

# LEARNING POINT 30

## creating pathways to work: the *EQUAL* Employability Development Partnership

### What next?

- The delivery stage of the EQUAL Employability Development Partnership ended in December 2007.
- From January to March 2008 the partnership will focus on raising awareness of the outcomes and key lessons from its approach.
- Many projects will be – or have already been – integrated into core services. For example, some of the partner further education colleges are building on the success of the pilot to integrate job coaches and support workers as a service available to all learners.
- Some partners will continue to seek funding so they can work on joint projects.
- The partners are also working to develop wider international partnership to continue to share learning and experience.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you would like more information about any of the issues mentioned in this learning point, please contact:

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### What are learning points?

Learning points share what people have learned from their experience in regeneration – from people working or talking together, or from research into issues and evaluation of what is happening. Learning points can help people and organisations to improve their practice through identifying what works and what doesn't.

### What is this learning point about?

People with health and other problems can have difficulty finding work. To help them, a range of health, social care and employment agencies need to work closely together. Providing the right service at the right time can help people in these circumstances make progress towards and into work.

This learning point is about how the EQUAL Employability Development Partnership worked locally, nationally and internationally to try out new ways of supporting people into work. It focused on helping people who need the most training and support to find work.

The EQUAL Employability Development Partnership is Scotland-wide. It involves six further education colleges, six voluntary organisations and one higher education institution. It tests new and inclusive ways of helping people to develop their skills for employment through 13 projects which provide support in:

- accessing learning opportunities;
- developing specific skills for employment; and
- coping with the early stages of employment.

Importantly, the partnership aims to influence how organisations plan and deliver employability services. A major part of its work is sharing the learning from its approach.

The partnership is funded through the European Union's EQUAL initiative.

#### What are the important issues?

- How can training and employability organisations work together locally to help people move into employment?
- Does working together at a national level help, and how can this be done?
- How can we share and learn from experiences outside Scotland?

#### What is known already?

- Unemployed people don't just need support to find a job, but training and other help with the process of becoming ready for work.
- It is important for organisations to work together to provide co-ordinated support.
- Locally, training and employability organisations in Scotland are already working together in different ways to support people into employment.



- The experience and lessons learned from these different approaches are not always shared between local areas, or at national or international levels.

#### What has been learned?

*Formalising a national and international partnership takes time.*

- The EQUAL Employability Development Partnership involved organisations from Scotland and northern Europe. It dedicated its first year of activities to setting up the partnership and building relationships.
- As it proved difficult to involve a wide range of organisations from the beginning, EQUAL began the project with fewer partners who could then build local and national links.
- It is important to dedicate time to identifying suitable partners. Think clearly about what you want to learn or share with them, and how they need to be involved. For example, EQUAL sought only international partners who met the criteria it set.

International partnership working requires even more commitment and communication than at a national or local level. It can be useful to have a written agreement which sets out aims and expectations.

*It is important to have shared objectives and communicate these clearly*

- Managing a partnership like this is complex. All the organisations involved should share clear strategic vision and direction.
- A lead organisation can help drive forward the partnership's activities. But it is important that this partner doesn't have to do all the work and that everyone is involved.
- Working in local, national and international partnerships means that everyone feels involved.
- Communication is critical. This partnership didn't always get it right, and sometimes in the early stages some people were not involved in decision making. The partnership wishes to develop more opportunities for sharing experiences in the future.

*Trying out new approaches gives valuable lessons for the future*

- The project funding meant that the partner organisations had the scope to try out different approaches and methods.
- Running a project as a pilot lets organisations find out what works and what doesn't.

*Dedicate time to client engagement*

- Some people may have had a bad experience of learning and training. Taking time to engage these clients in designing services helps them understand that learning can be useful and enjoyable.
- In many areas the pilot projects consulted clients and discussed options for how the pilot could operate. Many clients preferred to move away from certificates and testing, at least in the initial stages.
- In one pilot project, the organisation used the arts to engage people first and then encourage them to take up training and learning opportunities to help them find work.

*Gather evidence of success*

- It can be difficult to provide clear evidence that different approaches make an impact on people's lives. But using case studies and stories

to demonstrate success can be a good way of showing that your approach is making a difference. For example, one pilot project measured the impact of volunteering on ways into work. It profiled the experiences of each individual involved, and the difference it made to their lives.

*Make sure that others can learn from your experience*

- Working internationally was a useful opportunity to discuss problems, compare these between countries, find joint solutions and share experiences of implementing them.
- The partners jointly developed advice for others in the training and employability fields – including case studies, resources, and a transnational model for enhancing employability. [www.routestoemployment.com/index.htm](http://www.routestoemployment.com/index.htm)

*Don't assume that a successful approach is automatically transferable*

- Once you have the evidence that a pilot approach has worked, don't assume that it will work in other regions, or with different client groups.
- Approaches can be successful for lots of different reasons, such as the context, the role of key individuals, political commitment, client groups, and so on.
- Take time to establish why something worked well before transferring it to your area.

