

Employability Access Project - Action 2 Final Evaluation

November 2007



Jobs in
North Belfast...
Secure a
healthy future



Employability Access Project - Action 2 Final Evaluation

	Page No
1 Introduction	
1.1 Background	2
1.2 Terms of Reference	3
2 Overview	
2.1 The Equal Programme	4
2.2 The Context	5
2.3 The Development Partnership	6
2.4 Previous Reports	7
3 Evaluation Findings	
3.1 Summary of Action 2 Activities	10
3.2 Programme Activities	11
3.3 Outcomes	12
3.4 Management and Staffing	17
3.5 Finance/ Value for Money	18
4 Conclusions and Recommendations	
4.1 Conclusions	21
4.2 Recommendations	24
5 Appendices	
5.1 Action 2 Activities	26
5.2 Cost Benefit Analysis	31



Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 In recognising the barriers that long term unemployed people face while trying to gain suitable employment, North Belfast Partnership took the lead in establishing the Employability Access Project (E.A.P.) Development Partnership utilising funding from the European Social Fund under the Northern Ireland EQUAL Community Initiative Programme through the Department for Employment and Learning. The Employability Access Programme seeks to improve access to job opportunities, specifically within the health sector in North Belfast, for those people at most disadvantage when seeking employment. The Development Partnership seeks to consider recruitment and selection practices within the health sector and to build better linkages between the supply and demand for good quality jobs.

1.1.2 EQUAL is funding a number of programmes across Northern Ireland. All of these operate within three stages:

- **Action 1 (October 2004 - June 2005)** - involving the establishment of a Development Partnership, agreeing terms of reference, setting up a Transnational Co-operation Agreement and producing a Development Partnership Agreement. This will form the basis for further work by the Partnership and ensure relationships with European organisations seeking to deliver similar projects.
- **Action 2 (July 2005 - June 2007)** - this is the period during which activities and work programmes will be implemented, research undertaken or pilots delivered to look at reducing barriers to employment and information gained will be shared across the Transnational Partnerships.
- **Action 3 (July 2007 - December 2007)** - will focus on looking at the mainstreaming opportunities arising from the projects and will seek to encourage the dissemination and uptake of learning by statutory and other bodies. It should be noted that in some cases Action 3 has been extended to February/March 2008.

1.1.3 As lead partner for the Employability Access Project in North Belfast, the Partnership has taken responsibility for housing and providing support services for the staff employed by the E.A.P. The Development Partnership incorporates representatives from health sector employers, training and education providers, statutory agencies and community based employability providers. The Development Partnership has taken responsibility for:

- delivering a health sector targeted pre employment, personal skills development programme incorporating one to one mentoring support, job shadowing and guaranteed interview. The programme has been made available to any long term unemployed or economically inactive resident of North Belfast.
- addressing, reviewing and where appropriate amending the recruitment policies and practices of the North & West Health & Social Services Trust and the Mater Hospital (now both part of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust) in order to make these more accessible and inclusive for those potential employees currently furthest removed from the labour market.
- undertaking any additional activities identified at D.P. Board level to assist in addressing the project objectives.

1.2.1 The members of the Development Partnership are listed in Section 2.3.2.

1.2 Terms of Reference

1.2.1 North Belfast Partnership, as the lead partner of the Employability Access Development Partnership, appointed Williamson Consulting to undertake an external evaluation of the activities of the Employability Access Development Partnership. The evaluation brief includes:

- Oral and written reports on the progress of both the domestic and transnational elements of the project at regular intervals;
- Submitting interim and final reports on the

project, both domestic and transnational elements, covering:

- The extent to which the project has achieved its aims and objectives;
- How the project has achieved its aims and objectives;
- The transferability of results;
- Good practice and issues to be addressed within the project;
- Recommendations for the future development of the project.

1.2.2 An initial report reviewed progress on Action 1 and looked at the strategic and policy context and the establishment of the partnership structures and processes. A summary of this report is set out in the body of this report. This report focuses on the activities and outcomes in Action 2, including:

- The effectiveness of the Partnership
- The content of the programme
- The recruitment of participants
- Job outcomes
- Other impacts and outcomes
- Mainstreaming
- Conclusions and recommendations

1.2.3 The evaluation of Action 2 involved:

- Meetings with the Development Partnership to discuss the project and the outcomes of Action 2 in more detail, including programmes, rationale, involvement in EQUAL structures
- Detailed consideration of the Development Partnership Agreement (incorporating the Transnational Cooperation Agreement) and Action Plans to assess the extent to which key actions, outputs, outcomes, milestones, delivery agents and costs have been outlined and clarified and the extent to which it meets EQUAL requirements and the needs of the wider labour market.
- Consultation with each of the partners individually to discuss their involvement
- Interviews with participants
- Consideration of resource inputs
- Analysis of outcomes and achievement of objectives
- Impact of the programme on policies and procedures.

2

Overview

2.1 The Equal Programme

- 2.1.1 The Employability Access Project is funded under the EQUAL Programme through the European Social Fund. This aims to test new ways of tackling discrimination and inequality experienced by those in work and those looking for a job, with a view that new ideas could change future policy and practice in employment and training.
- 2.1.2 EQUAL operates by bringing together the key players in a geographic area or sector into Development Partnerships (D.P.) to pool their expertise and experience. Development Partnerships must establish links with at least one partnership from another European member state. The EQUAL Programme has 5 key themes, Employment, Entrepreneurship, Adaptability, Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, and, Asylum Seekers. The EQUAL programme in N.I. is the overall responsibility of the Department for Employment and Learning and is supported by Proteus N.I. It has adopted two key themes as being appropriate to the needs of the N.I. labour market, employability and equal opportunities.
- 2.1.3 The EQUAL programme incorporates six key principles

Partnership	bringing together key players into development partnerships and ensuring links with other member states
Innovation	testing and promoting new ways of combating discrimination and inequality faced by those groups most disadvantaged in the labour market
Equal Opportunity	cross cutting feature of the programme
Transnational Co-operation	the transnational dimension ensures that lessons are learned across member states and examples of good practice are exchanged
Mainstreaming	EQUAL has been designed so that its actions inform policy developments and ensure that policy makers learn lessons from its activities.
Empowerment	those who are targeted for support also have an opportunity to influence the design and the evaluation of the proposed activities.

2.2 The Context

2.2.1 While the Employability Access Project is specifically about addressing recruitment and employability issues in North Belfast, it operates within a wider context which has had some impact on the project. The project was launched and has operated within the context of the Review of Public Administration and its ongoing implementation. R.P.A. has sought to look at structures across Northern Ireland to consider whether the statutory sector could operate more efficiently with fewer, larger structures. This has perhaps been most public in the discussion about amalgamation of council areas, however R.P.A. has had most impact at an early stage on the health sector. At time of writing the process of removing the Health and Social Services Boards and the creation of a Strategic Health Authority has been temporarily halted while the process is reviewed within the Northern Ireland Assembly. However, the process of amalgamating Health Trusts has gone forward. From April 2007 the six existing Health Care Trusts in Belfast (Belfast City Hospital, The Royal Hospitals, Mater Hospital, South and East Belfast, North and West Belfast and Greenpark Health Care Trust) were merged to form a new Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. This has had some impact on the operation of the Development Partnership. One of the health sector representatives, who originally chaired the Development Partnership, no longer works

within the N.&W.B.H.&S.S. Trust. However, there has been some continuity with the other Trust representative continuing to work within the new Belfast Trust.

2.2.2 Another important area of change has been the implementation of "Agenda for Change". This is a single pay system in operation in the National Health Service which applies to all directly employed National Health Service staff, except for Doctors, Dentists and some senior Managers. The purpose of Agenda for Change is to create fairer, more easily managed pay structures which enable direct comparisons to be made between different roles. It has incorporated three elements including Job Evaluation; Harmonisation of Terms and Conditions of Employment; and the Knowledge and Skills Framework. While this process was agreed in 2004, it is still being rolled out across the Health Service and not all staff are part of this as yet. This has inevitably had a major impact on Human Resource Management staff within the health sector and has proved to be a very stressful time for many staff.

2.2.3 Statutory responsibility for employment and learning rests with the Department for Employment and Learning (D.E.L.). During the period over which the E.A.P.'s has operated, D.E.L. has made many changes to its range of programmes aimed at those who are unemployed, particularly those who are furthest from the labour market. In addition to

its direct support for those who are unemployed, through Jobs and Benefits Offices, Careers Service, etc., D.E.L. also funds a range of organisations to deliver its statutory programmes. Most of these are available throughout Northern Ireland, however some are specific to more disadvantaged areas and are being delivered on a pilot basis. The Partnership has been fortunate to have both D.E.L. and some of the local community based employment providers participating in the Development Partnership. In fact, there is a degree of overlap between the work being undertaken by the E.A.P. and the work that local organisations such as North City Training, North Belfast Employment Centre and Ashton Community Trust are undertaking. While the E.A.P. has undertaken a wide range of work on employability, it has focused its direct employment activity on health sector posts. Each of the local employability organisations is involved in delivering programmes and support to aid those who are furthest from the labour market to return to work and tend to work with a wide range of employees.

