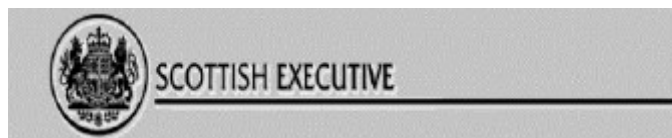

EQUAL

Executive Summary



Introduction

EQUAL will test and promote new ways of combating all forms of discrimination and inequalities faced by those groups most disadvantaged in the labour market, both those in work and those seeking work, through transnational co-operation. These groups include women, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, older workers, refugees, ex-offenders, drugs and alcohol misusers. EQUAL will also include action to help the social and vocational integration of asylum seekers.

The leading principles of EQUAL are:

- ✍ Partnership: including public authorities, representatives of workers and employers, the equality commissions, education and training communities, the voluntary and community sectors and the management authorities for the countries;
- ✍ Thematic approach: to explore new ways of tackling the problems common to different types of discrimination and inequality, rather than focusing on a specific group;
- ✍ Transnationality: to work in co-operation with partnerships from other Member States, learning lessons, developing new methods and approaches to training and job creation;
- ✍ Empowerment/participation: those targeted for support will have the opportunity to influence the design and evaluation of proposed activities to help them;
- ✍ Innovation: including new methods of delivery, new systems or innovative actions to address gaps identified in key reports, from, for example, the Social Exclusion Unit; and
- ✍ Dissemination and mainstreaming: to help inform policy developments at a national and European level

The GB EQUAL plan is broken down into five chapters, covering the following:

- ✍ labour market analysis
- ✍ policy context
- ✍ other factors that have shaped the programme
- ✍ implementation strategy
- ✍ delivery, monitoring and evaluation.

Labour market issues

The GB labour market as a whole has both strengths and weaknesses. Its strengths are:

- ✍ strong employment growth to record levels of employment
- ✍ falling unemployment to its lowest level for nearly twenty years
- ✍ long term unemployment falling faster than overall unemployment, taking it to a new twenty year low
- ✍ youth unemployment is the lowest for a generation
- ✍ diverse employment opportunities
- ✍ dynamism; lots of jobs come up all the time and are quickly taken by the unemployed.

Its weaknesses are:

- ✍ falling male employment rates since the 1950s
- ✍ rising male inactivity rates
- ✍ long term unemployment rate still high - 30% of unemployed¹ have been unemployed for one year or more
- ✍ youth unemployment rate still high - unemployment rate for 18-24 year olds is 12.2%, almost twice as high as overall rate
- ✍ increase in proportion of workless households to 17% of all households
- ✍ poor labour market opportunities for disadvantaged groups, particularly those on benefits
- ✍ high proportion of people without basic skills
- ✍ need to increase skills of older workers.

Action to improve outcomes in addressing these weaknesses as a whole is being taken forward under UK Government Policy and the mainstream Structural Funds. Funding under the EQUAL programme will also contribute towards addressing these problems by promoting and testing new ways of combating the discrimination and inequalities faced by those groups most disadvantaged in the labour market. Chapter One of the GB EQUAL Plan considers the labour market issues for each of these groups in more detail.

¹ ILO definition

Policy focus

In drawing up the EQUAL plan we have consulted widely with colleagues within DFEE and from other government departments to ensure that EQUAL maintains a sharp policy focus. When examining the priorities for support under EQUAL we have sought to identify the real policy gaps that could usefully be informed by EQUAL, where we would benefit from transnational co-operation. We took account of the work that was already being taken forward through domestic funding and mainstream ESF. It is essential that EQUAL maintain close links with new policy developments, such as key reports from the Social Exclusion Unit, and developments related to basic and IT skills. For example, the majority of the EQUAL activity to be funded under the employability theme must be informed by the social inclusion strategies agreed for England, Scotland and Wales

The EQUAL plan has also taken into account national developments such as the creation of:

- ✎ the Small Business Service, which was set up to provide a strong voice for small businesses at the heart of government and help improve the coherence and support for such businesses; and
- ✎ the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit, which was set up in September 2000 to drive forward the Strategy.

Devolved administrations

The Government has taken steps to modernise the way in which Britain is governed, including the devolution of power to Scotland and Wales since 1 July 1999, and the establishment of mechanisms for devolution in Northern Ireland in December 1999. There are important executive, legislative and administrative differences between each of these countries.

The GB plan takes into account the fact that there are variations in policy and labour market issues for Scotland and Wales. The policies reported are a mix of matters reserved to GB and those that are devolved.

Northern Ireland has a separate Community Initiative plan for EQUAL, which will cover all activities except asylum seekers, as policy on asylum seekers has not been devolved. Action on asylum seekers will be taken forward on a UK basis and is included in the GB plan.

Consultation process

Consultation exercises took place in England, Scotland and Wales. Individuals and organizations were invited to comment on the thematic fields to be chosen, the type and nature of Development Partnerships to be formed, the types of action for assisting asylum seekers, and the budget and time frame for each Action.

