

Workplace Adaptability

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

www.equal-works.com

www.esf.gov.uk



For our workplaces to become more adaptive and to anticipate change they need to treat diversity as a source of competitive advantage, and recognise the business benefits of better work-life balance. The issues in relation to workplace adaptability have become increasingly important in policy terms as improving workplace adaptability can be directly linked to improving skills within the GB economy. The Leitch review places employers and individuals at the centre of a flexible, demand-led system for learning and training.

Many Equal Development Partnerships (DPs) in GB, have developed programmes to improve the adaptability of individuals and employers and have tested new innovative approaches in this area. This document sets out some of the key messages from Equal which are directly relevant to the current policy agenda, particularly the Government's implementation of the Leitch review of skills and the EU's Lisbon agenda on increasing competitiveness.

Key Messages

Tailor qualifications and education to the needs of employers or industry: Experience from Equal has shown that mainstream education and training provision doesn't always address the needs of employers, industry or individuals. Equal has allowed for the development of qualifications that can be modularised, tailored to the needs of employers, delivered at the right pace and in a flexible manner.

The development of soft skills is vital: A skill is anything you can learn to do competently, a developed aptitude or ability. Often individuals do not realise the skills they already hold. People may have developed the kind of skills that employers are looking for – such as organising, planning and dealing with other people as part of their spare time activities. These skills are called soft skills. While

conventional training courses can facilitate the development of knowledge and skills, it is fruitless if individuals don't have the confidence to take their new skills forward. The development of courses within Equal means soft skill development can be factored into training provision.

Working with employers to raise awareness: Many DPs found that employers are unaware of employment patterns in their sector – for example, the lack of women working in the science, engineering and technology sectors – or the availability of skills amongst certain groups, such as older workers. DPs found it important to work with employers to raise awareness of such issues, to recognise the needs of employers and how they are best addressed.

Local and industry-specific knowledge contributes to better employer engagement: An understanding of employer's needs and the local employment situation means providers are able to give a more tailored and flexible level of support. This message is also important in meeting individual's needs.

Case Studies

Adjust the Balance, a DP led by Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council is promoting inclusive working practices and the adaptability of employers and employees in a range of sectors throughout the West Midlands.

This has been achieved through:

- Developing a regional strategy for Work Life Balance (WLB)
- Adding-value to existing sub-regional WLB policies and practices
- Broadening the national WLB agenda as a social, political and business issue.

The DP recognises that employees have different needs at different stages of their life and acknowledge that people will work best if they can achieve an appropriate balance between work and other aspects of their lives. Through engaging with large employers and SMEs Adjust the Balance has focused on the needs of people traditionally overlooked in the WLB agenda whilst ensuring the needs of employers are also met.

Midland Engineering Industries Redeployment Group DP (MEIRG), through consultations and discussions with employers identified key skills shortages that are impacting on business within the region. More importantly, they have been able to find new and innovative ways to address the skills shortages and encourage business growth.

A total of 602 individuals have benefited so far from MEIRG supported training with over 700 still in training, nearly 200 of which are over 45 years of age. Some small companies did not have access to a training room and were reluctant to allow staff to train off site. MEIRG's inimitable habit of finding creative solutions to problems resulted in the creation the projects' mobile resource centre. This allows companies a place to train when other options are not possible.