2.3 The Development Partnership

2.3.1 The initial driver for the Employability Access Project came from North Belfast Partnership Board and arose from a concern that there was a gap between unemployed people and major employers in the area. It also followed exposure to other Equal programmes and networks through, for example, the Futures Project delivered through the Health Action Zone. The Employability Access Project focuses on North Belfast and seeks to develop ways of closing the gap between employers in the health sector and those seeking employment. It was perceived by people working in North Belfast Partnership, the Health Trusts and in the employability sector that there was a difficulty, on the demand side, in relation to filling posts at certain grades and, on the supply side, accessing employment opportunities in the health sector, despite a range of work undertaken in the past to address this.

2.3.2 The Partnership reflects the interests and needs of key stakeholders including employers, trade unions, the community sector, and those involved in employability programmes. The list of partners is as follows:

- North Belfast Partnership Board (lead partner) brings together representatives from the statutory, private, voluntary and community sectors across North Belfast.
- The Mater Hospital is a major employer in North Belfast.
- North and West Belfast Health and Social Services Trust is also a major health sector employer in North Belfast and has a number of centres. (Both the Mater Hospital and North and West Belfast H.& S.S. Trust became part of the new Belfast Health and Social Care Trust in April 2007)
- The Health Action Zone was established to tackle health inequalities in North Belfast and to promote a holistic approach to health including lifestyle and employment issues.
- North City Training is a community based training provider in the area.
- South Belfast Partnership brings experience of employment programmes targeted on disadvantaged areas.
- Belfast Institute for Further and Higher Education (now Belfast Metropolitan College) is one of the leading third level adult education providers in Northern Ireland.
- North Belfast Employment Centre is a Labour Market Intermediary and provides a range of services for unemployed people from North Belfast.
- The Ashton Centre is a Labour Market Intermediary in North Belfast and also provides a range of training programmes focused on those who are long-term unemployed.

- The Department for Employment and Learning has a statutory responsibility for programmes to tackle unemployment.
- Women's Tec is a community based training provider.
- The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has a remit in terms of education qualifications.
- U.N.I.S.O.N. represented the trade union sector.

2.4 Previous Reports

Action 1 Report

2.4.1 The conclusions and recommendations in the Action 1 Evaluation Report are summarised below. The Employability Access project successfully completed Action 1 and, at that stage, was moving towards the point where it was starting to prepare to deliver projects under Action 2 of the programme. The project initially focused on establishing the partnership and ensuring that the appropriate structures are in place to enable the partnership to move forward. The conclusions included:

- 1 The Employability Access Project has achieved its initial objectives of setting up the partnership, establishing terms of reference and establishing the Transnational Partnership.
- 2 The Development Partnership has secured the commitment of the key stakeholders in the sector. All of the relevant sectors are included.
- 3 The structures within the D.P. are robust and working well. There are good internal communication and decision making processes.
- 4 The project is primarily about looking at the relationship between employers, communities and the labour market whilst seeking to address the gap between those seeking staff and people from North Belfast

seeking work. Its potential benefits are for employers, those who are unemployed and organisations who work with those who are unemployed in terms of improving communication, linkages and HR policies.

- 5 Initial progress in forming the partnership was slow, largely because of delays in receiving the letter of offer which meant that the project could not recruit staff until March 2005. Once the Co-ordinator was appointed on a full-time basis, the partnership has progressed significantly.
- 6 The project has secured the commitment and participation of all of the partners and there is good interaction between the sectors represented.
- 7 All of the partners are aware of the requirements of the programme and the potential benefits that could come from this.
- 8 The financial monitoring systems are robust and expenditure, while slightly less than budgeted is satisfactory.
- 9 The project is still working on developing its monitoring systems and these will be finalised over the next few weeks. The partnership is aware of the need for monitoring and the issues to be covered.
- 10 The Development Partnership, and the organisations within it, have made very significant progress during Action 1. There have already been achievements in terms of improving understanding, co-operation and communication between the partners which is already producing benefits in terms of human resource policies and practices.

2.4.2 The main recommendations were:

- It might be useful at an early stage in Action 2 to organise a residential to give all of the partners the opportunity to spend time reviewing the project and discussing its operation.

- The project is focused on recruiting those who are furthest from the labour market, who by definition are those hardest to reach. It will be important to look at and test a range of referral mechanisms, including community contacts, and this in itself will be a learning experience.

Interim Action 2 Report

2.4.3 The interim Action 2 report looked at the first year of Action 2, including the delivery of the first three programmes. The main conclusions and recommendations at that stage were:

- The Employability Access project has successfully completed the planning and set up stage of Action 2 and has now moved into the delivery phase.
- The project has successfully recruited two E.D.O.s to deliver the programmes.
- The set up of the programmes involved all of the partners and required co-ordination of a number of different organisations in the Health and Employment sectors. There has been a high level of participation and co-operation from the partners and this has been very successful.
- There has been good management and monitoring of the programmes which has resulted in changes to the programmes where necessary to ensure that they achieve their objectives.
- The partnership itself is working well with input from all of the main partners. There are some partners who perhaps feel less able to contribute and are unsure of their role at this stage.
- The project has been successful in targeting and reaching out to those who are furthest from the labour market. The project has managed to recruit people who have had difficulty getting jobs and would be unlikely to be able to compete in the labour market without an intervention of this type.
- The programme has had a high success rate to date in terms of getting completers into jobs. However the continued success of this will depend on the number of vacancies available in the Trusts.
- The project has used innovative methods to recruit and create awareness of the programme, for example door to door leaflet drops. These have proved successful in reaching those who would not respond to traditional means of advertising jobs.
- The majority of the participants would have been very unlikely to apply to for jobs in the Trusts without this programme.
- The programme is achieving or progressing towards achieving its objectives at this stage.
- Participants are very happy with the content and structure of the programme and believe that it is making a very significant difference to their lives.
- Employers are very happy with the programme and it has made a difference to recruitment and H.R. practices. The project organised and held a very successful launch which received positive publicity and was attended by local politicians and representatives from key sectors.
- The project is already looking at mainstreaming and is encouraging the partners to consider ways of mainstreaming elements of the project at this stage.
- The Transnational Partnership has held two exchange visits. These have been generally well received although there is some improvements needed in the Transnational Partnership, particularly in the area of communication between partners.
- The programme has had a very good completion rate to date.

- The programme has been run on a cross community basis and is recruiting participants from both communities. There are therefore positive cross community impacts.

2.4.4 The recommendations made at the Interim Action 2 report stage are set out below. The actions taken by the project in response to these are listed in the bullet points attached to each. It is important to note that each of the evaluation recommendations was taken seriously and addressed by the D.P. or project staff.

- It would be worth reviewing the membership of the DP to ensure that all members are clear about their roles and contribution.

- This issue was discussed twice by the Development Partnership. Members were given the opportunity to clarify their role and expected contribution. In spite of comments by D.P. members during the consultation for the evaluation, members did not use these opportunities to indicate uncertainty about their roles.

- It may be worth exploring how to target specific sections of the unemployed, e.g. lone parents, ethnic minorities, etc.

- The project took an in-depth look at how it recruited participants and at the potential for recruiting in a more targeted manner to attract specific groups. In particular the issue of ethnic minority recruits was considered. It was decided that blanket promotional methods were more appropriate as that the project would have had difficulty attracting a large enough number of more targeted participants.

- It may become increasingly difficult to find and match vacancies in the Trusts. It may be worth considering other potential posts within the Trusts or signposting participants to vacancies in other Trusts.

- The possibility of working with other Trusts was not explored fully as it became clear that the majority of potential participants targeted by E.A.P. only wanted employment close to home. The project did carry out an audit of other possible entry level posts within the two health trusts, however this showed that all suitable posts were being covered.

- It has been difficult to get feedback from anyone leaving the programme early. The project should look at alternative ways of doing this.

- Some work has been done to look at reasons for early departure from the programme. In practice, when someone leaves the programme early there is often little warning and it proved very difficult to contact them after their departure, despite numerous attempts by project staff. Where there are signs of potential early departure, the project carries out an assessment of the situation to identify reasons. Experience has shown that these are usually personal. Therefore, changes to the programme are not necessary and would not reduce the number of drop outs.

- The project should monitor sustained employment outcomes.

- This was being monitored by the E.A.P. and by the Belfast Health Trust. This has shown that those recruited through the E.A.P. appear to be likely to stay in post for longer.

