

Skills for an Equal society

Lifelong learning is the key to the prosperity of individuals, businesses and the nation. It also promotes a fair and inclusive society, active citizenship and contributes to economic growth, writes Ivan Lewis MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Young People and Adult Skills.

There is no doubt that learning strengthens families, communities and the economy. It is particularly relevant for people from disadvantaged backgrounds who, for various reasons, did not benefit from education in their earlier years.

The continued wealth of the nation depends on how we meet the challenges and opportunities presented by the expansion of the knowledge economy and information technology (IT).

Although our education system has made considerable progress in meeting the challenges, there are still many people with poor basic skills who have not benefited from recent opportunities. Up to seven million adults in England have poor literacy and numeracy skills, and cannot read and write at the level expected of an 11 year old.

Research suggests that people with poor basic skills earn less over their working lives and are more susceptible to health problems and exposure to crime.

Thousands of viewers have been encouraged to get rid of their Gremlins and 'Get On', in TV adverts featuring these creatures.

Between April 2001 and June 2002, 249,000 adults demonstrated their improved skills by achieving a national award, and over one million basic skills courses were started by learners keen to 'Get On'. Help is only a phone call away - 0800 100 900.

We want to convince adults of the advantages of learning and remove any barriers which may deter them from learning. This is where **Equal** has a big part to play, because it provides the opportunity to test new approaches for attracting non-traditional learners into studying.

Equal Development Partnerships (DPs) are trying to change people's attitudes towards learning. I welcome piloting approaches such as family learning schemes in the workplace and adapting sport and music to promote learning in the community. Research into the most effective learning messages for **Equal** target groups and providing innovative training for disadvantaged groups in the construction sector are vital work.

I want to see more close partnerships between **Equal** and adult education providers and agencies across England. **Equal** has defined mainstreaming as a key



Ivan Lewis

priority, and I look forward to the time when I am asked to support the introduction of a new approach to teaching and learning which owes its development to one of the **Equal** programmes.

'Skills for Life', the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills, is now eighteen months old. With the help of teachers, providers and our many other partners we have made a good start in tackling this deep-seated problem. But it is vital that all of us keep working together to sustain our momentum. Only then will we make a real difference to the lives of thousands of adults who have never had the opportunity to realise their full potential ■

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Equal News

Equal News is produced by the GB **Equal** Support Unit on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), European Social Fund Division. For further details contact the GB Support Unit, details on page 8.

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Issue 5
Winter 2003

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Warming up for Action 3

'Mainstreaming' is the hot topic for the cold season in our regular round-up of all things Equal across Great Britain.

The GB Support Unit, ESF Division and Development Partnerships have been working hard on the launch of Action 3. This is a separate funding stream for DPs to carry out thematic networking, dissemination and mainstreaming. One of **Equal's** main aims is to feed the lessons learned from new, innovative 'test-bed' activities directly into the policy process.

Action 3 is now in a consultation stage in which DPs are encouraged to work together and with policy-makers to make applications in spring 2003. More detailed information is available on our website, or by contacting the GB Support Unit.

Action 3 was officially launched in November 2002 at a series of consultation events involving DPs and policy-makers. We were joined by colleagues from Spain, Italy and the Czech Republic, who came along to learn how Action 3 will be implemented in Great Britain.

The GB Support Unit has also begun its annual visits to DPs, to support them while they implement their work programmes and to learn more about their activities.

The **Equal** website has also been relaunched as it becomes an increasingly important tool for DPs and all those interested in **Equal**. The website has a new discussion forum organised around the **Equal** themes, along with key topics such as equal opportunities, mainstreaming and empowerment.

The Support Unit and several DPs also attended Employ-

ment Week 2002 in Brussels. This was a key opportunity to meet other **Equal** DPs from across Europe.

