continue the promotion of the exhibition and encourage its display in public, private and voluntary / community sector workplaces.
- A research study was also commissioned by the transnational partners to examine the validation of qualifications held by migrants seeking work in the EU. As part of this work, Diversity Matters conducted research which highlighted the official recognition that has been granted for some qualifications by accreditation bodies in the UK and the Republic of Ireland. The other transnational partners are now seeking to bring these findings to the attention of accreditation bodies within their countries, transfer the lessons and replicate the progress that has been made.

⁵⁶ The four briefing papers are entitled 'Who Lives in a Place Like This?', 'Mind Your Language', 'The Story So Far' and 'Hate Crimes'.

Name of DP: Futures

EQUAL Theme: Employability – re-integration to the labour market

DP Lead Partner: North and West Belfast Health and Social Services Trust

Other DP Partners: North and West Belfast Health and Social Services Trust, Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education, Business in the Community, Department for Employment and Learning, Greater Shankill Partnership, Health Action Zone North and West Belfast, North Belfast Partnership, Social Security Agency, University of Ulster, West Belfast Partnership Board and Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Transnational Partners: Mehrstufige Arbeitsintegration bei Komplexen Sozialen Problemlagen (Vienna, Austria), INTERFACE EMPLOI (Paris, France), Universität Dortmund (Dortmund, Germany), West Meath Equal Development Partnership (West Meath, Ireland); Ruman Grandi (Rotterdam, Netherlands) and Erweiterter Arbeitsmarkt-Integration durch Arbeit (Austria).

Aims and objectives of DP project:

- The primary operational objective of the project was to create a development pathway for 80 very long term unemployed (two years +) and their households in each year of Action 2. A development pathway involves an integrated programme of actions tailored to clients needs and designed to assist them toward available opportunities in mainstreaming and community-based measures. The Development Pathway is designed to complement and strengthen, rather than replace, existing programmes. It identifies the barriers that prevent labour market reintegration of the group and works to overcome them. The project is based on a mentoring and support process.

Progress on project:

- In seeking to create a development pathway for the long term unemployed, the Futures project was dependant on gathering information from households on the barriers to labour market reintegration and then on designing an integrated programme of actions tailored to client needs. However, after attempting various methods of accessing the target group, only 9 households participated which did not provide a sufficient and reliable information base with which to advance the project and develop integrated actions. In discussing the difficulties in recruiting households to the project, the DP identified the following problems:
 - Despite assurances of confidentiality, potential participants were concerned that information provided to the project would be used by government departments and agencies to reassess their levels of social benefits;
 - Partners involved in the Futures project pointed out that a number of other larger bodies funded under government programmes (i.e. Employers Forum, Job Assist Centres and West Belfast Shankill Task Force) had developed similar projects causing competition in the recruitment for beneficiaries. However, after closer analysis, it is evident that this had only marginal influence on the recruitment of beneficiaries as during Actions 1 and 2 of the Futures DP, the government programmes were only in pilot or 'concept' stage of development; and
 - The particular social and mental barriers that affect labour market participation in Belfast. The project documented that amongst a section of the unemployed, a certain salary threshold needs to be reached before paid employment is considered viable. This is based on the existing level of welfare benefit and the ability to gain income and buy goods in the informal or 'grey' economy.

Progress on key principles of EQUAL

Partnership

- In some respects the partnership can be regarded as one of the most fruitful developments in the project. It was a forum through which broad learning was achieved. For example, the DP members now have a deeper understanding of the client group's nature and size, and the changes which the North/West Belfast labour market has undergone in recent years. The DP also experimented in some depth with different methods of attracting the client group. This learning curve has been an important contribution to understanding how to address pockets of long term unemployed in North/West Belfast.
- As all 11 contributing organisations are also members of the North and West Belfast Health Action Zone, each of the partners had experience of working together. Within the DP, there was good attendance at monthly meetings. Decisions were made at project board level by consensus and DP members are kept informed of developments at monthly to six-weekly meetings.
- One weakness of the partnership, however, was the failure to bring key community groups onto the project. It was reported that this may have been less than dynamic because they regarded the Futures project as competition for other labour market programmes they were involved.

Transnational Co-operation

- The transnational partners were chosen via the EU central database and had no previous experience of working together. The DP found this method of locating transnational partners to be difficult. It was felt that more detailed information on the partners would have been useful in this process.
- For Futures, the transnational level was the one which bore the most fruit in terms of outputs. Work at this level resulted in three concrete outputs:
 - tailor-made technical supports for clients called 'e-coaching';
 - research covering baseline data on health, education and employment throughout the partners' national context; and,
 - innovative diagnostics on effective ways of working with partners or beneficiaries in active labour market programmes.
- Representatives from the Futures DP believe that Futures would have been unable to develop such outputs had they not engaged with the transnational partners. The DP has played a key role in driving the transnational partnership. It became a central component of the programme. However, they were disappointed by the failure of the other transnational partners to fulfil their roles in the project.

Innovation

- Process innovation was central to the Futures DP. Futures aimed to synthesize the resources and expertise available within a host of statutory agencies and community-based organisations to implement tailored developmental pathways for households which experienced long-term unemployment. However, due to the low uptake of this project from the beneficiaries and the difficulties in engaging community representatives, the opportunities provided to develop and roll-out these innovative processes were very limited.