3

Evaluation Findings

3.1 Summary of Action 2 Activities

3.1.1 A detailed description of the activities undertaken under Action 2 of the E.A.P. is set out in section 5.1 of the appendices. This section summarises these key activities. In seeking to address the gap between jobs within the health sector which were difficult to fill and people in North Belfast who had difficulty gaining employment, Action 2 of the programme focused on recruiting participants, delivering training and organising job shadowing and support for participants leading through to interviews. Ultimately, it was hoped, that job outcomes would be delivered. The activities undertaken during Action 2 can be summarised as follows:

- **Planning** - this work included the recruitment of two Employability Development Officers. Staff were involved in extensive research into best practice in training and support for long term unemployed people, including discussions with the local Labour Market Intermediaries, training organisations, employers and Trade Unions. Work done over this six to eight month period led to the design of the programme and agreement of all the partners on the way forward.
- **Recruitment** - a number of innovative approaches were used to target those who would benefit from the E.A.P. This included house to house leaflet drops, providing leaflets in a range of locations and raising awareness through organisations that work with those who are long term unemployed. Potential applicants then met with the Employability Development Officer who gathered information about the participants, provided information about the programme and assisted participants to complete applications for the programme.
- **Training** - this involved a four week training programme (initially six weeks) followed by two weeks work experience within the Health Trust. Training utilised the Pacific Institute's Steps to Excellence for Personal Success Programme (STEPS). Pre-employment skills were provided and

participants were offered support during the job shadowing/work experience phase.

- **Support** - support is provided by the E.D.O., by the peer group and by staff within each of the Trusts. This recognises the fact that many participants suffer from low self-esteem or lack self-confidence.
- **Interview** - at the end of the work experience/job shadowing process participants are guaranteed an interview for a real job where they are in direct competition with others.
- **Monitoring** - a range of monitoring information is collected in relation to participants, training outcomes, success at interview and on participants and partner organisation's views.

3.2 Programme Activities

3.2.1 Programmes

The first programme started in January 2006. Each programme lasts six weeks (initially this was eight weeks) and it was planned to recruit between 10 and 12 participants for each programme. By the end of June 2007, eight programmes had been completed. The outcomes from these are assessed in later sections of the report.

- 3.2.2 In the first programme, the Steps to Excellence training was delivered by an external facilitator to test the suitability and fit of STEPS within the pre-employment programme. Subsequently, from programme 2 onwards, the E.D.O.s were trained to deliver Steps to Excellence training in-house. The participants have found the training challenging and useful in terms of looking at themselves and planning for the future. For many, the concepts covered in the training are new and, in some cases, quite difficult to get to grips with.

3.2.3 The Project Launch

The official launch of the Employability Access Programme took place on 10 January 2006.

The launch was held at Belfast Castle and the keynote speaker was Angela Smith, Minister for the Department for Employment and Learning. The event was attended by around 100 people drawn from the partner organisations and representatives invited from the private, public, community and voluntary sectors.

- 3.2.4 The launch was very successful and featured presentations from the Chief Executives of both Trusts, Belfast City Councillors and the Minister for the Department for Employment and Learning. The event was reported in the local media. The launch also showed a D.V.D. presentation which promoted the Employability Access Programme and included interviews with staff in the then Mater Hospital Trust and North and West Belfast Trust.

3.2.5 Mainstreaming

While mainstreaming is the focus of Action 3 of the project, work is already under way within the D.P. and among the partners to highlight the importance of mainstreaming and to look at how this can be applied. The sustainability of the project and learning from it is an important element of Equal projects. Consultation with partners suggests that some mainstreaming is already taking place and the project has already had an impact on recruitment policies within the Trusts, specifically in the way in which they advertise vacancies and recruit staff. However, it is recognised that there is still a great deal of work to be done on mainstreaming and disseminating learning from the project and this will take place during Action 3.

- 3.2.6 In May 2006, the E.A.P. organised a planning day with the D.P. to discuss mainstreaming of the project. This was well attended with all of the main partners represented. The event was held at Belfast Castle and lasted a full day. The event was facilitated by the W.E.A. The event looked at the highlights of the project to date and the main learning points for each of the partners. It also identified possibilities for mainstreaming and looked at how this could be introduced into policies and

processes within partner organisations. It considered the economic impact of the project and future possibilities for funding. The outcome of the event was that organisations were encouraged to consider mainstreaming as a ongoing product of the project and not something that is simply added at the end. The event was very useful and demonstrated the E.A.P.'s commitment to mainstreaming and to maximising learning from the project.

3.2.7 E.A.P. produced a mainstreaming strategy in June 2006. This document set out the main learning points from the project and the key steps to be taken in mainstreaming this learning so that it impacts on the policies, practices and funding priorities of employers, statutory organisations. Within the E.A.P. strategy, mainstreaming is defined as “using the experience and learning gathered from the project to influence and amend the policies, strategies, practice and culture of members of the D.P. as well as local, regional and transnational stakeholders”.

3.2.8 The Transnational Element

The Transnational project is a key element of Equal funding and of the E.A.P. project. E.A.P. is involved in a transnational partnership titled: Co-operation for Employment (Co.F.E). Co.F.E. brings together partners from Italy, Spain and the Republic of Ireland, as well as Northern Ireland. All of the partners are involved in matching the supply and demand of labour in disadvantaged communities. The Transnational partnership is subject to a separate evaluation, also being carried out by Williamson Consulting, and a more detailed report in relation to the Transnational Partnership has been produced separately. However, the activity of the Transnational Partnership is also relevant to this evaluation and therefore this is mentioned briefly below.

3.2.9 There have been four main transnational events hosted by each of the partner projects. These were attended by representatives from each of the partners. The theme of the exchanges were:

- Castilla la Mancha - critical analysis of public policies regarding labour market reintegration into entry level jobs including those in social care.
- Milan - matching the supply and demand of labour.
- Tallaght - approaches to motivation, qualification and accreditation.
- Belfast - strategies for effective welfare to work transition

3.2.10 Each exchange was held over two days and included a range of presentations by the partners and visits to local projects relating to the theme of the exchange. This provided opportunities for the partners to meet and share experiences and best practice. Overall, participants felt that the Transnational Partnership had been very successful and had provided a range of benefits for the D.P.s and partner organisations. C.o.F.E. has met the objectives set out in the Transnational Co-operation Agreement and has established good partnerships and communication. E.A.P. has played a very active role in the Transnational Partnership and contributed to its success in a number of ways. The Employability Access Programme was responsible for co-ordinating and collating all documentation leading to the Transnational Co-operation Agreement. E.A.P. also took responsibility for commissioning and managing the evaluation of the Transnational Partnership. E.A.P. organised a very successful transnational exchange in Belfast, in May 2007.

3.2.11 The C.o.F.E. partnership produced an Employability Good Practice Guide in 2007 which built on the partners' shared experience presented at the three exchange visits in 2006 and 2007. The guide, which was collated by E.A.P., set out a series of reports covering good practice by providers in each country and partners' own experiences, explaining how specific structural and personal barriers to accessing work were addressed in different contexts.

3.3 Outcomes

3.3.1 It is important to look at the initial outcomes from the programmes in both quantitative and

qualitative terms. The success of the project cannot be judged solely on numbers and must take into account the “soft” outcomes for beneficiaries and partner organisations. The quantitative analysis is based on records from the E.A.P. and looks at numbers recruited, numbers completing the course and gaining jobs. The qualitative analysis is based on extensive interviews with participants and partners and looks at issues such as the background of participants, changes in attitudes towards work, employment outcomes and changes in employment practice.

3.3.2 The recruitment process has been successful in attracting participants who would otherwise have been very unlikely to apply for jobs in health. The most successful contact method has been the leaflet drops, particularly door to door deliveries, with over one third of referrals in this way. While this can be a hit and miss approach, it has enabled the programme to reach people that would not be likely to respond to advertisements. The project was not formally advertised through the media, however press coverage did attract 2 participants. The E.A.P. experience perhaps emphasises the importance of good community contacts and direct marketing for a project aimed at those furthest from the labour market. Increasingly, word of mouth has been a source of recruitment as more people become aware of the programme. The recruitment sources for the first 7 programmes are summarised in the table below.

Source	Interim Report	Final Report	% of Total
Leaflet to home	10	24	37
Ashton/NBEC	4	12	18
Job Centre	5	11	17
Other leaflet	4	3	5
JACS	2	4	6
Word of mouth	2	5	8
Media	1	1	1
Other	2	5	8
Total	30	65	

3.3.3 Up to the end of June 2007, eight programmes had been completed and two further programmes planned for late 2007. The table below summarises the programme and job outcomes from the programmes to date. Some of the key statistics include:

- 69 people started the pre-employment course.
- 50 completed the course. The completion rate is 72%.
- 18 have started employment, with a further 12 waiting to be offered a post
- The proportion of those successful at interview is 48% of those who started the programme.
- The proportion offered a job after interview was 92%.
- The proportion of those who started in employment and are still in employment is 94%.
- The average age of participants was just over 33 years, with a range from 19 to 52 years.
- There have been 30 males and 35 females on the programme.
- The average time unemployed was 3.2 years, with a range from 6 months to 17 years.
- 32 participants were receiving JSA, 26 receiving income support and 4 on incapacity benefit.
- 10 participants were lone parents

3.3.4 The table below shows the length of time for which participants were unemployed. It is interesting to note that the largest group was those who were unemployed for more than 3 years.

