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More information about the wide range of activities undertaken by the EQUAL Access Partnership can be found at:  
[www.equal-access-scotland.org.uk](http://www.equal-access-scotland.org.uk)

**Other formats**

You can also ask for this publication in large print, Braille or on audio cassette, and we can also provide translations into other languages. Please contact Janette Campbell on 0131 479 5162 or email her at:  
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## LEARNING POINT 24: Equal access – full employment for all

**What are learning points?**

Learning points are a series of publications designed to share the lessons learned from regeneration activities, research and evaluation. They are one of the ways in which Communities Scotland's Centre for Regeneration passes on what people learn from working and talking together. Learning points encourage good practice and networking and build up a picture of what is happening in the field. We hope they will help people discover what has worked in other areas and what might work for them.

**What is this learning point about?**

This Learning Point is about how the EQUAL initiative, funded by the European Commission, is working in Scotland. It gives details about lessons from the EQUAL Access Development Partnership which was established in 2002 to bring together policy makers, practitioners and academics with a common interest in the labour market and inclusion. The aim of the Partnership was to test new ways of working with individuals unable find work due to barriers such as ill health, disability and caring responsibilities.

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The Partnership was interested in helping policy makers and practitioners be better able to:

- understand and develop partnership models within and between local labour markets;
- develop effective relationships with the private sector;
- develop new models of working with disadvantaged groups;
- investigate the role of welfare benefits as a barrier to employment.

#### Where did this learning point come from?

The learning point comes from an evaluation of the work of the Partnership and from learning gathered from a series of workshops and seminars under the banner 'Employment for All' which took place during 2005. These provided a platform for debate on the key themes of the Partnership's work and an opportunity for leading academics to present findings from related research studies funded by the Partnership.

#### What issues were examined?

The Partnership focused on five key issues:

- How do we develop new ways of helping disadvantaged individuals become ready for work and support them into sustainable employment?
- How do we ensure that there are high quality employment and training opportunities?
- How do we develop appropriate standards and benchmarking tools to measure how well we help people back into work?
- How do we develop ways of changing employers' perceptions, behaviour, policies, practices and procedures that affect disadvantaged groups?
- How do we influence European, national and local policy on the issues of getting into work and continued employment for excluded groups?

The Partnership brought together policy makers and practitioners to look at how local service providers could work better together. It also focused on better links between employment-

related services and those offering specialist services to tackle specific barriers preventing people from moving towards work.

#### What underlying principles did people identify?

The following principles were seen as crucial to success with those furthest away from getting into work:

- Services should be geared to clients' needs – that is, be client-centred and holistic.
- Other services (social work, health etc) can contribute to the employability agenda.
- Services need to be flexible because clients do not move towards employment in a straightforward fashion.
- More work needs to be done to show progress on a model of "distance travelled" towards getting a job. There should be a greater focus on other outcomes for clients rather than just in terms of jobs.
- Support to clients should be long-term and carry on into periods of employment in order to help them stay in work.
- Agencies should encourage key worker approaches that enable personalised, long-term support to be provided by a trusted individual.
- Health, social care and employability agencies need to co-ordinate their advice and referral systems better.
- Agencies should directly involve clients in the design, development and implementation of services and programmes and enable them to take part in the evaluations and reviews.
- Agencies need to adopt more common approaches and shared outcomes
- There need to be more effective and better co-ordinated approaches to engaging employers.

#### What problems or barriers did people identify?

The EQUAL Access projects were many and varied. But all identified, to a greater or lesser degree, the following barriers or problems in working with disadvantaged groups:

- Constant change affects the ability to work together effectively – both in policy and also in the way organisations operate.

- Barriers lie not just with individuals but also with organisations that are target-driven and unable to deliver services in a flexible way.
- People experience multiple and different barriers and require a sophisticated and tailored service. This is resource intensive and expensive to deliver.
- The disadvantaged are not a single group with the same characteristics and a "one size fits all" service does not always produce results.
- More should be invested in helping individuals in employment to move on to better jobs.
- There are not enough resources for initial contact with those furthest from the labour market. Funders also have unrealistic expectations on how quickly individuals can be made 'job ready'.
- Employers are not involved enough in 'aftercare' to support people once they are in employment.
- National and local initiatives are not always as well linked as they should be.
- Fear of loss of benefits is a major barrier to employment for disadvantaged groups.

#### What did people learn from all of this?

The Partnership evaluated its own activities and highlighted that there are in fact three stages in shaping and delivering better services for people facing multiple barriers to employment. These are:

- initial contact;
- moving on;
- staying in a job.

Many projects have a track record of success in one area but success in all three is crucial to helping people move on. In order to develop better services for jobless clients, it is necessary to invest more in proactive contacts with clients, aftercare once in employment and staff development of key workers. There needs to be much better and more streamlined employer engagement, which takes into account employers' concerns and involves employers in the design and delivery of programmes.

The partnership learned an immense amount about what works and knows from pilots and initiatives funded that tackling one problem in isolation is not the answer. Clients confirm the strengths and benefits of a key worker approach where they are not left to navigate their way through a complex range of services. Different agencies working together to address all an individual's barriers – be they homelessness, drug or alcohol addiction, childcare, disability or lack of skills – has been shown to work time and again.

However, pilots cannot run indefinitely. At both national and local level there needs to be better joined-up working and less of a focus on funding short term pilots. Pilot activity is rarely sustainable in the longer term. Greater emphasis on persuading existing agencies to share resources for the good of the client group is more likely to deliver success in the longer term.

Finally, the development partnership structure, required by the EQUAL programme, provided an invaluable opportunity to learn more about what other organisations across Scotland were doing in the field of inclusion and the labour market. EQUAL Access was a learning partnership and provided a much-needed forum for dialogue between academics, policy makers and practitioners.