Empowerment

- One of Futures key objectives was to empower its clients. It was intended that Futures would fully involve clients in the design, delivery and evaluation of its interventions. However, due to the low client take-up of the Futures programme, there was very little opportunity for clients to become empowered.

Impact and mainstreaming of EQUAL

Impact at the Individual level – soft outcomes

- While the Futures DP did not meet the aims and objectives of the project, important information on the barriers to employment was gathered by the project. By turning the focus to research rather than an integrated mentoring or a gateway programme, focus groups with the long term unemployed were held to examine lessons for future employment programmes. From this research there is now a better understanding among the DP partners of:
 - The barriers that prevented the client group from engaging in the programme;
 - The client groups nature and size and means to attract / recruit the client group;
 - The changes which the Northern / West Belfast labour market has undergone in recent years;
 - The range of factors which act as disincentives to potential clients.

Horizontal mainstreaming at DP level

- With the information on long-term unemployment gathered from the households, the Futures DP sought to test and potentially refine the services provided on the ground to address barriers to employment. However, given the problems in recruiting households to participate in the project, this did not occur.

Vertical mainstreaming at DP level

- While the potential for transferability at the vertical level may be limited, the research emanating from the project will provide useful information for other government departments and agencies. The project, for instance, has provided better understanding of how to address pockets of long-term unemployment and how to develop tailor-made support packages for people who wish to participate in the labour market.

Name of DP: Personal Progression System

EQUAL Theme: Employability – re-integration of the labour market

DP Lead Partner: NI Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders

DP Partners: NI Prison Service, Probation Board for NI

Transnational Partners: Prison Service UK, Athens Bar Association (Greece), Justitie (Netherlands), RPS Rainer (UK), Krimamaalihuoltolaitoksen Kajaanin Aluetoimisto (Finland).

Aims and objectives of DP project

The key aims of the project are:-

- To create pathways to employment for those who have served a custodial sentence
- To focus on engaging employer groups to visit institutions and see for themselves the quality of the training being provided, and the recruitment potential among prisoners; and to establish networks which will help break down the barriers to inclusion of offenders in the workplace;
- To increase understanding of the recruitment potential of offenders;
- To support prisoners in planning for employment through provision of individual training programmes, during and after custody.

At the heart of the project concept is partnership. The resources of the three organisations are channelled in a co-ordinated way to offer a seamless system of support, training, and education both within and beyond ‘the prison gate’ (i.e. post-release). The support is geared at providing an individually customised programme of support and development for each individual, which encompasses a range of areas not often covered in employability programmes (e.g. relationships, accommodation and substance abuse). The key tenet is that this support will improve both employment opportunity and re-offending behaviour amongst the target group.

Progress on key principles of EQUAL

Partnership

- The three core partners within PPS all had pre-existing bi-lateral relationships. The EQUAL project has provided an opportunity for the three key partners to move beyond their pre-existing bi-lateral relationships into a much broader co-operative partnership. This has enabled better co-ordination of their support to offenders and of their input in a strategic policy context (i.e. vertical mainstreaming). Decisions are taken on a consensus basis, and because the core partnership is small relative to some of the other EQUAL projects, the process of co-ordinating and governance within the DP has been fairly smooth.

Transnational Co-operation

- The partners had pre-existing experience and contacts in terms of transnational work, which clearly helped this aspect of the project to develop. While all key members of the DP have been engaged in aspects of the transnational work, one individual in NIACRO, the lead partner, has assumed more of the responsibility for attending meetings with transnational partners.
- The form of transnational co-operation evident within PPS has moved well beyond the exchange of experience, or even parallel development of similar initiatives. The PPS project exhibits features of the third type of typology of transnational co-operation i.e. ‘Import, Export or Adoption of New Approaches and their Adaptation to Own Situation’.

- The PPS project has produced two multi-lingual DVDs, which will enable all transnational partners to have insights into the complete solution that PPS embodies in terms of support for offenders right through committal, release and re-integration into society. One DVD is aimed at the target audience (i.e. the offender community and those who work with them) and the other at the employer community to encourage them to look beyond offending behaviour and at the skills, attitude and commitment of ex-offenders. The latter is key to future efforts for mainstreaming, at the vertical level, and could support transnational partners in similar efforts in their respective jurisdictions.

Innovation

- The PPS project brought together three organisations that had worked together in bi-lateral partnerships into a wider tri-partite arrangement. In effect the project has fundamentally impacted on the way that the organisations work together, bringing about a more co-ordinated process into the delivery of support for offenders and input into policy. Primarily the project demonstrates process-orientated innovation, but there is the potential for this to progress towards context- orientated innovation as the mainstreaming efforts progress.

Empowerment

- The PPS project clearly demonstrates empowerment of the client group. As detailed above, there is clear evidence of the emerging positive impacts of PPS on the employability of the target group and tentative evidence of positive impacts on re-offending. In addition, the PPS project has included consulting with representatives of the client group on decisions made within the DP, communicating directly with as many beneficiaries as possible to get their feed-back on developments within the DP and piloting aspects of the objectives on client groups to receive their comments.

