

European Year of People with Disabilities

Maria Eagle, Minister for Disabled People, argues that we need to work with employers to make sure that this European Year is just the start of a better future for people with disabilities.

A little while ago, I visited the Bamboozle Theatre Company in Leicester. The company, which is based in the Leicester Haymarket Theatre, runs a number of residencies each year, bringing together artists from a variety of backgrounds with disabled children.

The point of these get-togethers is to provide the children with a structured, safe environment where they can develop different skills and express themselves creatively. The children have a real blast, participating in everything from role play to puppetry, singing, story-telling and problem-solving, and learning some important life-lessons along the way.

Bamboozle is just one of the 171 projects to promote the rights and participation of disabled people that the Government is funding to mark the European Year of People with Disabilities (EYPD) in 2003. They are running throughout the year and will encourage more disabled people to take an active role in their communities.

The European Year is also about raising awareness among employers, as too many businesses

out there still won't consider hiring someone with a disability because of unfounded assumptions about what they can and can't do. Again, the Government has already taken steps to tackle this sort of discrimination. In September 2001, we introduced a national network of job brokers to provide a range of services and support for any Incapacity Benefit customers who were trying to find work.

The job brokers, who were introduced as part of the New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP), work closely with both jobseekers and employers, matching individuals to situations vacant and helping people to develop the necessary workplace skills.

The number of people joining NDDP is now running at more than 2,000 a month and since it was launched NDDP has helped more than 12,000 long-term sick and disabled people into work.

People such as Spencer Octave, who had to quit his job maintaining electronic office systems after he was involved in a serious car crash in 1995. Spencer was introduced to the NDDP through the Shaw



Maria Eagle

Trust, and received a great deal of help to market his skills and find appropriate work. As a result, Spencer landed a work placement at the BBC in IT support through the BBC's Extend Scheme, and impressed his employer so much that he's now secured a full-time job in IT support at the BBC World Service in London.

The Government's employment policies can and are helping disabled people to open doors into the workplace, but employers first need to unlock them. By helping to raise awareness, the European Year will encourage more employers to examine their own policies and attitudes to ensure that candidates are being judged solely on their ability to do the job ■

For more information on the European Year of People with Disabilities, visit www.eypd2003.org

Open Space

We've been experimenting again - this time using Open Space Technology. A bit of a departure from your traditional European meeting, says Karl Held.

Great Britain, with Denmark, is leading the European Thematic Group (ETG) on Employability. The ETG covers the **Equal** themes of combating discrimination for those at greatest risk of disadvantage in the labour market and promoting opportunities for ethnic minorities. It brings together Development Partnerships (DPs) from across all participating countries, the European Commission and thematic experts to exchange practice and push messages to policy-makers.

Our initial workshop, in Birmingham, used Open Space Technology to get the most out of the 100 delegates. Open Space means just that: no fixed agenda, no pre-loaded presentations and no 'Mr Chairman'.

On the first afternoon, delegates proposed workshop topics by stepping up to the 'agenda wall' and literally making their ideas stick. On day 2, these initiators led 24 workshops; delegates were encouraged to use the 'law of two feet' to decide when they'd



heard or said enough and wanted to move on. Note-takers then spent the night writing up reports to be presented to all delegates at breakfast. Finally, follow-up workshops distilled everyone's hard work into five subject areas that will form working groups over the lifetime of the ETG.

The working groups are on: involving employers, the role of trade unions, people with disabilities, strategies for networking, and ethnic minorities and migrants.

Feedback from the event's participants has been overwhelmingly positive - but the real work starts here. Over the summer, members of the five working groups will be developing mission statements, work pro-

grammes and detailed proposals for action prior to the first full meetings of the groups, which will be held in Brussels on 8-10 October.

In June, the GB Support Unit also helped to organise an event in London for the Entrepreneurship ETG. Three workshops focused on ethnic minorities, young people and people with disabilities. The event will act as a platform for future action, allowing the ETG to engage with important EU policy challenges like enlargement and achieving the economic targets set at the Lisbon summit ■

To find out more about the Employability ETG

(and other ETGs), visit www.equal.ecotec.co.uk

To find out more about Open Space

Technology, visit www.openspaceworld.org

For Programme Updates on Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, please see back page

Poles together

Four colleagues from the Ministry of Economy, Labour and Social Policy in Poland visited the UK in May.



Poland will become a European Union (EU) member in 2004, and our colleagues were eager to see **Equal** structures and processes at work in Great

Britain. They met with the **Equal** team in the European Social Fund (ESF) Division to discuss the Programme's general principles, framework and requirements. The teams were able to share experience and knowledge gained from **Equal** so far, and from previous programmes.

