

DublinEmploymentPact

A COMMERCIAL REPORT

Creating the framework for change

The Equal at Work project has been outstandingly successful in meeting its objectives of addressing imbalances in the Dublin labour market

After more than ten years of an economic boom, people could be forgiven for thinking that unemployment is a thing of the past and that there are no imbalances or inequities in the labour market. This is far from the case, however, and, because of this, the Dublin Employment Pact (DEP) was established as an initiative under the Partnership 2000 in 1998 with a mandate for tackling unemployment and development issues affecting disadvantaged areas of Dublin.

The DEP is a partnership of Dublin Region social partners, including Ictu, Ibec, Dublin Chamber of Commerce, the various local authorities, statutory agencies including Fás, the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the local area partnerships.

Its legal structure is that of a non-profit company with a board of 18 directors appointed by the various partners. It seeks to fill the gap which exists in terms of addressing issues at a Dublin-wide level.

While there are many local level initiatives and cooperation on specific issues between the four Dublin local authorities, no single body specifically seeks to address the major social issues of urban policy across Dublin.

This is the area in which DEP is active, working with partners from the local, regional and national level, and providing an unthreatening space for dialogue and innovation in public social policy initiatives in the area of employment and social inclusion.

Equal at Work was a project developed through DEP under the EU Equal Initiative in 2001. The idea behind the initiative was to tackle discrimination and other barriers in the labour market to full participation in the world of work.

"The project is aimed at tackling the structural issues which had kept people out of work or below their potential in the labour market," explains David Connolly, chair of the Equal project. "We developed a project on a scale sufficient to make an impact across Dublin and also in the very different dynamics of



From left: David Connolly, Community Sector/Trade Union Campaign Group (CS/TUCG), Dr Joanna McMinn, Director, National Women's Council of Ireland, (NWC) and David Begg, General Secretary, ICTU. Photograph: Maxwells

the sectors involved - private, public and community."

A second Equal project was designed in early 2005 with the aim of working with organisations in different sectors to pilot actions in relation to equality and diversity in the workplace.

Over 50 organisations from all sectors were involved in Equal at Work, notably the private sector, the health service, local authorities and the community sector.

The project comes to an end at the end of this year but such has been its success that many of the

actions undertaken as pilot programmes within it will continue on as mainstream activities within organisations in Dublin and throughout the country.

The work of the project took place through four clusters - the private sector cluster, involving companies such as Meteor Mobile Communications and Irish Life and Permanent; the health sector cluster which involved the participation of Tallaght Hospital, St James's Hospital and Stewarts Hospital among others; the local authority

cluster which saw major projects undertaken by South Dublin County Council and Dublin City Council; and the community sector cluster, which involved a wide range of community sector organisations, as well as the Impact and Siptu trade unions.

"A lot of what has been happening in the various programmes undertaken as part of the Equal project will continue," says DEP director Philip O'Connor. "We connected up with a lot of big national organisations during the project and this

will help continue the work. For example, we are hoping that the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development will be interested in working with us on projects in the future.

"The HSE are also interested in working with the Dublin Employment Pact again in further and similar projects."

The local authority sector cluster too has been very successful. "The South Dublin County Council project, which involved integrating members of the Traveller community into the

workforce there has been phenomenally successful," O'Connor notes.

"A number of Travellers were taken on in the outdoor section of the council. They were not employed as a separate team or anything, but as part of the overall team. This has worked tremendously well, as has an initiative to encourage younger Travellers to stay on in school and do the leaving cert. Initially the projects were run in Tallaght but are now being replicated in Clondalkin. Also, other councils

around the country including Cork and Clare have undertaken similar projects as a result."

Possibly the most dramatic success of the Equal at Work project has been in the community sector. This sector was long the poor relation in terms of social partnership, while employers within it tended to be relatively lacking in terms of human resources practice and staff were badly paid and worked in sub-standard conditions in many cases.

The Equal project set out to address this in a fairly innovative fashion, by helping organisations to become more professional and organised as employers while at the same time facilitating the workers in joining trade unions and becoming more effective in representing themselves.