Impact and mainstreaming of EQUAL

Impact at the Individual level – soft outcomes

- Recent evidence from internal monitoring and evaluation activity⁵⁷ suggests that the target group exhibited many key employability deficits (e.g. lack of stable relationships, evidence of serial offending behaviour, high incidence of lack of qualifications, or limited qualifications beyond GCSE, lack of a driving licence and the predominance of unemployment before conviction). The support from PPS has however resulted in measurable employability outputs, evidenced by the fact that these initial statistics suggest that completers of PPS were much more likely (in a ratio of 1:6⁵⁸) to secure employment than non-completers of PPS. Similarly over half of the remaining completers went on to an education programme post-release whereas practically no non-completers did. The net result evident in the analysis was that seventy-six completers went into employment or education post release versus seven non-completers
- In qualitative terms the text box below provides some illustrations of the benefits evident at individual participant level – in effect of the ‘soft outcomes’ on participants⁵⁹.

“It (having a criminal record) is always going to be a disadvantage. However it is important not to give up on yourself and to keep on trying. The support helped me through the first few weeks and helped me prepare from the outset for employment. I am now employed, I have a sense of self-respect and a more settled/secure outlook on life. My job keeps me away from the company I used to keep”

“When you are convicted you have two choices, you can respond positively or you can let the situation bring you down. Just because you are in a prison cell, your life is not of less value. You need to use the experience to prepare for employment through education and skill

⁵⁷ Based on a pool of 212 individuals within PPS (completers and non-completers).

⁵⁸ Sourced from a recent report, as yet unpublished, from the PPS evaluator Mike Morrissey

⁵⁹ This information was gathered from DVDs produced by the DP entitled ‘Working with Conviction’ and ‘Your Future...What’s Next?’

Horizontal mainstreaming at DP level

- The PPS project has made progress towards dissemination and mainstreaming at the horizontal level. In terms of dissemination two DVDs – one focused at the offender population and the other focused at the employer community – have recently been produced in multi-lingual formats (reflecting the trans-national dimension of the project). The former is a practically orientated guide, complete with case studies of PPS participants, for the offender community. The latter is designed to encourage employers to look beyond offending behaviour and at the skills, attitude and motivation of ex-offenders emerging from PPS. This highlights the important role that the private sector or employers organisations will play in enabling mainstreaming of activity within this project in due course, by creating favourable conditions for re-integration of ex-offenders into local economies and communities.
- The project partners within PPS had a clearly defined strategy for horizontal mainstreaming, (with an 80% orientation towards the Prison Service and a 20% orientation towards DEL). Accordingly, there has been a focus on building relationships with all of the resettlement team/ employability advisors within the Prison Service. The seniority of the board members in PPS has been important in this regard. The strategy for mainstreaming has followed the same holistic approach as that within the PPS project (i.e. of a joined up approach between committal, release and resettlement of offenders). At this stage, the pilot project is scheduled to be fully mainstreamed/ transferred by September 2005.

Vertical mainstreaming at DP level

- The PPS project has also made progress in the context of vertical mainstreaming. The core partnership of NIACRO, the Prison Service and the Probation Board enabled all parties to start work on a concerted front to lobby for policy and legislative change of relevance to the target group. The project has had a significant influence on the shape of the Prison Service Resettlement Strategy, building on the lessons learned to date from the wide-ranging support embodied within PPS. It also changed the processes for engagement with employers (which is central to achieving future support for vertical mainstreaming activity). Finally, it has helped the partners to work together to respond to other policy issues of relevance to their target group (e.g. such as the Single Equality Bill).

Name of DP: Young Women Making It Work

EQUAL Theme: Equal Opportunities – Reducing gender gaps and desegregation

DP Lead Partner: YouthAction Northern Ireland

Other DP Partners: Derry Travellers Support Group, Disability Action, Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities, Western Education and Library Board and the Voluntary Youth Network for Northern Ireland.

Trans-national Partners: Gender Empowerment (Austria) and Mediation Network (Spain)

Aims and objectives of DP project:

The DP aims to ensure that marginalised young women have access to a pathway of further training, further education and subsequent employment. The purpose is to facilitate access and return to the labour market of young mothers, young women travellers, young disabled women, minority ethnic and young lesbian women, especially from rural communities. The DP has a number of other key objectives:

- To develop four new accredited tailor-made training programmes of support, incorporating personal, vocational and educational skills, additional qualifications, work experience and integrated ICT over two years.
- Over three years, to create access to employment for 238 women over three years who have been prevented from entering the labour market, or fulfilling their potential due to poor qualifications, low self-confidence and self worth or stereotyping and prejudice. This will be achieved by equipping the young women with new skills, qualifications and experience to challenge barriers which hinder their employment prospects.
- To create specific opportunities in the Action Plan for young women from the target group to take a proactive role at all levels in the project.
- To deliver two accredited training programmes to 24 employers, training providers, community activists, in order to transfer skills and knowledge and identify appropriate methods of engaging the target group in years two and three.
- To maximise the learning from the project through; awareness training of DP members and their organisations; production of training materials, leaflets, evaluation reports, posters. They plan to host six seminars and one major conference over three years; establish a website and undertake CD Rom development. Finally, they have a strategic plan to target specific bodies of influence and responsibility.
- To enter into the trans-national activities to ensure maximum learning from other member states.