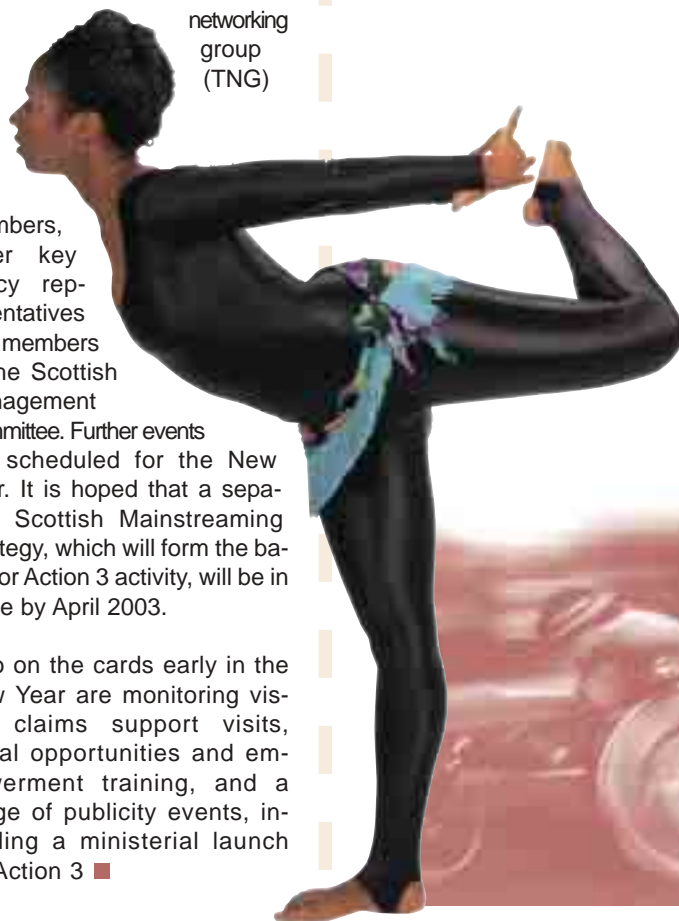
UPDATE ON THE SCOTTISH EQUAL PROGRAMME

This quarter has been a busy one in Scotland, too. A new team - Jennifer Ezzi (programme manager) and Sharon Thomson (programme administrator) - took up post. All Scottish DPs are now implementing Action 2 activity.

The Support Unit and the Scottish Executive are busy with preparations for Action 3. The first consultation event was held on 27 November for Scottish thematic networking group (TNG)

members, other key policy representatives and members of the Scottish Management Committee. Further events are scheduled for the New Year. It is hoped that a separate Scottish Mainstreaming Strategy, which will form the basis for Action 3 activity, will be in place by April 2003.

Also on the cards early in the New Year are monitoring visits, claims support visits, equal opportunities and empowerment training, and a range of publicity events, including a ministerial launch for Action 3 ■



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Learning to adapt

Equal DPs are developing inclusive work practices, promoting firms' adaptability, and attracting non-traditional learners into learning through innovative provision for basic skills and IT skills.

Lifelong learning remains a high priority on the European and UK political agendas. The UK Government sees it as the key to prosperity for individuals, businesses and the nation. Lifelong learning promotes a fair and cohesive society, active citizenship and economic growth. Within the lifelong learning agenda, basic skills and IT skills are particularly important.

BASIC SKILLS

The Government's strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy, 'Skills for



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Life',¹ indicated that seven million people have poor basic skills, including around half a million who struggle with English because it is not their first language. This has disastrous consequences for individuals, weakens the country's ability to compete globally, and places a huge burden on society.

The Government has established the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit (ABSSU) (in the Department for Education and Skills) to drive forward the national strategy's implementation, and to en-

sure that national and local efforts to improve basic skills are consistent and well co-ordinated.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The Government's White Paper 'Opportunity for All'² identified specific skills shortages, focusing on the problems associated with the shortage of technicians and information and communications technology (ICT) professionals. It stressed the need to bring disadvan-

taged people - including women and people with disabilities - into skilled ICT employment. The Government proposes working with business to encourage recruitment and retention of these groups. The White Paper set out a strategy for driving up the skills of the workforce, including fostering links between education and business to ensure that employers invest in their employees' skills.

'Ambition: IT' was launched in March 2001. This government-business partnership will enable unemployed people and lone parents on New Deal to gain ICT skills and experience, to improve their long-term career prospects. Business partners from leading IT firms anticipate that New Deal can make an important contribution to meeting skills shortages in the industry.



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HOW EQUAL DPS ARE RESPONDING

The *TASK (Textiles and Advanced Skills)* DP aims to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and their employees in the textiles and knitwear industry in the North West of England. The sector has experienced immense technological change over the last decade, and *TASK* will encourage ICT usage in SMEs. It will offer employees, many of whom are women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin, opportunities to train in ICT, with courses run alongside in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). This integrated approach means that if the industry faces even greater market threats, firms will be able to rely on their employees' diversified skills portfolio.

Project manager Richard Vann comments that, "The most challenging part of the project is to make a strong impact in a relatively large industry and bring about a culture change."