Participants' length of time unemployed

Time Unemployed	Number	%
6 - 12 months	20	30
12 - 24 months	12	18
25 - 36 months	7	11
Over 36 months	27	41

3.3.5 The courses are run on a cross community basis and participants have come from both of the main communities. Participants have reported that the groups have all bonded very well and the potential impacts of this, in terms of good relations, should not be underestimated.

3.3.6 As part of the evaluation, the consultants have undertaken interviews with participants. To date, 27 participants have been interviewed. The process involves an interview with participants at the start of the programme and again at the end of the programme. The interview uses a structured set of questions which look at the participants' background and work history, why they joined the programme and how they have found the programme. It also looks at changes in their attitudes towards key issues such as self-confidence, attitude to work and aspirations. To do this, the consultants have used a scoring frame where participants rate themselves on a scale of 1 - 10, with 10 being the highest. This is undertaken at two different points in the programme to assist assessment of attitude change. All of the participants have been very positive about the programme.

3.3.7 It is always difficult to measure changes in attitudes towards employability and self confidence in an objective way. The table below seeks to do this by scoring attitudes at different stages of the programme. The table sets out the objectives that were measured for each of the participants. This was conducted by the consultants at an initial meeting during the first week of the training programme. This was followed by a further interview towards the end of the placement period, with participants asked to score themselves. The results below are compiled for all of the participants, so as not to reveal

individual scores. As can be seen from the table, there has been a significant increase across each of the criteria, although aspirations, ability to compete for jobs and self confidence have improved most dramatically.

3.3.8 Explanations of each of the criteria which were measured are set out below:

- **Aspirations** - This assessed the participants' aspirations and hopes for the future. Issues such as employment choices, planning for the future, length of unemployment prior to joining programme, qualifications and personal backgrounds, etc., all impact on someone's expectations of life. This was measured and any changes examined
- **Motivation to join the Labour Market** - This looked at the participants' motivation to find employment at both time periods. Factors such as length of time unemployed before joining programme and success with various applications for employment were discussed and a score noted.
- **Ability to compete for jobs** - This assessed each participants' confidence in their ability to compete for jobs with other job seekers in the job market. How this had changed over the period of the programme was considered especially important
- **Self Confidence** - This measured participants' level of confidence before joining the programme and measured how this may have changed as a direct result of being involved on the programme.
- **Awareness of jobs that were available** - This looked at candidates' ability to find suitable jobs that they are adequately qualified for and how the range and nature of jobs that they could apply for may have developed since joining the programme.
- **Skills/Experience** - This looked at each participants' thoughts on how their skills and experience have changed as a result of being involved with the programme and the impact this has had.

Objective	Average Score at Start	Average Score at End	% Increase
Aspirations	4.8	7.9	65
Motivation to join Labour Market	5.5	8.1	47
Ability to compete for jobs	4.5	8.1	80
Self Confidence	4.5	9.1	102
Awareness of jobs that were available	5.3	8.4	58
Skills/Experience	4.8	8.4	75

* Based on 27 1st Interviews/ 18 2nd Interviews

3.3.9 All of the participants are from North Belfast and from disadvantaged areas. The majority heard about the programme through the door to door leaflet drop. All have been unemployed for a considerable period of time and most were very far removed from the labour market. Most had very few qualifications and very little experience. Most thought that they had little hope of obtaining employment and none thought that they would be capable of getting employment within either of the Trusts. All demonstrated very significant barriers to employment. All reported very significant changes in their attitudes towards themselves and work. All felt much more confident, much more positive about their future, and much more positive about their employment prospects. All were very enthusiastic about the programme and their jobs.

3.3.10 The interviews with participants highlighted a number of key points:

- The project has been successful in accessing those who are far removed from the labour market and would be very unlikely to gain employment through standard employability programmes.
- Many had already been on programmes such as New Deal or Worktrack but these had not worked for them.

- The programme provides a high level of support, both through the E.D.O.s, managers within the Trusts and the peer group. This has been very important in assisting participants to complete the programme.
- The outcomes in terms of attitudinal change are very positive. The majority of those who completed the course have been successful in securing employment.
- All of those who secured employment are very happy in their jobs and believe that this has made a very significant difference to their life.
- All have been very positive about the content of the programme and the input from the E.D.O.s.
- All believe that the programme has made it possible for them to access employment which would not have been possible otherwise.

3.3.11 All of the participants found the Steps to Excellence course very useful and enlightening. Some described it as difficult, particularly in the early stages and reported that they struggled to get through this. This was reported to the E.D.O.s who adjusted the course and addressed this issue successfully. Participants were also very positive about the site visits and the job shadowing, which were excellent experiences for them.

3.3.12 In terms of the employers, the feedback has also been very positive. The programme has enabled employers to fill vacancies that were otherwise proving very difficult to fill and the experience with the participants has been very positive. All have been keen to work and have done a good job. There is some evidence that those recruited through the project are likely to have higher retention rates. The project has been very useful in terms of assessing the recruitment policies and practices and changing these where they restrict access for good potential employees. It has helped to address the gap between large health sector employers and disadvantaged communities in North Belfast. The retention of staff has been very high, with all successful participants but one remaining in post for more than 13 weeks (94%).

3.3.13 All of the partners who were consulted agreed that the project had produced significant benefits for the two participating Health Trusts (now amalgamated with the other four Belfast Trusts into the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust). From the Trusts' point of view, their priority was to fill vacancies which they had had difficulty filling in the past. As a result of Action 2 a significant number of these posts have been filled. The reasons for this success are relatively complex, however it is clear that the Employability Access Project has helped in a number of ways:

- Because participants have undertaken a placement within the Trust they have a better understanding of the work situation, have some understanding of the ethos of the Trust and are more motivated. Consequently they make better candidates and are more likely to succeed at interview than they would have been had they simply turned up cold as unemployed individuals. Both Trusts felt that participants made substantial progress during the two week placement and this was particularly so for those who had not worked for a substantial period of time.
- The two week placement gave some participants the opportunity to discover that the work within the Trust was not for them. From the Trusts' point of view this was equally important as it meant that they did not recruit staff who only stayed for short period of time. This could have led to considerable recruitment and training expense by causing the Trusts to have to go through the process again.
- The Trusts have made a number of changes in terms of how they recruit, as a result of the programme. Discussions with Trust staff suggest that some of these changes would have happened anyway but were speeded up because of the E.A.P. For instance, both Trusts changed their application forms, getting rid of many irrelevant questions and making this easier to fill out. They believe that they would have made this change any way but were forced to do it more quickly because of the E.A.P. The Mater Hospital produced an information sheet to better explain job roles and also introduced a Buddy/Mentor scheme to help facilitate better integration of new staff.
- Trust representatives believe that they got a lot out of the D.P. meetings and the discussions that took place there were considered to be very useful. They learnt a lot from these meetings and believe that they are better able to undertake their own jobs as a result.
- The Trusts streamlined their recruitment process as a result of the E.A.P. This means that it takes less time to take candidates from interview into work and would credit much of this change to the E.A.P. The Trusts do not believe that their practices have changed dramatically as a result of the E.A.P., but that the project has encouraged them to make change more quickly and to introduce some minor, but significant, changes which would otherwise not have happened.

3.3.14 These benefits will remain after the project finishes and are evidence of mainstreaming having already occurred. Involvement in the project has also played a part in the personal development of staff in terms of management skills, project management skills and networking. The Trusts have gained better contacts with their local communities and the project has helped to dispel myths about access to jobs. As a result of its involvement in the project, the Mater has held workshops and open days to encourage applications for jobs. It has also helped to reduce the number of vacancies and the length of time that certain posts tend to be vacant. Both Trusts feel that the project has improved management, enhanced their standing and image in the local community, improved staff relationships and improved recruitment procedures. Many of the partners believe that there are opportunities to roll the project out to other health trusts or other public bodies. Some partners see this potential but are less optimistic about the likelihood of this happening.

3.4 Management and Staffing

3.4.1 The Employability Access Project was able to secure the commitment of all the key partners needed for a project of this type in North Belfast. The project had representation from both the supply side and the demand side. In other words, the project has the commitment of organisations which work with unemployed people to provide training and support and also the commitment of major employers who provide jobs and which are responsible for determining employment policy and practice. This partnership is very important both in terms of the operation of the project, i.e., it provided training, jobs and support, but also helped to target and recruit people who could benefit most. At the same time it also helped to influence employers' policies and practices and will help in mainstreaming findings and best practice.

3.4.2 All of the partners feel that the partnership worked well and that it was effective in putting in place the necessary procedures and structures for Action 2. Any potential problems were identified and addressed

through the planning process or during programme evaluation. Partners have established a better understanding of each other and the different needs and constraints within other organisations. The partners support the aims and objectives of the project and feel that they have the opportunity to make a positive contribution, both in the development of the project and into developing policy within their own organisations. The benefits from the project include better relationships and links between partners, where there is mutual benefit, and the opportunity to develop new approaches to recruitment and employability in North Belfast. The partnership has been meeting regularly and the level of participation and discussion has been good.