Progress on key principles of EQUAL

Partnership

- Following the initial stages of learning and exchanging information, the partnership progressed to develop joint actions. Within the DP, the partners have been open about their experiences and what they have learned from each other. YouthAction also held interviews with each partner regarding the development of the partnership and found the feedback to be positive. Indeed, partners commented that they would be prepared to commit to another DP in a future programme. This was confirmed in the case study research. Additionally, the DP holds monthly meetings in which each of the partners take the opportunity to make contributions and input into the development of the partnership.

- Decisions within the project are made by consensus and the minutes of the meetings indicate that all partners contribute equally. While YouthAction takes the lead role in meetings in relation to implementation of the project, different partners also take responsibility in different areas. Overall, the lead partner, YouthAction, provides strategic direction for the DP, reviews progress against set targets and makes the link between practice and policy.

Transnational Co-operation

- The transnational partners were chosen using the European Commission database that was found to be very useful for the matching process. Setting up transnational partners, however, was very timely and this needed to be completed quickly in order to develop the partnership and overcome communication difficulties. None of the transnational partners had previous experience of working with each other under other programmes. Overall, Young Women Making it Work regarded the exchange of experience and information as the main level of activity in the trans-national co-operation.

Innovation

- Young Women Making it Work is focused on a target group, which is largely under-represented in conventional active labour market policies. While many labour market initiatives aimed to address women before, the innovation within this project is that it attempted to address collectively the difficulties of these very disparate sub-groups within the female labour market. The project is also innovative by aiming to introduce a flexible approach by tailoring the project to different groups.

Empowerment

- DP's meet with representatives of the target groups at monthly meetings who then report back to the project participants. However, at the outset, there was particular difficulty in recruiting participants from the specific target groups. Given frequent relocation within their community, domestic duties, and low literacy and numeracy levels, young Irish Traveller women were not able to commit to the 26 week programme and had a high drop out rate. It was noted that young lesbians were difficult to identify in the predominately male 'Gay Scene' in Northern Ireland. Other problems included securing a neutral venue (for example, the Sikh community could not use a community centre belonging to the Indian Community). In addition, finding appropriate times created difficulties as it was reported that many young women from minority ethnic backgrounds work unsocial hours.
- After these initial difficulties, the client groups were located and did engage in the project. There is little evidence, however, that they helped shape the training programmes or had much voice in governing the DP. This may be explained by the 'marginal' nature of the client groups. Young women from very diverse backgrounds are likely to have multiple responsibilities and find it difficult to participate in such projects.

Impact and mainstreaming of EQUAL

Impact at the Individual level – soft outcomes

- Notwithstanding the problems encountered recruiting target groups, the project has made a degree of impact on beneficiaries. To compensate for the difficulties in accessing beneficiaries, Young Women Making it Work recruited an extra young mothers group and employed a different recruitment strategy by using peer support workers from minority ethnic communities. Working with participants from the target groups, the DP implemented the 'Moving On' programme that focused on employment skills and personal development. Soft outcomes such as confidence, self-esteem, assertiveness, communication skills and working with others have been measured through tutor observations and included in portfolios for accreditation for Youth Achievement Awards. These awards have provided a framework for the trainees and provided recognition for the 'soft outcomes'. Indeed, as part of this programme, young women gave oral presentations to members of the EQUAL Monitoring Committee and met with Government Ministers which demonstrates their enhanced skills and self-confidence. With regard to the disabled beneficiaries, however, discussions with DP partners noted

that longer training programmes would have permitted more progress as there are many stages that disabled persons need to complete before having the ability and confidence to enter the workforce.

- In addition, the project completed a training programme (Principles and Practices of Working with Young Women) for youth and community workers involved with young women. 21 trainees participated in this project and fifteen (three above the target) completed their portfolios which will be submitted towards Northern Ireland Open College Network (NIOCN) level three awards. To cascade the learning, the successful participants on this programme then held training initiatives themselves with groups of young women on issues such as in young mothers and sexual health which provides evidence of learning.
- To illustrate the impact on beneficiaries in the Young Women Making it Work project, the Figure 1 **provides positive qualitative evidence** from one of the pilot programmes that focused on young lesbian women⁶⁰:

Figure 1: Qualitative impacts of young women making it work at the beneficiary level

“I like being part of the group – I feel that we are able to talk about our feelings and experiences without being judged which is what normally happens”
“I feel like I am understood in the group”
“I am happy and feel privileged to be part of this group. I feel excited about what we can achieve”
“I enjoy meeting new people who are just like me”
“The group gives us the opportunity to meet other lesbians outside the usual nightclub scene. There should be more opportunities for other young lesbians”

Horizontal mainstreaming at DP level

- In providing a range of training programmes, Young Women Making it Work ensured greater awareness of Section 75 and gender issues among project partners. In particular, the DP made an important contribution to raising awareness and understanding of the issues facing young lesbians in Northern Ireland. Through a policy submission, the DP also contributed to the draft Northern Ireland Youth Work Strategy 2005-2008. In addition, from learning gained from the EQUAL Programme, the lead partner in the DP managed research on a number of issues regarding the employability of young people, including sexual diversity and disabilities. From this work, seminars have been held involving individuals from the relevant target group and stakeholders within the youth sector that have helped to raise awareness but evidence of horizontal mainstreaming has yet to emerge.