¹ 'Skills for Life: The National Strategy for Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills', 2001, Department for Education and Employment (DfEE)

² 'Opportunity for All in a World of Change', 2001, DfEE/Department for Trade and Industry

Apart from ICT and ESOL, the DP will offer training on work-life balance, health and safety at work, textiles manufacturing skills, and management skills.

The *Portland Partnership* DP aims to improve the employability and learning potential of beneficiaries with severe learning and/or physical difficulties. Existing provision will be evaluated to identify gaps and areas for development. The DP will also explore how ICT can be used to enhance opportunities for beneficiaries. Many learners with a disability are currently not able to use conventional ICT materials such as a mouse and keyboard. The *Portland Partnership* will work to create solutions through meaningful access to learning and by developing innovative learning equipment.

Matt Harrison, research co-ordinator, says that, "the DP will make a difference by producing age and level-appropriate learning resources for a target group which currently finds itself unable to access learning because of the unsuitability of existing materials. It aims to empower beneficiaries using their feedback and ideas to create learning environments in which accessibility is the number one priority and not merely an afterthought."

LINKING SKILLS TO REGENERATION

The *Construction Development Partnership*, and the *Building London: Creating Futures* DP both base their rationale on the increasing regeneration activities in their areas (Yorkshire & Humber, and London) and the shortage of skilled local labour pools. Both are targeting ethnic minorities, long-term unemployed people and women. The DPs are intent on changing the image of the construction industry so that it attracts a more diverse workforce. This will include identifying innovative ways to recruit and retain staff.

Patricia Slater, *Construction Development Partnership* project manager, feels that the DP's unique element is its "determination to directly link the needs of local employers with the needs of our communities. Employers traditionally do not have the resources to look beyond their core business and consider the

count both 'hard' issues (training and skills development, equipment and transportation problems) and 'soft' issues (such as motivation, time-keeping and other initial employment difficulties). A diverse range of partners from across London boroughs will work together to deliver the DP's objectives.



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"The most challenging part is to make an impact and bring about culture change."

barriers faced by potential employees. The partnership has provided local employers with the supportive environment required to build their capacity to open up opportunities to non-traditional entrants such as women, black and ethnic minorities, unskilled or unemployed client groups."

Fraser Liggett, project manager of *Building London: Creating Futures*, believes that the DP will make a difference by "supporting Central London residents into employment opportunities and helping them stay there through flexible onsite support". This will take into ac-

BRINGING LEARNING TO THE WORKPLACE - WHEREVER IT IS

The *Building Opportunities Through Workplace Learning* DP is testing new approaches to workplace learning and support for workers who are not currently taking part in learning - including those with basic skills needs. The partners, including the national Learning and Skills Council, the Basic Skills Agency and learndirect/University for Industry, will work together to develop networks, systems and materials to support learning through work. This will achieve earnings and job-security benefits for individuals, and productivity returns for enterprise.

Liz Smith of the TUC stressed that the DP "will build the workplace as a site of learning, taking what we already know as good approaches to participation, progression and effectiveness and testing them rigorously in our pilot sectors using the skills of workplace Union Learning Represent-



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tatives (ULRs)." She identified the most challenging but exciting aspect as "helping ULRs to support learners in a range of learning contexts, empowering the union, the reps and the learners themselves."

The *Use of ICT in Rural Industries* DP aims to support people in rural businesses and develop their ability to manage change. It operates in the South West region, which faces enormous challenges because crisis in the agricultural sector is impacting throughout the rural economy and the whole community.

The DP targets rural industries, which are often based on traditional skills, and where there is an ageing workforce - in agriculture the average age is 57. Promoting the use of new technology to learn new skills is a challenge. Geoff Lawrence, project manager, says that, "The outcome of this project will benefit the region for many years to come. Lack of investment in the

South West's infrastructure has resulted in poor communications, leading to problems in availability of training. This project aims to overcome these difficulties and make learning more widely available throughout the region."

What are the most effective ways of promoting workplace learning, especially to those with low basic skills? The *Campaign for Learning* DP aims to find out through an action research project that will evaluate what works in terms of encouraging employees, particularly those with low basic skills. The research will take place within SMEs, local authorities and large PLCs. The key objective is to inform the development of national policy on workforce learning. This will be further enhanced through widespread dissemination, assisted by the DP through its strong policy representation and lead role among its transnational partners in the 'Learning Barriers Group' ■

Projects' lead partners

Further information about the DPs mentioned in this article can be obtained by contacting the projects' lead partners.