Over 70 organisations replied with the highest response coming from the voluntary sector and local authorities. Around a third of these organisations had previous experience of ADAPT and/or EMPLOYMENT.

The key themes identified were:

- A** - access to the labour market
- E** - promoting lifelong learning
- B** - ethnic minorities
- F** - adaptability of firms and the use of IT.

In addition an EQUAL working group was established to draw together the relevant Government Departments, the social partners, equality commissions and other relevant organisations. This group helped to shape the overall design of the programme and the British priorities.

Thematic Priorities

The external consultation, the labour market analysis and the policy context have informed the split of funding between Themes, as described in the table below. Annex A provides further details.

Thematic field	GB allocation	Split between:
Employability	40%	A: 30% - Facilitating access and return to the labour market for disadvantaged people B: 10% - Combating racism and xenophobia
Entrepreneurship	20%	C: 10% - Opening up business creation process to all D: 10% - Strengthening the social economy (3 rd sector)
Adaptability	25%	E: 12.5% - Promoting lifelong learning and inclusive work practices for those suffering discrimination and inequality F: 12.5% - Supporting adaptability of firms and employees to structural economic change and use of IT and other new technologies
Equal Opportunities	5%	G: 0% - Reconciling family and professional life through more flexible work organisation and support services ² H: 5% - Reducing gender gap and supporting job desegregation
Asylum Seekers	5%	-
Technical Assistance	5%	-

² There will be no activity under theme G. Actions related to Work/life balance have been included in the Adaptability pillar. Any issues related to access to employment should be covered by the Employability pillar. Due to the strong focus given to the National Childcare Strategy in the domestic agenda and the proportion of ESFU Objective 3 which has been allocated to this, it will not be covered through EQUAL.

Implementation

EQUAL will be implemented via the establishment of Development Partnerships (DPs) and Thematic Networking Groups (TNGs).

Development Partnerships may be organised on a geographical, economic sector or industrial sector basis. Partnerships should be formed on a national, regional or local level, depending on the policy focus of their chosen activity. The thematic work related to assisting asylum seekers will be UK wide but there is expected to be scope for local projects. We estimate that of 100 DPs, 20% would be national/sectoral and 20% regional - the remaining 60% could have a local/regional focus.

Thematic Networking Groups will have responsibility for ensuring that EQUAL maintains a clear policy focus and also supports the mainstreaming process. The groups will be established for each selected theme and will include relevant policy makers from the Department for Education and Employment or other Government Departments, the Scottish Executive, Welsh Assembly, representatives for the equality commissions, social partners and the Development Partnerships. Government offices and Regional Development Agencies will need to be involved in these groups to help take forward the direct lessons for mainstream ESF and to specify regional priorities.

The Thematic Networking Groups will have two key roles:

✍	Strategic Focus: to ensure that EQUAL continues to focus on the priority areas, and takes account of emerging findings and changes in policy and/or the labour market. Each network will report to the EQUAL GB Monitoring Committee.
✍	Dissemination Strategy and Thematic Networking: The networking groups will develop and agree a dissemination strategy with the EQUAL GB Monitoring Committee. Each group will have to endorse the dissemination by development partnerships and will in addition have a budget to commission further dissemination activity. Dissemination strategies will include lessons learned as well as good practice. All DPs will be expected to participate in GB thematic networking activity.

The networking groups will ensure that mainstreaming takes place at both the horizontal level (ie organisations in the same or a similar field) and the vertical level - as they will encompass

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the representatives of regional and national policy. The groups will also need to feed into the UK ESF Evaluation Standing Group, which has been established to develop a more coherent way of transferring good practice within Structural Fund programmes. The networks will also identify and assess the factors leading to good practice and benchmark their performance and disseminate good practice.

Both Development Partnerships and Thematic Networking Groups will participate in dissemination and evaluation at the European level.

Funding

EQUAL will fund activity under four Actions within each Thematic Field:

- ✍ Action 1: setting up Development Partnerships and transnational co-operation - 5% of the budget
- ✍ Action 2: implementing the work programmes of the Development Partnerships - 75% of the budget
- ✍ Action 3: thematic networking, dissemination of good practice and making an impact on national policy - 15% of the budget
- ✍ Action 4: Technical Assistance to support actions 1, 2 and 3 - 5% of the budget.

Actions 1 and 2 are sequential. Action 3 should start at the earliest point that results are available to disseminate. Action 4 will provide support from before the commencement of Action 1.

Delivery, monitoring and evaluation

A GB Monitoring Committee will have responsibility for overseeing the EQUAL programme. Delivery of the EQUAL programme will be implemented both at country (Scotland, Wales and England) level and at GB level, depending on the focus of development partnerships. The devolved administrations will have responsibility for drawing up separate implementation plans for the EQUAL programme, with a policy focus appropriate to their specific needs. However there will be a common evaluation strategy that takes account of EC guidance.

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Find a document containing activities which EQUAL support at:

*http://www.esfnews.org.uk/equal/docs/EQUAL_Final_9_March_table.doc – MS-Word format
OR*

http://www.esfnews.org.uk/equal/docs/EQUAL_Final_9_March_table.pdf – Acrobat format