Vertical mainstreaming at DP level

- To date, Young Women Making it Work has had a limited impact at the national policy level but has conducted an extensive programme of dissemination in Action 3. To initiate this process, the DP held a conference on issues of training and employment for young women, involving practitioners, policy makers and youth service representatives. In addition, the DP has prepared four strategic policy papers and developed a drama piece with young women raising issues experienced by their groups. Each of these initiatives have assisted in raising awareness of the project and the issues affecting young women, but it is yet unclear at this stage if any of the methods or models will be mainstreamed at the national policy level.

⁶⁰ Youth Action Northern Ireland (2004) *Out and About, Young Lesbian Project, A Model of Effective Practice*. Youth Action Northern Ireland, the Gender Equality Unit.

Annex B - Case studies, Round 2

Name of DP: Employment for Autism

EQUAL Theme: Employability

DP Lead Partner: Orchardville Society

Other DP Partners: PAPA, the Now project, South and East Belfast Health and Social Services Trust, North and West Belfast HSS Trust, Department for Employment and Learning, the Equality Commission, Queens University Belfast and Botanic Inns Ltd.

Transnational Partners: Autis heat Werk (Netherlands) and Delic (France)

Aims and objectives of the DP project

Although there is a growing population of people in Northern Ireland with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), at present, there is limited provision for adults with ASD. Overall, there is a need for models of intervention toward supported employment. The DP objectives include:

- Involvement of people with ASD throughout all actions;
- Positioning of people with ASD within the labour market;
- Best practice model(s) from Europe test-bedded within Northern Ireland.
- Key front line staff trained;
- Dissemination;
- Mainstreaming of findings within the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Employment and Learning.

Progress on key principals of EQUAL

Partnership

The lead partner, the Orchardville Society, first spoke with a number of the partners before writing the bid for funding and refine the aims of the project. At the outset, the Orchardville Society recognised the importance of getting partners on board with long term financial responsibility, particularly those in the public sector. Although the DP was unable to provide the Chamber of Commerce as they could not provide the necessary commitment, the DP did succeed in attracting Botanic Inns Ltd. It was felt that involvement from the hospitality sector was important because of the expected growth in this area and the related employment opportunities..

As lead partner, all operational decisions are made by the Orchardville Society with strategic issues being decided by the wider DP board. Two subgroups have also been established to assist decision making that include:

- Assessment subgroups: this involves representatives from the South and East and North and West Belfast HSS Trust, DEL and PAPA who bring recommendations on adults with ASD to the DP board.
- Equal opportunities: this involves representatives of the Equality Commission, Queens University Belfast and Botanic Inns Ltd and aims to focus on employment opportunities for those with ASD.

In addition, the DP seeks to establish two further sub-groups that include:

- A User forum: to gain feedback on the project, the forum will facilitate liaison between project staff and the beneficiaries (those with ASD);
- Conference sub group: this group will be responsible for organising a conference and disseminating the findings from the project.

Transnational Co-operation

As the DP members had no knowledge of other ASD organisations operating across Europe, the DP relied heavily on the EQUAL database to source transnational partners. The DP was involved in a number of pre-engagement meetings to ensure the selection of appropriate partners. Following a number of meetings the TCA was formally signed with partners in Holland and France. The first formal meeting of the transnational partnership will be held in November 2005 and it is envisaged that staff exchanges will be held in the following March. Involving beneficiaries in the transnational meetings and exchanges is also being considered.

Innovation

As provision for adults with ASD in Northern Ireland is currently limited, the project is innovative as it seeks to address this gap in provision and develop a common approach among organisations that had not worked together before.

Empowerment

It is envisaged that empowerment will be realised through the user form in which representatives of beneficiaries will have the opportunity to engage with project staff and provide feedback to the DP. It is proposed that the forum will convene regularly during the initial implementation period and then meet on a monthly or quarterly as the project progresses. Ultimately, the DP seeks to facilitate the involvement of beneficiaries on the DP board.

Impact and mainstreaming of EQUAL

The DP aims to conduct an extensive dissemination process through each of the partners and holding conferences and seminars. It is also envisaged that the National Thematic Network and the North /South Steering Group will be utilised for dissemination and that the beneficiaries will play an active role in presenting the findings from the project.

Name of DP: The Engage Programme

EQUAL Theme: Employability

DP Lead Partner: Simon Community

Other DP Partners: Foyer Federation, Department for Employment and Learning, Housing Executive, Social Security Agency, Northern Ireland Open College Network, City and Guilds, LSC and the Northern Bank.

Transnational Partners: Outsider (led by probation service, Sweden), Malta, Netherlands, Lijot (Council of Lithuanian Youth Organisations, Lithuania).

Aims and objectives of the DP project

Overall, the project aims to facilitate access and return to the labour market for those who have difficulty in being integrated or reintegrated into the labour market. The project will have two key strands:

1. The development and delivery of a learning programme accessible to residents of the four member foyers;
2. A development programme for staff that are supporting learners.