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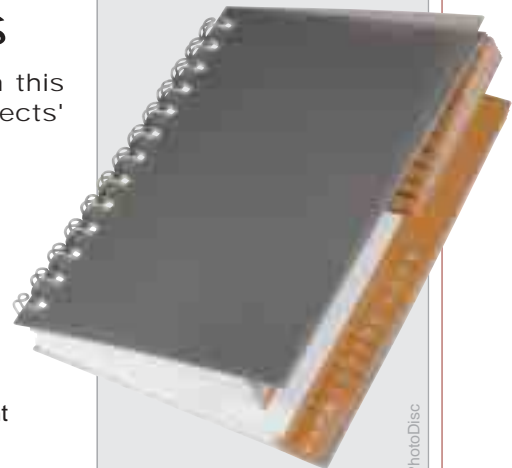
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Mainstreaming - a guide

Equal is all about getting proven innovations into the mainstream of policy and delivery. But exactly how do you 'mainstream' an innovation? Jo Binmore, project manager at the University of Gloucestershire's *Equipe* DP, has the inside knowledge.

ESF-funded projects are time limited. When they finish, the staff team disperses, perhaps looking for new projects to work on. The innovative materials, methodologies and networks which have been tested and developed may become orphaned. Without dedicated carers, these innovations may sicken and die.

The separate Action 3 phase of the **Equal** programme will fund networking, dissemination and mainstreaming activities. The rationale for this came from a desire to make sure that DPs' good practice, ideas and outcomes would be integrated into local, regional or national policy and practice.

The policy makers involved in **Equal's** thematic networking groups will be facilitators in achieving this admirable objective. However, it is up to DPs to identify an effective, appropriate mainstreaming strategy for their target groups, and to work with the TNGs to ensure maximum impact.

A successful mainstreaming strategy will:

- identify the target groups for mainstreaming at an early stage in your project;
- build on existing networks, through the DP's partners; and
- exploit the skills and contacts

from the DP to gain competitive advantage for your message in a 'noisy' environment.

Of prime importance is to have a high-quality, relevant output that your target groups - both beneficiary and policy - value, and have a strong interest in taking up.

PROVEN SUCCESS IN DISSEMINATION AND MAINSTREAMING

As manager of two earlier large, regional projects in the South West, I was fortunate in working with a grassroots organisation - the National Centre for Playwork Training and Education (SW). This organisation had contacts with those who would become our project beneficiaries, throughout the region we planned to cover. The two projects were *Eurochild*, funded under the EMPLOYMENT strand NOW (New Opportunities for Women), and *Pleiad*, funded under ADAPT. The impetus for these projects was the need for a framework of accessible playwork qualifications, supported by high-quality training materials. This was in order to enable a largely volunteer workforce to respond to the opportunities offered by the Government's 'Out of School' initiative.

We kept in touch with what ben-



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eficiaries really wanted by establishing a regional forum, with local meetings and a newsletter to encourage networking. We also had an annual celebration, where new ideas were exchanged and demonstrated. Speakers of national standing helped to raise the profile of what we were doing. In *Pleiad*, we carried out a training needs analysis, including questions about barriers to accessing training, and published the results as 'Playwork Counts'. This document was launched at an

"Successful strategies will identify the target groups for mainstreaming at an early stage in your project."

international childcare conference we ran in London, rather than in the South West, to be within striking distance of central government.

We invited our transnational partners and representatives of all local fund-holding bodies responsible for training our target group. Through contacts we had established (by keeping on knocking at the relevant doors) at the Childcare Unit in the then DfEE, we secured Margaret Hodge, then Minister with responsibilities for Childcare, to be our keynote speaker at the launch.

The event succeeded in identifying our project's work as something that was supported by government. When we sent copies of 'Playwork Counts' to all Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships, they used it in developing their local strategies. This meant that playwork was more likely to be

included with childcare in their local strategies, with a blueprint for training, and statistics to back up what needed to be done. In this way, we handed over part of what we had produced to those who had an interest in delivering it.

In addition to our dissemination activities, we empowered beneficiaries by making sure that they were actively involved in the design and development groups working on the new training materials. This meant not only that the materials and packages were appropriate to the target group, but also that their availability and high quality were publicised by word of mouth.

STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE MAINSTREAMING

In this way we attempted to approach the mainstreaming task from both ends. Policy-makers and fund-holders were aware of the need and the products available; beneficiaries, having contributed to developing the products, were ambassadors in the field, promoting the value and quality of the training packages. We included the National Training Organisation SPRITO (Sport and Recreation Industries Training Organisation) as a partner in *Pleiad* - they were particularly interested in the training needs analysis. By this means, we already had our foot in the door in getting our new products recognised in what was to become a national framework for the workforce.

We had chosen our partners strategically, with a view to their potential roles in mainstreaming and dissemination (e.g. did they have networks at both grass-roots and policy level?). This also proved very useful for investigating partners' special skills, which could be a bonus in terms of successful communications. For example, one partner organisation in Ireland was skilled in video-making with community groups. They came to Cornwall and made a video



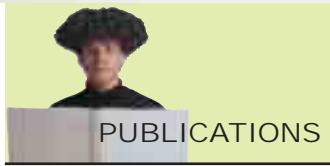
about what having access to a professional qualification had meant to women working in a remote rural area, and how that in turn had stimulated and supported community regeneration. This video was taken up by trainers as a tool to communicate the power and value of the training on offer.

"Choose your partners strategically, with a view to their roles in mainstreaming."

THE EQUAL ROUTE TO SUCCESS

In **Equal**, DPs have the advantages of a dedicated budget for mainstreaming and the willingness of policy-makers (TNGs) to be approached for help. You need to make use of a range of communication methods for disseminating, and ensure that your mainstreaming strategy focuses on end-users as well as policy-makers. In this way, you will give your project's outcomes the best chance of a useful life after you have all gone on to your next challenge ■

Publications websites events



Corporate social responsibility: A business contribution to sustainable development

Presents the EU strategy to promote corporate social responsibility.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-dial/csr/csr2002_col_en.pdf

In demand: Adult skills in the 21st century part 2 (November 2002)

Sets out an action plan for workforce development in England to 2010, with the aim of building on the progress made since the first 'In demand' report. Discusses the importance of workforce development, outlines a vision and strategy, and looks at targets for adult skills set out in the 2002 Spending Review.

www.strategy.gov.uk/2002/wfd/report/downloads/su-adult-skills.pdf

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Europa Newsletter

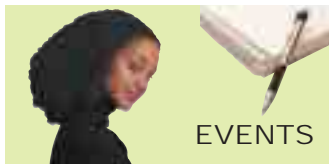
Keep up to date with the latest news and developments on the EU websites.

www.europa.eu.int/newsletter/current/index_en.htm

Sources of innovation and competitiveness: National programmes supporting the development of work organisation (October 2002)

This study identifies and evaluates essential outcomes from national programmes supporting the development of work organisation.

www.europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/national_progs.pdf



Reducing Youth Offending - The Role of Learning and Skills

Thursday 30 January 2002, Conference Centre at Church House, London SW1

This one-day conference will discuss how improving opportunities and progression routes for young offenders into education, training and employment can help to reduce the likelihood of them re-offending.

Keynote Speakers: Hilary Benn MP, (Home Office); Ivan Lewis MP, (Department for Education and Skills).

www.neilstewartassociates.com/li150/index.htm

More DP launches

Several DPs have recently held launch events for partners and a policy audience.

The ACE National Project held a reception at the House of Commons in October. Led by Carers UK, this DP is dedicated to helping carers to overcome multiple barriers to employment. Speakers included Malcolm Wicks MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the DWP; Bernard Hogan-Howe, assistant commissioner human resources for the Metropolitan Police; and PC Bob Westbury, who described his experiences of combining a frontline job in the Metropolitan Police with caring for his disabled son. Attendees included representatives of employers and employers' organisations, government departments, local authorities and service providers and, of course, carers themselves.

Other DPs have held transnational events. *Equipe*, led by the University of Gloucestershire, hosted an event for their Austrian, Swedish and Italian partners. Representatives from the Small Business Service, Business Link for London and Social Enterprise London spoke about promoting and supporting social enterprise in the UK. Interesting discussions took place around definitions of social enterprise and legal structures in the partner countries.

The *Learning Kitchen* DP, led by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, hosted a conference in October for their partners from Portugal, Sweden and Finland. The event was a starting point for the transnational work programme, which will develop new approaches to engage disadvantaged communities in learning, using ICT. Participants shared good practice in technology-supported learning. Speakers included Barry Brooks, head of ABSSU and chair of the TNG for Equal Theme E ■



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