3.4.3 Attendance at DP meetings has fallen away, particularly in 2007, with some members not attending for several meetings. Consultation suggests that this is due to a feeling that the project is working well and does not require as much input as it did at the beginning. It is not due to a lack of interest in, or support for, the project. The community sector has not been as actively engaged with the project in the last year. For those community based organisations on the partnership, the E.A.P. is both an opportunity and a potential competitor. E.A.P. provides an opportunity to test new practice and potentially create work opportunities for the future, however, it can also be perceived as a deliverer of similar services and therefore a potential threat to employability agencies.

3.4.4 There is a general consensus that the partners have learned from each other, that there is good communication and that changes in systems and procedures have taken place. During Action 2, the partners have been able to test the key issues for their organisations and for the target groups and this has already led to better understanding between the partners. This has had an impact on employers' practices and employers are already seeing tangible outcomes in terms of recruitment practice.

3.4.5 The project structure seeks to provide a strategic and practical approach which covers all of North Belfast and the target groups. The Development Partnership brought together all of the key stakeholders in the area and was responsible for the strategic development of the project, overseeing the programme and dissemination of best practice. The Development Partnership board met every two months. The Development Partnership also set up subgroups to take forward specific aspects of the project. These were an Employability Subgroup and a Transnational Subgroup. There is also a H.R. Policy Group and a H.R. Working Group which looked at key H.R. issues arising from the programme and identified potential means to restructure H.R. policy within the trusts.

3.4.6 The Employability Subgroup was responsible for taking forward the development of the programme, including the Pilot Pre-employment programme, job shadowing, and interviews. The Subgroup involved representatives from all of the Development Partner organisations. It met monthly and worked closely with the Co-ordinator and relevant organisations to establish the pilot programme and the marketing of the programme. The Employability Subgroup also played an important part in progressing the STEPS programme which was used by the E.A.P. to assist participants to change attitudes and barriers which limited their employment prospects. The Transnational subgroup is responsible for taking forward the transnational aspects of the project, which is subject to a separate evaluation. The H.R. Working Group produced a report looking at barriers to employment based on the experiences of participants and recommended changes to H.R. policy for the Belfast Trust and other such bodies.

3.4.7 The Development Partnership is supported by a Project Co-ordinator, an Administrator, and two Project Officers (one full time and one part time). The staff support the Development Partnership, provide administrative and financial monitoring and reporting, support the partners, organise the operation and delivery of the project, co-ordinate the work of the

partners and undertake the day to day running of the project. D.P. members were very positive about the staff, believing that their enthusiasm and effort has been a key determinant in it's success.

3.5 Finance/ Value for Money

3.5.1 It is perhaps unfair to carry out a value for money assessment on a on-off project of this kind, comparing it with other more established provision. However, such comparisons are necessary and, with appropriate health warnings, can be useful. It should be noted that this V.F.M. assessment ignores the many non-employment outcomes produced by the project. The nature of an Equal project is to research or pilot a new approach, with a view to changing policy or practice. By their nature, Equal projects will appear to be poor value for money if assessed purely on hard employment outcomes. The final Action 3 evaluation report will seek to deconstruct each element with a view producing a more accurate V.F.M. analysis. These factors need to borne in mind in considering this section.

3.5.2 The table below summarises the expenditure during Action 2 compared to the budget. In every area the actual expenditure is below the budgeted figure. This is largely because progress on Action 1 was slow at first because the letter of offer was delayed, thus staff were not recruited and programmes started until later than had been planned. Also, the costs of the programmes have been less than forecast because of low take up of child care and travel expenses. The transnational cost for travel has also been lower than expected. Due to the underspend, Action 2 has been extended until December 2007, and a further 2 programmes will run during this period.

E.A.P. Action 2 Summary July 2005 to June 2007

Item	Budgeted	Actual	Variance
Staffing	263,222	247,358.73	15,863
Beneficiaries	99,290	31,518.03	67,772
Other costs	81,066	67,816.82	13,249
Transnational Costs	40,868	26,008.02	14,860
Overall Total	484,446	372,701.60	111,744

3.5.3 As part of the evaluation, a cost benefit analysis was prepared which assessed the estimated costs of the project with its projected outputs during Action 2, and also over a 12 month period, assuming that the E.A.P. is a stand alone project. The latter analysis is set out in the appendices.

Cost Benefit Analysis E.A.P.

Outputs Summary

Output	Nos.
Total Number of Beneficiaries	69
Total Number of Completers	50
Total Number of Early Leavers	19
Total Number Successful at Interview	33

3.5.4 For the purposes of comparison, New Deal has an average cost per participant of around £4,000 for a three month programme. In a report by the Centre of Economic and Social Inclusion (by Marshall and MacFarlane), a figure of £13,860 was quoted as evidence of high cost per sustainable job, for an I.L.M. programme. Other Intermediary Labour Market programmes in Northern Ireland have had a cost of around £6,000 per participant and £8,500 per employment outcome. In the U.K. the average L.M.I. cost is £8,500 per participant and £11,000 - £14,000 per employment outcome.

Costs Summary

Cost Item	Amount (£'s)
Action 1 Cost	37,477
Action 2 Cost	372,701
Total Spend	410,178
Output per Total Programme Cost	

3.5.5 E.A.P., in comparison, is around £12,430 per employment outcome against total project costs over 2 years, although this includes additional management and administration costs necessary for the delivery of an E.U. funded programme. It is likely that the costs could be reduced if E.A.P. existed as a stand alone project as there would be less administration and monitoring required. The ongoing cost (i.e. ignoring Action 1 costs) is likely to be around £11,000 per employment outcome. However, as shown in the forward looking cost benefit analysis in Section 5.2 of this report, it may be possible to substantially reduce this cost through restructuring and larger throughput.

Total Programme Cost

Output	Cost per Output (£'s)
Cost per Beneficiary who started	5,945
Cost per Beneficiary who completed	8,204
Cost per Job Outcome	12,430

Action 2 Only (Action 1 costs have been excluded)

Output	Cost per Output (£'s)
Cost per Beneficiary who started	5,401
Cost per Beneficiary who completed	7,454
Cost per Job Outcome	11,293

3.5.6 As mentioned earlier, some caution should be used in this analysis. In drawing comparison with other Labour Market Intermediaries, the analysis assumes that the client group and opportunities available are similar. In practice this is probably not correct. D.P. members who are involved in work with those who are unemployed believe that many of those who participated in the programme would not have been particularly difficult to place in work and would not be considered “furthest from the labour market”, however this appears to be at odds with the participant statistics. It was suggested that some participants would have got a job irrespective of the programme. It must also be noted that the Health Trusts have been seeking to fill these posts for some time and have had difficulty attracting employees. The Health Trusts claim that they would have made many of these changes themselves over a longer period of time and therefore in future some of these employment outcomes might have happened without input from the E.A.P. However, it seems unlikely that they would have introduced elements such as job shadowing, or that they would have developed such good communication channels with community groups. It is therefore important to note that a true value for money assessment looking at employment outcomes would have to apply an appropriate factor to participants, depending on their employability, and to look at this in the light of changing practices within the health sector which may simply have taken longer to come about in some cases. It is probable therefore that if the economic analysis looks strictly at additionality, the cost per genuinely additional employment outcome would have been substantially higher and is more likely to be in the £20,000 to £25,000 per employment outcome range. It must be borne in mind that this cost includes much of E.A.P.’s work which did not seek to create employment outcomes. The Action 3 evaluation will seek to tease this out.

3.5.7 It should be noted that this analysis is not a criticism of the E.A.P., as its very nature tends to higher costs per participant. It is however an indicator that any future programmes of this kind needs to learn from this and must work out how it can deliver larger numbers of participants, reduce costs or, perhaps more importantly, attracting a slightly larger number of participants who are considered furthest from the labour market. Similarly, the analysis does not take into consideration the substantial in-kind costs provided by the members of the D.P. In-kind costs could substantially add to the overall costs of the programme. Finally, no consideration has been given to the costs saved by the Trusts in terms of retention of staff. While there is only short term evidence to back this up at this stage, it is probable that staff recruited through this process better understand the demands of the job and go into this work with their eyes open. Staff recruited in this way are therefore more likely to stay in post for a longer period of time and ultimately reduce the costs of recruitment and training.

4

Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

4.1.1 The purpose of this report is to summarise the activities of the Employability Access Project during the Action 2 period, which has now been extended to December 2007; to comment on its effectiveness and relevance and to make recommendations for the Action 2 stage, i.e. mainstreaming. The E.A.P., by its nature, has been multifaceted and has affected a range of stakeholders in different ways. It has sought to test human resource models of recruitment and selection to promote social inclusion in employment. It has done this and has developed a way of working that has proved to be beneficial to both participants and those employers that were involved. It has sought to lead engagement between health sector employers, employability services and beneficiaries. It has had considerable success in developing relationships between health sector employers and community based organisations which seek to address employability at a local level. It has also connected potential employees and employers in a way which has been beneficial to both. Finally, it has improved supply and demand for quality jobs in the health service. It has done this by filling posts which the health sector has found difficult to fill and at the same time providing employment opportunities for those who would not otherwise have access to these.