Progress on key principals of EQUAL

Partnership

The funding application was submitted by both the Foyer and the Simon Community and the DP has included a range of partners from the public, private and voluntary / community sector. The DP includes a mix of new partners and organisations that the Simon Community had worked with previously. The wider board meets on a quarterly basis while the DP is led by a Steering group that consists of the Simon Community and the Foyer Federation. The DP is split into four areas / sub groups that include:

- Service user involvement – best practice
- Curriculum
- Evaluation
- Dissemination

Transnational Co-operation

Initially, the transnational partnership started with ten members but it was felt that the organisation would be too cumbersome. As a result, the partnership was divided into two groups of five and the TCAs developed as two separate entities. The names of the TCAs are Hugan and Nunan which mean 'thought' and 'memory'. To date, the majority of contact with the transnational partners has been through email and telephone. There have had three meetings to date and six meetings are planned for Action 2 and one during Action 3.

Innovation

While this approach has been developed in England to assist people back into employment, no provision has been established in Northern Ireland to date. The approach seeks to develop self-help initiatives and also involve beneficiaries in decision making roles and the development of the project.

Empowerment

The DP seeks to establish decision making power within the target group. In particular, it is envisaged that the beneficiaries will have an important role in recruiting project staff.

Impact and mainstreaming of EQUAL

It is proposed that the National Thematic Network and the North /South Steering Group will be utilised for dissemination and that the DP will explore additional avenues for mainstreaming such as learning from the experience in Scotland. It is envisaged that over 200 beneficiaries will be involved in the project which will provide impact at the individual level.

Name of DP: Helios

EQUAL Theme: Opportunities

DP Lead Partner: Triax Taskforce

Other DP Partners: Department for Employment and Learning, North West Institute of Further and Higher Education, Business in the Community, Women in Enterprise, Bogside and Brandywell Initiative, Creggan Neighbourhood Partnership, West Bank Initiative, Bogside and Brandywell Women's Group, Derry City Council, Gasyard Wall Féile, Social Security Agency, Construction Industry Training Board, INGAGE and the Equality Commission.

Transnational Partners: France

Aims and objectives of the DP project

Overall, the DP seeks to increase the number of women entering construction trades and overcome obstacles to women's equal participation in such gender-segregated jobs. The main objectives of the DP are to:

- Ensure that equal opportunities and empowerment are central planks of Helios DP ethos, principle and practice for all partners and stakeholders;
- Review, and develop enhanced appreciation of, policies and practice impacting on women's entry to training and employment in construction trades;
- Review, and develop enhanced awareness of, barriers experienced by women attempting entry to training and employment in construction trades;
- Provide a gender specific Equal Opportunities' awareness programme for tutors instructing women considering entry to training and eventual employment in construction trades;
- Provide an innovative supported training programme for women considering further training and eventual employment in construction trades;
- Develop practical lessons of what works and doesn't from experience of programme delivery, and disseminate learning to impact on policy and practice in favour of women considering entry to construction trades;
- Based on programme experience and learning, develop and propose policy and practice improvements, where appropriate, in favour of women considering entry to construction trades;
- Work with the Department for Employment and Learning and other related organisations to review, and where appropriate add value to, any Government policies regarding modern apprenticeship/ traineeship requirements and frameworks;
- Seek to establish more effective pathways to reduce existing barriers experienced by women attempting entry to 'non-traditional trades'.

Progress on key principals of EQUAL

Partnership

Triax Taskforce, the lead partner, utilised their wide networks to engage a range of partners in the DP. It was important that the DP attracted specialists from the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) to facilitate the training provision whereas the Equality commission were invaluable in planning the strategy for the project. The DP was also successful in attracting community organisations that could encourage the participation of beneficiaries and provide support and mentoring. Finally, statutory organisations such as DEL were brought onto the partnership to provide information on government policy.

While the partnership has achieved all of their Round 1 objectives such as completing their DPA and ensuring the relevant participation of organisations on the DP, the partners feel they are falling behind in terms of building a partnership process.

In terms of decision making, the wider partnership board has overall decision making authority but the main operation activities are conducted through a number of sub groups focused on information and dissemination, recruitment and equality.

Transnational Co-operation

The transnational partners were chosen through the EQUAL Database. Four groups originally met with expectations of forming a TCA, however, Triax Taskforce felt that partnership with an organisation in France was more appropriate given the specific nature of the project and the objectives of both DPs. The transnational partners have met twice to date and they keep in contact via email. The partners plan to meet six times over the lifetime of the project and develop a report to demonstrate learning from the projects.

Innovation

The innovative nature of the project is based on three central themes that include:

- A 'Face-to-Face Forum' that will include participants, partners, trainers and representatives from government departments. It is envisaged that this forum will help build the confidence of participants as it will, for the first time, bring them face-to-face with policy makers and ensure that trainers and decision-makers fully understand and appreciate the barriers that women encounter when entering non-traditional trades. This Forum will have the effect of empowering the participants as full partners in the process as it will enable them to see how policy is formulated and how their experiences can help shape future policy.
- A 'Digital Diary Room' which will enable participants to record their experiences and the issues that have been affecting them while on the programme. This will provide opportunity for participants to give on-the-spot feedback that will enable Forum members to see how real life experiences and issues affect participants.
- 'Gender Specific Equal Opportunities Awareness Training' for trainers ensuring that all instructors and tutors undertake training on issues of equality, discrimination and gender.