"This has been very successful," says O'Connor. "The two unions, Impact and Siptu, bought into what we were trying to do and have actively recruited in the sector and have met with a lot of success in that regard."

"We have also established the Community Sector Employers Forum with about 100 organisations taking part. This will represent the sector both in terms of negotiations with unions and with the Government in the partnership talks, and so on. The community sector will no longer be the poor relation of the partnership process."

THE PROJECT WAS SUBJECT TO independent evaluation by Finbar McDonnell of Hibernian Consulting. "The project has been hugely successful," he says.

"Its success was facilitated by the ability of the DEP to set up well organised structures in the different sectors for the pilot projects. This meant that most of the 50 organisations which were involved with the project stayed with it from start to finish."

"Many of the pilots will now be mainstreamed and will continue after Equal finishes. This is not only due to the success of the pilots but also because the DEP had the foresight to partner with a number of strategic partners like the HSE who have the resources to take it forward into 2008 and beyond."



www.dublinpact.ie

Private and health sector projects build on their positive outcomes

Equality reviews were at the heart of a range of pilot projects undertaken with the private sector and created a number of very positive outcomes



Above: David Goggin, Meteor; Caroline Casey, the Aisling Foundation and Philip O'Connor, Dublin Employment Pact, at the launch of the comparative analysis of equality reviews. Photograph: Maxwells

Left: At the launch of the HR website erb.ie which is aimed at the community sector were Jean Somers, Dublin Employment Pact, Assumpta McGill, Labour Relations Commission and Noreen Byrne, Doras Bui. Photograph: Nick Bradshaw/Jason Clarke Photography



account of the nuances of the decision making process and made better decisions, while reducing the burden of decision making that falls on the central HR function.

This tool, which was piloted in three divisions of the company for eight HR policy areas during 2007, also provides an improved electronic record of HR decisions. "The private sector companies who participated in the project derived enormous benefit and value from it," says David Goggin of Meteor who also chaired the private sector cluster of the Equal project.

"It has been a significant learning experience for all involved. It has provided the managers with the knowledge and skills to manage diversity and equality in their workplaces much more effectively."

He points out that the business case for this extends beyond the workplace itself. "It also provides us with a much broader view in terms of our customer base," he notes. "We are now operating in an environment where our customer bases are becoming increasingly diverse. Clearly, having a greater awareness and understanding of this diversity is good for business."

The health sector cluster undertook five projects sponsored by six healthcare settings. The overall project was co-ordinated through the HSE HR Directorate and guided by a group comprising the Dublin Employment Pact, the HSE Employers Agency, Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown, HSE Dublin North East HR Section, the Children's University Hospital Temple Street, St James's Hospital, Tallaght Hos-

pital, Stewarts Hospital Services, EVE Enterprises and the National Disability Authority.

The first universal access audit of a public sector building in Ireland was undertaken at the Children's University Hospital, Temple Street. The remit of the audit included those with disabilities as well as other groups with access issues, including parents with children in buggies and those with limited English language proficiency.

The results of the review were translated into practical measures to increase access, some of which have been implemented.

For example, colour contrasting in key areas of the hospital to aid those with visual impairment. The outcomes of the project have been communicated to the HSE so that it can guide planning in the building design of

the new National Paediatric Hospital and other projects.

Connolly Hospital Blanchardstown and HSE Dublin North East looked at ways to improve the integration of staff from diverse cultural backgrounds so that they can deliver services more effectively to an increasingly ethnically diverse population.

These actions included training in intercultural working for staff teams from diverse backgrounds, training in managing diversity for senior staff and a programme of language skills for speakers of other languages.

Tallaght Hospital pioneered work in attracting older workers to the hospital and in retaining them at retirement age. A key part of the project was the development of a programme entitled "Options for Me" to enable older staff to develop their careers, remain in the workforce and plan for a smooth transition to retirement.

St James's Hospital further developed its equality programme with a project aimed at making the recruitment system more robust. The hospital developed a new system of interviewing staff, including equality training for interview panels, created a set of measures to market the hospital as accessible to those with disabilities and began addressing career progression for overseas nurses.