4.1.2 While the E.A.P. has clearly delivered on each of its broad aims, a more rounded assessment can be obtained by looking at each of the areas of work and stakeholders in the project. As well as delivering the broad aims of the E.A.P., it must operate within the framework established by EQUAL which includes being expected to play a key part in a Transnational Partnership and to work in a way which is compatible with other EQUAL projects. This inevitably requires considerable levels of input at a range of levels both regional, national and international. Within this conclusions section we have sought to consider the impact of this project by looking at each of its key elements and stakeholders.

4.1.3 Participants

It could be argued that those who benefit from the programme by gaining skills or employment are the most important stakeholder, however it is recognised that the nature of the E.A.P. was to develop new ways of working and practice which can carry on beyond the project. The consultants were involved in direct interviews with a large proportion of programme participants at various stages during the project. As we have shown in section 3.3.4, a large proportion of participants had been unemployed for a long period, 41% over three years, with the average length of unemployment experienced by participants being 3.2 years. Discussions with the participants clearly showed that they would have been unlikely to pursue the jobs that they eventually got the opportunity to compete for. In spite of this, some members of the D.P. felt that they were not among the furthest from the labour market. While some of the participants were clearly potentially employable, many seemed to have suffered a substantial loss of confidence, reduction in aspirations and low motivation, perhaps as a result of previous failures.

As we have shown in section 3.3.9, the programme played an important part in substantially improving the confidence, motivation and job search skills of those who participated. However, many found the training to be challenging and in some cases extremely difficult. In spite of this all those interviewed felt that it was useful and all felt much better equipped for interview that they have otherwise have been. Many providers of employability skills have found major difficulty in attracting participants in the first place, especially those who are long term unemployed. The E.A.P. used a range of mechanisms, perhaps surprisingly finding that leafleting homes (which has failed miserably for many other organisations) produced the greatest number of responses, although relationships with statutory and community based providers and word of mouth were also very significant. Within the first eight programmes, of 69 participants who started

the project up to June 2007, 30 have obtained jobs. It has to be concluded therefore, that from the participants' perspective, the project has proved very successful.

4.1.4 The Health Trusts

For the Health Trusts, the E.A.P. was a bit of a Godsend. Both Trusts had a number of posts that they were having difficulty filling and the E.A.P. provided an opportunity to address this problem at relatively little cost. While the E.A.P. has not succeeded in filling all of the vacant posts, and indeed could never have done so, it has succeeded in filling a significant number. Both Trusts claim to have made a range of changes in their recruitment processes, some of which they say would have changed anyway, but over a longer period of time, and others which came about as a direct result of the project. They believe that the E.A.P. has given them access to better informed and more motivated potential employees than they would otherwise have had. They believe that most of those who gained employment had a good understanding of the jobs beforehand and therefore performed better at interview and are likely to have higher retention rates. The Trusts also welcomed the links that they were able to make with community based employment providers. From the Trusts' perspective therefore the project has been considered a success.

4.1.5 The Development Partnership

Clearly the Trusts also play a key part in the D.P., however as they are both beneficiaries and participants/advisors to the project it is important to think of the partnership separately. Partnership members have expressed a range of views about the value of the project and of the partnership. Partners take a generally positive view of the partnership, believing that it provided a range of learning opportunities for everyone, created new relationships and communication channels and produced some valuable learning. However, it is clear that the Health Trusts gained most from the partnership and

that other partners have some reservations about the impact of the project. All will accept that the employment outcomes were positive and that the changes in Trusts' recruitment policies will have a longer term impact. However, some partners were concerned about the perceived overlap between the work of the project and other providers and at the cost per participant. For those partners who are community based employability providers, the project offered both a mechanism to move people from their provision, (e.g. New Deal) into work and also a potential competitor, albeit at a relatively modest level.

4.1.6 The Transnational Partnership

The Transnational Partnership is the subject of a separate report. The Transnational Partnership (C.o.F.E.) is shown in the evaluation report as a successful partnership which has been able to cross a number of European barriers. This is perhaps best shown in its production of the Employability Good Practice Guide. In common with such partnerships it has faced some communication difficulties, however these are relatively minor and by the standards of such bodies it must be considered successful. The E.A.P. has played an important part in making this happen.

4.1.7 Management

The management of the E.A.P. has demonstrated effectiveness in a number of ways. In the first instance, through regular monitoring of the programme, partnership views and views of participants. It has maintained effective records which played a part in steering and developing the project. This has included the use of the Rickter Scale which, while far from ideal, has provided some useful learning. Project staff have shown flexibility and a willingness to adapt the programme and its content to make it more cost effective and to better meet the needs of participants. The project had a particularly successful launch which attracted many key influencers. More recently, the success of the E.A.P. has been recognised through its

participation in a Welfare to Work conference in Birmingham in June 2007 where the E.A.P. presented its work as an example of good practice. It also achieved a "Highly Commended" rating in the 2007 National Training Awards and has presented at the All Ireland Health Promoting Hospitals Conference.

4.1.8 Value for Money

It is perhaps unfair to carry out a value for money assessment on a on-off project of this kind, comparing it with other more established provision. However, such comparisons are necessary and, with appropriate health warnings, can be useful. As the V.F.M. analysis in section 3.5 shows, ignoring the Action 1 work which would not be part of future provision, the project has achieved a cost per job outcome of around £11,000. This is comparable to other Intermediary Labour Market interventions, however such comparison must be used with caution. In practice, it is probable that some of the participants could have gained employment without the project and therefore there is potential for some dead-weight. On the positive side, it is likely that the project has led to the recruitment of employees who are more likely to stay with Health Trusts and therefore higher retention rates may ultimately reduce the cost to the public purse in recruiting additional staff. However, those members of the D.P. that are involved in addressing employability believe that the project was expensive on a cost per participant basis, certainly compared to mainstream programmes such as New Deal. Balancing this, we must accept that a substantial proportion of resources were used in carrying out work in developing a model of good practice, in working at a transnational level and in a range of monitoring and other activity associated with EQUAL funding. Therefore, cost per employment outcome is only one measure and must be accepted that a range of other outcomes are not included in this analysis.

4.1.9 Mainstreaming

The potential for mainstreaming the project will be affected by demand for such services in future and by the availability of other providers delivering similar work. Those consulted expressed different views about this, with some believing that existing community based employability providers can perform this function effectively in future. However, there is a view that specific groups within the labour market who are furthest from employment are potential participants of the future for E.A.P.. Similarly, it is probable that other public sector bodies have some recruitment processes that restrict their access to these people and there is potential for the E.A.P. to work with other public sector bodies to identify and address these barriers.

4.1.10 In summary therefore, the E.A.P. must be considered a success in terms of addressing recruitment problems faced by the Health Trusts and assisting those who may not otherwise have got these posts to gain employment. There is some doubt about its cost effectiveness, however it is by its nature a pilot project and the potential for savings in future exist. While mainstreaming this project as a D.E.L. funded provision seems unlikely, there is clearly some potential to mainstream some of the learning and to develop further work with employers and those who are furthest from the labour market.

4.2 Recommendations

4.2.1 It is clearly important that the experiences and learning from the E.A.P. are captured and used to maximum benefit. What happens next will play a substantial part in determining the project's true value for money. To ensure that learning is captured and that the project continues to provide benefit to potential employers and potential employees the following recommendations are made:

- **Employer Guide** - it is recommended that the E.A.P. consider the key features of its work with employers and the changes made within the two Health Trusts. This

information should be collated into a short Employers' Guide to assist public bodies in removing barriers to recruiting long term unemployed people.

- **Promotional Document** - a short promotional document for employers should be developed, aimed at encouraging them to work with E.A.P., or community based employability providers, to improve their recruitment and retention of staff. This document should highlight the outcomes from the E.A.P. and the sorts of issues that can be effectively addressed by work of this kind.
- **Other Public Bodies** - the E.A.P. should do some work in the next few months to look at posts that other public bodies have difficulty filling. Clearly the E.A.P. will work best with entry level posts, where perhaps recruitment practices are most likely to be barriers to those who are furthest from the labour market. The E.A.P. should meet the H.R. departments of a range of larger public sector employers to identify such posts and to determine whether these bodies would be interested in working with the E.A.P. to address some of their practices.
- **Community Based Providers** - in the longer term, it is important that the learning experiences from the E.A.P. are utilised by North Belfast community based employability providers. It is therefore recommended that the E.A.P. staff work with the community based providers and D.E.L. to develop a shared way forward in terms of the project and the use of learning by the partners.
- **Targeting Gaps** - discussions with D.E.L. suggest that there are certain groups of unemployed people who are much more difficult to get into employment. E.A.P. should work with D.E.L. to identify specific gaps that could be targeted by the project with the view to running a more intensive programme specifically for these groups in future, post Equal funding. It should be noted that a higher cost per unit may be

acceptable where mainstream programmes have proved ineffective in assisting these people into work.