Empowerment

The Face-to-Face Forum and the Digital Diary Room will help to empower beneficiaries by providing an opportunity for them to provide immediate feedback on their experience, both positive and negative, of training provided and organisational training culture. These processes place beneficiaries at the centre of the project, ensures that they take ownership, and encourages beneficiaries to express their views and articulate their own viewpoints. In addition, the training, mentoring and personal development will empower beneficiaries to make informed choices about which aspect of construction trades they wish to develop.

Impact and Mainstreaming of EQUAL

By providing training and mentoring it is envisaged that the project will improve the skills and confidence of the beneficiaries. In terms of possible mainstreaming strategies, the DP seeks to develop greater linkages with the North West Institute with a view to transferring lessons from the project and changing the Institutes approach to teaching tutors. The National Thematic Network and the North /South Steering Group are also considered important avenues for dissemination.

Name of DP: Possibilities

EQUAL Theme: Opportunities

DP Lead Partner: Gingerbread

DP Partners: University of Ulster, Department for Employment and Learning and Belfast GEMS

Transnational Partners: Italy, Spain, Lithuania and Malta

Aims and Objectives of the DP project

The partnership aims to create equality of opportunity for lone parents entering the labour market in Northern Ireland by:

- Identifying and addressing the obstacles which continue to restrict equality of opportunity for lone parents in respect of the labour market;
- Exploring ways in which existing interventions can be optimised and identify gaps in provision;
- Recommending appropriate responses at the local and transnational level.

Progress on key principles of EQUAL

Partnership

At present, the DP involves the University of Ulster, Belfast GEMS and Gingerbread but the partners are seeking to develop the partnership and involve government departments and employers. The DP is centred on two main strands of research and training. The research is lead by the University of Ulster and funds a Research Associate to examine the barriers to labour market entry facing lone parents. The training will be piloted in South Belfast and has a target of attracting around 60 lone parents who will also receive work placements. The training will be conducted through the Employment Support Network (ESN) which is collaboration of the local community groups in the area. Within the partnership, decisions are taken by Gingerbread (the lead partner) after a consultation with other partners. Each of the partners has not worked together before.

Transnational Co-operation

Under the TCA, the DP is considering the issue of lone parenthood and employment from the perspective of other European Member States. It is envisaged that working together will highlight different approaches and models of practice which may be replicated domestically to the benefit of lone parents in both Member States. Transnational co-operation will also include the joint development of a pre-employment training model and the exchange of staff and participants.

Innovation

The innovative nature of the project is based on the promotion of a model of community based training, delivered in partnership with key stakeholders. The model aims to introduce measures to enhance provision and include an overall package of accredited pre-employment training, work placements, employer matching service, professional careers guidance and ongoing support. In addition, the DP seeks to undertake research into lone parents and employment in NI, within the context of equality of opportunity. It is proposed that the report will make recommendations to improve existing interventions and introduce innovative working arrangements suitable for mainstreaming within existing available resources.

Empowerment

It is envisaged that beneficiaries will be mainly empowered through the lead organisation, Gingerbread. Gingerbread's Board is composed of lone parents directly elected by the organisation's membership and this board will be actively involved in the development of the work programme for Action 2. In this role, lone parent representatives from Gingerbread's Board will attend DP meetings and will be supported and encouraged by Gingerbread staff to contribute to the development of the project.

Impact and mainstreaming of EQUAL

The DP has established a dissemination strategy. This is mainly based on launching the findings from the research through conferences and seminars and publishing work on the websites of each of the partners. It is proposed that the National Thematic Network and the North /South Steering Group will be utilised for dissemination

Name of DP: Supporting Employment in Action

EQUAL Theme: Employability

DP Lead Partner: Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment (NIUSE)

Other DP Partners: Disablement Advisory Service (DEL), Social Security Agency, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety - Disability Unit (DHSSPS)

Transnational Partners: Paris, Equal Shares for All (Cardiff) and Increasing Adaptability of Disabled Persons (Czech Republic).

Aims and objectives of the DP project

The project seeks to address the under representation of people with disabilities in the labour market and enhance their employability by testing the model of Supported Employment. More specifically, the objectives of the project are to:

- Establish a partnership of key stakeholders and policymakers to strategically review current policies and practices;
- Identify and communicate policy gaps to relevant policymakers and government departments at local, national and European levels;
- Test the model of Supported Employment, an innovative model of employment for people with disabilities;
- Explore and develop the model of Supported Employment for other socially excluded groups;
- Promote the model of Supported Employment as a mainstream government programme;
- Disseminate information throughout the life of the project;
- Construct and maintain a long term partnership capable of surviving the life of the project.

Progress on key principals of EQUAL

Partnership

In developing the partnership, NIUSE, the lead partner, were eager to approach organisations that could have an influence on policy. On this basis, the Social Security Agency was incorporated into the partnership as it was important that the DP had knowledge and experience of the benefits system.

At present, the lead partner makes the majority of decisions within the partnership but it is understood that the other partners will be involved as the DP progresses into Action 2. To date, many of the partner organisations have experienced changes in personnel which have disrupted the process, and take the partnership longer to 'gel'. For Action 2, the DP will establish working groups to manage operational decision making. Membership of these groups has yet to be established but it is proposed the sub-groups will be centred on the following themes that include equal opportunities, transnational cooperation and communication.