Visits to the *Fuirich Transport* and *Women into Work* DPs provided an opportunity to ask questions of DPs and see **Equal** in action. The visitors also spent two days

at the **Equal** Support Unit in Birmingham for a comprehensive look at our systems.

The Polish and GB representatives all enjoyed the visit as an opportunity to learn about and understand working practices, and also cultural ones. Nastrovje, as they say ■



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Disability

Equal Development Partnerships aim to change attitudes and promote social inclusion. Ruth Santos and Sarah Carling explore what DPs are doing to better exploit the employment potential of disabled people.

and diversity

This year is the European Year of People with Disabilities. The objective is to change attitudes and highlight the benefits of full integration for society as a whole.

While the EYPD's ultimate aim is to make jobs more accessible to people with disabilities by raising awareness and changing attitudes, the EU is also taking more concrete measures. In the area of employment, by the end of 2003 all Member States must implement the new EU Directive outlawing all forms of discrimination against disabled people in the workplace. The Directive obliges EU businesses to 'make reasonable accommodation' to the needs of disabled employees. This could mean, for example, ensuring adequate access into and within the workplace, or providing tailored training.

"The goal is a society open and accessible to all"

The EU-endorsed approach to disability acknowledges that environmental barriers are a greater impediment to participation in society than functional limitations. Removing barriers

through legislation, provision of accommodations, universal design and other means is key to equality of opportunity for people with disabilities. The goal of the EU's Disability Strategy is 'a society open and accessible to all'.

UK POLICY ON THE MOVE

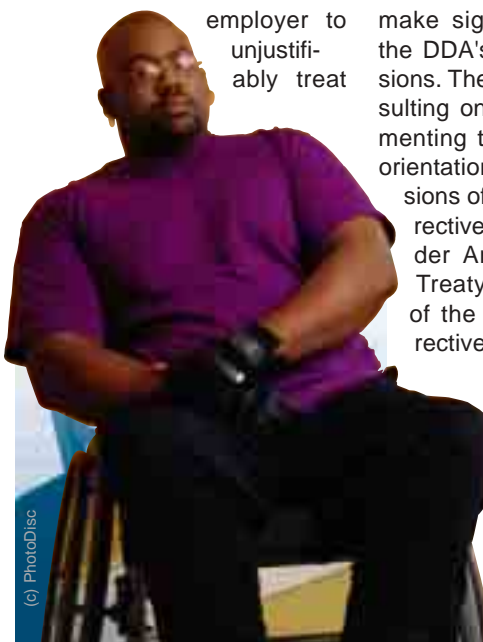
People with disabilities form one of the most disadvantaged groups in society, and continue to face considerable barriers in accessing all aspects of social life. The UK Government's policy over recent years has been to encourage disabled people to consider paid work, and to support them with changes to the benefits system and by setting up specialist schemes.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995, it is unlawful for an employer to unjustifiably treat

a disabled employee or job applicant less favourably, or to fail to make reasonable adjustments for the disabled person. The Act gives disabled people rights in the areas of employment, access to goods, facilities and services, and buying or renting land or property. The employment rights and first rights of access came into force in December 1996, with further rights of access in October 1999.

Draft regulations laid before Parliament in May 2003 will make significant changes to the DDA's employment provisions. The Government is consulting on its plans for implementing the disability, sexual orientation and religion provisions of the Employment Directive brought forward under Article 13 of the EU Treaty and the provisions of the Article 13 Race Directive.

The Government plans to implement the Directive's disability provisions, as they affect employees and jobseekers, in 2004.



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DISABILITY RIGHTS COMMISSION

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) is an independent body set up by the Government in 2000 to help secure civil rights for disabled people. The DRC is committed to achieving 'a society where all disabled people can participate fully as equal citizens'. It is building links with disability and advisory groups, networks and organisations representing business and employers.

The DRC is currently writing two new codes of practice for Part 2 of the Disability Discrimination Act (the employment provisions). The main code will cover employment issues such as advertising vacancies, recruitment, retention, health and safety, and employment agencies. The second code will be aimed at trade unions, trade organisations, professional associations and qualifications bodies. These two new codes will replace the existing ones in October 2004, when the EU Directive on employment comes into effect in the UK. Public consultation on the new draft codes ends in August 2003.