- **Cost Effectiveness** - the E.A.P. should review its programme activity to determine whether it would be possible to run a shorter training programme, followed by work experience, to enable a greater number of participants to benefit from this work within a certain period of time. The programme design must reflect the specific needs of participants and recruitment needs of employers. It should be designed with a view to reducing the project's cost per employment outcome and perhaps working with the community based providers to deliver this as a further pilot.
- **Retention Rates** - evaluation and monitoring of the project suggests that people recruited through the E.A.P. are likely to stay in their posts for longer. The E.A.P. has monitored this to date, however the time scales have been too short to provide accurate comparisons. Therefore it is recommended that the E.A.P. continue to monitor and to review retention rates after one year to determine how those recruited through the project compare with those recruited through other methods. The information obtained from this should feed into the Employers Guide and promotional information.

5

Appendices

5.1 Action 2 Activities

- 5.1.1 The Employability Access Project focused on tackling employment issues in North Belfast and sought to develop ways of closing the gap between employers in the health sector and those seeking employment. It was perceived by people working in North Belfast Partnership, the Health Trusts and in the employability sector that there was a difficulty in relation to, on the demand side, filling posts in certain grades, and on the supply side accessing work in the health sector, despite a range of work undertaken in the past to address this. EQUAL provided a means to tackle this by creating a genuine partnership and piloting new approaches to recruitment and training.
- 5.1.2 Health sector employers in North Belfast had, for some time, found it difficult to fill vacancies in service type posts (cleaners, home-helps, domestics, catering, laundry, etc.) and were open to looking at ways to better access the available pool of unemployed people from North Belfast. Given the nature of the posts that were vacant, many of these would suit unemployed people who live locally. Both the Mater Hospital and the North and West Trust were open to reviewing their recruitment policies and practices to test how these present barriers to those who are unemployed.
- 5.1.3 Action 2 of the programme therefore was mainly concerned with the operation of the programmes, in this case the recruitment of participants, the delivery of training, the organisation of job shadowing and support for participants through to interview and job outcomes. The activities of the Employability Access Project under Action 2 are described under main headings as follows:

Planning

5.1.4 The planning for Action 2 began around March 2005 with the recruitment of the Project Coordinator and the subsequent recruitment of the Administration and Finance Officer. The initial work involved setting up systems and procedures and discussions with partners' organisations about the content of the programme. Two Employability Development Officers were appointed in August 2005. These are the staff who have been involved directly in programme delivery. The recruitment was carried out through public advertisement with the qualifications for the post including previous experience of work in the employability field. Following review of applications and interviews, two staff were appointed to work alongside the Project Co-ordinator and Finance and Admin. Officer.

5.1.5 The planning stage involved research into best practice in training and support for the long-term unemployed and discussions with partners to co-ordinate recruitment, training, job shadowing and interviews. This included:

- Discussions with L.M.I.s, including Ashton and N.B.E.C., to look at key issues for those who are long-term unemployed and furthest from the labour market. These included barriers to employment, recruitment issues and training.
- Discussions with training organisations to look at best practice in providing training for those who are long-term unemployed or furthest from the labour market and at issues such as the duration of training, the level of training and support required. Partners involved with this included Ashton, N.B.E.C., North City Training, B.I.F.H.E. and Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (Q.C.A.).
- Discussions with employers and trade unions to look at recruitment issues, job shadowing, management support by employers, vacancies and interviews. The employers included the Mater Hospital Trust and North and West Belfast Health and Social Services Trust (both now within the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust).

5.1.6 A great deal of work went into the planning of the E.A.P. programme with a high level of participation from all of the partners. Planning was a genuinely collaborative effort which involved a great deal of discussion between the E.A.P. staff and partners and also between partners. The planning of the programme took around six to eight months of negotiation and discussion to design the programme and secure the agreement of all the partners. The planning process was very successful and did require a high level of input and flexibility from each of the partners. The planning process was in itself a valuable learning opportunity for several of the partners, as it gave them an opportunity to gain insight as to how other organisations work and to better understand the issues facing the target group and organisations in other sectors.

Programme Set Up

5.1.7 The aim of the planning process was to develop a pre-employment programme to match long-term unemployed and economically inactive residents of North Belfast to access entry level jobs at the Mater and N.W.B.H.S.S.T. The programme therefore had to recruit participants, deliver programme training and support in essential skills and personal development, provide a period of job shadowing and provide a guaranteed interview with the opportunity of securing permanent employment. All of these elements had to be co-ordinated and had to ensure the support and participation of key partners at various stages.

Programme Elements

The elements of the programme are as follows:
Recruitment

5.1.8 This is a key element of a pre-employment programme as those who are furthest from the labour market are often those who are most difficult to recruit. Therefore, this requires innovative approaches to maximise outcomes from the programme. There is little point in providing an employability programme which provides training and interviews for those who would be likely to obtain

employment in any event. E.A.P. has adopted a number of approaches to maximise awareness of and access to the programme. This includes house to house leaflet drops in targeted areas of North Belfast which demonstrate high levels of unemployment, particularly Neighbourhood Renewal areas. Leaflets have also been left at places that people use regularly, such as doctors' surgeries, libraries and community centres, again in areas where there is high unemployment. Leaflets were left and awareness raising work carried out with Labour Market Intermediaries (L.M.I.s) and other organisations that work with those who are long-term unemployed, including D.E.L., Job Assist Centres (J.A.C.s), the Ashton Centre and North Belfast Employment Centre (N.B.E.C.). Thousands of leaflets were distributed in target areas of North Belfast to coincide with each training programme.

5.1.9 The second phase of recruitment was to facilitate contact with the programme and to make it relatively easy for those furthest from the labour market to access the programme. The first point of contact was the Employability Development Officers (E.D.O.s), although in some cases applicants will have made initial contact with an advisor in an L.M.I. (often Ashton Centre or N.B.E.C.) or a J.A.C. The E.D.O. provided information about the programme and arranged an initial meeting with the applicant. The purpose of the initial meeting was to gather information about the applicant's background, work history and qualifications and to look at their circumstances. A key part of the application process was that applicants were advised to take a finance check to look at their financial circumstances, and were given advice on how gaining employment would affect them financially, particularly in terms of benefits. This allowed the applicant to make a decision about whether to join the programme, based on full information about how it would impact on their lives. Each applicant was then invited to apply for the programme. The E.D.O.s assisted with the application.

5.1.10 It was important to ensure that there were vacancies available before running a

programme. It was also important that all of the partners were aware of the programme at management and staff level so that the job shadowing and site visits could take place and were available where there were job vacancies. This required a great deal of coordination and organisation.

5.1.11 Training

The training programme provided four weeks training (it was initially six weeks) followed by two weeks work experience in either the Mater Hospital or in N.W.B.H.S.S.T. The training provided essential skills and personal development and pre-employment skills. The training incorporated the Steps to Excellence programme and the E.D.O.s were trained to deliver this. Steps to Excellence for Personal Success (STEPS) is a developmental programme for adults which is developed by the Pacific Institute to aid building self-esteem and confidence. It seeks to assist people to develop their capacity for growth and creativity by understanding the factors that affect their choices and behaviour and encourages them to take control of these. The programme is delivered to groups of eight to twelve participants by a qualified Facilitator using a range of training styles. Plenty of time is allowed for personal reflection group work and discussion. Participants obtain a Resource Manual which they continue to use after the programme.

The programme has twelve modules. These start by looking at how people act, work and perform based on their understanding of the truth and their past experiences. It continues through a series of modules which seek to assist participants to understand their conditioning, to look at their self-image and motivation and to develop appropriate visions, set goals and become more capable of making things happen. The programme has been shown to be effective in helping long term unemployed people develop motivation and self-belief to complete training and find jobs. The E.A.P. training also provides pre-employment skills such as interview techniques, filling in application forms and work skills. Training takes place on three

days per week over the four week period and runs from 9.30 a.m. until 2.30 p.m.

5.1.12 Each of the participants has the opportunity to job shadow for a two week period. The placements are either at the Mater Hospital or North and West Belfast community sites. During job shadowing, the participant will work alongside one of the Trust staff and will have the opportunity to experience the reality of working in a post that they will then have the opportunity to be interviewed for. During this period, the participant is supported by the E.D.O., the member of staff being job shadowed and line management within each Trust. During the training, the participants were offered site visits to the Mater and N.W.B.H.S.S.T. (now both within the new Belfast Health and Social Care Trust) and can speak to staff working there. This gives them the opportunity to see the type of work that is on offer and to find out a little bit more about it by speaking to staff in post. This has generally worked very well. There were some initial problems with organisation of one of the site visits but this has been addressed through the partnership and they have been very successful since.

