

# Tackling Skills Gaps

## What is Equal?

The Equal Programme is a European Social Fund (ESF) initiative which operates across all of the European Union. The Programme aims to develop and test new ways of challenging discrimination and inequalities in the labour market, both for those in work and for those seeking work.

Equal has acted as a learning platform, developing innovative ways of tackling existing labour market problems. It has presented evidence based outcomes which could be adopted by policy makers and delivery agents at local, regional, national and European levels.

The partnership approach in Equal is based around a model of Development Partnerships (DPs), consisting of organisations with common interests and different expertise, working collaboratively to deliver shared aims and objectives.

[www.equal.ecotec.co.uk](http://www.equal.ecotec.co.uk)

[www.equal-works.com](http://www.equal-works.com)

[www.esf.gov.uk](http://www.esf.gov.uk)



## “Skills present a formidable challenge and a brilliant opportunity”

Lord Sandy Leitch

Ambition and aspirations for the nation’s future prosperity are high and a common thread of analysis points to skills as a key factor in realising this future.

The recent Leitch report “Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills” has raised the profile of the skills debate and brought home the reality that the UK skills base remains weak by international standards. The government has committed itself to improve the nation’s skills and to be amongst the world’s ‘premier league’ standard of skills by 2020. Fundamental to realising this vision will be ensuring that all adults have the skills they need to find and progress in work.

Equal Development Partnerships (DPs) have been working with the most excluded and marginalised beneficiary groups: lone parents, disabled people, ethnic minorities, older people and women. The partnerships have gained real insights and understanding in how to effectively bring individuals from these groups into the workforce and also to develop individuals who are in work.

## Key Messages

The lessons learnt from the work of DPs are wide ranging and can be explored through the Equal Works website but there are a number of recurring messages in relation to skills shortages and skills gaps. These messages are highlighted below and are supported by case studies of good practice.

- In tackling skills gaps it is important to address both supply and demand side issues in conjunction with the relevant stakeholders to develop joined up solutions

## Case Studies

**The Equalitec DP** brought together a partnership of 20 key organisations and a network of over 70 bodies working together. The project worked to improve the prospects of women returners entering the ITEC sector and progressing in work. Working with employers, women themselves, recruiters, professional & accreditation bodies and training providers the DP was able to develop courses which effectively met employer and beneficiary needs. E-mail: [info@equalitec.org.uk](mailto:info@equalitec.org.uk) for further information.

- A shared approach to meet the needs of employers and individuals is important but needs to be supported by practical measures to facilitate a coordinated and coherent approach. This includes single coordinating points of contact and shared operational systems

**The CEMENT DP** has been developing innovative ways to network a number of key partners. The DP has involved Regional Development Agencies, Learning & Skills Councils, the Construction Industry Training Board, Local Authorities, Business Links and other strategic organisations in partnership with private sector employers. With the wide range of partners involved in the development and implementation of new training structures aimed at the construction industry the DP strongly advocates a single coordination contact point but with shared operational systems e.g. access to beneficiary data. E-mail: [Robert.Morrall@dacorum.gov.uk](mailto:Robert.Morrall@dacorum.gov.uk) for further information.

- Holistic, blended and tailored approaches are required to meet the diverse needs of beneficiaries. This is particularly referenced to soft skills needs as a skills gap (includes motivation, confidence and self esteem)

A message which has come through consistently from Equal DPs is the need to adopt holistic but tailored approaches. **Progress GB DP** has focused on valuing the skills of refugees and migrants in the UK. It has worked to support employers to overcome skills shortages, to develop inclusive work practices and at the same time help refugees and migrants to adapt their skills for the labour market. Progress GB is working holistically providing language, workplace, and family support for individuals. E-mail: [Jane.Watts@niace.org.uk](mailto:Jane.Watts@niace.org.uk) for further information or visit [www.niace.org.uk/Research/ASR/Projects/Progress-GB.htm](http://www.niace.org.uk/Research/ASR/Projects/Progress-GB.htm)

- The most effective approaches include empowering both employers and employees/potential employees

Empowerment as a means of facilitating and driving skills development forward is an often overlooked strategy. **The Jive DP** comprises 13 organisations including Sector Skills Councils, FE providers, the Equal Opportunities Commission and Women's Training Centres. Their aim is to increase the employment of women in engineering, construction and technology by bringing about cultural change. Using empowerment to achieve effective results can be particularly seen in their development of courses and mentoring programmes. E-mail: [setwomenresource@bilk.ac.uk](mailto:setwomenresource@bilk.ac.uk) for further information or visit [www.jivepartners.org.uk](http://www.jivepartners.org.uk)