The fact remains, however, that people with disabilities still face a wide range of barriers that limit their equal participation in the labour market. In the UK, highly developed legislative frameworks and differentiated systems of services and financial support structures have existed for many years. Yet despite this, disabled people are still two to three times more likely to be unemployed - often for long periods of time.

Equal DPs are exploring the factors that prevent the employment of people with various types of disability. They have

identified several priorities and lines of action which can open up new perspectives for integration. A small number of **Equal**-funded DPs are focusing specifically on disabled people. However, all DPs are working to accommodate the needs of this group within their wider equal opportunities approaches.

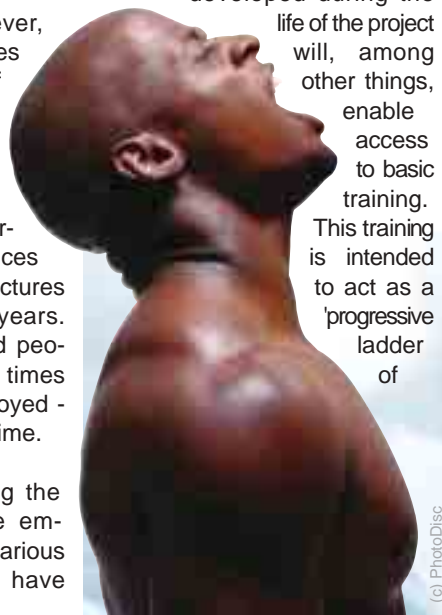


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BETTER ACCESS TO LEARNING AND EMPLOYMENT

The *Portland Partnership* works with people with severe physical/learning disabilities. This group faces multiple barriers to accessing training and employment. The project aims to develop a range of technological solutions which will allow severely disabled people to acquire essential life skills. The products

developed during the life of the project will, among other things, enable access to basic training. This training is intended to act as a 'progressive ladder of



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"Better and more meaningful access to learning"

opportunity', giving people the skills they need for work and independent living.

In addition, *Portland* is addressing the obstacle that the perception of disability can present. It aims to show employers that people with physical disabilities can make a positive contribution to the workforce.

Portland is also tackling the self-perception of people with severe disabilities. People from this group often lack confidence in their ability to function independently, and this can be a barrier to learning and work. The project aims to build their confidence, for example by developing a virtual learning environment that can be used autonomously. This will allow the users to take control of their own learning and, through this, develop their independence.

The project has an integrated, collaborative approach to learning, taking into account the multiple barriers that this group of people face. For example, *Portland* will work on allowing access to its products through home or community environments, which are often more accessible to severely disabled people. Ultimately, the project aims to make products that truly address the needs of this group by offering better and more meaningful access to learning, which will act as a bridge to employment.

WORKING WITH EMPLOYERS

The *Forward* DP aims to develop and test models of intervention focused on access, retention and progression in the labour market. *Forward* will work with employers to look at

basic skills, older workers and disability issues. The DP has appointed an employment coordinator to work directly with companies to develop a job brokerage and retention service linked to the NDDP. *Forward* will also develop and pilot in-company support systems, such as in-house disability champions, to both increase disability awareness in companies and support affected employees.

The employment co-ordinator reports to the *Forward* Disability Sub-Group, which meets every two months. The sub-group is made up of representatives of over a dozen local voluntary and charitable organisations working directly with disabled people, as well as representatives of Jobcentre Plus and Birmingham City Council and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council.

INFLUENCING POLICY AND LEGISLATION

Positive Futures is a pan-London Development Partnership supporting people living with HIV and AIDS. It aims to improve the employment, education and skills prospects of people living with HIV in the Greater London area, and to address issues of social exclusion and lack of opportunity.

Positive Futures has been campaigning for changes to the Disability Discrimination Act, and this year welcomed a proposed extension to include progressive illnesses, including HIV, from the point of diagnosis. At present, the Act only provides protection for people who fall ill as a result of their HIV diagnosis.

'Many organisations have been uncomfortable in addressing HIV as a disability. The Employers Forum on Disability was concerned that people living with HIV would be dismissed as disabled. But *Positive Futures* has now worked with the Forum to produce its latest briefing paper, 'A practical guide to employment adjustments for people with HIV', says Allan Anderson from *Positive Futures*.

'However, our role does not end here. Firstly, we need to work with groups such as the Disability Rights Task Force to ensure that these changes are implemented. Secondly, we will continue to educate employers and other organisations about these changes and ensure that people living with HIV are supported and guaranteed equality in the workplace.'