5.1.13 **Support**

Most of the participants have not worked for an extended period time and suffer from low self-esteem and low self-confidence. For many, the experience of training and work can be daunting and stressful. Built into the programme is a wide range of support for participants to assist them to join the programme, complete the training and enter the labour market. The initial, and perhaps most important, means of support is the E.D.O.s. The participants work closely with the E.D.O.s throughout the training, job shadowing and into employment. The programme is relationship based and the E.D.O.s provide a very high level of support. This runs from support with applying to the programme as described earlier, to training and frequent contact during work shadowing and into employment. Support can take the form of advice, encouragement, practical assistance, or simply providing someone to listen.

5.1.14 Support is also built into the programme through the Peer Group. The training is undertaken in groups of around 12 participants. One of the purposes of this is to provide a support group of people who are in a similar position. The programme seeks to encourage the group to work together to support each other. It is not a competitive atmosphere but one of mutual co-operation.

5.1.15 The third level of support is the staff and management within Trusts. The co-operation of staff and management within the Trusts is very important both during the training, job shadowing and into employment. Participants have the opportunity to meet staff, including previous participants, and the support from staff and managers is very important.

5.1.16 **Job Shadowing and Interview**

The job shadowing element of the programme lasts two weeks and involves the participant working with a member of staff in the Trust in one of the roles that the participant will have the opportunity to apply for. These include jobs in stores, portering, catering and domestic services and elderly unit care assistant roles. The job shadowing is co-ordinated with employers and during this period the participant has the opportunity to experience the culture of work and to gain experience in the job. This has four main benefits. First, it allows the participant to experience different types of work and to have an idea of what they might like to apply for. Secondly, the participant has an opportunity to become familiar with the task. Thirdly, the participant can experience the culture of work and get used to what is expected from them. This builds confidence and reduces anxiety about their ability to work. Fourthly, it provides the Trusts with an opportunity to view and develop the participant in the post. The job shadowing is a key element of the programme as it assists participants to put their learning into practice and to build their confidence and aptitude.

5.1.17 The job shadowing also helps the participants when it comes to interview, as they have more confidence and can talk about the job. All participants are guaranteed an interview at the end of the training and job shadowing process. The interview is for an actual job and the participant will be in competition with others who may have applied for the job. Only the interview is guaranteed, the outcome of the interview is not.

5.1.18 **Monitoring**

The recording and monitoring of outcomes of the programme is critically important, not just as a record of the achievements of the project, but also to inform mainstreaming activity. Recording and monitoring includes information on the background of participants, the numbers trained, the outcomes of training, the numbers going on to permanent employment, attitudinal change and other outcomes. A range of quantitative data is recorded, including information about the participant's age, gender, time unemployed and benefits. All Equal projects were expected to use the Rickter Scale to measure soft outcomes but this has not always worked particularly well. The Rickter Scale is aimed at engaging the client, overcoming communication barriers and producing good quality information in a short period of time. It is meant to assist clients to better understand their circumstances, to identify priority areas for support or intervention and to recognise strategies that have worked for them previously and to explore future possibilities. It is a non-threatening, non-judgemental mechanism using a simple scale which allows clients to assess a range of factors. It enables clients to look at the distance they have travelled and to look at how far they still have to go to achieve their personal objectives. In common with other EQUAL partnerships, the Employability Access Project has found the Rickter Scale to be useful at times, but also to be problematic.

- The scale has not always produced the information needed. In spite of the training given, staff have found it difficult to get honest information out of people, especially

where they have mental health problems or poor communication skills.

- As provided, the "Life Board" was too generic and did not provide the information needed by the E.A.P. Once this became apparent, the E.A.P. formulated its own set of questions around employability. The Rickter company charged a fee for producing a new Board based on these questions.
- E.A.P. staff have discovered that many participants did not have an accurate view of themselves in relation to employment and they only understand this as the programme develops. E.A.P. staff feel that it may be more appropriate to build a relationship between the practitioner and participant before setting a baseline profile.
- The computer system associated with the Rickter Scale has proved to be difficult to use. Using this system, as indicated in the Rickter manual, has led to work being lost and has caused substantial frustration among staff due to the loss of information at each stage.

5.1.19 While these limitations and annoyances have made the Rickter Scale less effective than it could otherwise have been, and have wasted substantial staff time on some occasions, the E.A.P. staff believe that the Rickter Scale can work well once the difficulties are ironed out, if it is used over a longer period of time, and the tool is adapted to suit the particular programme and clients.

The evaluation is also measuring quantitative and qualitative information using interviews with participants and partner organisations.

5.1.20 The project was overseen by the Development Partnership, which meets on a bi-monthly basis. Its work is assisted by sub-groups to look at employability issues, H.R. policy and the Transnational programme.

5.2 Cost Benefit Analysis

5.2.1 This is a Cost Benefit Analysis undertaken for E.A.P. It projects the likely costs if E.A.P. operated as a stand alone project. In this case, 2 possible scenarios are assessed. The first assumes that 2 staff are employed on a full time basis and would undertake all of the training, interviews, promotion and recruitment. The second scenario requires 3 staff, with 1 full time and 2 part time.

Scenario 1 (2 full time staff)

5.2.2 In this scenario, E.A.P. would employ 2 staff on a full time basis at a salary equivalent to the current salary levels for the Development Officers. The project would run 4 programmes per year with an average of 10 participants per programme. The project would work with a range of employers and would not be restricted to any single employer, sector or geographic area. The training period would be 4 weeks with a 2 week job shadow. Identification of vacancies, promotion and recruitment would take around 4 weeks. The costs are based on current costs, excluding costs that would be unlikely for a stand alone project.

See pages 32 to 35 for cost benefit analysis breakdown.

Cost Benefit Analysis E.A.P.

Programme Outline

Action	Week
Identify vacancies	1 - 2
Promotion	2 - 4
Interviews	3 - 4
Training	5 - 8
Job Shadow	9 - 10
Interview ready	11
Total Programme Cycle	10 weeks

Outputs Summary

Annual Output	Nos.	%
Total Number of Beneficiaries	40	
Total Number of Completers *	28	71%
Total Number of Early Leavers *	12	29%
Total Number of Jobs *	15	38%
Successful at interview *	21	94% **

* Assumes current level of completion and job offers

** Of those interviewed

Costs Summary

Cost Item	Amount
Development Officer Salary 1	27,942
Development Officer Salary 2	27,942
Office costs	11,793
Promotional costs	5,187
Beneficiary allowances and costs	9,530
Beneficiary Travel Costs	2,751
Training materials costs	6,114
Management fees *	7,000
Staff Costs	600
Staff Training	2,500
Total Costs	101,359

* It is assumed that an organisation would provide a management function for an agreed fee.

Output per Programme Cost]

Output	Cost per Output
Cost per Beneficiary who started	2,533.97
Cost per Beneficiary who completed	3,619.96
Cost per Job Outcome	6,757.27
Cost per successful interview	4,826.62

Scenario 2 (3 staff)

5.2.3 In this scenario, E.A.P. would employ 3 staff, one full time and two part time (75% and 50% respectively) based on the current salary levels for the Development Officers). This would require 2 Development Officers and a Recruitment Officer. The project would run 8 programmes per year with an average of 10 participants per programme. The project would work with a range of employers and would not be restricted to any single employer, sector or geographic area. The training period would be 4 weeks with a 2 week job shadow, and during this period the Recruitment Officer would plan and organise the next programme. The Development Officers would dedicate almost all of their time to the training programme. Identification of vacancies, promotion and recruitment would take around 4 weeks. The costs are based on current costs.

Cost Benefit Analysis E.A.P.

Programme Cycle

Action	Week
Identify vacancies	1 - 2
Promotion	2 - 4
Interviews	4 - 5
Training	1 - 4
Job Shadow	5 - 6
Total Programme Cycle	6 weeks

Outputs Summary

Annual Output	Nos.	%
Total Number of Beneficiaries	80	
Total Number of Completers *	57	71%
Total Number of Early Leavers *	23	29%
Total Number of Jobs *	30	38%
Successful at interview *	42	94% **

* Assumes current level of completion and job offers

** Of those interviewed

Costs Summary

Cost Item	Amount
Development Officer Salary 1	27,942
Development Officer Salary 2 (75%)	20,956
Recruitment Officer (50%)	13,971
Office costs	11,793
Promotional costs	10,375
Beneficiary allowances and costs	18,743
Beneficiary Travel Costs	5,410
Training materials costs	12,024
Management fees *	10,000
Staff Costs	900
Staff Training	2,500
Total Costs	134,614

* It is assumed that an organisation would provide a management function for an agreed fee.

Output per Total Programme Cost

Output	Cost per Output
Cost per Beneficiary who started	1,682.67
Cost per Beneficiary who completed	2,361.65
Cost per Job Outcome	4,487.13
Cost per successful interview	3,205.09

Employability Access Project - Action 2 Final Evaluation

Jobs in North Belfast... Secure a healthy future

Employability Access Project (EAP)
North Belfast Partnership
2 Duncairn Gardens, Belfast BT15 2GG

Tel: 028 9075 2990
Web: www.nthbp.org

Evaluation produced by Williamson Consulting

A North Belfast Partnership Initiative