Transnational Co-operation

The Transnational partnership has two main aims that are to:

- Explore the use of the Supported Employment Model for other socially excluded groups
- Explore how other EU Countries have mainstreamed the model of Supported Employment.

The DP also hopes to develop a 'tool kit' from the transnational element that will compare experience and best practice across the partnership, particularly as each of the transnational partners come from different backgrounds (i.e. drug users and children in care homes).

To date, communication between transnational partners has been through email and telephone but in Action 2 it is proposed that the partners will meet five times for project meetings and conduct four additional exchange visits. The operational actual meeting of the transnational partnership will be held in Northern Ireland in October 2005.

Innovation

The project promotes an innovative approach by identifying barriers faced by people with disabilities in the labour market and seeking ways to remove them through testing the model of Supported Employment. The model aims to assist people with disabilities to access and stay in employment through providing a person centred approach and providing ongoing support. In addition, the DP, itself, adopts an innovative approach by including key stakeholders and policymakers in employment of people with disabilities. In particular, the DP seeks to involve the target group at every stage of the project particularly, in relation to decision making and project planning.

Empowerment

With a view to ensuring that people with disabilities play an active role in all aspects of the project, it is proposed that disabled people will be represented in the DP through working groups. Beneficiaries will also be given the opportunity to input into the design and development of the mainstream programme as they will be involved in testing the model and outlining their views and concerns regarding accessing the labour market. In essence, empowerment is a fundamental principle of the model of Supported Employment which recognises the importance of user participation and involvement. For example, in the model, the individual is actively involved in all processes such as selecting the service provider, developing a vocational profile, job matching, on the job training and ongoing support.

Impact and mainstreaming of EQUAL

During Action 3, the DP aims to highlight the main issues and barriers faced by disabled people in terms of sustaining employment. An important part of the project is also raising awareness of the problems facing disabled people and to this end, the DP plans to set up a Dissemination Strategy Group. Initial ideas for dissemination include organising a conference in Belfast for the European Supported Employment Network which will be held in 2007.

Name of DP: Women in Rural Areas and Investment in Self-Employment (WRAISE)

EQUAL Theme: Opportunities

DP Lead Partner: Aspire Micro Finance

Other DP Partners: Invest NI, Rural Community Network (RCN), Women in Enterprise (WIE), Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) and Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI).

Transnational Partners: ADIE (France), Integra (Slovakia) and Un Sol Mon (Spain)

Aims and objectives of the DP project

The purpose of the partnership is to develop an innovative methodology for supporting women in rural areas to start and run their own businesses. More specifically, the DP aims:

- To develop an agreed approach to deliver enterprise support services for women in disadvantaged rural areas who are interested in self-employment;
- To train Aspire staff, WRDA community facilitators and rural credit union staff, in community-based outreach and enterprise skills to recruit 100 'hard-to-reach' women in five disadvantaged rural areas;
- To work with our transnational partners to design a methodology for peer-groups to learn and support each other through business start-up over the two-year period of Action 2;
- To establish five peer-groups (4-12 members each) and to support those peer-groups through business start-up;
- To work with DETI, Invest NI and the transnational partners to feed learning into the policy process vertically (design of enterprise support services) and horizontally (capacity and tools for learning providers and advisors in the enterprise network), regionally and internationally.

Progress on key principals of EQUAL

Partnership

The partnership is based on an amalgamation of community / voluntary organisations, public sector stakeholders and business support groups. The DP is lead by Aspire Micro Finance and formal meetings are held every three months. Progress reports are disseminated to each partner before every meeting.

Transnational Co-operation

The basis of the transnational co-operation is largely centred on the concept of providing peer group support in the field of enterprise and self-employment to women, particularly in disadvantaged and excluded communities. It is envisaged that each of the DPs will share lessons and experience and that transnationality will include joint development of innovative approaches to training, benchmarking, exchanges of peer group facilitators and trainers. In Action 3, it is proposed that a joint workshop at the annual European Microfinance Network conference will be held to mainstream the lessons learned from the EQUAL Programme.

Innovation

The innovative nature of the project is based on the formation of a network of functioning peer groups of women micro-entrepreneurs in rural areas. These peer groups seek to enhance capacity and provide effective tools of mentoring, support, training and capacity-building to encourage other women to enter self-employment. In addition, the DP seeks to develop an innovative approach by spanning boundaries between a range of voluntary and statutory organisations and credit unions and using this network as basis to provide a range of finance, mentoring, training and other skills support.

Empowerment

It is envisaged that empowerment in the DP will be realised through the development of the peer-groups. These groups will provide support for women interested in full-time, part-time or seasonal self-employment or who are already self-employed. The peer groups will be empowered to decide what forms of business training, mentoring, advice or support they need. In addition, it is proposed that peer group members will contribute to the evaluation of our work programme through a range of evaluation tools including impact assessment, client feedback questionnaires and focus group interviews.

Impact and Mainstreaming of EQUAL

This DP seeks to create an impact at the individual level by involving rural women in peer groups (which will encourage personal development and increase confidence) and providing direct business training to support self-employment. The DP also aims to disseminate the findings of the project through conferences, seminars and research papers.