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DPs have a fundamental part to play in combating discrimination against disabled people in employment, and in promoting concrete measures to facilitate disabled people's access to mainstream employment opportunities. The real challenges are to determine how **Equal** DPs can best build on the diversity of their target groups, and how promising practices can best contribute to the development and delivery of inclusive, active employment policies ■

Contact details

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

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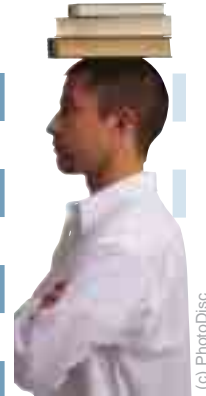


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From practice

In this new series of articles, we ask stakeholders in Equal about their involvement in the programme and what they seek to gain from it. For this first instalment, Kruti Patel asked four policy-makers what Equal means to them.

to policy



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Policy-makers are often billed as the ultimate target audience for programmes like **Equal** - after all, they are the people with the power to make the kinds of changes that **Equal** might propose. But what does it mean to be a 'policy-maker'?

'It means different things to different policy areas,' says Ali Kendrick, who leads the DWP's Worktrain team and chairs the Thematic Networking Group (TNG) on employability. 'I guess my key aim is to facilitate communication between government departments and DPs.'

This view is echoed by Ali's colleagues on other TNGs. A shared principal aim is to act as a medium for exchanging information, and to use that information to develop structures to help break down barriers. Clearly, this is a two-way process.

Pam Smith from the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) chairs the TNG on ethnic minorities. She emphasises that no-one who wants to create change can work in isolation: 'being a policy-maker mainly involves helping and encouraging a wide range of other organisations to develop policies and procedures which

will help to eradicate racial discrimination and promote racial equality and good race relations'.

So the role of a policy-maker is to distribute information on various policies and act as a platform for collating information, with the aim of discovering new ways of delivering policies. But how can **Equal** help?

THE EQUAL DIMENSION

'Developments from **Equal** will begin to give people the information they need to make informed choices about jobs,' says Stephanie Dickinson, chair of the TNG on asylum seekers, 'and will help to prepare them for work where they can.'

The eight **Equal** TNGs comprise policy representatives from governmental, regional and public organisations. The chair of each TNG is a policy-maker. The groups were initially set up to undertake three principal activities.

Firstly, they aim to ensure the strategic focus of **Equal**. This means ensuring that **Equal** concentrates on key areas of exclusion and has the capacity to adapt to new information and changes in the labour market. Secondly, at the beginning of

KNOW YOUR TNG CHAIRS:

Employability (Theme A) - Ali Kendrick, DWP Worktrain Division

Ethnic minorities (Theme B) - Pam Smith, Commission for Racial Equality

Entrepreneurship (Theme C) - Ron Downing, Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Small Business Service

Social entrepreneurship/economy (Theme D) - Maria Kenyon, DTI Small Business Service

Lifelong learning (Theme E) - Barry Brooks, Department for Education and Skills, ABSSU

Adaptability and information and communication technologies (Theme F) - John Lawton, University for Industry/learnirect

Gender equality (Theme H) - Kylie Stephen, DTI Women and Equality Unit

Asylum seekers (Theme I) - Stephanie Dickinson, DWP Adult Disadvantage Division

OTHER ORGANISATIONS REPRESENTED ON TNGS:

Governmental

- Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions - Neighbourhood Renewal Unit
- Government Office South East
- Government Office West Midlands
- Home Office
- National Assembly for Wales
- Scottish Executive

Regional organisations

- East Midlands Development Agency
- East of England Development Agency
- Embrace West Midlands
- North West Development Agency
- South East of England Development Agency
- Yorkshire Forward

Public bodies and non-governmental organisations

- British Refugee Council
- Confederation of British Industry
- Equal Opportunities Commission
- Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
- National Asylum Support Service
- Race Relations Employment Advisory Service
- Social Enterprise London
- Trades Union Congress
- Women's Training Network

the programme they helped to select the DPs that best suited their strategic focus. Finally, they also ensure that the lessons learnt and good practices coming out of **Equal** are fed into mainstream structures at all levels. This is achieved by increasing the interaction between DPs and policy representatives from local, regional and national organisations.

However, TNG involvement in **Equal** goes beyond these three activities. Barry Brooks, deputy director at the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit (ABSSU) and chair of the TNG on lifelong learning, became involved with **Equal** because 'it enables policy-makers to be at the forefront of new developments'. In particular, he was looking for new ways of delivering the Skills for Life strategy.