Stewarts Hospital Services became the first healthcare setting to undertake a complete equality audit of employment practice. Funded by the Equality Authority, a unique aspect of this review was the creation of a panel of staff facilitators, which included those from diverse cultural backgrounds, to assist other staff complete questionnaires and participate in the review. During 2007, Stewarts developed and implemented a comprehensive programme of equality and diversity training for staff and managers.

The HSE HR Directorate, supported by the Dublin Employment Pact, is currently seeking funding to continue the current projects as well as extend the work to other healthcare settings.

The purpose of this next phase will be to proactively promote equality of opportunity as part of good people management and increase the recognition of the contribution made by a diverse workforce to healthcare in an increasingly heterogeneous society.



Above: Irish Life and Permanent employees: Elaine McGauran, Therese Hannon, Deirdre Fay and Laura-Jane Dunne after receiving an O2 ability award earlier this year

Charting an equal future

The various projects undertaken in the local authority and community sector clusters of the Equal at Work project are already having an impact in terms of affecting employment practices at a national level.

Two local authorities were involved in the project: South Dublin County Council and Dublin City Council. The South Dublin County Council project was undertaken in the context of national efforts to promote the social inclusion of Travellers.

The council undertook a number of actions relating to the training and employment of young Traveller men and women. Training programmes linked to the council's Parks Department were implemented in Tallaght and Clondalkin and work placements were organised for Travellers wishing to work as clerical officers.

Eight Travellers are now employed with South Dublin County Council on a permanent basis and another 15 are employed on a non-permanent basis - some of them on a dedicated anti-graffiti team. A further 14 young people from the Traveller community undertook summer work placements with the council this year.

Another aspect of the project was the encouragement of young people in the Traveller community to remain on in school and complete their leaving cert. This has led to strengthened relationships between the council and local schools in terms of Traveller education, as well as a significant increase in the number of Travellers remaining on in school.

"The impact of this project has been very significant already," points out John Conway of the Local Government Management Services Board.

"Clare County Council has had a similar project running for some time and at the beginning of November Cork City Council launched a project which is an exact replica of the South Dublin one. We have alerted local authorities around the country to the success of the Equal projects and interest has been very good."

Dublin City Council focused its action on outdoor workers. This cohort of workers had expressed an interest in applying for promotional opportunities, but many workers lacked the confidence to do so. Through engaging directly with the workers, the council developed an accessible interview skills pack for outdoor workers. Some 2,000 copies of this pack have been distributed to council workers so far this year.

"This is a very important project," says John Conway. "Despite the fact that Dublin City Council had moved over to competency-based interviewing, there was still a perception among some of the outdoor staff that clerical staff were somehow favoured at the interview stage."

"This pack, along with the accompanying training, is aimed at helping people shine at interview. It means that not only is the interview process fair but that it is equally accessible to all."

The community sector cluster of Equal at Work based its actions on evidence that the pay and conditions of workers in the community sector lagged well

behind those in the private and public sectors of the economy.

"We looked at the community sector because it is a specific labour market distinct from either the private or public sectors," says David Connolly, chair of the Equal at Work project.

"Some 50,000 people work in the sector, that's more than in agriculture. We wanted to make sure that people had the opportunity to progress within the sector and to help them remain in the sector rather than be tempted out of it by either the public or private sector."

In the area of trade union membership the project engaged with Siptu and Impact to encourage them to increase their membership in the community sector. A joint trade union campaign in this regard was launched in Liberty Hall, Dublin, in November of 2006 and this led to several thousand workers in the sector joining the unions during the following year.

The fragmented nature of the community sector and the small size of many of the organisations mean that they tend not to have access to HR expertise. To address this issue, Equal at Work established an Employer Resource Bureau website (erb.ie) to provide a central point of information on good HR practice for the community sector.

"The establishment of the Forum and the increase in trade union membership will help the sector achieve the equality of treatment it deserves," says Connolly. "This is long overdue. We have now put in place the foundations on which the sector can build and grow in the future."