So TNG involvement is not just about supporting DPs, but also about learning from their activities. Pam Smith explains that, as a policy-maker, she does not always get the opportunity to meet the people who really make things happen on the ground. But she also says, 'I have found it extremely interesting and helpful to learn at first hand from DPs about the work they are doing in a range of new and innovative projects. I can also share with DPs current policy developments at the CRE and elsewhere, which will hopefully assist DPs and help to get them implemented'.

Ali Kendrick stresses that her involvement with **Equal** has added a dimension to her 'day job' with Worktrain: 'I've had the opportunity to attend national and international conferences, facilitate workshops with DPs, and work with the European Thematic Group ... it's a great way to really appreciate what's going on under my theme across Europe'. And this enhances her work in Worktrain: 'at present I'm exploring joint working with one DP to learn from their experiences of working with different target groups'.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Around the table I found agreement that **Equal** really does have the potential to make a difference. 'I believe that the work of the DPs, together with the input from TNG members and support structures, can play a key role in spreading more widely better policy and practice in the area of equality,' said Pam Smith.

Ali Kendrick added that she has no doubt that **Equal** will make a difference to the people it targets directly, because of the commitment shown by DPs.

Policy-makers, and in particular the members of TNGs, have a crucial role to play in the success of DPs and **Equal**. They act both as sources of information and as audiences for innovation. They are constantly looking for new strategies to help to implement and further develop the policies for which they are responsible. Their relationship with DPs is characterised by two-way communication. And from the response I received, they greatly enjoy being involved.

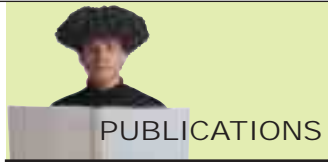
"It's a great way to really appreciate what's going on under my theme across Europe"

Everyone with a stake in the programme has the opportunity to really make a difference. 'The challenge for all of us,' says Barry Brooks, 'is to create a climate where everyone is aware of the target audience and their needs, the political context and the required outcomes, and the international dimension and its potential benefits. If we can find the synergies, then the traditional process of "policy to practice" can be turned full circle and **Equal** DPs can bring "practice into policy".' ■



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Publications websites events



Equality and diversity - the way ahead

Joint consultation with the DTI and the Home Office.

www.dti.gov.uk/er/equality/index.htm

Race Relations Act 1976 (Amendment) Regulations 2003: briefing by the Commission for Racial Equality

Briefing on the detailed wording of the race regulations and, in particular, on the standards in the EU Race Directive.

www.cre.gov.uk/downloads/docs/race_regs.doc

Pathways to Work: helping people into employment - the Government's response and action plan

www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/dwp/2003/pathways2work.pdf



DWP Disability Unit

www.disability.gov.uk

EU Disability Strategy

www.europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/disability/index_en.html

Scottish Equal Support Unit

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Welsh Equal Support Unit

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Broadband in Brussels

In May, Working Broadband GB, led by Abi Associates, organised an event in Brussels to get to the heart of European policy-making...

Over a hundred delegates from five countries joined speakers Robert Evans MEP, vice-chair of the EU Citizens Rights Committee; Jean Lambert MEP, who will also be responsible for reporting on **Equal** to the European Parliament; and Claude Moraes MEP, who was able to meet with delegates to gain information which he can input to his work on the Citizens Rights Committee.

Delegates also included beneficiaries of **Equal**. They not only contributed to the debate, but provided the music too. A film made by Marsh Farm residents in Luton was also shown - it identified drug problems from a community perspective.

As policy and programme come from Brussels, the event provided an excellent opportunity to 'close the loop' and enable direct feedback from partners and beneficiaries to policy-makers ■

For more information on Working Broadband GB contact gerry@abi.co.uk or visit www.e-mpowerment.org



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And finally...

...our regular round-up of what's new in the UK Equal programmes.

In Northern Ireland, the new merged National Thematic Network for **Equal** has set up two working groups: one on soft outcomes and distance travelled, the other on engaging with employers. The first group met in May to look at soft outcomes and distance travelled. DPs attended with their evaluators and it was agreed that the group should consider producing a Northern

Ireland annex to the Institute of Employment Studies' paper 'Guide to Measuring Soft Outcomes and Distance Travelled'.

In Scotland, preparations for Action 3 are well underway and the first draft of the Scottish Mainstreaming Strategy is now available. Scottish DPs have hosted a series of events this quarter, including a rural conference on entrepreneurship

and an event on the social economy.

The work programmes of Welsh DPs are progressing well, and already yielding significant results. Action 3 applications have been received from all three DPs. The programme of awareness-raising for the second call continues, and is already highlighting a number of topics of concern and potential partnerships ■